

## **Business planning for neighbourhoods**

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# Business Planning for Neighbourhoods

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## THE COMMITMENT:

'We will put neighbourhoods at the heart of everything we do. We will promote neighbourhoods where there is a place for everyone with positive support for diversity of people and places. We will work in partnership with local people, councils and other agencies, and will champion local needs. We will be open and explicit about our role in the neighbourhoods where we work, and about the time and money invested in them'

## INTRODUCTION

**iN business for neighbourhoods** was launched in September 2003. The introductory document, 'Action for Change' called on all housing associations to sign up by making three commitments - to neighbourhoods, customers and excellence - and to adopt the **iN** logo. The aim is to look beyond housing management to the wider neighbourhood, working with local people and agencies, to improve quality of life.

As a result, housing associations are actively committing resources and energy to make their neighbourhoods places where people want to live. 'Business planning for neighbourhoods' aims to move from one-off initiatives to mainstreaming the neighbourhood focus. This is a challenging agenda, but much can be learned from the experience of those associations who adopted **iN** at the beginning (the early adopters). This booklet sets out some ideas and tools that can help both those already involved, and those who are still considering adopting the **iN business** commitments.

This booklet also complements and builds on 'Fast forward to 2008' which presents the findings of a scenario planning event that formed part of the housing association sector's activity to develop **iN business for neighbourhoods**. The main lesson from the event was the need for associations to take a role in shaping the future rather than just waiting for it to happen. There were eight actions identified as vital for housing associations to undertake in preparation for the future, and many of these will feature in business plans that take the lead in delivering **iN business for neighbourhoods**.

Neighbourhoods are very different, and so are housing associations, so approaches have varied, but starting with what neighbourhoods want is key to success. This is about focusing on customer pull, not organisation push. While associations need to progress at their own pace, **iN business for neighbourhoods** is all about learning, from each other and from neighbourhoods themselves, how to deliver more for the communities which we work with.

## WHAT ARE YOU STARTING WITH?

The early adopter associations recognise that they are learning as they go. Corporate commitment, at board and senior management level, to **iN business for neighbourhoods** is critical to success, but beyond that, each association needs to use the approach to implementation - engaging with residents, communities and stakeholders, deciding roles, agreeing goals, and allocating resources - that makes most sense for their neighbourhoods and their organisations.

### Identifying neighbourhoods

For associations with concentrated stock and resources already identified, it may be possible to move straight from adopting the **iN business** commitments to engaging with communities and stakeholders and a fully integrated, corporate approach to neighbourhoods. For associations with dispersed stock, identifying coherent neighbourhoods with which to work is one of the hardest tasks. Some have used local authority wards or areas where they have 'critical mass', eg 200+ units, while others have been guided by residents' views of neighbourhood, and so moved away from an approach centred on ownership. Early adopters have often established pilot areas to learn how to achieve neighbourhood focus before rolling it out more widely.

For most associations, the neighbourhood focus will vary between areas, depending on needs, amount of stock, resources, and the activity of other agencies and partners. Establishing what's already there will help to determine the role to take.

#### Case study - Threshold Group

Threshold adopted a local neighbourhood strategy as early as 1997, and works in 17 London boroughs. The approach to defining neighbourhoods was deliberately non-prescriptive, and based on locations and communities with which residents can really identify. Neighbourhoods vary from an estate, to a number of adjoining streets, to a wider area encompassing other landlords and homeowners.

The strategy began with two pilot areas, and has since extended to a further seven areas, covering nearly half its tenants. Given the dispersed nature of the stock, the local neighbourhood approach is augmented by a minimum standard of community investment for all homes, thematic projects to address priorities for all residents, such as engaging with young people and financial inclusion, and working supportively with other partners and agents to ensure Threshold tenants have access to the services they need.

## **Mapping what's there**

Early adopters are using a variety of techniques to map neighbourhoods, using their own tenant data, Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping, accessing census data at ward level, and using other sources such as local, health, police and education authorities, and other regeneration schemes. Building up a good picture of the demographic make up of the area, in terms of age, ethnic origin, disability, household composition, income levels and working patterns is important in working with local communities to develop neighbourhood plans. But obtaining the best data is still secondary to engaging with communities and understanding what they want.

