

Building opportunity

How social housing can support skills, talent and workforce development

Kate Alexander (IES), Stephen Evans (L&W) and Tony Wilson (IES)

Institute for Employment Studies

The Institute for Employment Studies is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and organisational human resource management. It works closely with employers, government departments, agencies, and professional and employee bodies. For 50 years the Institute has been a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and human resource planning and development. Our values infuse our work. We strive for excellence, to be collaborative, and to bring curiosity to what we do. We work with integrity and treat people respectfully and with compassion.

Learning and Work Institute

Learning and Work Institute is an independent policy, research and development organisation dedicated to lifelong learning, full employment and inclusion.

We research what works, develop new ways of thinking and implement new approaches. Working with partners, we transform people's experiences of learning and employment. What we do benefits individuals, families, communities and the wider economy.

Stay informed. Be involved. Keep engaged. Sign up to become a Learning and Work Institute supporter: learningandwork.org.uk/supporters

Ethnicity Terminology

The terminology used to define ethnicity remains a challenging concept and one that continues to evolve with societal shifts. IES seeks to be a learning organisation; as such we are adapting our practice in line with these shifts. We aim to be specific when referring to each individual's ethnicity and use their own self-descriptor wherever possible. Where this is not feasible, we are aligned with Race and Disparity Unity (RDU) which uses the term 'ethnic minority' to refer to all ethnic groups except White British. RDU does not use the terms BAME (Black Asian and Minority Ethnic) or BME (Black Minority Ethnic) as these terms emphasise certain ethnic groups and exclude others. At the time of this publication, we have opted to use the RDU terminology where appropriate.

Acknowledgements

The authors are indebted to Lynsey Sweeney at Communities that Work, Sue Ramsden and Bekah Ryder at the National Housing Federation, and Lisa Birchall at the National Federation of ALMOs for all of their advice, support, guidance and challenge throughout the project. We are also very grateful to colleagues at the six case study landlords (and their stakeholders and partners) who gave up their time for this research.

Institute for Employment Studies
City Gate
185 Dyke Road
Brighton BN3 1TL
UK

Telephone: +44 (0)1273 763400
Email: askIES@employment-studies.co.uk
Website: www.employment-studies.co.uk

Copyright © 2022 Institute for Employment Studies

IES project code: 6214

Contents

Foreword	1
Executive Summary	4
1 Introduction and context	10
1.1 Three big challenges	12
1.1.1 <i>The workforce challenge</i>	12
1.1.2 <i>Cost of living crisis</i>	13
1.1.3 <i>Fairness and inequality</i>	14
1.2 The importance of considering social housing tenants	14
2 Social housing and employment	19
2.1 Employment status	19
2.1.1 <i>Employment flows</i>	21
2.2 Sectors, occupations and qualifications	22
2.3 Hours worked and pay	24
2.4 Diversity of working patterns	26
2.5 Variations by demographics and geography	27
2.5.1 <i>Demographic groups</i>	27
2.5.2 <i>Geographic areas</i>	29
3 Supporting residents and communities	35
3.1 Case study methodology	35
3.2 The six case studies	35
3.3 Social landlords' roles in delivering employment support	36
3.3.1 <i>Core employment services</i>	36
3.3.2 <i>Specialist support for those further from work</i>	37
3.3.3 <i>Direct employment, apprenticeships and social value clauses</i>	37
3.4 Key strengths and what is working well	38
3.4.1 <i>Supporting those further from work</i>	38
3.4.2 <i>Open ended, personalised support</i>	38
3.4.3 <i>Strong partnerships, alignment and local co-ordination</i>	38
3.4.4 <i>Access to wider services, but a strong focus on employment</i>	39
3.4.5 <i>Leveraging landlords' roles as 'anchor institutions'</i>	40
3.5 Challenges and opportunities	40
3.5.1 <i>Continuity of funding</i>	40
3.5.2 <i>Fragmentation, duplication and gaps in delivery</i>	41
3.5.3 <i>Inflexible commissioning and delivery models</i>	41
3.5.4 <i>Effective engagement with employers</i>	41
3.5.5 <i>Recruitment and retention</i>	42
4 Conclusions and recommendations	43
4.1 A new plan for jobs, growth and incomes	43
4.2 More support for partnerships and co-ordination	44
4.3 Sector action to build capacity and capability	45
4.4 Supporting innovation	45
Annex: Case studies of employment support	47
1 Stockport Homes	47
2 Optivo	55
3 whg	61
4 Barnet Homes	69
5 South Yorkshire Housing Association	76
6 Tyne Housing	83

Foreword

This new and timely research discusses one of the biggest problems our country faces – a shrinking workforce. We have emerged from the shock of Covid only to plunge into a cost-of-living crisis and, it is now clear, many working age people who left the labour market during the pandemic have not yet returned.

We have asked employment experts at the Learning & Work Institute and Institute of Employment Studies for a new analysis of the data from the Office of National Statistics Labour Force Survey. Specifically, it looks at employment trends in the social housing sector.

Why? Because we want to demonstrate that the employability and financial wellbeing work we do with social housing residents is crucial for prosperity – not just for them and their families, but for the whole economy. When we support residents to improve their skills and access the jobs market, everyone benefits.

This data clearly shows the scale of the challenge, but also the scope we have to build opportunity and work with government to tackle that challenge.

Contrary to existing myths, most people of working age who live in social housing are working. However, it is also true that a greater proportion of social housing residents are what economists would describe as ‘economically inactive’ as compared to the general population. The data shows residents of social housing have to conquer more obstacles than most to gaining employment – challenges such as long-term sickness, disability, and unaffordable childcare. Increasingly social housing helps residents overcome these challenges and acts as a safety net where traditional support has failed.

Six case studies here show what can be achieved when housing associations and ALMOs provide support in a way that is flexible and tailored to their needs. Last year, for example, Optivo supported 1,300 residents into jobs and accredited training; 8,500 people took part in employability projects, health support or training to designed to help them move into work.

Support work with those facing the biggest challenges, including homelessness and rough sleeping and those with mental health conditions, can have a life-changing impact. Dan’s story on page 86 shows the value of this small-scale, complex work. Supported by Tyne Housing to move from the streets of Newcastle into his own home and a job, he says: “I do just feel like there’s a real way forward now, and I know I can see myself having a normal future.”

The key takeaway from this report is that if we fail to give the most disadvantaged in our communities the help they need, we are not failing just a few individuals. We are, instead,

letting too much untapped talent go to waste that could feed into the prosperity across the country.

In the times ahead, resources will be few and need will be great. We will need to target what little we have very carefully. This report explains why social landlords are the best possible partners for that work. It explains why it makes sound economic sense to help the social housing sector reach more people.

Our sector is keen and ready to work with government to do this. We want to play our part in tackling the complex and extraordinary challenges our country faces.



Kate Shone

Chair of Communities that Work

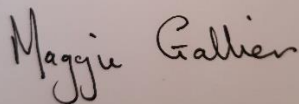
Managing Director, Torus Foundation



Mike Ainsley

Chair of the NFA

Derby Homes Board Chair



Maggie Galliers CBE

Chair of the National Housing Federation

President of the Learning and Work Institute



Photo credit Clementine Flack, Optivo

Executive Summary

Our labour market is changing. For the first time in at least thirty years, the workforce has stopped growing and may be getting smaller – driven by the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit and demographic change. Now more than ever, employers and government will need to find new ways to raise participation in the labour market, engage people further from work, and improve job retention, security and progression. This report sets out a key potential driver and opportunity for this, by looking at how we can raise employment and address labour market disadvantage for people living in social housing. It finds that:

- Social housing residents are nearly twice as likely to be out of work as those living in other tenures
- This is driven by structural factors including being more than twice as likely to be disabled and more than three times as likely to be lone parents or to have no qualifications
- More than four fifths of those out of work are outside the labour force entirely – not looking and/ or not available for work, with little access to employment support
- More than a quarter of those outside of the labour force live in social housing
- Social housing residents in work are twice as likely to work in lower skilled jobs, and are on average paid a third less than people who live in other tenures
- Improving support for social housing residents and local communities can play a key role in boosting growth, raising living standards and reducing inequalities
- Many social landlords are working to do this – through core employment services, specialist support and direct employment and training – but there are a range of challenges in scaling this up
- A new approach is needed – built on a new plan for jobs, growth and income; a new model of partnership working; and support to innovate, learn and scale up support

Overall, one in seven people of working age in England live in social housing, or five million adults. Social housing is available to support people who may have faced disadvantage and cannot access housing on the open market. The disadvantages that residents face in the labour market reflect this role that social housing plays, but many residents want to work and would work with the right support.

Raising employment for people in social housing was an economic and social imperative before the pandemic, but should be a necessity now – to boost supply and help meet labour and skills shortages; to help families and communities to deal with the cost of living crisis; and to tackle inequalities between people and places.

Social housing tenants are significantly disadvantaged in the labour market

Just over half of social housing tenants are in work (53%), compared with 76% of those owning their own homes or renting privately. This employment gap had narrowed through the 2000s and early 2010s but has been largely unchanged over the last five years. Lower employment reflects higher levels of disadvantage among residents of social housing – with tenants two-and-a-half times as likely to be disabled, more than three times as likely to be lone parents or to have no qualifications, and 50% as likely to be from an ethnic minority group.

However, employment rates for social housing tenants from specific demographic groups are lower than rates for people in the same group and in other tenures – with employment for older people, lone parents and ethnic minorities on average 49-52% in social housing compared with 72-75% in other tenures. Employment for disabled people is 30% in social housing, compared with 55% elsewhere. This means that people in these groups are even more disadvantaged than others, and likely face multiple disadvantages and needs.

Almost all of this difference in employment is explained by more people who are outside the labour force altogether – so not looking for work and/ or not available to work (which is described as being ‘economically inactive’). In all, 40% of social housing tenants are economically inactive, compared with around 20% of those in other tenures. Overall, more than a quarter of all of those who are outside the labour force live in social housing.

Social tenants are more likely than those in other tenures to be economically inactive due to long-term ill health and are less likely to be students. Economic inactivity due to long-term ill-health has risen over time and through the pandemic. It is now cited by two fifths of all of those outside the labour force and in social housing – around double the rate in other tenures.

Social housing residents live in all parts of the country, ranging from one in ten of all residents in parts of the Home Counties and South West of England to more than a quarter in inner London. Unsurprisingly, employment rates vary widely across areas too – typically in a range between 40 and 60%. However across the country there are persistent and significant differences between employment for social housing residents and those in other tenures.

Overall low employment in social housing nonetheless disguises significant flows into and out of work, with over a million residents starting or changing jobs every year. However, those who are unemployed are far more likely to move into work than those who are economically inactive – with one in five of the unemployed moving into work each quarter compared with just one in fifty of those economically inactive (which itself is one third the rate for the economically inactive population as a whole). In other words, unemployed tenants are almost ten times as likely to be in work three months later than an economically inactive tenant. This highlights the need to extend employment, skills and related support to people who are economically inactive and who want to work.

Social housing residents are often in lower skilled, lower paid work

Those in social housing are twice as likely to work in the lowest skilled jobs ('elementary occupations') but just one third as likely to work in high skilled, professional jobs as those who live in other tenures. This again is a consequence of a combination of housing allocation policies and labour market disadvantages.

This also means that social housing tenants also have substantially lower hourly earnings – around £11 per hour on average compared with over £17 in other tenures – and this pay penalty is compounded by working on average 3-4 hours fewer per week (likely due to the sorts of jobs that social tenants do and their greater likelihood of having poor health or caring responsibilities).

As with those in other tenures, rates of pay vary across the country – with higher wages in London and the South East. However, pay for social housing tenants in London does not have the same premium seen for other tenure types. This likely largely reflects the sectors and roles that social housing tenants tend to work in, and highlights the importance of supporting residents to access comparatively better paid and higher skilled work.

Social landlords are at the forefront of supporting tenants and communities to access decent work

Social landlords can play a key role in working to address these challenges, by supporting their residents and others in their local communities to prepare for, find, secure and progress in decent work. This report uses case studies from six landlords to draw out key lessons in how social landlords are working to improve jobs, incomes and wellbeing, and identify key challenges and opportunities for the future

Social landlords take a range of approaches that can vary according to their objectives, funding landscape and local needs. These can be grouped around three broad models:

- Core employment services – with most case studies offering one-to-one help around job preparation, matching and brokerage; generally open to all in a local community and working closely in partnership with other services. In some cases, these are self-funded by the landlord; in others, funded through combinations of local grant and contract funding.
- Specialist support for those further from work – invariably funded from a range of sources including the European Social Fund, DWP funding and the National Lottery. Support is generally determined by the needs of residents, with notable examples of specialist support for people with health conditions and disabilities, ethnic minority groups, disadvantaged young people and those with multiple and complex needs.
- Direct employment, apprenticeships and use of 'social value' clauses – with landlords using their own resources and local leverage to create opportunities for disadvantaged

residents; either as a pathway to permanent employment or alongside transitional support to move on to other jobs.

There can be real strengths and benefits from this

The case study research found that delivery by social landlords could add real value in supporting disadvantaged groups and residents. In particular, these social landlords were well placed (often uniquely so) to:

- **Support those furthest from work** – both because landlords had regular contact with their tenants and were relatively well trusted in their communities, also because of conscious and sustained efforts to engage, listen to and deliver for those further from work.
- **Deliver personalised support** – which acted as a strong magnet in attracting people to engage with support, and also meant that this could be personalised to their needs and delivered in ways that were more flexible than mainstream employment services.
- **Build strong partnerships and co-ordinate activity locally** – with many playing a key role within local communities to bring together services, align provision, and then use this to reach more people and deliver more joined-up, person-centred support.
- **Enable residents to access wider support** – with case studies notable in the extent to which they drew on and provided access to a range of services and supports. This included training and skills, health and wellbeing, and help around issues like welfare, tenancy, digital skills, travel to work and more.
- **Leverage landlords' roles as 'anchor institutions'** – with landlords often using their roles as large local employers and commissioners of services to drive change in their communities and among their suppliers.

There are a range of challenges to going further

However, case study areas also pointed to some common themes that threatened their ability to deliver services and to do more for their residents and communities.

- **Continuity of funding** – with short-term funding, peaks and troughs having made it hard to plan for the future, deliver services over the long-term and recruit staff. A particular concern was around the end of ESF funding and the gap to the Shared Prosperity Fund, but there were also some general concerns around reduced funding overall for those further from work.
- **Fragmentation, duplication and gaps in delivery** – with the complicated and fragmented landscape for funding and delivery meaning that there were risks both of duplication across services and of people slipping between gaps. A related issue was a lack of awareness among commissioners, funders and local policy makers of the needs of social residents and the services that social landlords could provide.
- **Inflexible commissioning and delivery models** – which tended to restrict access to support and reward rapid entry to employment. Landlords often seemed to be

delivering services in spite of, rather than because of, different funding and commissioning approaches.

- **Effective engagement with employers** – partly related to the challenges listed above, and partly too around issues in addressing inherent biases against social tenants in recruitment processes (particularly related to work experience and skills).
- **Recruitment and retention** – with it proving harder in the current tight labour market, and with the short-term and uncertain nature of programme funding, to recruit and retain staff to deliver employment support and services.

The case for doing more is stronger than ever

Social landlords have always been at the forefront of efforts to support social housing tenants (and those in the communities where they live) to secure decent work and to improve their incomes and wellbeing. However, the case for building on and supporting this work is arguably stronger than it has been in decades – to raise participation in the labour force, address labour and skills shortages, and help those households likely to be hit hardest by the cost of living crisis. This report proposes action in four areas:

1. A new plan for jobs, growth and incomes

The crises that we are facing now are fundamentally different to those that we faced when the Plan for Jobs was launched in the summer of 2020. We need a new plan that can invest in specialist employment support for those out of work and who want to work; broaden access to mainstream employment services; strengthen local partnerships and alignment, including with wider services like health, childcare and transport; and work better with employers. This research demonstrates the critical importance of involving social landlords and housing bodies in the design, development and delivery of these services alongside other partners.

This should include focusing on engaging social residents, commissioning in ways that support local partnership, and bringing forward to 2023 the employment and skills strand in the Shared Prosperity Fund (and ensuring that funding at least matches the amounts that were spent through the European Social Fund).

2. More support for partnerships and co-ordination

There is a strong case for going further on how we support local co-ordination, partnership working and alignment and co-ordination of service delivery. This should include stronger governance (for example through local boards and outcome agreements, and/ or placing 'duties to co-operate' on statutory services like Jobcentre Plus); improved support and guidance on working locally; and ensuring that local planning takes account of social tenants and involves social landlords (for example on Local Skills Improvement Plans). As part of this the Government and local and combined authorities should ensure regular data on performance of employment and skills programmes is available on as local a level as possible.

3. Sector action to build capacity and capability

There is also scope for the housing sector to do more on building capacity and capability, sharing practice and raising awareness of the role that social landlords can play in supporting jobs and incomes. This should be sector-led, and include support with capacity and capability

building, sharing practice and expertise, celebrating success, and identifying new opportunities and challenges.

4. Supporting innovation

Finally, there is a strong case for government to work with the sector to encourage, support and fund innovative approaches to employment and skills support that can be delivered through and with social landlords. This would help to improve the evidence base around what works in supporting those furthest from work, and would serve to support wider sector and government work to build capacity, capability and local partnerships. Similar models already exist in the 'what works' network, and a similar model of challenge and innovation funding could be delivered through the Shared Prosperity Fund. This could be underpinned by an Employment and Skills Data Lab, modelled on the Justice Data Lab, and allowing landlords and partners to better test and see the impact of their interventions.

As a starter, there would be significant value in trialling the 'Jobs-Plus' model in the UK, which is a well evidenced approach to supporting people out of work in the most disadvantaged communities, taking a place-based, joined-up and work-focused approach to engaging residents and supporting social action.

1 Introduction and context

One in seven people of working age in England live in social housing. Partly because of how the limited supply of social housing is allocated, tenants are more diverse than the population as a whole and more likely to live in relative poverty. Strategies to tackle the big workforce, growth, cost of living and inequality challenges the country faces must therefore include and work for its five million working age social housing tenants.

This report, written in collaboration between the Institute for Employment Studies and Learning and Work Institute, seeks to explore the employment and labour market challenges for social housing residents; how social landlords are working to support their residents and local communities; and the steps that we could take in future to improve employment, incomes and wellbeing. The data throughout the report is (unless otherwise stated) drawn from the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Labour Force Survey.

Social housing is available to support people who may have faced disadvantage and cannot access housing on the open market. The findings around employment presented in this report do not mean that those living in social housing are unable or unwilling to work, and indeed most people who live in social housing do work. Rather, the findings show that people who live in social housing are more disadvantaged in accessing the labour market than those who do not, and often for the sorts of reasons that may have led to them being disadvantaged in the housing market too.

This chapter discusses social housing and residents within the wider UK labour market and economic context, and explores why consideration of people living in social housing is vital to both meeting immediate challenges and improving long-term prosperity and fairness¹.

Chapter two then sets out more detailed, new analysis of labour force participation and employment among social housing residents, drawing on more detailed analysis of the Labour Force Survey.

In Chapter three, we draw on six case studies of how social landlords are supporting their residents and local communities and draw out key strengths, challenges and opportunities; before setting out in Chapter four some proposals for how policy and

¹ The pandemic had a significant effect on the Labour Force Survey, including a fall in the number of renters who responded. As a result, the [ONS changed the weighting of the survey](#) to keep the proportion of people in rented accommodation constant (the change in response rates would otherwise have implied a large fall in renting and rise in owner occupation). This means some caution needs to be applied to the data, though we have aimed to mitigate this by pooling different waves and looking at trends over time.

practice could be improved in future. More detail on each of the case studies is then set out in an Annex.

This project has been funded by the National Housing Federation, the National Federation of Arms-Length Management Organisations (ALMOs) and Communities that Work and has been developed following discussions over the last two years through a Housing and Employment Taskforce drawing together partners across government, the housing and employment sectors.

Box 1: Labour market terminology

The terms employment, unemployment and economic inactivity are used throughout this report. These are the commonly accepted and internationally used terms to describe individuals' status in the labour market.

Employment encompasses everyone who is in any form of work of any duration. This mainly comprises paid work as an employee or while self-employed, but can also include people working unpaid (for example for a family business or as part of an employment scheme) as well as people who are away from a job that they expect to return to (for example due to ill health or temporary lay-off). In all there are 32.7 million people in work, or around 61% of the population (75% of the population aged 16-64).

Unemployment refers to those who are out of work and are both actively seeking work and available for work. It is not a measure of all of those out of work. The size of the **labour force** is measured by adding together the number of people who are employed and unemployed. There are 1.2 million people who meet the definition of being unemployed, or 2.3% of the population (2.9% of the population aged 16-64). The official unemployment rate however is larger than this, at 3.6%. This is because the unemployment rate is a **labour force** measure, and so is calculated by dividing unemployment by the overall labour force (employed plus unemployed).

Economic inactivity then describes the remaining population who are not employed and not unemployed – i.e. they are out of work and either not looking for work and/ or not available for work. The most common reasons that people give for being 'economically inactive' is that they are out of work due to a long-term health condition, are non-working students, are looking after their family or home (usually mothers of younger children), or (for those aged 65 and over) are retired. Other reasons can include short-term ill health, early retirement, being discouraged from working, waiting for a job to start, or not needing to work. Overall, around 20 million people are economically inactive, but half of these are aged 65 or over. Among those aged 16-64, 9 million people are economically inactive, comprising 21.7% of the population.

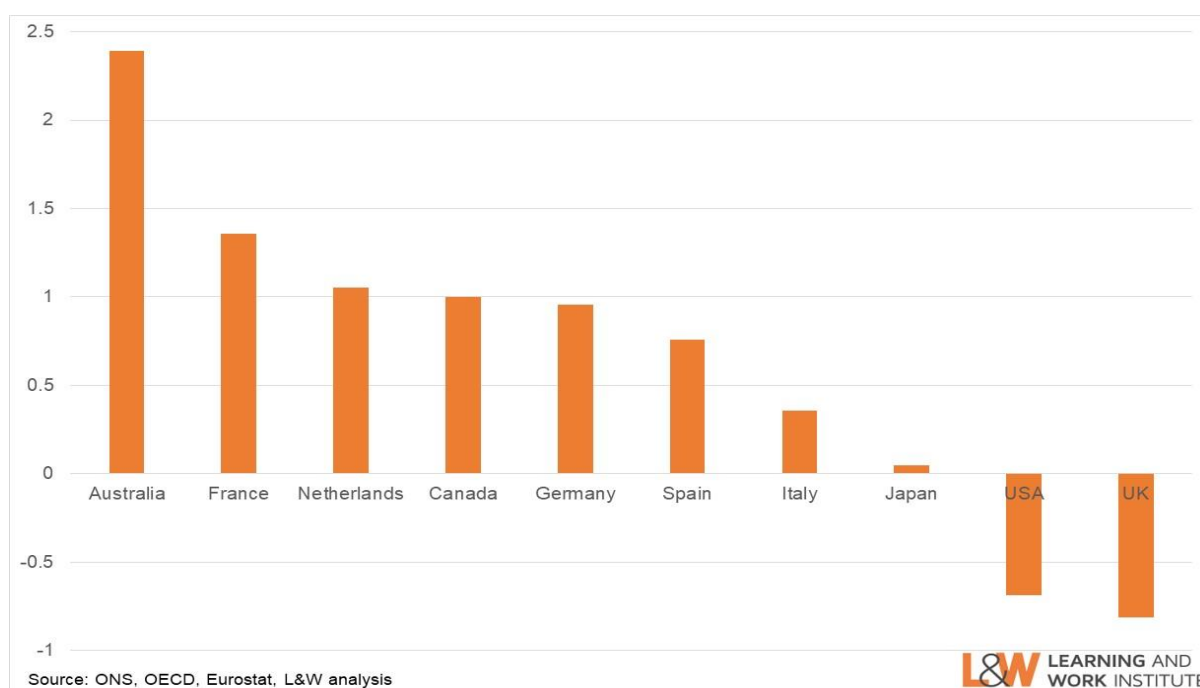
In this report, we use the above three terms as they are the accepted and established terms used to describe individuals' labour market status. However it should be emphasised that these terms refer specifically to labour market status. Many of those who are defined as 'economically inactive' are leading active lives and contributing to the economy – as parents, carers, students and through voluntary and community activities.

