



GOOD NEIGHBOURS

HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS' ROLE IN NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE

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Published by:



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'Good Neighbours: The Role of Housing Associations in Neighbourhood Governance' Summary report

Copies of the full and summary reports are available at youngfoundation.org

Publishing Information

ISBN: 978-1-90551-04-0

Researched and written by Nicola Bacon, Liz Bartlett and Anne Marie Brady. Published by the Young Foundation, 2007

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Price £10

Further copies may be obtained from:

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This report reflects the views of the authors only, and does not represent the views of either the members of the virtual advisory group or the Housing Corporation.

FOREWORD

The future of housing associations and neighbourhood governance

Housing is moving up the political agenda. The Cave Review of social housing regulation published in June addressed issues that politicians increasingly recognise as major public concerns: affordability and access to housing; housing growth; and the role of housing in promoting regeneration, economic prosperity and community cohesion. In short, both central and local government are seeking to maximise the contribution that housing can play to shaping places.

At the same time as housing is moving up the political agenda, most councils have had to re-evaluate their role in relation to social housing and to think more carefully about their wider strategic housing role. With the advent of arms-length management organisations and large scale voluntary transfer, councils have to work with partners to improve outcomes for their communities.

Local authorities are now developing new skills in commissioning, influencing and enabling partners to deliver outcomes that benefit whole communities or neighbourhoods. Likewise, many partners, including housing associations, are accepting their share of the responsibility for the wellbeing of neighbourhoods, rather than just buildings and tenants.

The Cave Review recommends that a new social housing regulator should have the power to require social housing providers to co-operate with councils as a condition of registration. The Young Foundation's research into housing associations' potential role within neighbourhood governance is therefore very timely.

This research contains advice for both housing associations and councils. It concludes that councils need to ensure that housing associations can interact with the local strategic partnership and feed in to the development of wider community strategies. Housing associations need to engage with neighbourhood management and work with the elected members to pursue community goals.

The research also advises both local authorities and housing associations that they will need to think about how to involve the communities that they serve in any discussions about their neighbourhoods - a message that is strongly echoed by evidence gathered through the IDeA's own strategic housing programme.

The Transforming Neighbourhoods Programme - another strand of work that the IDeA has

undertaken with the Young Foundation - has demonstrated that by involving local people in shaping the area they live, local public services can be improved. There is already a wealth of innovative practice in neighbourhood working - the challenge for all of local government is to tap into and learn from the sector's best practice.

I recommend that policy-makers and practitioners from the social housing sector, local and central government read this publication. Hopefully you will be inspired by the innovation in neighbourhood governance that the publication highlights.

Lucy de Groot is the executive director of the Improvement and Development Agency for Local Government (IDeA). To find out more about the IDeA's work on strategic housing visit: www.idea.gov.uk/housing

Housing Associations at Neighbourhood Level

First we had 'new localism', then 'double-devolution' and Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) – now everyone is talking about 'place-making' or 'place-shaping' and 'Comprehensive Area Assessments' (CAAs). Whatever we call it there is a consensus around the need to think and act locally as well as (and sometimes instead of) nationally.

Despite this broad agreement around the overall direction of travel towards working at the neighbourhood level we are, however, yet to iron-out all the strategies, the policies, the funding mechanisms and the (charmingly named) 'delivery vehicles' that will make a reality of the place-shaping rhetoric.

This report by the Young Foundation helps us to unpick one of the key elements of this place-shaping agenda – that of neighbourhood governance in general and of the positive role of housing associations in delivering it in particular.

In many neighbourhoods across the country existing housing associations are well-placed to support the delivery of neighbourhood governance in its many formal and informal forms. Doing so effectively does, however, raise a complex set of issues around such things as, for example, housing association legitimacy and local authority democracy (and the relationship between the two bodies), the rationalisation of housing association stock ownership/management and policies, the culture of housing associations (in particular their willingness to devolve control to residents), the capacity of residents to engage and the skills sets of the housing association to facilitate this way of working.

Effective and genuine partnership working with local authorities is the key to underpinning success – particularly as associations continue to grow in size and complexity. Those who are already making a success of neighbourhood governance have shown their commitment to the communities in which they operate, their willingness to support the local authority's democratic mechanisms and their belief in the importance of neighbourhood empowerment and accountability.

The report provides useful glimpses into a world that could (rather than generally does) exist and is recommended reading of local authorities and housing associations alike.

Sarah Webb is the Deputy Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). To find out more about the CIH's work visit: www.cih.org



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Young Foundation has been commissioned by the Housing Corporation to investigate the role that housing associations can play in neighbourhood governance.

1. Neighbourhood governance at the local level consists of a variety of arrangements between agencies and individuals that decide actions, allocate resource and influence wider plans. 'Governance' has been defined as meaning either formal or informal structures and ways of working that enable housing associations to:
 - support residents directly to influence decisions made in the neighbourhood
 - influence other organisations working at the neighbourhood level to ensure residents' and wider community priorities are met.
2. The research found that some housing associations are developing creative and effective initiatives to increase their involvement in neighbourhood governance, but that this is inconsistent, with definitions of neighbourhood working varying between agencies. Although very local partnership working is widespread, the majority of housing associations are unclear about how they fit with strategic partnership working at the local authority level. Some associations voice high levels of cynicism about Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs).
3. Many associations appear to be ill-equipped to understand and take advantage of the opportunities within the localism agenda, which has been given new impetus by the publication of the 2006 Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities* and subsequent legislation.
4. There is the potential for associations to exploit this policy direction in the best interests of their residents and wider communities. This will demand that they respond strategically, examining their partnership working, resident involvement and funding arrangements, and take a flexible and creative approach to finding solutions and learning from others' experience.
5. The Housing Corporation - and in future Communities England - government and local authorities should encourage housing associations to take a wider and more strategic role in neighbourhood governance. This should include requiring housing associations to engage more fully in neighbourhood and LSP structures and plans, to ensure synergies between associations' neighbourhood working and LSP Sustainable Communities Strategies.
6. Although this study is based on the experience of housing associations, the findings and recommendations are also of relevance to arms length management organisations

(ALMOs) and other agencies which may be in receipt of public subsidy for affordable rented housing in the future.

FINDINGS

7. Success in neighbourhood governance is associated with three key areas:
 - combining neighbourhood level partnerships and strategic involvement with the LSP
 - maximising low cost solutions and valuing investment in neighbourhood governance within wider financial and asset management strategies
 - placing value on both formal and informal resident involvement.
8. Housing association involvement at the local level is primarily driven by pressure from Local Authorities, residents or internally from the association. These internal drivers are complex, including political factors; regulation; the need to protect investments; the ethical foundation of the organisation and its wish to meet the social needs of individuals and communities.
9. Five typologies have been developed to help housing associations navigate the range of options. They are:
 - the LEADER - self-sufficient neighbourhood operator
 - the INFUENCER - consortium and partnership player
 - the NETWORKER - driven by pressing neighbourhood need
 - the EXEMPAR - tangible product approach
 - RESIDUAL landlords - bricks and mortar only.
10. Political pressures over the next five years, against the backdrop of longer-term demographic trends will increase housing associations' focus on neighbourhoods. Housing associations will need to meet the demands of the Housing Corporation and its successor body Communities England, as well as those of local and central government; they will also need to satisfy the demands of their tenants; and finally meet the needs of an ever more complex tenant and resident population.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HOUSING CORPORATION AND COMMUNITIES ENGLAND

11. The Housing Corporation should increase the *expectations* it has of housing associations' involvement at the neighbourhood level. The vehicle for this is the roll out of the Neighbourhoods and Communities strategy, particularly the development of the Communities Standard for Social Housing. This should differentiate between associations who propose to lead on neighbourhood governance within an area - and those that do not plan to progress this agenda.