## **Community engagement**

Residents' concerns will extend beyond housing services to wider neighbourhood issues, such as crime, anti-social behaviour, transport, employment and green spaces. Community engagement involves a proactive dialogue with local residents about the issues they face and what they would like to see happen. Adopters have engaged with established residents' groups, but also reached beyond them to engage with different communities and faith groups.

Building capacity starts with understanding the issues that communities face, such as poverty, unemployment, anti-social behaviour and inter-community conflict. Understanding the resources and capacity of the community and its existing networks is vital, as is developing dialogue with other stakeholders and partners (see below), before working together to develop neighbourhood action plans. Supporting communities to establish social enterprises or setting up resident services organisations that employ local people both help to respond to communities' needs and build community capacity. A number of early adopters have used a range of outreach initiatives, like open days, 'planning for real' and engaging with faith groups to enable minority communities to engage in community development. The Federation is developing additional resources to help effective community engagement

## **Tool - community audit**

Community audit is a powerful and flexible tool to establish the needs and resources of an area, in consultation with residents. Some associations have worked with existing residents' groups, or set up residents' steering groups, and then all parties have worked together to carry out a 'census' of everyone living in the area, using face to face interviews, open days and surgeries.

While some of this information may be available through census data, by interviewing residents a more complete picture can be built up of the services available, potential resources and what is needed. Meetings with all the providers of services in the area - police, transport, community psychiatric nurse, GP surgery, businesses, shops, meals on wheels, schools, community facilities will establish what is available and future intentions.

By analysing the information obtained with the steering group, a picture of community priorities and the gaps, overlaps and future priorities of service providers can be developed. This will set a community-led agenda for neighbourhood planning for the future of the area.

Some early community audits were the basis for one of the first Groundwork Trust initiatives, based in Hackney, and a scheme to provide accommodation, training and jobs for homeless people in Kings Cross, part-funded and supported by the local businesses who participated in the community audit.

### Case study - Community profiling

Bradford Community Housing Trust has commissioned a community profiling exercise to provide data on employment, education, skills, housing and health. Existing services will also be mapped, using an IT based GIS system, to benchmark sustainability, to prioritise intervention and to develop indicators to quantify the impact of **iN business for neighbourhoods**.

### Case study - Community action planning

Bedfordshire Pilgrims HA are working with tenants and residents on two estates to undertake community surveys, to improve participation and to develop tenants' skills while gathering the information. Two community action groups will then develop regeneration plans for their communities. This is part of the association's work towards accreditation as an 'Investor in Communities'

## Partnership

Early adopters have been clear that they cannot do all the work themselves. So when neighbourhood needs are identified, how other stakeholders are approached becomes very important. Associations need to work with existing structures, such as Local Strategic Partnerships, crime and disorder partnerships, neighbourhood management pathfinders, and new Local Area Agreements. Mapping community organisations, services and resources, and meeting to establish the activity and strategic intentions of local stakeholders and partners is vital in developing dialogue and relationships.

The key is to engage from the beginning with stakeholders, and not to assume a lead role. One early adopter commented "If you can't get the local authority or community body to give you legitimacy - 'permission to lead' - you have no choice but to adopt a support role. Trying to lead without that is disastrous".

Offers of help, in terms of support, time, staff, office space or funding are most likely to generate a positive response and to give the basis for longer-term dialogue to meet the identified needs of a neighbourhood. Often a great deal can be achieved in meeting identified needs simply by re-allocating existing resources.

Knowing what other stakeholders think of you is extremely important, and can form the basis for excellent long-term relationships. One association holds annual stakeholder conferences and conducts an annual survey to ensure they are responsive to stakeholders' views.

### **Tool - stakeholder perceptions study**

East Thames Group carried out a study during 2002/3 to find out what its key stakeholders thought about it and to help it to understand and respond to their priorities and concerns. The results showed that their community, social and economic regeneration focus gave very strong involvement in the localities in which they work, and it also identified areas where stakeholders wanted to see more activity. They built on this by developing their future strategy in consultation with their stakeholders, and have continued to consult and work with them since.