1.1 Three big challenges

1.1.1 The workforce challenge

The UK has a relatively high employment rate by both historic and international standards, with around three quarters of 16-64 year olds in work.² However, the employment rate remains below pre-pandemic levels in contrast to many comparator countries.³ A key reason for this is a reduction in the number of people aged over 50 who are in the workforce and a rise in the number of people outside the labour force due to long-term sickness. The result is that one million fewer people are in the workforce (either in work or looking for work) than if pre-pandemic trends had continued.

Figure 1.1: Change in employment rate since Dec-Feb 2020, percentage points



At the same time, vacancies have been at record levels. This means that employers are struggling to fill all their roles despite hiring at record levels – 1.9 million people either changed jobs or started work in the three months to June 2022.

To increase the employment rate and help employers meet their needs, the UK needs to increase the size of its potential workforce. The good news is that many who are outside the labour market say they would like to work: 1.7 million economically inactive people say they want to work, and 72% of 50-59 year olds in Great Britain who left the workforce during the pandemic said they would consider returning to work.⁴

² Labour Force Survey, ONS, 2022.

³ The participation gap: the UK's labour market through the pandemic in international context, L&W, 2022.

⁴ Reasons for workers aged over 50 years leaving employment since the start of the pandemic, ONS, 2022.

However, labour market policy remains largely focused on people who are unemployed and on out-of-work benefits. By definition, this means that those who are outside the labour market, including those who are economically inactive but say they want to work, often miss out on support to find work. If we are to expand our labour force and increase the employment rate, that needs to change.

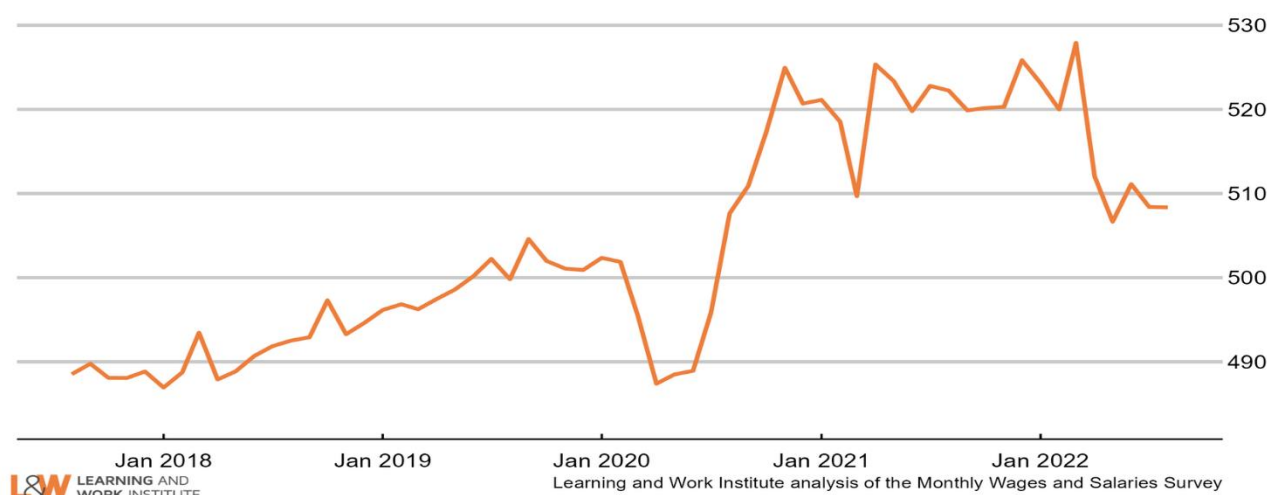
1.1.2 Cost of living crisis

Real wages have been falling in 2022 at their fastest rates on records dating back to 2000, as inflation has rocketed to its highest rates in 40 years.⁵ This follows stagnation in real wages since the global financial crisis of 2008. The result is likely to be 20 years of no overall real wage growth for most workers, though increases in the national minimum wage have helped many on the lowest wages and those on the highest incomes have seen their wages rise.

Figure 1.2: Average weekly earnings, real terms

Average Weekly Earnings

Current GBP, Monthly measure



Low real wage growth has been combined with cuts and freezes to working-age benefits, reducing the real value of support for incomes and leading to increases in poverty⁶. Rises in inflation have been particularly driven by increased energy and food costs⁷. These are essential goods which poorer households spend a higher proportion of their incomes on, so the current high rates of inflation are particularly impacting lower-income households and risks leaving them with relatively little left over each month after paying for heating, housing and food.⁸

Unfortunately, the cost of living is likely to remain a significant challenge over at least the next two years. Inflation is a measure of how fast prices are rising, so even if inflation falls

⁵ Labour Force Survey, ONS, 2022.

⁶ Fifty Years of Benefit Upgrading, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, April 2022

⁷ The cost of living crisis and its impact on low-income Londoners, L&W, 2022.

⁸ In at the deep end: the living standards crisis facing the new Prime Minister, Resolution Foundation, 2022.

back as projected by the Bank of England the *level* of prices will still remain high – lower inflation won't on its own improve household finances, it will merely stop them getting worse quite so quickly.

The Government has introduced support, with more support for those on the lowest incomes. This includes an Energy Price Guarantee, ensuring the typical household will face energy bills no higher than £2,500 per year. Cuts to National Insurance will also benefit those earning enough to pay them. However, overall most people, particularly those on the lowest incomes, face a drop in their living standards.

1.1.3 Fairness and inequality

Inequalities in income, employment, education and opportunity have been a feature of the UK economy and a focus for policymakers for decades if not longer. They manifest themselves in gaps in incomes between areas and groups, differences in employment rates (for example, disabled people have an employment rate 28 percentage points below non-disabled people), and low social mobility (meaning a stronger link between parental education and incomes and their children's outcomes in this country than elsewhere).⁹

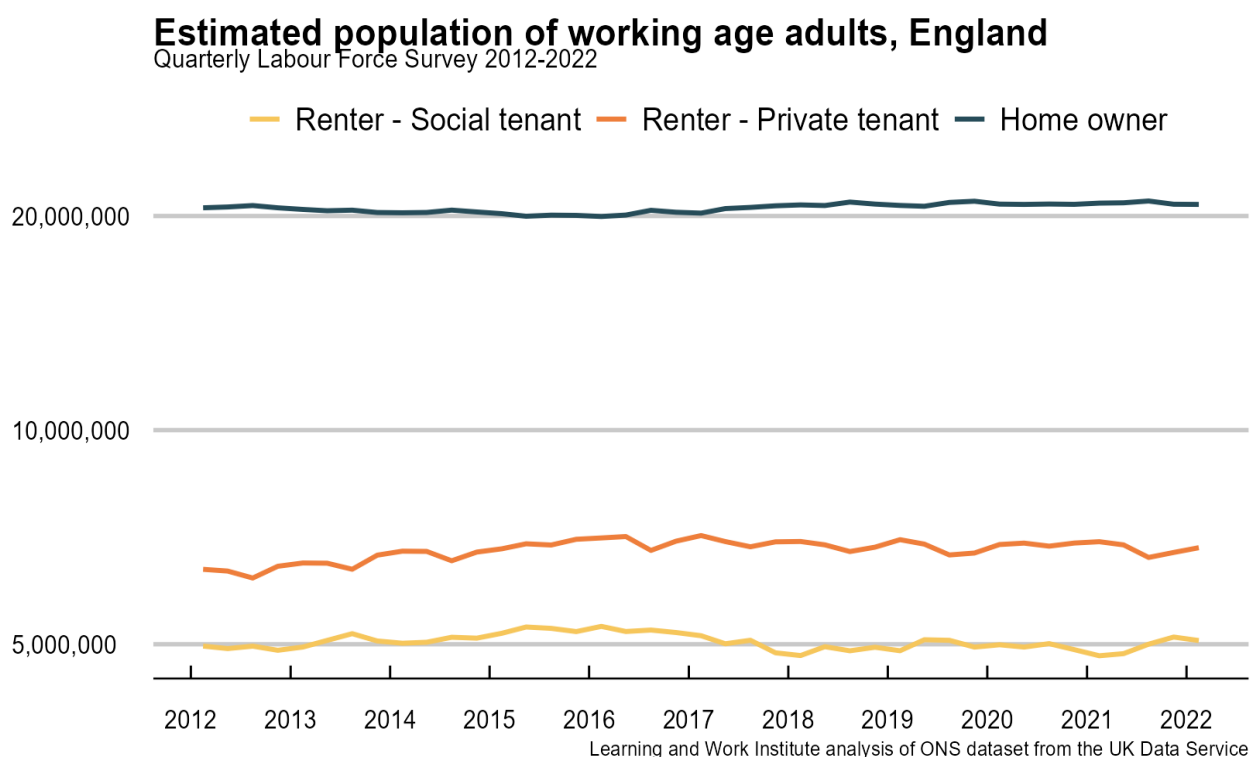
These inequalities represent both a fundamental unfairness (opportunity should not be dependent on family background) and a waste of talent (talent is evenly distributed but opportunity isn't). Tackling them is therefore a priority for both fairness and prosperity.

Policy has sought to make a difference in a range of ways over the decades, including: regeneration funds; investments and initiatives in education ; targeted employment support for groups with lower employment rates; and more recently initiatives that have come under the heading of 'levelling up'. Nonetheless inequalities remain stark and persistent. Making a serious dent in them will require long-term, joined up, sustained effort across policy areas.

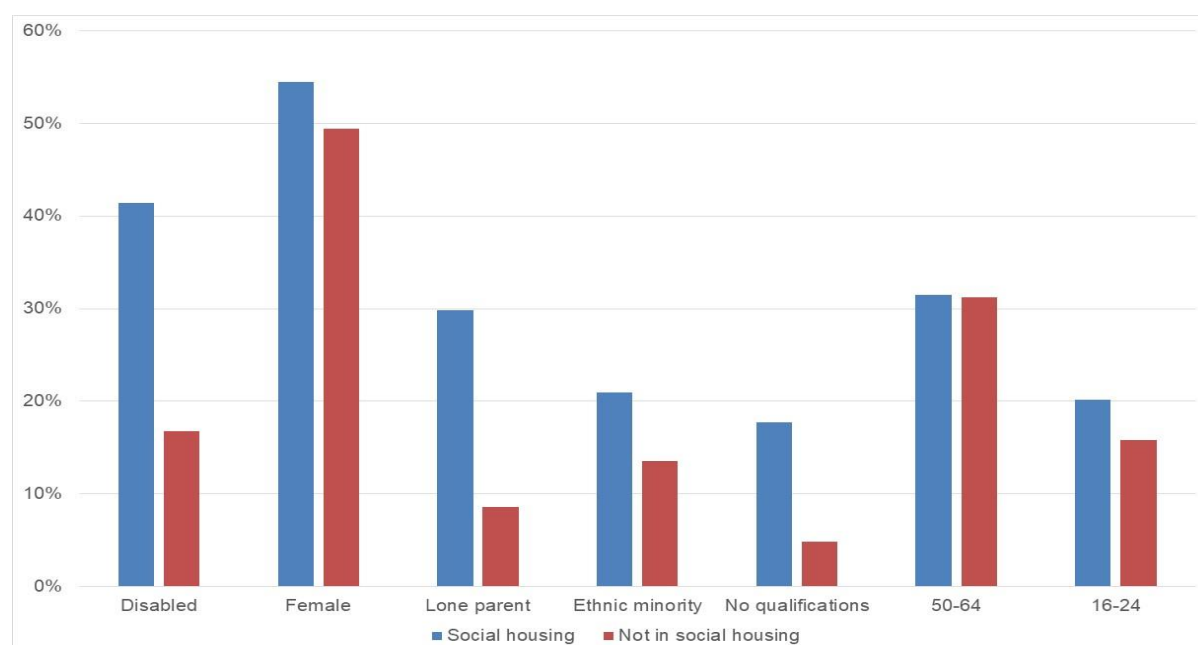
1.2 The importance of considering social housing tenants

Around five million people aged 16-64 live in social housing in England. That figure is little changed over the last decade and equates to about one in six (16%) of the working-age population.

⁹ Opportunity knocks? Youth Commission report 1, L&W, 2018.

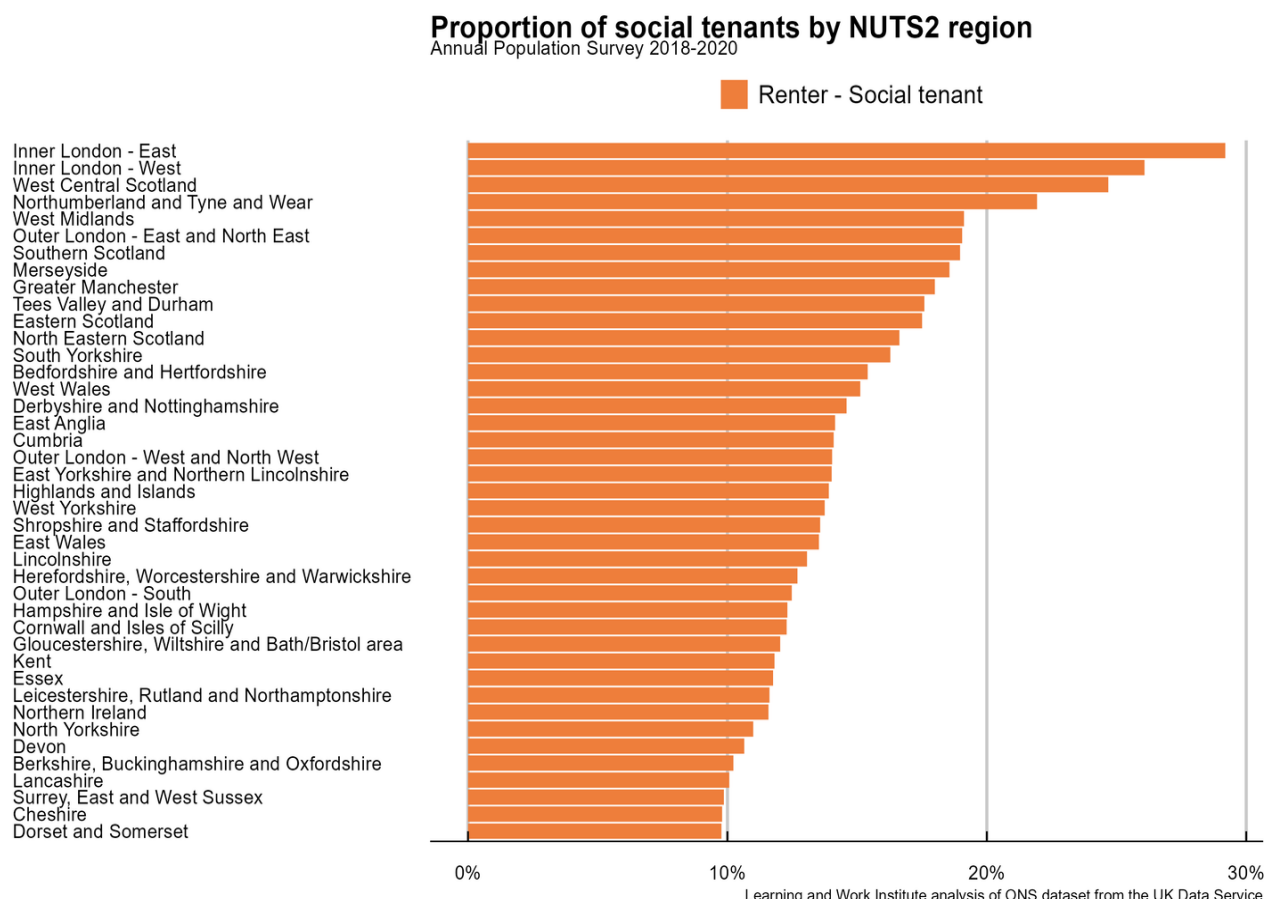
Figure 1.3: Population of 16-64 year olds by housing tenure type in England

People living in social housing tend to be more diverse and more likely to have a characteristic associated with poorer labour market outcomes than the population as a whole. People who live in social housing are more likely to be disabled (41% v 17%), a lone parent (30% v 9%), from an ethnic minority (21% v 14%), or have no qualifications (18% v 5%). Of course, in large part this relates to the limited supply of social housing meaning that it is allocated only by need.

Figure 1.4: Demographics of people by housing tenure

In every local area, social housing tenants represent at least one in ten 16-64 year olds, ranging from more than one in four in Inner London to one in ten in Cheshire and Somerset.

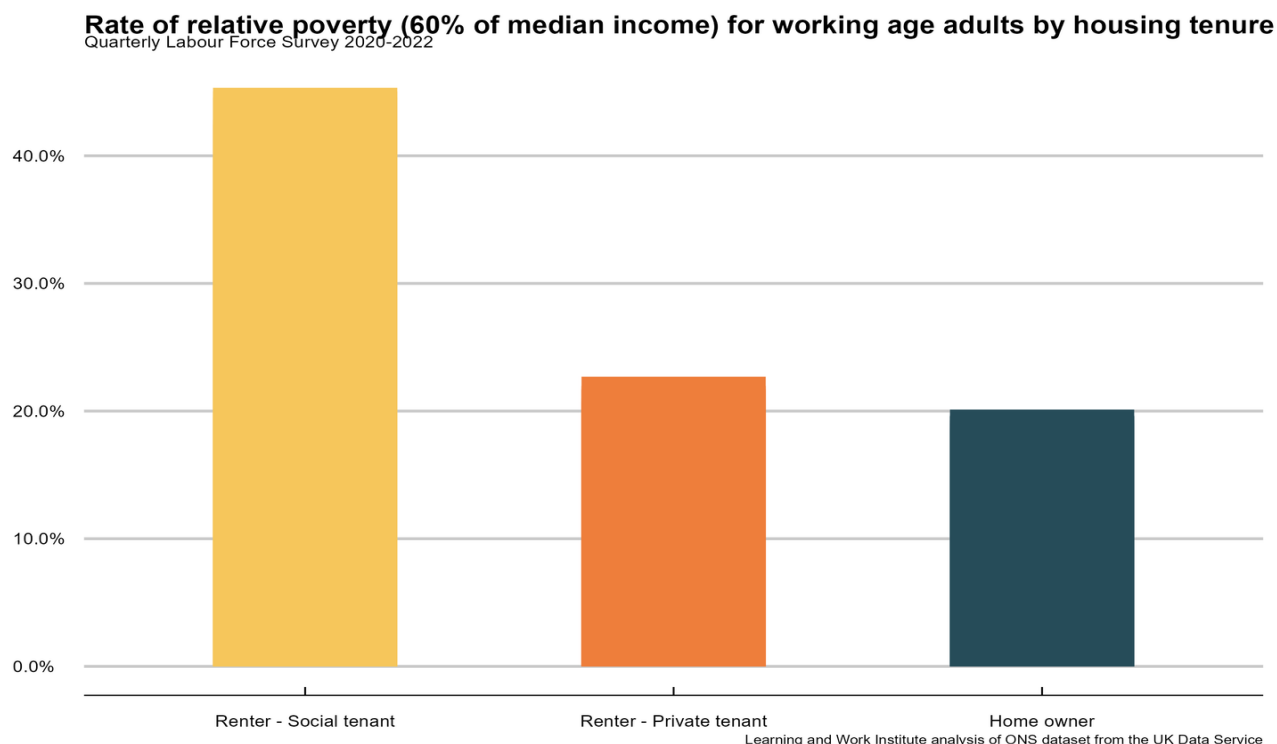
Figure 1.5: Proportion of residents who are social housing residents



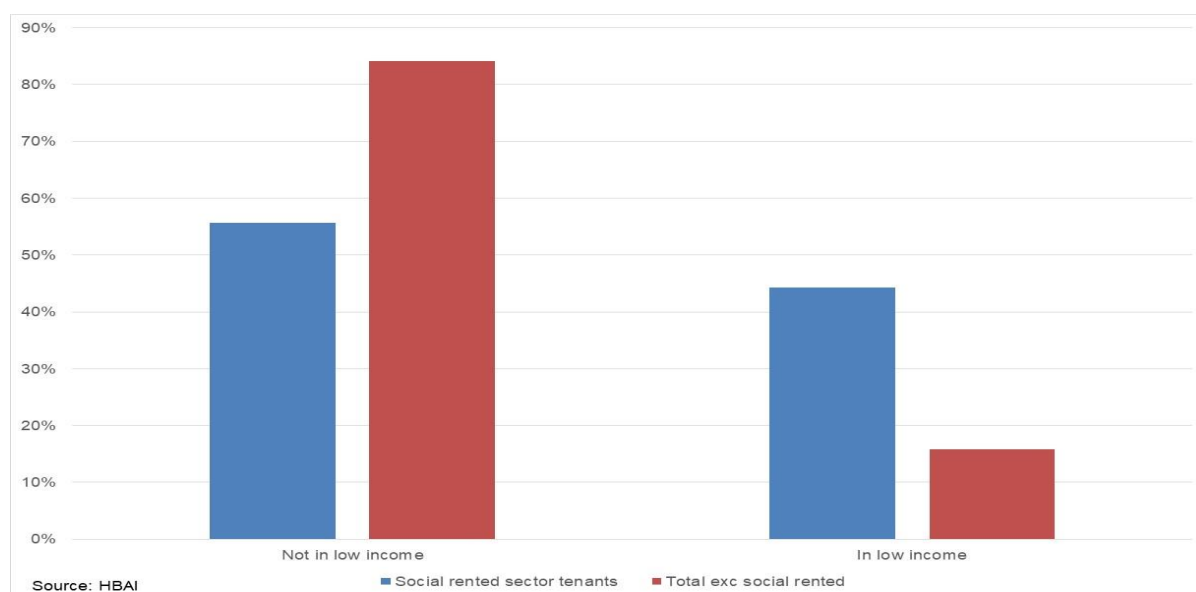
People who live in social housing are more likely to live in relative income poverty than people in other tenure types.¹⁰ Almost one in two people living in social housing had incomes below 60% of median income in 2020-21, 2.5 times the rates seen for people living in other housing tenure types¹¹.

¹⁰ Relative income poverty is usually defined as those earning less than 60% of median wages.

¹¹ It is important to note that these measures, like the LFS, will have been affected by the pandemic too.

Figure 1.6: Relative income poverty by housing tenure, 2020-21

This is backed up by data from the DWP's Households Below Average Income (HBAI) survey.¹² This shows that 44% of social rented sector households have incomes below 60% of the median, almost three times as many as those not in social housing. In fact, one in three households in relative income poverty live in social housing.

Figure 1.7: Proportion of households below 60% of median income

¹² Households below average income: 2020-21, DWP, 2022. The pandemic will have affected some measures, but the overall pattern and relative difference in poverty rates remains true.

These lower employment rates, hours worked and pay (see chapter two) all contribute to the higher risk of relative income poverty among social housing tenants. Indeed, low income and savings are among the key criteria for social housing allocation, alongside housing need.

Efforts to tackle poverty, reduce inequalities, and increase employment must take account of and effectively reach social housing tenants. They are a significant proportion of the population, more diverse than the population as a whole, and more likely to have low incomes and live in poverty.

The next chapter explores labour market participation of social housing tenants in more detail, to better understand the picture and scope for improvement in outcomes.