12. Housing associations that wish to lead on neighbourhood governance should be expected to invest in local communities and actively engage with LSP processes.
13. Housing associations that do not plan to lead on neighbourhood governance should make arrangements with other agencies - through partnerships, consortiums or outsourcing - to make sure that their residents are given a strong voice at the very local level.
14. As well as strengthening its expectations of all associations, the Housing Corporation should review whether it wishes to *require* housing associations to increase their involvement within neighbourhoods.
15. This research, particularly the review of what is known about social innovation, also identified an important role for the Corporation in driving innovation at neighbourhood level, promoting awareness of the wider agenda and existing models of good practice.

RECOMMENDATION FOR GOVERNMENT

17. For central government housing associations are a vital local resource with significant potential to underpin implementation of the localisation agenda set out by the 2006 Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. Their potential is at both the local authority strategic level and as delivery agents within neighbourhoods.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

18. In many areas there is potential for housing associations to work more closely with local authorities delivering their community empowerment and neighbourhoods strategy, and to contribute resources and assets to this process. Housing associations should become key partners for local authorities in their Sustainable Community Strategies in the same way that they already are in their housing and homelessness strategies.
19. To accelerate this process, local authorities and LSPs should review housing associations' involvement in LSP structures, audit housing associations' existing contribution to neighbourhood governance, and include housing associations within their strategic planning processes at neighbourhood level.

INTRODUCTION

Housing associations are a diverse group of agencies providing both housing and a vast range of other services to meet wider neighbourhood needs. They support vulnerable individuals and alleviate the problems of stressed and disadvantaged communities. Housing associations are amongst the most successful third sector organisations in England. The number of housing association properties is now around two million homes, outstripping the number of homes owned by local authorities^[1].

Housing associations include organisations that are very small and locally based and those that operate nationwide. They have different client groups and varied ways of working. The sector includes some of the most entrepreneurial, innovative and competitive social businesses in the country, yet is funded by government to deliver Whitehall's policy and political priorities. There is within this a potential tension, between those working at the local level who demand the flexibility to innovate, and the people who allocate resources and plan strategies in town halls and in Westminster. Equally, this relationship has proved that it can spur the development of new solutions to pressing problems.

In the 2006 Local Government White Paper, *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, government outlined its political commitment to localism and community empowerment. It also increased the role of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) as 'place shapers'- strategic alliances of organisations that come together to deliver outcomes for communities. The Local Government White Paper sets out an expectation that local authorities will improve their community engagement and place shaping co-ordination functions.

The neighbourhoods agenda represents a business opportunity for housing associations to extend their involvement in neighbourhood services, within the existing regulatory framework. In many cases housing associations take the lead on neighbourhood initiatives and community participation. As key local service providers, housing associations are expected by other partners - crucially by local authorities - to be active partners in area based initiatives.

However, although there are pockets of excellence where housing associations are actively and creatively supporting and empowering communities, some housing associations have been less willing than others to explore this agenda. This is either because it does not fit their business plans or because they do not consider it to be within their remit.

Following the direction of the Local Government White Paper - and their own political trajectories - it is likely that local authorities will increasingly encourage or expect housing associations to

[1] Global Accounts of Housing Associations, Housing Corporation, 2005

become involved in their neighbourhood strategies and initiatives. In practice this will vary between different authorities, however housing associations everywhere need to be prepared for change in their relationships with local authorities at the neighbourhood level. The report of the Cave Review of social housing regulation in June 2007, which advocated that the regulator should be able to require social housing providers to engage constructively and co-operate with local authorities, has added a new dimension to this^[2].

This report explores what happens when housing associations wishing to grow their businesses to meet social need at the very local level come up against the wider public policy agenda of neighbourhood and community empowerment. Ultimately it asks the question, where should the *balance* be struck between supporting dynamic entrepreneurial activity and the constraints of strategic planning and 'place shaping'?

Defining neighbourhood governance

This project was set up with the intention of moving beyond the relatively well-known territory of neighbourhood service provision and multi-agency working, to explore how *influence* is exerted on neighbourhood life by housing associations, both through their relationships with other agencies and by supporting their tenants and other members of the community to influence the neighbourhood.

GOVERNANCE: A WORKING DEFINITION ^[3]

'Governance' refers to the process whereby elements in society wield power and authority, and influence and enact policies and decisions concerning public life, and economic and social development.

Governance is a broader notion than government, whose principal elements include the constitution, legislature, executive and judiciary. Governance also involves interaction between those formal institutions and those of civil society.

Housing associations wishing to become more involved in neighbourhood governance need legitimacy to:

- persuade local authorities and other partners that they act in the residents' interests
- persuade residents that they have influence in housing association decision-making
- persuade residents that they can influence other services.

If relationships in one area are not secure, housing associations' ability to operate effectively at the local level is undermined. This legitimacy is key to enabling housing associations to exert influence over a neighbourhood and to become involved in neighbourhood governance.

[2] Every tenant matters: a review of social housing regulation, CLG, 2007

[3] From the Global Development Research Centre, for full definition see: www.gdrc.org/u-gov/work-def.html

In practice neighbourhood governance at the local level consists of a variety of arrangements between agencies and individuals that decide actions, allocate resource and influence wider plans. These include *formal* and *informal* structures. Formal structures include including parishes, area partnerships, and particular initiatives such as regeneration partnerships and neighbourhood management initiatives. Informal structures include short term and ad-hoc partnerships with agencies and elected members.

To refine the focus of the project **neighbourhood governance** has been defined to mean either formal or informal structures and ways of working that enable housing associations to:

1. support residents directly to influence decisions made in the neighbourhood
2. influence other organisations working at the neighbourhood level to ensure residents' and wider community priorities are met.

THE RESEARCH

The Young Foundation was commissioned by the Housing Corporation to investigate the role housing associations can play in neighbourhood governance.

The project had three aims:

- to assess the current involvement of housing associations in neighbourhood and community governance structures
- to assess the scope for future development of housing associations' role in this area to develop options for new tools and initiatives
- to consider the implications of housing associations' evolving role in this area for government, the Housing Corporation, and in future for Communities England.

This study has focused on the experience of housing associations; however the findings and recommendations are also of relevance to ALMOs, and other agencies - including those from the private sector - which may be in receipt of public subsidy for affordable rented housing in the future.

METHODS

This report is based on qualitative research carried out over a six-month period, between September 2006 and March 2007.

- An initial scoping exercise included interviews with key stakeholders, with a parallel literature review.
- Four case studies focused on housing associations that were perceived to be exemplars of neighbourhood working, setting the standard for others to follow.
- The findings from the case studies were then discussed with and tested against the experiences of a further 10 housing associations chosen to represent a cross-section of the range of experiences within the housing sector.
- A stakeholder seminar discussed the findings to date and helped refine recommendations.