#### **Case study - Orbit, Touchstone and Whitefriars**

The Coventry Cohesion project is a joint initiative in partnership with other agencies working in Coventry to deepen the associations' understanding of the city's black, Asian and minority ethnic communities and particularly their attitudes and expectations about social housing.

## ORGANISING FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

### What do you want to achieve?

Most adopter associations have adopted a vision or mission statement that incorporates the **iN** commitments, many have developed objectives and most have pilots or neighbourhood projects under way. But moving from multiple initiatives to mainstreaming the neighbourhood approach requires a strong corporate drive and a major cultural shift to enable neighbourhoods to set their own agendas, to which corporate and business plans adapt. Adopter associations have made progress. Initiatives have included establishing frameworks and allocating initial resources, facilitating neighbourhood engagement, and looking at board commitment, staff skills, reorganisation, culture change programmes, measurement, reporting, review and sustainability.

### Establishing the framework: business planning & resources

Inevitably, associations' early plans for implementing **iN** were additional to business plans already established. Adopter associations are acutely aware of the need to start with what neighbourhoods want. They also need to align with different government initiatives on growth and market renewal, the renewal of the most deprived neighbourhoods, and work with Local Strategic Partnerships and a wide range of other neighbourhood players.

The **iN business** commitment to neighbourhoods requires partnership working and clarity on the role and resources for each neighbourhood, with the aim that these commitments are reflected in each association's business plan. A number of associations allocated resources to their neighbourhood work, typically between 1% and 10% of revenue budget. There is general recognition that in learning as they progress, the development of objectives and resources for each neighbourhood will evolve and change, based on what neighbourhoods want.

#### Case study - Keynote Housing Group

Keynote Housing Group went 'back to basics' with their business planning, involving all their internal and external stakeholders, staff and Boards. They realigned services to match neighbourhood needs, in some cases integrating regeneration services with local housing services, recruiting some new staff focusing on neighbourhood services. They embarked on a 6 month culture change programme with all staff. The focus now is to develop a learning and review process and to develop better measures to demonstrate effectiveness and added value.

### **Case study - New Charter Housing Trust**

Most associations consult their tenants on issues that affect their own home - improvement works, play space etc - but it's a much bigger challenge to engage tenants on the bigger issues of the future business plan. New Charter used electronic voting, like that used on 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' to record and display tenants' views on business plan issues. The 'kit' was lent by their auditors, and the results showed clearly where tenants felt strongly and the association needed to adjust its plans.

### **Neighbourhood planning by communities**

As suggested earlier, a number of adopters are piloting neighbourhood engagement and planning, with review and evaluation before wider implementation. Most associations are gathering information and engaging with communities to help the communities themselves to plan what is needed for their own neighbourhood. That requires greater flexibility in corporate and business planning. It will also require considerable skill in being realistic about what is possible, and in negotiating priorities.

### **Case study - community development arm - West Kent Housing Association (WKHA)**

West Kent Extra developed from tenant participation initiatives, but was specifically set up to benefit wider communities, including non-tenants. It aims to 'build and support strong, sustainable neighbourhoods that provide opportunities for all'. Its brief is to bring added business and community benefit at a rate of £4 for every £1 invested by WKHA, to work in partnership with tenants, local people and stakeholders, and to deliver on three key themes: neighbourhood cohesion and inclusion, social investment (financial inclusion) and youth. Two planned developments include: establishing a Neighbourhood Chest in partnership with other organisations to support capacity building activity with support and seed funding; and to pilot, with the County Council, new social investment practice.

## External resources

There is a bewildering array of funding sources, which require substantial time and skills to be accessed effectively. Some of the website references and publications listed may help in accessing funding. There is potential both for associations to pool resources to obtain funding, and to spread the net widely. One group of associations has funding from: the regional economic development agency, the local city and County Councils, the European Social Fund, the Learning and Skills council, the Housing Corporation, the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund, the Single Regeneration Budget, Regeneration Zone, and Market Renewal. Such a wide range of funders for neighbourhoods creates its own issues, as all have different priorities, measures and timetables, and there is a need for much greater coherence.