2 Social housing and employment

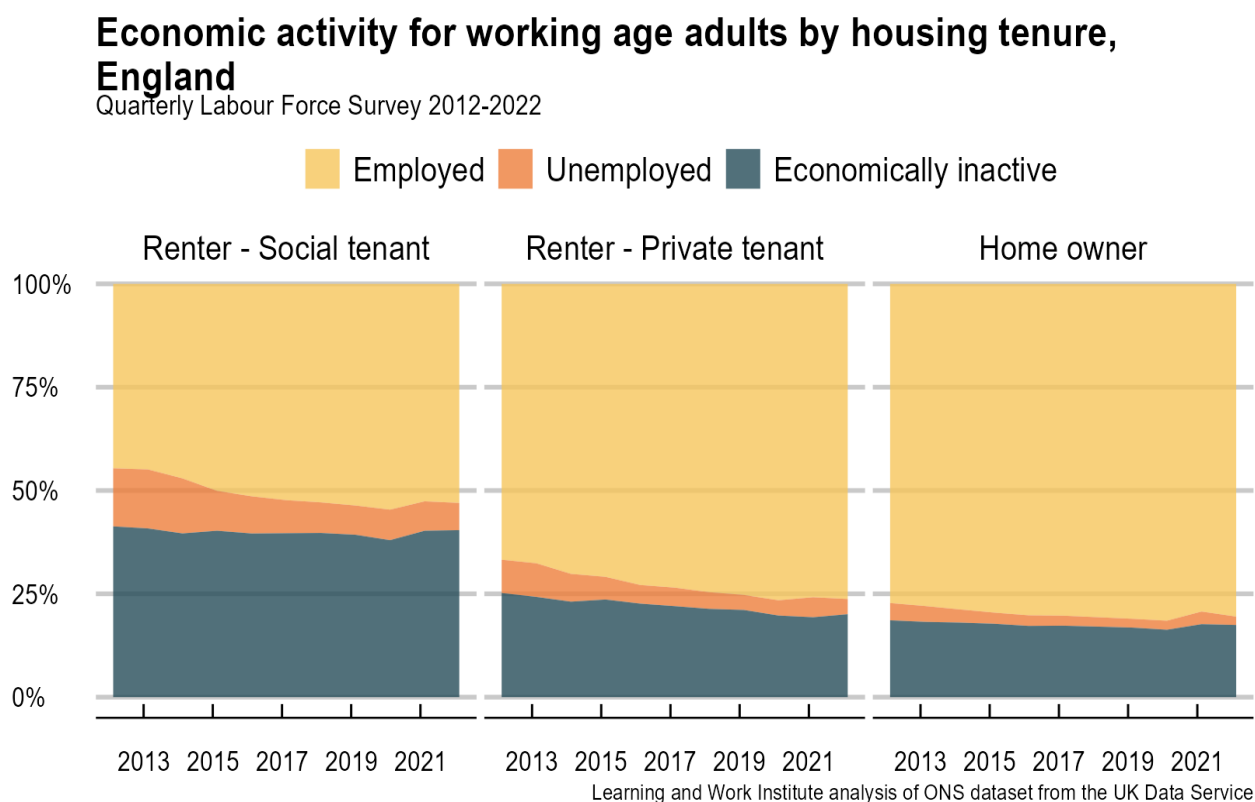
Social housing in England is allocated on need and this helps to explain differences in labour market outcomes. Employment rates are lower for social tenants than other tenure types, with the gap little changed in recent years. A key cause of this difference is higher economic inactivity, with two million social tenants of working age neither in work nor looking for work, equating to more than one in four of all economically inactive people. Hours worked and hourly earnings are also lower on average for social housing tenants in work than other people.

This chapter shows how employment rates and working patterns for social housing tenants compare to people living in other housing tenure types, drawing on analysis of data from the Labour Force Survey.

2.1 Employment status

The proportion of 16-64 year olds living in social housing who are in work has risen from 47% in 2012 to 53% in 2022. However, this remains well below the 76% employment rate for people living in private rented accommodation (up from 67% in 2012) and 81% for owner-occupiers (up from 77%).

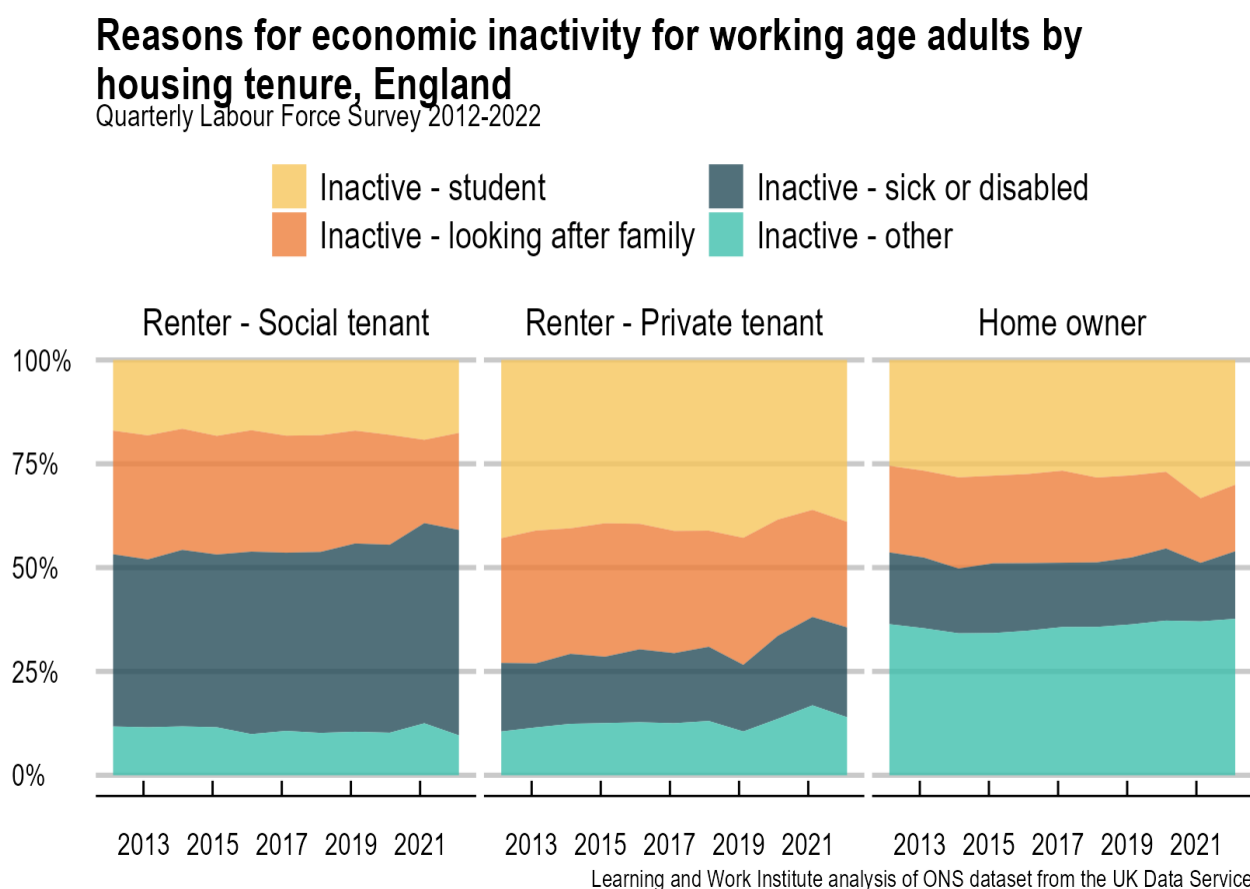
This means **the employment rate of people living in social housing is 20 percentage points lower than people in other housing types**. This gap has narrowed over time but remains substantial and is little changed in the last five years. The supply of social housing is limited and priority for accessing it goes to groups who are less likely to be in work, so this result is not surprising. However, for many people it represents a lost opportunity to work, to pursue a career, and to increase their income.

Figure 2.1: Labour market status by housing tenure type

Increases in employment for people in social housing over the last decade have mainly come from falls in unemployment over the last decade, as the labour market recovered after the global financial crisis. Unemployment rates for each housing tenure type have roughly halved over the last decade: for people in social housing the unemployment rate fell from 14% in 2012 to 7% in 2022.

By contrast, **the proportion of social housing tenants who are economically inactive (either not actively seeking work or not able to start work) has remained fairly flat at about 40%, more than double the economic inactivity rates of people living in other tenure types.** This means that two million 16-64 year olds living in social housing in England are economically inactive. **That represents more than one in four of all people who are economically inactive across England.**

Across England, the most common reasons for economic inactivity are long-term sickness, being a student, and looking after home or family. This is true for social housing tenants too, but long-term sickness is a much more common reason and being a student less so. **Long-term sickness is the main reason for economic inactivity given by around 40% of economically inactive social housing tenants,** a proportion that has risen over time and through the pandemic and is around twice as common an answer compared to other tenure types.

Figure 2.2: Reasons for economic inactivity by housing tenure

2.1.1 Employment flows

Headline data on those in or out of work represent a snapshot in time. Underneath these headline numbers, much larger numbers of people move in and out of work over time.

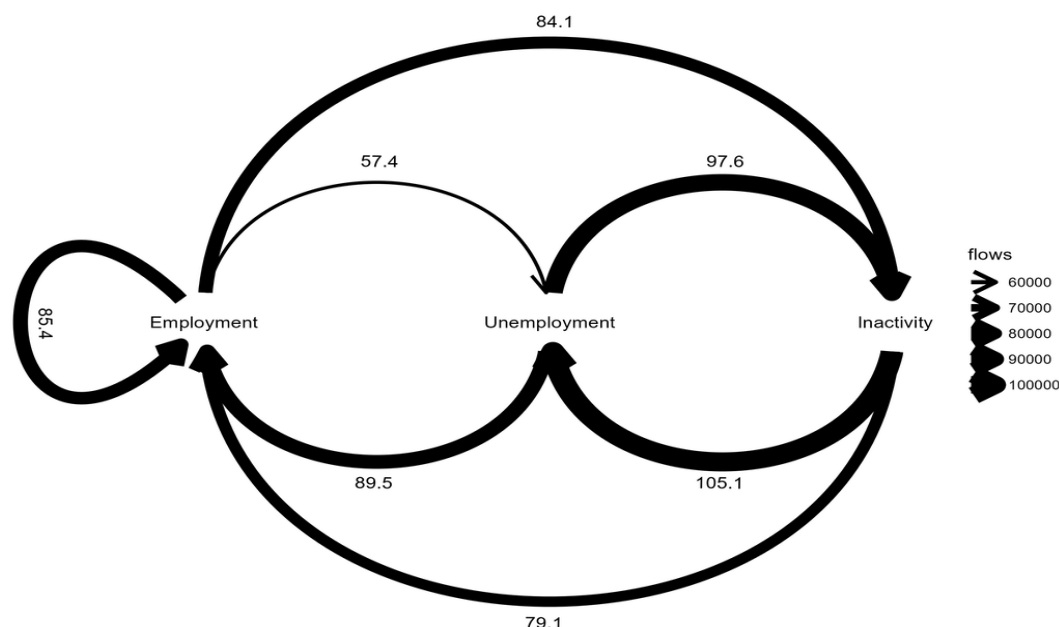
Every quarter, over 250,000 social housing tenants either start work or change jobs.

Of these, over 170,000 social housing tenants move into work (just over one half from unemployment, just under one half from economic inactivity) and 85,000 change jobs. This means that around 5% of out-of-work social housing tenants are in work three months later. But that varies from 19% of unemployed tenants to only 2% of economically inactive tenants (compared to 6% of economically inactive people as a whole).

In other words, **an unemployed tenant is almost ten times as likely to be in work three months later than an economically inactive tenant.** This highlights the need to extend employment support to people who are economically inactive, particularly where they want to work or are able to work.

Figure 2.3: Average quarterly employment flows of social housing tenants**Social Housing residents: Average quarterly employment flows (thousands)**

Jan-Mar 2021 to Jan-Mar 2022



Learning & Work Analysis of ONS Labour Force Survey longitudinal data

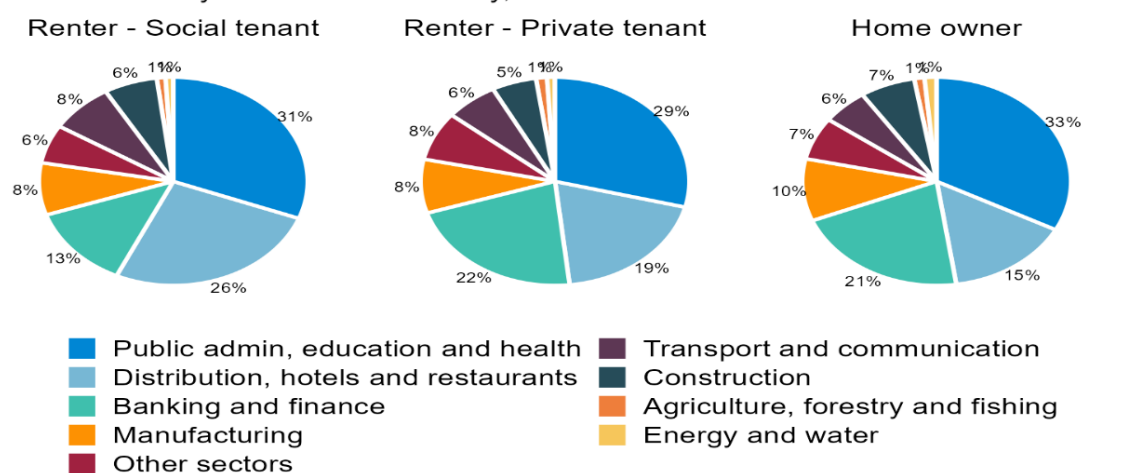
2.2 Sectors, occupations and qualifications

Patterns of employment for social housing tenants, including sectors, occupations, hours and pay, also reflect in large part how the limited supply of social housing is allocated and the resulting demographics of tenants described above. In short, social housing tenants are more likely to work in lower paid sectors and occupations than people living in other tenure types.

People who live in social housing are more likely to work in retail and hospitality and less likely to work in banking and finance than people who live in other tenure types. The most common sector of employment for all tenure types is public administration, education and health, accounting for almost one in three people in work. One in four employed social housing tenants works in distribution, hotels or restaurants, compared to 19% of private renters and 15% of owner occupiers.

Figure 2.4: Sectors and occupations of employment by housing tenure**Main employment sector of working age adults by tenure type, UK**

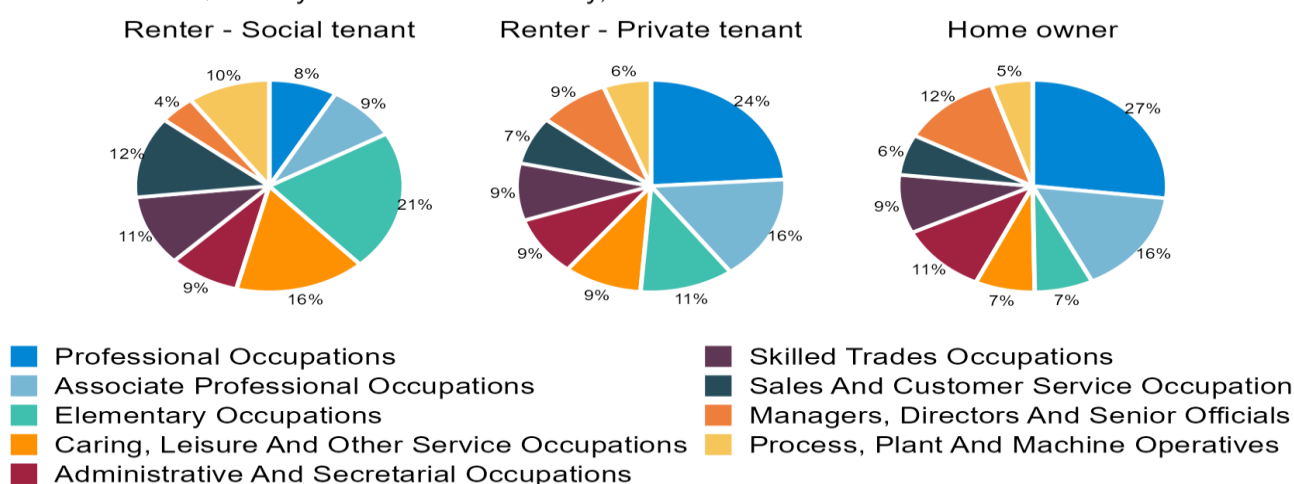
Pooled Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2020-2022



Learning and Work Institute analysis of ONS dataset from the UK Data Service

Main occupation of working age adults by tenure type, UK

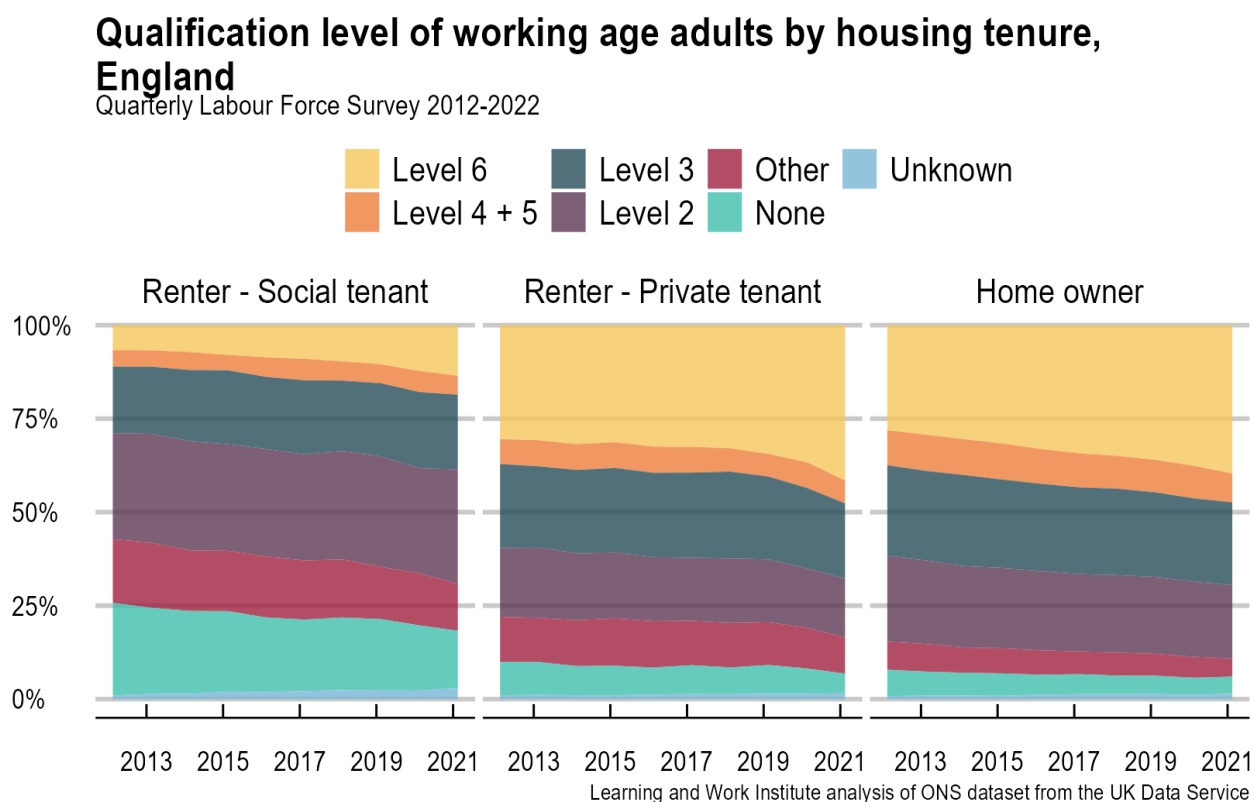
Pooled Quarterly Labour Force Survey, 2020-2022



Learning and Work Institute analysis of ONS dataset from the UK Data Service

People who live in social housing are twice as likely to work in elementary occupations and one third as likely to work in professional occupations than people who live in other tenure types. As described above, this reflects the demographic and qualifications profile of social housing tenants, which in turn reflects how the limited supply of social housing is allocated.

The qualifications profile of people living in social housing has improved over time. However, this is true of all tenure types, particularly because of the expansion of higher education over recent decades. The chart below shows qualifications patterns by level: level 2 is GCSE equivalent; level 3 is A level equivalent; level 4 and above is degree-level or equivalent and above. This means **people living in social housing are three times as likely to have no qualifications and one third as likely to have degree-level qualifications than other people.**

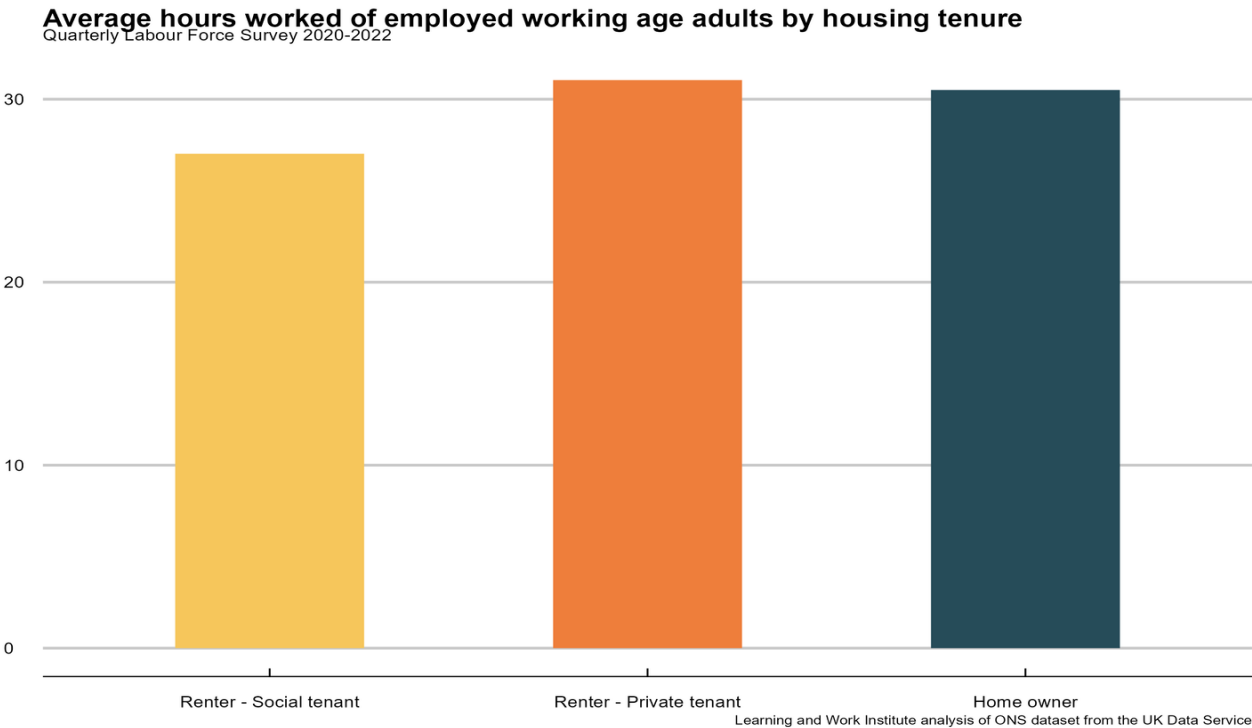
Figure 2.5: Highest qualification by housing tenure type

Taken together, social housing tenants are more likely to work in lower paid and lower productivity sectors and occupations and more likely to have lower qualifications. Efforts to improve productivity and pay in these roles and improve skill levels would therefore be disproportionately likely to benefit social housing tenants. Likewise, efforts to support growth and productivity in these sectors will ultimately have a significant focus on social housing tenants. This could make social housing landlords important partners in improving pay and productivity in these sectors and occupations, and in boosting skills.