In total, 54 semi-structured interviews were conducted. In each case study, one focus group with residents regarded as 'resident champions' was also carried out

THE CASE STUDIES

Four associations, **Penwith Housing Association**, **Touchstone**, **Poplar HARCA** and **Tees Valley Housing Group**, were chosen to cover a range of experiences. All were selected as exemplars of neighbourhood working, agencies that were widely perceived to be leading housing associations in this field.

Penwith Housing Association

Penwith Housing Association (PHA) operates in West Cornwall, in a very rural and deprived area. It was set up in 1994 as a stock-transfer organisation and now, as part of Devon and Cornwall Housing Group, manages almost 4,000 properties. PHA, along with two other housing associations and the Cornwall Tenant's Forum helped set up Cornwall Neighbourhoods for Change (CN4C), an independent charity with the specific remit of working with communities in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

PHA's experience illustrates the strengths, and pitfalls, of outsourcing community engagement to an arms length organisation (CN4C) and the need to ensure that such an organisation is sustainable. PHA's relationships are good at the strategic level. It has effective working relationships with local authority officers and members, and with the LSP. However, outsourced community engagement sometimes means that good strategic relationships do not dovetail with very local neighbourhood involvement.

Touchstone

Touchstone, part of the Midland Heart group since 2006, manages almost 10,000 properties, across the Midlands. Touchstone's approach has been to work intensively at the strategic level

to draw together partnerships able to deliver large redevelopment projects for community facilities. At the time of the case study, Touchstone's resident involvement structure was relatively weak.

Touchstone's experience demonstrates the potential of strategic level partnership working, particularly at LSP level, to lever in funds and generate partnerships. This has enabled them to build flagship developments to meet social need. However, it also demonstrates that day-to-day resident involvement and very local partnership working need to be integrated with large showcase initiatives.

Poplar HARCA

Poplar HARCA (Housing and Regeneration Community Association) was set up in the late 1990s as a stock transfer vehicle for some of Tower Hamlet's most deprived estates. It has now grown to over 7,000 properties, largely through further stock transfer. Each of its estates has a neighbourhood centre. This is the base for their neighbourhood management service and a range of activities for the local community. Poplar HARCA is the first housing association in England to be resident-led. It has had particular success in engaging its Bangladeshi residents.

Poplar HARCA is strongly represented at the strategic level in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. It is represented on the LSP, has strong ties to the local authority, and local councillors sit on its executive board.

Poplar HARCA demonstrates what can be achieved by a dedicated, highly motivated team with relatively high funding, operating in a very small but densely populated area. It also highlights the need to carefully manage relationships with the local authority.

Tees Valley Housing Group

Tees Valley Housing Group manages almost 4,000 homes across the North East. Until the turn of the millennium it concentrated primarily on traditional housing provision services. However, faced with the collapse of the housing market in some areas and severe deprivation, the decision was taken to become more neighbourhood focused. This has involved work on organisational culture change and particular community initiatives.

As well as managing their own stock, Tees Valley act as neighbourhood management and community development agents on behalf of other organisations, and has developed strong partnership arrangements at both the strategic and neighbourhood level.



THE FINDINGS

Analysis of the interviews and other fieldwork data revealed trends and patterns that explain why housing associations become involved in neighbourhood governance, and what drives their decision making about neighbourhood working. It also found three key areas underpinning involvement in neighbourhood governance: partnership working, resident involvement and investing in neighbourhoods.

THE UNDERLYING DETERMINANTS

Five variables emerged from the case studies as crucial determinants about whether and how housing associations become involved in neighbourhood governance.

- Stock density.
- History of stock transfer.
- Ethos of the founding culture and current board.
- Neighbourhood demographics.
- External shocks.

Variable one: Stock density

Geographical concentration of properties is a significant factor in how a housing association approached neighbourhood governance. In general, associations with dispersed stock are less likely to invest in wider community issues. However, the research did unearth examples that bucked this trend, where housing associations managed only few homes in a particular locality, but were still highly involved in neighbourhood governance. This tended to be a result of the mission of the housing association, an appreciation of the benefits of improving the greater neighbourhood, or opportunism.

Other associations formed very local 'consortiums' with other housing associations in order to pool funds and resources to tackle neighbourhood problems. This is an element of the Housing Corporation's approach to stock rationalisation.

The Peabody Trust is one of the most well-known housing associations in London. Many of its estates were built in the 19th century. Since its inception Peabody has focused not just on the housing needs of its tenants but also the wellbeing of the wider community. Many of its new initiatives are designed for the 'Peabody community' - their tenants and residents plus others living in the area. The density of much of Peabody's stock, as well as its ethos, means that tensions over providing services for non-residents arise less often than for many other housing associations.

Variable two: Stock transfer

The history of each individual stock transfer has an impact on the likelihood of the successor landlord's involvement in neighbourhood working. Particular factors may lead to a greater emphasis on neighbourhood and community involvement, for example where an emphasis on community issues becomes important in reassuring tenants of the benefits of stock transfer. Other factors - such as a focus on meeting the Decent Homes Standard - may constrain these activities. Some stock transfer associations are now well over 15 years old and have distanced themselves from past expectations and legacies.

Stock transfer was a driver for neighbourhood working for Westlea Housing Association, because it made the association the major landlord in specific geographic areas. They report that this has put them in a strong position to improve the lives of their residents.

Variable three: Ethos of the founding culture and the current board

Housing associations that have had a mission to alleviate poverty as a founding objective, or those that have more recently incorporated such a mission into their organisation, tend to view neighbourhood governance as core to their work. Many housing associations have re-evaluated business plans and mission statements in the last decade, partly in response to political initiatives from central government. Some have invested in employee training programs to reinforce cultural change.

Housing associations that have undertaken this shift in focus tend to be led by a 'charismatic' figure, either at senior management or board level. The significant factor in driving change over the long term is whether the changes they initiate become embedded in the organisation. Instances were found where the broad support and infrastructure change needed to underpin long-term change had not been generated, the result being that good work collapsed when the leading figure left the organisation.

In the face of severe deprivation and high tenant unemployment, Black Country Housing Association, as far back as 1992, decided to concentrate on the welfare of the community alongside the management of their housing. A year later the association created a 'community development' department. It also began to integrate the new focus on community into their business plan and to reinforce it further through staff training.

Variable four: Neighbourhood demographics

The demographics, circumstances and needs of residents are key in dictating what services are needed in a particular area. Meeting these needs will often require close working with another agency; consequently housing associations working in deprived neighbourhoods are more likely than others to work in partnership with other organisations.

Many communities are becoming increasingly diverse. The reality of modern migration patterns means that an increasing number of nationalities, ethnicities and faiths are moving into new areas, challenging established patterns of community relationships between long standing communities (both black and white). In some cases this has compounded tensions within communities and led to greater instability. Sensitive community engagement is the key to tackling these problems and is a first prerequisite for developing plans to stabilise fragile communities.

Variable five: External shocks

External factors may unexpectedly change a housing association's focus, particularly if its impact is to force a re-evaluation of business models. For example, the collapse of the housing market in the 1990s in the North of England and parts of the Midlands compelled many housing associations to re-assess their mission and business plans.

Other sudden changes may generate social needs that threaten community cohesion. For example, the arrival of significant numbers of people from different backgrounds in a particular neighbourhood may demand a swift response from landlords to manage tensions between communities. Riots and uprisings, natural disasters or the collapse of particular industries can also force local agencies to consider their overall strategies.