Associations should also look at how they can reinvest efficiency savings or engage with local partners, pooling resources to meet neighbourhood priorities.

### Case study – South Liverpool Housing

The SLH Group has been involved in a joint initiative to deliver a One Stop Shop in partnership with the local authority in Speke, Liverpool. Integral to the partnership is a data exchange agreement to enable sharing of information on tenancies and the progress of benefit claims. SLH and the council share the reception area of the One Stop Shop where information on both SLH and council services are available, and the two bodies work together on the delivery of services to residents. The initiative has been very successful, customers and staff are very positive, and it has led to a further partnership on benefits delivery.

## Mainstreaming: staff, boards and culture change

Adopter associations are very clear that establishing frameworks and resources must be followed through:

“It won't work without commitment at the top from board members and senior staff”  
“Work in neighbourhoods must be integrated as a business imperative, just as much as delivering on Decent Homes”.

Many have held board away days and staff conferences to debate the changes needed. Some have already reorganised staff to focus more on neighbourhoods, using call centres and other systems to streamline administrative work and free up locally focused staff to concentrate on engaging with neighbourhoods. Some associations have appointed specific senior posts to deliver the **iN** agenda, others have decided the task should belong to all. In all cases, maintaining momentum and ownership will be critical for the future, particularly given the speed of change and the range of demands on associations.

### Case studies - involving staff

One association has formed a group of frontline managers from community development, general needs, home ownership and supported housing with the joint responsibility for monthly review of progress on the **iN business** agenda. Another association identified neighbourhood champions to set the example for staff rather than managers using a 'top down' approach.

## Measurement & reporting

Measuring the impact of **iN business** is not easy. It obviously helps to establish a baseline position of hard data and then to monitor progress, developing softer, more aspirational and outcome measurements as work progresses. A good starting point may be to consider the results of mapping and audit work, and then to select from the Egan Review's sustainable communities indicators. One association has selected the following headline indicators that can be monitored over time:

The percentage per neighbourhood of:

- people registered with a GP;
- transfer requests for non-housing needs;
- open anti-social behaviour cases;
- people who feel they live in a poor environment;
- residents involved in some form of voluntary activity;
- residents registered unemployed and long-term sick.

Other associations, particularly those in areas of low demand, have used tenancy turnover rate, arrears, and level of interest in property sale as neighbourhood indicators. One association is now focusing on positive endorsement from residents and stakeholders, as well as 'hard' data. Whatever measures are used, regular reporting of results keeps staff and boards focused and motivated. The Federation will be providing further guidance on measuring the impact of **iN business for neighbourhoods**.

### Case study - prioritising needs & communicating progress

One association worked with tenants to draw up a list of community needs, and then worked with the tenants' association over some months to identify some quick wins. They then developed approaches to tackling each of the other issues, whether through approaching the local authority or transport provider, submitting a funding application or helping the tenants to set up their own initiatives. The association was open about what was possible, communicated frequently and sustained its commitment. This was recognised and valued by tenants, who have since developed more initiatives themselves.

### Sustainability and review

Community development and regeneration initiatives need to be sustained. Most initiatives take longer than planned before they can become independent. Adopter associations are investing in community capacity building, skills training and fundraising to try to address this. Some have turned existing community centres into learning centres, engaging with local colleges and training providers to improve residents' skills and opportunities. The Egan sustainability agenda, and the new skills centre will provide new opportunities to take this further.

“Learn as you go, and share the learning - some brilliant ideas just don't work, but there will be some unexpected successes. Learning from others' mistakes saves a lot of time and heartache.”

“Don't expect too much too soon - we had high expectations of delivering quickly. We have a clear vision but it will take time, our measures must be realistic and our partners must be included.”

### **Case study - Prime Focus**

Prime Focus established a social investment agency in 1997. A rigorous 5 year review, led by the Board, established what the agency would stop doing, a menu of added value services for all tenants and the range of activities for priority areas, and a more tightly controlled funding strategy. It established effective monitoring through soft and hard measures, and integrated the agency firmly within the group structure, with all the subsidiaries developing their own strategies to support its work.