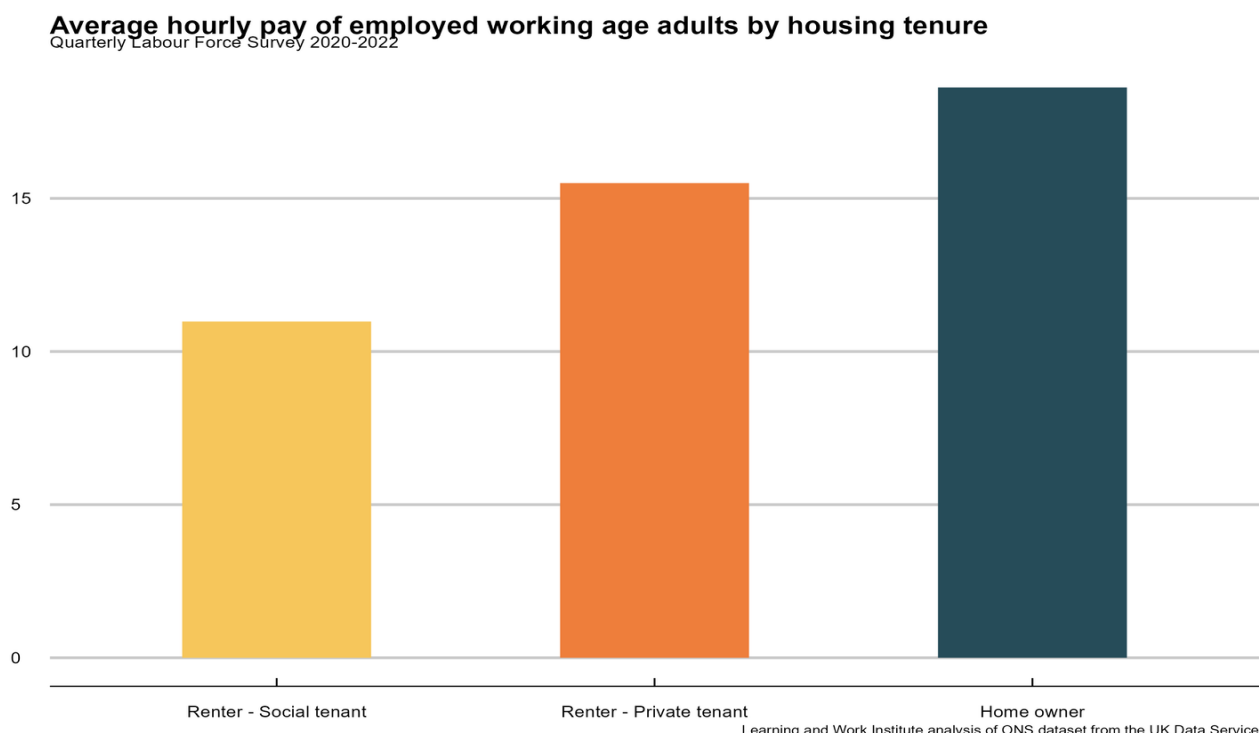
2.3 Hours worked and pay

People living in social housing who are in work tend to work fewer hours than other people in employment: 27 hours per week compared to 30.5 for owner occupiers and 31 for private renters. This is likely partly related to differences in demographics by tenure described earlier, for example the higher proportion of people with caring responsibilities or with sickness or disabilities, and the structure of the labour market (i.e. the jobs on offer for people with lower qualifications or wanting to work part-time). So while some will want to and be able to work longer hours, many will not and some will be constrained by the types of jobs on offer, availability of childcare or other reasons.

Figure 2.6: Average hours worked by housing tenure type



Similarly, the **average hourly pay of people living in social housing is about 40% below that of owner occupiers**: £10.98 for social housing tenants; £15.50 for private renters; and £18.62 for owner occupiers. This will also be related to differing demographics across tenure types, such as difference in qualification levels and age.

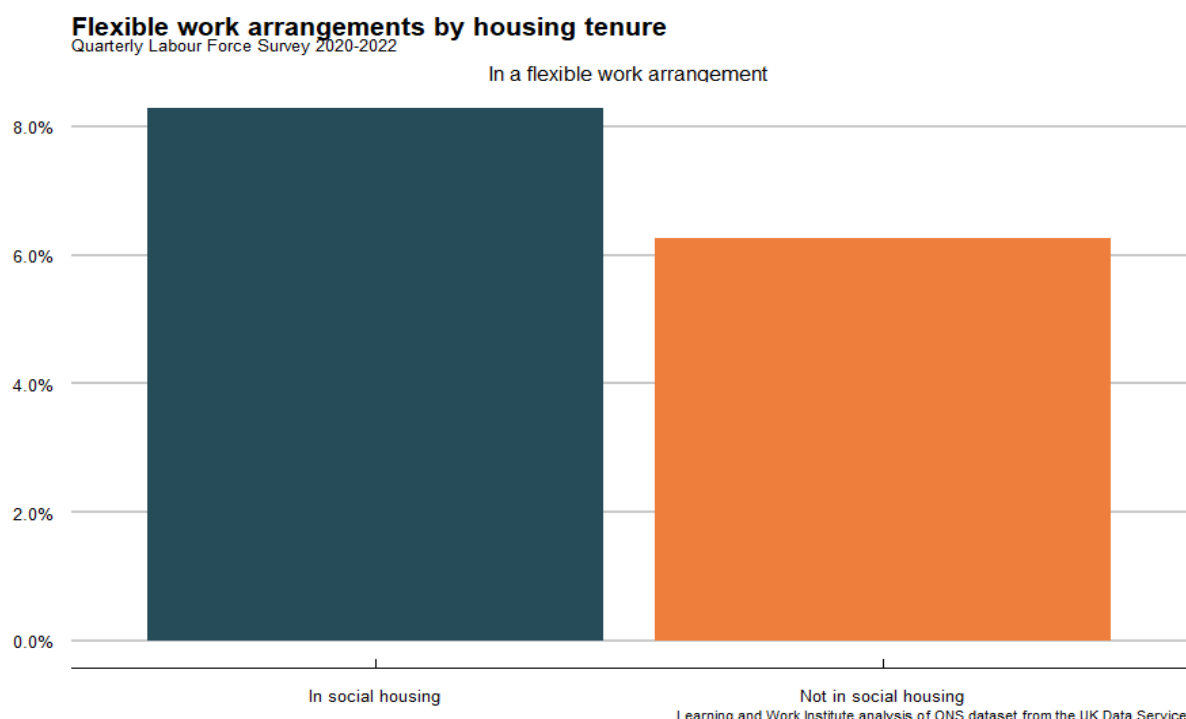
Figure 2.7: Average hourly pay of those in work

2.4 Diversity of working patterns

It is difficult to measure the quality of work. There are numerous measures and definitions, quality means different things to different people, and measures can be challenging to interpret. For example, zero hours contracts may represent insecure work if the flexibility over hours lies solely with the employer and the individual would like more certainty, or could represent flexibility if the individual has and values the chance to flex their hours.

For this report, we have looked at the number of people in flexible work arrangements such as a zero hours contract, temporary or fixed term contract. This does not tell us whether that individual is happy with that arrangement or would prefer a different approach, in other words whether flexibility is a two way street or a one way street in favour of the employer. Rather, it tells us how common particular forms of contract are.

With those caveats in mind, 33% more social housing tenants are in a flexible working arrangement than people in other housing tenures. But these arrangements still represent a minority, 8% of social housing tenants and 6% of non-social housing tenants. Further research would be needed to build a fuller understanding of tenants experience of these flexible work arrangements and their preferences.

Figure 2.8: Flexible work arrangements by housing tenure

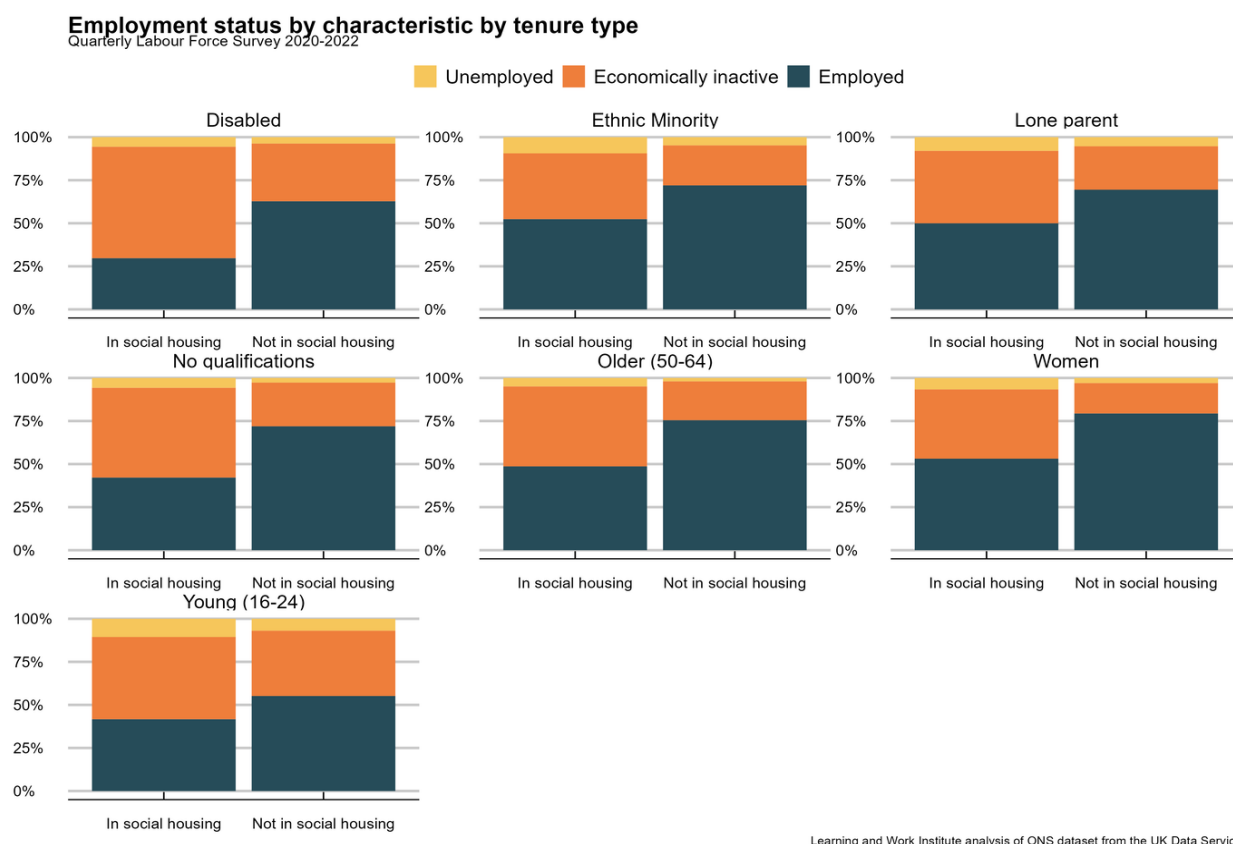
2.5 Variations by demographics and geography

Groups such as people from ethnic minorities and lone parents have significantly lower employment rates in social housing, mirroring employment patterns across the economy although disabled people in social housing face bigger employment rate gaps. Employment rates for those in social housing vary across the country, and tenants in work in London do not get a wage premium that reflects the higher cost of living making in-work poverty a particular challenge for them.

This section explores how labour market outcomes vary for those living in social housing by demographic group and geographic area, and how this compares to those living in other forms of housing tenure.

2.5.1 Demographic groups

For demographic groups, the analysis focuses on key groups that can be identified in the Labour Force Survey, namely people that are: disabled; from an ethnic minority; lone parents; have no qualifications; aged 50-64; women; or aged 18-24. These are groups where data is available and that are often a focus of public policy due to characteristics such as lower employment or income. Note that of course people can be in more than one demographic group (for example, a disabled lone parent), and so in those cases are counted in each group (so for example the disabled group includes single and couple parents, while the lone parent group includes disabled and non-disabled people).

Figure 2.9: Employment status by demographic group and housing tenure

Each of the demographic groups analysed has a lower employment than average whatever their tenure type. As with the overall employment trends described in previous chapters, this will partly reflect the policy to allocate a limited supply of social housing according to need.

Overall **people living in social housing have an employment rate around two thirds that for other people** (53% versus 76%), i.e. a gap of 23 percentage points. For most demographic groups that pattern is repeated. For example, people in ethnic minorities (52% v 74%), lone parents (49% v 72%) and older people (49% v 75%) have employment rates one third lower if they are living in social housing.

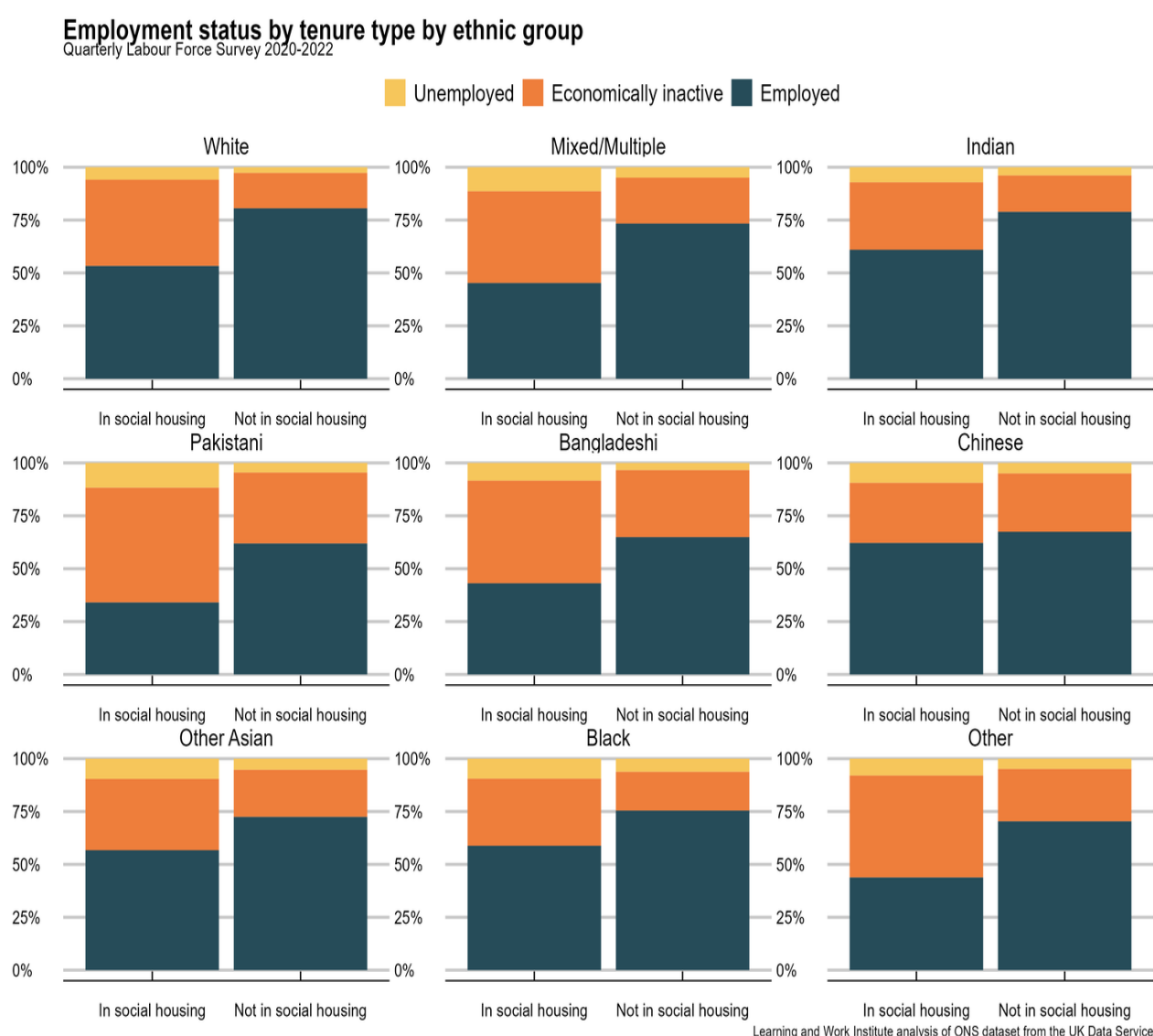
This means that people in the broad demographic groups described above are more disadvantaged in their employment rates compared to people in the same demographic groups living in other tenure types, but not more disadvantaged compared to others living in social housing. However, a higher proportion of people living in social housing belongs to one of these groups, so reducing employment gaps for groups living in social housing is both a priority for fairness and also for increasing employment rates overall.

The main exception to this pattern is disabled people. **Disabled people who live in social housing are around half as likely to be in work as other disabled people** (30% v 55%). This means the disability employment rate gap in social housing is 39 percentage points compared to 28 percentage points for disabled people as a whole.

The data allow analysis of variations in employment status for different ethnic minority groups. The groups that have lower employment rates in the population as a whole also have lower employment rates for those who live in social housing.

Employment rates are lowest for people from Pakistani and Bangladeshi backgrounds, and highest for people from Indian and Chinese backgrounds. The latter two groups also had the smallest employment rate gaps between those living in social housing and those living in other housing tenure types. This highlights the importance of effectively targeting support and understanding the structural reasons why patterns of employment vary within and between groups.

Figure 2.10: Employment status by housing tenure and ethnicity



2.5.2 Geographic areas

Employment and pay vary across England, both between and within geographic areas. This section analyses local variations for people living in social housing. There are some data limitations which means it is not possible to report every variable available at

England level down to local level. The same data challenges also limit the level at which geographical analysis can be undertaken. Nonetheless, the data help illustrate the picture and identify some key challenges.

In general, employment for people in social housing is lower where it is lower for the overall population. This means there is a **huge range in employment rates for social housing tenants**, from over 60% in places like Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly to under 40% in places like East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire.

Figure 2.11: Employment rate for 16-64 year olds by housing tenure and local area

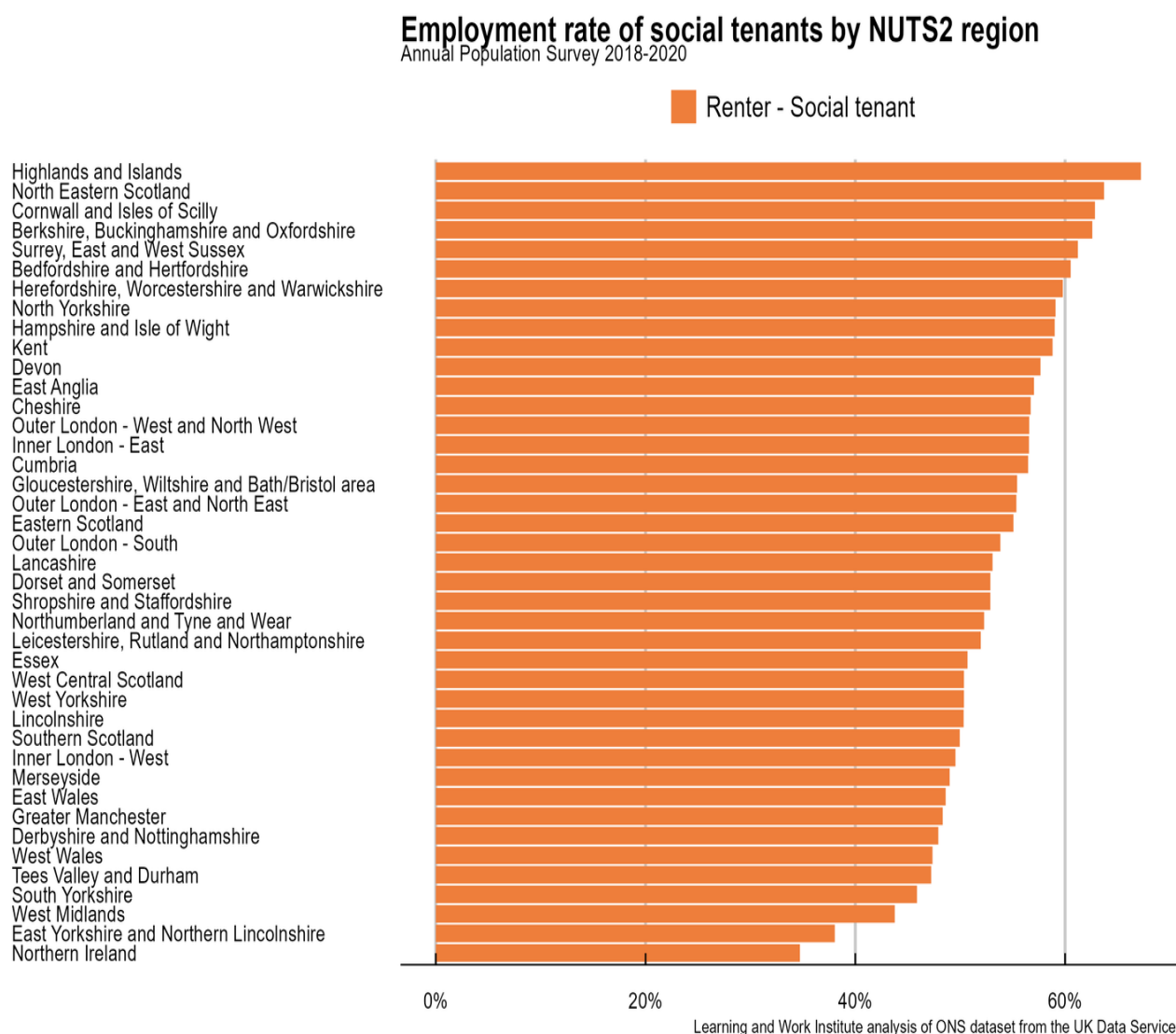
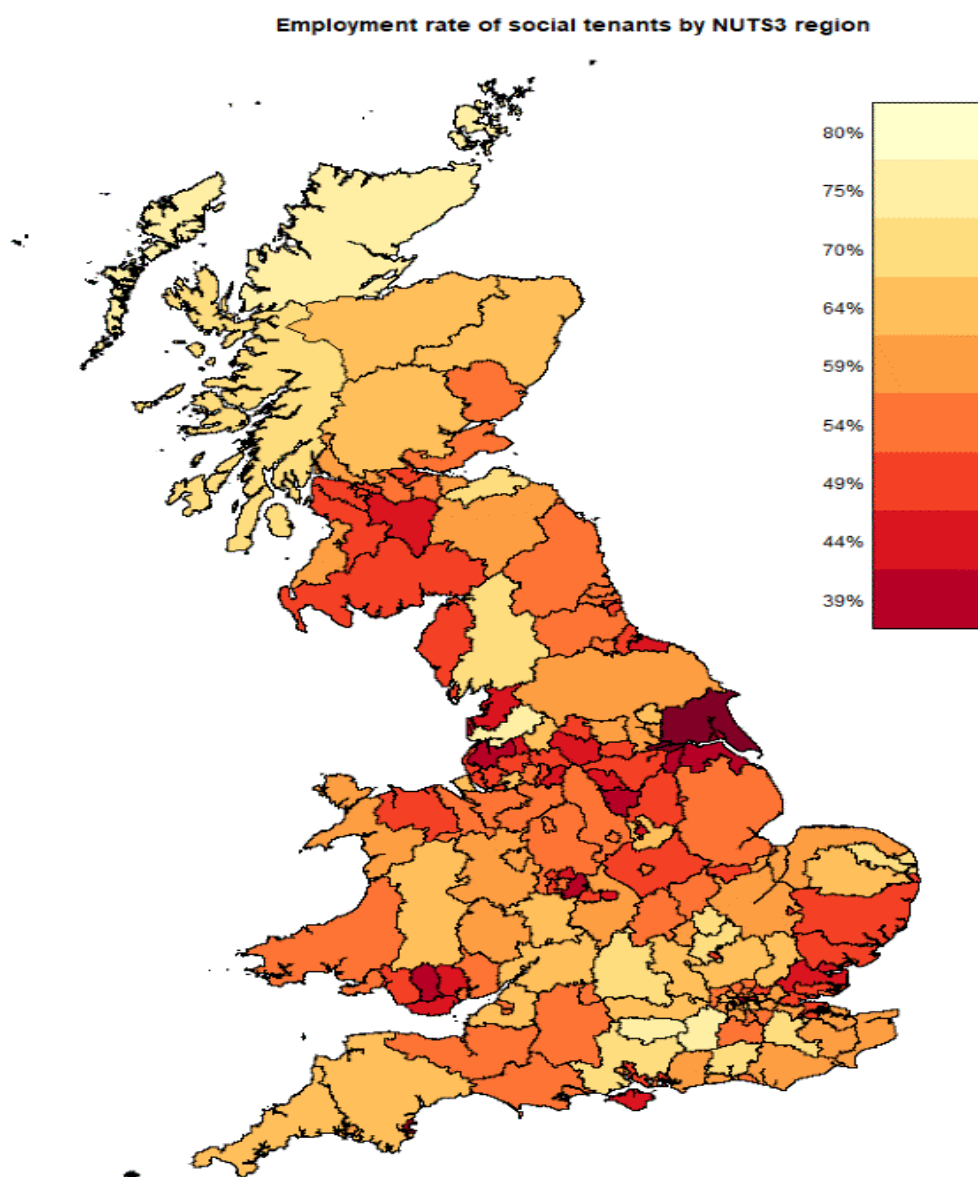


Figure 2.12: Employment rate of 16-64 year olds social housing tenants by local area¹³

Hours and pay

Social housing tenants worked fewer hours than people in other housing tenure types in every region and nation of the UK. This may in part reflect the demographics of social housing tenants, with a higher proportion of people with a disability or caring responsibilities who may not therefore want or be able to work full-time. There is some variation across the country, though relatively limited. The South East has the lowest hours worked by social housing tenants, even though it has the longest hours worked by

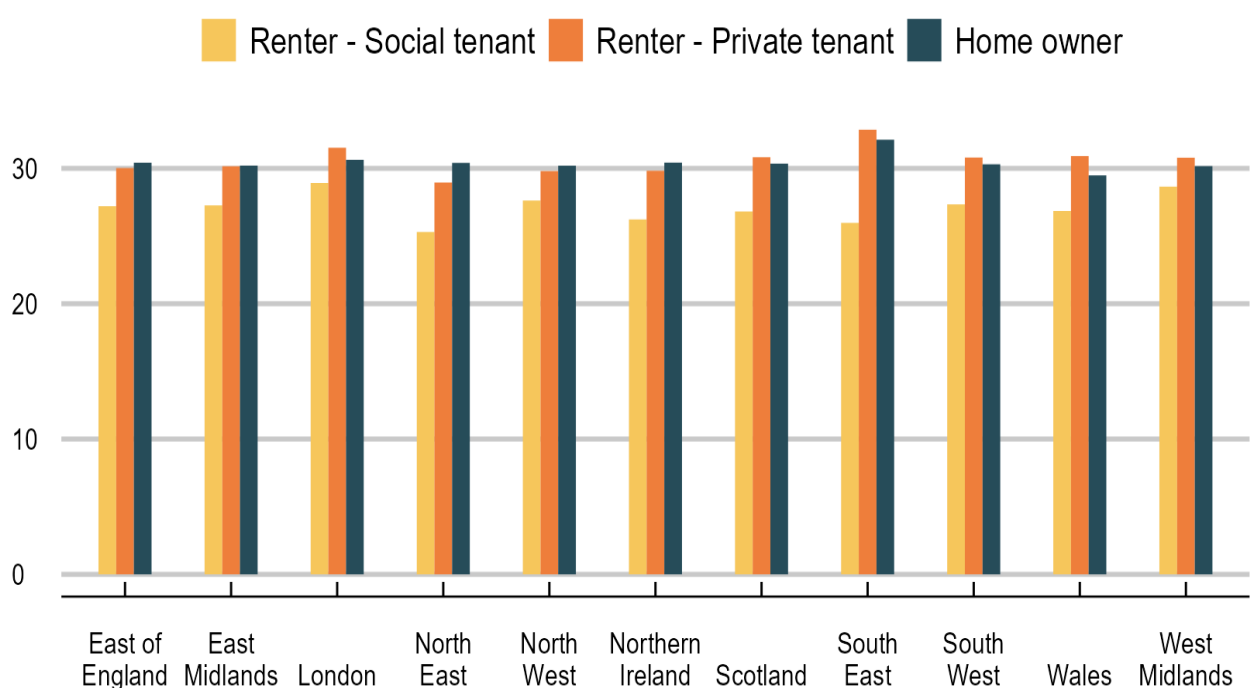
¹³ This map does not include Northern Ireland due to significant differences in the structure of social housing compared to other parts of the UK.

other tenure types. London has longer hours for social housing tenants, likely reflecting a lower proportion of part-time working (in part because travel times and the higher cost of living can make this unviable) for people overall in London, whatever their tenure type.¹⁴

Figure 2.13: Average hours worked by housing tenure and region and nation

Average hours worked of employed working age adults by housing tenure

Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2020-2022



Learning and Work Institute analysis of ONS dataset from the UK Data Service

Pay varies across the country too, with higher wages in London and the South East. However, pay for social housing tenants in London does not have the same premium seen for other tenure types. This likely largely reflects the sectors and roles that social housing tenants tend to work in. In other words, this highlights the importance of **ensuring that pay in lower paid roles (and, where appropriate, benefits) in London and other high cost areas better reflects the cost of living.**

¹⁴ The hourglass economy: an analysis of London's labour market, London Assembly, 2016.