WHAT DRIVES HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS' DECISION MAKING?

The five determinants explain which housing associations are more likely to become involved in neighbourhood working. However, as well as analysing the key underlying factors, it is important to understand what drives senior officers and board members' decision-making about whether, and how, to develop their neighbourhood activities.

Drivers for involvement in neighbourhood working were explored within the case studies and subsequent interviews. The key drivers can be condensed into three areas:

- drivers generated by the local authority
- housing associations' internal drivers - capturing pressures from private finance and the Housing Corporation
- pressure from residents.

The ten housing associations interviewed in the second stage of the research were asked to place themselves on a diagram that expressed the balance between these three factors - see figure 1. The four case studies (represented by letters) were then added to this.

The diagram illustrates that housing associations respond more to internal pressures to maintain

their business than to external pressures to develop neighbourhood working. The majority of the housing associations interviewed publicly state that their neighbourhood initiatives are developed in response to tenants' wishes. However, analysis of interviews confirms what is suggested by this diagram: that resident input often drives the organisational focus and motivation of housing associations less than publicity would suggest.

Local authority drivers are important but not critical. Housing associations interviewed did not report an increase in demand for neighbourhood working from their partner local authorities. Neither were they expecting this to increase with the roll-out of the Local Government White Paper.

The factors that drive housing associations involvement at the neighbourhood level are largely *internal*. These include a complex mix of factors that vary in different cases. For example, internal drivers may dictate that a housing association's involvement in neighbourhood governance is business-driven. A healthy neighbourhood results in lower turnover and higher property values, protecting assets and guaranteeing loan repayments. Conversely, internal drivers may stem primarily from ethical and social motivations.

Further analysis of the 'housing association internal driver' category in figure 2 established a complex mix of factors driving individual housing associations.

- *Political factors* including influence from central, regional or local government. In the future it may also involve parish level government, or greater influence from local councillors.
- *Regulation*, mainly by the Housing Corporation.
- The *business case* for increasing involvement in neighbourhood governance, particularly in areas where new developments or regeneration are planned or where management fees are available for organisations that oversee neighbourhood activities.
- *Protecting investment* may include pressure from private finance to protect the value of the associations' assets or reduce tenant turnover. In the face of pressing needs, such as the collapse of the housing market, this may heavily influence the association to look at neighbourhood involvement.
- *Ethical foundation*, a mission that goes beyond 'bricks and mortar'.
- Meeting the social needs of their residents as *individuals*.
- Meeting the *community* needs of their own residents and the wider communities living in the neighbourhood.

Figure 1: Where do housing associations position themselves? We asked what drives involvement in neighbourhood working

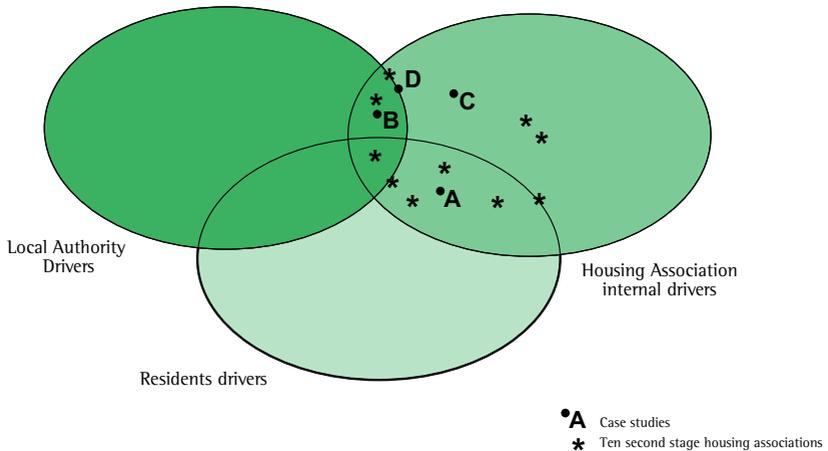
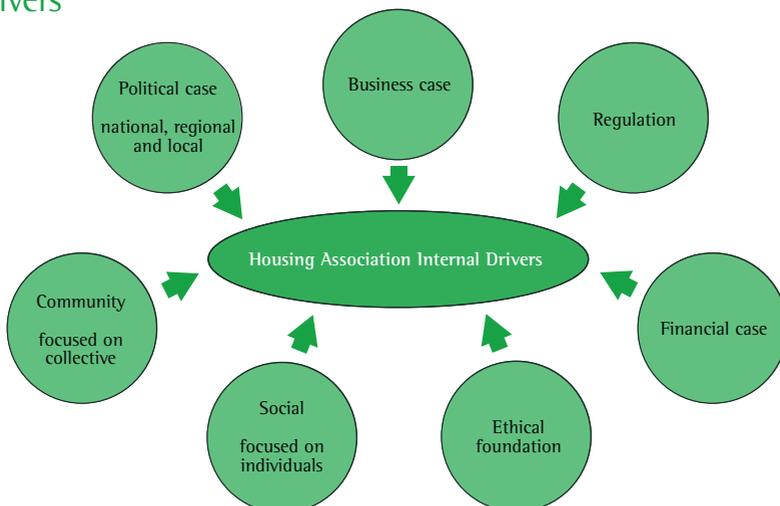


Figure 2: Factors shaping housing association internal drivers



For individual housing associations, the balance between these different factors is key. Figure 1 shows how housing associations interviewed assessed themselves in terms of the relative importance of different drivers. The case studies were added to this after analysis of interview data.

Our case studies illustrate the diversity of drivers between organisations. Although all of them balanced these different factors, for one association in particular the driver from ethnical and social drivers was stronger. For two the business case was dominant, though this did not completely exclude the desire to meet community needs.

There are implication in this analysis for policy. If government, or regulatory bodies, wish to encourage housing associations into more effective engagement at the neighbourhood level, then they are likely to be most successful if they bolster the internal drivers pushing housing association activity, rather than relying on the efforts of local authorities implementing the Local Government White Paper, or on resident voice.

THREE KEY ISSUES FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD GOVERNANCE

Three issues emerged as key for housing associations wishing to increase their involvement in neighbourhood governance: partnership working, funding and resident involvement. Much work has been undertaken on these in other research and good practice publications, and this study does not intend to duplicate what has been reported elsewhere.

Partnership working

It is not surprising that partnership emerged as an important component of neighbourhood governance. Partnerships allow housing associations to influence other service providers and through this enable residents to influence decisions taken by agencies in the neighbourhood.

Analysis of the different types of partnership - strategic level arrangements, neighbourhood level partnerships or informal working with local authority officers - established that a different pattern emerged between our case study exemplars of neighbourhoods working, and the broader selection of ten housing association interviewed. Figures 3 and 4 show how the different housing associations reported their partnership activity, the volume of each area on figures 3 and 4 represents the relative importance placed on partnership working at various levels by each of the associations interviewed.

All housing associations interviewed worked closely in partnership at the very local level and were significantly involved in a variety of partnership initiatives sitting outside or underneath formal LSP structures. The case study housing associations appeared to be more involved in the LSP than broader sample. While neighbourhood level arrangements are necessary for day-

to-day neighbourhood working, this study suggests that strategic involvement at LSP level is needed to drive neighbourhood working to a higher level.