Encouraging a learning culture, and using milestones and reviews to consider progress, revise objectives and share learning will all be important, as will learning from other associations. It may be helpful to consider the potential for local devolution of decision-making to maintain momentum, so that neighbourhoods themselves drive the process.

### **Case study - Poplar HARCA**

Poplar HARCA has a well-established tradition of resident involvement and using neighbourhood centres as a key focus for their work in each area. They are actively involving tenants and leaseholders in the management of their homes through locally based estate boards, with delegated budgetary and operational responsibilities.

### **Case studies - maximising potential**

Early adopters are using great creativity to make a difference in neighbourhoods, even when resources are limited. Arawak Walton HA has converted the ground floor of a block of flats to provide quality office/workspace for community-based businesses at cost. This makes best use of the building and improves security for residents.

Another association has converted a disused office into a modern community centre with an IT suite, using government funding. The centre is hired out with different pricing so that community and private groups can afford it. It is used for asylum seekers, family support groups and health promotion programmes, and for IT training to local people. It is always fully booked, and it makes a profit which is re-invested in the community.

## SOURCES OF INFORMATION

### Websites

- **[www.iNbiz.org](http://www.iNbiz.org)**  
The iN business for neighbourhoods website.
- **[www.housing.org.uk](http://www.housing.org.uk)**  
The National Housing Federation website.
- **[www.neighbourhood.gov.uk](http://www.neighbourhood.gov.uk)**  
The Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) supports the delivery of the government's National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal
- **[www.renewal.net](http://www.renewal.net)**  
Developed by the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit, part of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, it aims to provide an independent, evidence-based view of what works and what doesn't in neighbourhood renewal.
- **[www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)**  
The Social Enterprise Coalition (SEC) is the UK trade body that brings together all types of social enterprise to promote the sector and share knowledge.
- **[www.community-links.org](http://www.community-links.org)**  
Community Links is an inner city charity running community-based projects in east London.
- **[www.socialexclusion.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk)**  
The Social Exclusion Unit was set up by the Prime Minister to help improve Government action to reduce social exclusion by producing 'joined-up solutions to joined-up problems'.
- **[www.groundwork.org.uk](http://www.groundwork.org.uk)**  
Groundwork is a leading environmental regeneration charity making sustainable development a reality in communities in the UK which are in need of investment and support.
- **[www.domeconsultants.co.uk](http://www.domeconsultants.co.uk)**  
DOME has worked with service users & providers in the housing, care, community & business sectors across the UK since 1987. They developed the 'Community Audit' to assist their clients in understanding and responding to local needs and circumstances.
- **[www.surestart.gov.uk](http://www.surestart.gov.uk)**  
Sure Start is the Government's programme to deliver the best start in life for every child by bringing together: early education, childcare, health and family support.
- **[www.bura.org.uk](http://www.bura.org.uk)**  
Promoting best practice in regeneration, the British Urban Regeneration Association is the leading independent organisation for urban Regeneration in the UK.
- **[www.dta.org.uk](http://www.dta.org.uk)**  
The website of the Development Trusts Association- the national body of development trusts.

## Publications

- We can work it out: a community planning approach to regeneration NHF 1999
- Community Engagement: discussion paper NHF 2004
- Fast Forward to 2008: delivering Housing's Better Future - Key findings from the scenarios event March 2003 NHF 2003
- Fast Forward to 2008: the diagnostic toolkit NHF 2003

'Sustainable communities do not happen by chance, they are something we must work to create. Unless we have a common understanding of the sorts of communities we are trying to achieve, we put in place effective delivery processes and set out clear responsibilities, and we ensure everyone involved has the right generic skills, then we are never going to have the sustainable communities we deserve' Sir John Egan, 19/4/2004.

This leaflet was written by Liz Potter, based on conversations with a number of 'early adopter' housing associations and the audit forms and business plans they sent in to the National Housing Federation, and advice from Peter Bevington. The National Housing Federation is very grateful to all those who have shared their ideas to help develop the **iN business** agenda.

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