Figure 2.14: Hourly pay by housing tenure by nation and region

Average hourly pay (£) of employed working age adults by housing tenure

Quarterly Labour Force Survey 2020-2022



The proportion of social housing tenants living in relative poverty also varies significantly across the country, from over 60% in the North East and Wales, to just over 40% in the South East. **In every region and nation, relative poverty rates are significantly higher for people living in social housing.** As noted throughout this report, this in part reflects the fact that social housing is allocated according to need.

Figure 2.15: Relative income poverty by housing tenure and region and country



3 Supporting residents and communities

Social landlords have often been at the forefront of supporting their tenants and local communities to prepare for, move into and progress in work. For many landlords, supporting residents to improve their incomes and wellbeing is a key part of their wider social purpose; while many also deliver employment, skills and wider support as commissioned programmes on behalf of government and wider public services. However, with the economic, social and funding landscape changing, there are both opportunities and risks for landlords in how they work with and support communities.

This chapter sets out findings from six detailed case studies of how social landlords are working to improve jobs and incomes. It sets out the different ways that landlords are delivering employment related support, some key lessons what is working relatively well and the difference that they can make, and then key challenges for the future. The full case studies are set out in the attached Annex.

3.1 Case study methodology

Social landlords' provision of employment related support and other means of improving jobs and incomes were explored through six in depth case studies. Case study organisations (see section 13.2) were selected to represent a range of geographical areas, organisation sizes, and organisation types (housing associations, ALMOs and supported accommodation providers).

Each case study involved between one and three in depth interviews with staff members at social housing providers who were involved in employment support, and in some cases key partners. Interviews were conducted between June and August 2022. They explored the employment support delivered by case study organisations, the impacts of this support, key organisational strengths, and challenges providers faced. Information gained from in-depth interviews was supplemented by a document review. The review identified additional information on key themes from the case study organisations' websites, annual reports and internal documents shared with the research team.

3.2 The six case studies

Case study landlords were chosen to try to reflect the diversity of social landlords in England, different local economies, and the breadth of approaches being taken in supporting residents. The six landlords chosen and who participated in this research project were:

- **Stockport Homes** – an ALMO that manages 12,500 properties in the Stockport area on behalf of Stockport Council, providing a core employment service and contracted and grant-funded provision for specific disadvantaged groups;
- **Optivo** – a housing association with 46,000 homes across London, the South East and Midlands, providing a core employment service alongside other programmes, including large-scale partnerships with other social landlords;
- **whg** – a housing association based in the West Midlands providing over 21,000 homes, with a particularly strong presence in Walsall (where they house around one fifth of the population), again delivering a core employment service, with specialist provision particularly focused on health and wellbeing;
- **Barnet Homes** – a council-owned ALMO managing 14,500 homes in the London Borough of Barnet, leading the delivery of Barnet Council’s employment service, alongside other specialist programmes that particularly target young people;
- **South Yorkshire Housing Association** – which has 6,500 homes across South Yorkshire, North Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, and delivers a range of specialist employment and health support, with a particular focus on support for those with mental health conditions; and
- **Tyne Housing** – a provider of specialist supported accommodation with around 400 homes, delivering specialised employment support for residents, many of whom face significant and multiple disadvantages.

3.3 Social landlords’ roles in delivering employment support

The six case studies demonstrate that social landlords are taking a range of approaches to employment support and delivering different services and using different models to reflect their objectives, funding and local needs. However, their approaches can be broadly grouped around three broad models which are taken in turn below.

3.3.1 Core employment services

Most case study areas run a core employment service offering one-to-one help around action planning and job goals, job preparation, jobsearch, applying for jobs, employability skills, vacancy gathering and job brokerage. In some cases (Stockport Homes and whg), this service is self-funded by the landlord (i.e. through rental income); while in others (Optivo, Barnet and Tyne) the service is funded through combinations of grant and contract funding. In the case of Barnet Homes, their core service (BOOST) is Barnet Council’s commissioned employment service for the whole borough.

For four of these landlords (excluding Tyne, who deliver more specialist support) this employment service is also open to wider residents in the communities where they operate, and in all cases support is non-time-limited and can be flexible and tailored to individuals’ needs. Most also offer support in work, and all link up with a range of wider services and often co-locate with them too – with examples of this with Jobcentre Plus,

local training colleges, welfare advice services like Citizens Advice, other housing teams (for example tenancy support) and health services.

3.3.2 Specialist support for those further from work

All six case studies deliver specialist services for specific groups of residents. This specialist support is invariably funded through grants and contracts, from a range of funders but in particular the European Social Fund (ESF), DWP funding, the Community Renewal Fund and the National Lottery. The nature of this specialist support is generally determined by the needs of residents (and in virtually all cases open to both tenants and the wider community) but can also simply reflect the priorities of the organisation funding the services. This includes examples of specialist support for:

- **People with health conditions and disabilities** – with for example SYHA a centre of excellence for the delivery of Individual Placement and Support (IPS) and recently leading a large-scale trial of IPS across the South Yorkshire region (the Working Win project); while whg has very effective partnership programmes with their Integrated Care Partnership;
- **Disadvantaged ethnic minority groups** – for example through the Love London Working programme delivered by Optivo in partnership with other London landlords, the Motiv8 programme delivered by Stockport Homes, and Project Uplift from whg;
- **Disadvantaged young people** – with Stockport Homes delivering the national Hidden Talent programme in their area, as well as Steps to Work (supporting young care leavers); BOOST providing specialist support for young people not in education or employment, working with Barnet Education and Learning Services; and four landlords creating opportunities for unemployed young people through the Kickstart scheme.
- **Those with multiple and complex needs** – most notably, through Tyne Housing's specialist support for their residents of supported accommodation – many of whom were former rough sleepers, have severe mental health conditions and issues around addiction and substance misuse.

3.3.3 Direct employment, apprenticeships and social value clauses

Finally, five of the six landlords (Tyne is the exception) reported using their apprenticeship levy funding to create jobs with training (within the organisation) for disadvantaged residents. All were using this either as a pathway to permanent employment, or alongside transitional support for apprentices to move on to other jobs (with this support usually delivered by their employment team). Most landlords were also working to source apprenticeships for their residents from other (local) employers, and were promoting inclusive apprenticeships through their supply chains.

More broadly, most employers also make active use of social value policies to support employment for disadvantaged groups in their supply chains and wider partners. Often this was through 'hard' levers like clauses built into sub-contracts, but also included 'softer' levers around sharing practice and running jobs fairs and recruitment events.

3.4 Key strengths and what is working well

The case study research identified a number of common themes around how social landlords in general, and the six case study areas in particular, were able to add value in reaching those further from work and/ or in complementing wider services. These were broadly in five areas as follows.

3.4.1 Supporting those further from work

Most importantly, across all six landlords, a common finding was that landlords were able to reach people who were out of work, disadvantaged and often not in contact with mainstream or statutory services. In part, this was attributed to the fact that landlords simply had regular contact with their tenants and were relatively well trusted in their communities; but it also reflected conscious and sustained efforts to engage in communities, listen to and work with residents, and to use outreach services and co-location. As a member of staff at Tyne Housing put it:

“We are delivering programmes supporting individuals right in the heart of the communities where levelling up needs to happen. Right down to postcodes...We’re housing there, we’re in those communities, we’re dealing with those individuals day in day out. So we’re best placed to identify and deliver programmes of support.”

Or more succinctly, a whg staff member pointed out of their residents:

“They’re not hard to reach, you’ve just got to think about it differently”

3.4.2 Open ended, personalised support

A number of landlords also emphasised that the nature of their services – which is often open to all, is not time limited and where attendance does not affect benefits – acted both as a strong magnet in attracting people to engage with support, and also meant that this could be personalised to their needs and delivered in ways that were more flexible than mainstream contracted employment. As a member of the Stockport Homes team describes:

“Customers engage with us because there is no obligation to continue...there is no sanction if they can’t continue with the intervention...the thing that makes us successful is that they can dip in and dip out”

3.4.3 Strong partnerships, alignment and local co-ordination

Social landlords are not at all unique in wanting to work in partnership across local services, but the six case study areas showed how many landlords had leveraged their position within the community to build effective partnership with other services, co-locate and align support, and then use this to reach more people and deliver more joined-up and person-centred services.

The way that this was being done was often slightly different in different places. ALMOs, for instance, are wholly owned by their parent councils. This meant that for the two ALMOs (Stockport and Barnet), they were able to work effectively ‘inside the tent’ with their parent council and outside of it in wider local partnerships. In South Yorkshire and whg, there has been a particular focus on health partnerships, recognising how (decent) work and good health are closely related and mutually reinforcing. In Tyne, their need to be able to bring together a range of services for people with complex needs also supported strong partnership working on employment support. For all though, the common thread was that their local partnerships were strong, based on trust and mutually beneficial. As a staff member at whg put it:

“Because of that strategic work and where we sit on either the integrated care partnership or other...boards that whg sit on, particularly around employment and skills...we then collaborate to...allow a programme to be crafted...delivered and launched that maximises outputs”.

Or at Barnet Homes:

“What works well is partnerships...it is fundamentally important. We can’t do the services that are needed on our own, we couldn’t afford it. And colocation...brings in footfall, which in turn brings us sign ups”

3.4.4 Access to wider services, but a strong focus on employment

Linked to the above elements, case studies were notable in the extent to which they drew on and provided access to a range of services and supports – sometimes funded by the landlord and often through onward referral to partners. There were particularly notable examples around the delivery of ‘Sector-based Work Academy Programmes’ (SWAPs – a well-evidenced model¹⁵ that provides short, accredited pre-employment training followed by a work placement and guaranteed interview); the use of specialist staff to provide support health and wellbeing; and alignment with support around welfare, tenancy, digital skills, travel to work and so on.

There was positive feedback on the effectiveness and utility of these wider services, given that many of those who were being supported by social landlords were significantly disadvantaged and may need access to wider support alongside help with finding work. This was also aided by the strong partnerships and co-ordination that landlords were able to achieve locally. In SYHA for example, it was reported that:

“[Allied health professionals employed by SYHA are] a fantastic resource...they can provide the knowledge tools and resources we need to get somebody back into work”

This also meant that landlords could connect their residents with wider services, beyond just help to prepare for and find work. As a member of the Tyne team put it:

¹⁵ Sector-based work academies A quantitative impact assessment, Department for Work and Pensions, March 2016

“it’s all about progression and ultimately the notion of getting people into employment, structured volunteering or accredited training...We don’t have one door we have several doors...because hitherto [residents haven’t] managed to connect well with other services”

However, in all cases there was also a strong focus on employment – so engaging people who want to take steps towards work, drawing on wider services to help achieve that, and ensuring that there was a clear focus on employment goals, employability and preparing for work.

3.4.5 Leveraging landlords’ roles as ‘anchor institutions’

Finally, a key feature of social landlord provision in these case studies was how they used their roles as large local employers and commissioners of services to drive change in their communities and among their suppliers. In particular, this included the use of social value policies (see section 3.2.3), but also included in some cases landlords using their scale to build effective partnerships with larger local employers. In whg for example, this had led to a particular focus on working with health trusts to fill health service vacancies (helpful too given their focus on working with health services to align health and wellbeing support with employment).

“As a big anchor organisation that housed a fifth of the borough, that had a huge number of working age customers in our homes, could we be the supplier of those people that they needed to run the hospitals, run the acute services?”

3.5 Challenges and opportunities

While there were a range of strengths identified among the case studies, there were also some common challenges in the delivery of employment support. These again varied across areas, but five themes stood out in particular.

3.5.1 Continuity of funding

Across all case studies, a common refrain was that short-term funding, peaks and troughs made it harder for landlords to plan for the future, deliver services over the long-term and recruit staff. It was also an inevitable source of stress and effort that detracted from the delivery of services. A particular concern was around the end of ESF funding and the gap to the Shared Prosperity Fund (where the main employment and skills money will not come on stream until 2024/5), but there were also some general concerns around reduced funding overall for those further from work. As a member of staff at Barnet Council put it,

“at the moment there is a bit of a gap coming between the end of the ESF and the beginning of UKSPF because the employment skill strand doesn’t kick in until 2024/25”

However there is a further risk to those services funded directly by social landlords through rental income, as future cuts to rents could lead to reductions in those budgets too.

3.5.2 Fragmentation, duplication and gaps in delivery

Related to this, some areas also stated that the complicated and fragmented landscape for funding and delivery of services meant that there were risks both of duplication across services and of people slipping between gaps. Again in Barnet, a staff member at Barnet Homes asked:

“if [an organisation is providing employment support] why would you want someone else to do exactly the same as what you’re doing, and asking the same questions and doing the same stuff with participants? Because surely [participants] are going to get frustrated”.

A related issue identified by a small number of landlords, but which is likely to be more prevalent in wider areas, was a lack of awareness among commissioners, funders and local policy makers of the needs of social residents and the services that social landlords could provide.

3.5.3 Inflexible commissioning and delivery models

Many landlords also raised common issues around commissioning models for employment support not aligning well with their approaches to engaging residents and delivering services. One important theme was that outcome-based contracting tended to prioritise rapid job entry and to expect high volumes finding work. This meant that many of those furthest from work who may be most likely to benefit from support were also the least likely to access it. A slightly different issue raised by Tyne Housing was that as a small provider, they could often only really engage with national programmes within supply chains, which offered far less scope to deliver services flexibly and in line with tenants’ needs. Overall, the impression given was of landlords delivering services in spite of rather than because of different funding and commissioning approaches.

3.5.4 Effective engagement with employers

There were a set of issues around employer engagement in a number of case study areas, although experiences varied. For some smaller landlords, there were simply scale challenges in accessing larger employers with significant numbers of vacancies. Notably, Tyne Housing had addressed this by working in partnership with a larger group of social landlords across the region. Another issue though was that employer recruitment practices inherently disadvantaged residents in social housing, particularly as employers often sift and screen on candidates’ previous employment record and qualifications – both of which can be significant barriers for social tenants. This is inherently difficult to address given that many recruitment processes are increasingly automated, and so requires time and effort, and often engagement at a senior level and wider scale than an individual

landlord may be able to achieve. Nevertheless, some landlords reported having been able to make progress in changing these practices with specific employers.

3.5.5 Recruitment and retention

Finally, recruitment and retention of staff within social landlords' employment services was flagged by three case study areas as being a key challenge at the moment – and in the case of Tyne Housing this was seen as *“the biggest challenge”*. This likely largely reflects the incredibly tight labour market in the UK, where there are now more vacancies than there are unemployed people and more choice in the sorts of jobs that people can take up. But it will not be being helped by issues around the often short-term nature of funding for employment services and the relatively low rates of pay for employment advisers, support workers and work coaches.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

This research demonstrates clearly that social housing residents are significantly disadvantaged in the labour market: with far higher rates of worklessness than people in other tenures, more significant barriers to work, lower pay while in work, and greater risks of poverty both in and out of work. This picture existed before the Covid-19 pandemic and has continued since. However, the case for doing more to support social housing residents is arguably stronger now than it has been in decades – with widespread labour and skills shortages meaning that it is more important than ever that we help those further from work to prepare for and ultimately move into jobs; and with the costs of living crisis likely to hit those on the lowest incomes especially hard.

Social landlords have always been at the forefront of efforts to support social housing tenants (and those in the communities where they live) to secure decent work and to improve their incomes and wellbeing. The case studies in this report demonstrate some of the diversity of practices across the sector, as well as the common themes around their strengths and the challenges they face.

Social landlords are well placed to reach those who are further from work, to work effectively in partnerships, and to deliver effective, personalised employment support.

However, they do this while often having to navigate a complex and fragmented funding and delivery landscape and with scaling up services for residents and employers. So there is more that we can do to extend and improve access to high quality employment, skills and wider support, and we believe that there is a strong case for action in four areas.

4.1 A new plan for jobs, growth and incomes

The current government's Plan for Jobs was launched in summer 2020, at a time when the official forecasts were warning us that unemployment would peak at four million and that now – two years later – we would be dealing with a legacy of high long-term unemployment and weak demand. Instead, we are facing widespread labour shortages, a smaller labour force and high inflation. Therefore our approach to employment and the labour market needs to change to reflect this new reality.

Both IES and L&W have set out what the contours of this new approach should be, and in particular the need to invest in specialist employment support for those out of work and who want to work (especially those with long-term health conditions, older people and parents – drawing on the underspends from the Plan for Jobs); to broaden access to our mainstream employment services; to strengthen local partnerships and alignment between employment, skills and wider provision including health services, childcare and

transport; and to work better with (and expect more from) employers. However, this research demonstrates the critical importance in that of **having effective means to involve social landlords and housing bodies in the design, development and delivery of these services alongside other partners.**

This should include, for example, commissioning new support in ways that can better support local partnership – for example through devolving funding, co-commissioning or building in requirements to consult and engage with key local partners; and having clear expectations or requirements around reaching and engaging with residents in areas with high rates of social housing.

Related to this, there is a very strong case for **bringing forward to 2023 the employment and skills strand in the Shared Prosperity Fund**, and reviewing funding levels to ensure that this at least matches the amounts that were spent on equivalent provision through the European Social Fund.

4.2 More support for partnerships and co-ordination

This research demonstrates the clear value of effective local partnerships in supporting those further from work. Over recent years there has been a growing focus on this in government – in particular in working with combined authorities and in developing pathfinders for local employment and skills provision in Blackpool, Walsall and Barking and Dagenham. This has also been a key feature of the Local Government Association’s ‘Work Local’ research and proposals.

Looking ahead, we believe that there is a strong case for **going further on how we support local co-ordination, partnership working and alignment and co-ordination of service delivery.** This should include looking at the governance that could underpin more effective local partnership working – for example through local boards bringing together key partners along the lines that the LGA have proposed and underpinned by outcome agreements to show the difference this would make, and/ or placing ‘duties to co-operate’ on statutory services like Jobcentre Plus; as well as the support, guidance and expectations that are put in place for those working and delivering services locally. A key part of this should be around guidance and support on working effectively with social landlords. Social landlords may also have an important role to play in shaping local skills provision, including working directly with colleges and providers and contributing to Local Skills Improvement Plans.

As part of this the Government and local and combined authorities should ensure regular data on performance of their employment and skills programmes is available on as local a level as possible. This would help local partners see whether provision was reaching those that need it the most and target action where improvements were needed. It would also be helpful to explore the options for easier and more systematic data sharing.

4.3 Sector action to build capacity and capability

Alongside this, there is scope for the housing sector to do more on **building capacity and capability, sharing practice and raising awareness of the role that social landlords can play in supporting jobs and incomes**. This should be sector led, and could build on wider models in employment services, local government and education and skills. It could usefully include:

- Capacity and capability building – supporting social landlords that want to do more or to improve their services to get access to advice and support on how to do so, as well as supporting the professional development of practitioners;
- Sharing practice and expertise – for example on tenant engagement, service delivery, the use of the Apprenticeship levy and social value policies, employer engagement and partnership working;
- Celebrating success – demonstrating to wider services, funders and to social landlords themselves the added value and benefits of effective employment support; and
- Identifying new opportunities and challenges – for example around costs of living or sector shortages.

4.4 Supporting innovation

Finally, given the wider changes in the economic and social landscape, the need to reach those further from work, and the ability of landlords to deliver services flexibly and in a way that is responsive to local needs, we believe that there is a strong case for government to work with the sector **to encourage, support and fund innovative approaches that can be delivered through and with social landlords**. This would help to improve the evidence base around what works in supporting those furthest from work, and would also serve to support wider sector and government work to build capacity, capability and local partnerships.

Similar models already exist in other services, particularly through the Education Endowment Foundation (for education) and the Youth Futures Foundation and Youth Endowment Fund (on youth employment and offending respectively) and the What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth. A similar ‘what works’ model of challenge/ innovation funding could be delivered through the Shared Prosperity Fund, given that supporting innovation was a key feature of the European Social Fund that it replaces.

This could be underpinned by an Employment and Skills Data Lab, modelled on the Justice Data Lab, and allowing landlords and partners to better test and see the impact of their interventions. As a starter, there would be significant value in trialling the ‘Jobs-Plus’ model in the UK, which is a well evidenced approach to supporting people out of work in the most disadvantaged communities, taking a place-based, joined-up and work-focused approach to engaging residents and supporting social action. A prototype for this model

has also been developed by members of Communities that Work and the National Housing Federation, working with the Learning and Work Institute¹⁶.

¹⁶ Developing a Jobs Plus model for the UK, L&W, 2018.

Annex: Case studies of employment support

1 Stockport Homes

This case study is based on an in-depth interview with a member of Stockport Homes management team and a compiled document providing more information on the employment support they provide.

1.1 The organisation

Stockport Homes (SH) is an ALMO managing 12,500 council-owned properties on behalf of Stockport Council, making them the largest landlord in the town. Their key goals are to enrich the local area and improve people's lives by supporting both Stockport Homes residents and the wider community towards and into good quality, sustainable employment.