Different housing associations had widely differing opinions of the relevance and effectiveness of LSPs. Some associations were actively engaged in LSPs and their associated structures: Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), theme groups and other sub groups. However other housing associations were very dismissive of their relevance and effectiveness. The most significant factor in determining whether or not a housing association was involved with an LSP was the number of properties it had in that area.

Cheviot Housing Association spans 14 Local Authority areas, but is only represented on LSP boards where it has a significant concentration of stock. In other areas it maintains links with the LSP through housing sub-groups or by working closely with other housing associations, ensuring a representative from one association feeds information back to others.

Some associations had formed consortiums with others, with one member representing all at LSP meetings. Others were represented through the Community Empowerment Network (CEN), as one of many voluntary and community organisations in the area.

Within less formalised partnerships and underpinning LSP and other formal involvement, relationships with local authority representatives were often extremely productive. Often the attitude of key individuals and organisational culture was important, particularly the degree to which the housing function of the local authority welcomed joint working. However, there were reports of poor relationships with local authority staff obstructing otherwise successful projects.

All the 10 housing associations we spoke to and three out of our four case studies claimed to be heavily involved in very local partnership working. Such relationships often (but not always) exist independently from those at strategic level. Many felt them to be more relevant to the success of service delivery and improvement than those at LSP strategic level.

Housing associations in practice often boost neighbourhood-level partnership working by supporting residents and community initiatives. This can include in-kind support and creative use of their assets. Asset transfer can be long term through transferring ownership of an entire building or piece of land, or shorter term by leasing land or buildings at cost. Examples were also found of housing associations offering kind support, such as lowering the cost of neighbourhood services.

Resident involvement

The research found that those housing associations that integrate resident views formally *and* informally into their governance structure have the greatest success in developing their involvement in neighbourhood governance.

'When tenants were asked whether their landlords should be involved in specified neighbourhood activities, the top priority mentioned by half of respondents was that their landlord should be directly involved in helping tenants in the neighbourhood to get better services from the local council followed by helping tenants to secure local environmental improvements (43 per cent), becoming involved in reducing crime (40 per cent) and providing community facilities such as nurseries and youth clubs (35 per cent)^[4]'

Involvement in formal governance structures, such as board or tenant panels does not appeal to everyone nor is it appropriate for all. Other forms of informal, non-traditional engagement are equally legitimate and are an invaluable way for housing associations to access resident input.

Cost versus investment

Cost is critical for many housing associations considering involvement in neighbourhood governance and was, on occasion, cited as a barrier to neighbourhood working. In general, housing associations were relatively happy to absorb the day-to-day costs of partnership working at the neighbourhood level. Associations were cognisant of the amount of senior manager time spent bolstering the relationships necessary for neighbourhood working, but the cost involved was not seen as excessive.

When offered the prospect of external funding, often from Neighbourhood Renewal or European sources, housing associations were willing to act as an initiator or lead, driving the project through. Many were apprehensive that there would be less central government money available in the future. Others assumed that other funding sources would continue to support their community-based work.

Some housing associations were also investing their own core budgets in neighbourhood working - in both services and governance structures. The key factors that lead housing associations to spend at the neighbourhood level above 'bricks and mortar' housing services are the perception of social need and the availability of resources. Others however were less willing to do so, sometimes citing the concern that they did not wish to use tenants' rents to subsidise facilities for the wider community.

The Housing Corporation has encouraged associations to think carefully about neighbourhood investment: 'Financial and development strategies and wider asset management strategies should be closely aligned. Both boards and executive teams should ensure that the comparative

[4] Up Your Street, Housing Corporation, 2005

Figure 3: How the case study housing associations work in partnership

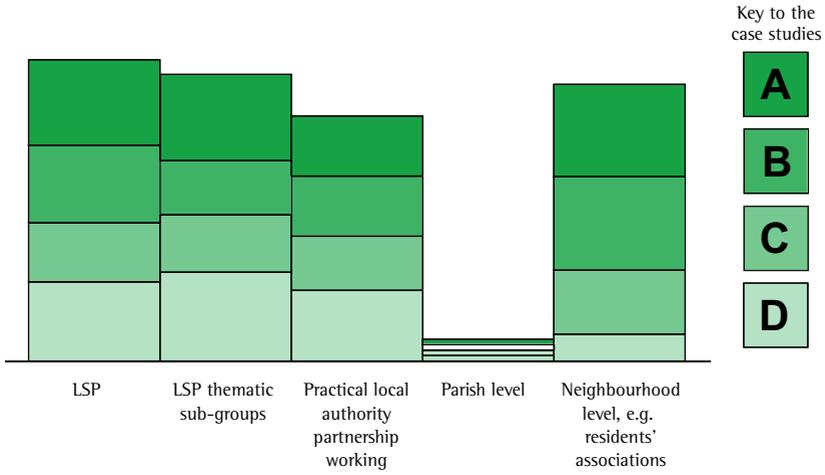
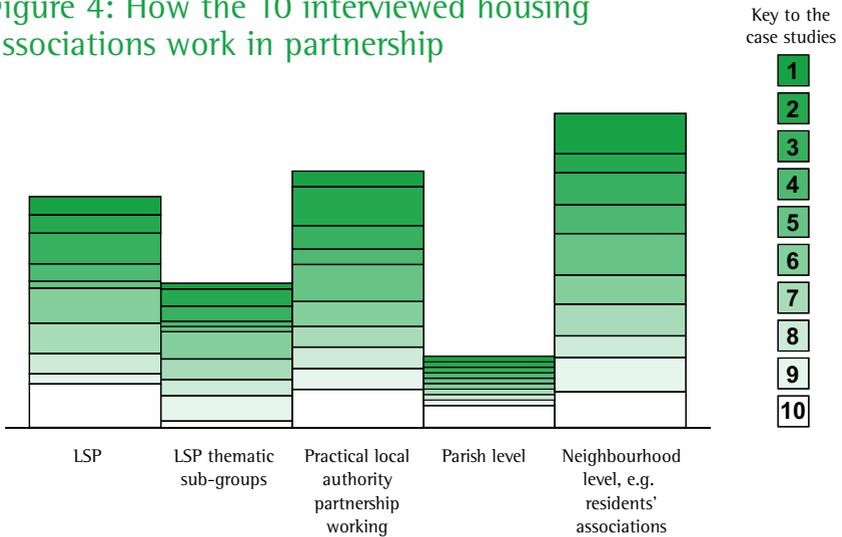


Figure 4: How the 10 interviewed housing associations work in partnership



priorities of investing in new supply, existing stock and wider community services, have been fully debated^[5]. This enables housing associations to consider community and neighbourhood provision on the same footing as their core housing activities. However, our study found relatively high levels of conservatism about funding neighbourhood activity, partly because it was seen as something that should be externally funded, and partly because of larger anxieties about the future of neighbourhood focused subsidy and overall levels of public sector spending.

IMPLICATIONS FOR HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

The research has identified certain pre-requisites for housing associations seeking to increase their involvement in neighbourhood governance.

- Board and senior management support.
- Financial commitment.
- A supportive management culture.
- Appropriate resident involvement practices.

The four case studies exposed the extent of the difference in approach between housing associations who, on paper, are trying to achieve the same outcomes and who work in similar contexts. One finding of the research, informed by broader Young Foundation work on neighbourhoods, was that the multitude of different approaches to neighbourhood working can be a source of further confusion that can hamper housing associations' relationships with residents and agencies. At worst, the lack of clarity can lead to significant and damaging misunderstandings by partner agencies - including local authorities and community organisations - who may perceive their local housing association as acting competitively and aggressively.

The further housing associations move away from their expected core business - the provision of housing to meet need - the greater is the potential for confusion about their role. If housing associations are to avoid accusations of 'spin' and of using the language of neighbourhood working in order to position themselves advantageously for funding, then clarity about what they do and how this fits with other local agencies is key. Good relationships at the very local level, and sensitivity to other agencies' perceptions, are also very important.

[5] [Unlocking the door, delivering more homes from the comprehensive spending review 2007](#), Housing Corporation February 2007

DEVELOPING TYPOLOGIES

Given the varied circumstances of individual housing associations - including their history, density of housing stock, urban or rural location, characteristics and needs of their residents, funding streams and the housing association's relationship with other agencies - there is no one model to propose as guidance for housing associations seeking to increase their involvement in neighbourhood governance. A series of typologies to guide housing associations in different circumstances has been devised, informed by the four case studies and other interviews.

The LEADER - self-sufficient neighbourhood operator Typically, housing associations with high density housing portfolios, often housing complex tenant groups, sometimes spanning several local authorities.

These associations will often be strongly involved at LSP level and use formal and informal strategies to involve residents in governance.

The INFUENCER - consortium and partnership player Many housing associations with small numbers of properties, or pepper-potted stock, may be hindered in their neighbourhood involvement by financial pressures, or by their low profile with other local agencies.

Housing associations in this situation are well placed to form a 'consortium' with other local associations, enabling them to be represented on the LSP, and to pool resources to manage neighbourhood issues. Associations could also 'outsource' neighbourhood working to an arms-length charitable or social enterprise, or enter into joint ventures with large community organisations or development trusts.

The NETWORKER - driven by pressing neighbourhood need In areas of pressing need, investing in neighbourhood stability and regeneration is likely be crucial to maintain assets. Such needs are usually community-wide and the association will have to look beyond their immediate residents and engage fully with the wider community to mitigate the crisis.

Substantial formal partnership working , including LSP involvement , is needed as solutions to problems are complex and require input from many players.

The EXEMPLAR - tangible product approach Many larger housing associations are drawn to a 'tangible product' approach, showcasing neighbourhood working through the development of large projects. This could be a new capital asset such as a youth centre or training provision. Securing residents' cooperation in planning, developing and making best use of showcase facilities will be important to make sure that developments meet need and are well used.

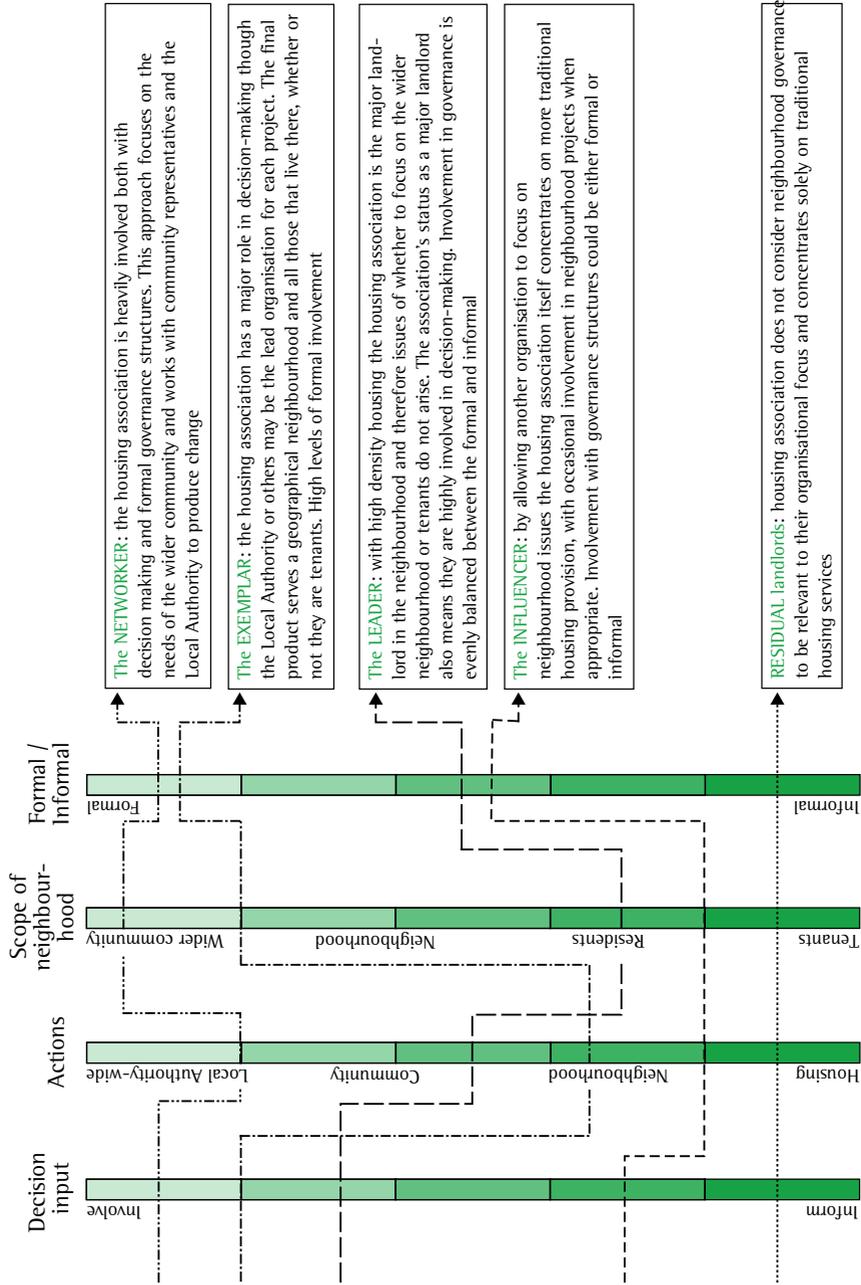
Substantial involvement in the LSP will be essential to ensure synergies with other key initiatives and to lever in funding.

RESIDUAL landlords - bricks and mortar only Housing associations may decide that neighbourhood working is not their core business, because their mission is to focus on housing need, or on specialist provision. Others may wish to progress neighbourhood working in some areas, but in others they may manage too few properties to justify the cost. In these cases they may wish to rationalise their stock by transfer of management to another association - in effect exiting the area - or enter into an arrangement with another association with a greater presence in the area to take on neighbourhood working on their behalf.

Figure 5 shows how these five typologies relate to four dimensions of neighbourhood working that this project has developed. The four dimensions are:

- To what degree are outside bodies able to influence housing association's decision making process? On a spectrum from **inform** to **involve**.
- In what arena does the housing association focus its actions? On a spectrum from housing through neighbourhood and **community** to **local authority wide**.
- How does the housing association conceptualise 'the neighbourhood'? On a spectrum from **tenants only** to **wider community**.
- To what degree does the housing association use formal or informal partnerships to influence issues at the neighbourhood level? On a spectrum from **formal** to **informal**.