1.1.1 What support do they provide?

Stockport Homes provide a range of employment and skills training tailored to individual needs and career pathways. Support is delivered by their Employment and Training team.

“Every customer is individual and unique, we try and figure out where [an individual is in] their journey”

Stockport Homes staff member

The majority of their employment support is funded internally through rents **and delivered by their employment team**, complemented by some external funding for specific interventions. Their core employment service offers one-to-one support, tailored to the needs of the individual. Therefore, support can range from light touch interventions to long-term support (sometimes over a number of years) for those who need support overcoming more complex barriers.

“With no time scales on support or prescribed structures to engagement, each customer journey is unique. The team design the pathway in conjunction with the customers to meet their needs. The service is responsive and holistic and is at a pace led by the customer.”

Stockport Homes staff member

Coaches provide support with CV writing, job applications, cover letters, interview coaching, job search support, and careers advice. They also support those further from the labour market towards and into work with access to support including volunteering, work placements and training.

As well as one-to-one support, Stockport Homes' employment team run a weekly job club at a local community centre and Sector-Based Work Academies (see box 1.1)

Box 1.1: In focus: Sector Based Employment Support

SH's employment and training team work with DWP, local and national businesses to design and manage bespoke training and work placement support, following the Sector-based Work Academy Programme (SWAP) model. Employers share roles that they are recruiting for and what skills and experience they need, which SH then advertise to their service users (including through social media like Facebook). People who are interested attend an initial Welcome Day where SH explain the role and then sift for suitable candidates, for example through group interviews using team building exercises. Successful candidates then receive a bespoke, accredited training course designed and delivered by their training manager and receive tailored employment support such as CV writing and interview prep. Participants then go through an interview process with the employer.

Around 20 people secured employment in 2022 directly through these SWAPs programmes, with employers also valuing the offer. One employer reported that:

"A recent candidate who came through the last group is an absolute star – definitely one to watch for us. Full of energy and enthusiasm and really keen to absorb and apply everything she is learning. I've had numerous Team Managers telling me that she has a real bright future ahead of her."

Stockport Homes also fund and deliver a comprehensive **internal training offer** through an in-house Training Officer and team. This accredited training is open to all Stockport residents, with Stockport Homes residents getting priority. Training is delivered face-to-face in SH buildings and local community centres, with an online training suite of 27 employment skills videos designed during the pandemic (and which is now a key resource for the team). Training falls into three categories which aim to overcome barriers and support people towards employment:

- **Employability Skills** – this is provided through half- and full-day courses. The training aligns with support from the employment team, for example meeting skills gaps identified by coaches.
- **Health and wellbeing** – many service users are socially isolated and/ or have health problems so wellbeing support can include exercise (e.g. kayaking, a Six Peaks Challenge) which builds confidence and connections with other people; mindfulness sessions; and language courses.
- **Community** – this provides support to set up community groups through a seven-session, accredited course (called Participation) which teaches skills such as how to run a meeting, set an agenda and market their group.

Overall, the training offer is intended to provide a holistic learning experience to improve wellbeing, employability and community.

“We believe all training is an enrichment opportunity and starting to learn again should be a positive experience.”

Stockport Homes staff member

While most training is designed and delivered internally, SH work with external training providers where needed, such as a recent Construction Skills Training course delivered by a local partner.

As well their core internally funded offer, SH also deliver several **externally funded contracts** focusing on providing employment support to disadvantaged residents. Notable recent examples include:

- **Motiv8 (Building Better Opportunities)** – For the past six years, SH has delivered this ESF and Lottery funded programme aimed at supporting those aged 25 and over who are furthest from the labour market due to facing more than one complex barrier to work (for example. issues with health, addiction, domestic violence, debt and homelessness). Motiv8 has a specific focus on supporting those from underrepresented groups, ethnic minorities, people aged over 50, and disadvantaged women. The wider programme covers Greater Manchester, with SH delivering in Stockport and Rochdale. It is delivered using a key worker model, where staff co-create action plans with participants and set realistic targets to help people move towards work.
- **Hidden Talent** – This national programme supported 18-24 year olds who were disadvantaged and outside of education, training or employment. SH’s employment team provided strength-based, holistic support to young people on the programme, on behalf of the Greater Manchester Council for Voluntary Organisations (GMCVO) and in partnership with a number of local partners.
- **Steps to Work (Stockport Council)** – this programme supports young care leavers, those with Special Education Needs and other significantly disadvantaged young people through a wage subsidy scheme. This offered £4,500 to employers able to commit to offering at least six months’ employment. SH works with local services to identify eligible young people and then provide pre-employment and in-work support to those young people and their employers. The programme launched in 2022, after the end of the Kickstart scheme..

Finally, SH also support **internal work placements and direct employment**. For example, they delivered sixteen Kickstart placements – offering subsidised employment to previously unemployed young people – in a variety of roles, alongside tailored training, group sessions and dedicated mentor support. They also offer multiple eight week part-time work placements within various departments, targeted at people with limited to no work experience and tailored to develop a range of skills. In addition they create apprenticeship opportunities for residents, creating seventeen apprenticeships in the last year, and have started delivered T-level industry placements in construction in partnership with Stockport College.

“We recognise that [T-levels] is a strong pathway for us as an organisation to engage the future workforce”.

Stockport Homes staff member

More broadly, SH has also been working to promote and improve pathways into the housing sector – running a quarterly ‘introduction to housing’ programme alongside support with job applications and job shadowing; and delivering this year their first housing-focused Careers and Jobs Fair.

1.1.2 Delivery

Employment support is delivered by SH’s Training and Employment Team. These were initially two separate teams but have been brought together to create stronger pathways between training and employability support. The team tend to have a caseload of 200-250 customers at various stages of support, and deliver training accredited by NCFE.

SH also engages in some co-design of their employment offer and are currently consulting on changes to their weekly job club with a view to including employability skills workshops, opportunities to meet employers, training sessions and benefits and financial advice service.

“We are keen to co-design a vibrant job club environment that is ready for the future, meeting the needs of customers’ in a challenging employment and financial environment”.

Stockport Homes staff member

1.1.3 Partnership working

SH work with a range of partners, including Stockport Council, DWP, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, local training providers, and the wider voluntary and community sector.

Their partnership with DWP was described by SH staff as being uniquely close among social housing providers and has included co-location of DWP’s ‘youth hub’ in SH community spaces. A member of the DWP Youth Employment Team is permanently based in this space, and it used both for delivery of DWP support including group work and for generating footfall and onward referral for other services. SH also worked closely with DWP to promote their kickstart vacancies – in joint virtual and in-person sessions – and on wider initiatives like their SWAPs provision.

SH work with local training providers to broaden their training offer when needed. For example, they work closely with a local charity providing construction skills training, who recently hosted a ‘Women in Construction’ event in partnership with SH and DWP. SH also deliver employability training services for this organisation. They have a good relationship with Stockport College and view themselves as a gateway to formal education for those who may have barriers to learning.

1.1.4 Funding

SH's Employment and Training Team has core funding through SH rental income, supplemented by several external funding streams including ESF, National Lottery, Community Renewal Fund, and local and national government funding. This is used to complement their core offer by building capacity to support more people or specific groups; as well as enhancing their offer by funding additional support like training, wage subsidies or employment costs (e.g. travel, clothing).

The team is supported through rental income as Stockport Homes sees the work of the team as playing a key part in supporting prosperous communities. In addition, they also see benefits for them as a landlord through improved income stability, improved wellbeing of tenants and decreased anti-social behaviour.

1.2 Impact

In 2021/22 SH employment and training team received 867 referrals overall, the highest number since the team was created as a standalone service. As at April 2021, the team had supported 369 people into employment and had 958 attendances on courses, with 3,110 people views on their training videos which were introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic. Their support has also had wider impact on participants confidence and wellbeing, with box 1.2 setting out a case study example.

Box 1.2: David's journey to work

David* had not worked for nearly two years due to anxiety and depression. He had led an active life previously, but his anxiety had become so overwhelming it made leaving the house very challenging. SH invited him onto a walking group as a good first step. These are usually a small group where participants are invited to learn new skills around navigation and safety, but most of all to build relationships and connecting to nature. After much encouragement David agreed to take part. David loved the walking group, being with others, learning as part of a group, challenging himself and connecting to nature. He started to address some of his anxiety and depression and was eager to take part in more training. Their training lead suggested mindfulness sessions which he attended, followed by a 10-session programme that looked in depth at building personal skills, working with others, time management and critical thinking. The report he received

"Changed his life, he became more confident to mix with groups, he felt like he had a reason to leave the house, he made new friends and finally after a long time he wanted to get a full-time job."

Stockport Homes staff member

After expressing this wish David was linked in with the Employment Officer and invited to start volunteering. He did this while continuing to attend training and build his confidence. To further enhance his CV David completed the Introduction to Housing course and a safeguarding session. David then started to apply for roles at Stockport Homes, where he was successful in securing employment as a caretaker.

*Pseudonym

On wider funded provision, as noted SH have in the last year delivered 16 Kickstart placements, 17 apprenticeships and three T-levels industry placements. Since April 2021 they have also provided five internal work placements. These developed individual's skills, confidence and work experience, with one individual with a long-term health condition who took part in a work placement reporting that

“being a part of the service on placements and attending various training days has made a positive difference by enhancing my previous experience, this maximises my current job searching and will eventually lead to employment. I feel it has opened my eyes to what is available and being thoroughly prepared for applying for employment”

Stockport Homes work placement participant

In 2021/22 **Motiv8** received 269 referrals and 26 participants were supported into employment. Since the programme launched in 2016 SH have supported over 835 participants, with at least 53 moving into employment, 210 entering training and 97 moving from being economically inactive to looking for work.

“The beauty of [Motiv8] was that we...really worked out that we're based in our communities, we can deliver to our communities, we can identify those people who are in need and we actually engage them really well. One of the things that Motiv8 showed us is that we have an amazing ability deliver a phenomenal programme to those that are very far from the employment market and move them into education, training and employment”

Stockport Homes staff member

Since January 2022 16 young people who were not in employment, education or training and who weren't receiving support have signed up to **Hidden Talent**. Of these three have secured employment, 2 were supported into education and 12 have received support to develop their job searching skills and all have developed life skills.

Since **Steps to Work** launched in April 2022, SH have engaged 21 young people from target groups, identified five organisations with opportunities to receive wage subsidies and moved five young people into employment.

1.3 Lessons learned

1.3.1 What works well?

Having **strong links to residents** allows SH to engage people with their employment and training programmes, including groups that are most in need of this support. This a key theme which emerged from the research and was echoed by all case study social housing providers.

A more unique finding in relation to SH is that **funding their employment and training offer primarily through rents** allows SH to be independent and tailor the support to the needs of residents. A major benefit of this is that there is less obligation for their

customers to engage than with other forms of employment and skills support which may be mandated or require a certain level of attendance, which in turn can make it harder to engage those who are further from work.

“Customers engage with us because there is no obligation to continue...there is no sanction if they can’t continue with the intervention...the thing that makes us successful is that they can dip in and dip out”

Stockport Homes staff member

Internal funding also gives SH more flexibility to **recognise positive outcomes beyond employment and training**, reflecting an understanding that overcoming a barrier to work or improving confidence is an important outcome for some people.

In addition, bringing together **training and employment in a single team** has been effective in achieving positive outcomes as it makes it easier to join up support, refer between provision and to tailor support to individuals’ needs.

“Our ethos is that training is always more than just attending the session, it is clear in many cases to map the unmistakeable difference that occurs in customers when they learn something new, meet new people and challenging themselves.”

Stockport Homes staff member

In terms of training, they have found that **training works best in a face-to-face setting** that allows for interaction and the development of practical skills.

“Face to face training is however the gold standard and we know this is where the best interactions and learning takes place.”

Stockport Homes staff member

This approach also enabled them to deliver well joined-up support to kickstart participants, aligning job placement with training and wider support. This led to their employment team being contracted by other local organisations to deliver wraparound support, and improved Stockport Home Group’s ability to recruit young people.

“The carefully crafted employment support package was essential to tangible progression after Kickstart and ensured that the Kickstarters felt confident when re-entering the job market.”

Stockport Homes staff member

Finally, SH have also had some success in supporting employers with **recruitment and job brokerage**, focused on recruiting underrepresented groups and those facing barriers to work. This was intended to address barriers around skills- and experience-based job descriptions, which they replaced with infographic role profiles based on desirable behaviours and qualities – helping employers to improve their recruitment practices and to recruit from a wider range of residents.

1.3.2 Key challenges

The biggest barrier reported by SH staff was the **constraints around what support can be delivered in externally funded provision**. This could sometimes lead to impersonal services, prescriptive content and inflexibility, making it harder to gain or maintain buy-in from participants and to personalise support. This was also an issue in the early implementation of Kickstart, but in this case their partnership with DWP – and later flexibility in its implementation – was able to overcome these.

Another challenge faced has been around **duplication of support** which can negatively impact referrals. This was particularly the case with some pandemic-related provision, most notably with SH having to pause implementation of its planned Steps to Work programme due to overlaps with the Kickstart scheme.

2 Optivo

This case study is based on interviews with a member of Optivo's management team and two Optivo staff who deliver employment programmes, as well as their 2020/21 annual report and social impact statement.

2.1 The organisation

Optivo is a large housing association providing 46,000 homes in London, the Southeast and the Midlands. They see the achievement of Social Impact as a key part of their purpose, and this includes focus on supporting residents into work and training and on creating jobs in the areas they operate in. This also reflects feedback from residents and service users. Many of Optivo's residents are disadvantaged in accessing work. Between 42% and 48% are not in work, with 24% of out of work residents highlighting confidence and health barriers to employment.

2.1.1 What support do they provide?

Optivo's employment offer consists of a core service providing one to one employment support and additional co-investment grant funded programmes. The programmes are accessible to residents and non-residents in Optivo localities. Optivo's employment support aims to help people to enter and progress in work, so it includes both support for unemployed people to enter work and support for those already in employment.

"We're here to create opportunities and raise ambition"

Optivo staff member

Optivo's core employment offer is delivered through **one-to-one, person-centred employment support**. Individuals are supported by a dedicated case officer who provides individual support including developing a work plan, traditional CV/employability support, delivering workshops and supporting customers into sector specific training. Coaches also work with customers to identify key skills, barriers, and needs, and help people to address specific barriers by referring them to internal support including Optivo's residents' Wellbeing Team and Financial Inclusion money guidance support. Skills and training support is informed by local labour market needs. The team use local data to identify key sectors and employers with vacancies; and then look to tailor training to skills gaps in those industries.

Support is currently delivered using a hybrid model, with about half delivered online and half in person. The association's Covid urgency support services ran through pandemic lockdown providing residents' resilience support. The employment team returned swiftly to

face-to-face working following the pandemic, reflecting the importance of personal local contact to their employment support offer.

Their core employment offer also includes **in-work support** to help people sustain work and progress their career. This offer is relatively small as it's delivered outside of working hours and is tailored to individual needs. During the pandemic, the team saw particularly high demand for retraining and support for changing sectors.

Optivo use their household profile data to target support to household groups likely most at risk of financial challenges or job loss. Proactive support campaigns are currently running for residents' Cost of Living support. This helps residents struggling with the cost of living and those who are likely to be in poverty and in work, to target retraining and job switching support. They have found that helping people to move into a better paid job is frequently about giving people the confidence to do so, especially for those who have been in a job for a long time and are not up to date with current recruitment practices.

Optivo are also currently delivering three projects with partnership co-investment from external grant funders matched with funding from Optivo:

- **Love London Working** is Optivo's longest standing externally funded project, running from 2016-2023 and match funded through ESF. The programme is run by a pan-London social housing consortium made up of 9 social housing providers. It delivers targeted support to people from ethnic minority backgrounds and was described as "*a really good example of the housing sector coming together, getting into communities and delivering excellent results*"
- **Work Smart** is another ESF-funded project delivered in Sussex with funding received through Hastings Borough Council. It provides employment support for over 55s and seeks to address local employment issues, such as seasonal working.
- **Ways to Work** is an employment programme based in Kent. Optivo work directly with DWP to deliver this in partnership with Kent County Council. Ways to Work supports people to overcome travel as a barrier to accessing employment or employment support.

In addition to these, Optivo delivered **Kickstart placements** as part of a consortium of over 80 social housing providers, creating 67 jobs in their organisation. They found the model to be successful both in helping to meet labour needs and in supporting young people, and so are now looking at developing a similar traineeship scheme.

A further key focus for Optivo has been in **direct recruitment (and job creation)** within the organisation. This also includes using **Social Value clauses** in their procurement to create jobs and apprenticeships in their supply chain, which the employment team then matches individuals to.

Finally, a key focus in recent years has been **support for self-employment**, through the Increase VS programme – set out in more detail in box 2.1 below.

Box 2.1: In Focus: Increase VS

Increase VS is a self-employment support programme led by Optivo and running in England and France, co-funded by Interreg FCE and ERDF. The programme focuses on raising ambitions, micro start-up business training and peer support. It is a five-year project running from 2018 until March 2023 when EU funding completes. Increase VS support encompasses:

- Engagement and assessing needs – Early engagement with participants to gauge support needs and create an individual pathway.
- Preparation – Helping people to come up with ideas and improve their confidence.
- Training modules – Covering developing ideas, how to sell, social media and websites, and tax and finances.
- Ongoing one-to-one support – Including referrals to the employment support team for training and to access volunteer placements when needed. This support is action driven, focusing on action plans and with specific activities to focus on after each session.
- Ambassador training – Participants who successfully start a business or enter employment can become trained ambassadors, to support future participants and host sessions.

Optivo also help participants to find market opportunities for their business, including through their supply chains. They involve local businesses who are invited to networking events with participants; as well as communities for peer support (e.g. WhatsApp groups) to keep people engaged.

A key aim of the programme is to engage participants who are significantly disadvantaged, with self-employment being used as the means to do that as many of those individuals have struggled to benefit from mainstream employment services and/ or to access employee jobs (for example because of fluctuating conditions or needs for flexible working). Two thirds have qualifications below Level 2 (five good GCSEs). It also aims to improve wellbeing, with again self-employment being used to develop participants' self-confidence.

Delivery

Increase VS is delivered by 9 partners across England and France, with Optivo leading the programme in the Southeast of England. It was initially run as a pilot in London and then extended to six areas. The programme is open to residents in social housing neighbourhoods (not just residents). Optivo work in partnership with other housing associations and with Optivo's employment team to generate referrals, as well as with Jobcentre Plus.

Increase VS was initially staffed by 10 people (five managing the programme and 5 delivering services) but is currently run by a smaller team of self-employed project co-ordinators who run the programme independently.

Outcomes

Across the UK and France 7,800 people have engaged with Increase VS; 4,060 have received 12 or more hours of support and 2,300 people have set up a business or gone into employment or education. Participants have entered self-employment in a variety of sectors including online commerce, digital PA and consultancy, and local businesses including health and beauty, dog-walking, and cleaning. Other participants have entered employment or engaged in wider support, including Optivo's core services. Even for those who do not secure a job,

"People come out the other side with more of a sense of self-worth and purpose"

Optivo staff member

What works well

The two key, linked benefits of Increase VS are that it **reaches people who are significantly disadvantaged** in the labour market; and it **fills a gap in support for self-employment**.

“We identified that we’ve got this direct line to the people that would benefit most from support”

Optivo staff member

The focus on **one-to-one support** is also seen as effective, particularly the focus on actions and on regular meetings (not just text or email contact). This is seen as particularly important for people setting up in self-employment and so often working alone.

“The support is as important if not more so than the training...that’s what gets people active”

Strong **partnership working** with referral and delivery partners was identified as key to the success of the programme. Optivo have a close and open relationship with Jobcentre Plus (JCP), and in turn Increase VS is counted as activity towards individuals’ Claimant Commitments.

Staffing is also important, as *“hiring the right people with the right experience”* has contributed to the success of the programme.

Key challenges

Continuity of funding is seen as the biggest challenge for the programme. ERDF funding will end in 2023, so Optivo are exploring how they can continue to deliver self-employment support when this ends, and to build on the team, training and partnerships that are in place.

“We’ve got all of this [in place] so I think we’ll continue to use it”

Optivo staff member

Maintaining engagement with participants has also proved challenging - as self-employment can have peaks and troughs, particularly relating to health and well-being. Participants are able to engage or withdraw when they want, which can make it hard to identify when people who are withdrawn may need more support (and to then bring them back in).

2.1.2 Partnership working

Optivo work with a number of partners to deliver their employment support. Within London and the Southeast, they are part of housing sector partnerships that work together to deliver support to meet specific needs, notably through the G15 group of social landlords. They work closely with Jobcentre Plus and DWP (as noted in the Increase VS programme) and work with contractors and suppliers to leverage social value, source vacancies and deliver training. Optivo also work with external training providers to deliver accredited sector specific training based on local labour market need – for example recently running hospitality courses to meet high demand in this industry.

2.1.3 Funding

Optivo fund the core employability support offer and additional grant funded programmes through ESF, DWP and local authorities. As noted, employment is seen as a key element of Optivo's social purpose; but they also see a business rationale too, as tenants in stable employment will be better able to manage their finances and pay rents.

2.2 Impacts

Optivo have an objective of supporting a thousand people into jobs and training each year. They include training as an outcome because residents may be far from the labour market and if a customer gains an accredited qualification, they are more likely to move into employment in future. If Optivo meet this target, then they receive a preferential bank rate and a contribution from their bank to the employment service.

Optivo have consistently exceeded this target over the four years their employment service has been running. In 2020/21 they supported over 1,300 residents into jobs and accredited training with overall 8,500 people taking part in Social Impact activities (employability, health support or training to move people towards work).

Optivo see particularly strong demand for services from people from ethnic minority backgrounds, especially in London, with up to 79% on their support programmes being from ethnic minority backgrounds.

2.1 Lessons learned

2.1.1 What works well?

As a social landlord, Optivo are well placed to provide employment support as they are embedded in their communities. This provides access to people who are furthest from the labour market and means Optivo are still present in the communities they support once funding for specific programmes has ended.

"We have direct access to a percentage of people who are furthest from the jobs market"

Optivo Staff member

Optivo have found that taking a **person-centred approach** to employment support has been most effective. It allows them to help customers to overcome complex barriers and move into or towards employment. Poor health is a particularly significant barrier, but residents can also face significant issues around poor skills, low confidence, and low self-esteem. Optivo has a dedicated health and wellbeing team, as well as a financial inclusion team that provides advice on money and benefits, and so employment services also cross-refer into and from these teams.

Having a core internally funded offer is also seen as important, as it means that they can **continue to fill gaps when specific programmes come to an end.**

2.1.2 Key challenges

As noted in the Increase VS case study, **continuity of funding** is a critical issue, particularly with the end of EU funding. Optivo's external programmes are primarily funded through ESF, and the gap between the end of this and the start of the UKSPF is a significant risk. If funding gaps cannot be bridged, then it is likely that experienced staff could leave. Optivo have however been able to extend many of their ESF projects into 2023, which will narrow the gap to the start of UKSPF.

A further issue with UKSPF will be around **building the right partnerships** to access the funding – with a stronger role expected for local councils and likely a greater focus on local authority-level (rather than for example pan London) provision. It is also likely that specific policy or impact priorities will change.

Post-pandemic working has also created challenges for Optivo, in getting the balance right between face-to-face and online support. Online delivery appears to work well for people who are digitally enabled and has the benefit of allowing residents to access support across the regions Optivo works in; however, for many residents there is a preference and need for face-to-face support. The pandemic also disrupted partnership working with JCP, with less co-location and face to face contact with staff there.

The focus on **in-work support also brings challenges** but is growing in importance. Staff have found that it can take longer to support people who are in work to change sectors than to support unemployed people into work, as in-work support must fit around the individual's working hours. This in turn also means that the support can be harder to organise and manage.

3 whg

This case study is based on three in-depth interviews with whg staff and whg's 2020 Corporate Plan and Social Impact Report.

3.1 The organisation

whg is a housing Association based in the West Midlands, providing over 21,000 homes of various tenures. Previously known as Walsall Housing Group, the organisation was formed in 2003 as a stock transfer organisation from Walsall Local Authority. Today whg operates across the West Midlands in local authority areas such as Wolverhampton, Shropshire, Worcestershire and Staffordshire amongst several others.

As whg started life in Walsall, it is the place that still anchors the organisation and sees whg providing homes for one fifth of the Walsall population. The 2019 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks Walsall as the 25th most deprived English local authority (out of 317), placing Walsall within the most deprived 10% of districts in the country. whg has a strong focus on social value and purpose, reflected in its corporate plan which includes targets around skills, employment, and wellbeing. They have a particular focus on improving the health and wellbeing of its customers and communities, *“based on the premise that if people are well, then they’re more likely to stay in their tenancy and be in work”* (whg staff member). As one staff member put it:

“Where our homes are is where health inequalities are worst and people are dying on average 10 years earlier and healthy life expectancy is just 56.8 years, for women. Which means people are going to be economically inactive at a much younger age, far more dependent on services and so on”

whg staff member

3.2 Employment support

3.2.1 What support do they provide?

whg *“have a thorough and broad employment & skills offer for customers...[which] dovetails with the overall business strategy”* of tenancy sustainment, providing social value and being more than just a landlord (whg staff member). The offer focuses on supporting and coaching customers to move towards employment, address and overcome barriers to work, building their capacity to improve core skills and confidence, and then move into work and closer to the labour market.

whg funds a **core employment and skills service** which provides one-to-one coaching and case loading support for CV writing, interview preparation, tailored job search support

and job matching as well as referring customers to sector skills training at local Training Providers. Customers are provided with expert information, advice and guidance in order to develop an agreed action plan of activities to support customers on their journey to improve their employment prospects. The service delivers a People's Fund grant of up to £300 to help customers overcome financial barriers to improving their employment prospects such as purchasing clothes and equipment, assisting with travel costs for work and to complete training programmes, and providing documentation such as passports and birth certificates or DBS certificates. Wider, wraparound support includes financial advice to manage the transition from benefits to work, and a digital offer to facilitate engagement in skills learning & job seeking – including the loan of a digital device to customers to support their work focused activities whether that be job seeking and/or completion of training programmes. whg are also working with an independent service provider to develop and deliver a social broadband tariff to support digital inclusion for residents.

To maximise job outcomes for customers whg also actively uses **social value policies** to build job creation programmes into whg's own recruitment practices and also into the procurement of goods and services with supply chain contractors. whg's Employment and Skills team then lead on the implementation of these job creation programmes to ensure a targeted approach in our communities to maximise job and skills outcomes for whg customers.

Alongside this core employment and skills offer, whg deliver a number of externally- or co-funded work focused programmes. Many of these embed DWP's Sector Work Academy Programme (SWAP) model, providing bespoke & customised accredited skills training and employability support for specific job vacancies or work placements (including for posts within whg and its supply chain partners).

- **Integrated Care Partnership programmes** – whg stands out among the case studies for this project as having strong links with their NHS Integrated Care Partnership (ICP). whg are a board member of the ICP called locally Walsall Together in recognition of the role housing plays on promoting equality and reducing health inequalities focusing upon the wider/social determinants of health.
- whg work with the ICP to deliver the **Work4Health** programme (see box 3.1) and together they collaborate to recruit local jobseekers into a range of NHS job roles at Walsall NHS Healthcare Trust. To further support whg's work as an anchor organisation in communities, whg have also recently secured NHS funding to create a number of Community Health Champions within whg, who are responsible for delivering a diabetes focused community programme to whg customers living in geographical areas of the borough where take up of diabetes support from within the NHS is really low. This programme will encourage and support whg customers at risk from or impacted by diabetes to take up the support to help them manage their health as well as connect them to a range of wrap around services to allow them to thrive. whg's Employment and Skills team led the recruitment campaign to fill these Community Health Champions job roles undertaking a targeted approach in whg communities rather than advertising these job roles on their website. Champions were

all recruited from the local area as whg customers who have diabetes or have an awareness of living with diabetes and can draw on lived experience to engage the community. The recruitment of the champions was supported by a 13-day SWAP programme run by Walsall College covering accredited training in customer service, health and safety, safeguarding, data protection, digital skills plus employability support including mock interview preparation; followed by support from the employment and skills team to apply for the roles with every participant offered a guaranteed interview. All of the Community Health Champions recruited were disadvantaged in the labour market and lacked the skills, confidence and work experience that normal recruitment practices focus on.

“They were completely supported to make a really high quality application form, plus mock interview support to allow them to present as high calibre candidates. We then guaranteed them an interview for these roles with a total of 4 securing job roles”

whg staff member

- **whg Works + Programme** – whg is working in partnership with Walsall Council to deliver the Works+ project in Walsall, funded by the UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF). This assists local people into work by offering employability skills training (such as CV writing, interview skills and confidence building) alongside funded job placements for customers not eligible for the governments Kickstart scheme due to the age limit. whg have so far created 16 four-month fully funded work placements as part of this project in a range of roles across the business and within their supply chains in order to boost the confidence and work experience of its customers.

“The project has allowed whg and the council to pilot new collaborative working partnerships ahead of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund being launched for external bids during 2022, which will further strengthen joint working opportunities to benefit customers.”

whg staff member

- **Project Uplift** – this SWAP is run at Walsall College to support underrepresented groups including women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds into the construction industry. The programme provides construction skills training and a six-week work placement created by whg, followed by support to move into sustained employment.
- **Clickstart** – whg leads on a Black Country wide housing led Building Better Opportunities IT and Financial Literacy Project using ESF and Big Lottery funding. This project commenced over 6 years ago and delivers a digital and financial capacity building programme to customers.

As with other case studies, whg also support employment through **internal employment, apprenticeships, and training opportunities to maximise outcomes for customers.** This included creating 18 new job roles that were fully funded by the governments Kickstart programme aimed at jobseekers aged 18-24 who are at long term risk of unemployment. Placements were created across whg and within our supply chain with recruitment targeted at their customers through community engagement events.

Finally, whg work to support **wider community development and investment activities**. They work closely with Walsall local authority, using their data on rent arrears and changes in residents' employment status to influence and support the distribution of local hardship funding. whg also deliver a social prescribing programme in partnership with local health services, and chair the Walsall 'Resilient Communities' group, which aims to prevent health and other inequalities *"in recognition that the wider determinants impact on people's health and wellbeing"* (whg staff member).

Box 3.1: In focus: Work4Health programme

About the programme

Work4Health is a housing led Walsall skills-based employment programme used to fill entry level roles in the NHS such as clinical support workers and support service assistants. It was set up to widen the NHS talent pipeline and improve workforce retention and well as to help the NHS to meet quality and diversity targets.

As a housing provider, whg knew that some of their communities already had poorer health outcomes before the pandemic and this has been exacerbated by Covid. Inequality has widened and not just in terms of health, they have been hardest hit by job losses and furloughing as well, bringing further economic hardship to communities who can least withstand it.

To address this, whg introduced and led a bespoke programme called Work4Health designed in partnership with Walsall NHS Healthcare Trust and DWP and delivered through Walsall College using Adult Education Budget funding. The programme provides accredited skills training in health and safety, food handling, customer service and NHS core values plus employability skills including mock interview support; a work experience placement; and then a guaranteed interview at Walsall Manor Hospital For those that successfully move into work, 12 weeks of follow-up support is provided and can include financial support, assistance with travel and help with any issues that arise at work. The Work4Health programme was described as:

"giving customers all the tools, the knowledge and skills... the course upskills them and helps them to make a good application"

whg staff member

Outcomes

The whg led Work4Health programme has supported 114 people locally into work over 2½ years. 82% of these had been unemployed previously and 48% were from ethnic minority backgrounds. A customer testimonial described the positive impact the programme and on finding work has had on them:

"The course was brilliant; I gained so much knowledge from it, everything was explained in the best detail possible and everyone on the course was treated the same. No one was treated differently based on circumstances...I jumped at the opportunity as I was determined to follow my dreams and focus on my career before I hit 30 years of age. I'm so glad I built the courage up to participate and achieve what I have today. My confidence has grown so much since starting the course. Thank you so, so much."

The programme has also had a positive impact on the NHS, allowing them to fill vacancies and improve workforce diversity. They reported that the people recruited through the scheme have been of a high calibre and that the programme has better retention rates than other forms of

recruitment programmes. The NHS has now funded a full-time role in whg's Employment and Training team to support and lead the Work4Health programme as well as another full time post on secondment from Walsall NHS Health care Trusts HR Resourcing team to whg to support the recruitment and onboarding process for this programme. A member of staff at whg described the impact of the programme on individual, the NHS and the local community:

"we're meeting the needs of the health workforce because we're giving them more access to a more diverse group of people that represent the communities we serve. We're getting long-term unemployed or low skilled people into a career pathway rather than just a job"

whg staff member

What works well

whg staff felt that having a **single organisation leading and delivering on the Work4Health programme** to focus on customer engagement, lead marketing activities, broker SWAP courses with Walsall College and being the main conduit between the employer and the customers going through the programme has helped make the programme a success. In addition, the focus on **in-work support** had helped to support more sustainable employment outcomes and greater retention rates.

Collaborative working has also supported **improved partnership working with the NHS**, and specifically has enabled whg to work with the Walsall NHS Healthcare Trust to make wider improvements to their recruitment processes – moving away from a skills-based application form that disadvantages jobseekers and those furthest from the labour market who normally struggle with online recruitment processes and portals. The partnership influenced the introduction of a more values- and behaviours-led application process which is embedded and completed as part of the Work4Health programme.

Challenges

The main challenge faced was dealing with delays created by **onboarding and pre-employment checks post recruitment**. This was initially creating long delays between the job offer stage and starting work within the NHS, but has been addressed through increased resourcing and process changes led by whg and the Resource Officer on secondment to whg.

3.2.2 Partnership working

whg work with a number of partners to collaborate and deliver their services. They have strong strategic partnerships with local councils and the DWP; and work closely with Walsall College as well as other Training providers locally to access adult education funding and design and influence the delivery of skills support locally.

"Strategically we knew we couldn't do it [meet targets for employment and skills] alone. We pride ourselves on our collaborative working approach and work closely with a number of key strategic partners to maximise outcomes for our customers".

whg staff member

Partnerships support the design, targeting and delivery of support, and also act as sources of referrals. Referrals are primarily generated internally, for example from core

housing teams, but support is open to the wider community too and so the employment and skills team undertakes outreach in local job centres to generate referrals and have worked to embed their offer with JCP work coaches and introduce robust referral pathways.

The key partnership explored in the case study was with the Integrated Care Partnership – Walsall Together. This reflects that social housing customers have a high degree of health inequality, and so working with whg enables the ICP to reach people effectively and to work collaboratively to address the wider determinants of health. During the Covid 19 pandemic the strength of the local health partnership helped whg deliver their ‘Stay in Stay Safe’ programme to support their isolated and vulnerable customers during lockdown (with the ‘Kindness Champions’ model forming the basis for the later Health Champions approach). As a member of whg staff explained:

“We influence the model of that alternative health workforce [e.g. Health Champions] as an anchor institute that are operating in areas where health inequalities are worst, which is where our homes are. So we’re sort of hitting [health inequalities] in a bit of a pincer movement [with the NHS]”.

whg staff member

3.2.3 Funding

whg provides core funding for the employment and skills service, supplemented through external funding secured for specific programmes and interventions – including Big Lottery funding, ESF, UKCRF and funding from the NHS, local authorities and AEB skills funding.

3.3 Impact

By 2024 whg aims as outlined in their corporate plan are to support 10,000 people to increase their confidence, skills, and health and wellbeing by moving them into new opportunities, including training, education, volunteering, and to support 1,500 people to improve their employment prospects with 20% of these securing employment. whg staff stated that they are targeting their support on *“really supporting those who are the most disadvantaged”*. In the last year:

- 1821 customers improved their employability skills
- 274 customers secured employment
- 2210 customers were supported with Money Advice and were supported to access £5.6 million in welfare benefits
- £24K in utility bills discounts achieved for customers
- 910 customers receiving digital support & training through our digital inclusion projects
- £1.7million of external funding secured to support a range of community investments projects.

- 1274 customers were supported through whg's Health & Wellbeing service.

Outcomes data for the Works + CRF programme re not yet available but was described during this research as achieving good outcomes.

3.4 Lessons learned

3.4.1 What works well?

whg identified that being **embedded in the local community as an anchor organisation and having a strong relationship with their tenants** was a key strength, allowing them to successfully support those from otherwise hard-to-reach groups and facing complex barriers to employment. whg's community housing officers and other internal teams such as Community Health Champions, Social Prescribing and Money Advise colleagues create a strong link between tenants and the housing association, with most referrals into the service coming through this route in addition to community engagement activities being undertaken by the team.

"That's our bread and butter...as housing associations we can get beyond the front door because they are our customers. So we've already got a relationship with them"

whg staff member

This approach has been effective as it based on trusted relationships and sustained contact. In addition, the use of **locally recruited Community Champions to engage in outreach** was seen as a key strength, as these champions had lived experience of the struggles people may face and can connect with residents more effectively than statutory services. As one staff member put it:

"They're not hard to reach, you've just got to think about it differently"

whg staff member

The other key strength identified was the strength of whg's partnerships with wider services and support. This was underpinned by the fact that whg could reach people who are significantly disadvantaged and could **use employment skills support to improve wider outcomes**, such as health and finances.

"Strategically what we want to embed is that the very people that live in social housing are the people with the worst health and the least accesses to services. And one of the interventions that will help them to improve their health is getting a job. But getting a good job, not any job, a job that will help them be lifted out of poverty"

whg staff member

These partnerships also enable whg to help **shape the design and delivery of services**, by sitting on local strategic boards, including for health, skills and economic as well as a range of steering group meetings. As a member of staff explained:

“because of that strategic work and where we sit on either the integrated care partnership or other...boards that whg sit on, particularly around employment and skills...we then collaborate to...allow a programme to be crafted...delivered and launched that maximises outputs”.

whg staff member

This has also enabled whg to **leverage its role as an ‘anchor institution’** that can then help wider services to meet their objectives and help employers to fill their jobs – with the Work4Health programme with the NHS helping to do both of these things.

As noted, **the skills-based SWAP model being used by whg was seen as particularly effective**, enabling the employment team both to build confidence, capacity and readiness for work for disadvantaged customers. The model also enabled them to work effectively with employers to improve recruitment practices and fill vacancies with high calibre applicants. This in turn was also improving workplace diversity and retention in work as well as lifting customers out of poverty.

Finally, having a **dedicated Social Value Co-ordinator** in post to manage relationships with supply-chain contractors is seen as a crucial role across the business to help record and monitor that contractors are fulfilling their social value commitments within their contracts to maximise employment and skills outcomes for customers.

3.4.2 Key challenges

whg highlighted that a major challenge is a **lack of awareness and understanding of the role that social landlords can play** in addressing worklessness. This has led them to focus on strategic partnerships and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders, but staff turnover within these organisations can make this challenging. More consistency across places, and a higher profile of the role social housing providers play nationally, would be beneficial.

A general **lack of grant funding for those furthest from work** was also raised as a key challenge. This can be exacerbated by externally funded provision often having a **narrow focus on specific groups**, with JCP provision in particular often having very specific eligibility criteria. hg staff felt that they would be able to achieve better outcomes if they could support a wider range of disadvantaged customers and be commissioned directly to deliver employment & skills programmes.

Finally, while partnership working and employer engagement were seen as key strengths, both also presented challenges – with challenges on the former, around **data sharing and data protection**; and on the latter on changing and influencing **recruitment practices to remove barriers for disadvantaged jobseekers**.

4 Barnet Homes

This case study is based on two interviews with staff members at Barnet Homes, including one who works exclusively on the BOOST employment support programme, and a member of staff from Barnet Council. It also drew on information included in Barnet Homes' annual report 2021/22 and from their website.

4.1 The organisation

Barnet Homes (BH) manages 14,500 homes owned by the London Borough of Barnet. They are part of the Barnet Group, which is a Local Authority Trading Company whose principal shareholder and lead is Barnet Council.

4.2 Employment support

4.2.1 What support do they provide?

Barnet Homes leads **BOOST Barnet**, Barnet Council's employment and skills service. BOOST is an employment, training advice and wellbeing service that has been operating for seven years and is based in community venues across the borough. The council aims to target key groups through BOOST, namely social housing tenants, those who are 'economically inactive' and groups that were particularly disadvantaged by Covid-19 such as women from ethnic minority backgrounds.

BOOST is a free service open to all residents in the borough and all BH tenants. It is an 'end-to-end service' that aims to help people with a range of different needs including addressing barriers to work, building skills and confidence, preparing for work and then finding/ entering employment. From January 2022, BOOST has delivered the West London Boroughs' Employment Support Service. This is a £2.7 million project funded by Barnet Council, West London Alliance and ESF, and provides specialist support for those furthest from work.

"BOOST supports not only job-ready Barnet residents but all those who are unemployed or want a change in career. This includes rough sleepers, graduates, people with disabilities, those furthest from the job market and those who lack confidence or motivation. Everyone we work with is different, so we use a tailored, person-centred approach that helps clients to overcome their own barriers and get ready for employment"

Barnet Homes website

Support is primarily delivered face to face, supplemented by an online offer with a wide variety of resources including self-referrals to wider support, webinars and free online

courses. BOOST also provides **wraparound support** for health and wellbeing, debt, finances, housing and benefits support (including distributing discretionary funding provided by government), IT access and legal advocacy. Some of this is delivered by teams within BH, with for example the incomes collection team identifying those struggling with rent payment and referring to BOOST for employment support; and an office for technology and innovation which helps people to gain access to IT skills and equipment (e.g. laptop and tablet loans). A dedicated **in-work support** offer includes access to upskilling support, help to change jobs, and advice and support to deal with issues in the workplace.

The BOOST programme is **outreach-based**, with six locations including housing estates and libraries, including locations in particularly deprived areas of the borough. BOOST is run by staff who are typically residents of the borough and share lived experience with residents, helping to engage and build trust with local residents. Over the seven years that BOOST have been running it has grown from 5 to 46 members of staff covering benefit advice, housing support, recruiting and youth focused support.

The **jobs brokerage element** of BOOST helps local employers to fill vacancies and deliver on social value and corporate responsibility (CSR) objectives. It offers a job advertising, screening and shortlisting service; events to promote vacancies and put residents in touch with employers; pre-employment training; recruitment sessions; reference checks; in-work support; and advice on reasonable adjustments to support inclusive hiring. They hosted twenty-one bespoke Social Care job fairs last year, and provided a weekly drop in space for social care employers to recruit staff. An employer service on their website also enables local employers to approach them directly with vacancies.

BOOST provides **specialist provision for young people**, including those not in education or employment, working with Barnet Education and Learning Services. This included providing support to people employed in Barnet through the Kickstart scheme (with eight Kickstarters directly employed by Barnet Homes). The BOOST team also offers an **apprenticeships service**, open to people of all ages, with a dedicated recruitment lead who sources apprenticeship opportunities and support residents into those jobs with training.

The BOOST service is also used as a means to deliver wider initiatives and programmes. In particular, BOOST works with the Shaw Trust to provide the **Job Entry Targeted Support scheme (JETS)**, which was funded by DWP to provide additional support for the newly unemployed during Covid-19.

Barnet Homes also makes effective use of the **apprenticeships system** to support residents into jobs with the landlord and its contractors. Their Team runs an apprenticeship programme which has supported 37 apprenticeships at BH over the last three years, with the BOOST service providing support and mentoring for apprentices. Apprentices can be at all ages, and the model aims to achieve sustained employment outcomes by focusing on securing transitions to permanent work before apprenticeships are completed – either in BH or a contractor.

4.2.2 Partnership working

BH is unique among the case studies for this research in that their employment and skills support is commissioned and funded by the local authority as its primary employment skills support service. It receives annual funding using 'section 106' contributions, which it supplements with additional funding sources (for example ESF) to deliver specific services.

Barnet Homes is separate from the council, however their status as an arms-length body wholly owned by the council means that they work very closely with them and are seen as being *“inside the tent”* – which means they are often members of key council groups and networks, and are involved in meetings and strategic planning. As a member of staff at Barnet Council described:

“[BH] is more than just a commission provider... it feels like they are in house really, it feels like they are part of the council”

Barnet Council staff member

They also work closely with Barnet Council's tax team to reduce risks of interventions from bailiffs, help deal with debt issues and help residents with managing their finances and incomes.

More broadly, BH works closely with a range of partners in the borough through the **Barnet Employability Group**, hosted by the local authority and bringing together an extensive network of employment skills providers and employers. Other key partners include:

- DWP – a strong relationship has meant that BOOST staff are able to co-locate weekly at DWP sites and job clubs, while DWP staff work at BOOST outreach spaces once a week to support people with benefits issues. This also improves footfall and referrals for BOOST. However, there was a higher degree of co-location prior to the introduction of Universal Credit (UC).
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) – in 2021 BOOST piloted a programme to fund a CAB adviser in their outreach spaces offering drop ins and appointments. This again improved footfall and also filled a gap for legal advice which was not previously available. The success of the pilot has now led to hiring a full time adviser, shared with one of their partners.

“Having citizens advice in the service is...a big draw for bringing clients in because of the service and access, they offer different types of things that we can't...it's always beneficial to look at what gaps are out there and bring those in as a service”

Barnet Homes staff member

- Libraries and children's centres – which act as key outreach organisations.
- Other employability support organisations – with BOOST working with providers of services including Restart and the Work and Health Programme, again with services often co-located in each others' spaces.

- Public health – finally, BOOST works with services including the local mental health support team, in order to try to realise the benefits of decent work on improving health.

Successful partnership working is now being supported by the Greater London Authority (GLA)-funded **‘no wrong doors’ initiative**, which is working to bring together services and address issues around data sharing and fragmentation of funding and support. Barnet Council have been involved in the initiative since it was launched, working closely with the West London Alliance.

“I’m optimistic that ‘no wrong doors’ will be a big step forward on how we connect the dots and actually help unemployed people...to navigate that landscape. It’s absolutely essential”.

Barnet Homes staff member

4.3 Impact

BOOST has successfully met its targets for signups, engagements, training and employment outcomes. Since its launch in 2015, BOOST has achieved 1,463 job outcomes. In 2021/22 BOOST received 663 new sign-ups, 137 of which were BH tenants; and delivered 16,300 interventions, including 13,000 employment interventions and 3,300 wellbeing and translation support interventions. 156 BH tenants attended training and workshops in 2021/22. This included 25 Make it Click webinars supporting digital improvements which a majority of attendees described as useful and as having improved their skills.

Overall, last year 58% (387) of new signs ups were supported into work (exceeding their target of 300), 28% (190) of which were BH residents. In addition they supported 471 people into employment through the JETS programme. BOOST worked with over a hundred individual employers to recruit staff, apprentices and volunteers with testimonials from employers speaking to the quality of BOOST’s job brokerage service:

“We have been working with Boost for about six months, in that time the staff have always gone above and beyond in their knowledge and assistance. It has been beneficial for our Social Value Commitment as we are reaching client areas to recruit”

Employer testimony from Barnet Homes’ 2021/22 annual report

BOOST worked with 29 rough sleepers in 2021/22, 10 of which were new sign ups. Five rough sleepers were supported into work. Feedback from the council suggested that BOOST was successfully engaging the councils’ key target groups of social housing tenants, the economically inactive and those disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic.

While broader social outcomes such as increased rent and council tax payment are not tracked, staff highlighted that BOOST has a broader positive impact on the local community by supporting people into work and improving incomes.

4.4 Lessons learned

4.4.1 What works well?

Close alignment with the council was identified as a key strength of BH's employment and skills offer. The partnership provides access to core annual funding, which gives stability and continuity of support not offered by fixed term funding streams. This helps BH to provide long term support to those furthest from the labour market. Being part of the council's employment and skills strategy was also highlighted as beneficial, with the Council using BOOST as their main employment and skills service and then commissioning other providers to fill gaps and meet additional needs.

Like other social housing providers, BH's **strong links with the local community** was highlighted as a major strength. Council staff raised BH's direct links with people in the borough most in need of support as a major benefit of commissioning them. A member of staff at Barnet Council told us that:

"they know where these people [that they want to target] live...they've actually got there addresses...they can knock on the doors...and that access is golden"

Barnet Council staff member

This direct contact also enables Barnet Homes and BOOST to **help the council to understand local needs**. For example BOOST have run focus groups with young people to help understand why they are out of work and how vacancies and apprenticeships could be better targeted, and are looking now to do the same with women from ethnic minority backgrounds. Again a member of the council raised this as a major benefit:

"Nothing beats getting face to face feedback from the actual people who are affected by the situations we're trying to resolve. So BOOST are our natural partner"

Barnet Council staff member

Similarly, BOOST can also help the council to understand which tenants are struggling financially, as they have data on debt and rent arrears. The council meets regularly with Barnet Homes and their Revenues and Benefits teams to understand how to support people who need direct housing payment or who are falling behind on council tax, and so help people to clear their debt, avoid prosecution and keep on top of their bills in future. Many of these people are out of work, so BOOST can then also provide employment support.