Figure 5: Developing a typology to guide housing association activities





THE FUTURE

Housing associations in the next five to fifteen years will be profoundly affected by demographic trends; increases in the numbers of new migrants, increasing diversity amongst many (but not all) deprived communities, and growing numbers of people living alone. Forecasts suggest that increasing polarisation between the most disadvantaged and the most affluent will continue to grow.

Policy and political pressures over the next five years are likely to reinforce the impact of the longer-term demographic trends. Both will have the effect of increasing housing associations' focus on neighbourhood concerns. The intention will be to satisfy the wishes of their tenants, meet the demands of the Housing Corporation, local and central government, and to meet the needs of an ever more complex tenant and resident population and stabilise and sustain the communities in which they live, in order to promote their best interests and maintain asset bases.

Three scenarios

Drawing on the findings of the research, and putting this in context of what is known about future trends, three possible scenarios are possible:

Reactive ad-hoc development: a thousand flowers bloom at local level. Significant amount of money wasted through duplication and inefficiency. State takes up financial burden through housing benefit.

A strategic future: housing associations encouraged to increase involvement in neighbourhood working within stronger LSP framework to ensure synergies with other neighbourhood strategies. Within strong risk management framework, Housing Corporation and its successor body, Communities England encourages good practise and innovation. Office of the Third Sector gives housing associations strong role at local level in VCS improvement.

Local Authorities in control: more effective future LSPs drive neighbourhood working, but local authorities take dominant role in this. Housing associations involvement in neighbourhood outside services for own tenants becomes contingent on local authority approval.

Of the three scenarios, this study suggests that the most positive is the middle way, the strategic future. This scenario reflects the most promising elements of the four case studies, combining integration into both strategic planning for the neighbourhood through the LSP and local partnership working, whilst maintaining housing associations' creative autonomy, flexibility and potential for innovation.

However both of the other scenarios are possibilities, with the potential to emerge nationally or within individual local authority areas.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Future demographic and social trends will push housing association activity towards a greater focus on people within place - on the management of communities as well as residents, and of neighbourhoods as well as housing. These developments, fuelled by increasing polarisation within this country and the impact of globalisation at the very local level, are mirrored by the overall direction of public policy.

Although the detailed policy landscape underpinning the development of housing association activity at the neighbourhood level is in flux, the overall direction is clear. It includes an increasing focus on localism, on the role of the public sector as 'place shaper', and on the development of community empowerment. The June 2007 report of the Cave Review has further focused attention on the relationship between housing associations and local authorities.

In the future, the new organisation taking over the role of the Housing Corporation - Communities England - will have a wider remit than the Corporation, opening up the possibility that housing association activity might be reframed within a wider regeneration agenda.

This research looked at housing associations' involvement in neighbourhood governance primarily through the lens of housing associations that were seen to be succeeding in driving forward neighbourhood working. It therefore has not explored the barriers that many housing associations report in expanding in this area. Neither does it fully capture the perspective of local authorities and third sector agencies, which sometimes report frustration with their housing association partners.

If the housing association movement is to continue to build on its strengths in neighbourhood governance, it is important that it is not over-constrained by new regulation and guidance. The right balance needs to be struck between maintaining the potential for rapid response

and flexibility, and meaningful engagement with neighbourhood planning and strategy development.

The recommendations of this report are relevant to housing associations and other landlords receiving funding to build and manage affordable rented housing with public subsidy. This will include ALMOs and, in the future, some private sector providers.

This research has identified eight key recommendations, designed to encourage the right balance of strategic control and organisational innovation to facilitate the growth of housing associations involvement in neighbourhood governance.

1. All housing associations should be **alert**: they should consider the importance of their response to neighbourhood and community concerns within business planning processes and overall financial and asset management strategies.
2. Housing associations must be **prepared**: those that want to expand involvement in neighbourhood governance will need to develop new skills and become accountable for wider issues than many have taken on to date. Accountability and transparency needs to be extended downwards to residents, and outwards to partner agencies, particularly LSPs.
3. Housing associations should be **realistic - and pass the baton when it's the right thing to do**. Those that decide that they do not want to develop involvement in neighbourhood governance should ensure that this function is carried out by another organisation or partnership on their behalf.
4. Housing associations must be **co-ordinated**: stock rationalisation should be guided by the best interests of neighbourhoods, ensuring that the best-placed associations take forward the lead role within neighbourhood governance, and that others take secondary roles.
5. Housing associations should be **integrated**: they should be encouraged to participate appropriately in LSPs and to ensure synergies between their neighbourhood working and LSP Community Strategies.
6. Housing associations should be **attuned to resident voice**: they need to develop both formal and informal governance structures and associated ways of working with residents.
7. Housing associations should be **structured**: they should be encouraged to take forward the development of new vehicles to respond to community voice, including supporting new community and existing parish councils.
8. Housing associations have to be **strategic**: to do so they need more support to understand

the implications of the central and local government agenda on neighbourhood and community empowerment, where the opportunities are and how they could benefit.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HOUSING CORPORATION AND COMMUNITIES ENGLAND

The central question for the Housing Corporation, or any future regulator, is the extent to which it wishes to require, encourage, or incentivise, increased housing association involvement in neighbourhood working.

1. The Housing Corporation should increase the *expectations* it has of housing association involvement at the neighbourhood level. The vehicle for this is the roll out of the Neighbourhoods and Communities strategy, particularly the development of the Communities Standard for Social Housing. This should differentiate between associations whose key focus is on neighbourhoods and those that do not plan to progress this agenda.

Housing associations that *propose to lead* on neighbourhood governance should be expected to:

- actively engage with the LSP, including participating in LSP sub-groups
- spend some surpluses or reserves on neighbourhood activities and where possible transfer assets (either buildings, or through subsidy to community groups) balancing this with the demands of housing need and stock condition.

Housing associations who *do not propose to lead* on neighbourhood governance should be expected to:

- enter into consortium or partnership arrangements that ensure that their residents are given a strong voice within neighbourhoods
 - consider how their assets and surpluses could be used to support the working of these partnerships or consortiums.
2. The Housing Corporation should review whether it wishes to *require* housing associations to increase their involvement within neighbourhoods. There are several options for taking this forward. These include:
 - strengthening the Housing Corporation's Regulatory Code and Guidance
 - working with government and the Audit Commission to boost the relevant requirements within the Audit Commission's key lines of enquiry. This is compatible with the emerging Comprehensive Area Assessment framework, which is likely to bring together the work of different Inspectorates with a new focus on place and citizen perspective
 - exploring how this could be integrated with the recommendations of the Cave Review, to require social housing providers to engage constructively and co-operate with local

authorities, as a condition of registration.

3. This research, particularly the review of what is known about social innovation, also identified an important role for the Housing Corporation in driving innovation at neighbourhood level, promoting awareness of the wider agenda and existing models of good practice.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

For central government, housing associations are a vital local resource with significant potential to underpin implementation of the localisation agenda set out by the 2006 Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*. Their potential is at both the local authority strategic level and as delivery agents within neighbourhoods.