The **flexible, one-to-one support model** was also seen as a key strength. BOOST are able to work with those who are further from work and to provide tailored support as they don't have the time, funding and target limitations that some other services have. They also keep in touch with people to offer the opportunity to come back for further support.

"it's about going above and beyond for these people and trying to find solutions"

Barnet Homes staff member

Finally, **effective and strong local partnerships** were identified as critical to the success of BOOST. This enables the service to provide a wider range of support and to reach more people.

“What works well is partnerships...it is fundamentally important. We can’t do the services that are needed on our own, we couldn’t afford it. And colocation...brings in footfall, which in turn brings us sign ups”

Barnet Homes staff member

Partnership working has also allowed Barnet Homes to respond to changing needs. For example during the pandemic they were able to move quickly to deliver DWP Plan for Jobs measures, and when they were asked by the council to expand into more parts of the borough that had been previously poorly served.

“One of their strengths...[is that] they are very good at being led by need and being able to respond to need and change and adapt”

Barnet Council staff member

4.4.2 Key challenges

As for other case studies, **fixed term funding** – and particularly the end of ESF – was raised as a key issue, with a member of staff at Barnet Council telling us that:

“at the moment there is a bit of a gap coming between the end of the ESF and the beginning of UKSPF because the employment skill strand doesn’t kick in until 2024/25”

Barnet Council staff member

This is exacerbated by Work and Health Programme winding down in the same period.

These peaks and troughs in funding mean that learning and expertise can be lost at the end of a programme, and **retention and recruitment** of skilled staff is made more challenging. While this issue is ameliorated by the core funding received from Barnet Council, this is also year-to-year funding which can make long-term planning harder.

Linked to this, **fragmentation of funding and provision** can make it difficult to keep up with the range of provision offered. When the council tried to create a map of provision in the borough it quickly became out of date due to funding ending and key contacts leaving organisations. This fragmentation also means that organisations may be competing for clients rather than working together to get the best outcomes, and can be an issue for participants too in identifying the right support for them. This was seen as an issue with Restart currently, as the provision was similar to the sort of help being delivered through BOOST. As one BH staff member put it,

“if [an organisation is providing employment support] why would you want someone else to do exactly the same as what you’re doing, and asking the same questions and doing the same stuff with participants? Because surely [participants] are going to get frustrated”.

Barnet Homes staff member

This fragmentation and competition between services was also contributing to **lower referrals**, especially where people are mandated to attend other services. The Covid-19 pandemic has also reduced footfall in their outreach venues, which fell by around two thirds during the pandemic and has not recovered to where it was. An increase in hybrid working has also made co-location of services more difficult.

5 South Yorkshire Housing Association

This case study is based on two in-depth interviews with management staff at South Yorkshire Housing association and one interview with a staff member from the NHS primary care network who are a key partner for the organisation.

5.1 The organisation

South Yorkshire Housing Association (SYHA) provides 6,500 homes across South Yorkshire and the surrounding areas, including North Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. They have a strong focus on wellbeing and are a significant provider of caring and support services, within which their employment service is located. Employment support is seen as central to their purpose, and a key means to support improvements in health and wellbeing, housing security and longer-term progression for residents. This is reflected in the fact that the health and wellbeing service employs over 100 members of staff, making up one fifth of SYHA employees.

5.2 Employment support

5.2.1 What support do they provide?

SYHA's employment offer reflects their strong focus on **health and wellbeing**, aiming primarily to support people with health conditions and disabilities to enter and sustain work. In particular, SYHA is a Centre of Excellence for the **Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model**.

Employment support is delivered by an **Employment and Wellbeing Team** which provides various interventions to support residents and non-residents with skills development, employment, and wellbeing. Their employment support offer is delivered through **one-to-one employment support** from a dedicated employment coach. They take a strength-based approach, with the support initially identifying skills and strengths which coaches then use to identify suitable employment and which of their support services can enable this. Coaches take an action orientated approach, so that every support session moves people closer to work.

The team also offers **in-work support** focused on job retention, including to support returns to work after sick leave. This includes coaches speaking to employers about individuals' health needs such as when someone is off sick (e.g. filling out health disclosure assessments, identifying reasonable adjustments), or supporting individuals to have these discussions themselves. The service also helps people to change jobs by offering help for CV development, interview skills and short skills courses.

The team recognise that apprenticeships can be an effective means to support job entry and career changes for those looking to work in new sectors, and so a particular focus is on matching and brokering people into apprenticeship opportunities and promoting these to their coaches and service users (including through publicising success stories).

Their largest employment support service is **Working Win**, which is a large-scale IPS project being delivered across South Yorkshire (see box 5.1). They also draw together other IPS-based services for residents and employers under a '**Good Work**' brand, which includes:

- Targeted support for people with severe mental health issues, delivered in partnership with the local NHS trust and with employment specialists from SYHA embedded in secondary mental health services across the area;
- IPS provision funded by European Social Fund and the National Lottery (Building Better Opportunities funding);
- A short IPS programme funded by the Community Renewal Fund, in Nottinghamshire; and
- A small skills training programme funded by the combined authority's Adult Education Budget.

Box 5.1: In focus: Working Win

Working Win is an IPS employment service with strong wraparound health and wellbeing support, aimed at people with a mild to moderate mental or physical health conditions. Its primary objective is to support people into employment of at least seven hours a week. The service provides support through bi-weekly face to face meetings focused on help to find a job (including CV writing, job applications, interview prep and health disclosure), followed by in-work support when a customer enters employment. This is integrated with wraparound health and wellbeing support. SYHA have internal health and wellbeing coaches who are allied health professionals (such as occupational therapists and counsellors) and are integrated with their employment team. Working Win also provides debt and benefit advice as a core part of their offer.

Delivery

Working Win started as a trial and has now been extended. It was funded by the government's joint Work and Health Unit (NHS England and DWP) with funding distributed by the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA). It is delivered in partnership with the SYMCA and local NHS partners. Working Win is integrated with the local health system and primary care, with employment specialists embedded in all 15 primary care networks (PCNs) in Sheffield. They also work with psychological therapy and with physiotherapy services and have recently started working with Long Covid hubs.

People are referred to the programme either by a health professional (such as GPs, physios and opticians) or through self-referral – with SYHA advertising on social media and through PCN partners. GP surgeries also promote to patients who are signed off sick, at risk of being signed off, or presenting with a mental health issue.

SYHA engages in close partnership working with Primary Care Sheffield (PCS) with their employment and wellbeing manager meeting regularly with PCS staff. PCS helped to design the

programme, make introductions between Working Win staff and GP practice managers, and support their induction to make sure they have good profile within primary care networks and that health professionals know about the support and who is eligible for referrals. PCS also promotes Working Win widely:

“Any projects we work on we make sure we’re including Working Win”

Member of staff at NHS partner

Outcomes

Over 6,000 people signed up to the trial. Referrals for the extension were open from 1st November 2020 until 31 January 2021 and over the course of the programme 511 people were supported to stay and thrive in employment. People entering work have also seen improvements in their wellbeing. The programme supported inclusion for people from under-represented groups, with 44% of participants from minority ethnic backgrounds (double the city average) and Working Win also successfully accessing people in hard-to-reach areas and demographics.

What works well

Strong health partnerships have been key to the service’s success. The partnership with PCS has enabled (and then been supported by) embedding of SYHA employment specialists within primary care settings. The NHS has also been an effective referrals partner – with extensive reach into the community through GP surgeries in particular, and access into communities and groups that are traditionally under-represented and have a high degree of health inequality.

This also works because **health services can see the benefits of partnership working** – with PCS and GPs seeing the alignment of health support with employment support leading to positive impacts on health and wellbeing and ultimately reducing demand on GPs from those who may otherwise have been out of work. PCS were also particularly positive about the whole-person support provided through the service, and the quality of staff at SYHA:

“The partnership is fantastic, the people at South Yorkshire Housing...are all amazing to work with”

Member of staff at NHS partner

The **simple referral model**, of sending texts to eligible patients from trusted sources (GPs), was also seen as a key strength. This also means that referrals take very little time and place few demands on GPs themselves.

“People feel encouraged to actually refer themselves just on the back of a text message from their GP”

Member of staff at NHS partner

Overall the programme demonstrates clear positive impacts from bringing together health and wider social and employment related support.

“The project that we’ve managed to roll out speaks volumes for how you can bring social and health together and how important they are to work alongside each other. Because ultimately people who are off work...is affecting the economy, [and] is affecting them individually. So it just shows that huge need to bring social and health determinants together and manage them better”

SYHA staff member

Key Challenges

As with other partnerships, **data sharing** has at times been challenging. Working Win participants' information is held in a number of places so health and programme data is separate and cannot be integrated. Other PCNs have started to find ways to deal with similar issues, and there was appetite to address this in Sheffield too.

“Shared care record is probably the biggest challenge we face”

Member of staff at NHS partner

A further challenge is in **promoting the service among all GPs**, which has been a key area of focus but has also been partially addressed by being able to share positive outcomes data and success stories.

The employment and wellbeing service is supported by other internal SYHA services offering housing support, and a debt and benefit support service run by CAB which customers can access to discuss how entering work will affect benefits and incomes. This service also explores social and health benefits to entering employment.

Allied health professionals employed directly by SYHA, including counsellors and muscular skeletal specialists, can also help individuals and employers to understand and manage health conditions. This often focuses on helping customers with a health condition to return to work and manage their health while working.

“[Allied health professionals employed by SYHA are] a fantastic resource...they can provide the knowledge tools and resources we need to get somebody back into work”

SYHA staff member

Finally, SYHA provides **additional financial support** to residents for costs such as bus passes, clothing for interviews, and fuel costs for the period between starting work and receiving pay cheque. People can also access wider assistance through Westfield Health including 24 hour phone counselling, legal advice and CBT sessions; with SYHA also providing subsidised gym memberships for those using their services.

5.2.2 Partnership working

Due to their focus on health and wellbeing, and as noted in box 5.1 above, SYHA works in close partnership with the NHS Primary Care Networks (PCNs) across Sheffield to reach residents and generate referrals, with employment specialists spending a day a week in GP surgeries to publicise SYHA's support offer to staff and patients.

SYHA has good links with Jobcentre Plus (JCP) and have regular meetings with the local management team. JCP work coaches have direct links with SYHA employment and wellbeing staff to support people, and DWP deliver training for SYHA's employment coaches to help SYHA staff navigate DWP systems. SYHA staff also co-locate in JCP, so that residents can have easier and more joined-up access to employment support.

Other partners include outreach venues such as local libraries and cafes; private health and wellbeing providers including Westfield Health and gyms; Shelter; CAB; the SYMCA and individual Local Authorities who SYHA work with to align support and reduce risks of duplication.

SYHA also engage employers, acting as a job's brokerage service and providing help with recruitment campaigns, sifting and providing interview space. They also work with employers to keep people in work, such as by delivering mental health awareness training for line managers. SYHA see high demand for their employer services currently, due to the tight labour market. This has included working with the police force's positive action team to meet diversity targets. They also invite employers to attend their events and outreach sessions to sell their business and speak to people about their opportunities and the people that they are looking to employ.

5.2.3 Funding

SYHA employment programmes are generally externally funded through a number of different funding streams including government funding, ESF, Lottery funding, AEB, UKCRF, DWP and NHSE. This means that provision is open to residents across the area subject to meeting any eligibility criteria, not just to SYHA tenants. SYHA staff also engage in fundraising, with SYHA matching donations. Some of this money goes to the employment and wellbeing team and staff are able to decide how to spend it.

As noted, while funding is received from various sources, SYHA looks to 'hide the wiring' of this and promotes all of their main employment services under a single, 'Good Work' brand. This makes it easier to access services, simplifies referrals and marketing, and means that advisers can help people access the right provision (so reducing complexity or duplication).

5.3 Impact

SYHA support around 2,000 to 2,500 people a year across their programmes. In general, their employment support services achieve good employment outcomes, with 3,412 people having found or stayed in work since 2017 (out of around 6,600 service users). They aim to achieved sustained employment of at least 3-4 months for all, and since 2017 just over 2,000 people have so far sustained their employment for over 13 weeks.

As support focuses on health and wellbeing SYHA also collect wellbeing scores through the Short Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale, with customers showing a median increase of two points on the scale from baseline to exit (as well as improvements in scores on the Job Search Self Efficacy scale).

5.4 Lessons Learned

5.4.1 What works well?

As noted in box 5.1, SYHA's **strong local partnerships** – and in particular with health services – are seen as the key strength of its offer, enabling it to target provision effectively, increase referrals and join up support and services.

SYHA are well placed to support those further from the labour market as they are able to **build relationships with their tenants** and **deliver long-term support**. SYHA also builds trusting relationships with local people that they do not house by engaging in outreach in the community and employing staff from the communities they are working in.

They have also been effective in **using their own data** on residents to target provision, tailor support and cross-refer to other internal services such as housing support. As a member of staff said:

“it’s so much easier to transition [residents] from one service to another”.

SYHA staff member

Having a **large team** providing employment and wellbeing support also makes it easier to create links between customers and other services offered by SYHA, and helps the organisation to see the positive impacts that employment has, including on rent payments.

Finally, providing **long-term support** to those further from the labour market means that SYHA can focus on helping people make progress towards work and provide support for the whole person – which may include health and wellbeing support, skills, support on finances and budgeting and employment support. This also means that support can be tailored to specific, current needs, such as around rising costs of living.

5.4.2 Key challenges

Staff recruitment and retention was identified as a major current challenge. The employment and wellbeing team has recently expanded but also found it difficult to recruit in the current labour market, especially due to the rise in remote working which means that people based in the region can look for work across the country. Funding levels in projects make it hard to compete directly on wages with many of these jobs.

“the biggest challenge at the moment is recruiting...enough staff quickly”

SYHA staff member

As with other case studies for this research, the **end of ESF funding** was flagged as a significant risk from next year.

Finally, the **cost of living crisis** may be having an effect on the financial returns of employment for residents with some residents appearing to find that salaries are not keeping up with rising costs. However, data collected by SYHA does not show a reduction

in employment outcomes from their programmes, suggesting that cost of living is not disincentivising residents from entering employment at this point.

6 Tyne Housing

This case study is based on three interviews with members of staff at Tyne Housing, and supplementary information from their website.

6.1 The organisation

Tyne Housing (TH) provides supported accommodation in 14 areas across Tyneside. It is a specialist provider with around 400 homes. Their strategic plan focuses on housing, wellbeing, community and learning, and TH has a strong reputation for housing people who have been unable to access mainstream housing due to issues such as mental health, substance abuse or criminal records. The majority of their residents are men.

6.2 Employment support

6.2.1 What do they provide?

The TH model is based on aligning delivery by **support workers** – who provide tailored assistance for issues such as addiction and reoffending – with support from a **Progression Team** which then helps people progress towards work and out of supported accommodation. TH has also recently hired an **employability coach** who works alongside the support workers and progression team to provide dedicated support to access employment, training or voluntary work. Often, employment support focuses on addressing specific issues around low confidence, skills or experience, and on setting goals and putting in place a progression plan. As a staff member explained:

“It is a full blown employability service giving people the skills and competences and experience they need to become more active in what hitherto was a very challenging circumstance regarding finding employment...some of our people haven’t worked for decades, some people are in their forties and haven’t worked, have empty CVs and zero confidence. So that’s the kind of starting point”

Tyne Housing staff member

Employment services are delivered in the Progression Hub, which was recently set up and is located near emergency and supported accommodation. The Progressions Hub is also TH’s ‘Learning Zone’ where accredited training is delivered (for example literacy, numeracy, introduction to IT, employability and a course designed around homelessness). They have also delivered support directed at ex-offenders looking at how to overcome barriers such as being unable to work in roles requiring DBS checks.

TH also run The Studio, delivering person based creative skills including creative woodwork, writing and music production. A key element of this is their carpentry studio

which aims to build residents' confidence by taking them through the process of designing, managing and committing to a project which ends with a piece of work that they have created. Importantly, this helps to build teamwork, interpersonal skills and confidence and acts as a bridge towards work, training, volunteering. As a staff member described:

“everything we do is about giving people opportunities. We may not mention employability at the beginning, but they are starting what may potentially be their own employability journey”

Tyne Housing staff member

Similarly, TH also provides funding for a charitable subsidiary Ousburn Farm which is a city farm providing training for adults with learning difficulties and physical disabilities, with around 50 placements a year; and they provide free wi-fi to all residents, which also helps in improving digital skills and social inclusion.

TH delivers provision funded by a range of partners. One good recent example was the **Move On project**, delivered in the late 2010s. This was funded by Homes England to help those in supported accommodation to move into or towards employment and out of supported accommodation. Funding included both capital and revenue money, which allowed TH to build and buy one bedroom flats across the Tyneside area (co-funded by TH and Homes England) and also paid for an employment coach, support staff and security. Importantly, the funding also allowed TH to set rents at an affordable level, overcoming a key barrier to supported housing residents entering work. While the Move On programme and funding has ended, TH continue to rent out one bed flats at affordable rates, aligned with employment support.

As a small housing provider, Tyne has limited ability to broker job opportunities for residents with large employers. To overcome this and other issues they have led on creating the **Housing Employment Network North East (HENNE)**, working in partnership with 13 landlords of a range of sizes and strong links to local communities. The network aims to help share practice and celebrate success, enable landlords to work together on securing funding, and collaborate more effectively across places and with employers.

6.2.2 Delivery

Residents are referred to their employability coach through housing support officers who have regular contact with residents, with support also advertised through housing support networks. Residents can also be referred by other housing services. Participants fill out a basic referral form covering what they want (work, training or volunteering) and the coach then contacts residents and visits them in their home for an initial assessment. She then makes an employability support action plan outlining their goals and the steps they will take to achieve them, with monthly reviews to check in on actions taken. The coach has been in post for two months and has a caseload of ten residents, many of whom are significantly disadvantaged and taking preliminary steps towards work.

6.2.3 Partnership working

TH works with a number of training partners to provide a range of training and services to residents. These include the Northern Learning, Trust who deliver basic skills training and accredited qualifications, and external employment skills training providers. They also host other partners such as domestic violence services.

The Progression Hub is also based above a health and wellbeing centre and near a hostel, both of which are used by homeless people who they work with, which also helps with improving outreach, referrals and partnership working.

TH also consults with residents in an ongoing and structured way to inform their support offer. This includes involving residents in the recruitment and selection process of staff members, with residents part of the interview panel for every appointment (and residents receiving training on recruitment and selection, diversity and inclusion, and unconscious bias). Residents in consultation groups suggested schemes such as free wi-fi, and were involved in the design of the Move On scheme. Being involved in the group, and particularly recruitment, also has wider positive impacts on residents' employability and readiness for work.

6.2.4 Funding

Employment support is funded from a range of sources including rents, grants and other external funding streams. The progression hub is entirely funded by TH; while their employability coach is currently funded for two years by Nationwide Building Society. However this is a permanent position and TH will secure further funding in future. The studio receives staff funding from the Adult Social Care Commission, with tools and services are funded through rents, grant aid and commissions made from selling the products that residents make.

6.3 Impact

Tyne takes a more qualitative approach to measuring success than other case studies in this research, as success for supported accommodation residents is highly individual. TH's goal of moving people into a 'better place' is widely defined and encompasses things like improved social lives, basic life skills and improved wellbeing as well as entry to training and employment.

Nonetheless, data from the Move On scheme suggests that since it was launched in late 2019 around three fifths of residents have entered work since taking up residency, while a further fifth have had structured volunteering placements. A number have moved out of supported housing, including to home ownership and to local authority housing. Some residents facing major barriers to employment (including agoraphobia and hoarding) have moved closer to the labour market by engaging in training and support. A case study supplied by TH is set out below (see box 6.1).

Box 6.1: Case study: Move On

Dan was homeless and living on the streets in Newcastle before being housed by TH. Having stable and affordable housing with support from staff helped him to enter work, with Dan explaining:

“I’ve now lived with Tyne Housing for around two years and having someone there who I can trust and talk to has really helped. I’m dead happy I’ve been given a chance to move into this new place on my own and out of a shared house. In the first week I was in here I just knew I was ready to get out there and get a job and start moving on with my life. This place being actually affordable means I could do it and not be worried about losing my home or keeping up with costs if something went wrong. I woke up one morning and just started applying for loads of jobs online, I got three interviews and offered two jobs, but I took this one because I could start straight away and it’s been dead good so far. I’ve been taking on as much overtime as I can so I set myself up right, pay all my bills and start getting stuff sorted in the flat to make it more homely. Maybe in the future, I might look at going back to college or something, but I do just feel like there’s a real way forward now and I know I can see myself having a normal future”

6.4 Lessons Learned

6.4.1 What works well?

As a supported housing provider, TH are well placed to access people most in need of support, develop trusting relationships and offer a tailored and personalised support that can move residents towards and into employment. Importantly, this also means that they are reaching people who live in areas that are highly deprived and facing wider inequalities. One staff member described that:

“We are delivering programmes supporting individuals right in the heart of the communities where levelling up needs to happen. Right down to postcodes...We’re housing there, we’re in those communities, we’re dealing with those individuals day in day out. So we’re best placed to identify and deliver programmes of support”

Tyne Housing staff member

Their small size and focus on helping people move to a ‘better place’ means that they can **work flexibly, tailor support and align support across services**. This is particularly important in engaging people further from the labour market and living in the most disadvantaged communities. As one staff member put it:

“it’s all about progression and ultimately the notion of getting people into employment, structured volunteering or accredited training...We don’t have one door we have several doors...because hitherto [residents haven’t] managed to connect well with other services”

Tyne Housing staff member

Their **trusted relationships** with residents also mean that they are well placed to engage people in the support, while their long-term approach means that they can **maintain support over a number of years** and so address more complex barriers and continuing needs.

“What makes housing so unique is we that we have...sustained trusted relationships with our tenants...which places us directly...at their doorstep for support....these individuals [supported housing residents] the...only relationship they will have is their housing provider and there was a raft of different contact points we’ll have with them”

Tyne Housing staff member

Finally, the success of the Move On projects project has **challenged staff and residents’ perceptions** of people in supported housing and their goals – showing that residents both want to and can move on

“since we set up the Move On project we’ve challenged our own perceptions as a company as well as challenged residents’ perceptions about themselves, and challenged the wider world’s perceptions about people in supported housing...it enabled us to have different conversations with our residents about the future and about what their potential was”.

Tyne Housing staff member

6.4.2 Key challenges

External funding raises challenges for TH, and as a supported accommodation provider these issues are slightly different to those described in other case studies. In particular, the significant disadvantages faced by TH residents make it harder for TH to engage in outcome-based programmes that require (and often link funding to) the achievement of employment outcomes over short periods of time. The relatively short timescales and fragmentation across funding streams also presents challenges, given TH’s focus on providing long-term and stable support.

Linked to this, TH also struggle to engage in **supply chains for larger government programmes** where provision can often be **less flexible and less able to be tailored** to residents’ needs. Their long-term aim is to try to ‘cut out the middleman’ and provide government-funded schemes directly.

Also related, **measuring success** beyond employment and training outcomes can be a challenge, as they have a small customer base with complex needs who are often disengaged from other organisations and public services. TH do not expect or aim to support a large number of people into work, and see success as moving residents closer to employment in future.

As noted earlier, a specific issue that TH faces as a supported accommodation provider is that **rental costs can increase significantly** when residents enter work (as benefits are reduced) which can mean that residents can find themselves worse off for as long as they remain in supported accommodation. This is exacerbated by the fact that residents tend

to move into lower paid and less secure employment, which in turn can make it riskier to take up work. However, addressing this would require changes to the benefits system, for example by introducing an extended 'grace period' where people continue to receive full housing benefits after entering work.

Finally, as noted, **engaging large employers** can be a particular challenge for TH as a smaller organisation. This has been a key driver of their partnership work with other social landlords in the HENNE.