1. At the *strategic level*, housing associations should be encouraged to contribute resources, experience and influence to taking forward the community empowerment agenda, through:
 - strengthening guidance to LSPs on the involvement of housing associations in ‘place shaping’
 - incentivising housing association involvement by placing expectations on their performance within neighbourhood governance in the new local authority performance framework (which will set the parameters for the Audit Commission’s different Inspectorates)
 - including housing associations within new area scrutiny structures set out in the White Paper.
2. Local authorities should be encouraged to work with housing associations to use housing associations’ potential as *delivery agents* of neighbourhood working, including:
 - delivering more neighbourhood management initiatives, including low cost low intensity schemes
 - acting as brokers of community charters or neighbourhood agreements
 - bolstering local authority-led neighbourhood working by contributing assets
 - becoming ‘community anchors’ by supporting community groups with assets and expertise.

Housing associations have also been highlighted by the Office of the Third Sector as positive examples of third sector organisations working entrepreneurially and dynamically, providing services on behalf of and complementary to, the public sector. This recognition is valuable in itself, and the sector should be encouraged and nurtured within the wider context of policy towards the third sector.

RECOMMENDATION FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND LSPS

Local authorities have developed strong relationships with housing associations as partners in meeting housing need and housing demand, and as providers of housing and services for vulnerable individuals. In many areas, however, there is potential for housing associations to work more closely with local authorities delivering their community empowerment and neighbourhoods strategies, contributing resources and assets to this process. Housing associations should become key partners for local authorities in their Sustainable Community Strategies in the same way as they already are in their housing and homelessness strategies.

To accelerate this process, local authorities and LSPs should:

- review housing associations' involvement in LSP structures, including thematic, area and other sub groups
- audit housing associations' existing contribution to neighbourhood governance
- include housing associations within their strategic planning processes at neighbourhood level, including those that are part of the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TENANTS AND RESIDENTS

Housing association residents want their landlord to provide good services that meet their needs. Although the majority may not be prepared to become committed activists, a significant proportion of residents everywhere are keen to be involved in the way their landlord operates and in wider neighbourhood issues.

Residents should be able to expect that their landlord will feed their voice into agencies that shape the wider neighbourhood, and that those who wish to be active in the wider neighbourhood will be enabled to take on this broader role. This can be achieved either directly by the association themselves or through a partnership with another agency.

CONCLUSION

This research has shown the rich experience of housing association activity within neighbourhoods. It has however also demonstrated that this activity often fails to align with other agencies' parallel work, that associations are undertaking vastly different jobs under the broad label of neighbourhood and community working, that many agencies that work at the neighbourhood level are suspicious of housing associations' motivation, and that relationships with local strategic planning, particularly through LSPs, are scattershot and often weak.

Neighbourhood governance, as opposed to neighbourhood management or service provision, implies an involvement with the broad community - and engagement with the web of relationships and networks, formal and informal, that influence what happens at the very local level. If housing associations are to become more involved in this then they need to make sure that they fully understand residents' views and needs and that they can advocate on their behalf; and have strong relationships with other services working at both the neighbourhood and the strategic level.

Neighbourhood governance, as opposed to neighbourhood management or service provision, implies an involvement with the broad community - and engagement with the web of relationships and networks, formal and informal, that influence what happens at the very local level.

The direction of central and local government policy and practice, and the imperatives of demographic trends, will push housing associations into a fuller engagement with very local neighbourhoods. In the next few years, housing associations need to be prepared for local government, and local strategic alliances of agencies, making more demands to meet neighbourhood concerns. This will demand changes in services and practice, building an internal culture that frees up staff to develop relationships, respond flexibly and take risks. This will enable housing associations to be both responsive partners and proactive social innovators, driving the development of neighbourhood governance, building on associations' strong tradition of flair and creativity at the very local level.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Young Foundation's research into housing associations' potential role within neighbourhood governance was supported by Housing Corporation Innovation and Good Practice funding. This work grew out of the Foundation's broader work on neighbourhoods and social innovation. We are very grateful to all our Young Foundation colleagues, and particularly to Adrian Moran at the Housing Corporation, for their support, advice and guidance.

We would like to thank our four case studies: Touchstone Housing Association, Penwith Housing Association, Tees Valley Housing Group, and Poplar HARCA for allowing us access to their staff and for meeting with us. We would particularly like to send a warm thank you to all the residents in Penwith, Middlesbrough, Poplar and Coventry who took time out of their busy lives to attend our focus groups.

We would also like to gratefully acknowledge the contribution of the ten housing associations with which we tested our emerging findings:

Accent Group, Ashram Housing Association, Black Country Housing and Community Services, Cheviot Housing Association, Home Housing Group, INclude Neighbourhood Regeneration, Notting Hill Housing, Cheviot Housing Association, Peabody, Places 4 People, PLUS Housing Group and Westlea Housing.

Many people gave up their valuable time to contribute to this work. Thanks are due to:

Alison Thain, Andrea Malcom, Andrew Mahoney, Andrew Wells, Arlene Walton, Babu Bhattacharjee, Bren McGowen, Chris Banes, Chris Ley, Christina Gates, Christine Searle, Dave Winslow, David Ashmore, David Barrow, David Cowens, David Edgar, David Francis, Debbie Sims, Elaine Shirley, Elaine Le Montais, Erika Rushdon, Flo Allen, Gary Neilson, George Hopkins, George Walton, Gerald Murden, Heather White, Helen Beck, Ilias Ahmed, Janet Parry, Jaz Baines, Jean Canwell, Jim Brownfield, Jim Rogers, Josie Stacey, Kate Davies, Ken Mendum, Keren Miller, Kim Kewn, Malcolm Dean, Mandy Andrews, Manjit Sehmar, Mary McDermott, Mathew Warburton, Matthew Buckham, Melville Durrant, Millie Mendum, Mrs Gill Barnes, Nargus Begum, Nigel Fisher, Paul Forsythe, Paul Neilson, PC Holmes, PC Tony Duddall, Peter Hodge, Peter Matthew, Peter McCarthey, Peter Stott, Rob Trimble, Roger Jarman, Sandra Spence, Sarah Davis, Sarah Ross, Scott Spencer, Simon Batton, Steve Bird, Steve Clare, Steve Wylar, Steven Howlett, Stuart Dexter, Stuart Thompson, Ted Clemens, Trica Zipfel, Vanessa Luckwell and William Roberts.

And from the project advisory group:

Alan Benson, Greater London Authority; Chris Wadhams, Chris Wadhams Associates; Professor David Mullins, Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, University of Birmingham; Dennis Rees, Derby Homes; Harriet Baldwin, English Partnerships; Heather Petch, HACT; Helen Williams, National Housing Federation; John Low, Joseph Rowntree Foundation; Dr. Rebecca Tunstall, Department of Social Policy, London School of Economics; Sandra Brown, Local Government Association; Sarah Webb, Chartered Institute of Housing; Shirley Mucklow, Bellingham Sure Start.

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Our main goal is to speed up society's ability to respond to changing needs through innovating and replicating new methods and models. Our work program has three strands - Launchpad, Local Projects and Research - all of which complement each other in the shared goal of finding practical initiatives to meet unmet needs.

The Housing Corporation

The Housing Corporation is the Government agency responsible for investing in new affordable homes and regulating over 1,500 housing associations across England. Its biggest ever investment programme of £3.9 billion for 2006-08 will fund 84,000 homes; 49,000 of these will be for affordable rent, and 35,000 will be for affordable sale through the Government's new HomeBuy initiative, helping people to get a foot on the property ladder.

