



Briefing:

Great Places - member workshop

Nottingham

5 February 2019

Representatives from nearly 30 housing associations from across the Midlands attended this workshop to discuss:

- the Great Places Commission's findings to date, as summarised in the [Great Places interim report](#)
- ideas for the Commission's final recommendations, due in spring 2019.

1. Introduction

The interim report of the Great Places Commission was published in November 2018. It captures the breadth of insight and evidence the Commission has gathered during 2018 and includes a number of discussion points for further exploration.

From January to March 2019, the Federation is engaging with members and stakeholders to seek feedback on the findings and understand should be included in the Commission's final recommendations, due in the spring. The three workshops, held in the Midlands and the North in February 2019, are a key part of this member engagement.

This briefing note summarises the discussions that took place during the Nottingham workshop.

2. Summary

The workshop consisted of facilitated table discussions on the four themes in the interim report: people, places, partners and housing associations. Members welcomed the report's focus on place and the wider role that housing associations play in communities. They recognised that some of the questions raised in the report are fundamental to organisational mission and values, and that many of these conversations are being had by housing association boards across the country.

The sections below summarise some of the key points discussed on each table and identify case studies which came to light.

3. People

Key discussion points:

- Asset-based community development – this starts before you even start to build in a neighbourhood; it is important to consider what already exists in a community that is important to people.
- 'Hard to reach' residents – often those described as 'hard to reach' by local services are not seen as 'hard to reach' to housing associations as 'through the front door' organisations.
- Adaptability – housing associations are able to flex around different people and customer bases, adapt to local needs and demographics, and collectively providing an offer for everyone. This is the major benefit of a mixed economy, as long as it is responsive and coordinated to some degree.
- Offer for communities – developing an offer and working with communities through genuine co-creation is essential. Doing this across varying geographies is a challenge, and one that will vary enormously, but these principles and understanding need to be built into the way an organisation works, e.g. into the design of new homes.
- Resources – working closely with communities requires resources, time and skills.
- Health – this needs to be considered as an important part of this work, but there are challenges around the evidence base, commissioning and relationships that have not been resolved.

Examples:

- Where residents have taken responsibility for a project/idea there is a much higher rate of success, e.g. Whg Woodend, Coventry, a community-run business.
- Whg has social enterprises managing its communal areas.
- Whg is working on social prescribing through its 'community champions' model.
- Housing Plus Group are strong on the prevention agenda.

4. Places

Key discussion points:

- Procurement – more thought is going into how procurement can be done effectively and how to increase the focus on local suppliers. However, there is a shortage of SME suppliers and a lack of skills in the industry more generally.
- Town centre regeneration – not necessarily housing associations' place to lead, but we can be partners; there are some good examples of turning existing town centre spaces into flexible community spaces that can adapt to changing local needs.
- Organisational culture – we need to recognise the importance of housing associations as employers, in terms of the way we support staff, provide opportunities for agile working; flex our approach to recognise community and resident priorities; and factors such as Living Wage accreditation and an organisational commitment to training and development.
- Diversity – communities are not only organised geographically, and this work should also look at examples of other types of communities, such as BME communities, people with disabilities, etc.
- Total Place Analysis – this shouldn't just focus on or start with budgets, but could start by taking a blank page approach to assets and challenges and build up from there with the community and partners.

Examples:

- Nottingham City Homes has carried out its own local economic impact calculation and has a big focus on using local or internal suppliers, in-house contracts and apprenticeships – 98% of staff have a Nottingham postcode.
- [Building Better Opportunities](#) (BBO) is a programme jointly funded by the European Social Fund and Big Lottery which aims to tackle the root causes of poverty by investing in local projects. Some housing associations have secured funding for their community development activities through this route.

5. Partners

Key discussion points:

- Local authorities – this relationship is crucial, and success is more likely where local authorities are more willing to proactively listen and share ideas, compared with those that are more insular and unwilling to collaborate. Conversations should happen at executive level to avoid red tape and bureaucracy.
- Devolution – there are issues with leaving local authorities to work up devolution deals in isolation, as vast groups of stakeholders and the community are then excluded from the process.

- Regulatory pressures – there is a challenge for housing associations to maintain their focus on the needs and opportunities within an existing place when Homes England is strongly focused on net additions and new supply.
- Health – there needs to be more of a focus on health in this work, including the challenges around brokering partnerships in this field. For many housing associations this is more of a priority than the Industrial Strategy.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) – these are often difficult to engage with and don't see housing as a priority; health and social care is often a more important partner for the sector. If LEPs are going to remain an important stakeholder, we need to consider strategic sector engagement, for example an offer on behalf of housing associations in a geographical area.
- Local politicians – we need to invest in our relationships with local politicians, who can act as champions for the sector's role in a place.
- Schools and education – links with schools, adult learning budgets and community learning should be a big focus of this work.
- Supply – a sustainable approach to our supply work needs to focus on issues beyond building more homes, to cover quality and placemaking too.
- Regeneration – successful approaches to regeneration should be asset-driven and community-driven, with a strong focus on legacy planning and sustainability. In the medium to long term, successful regeneration will be a key way of addressing some of the stigma challenges identified in the Social Housing Green Paper.

Examples:

- whg secured LEP funding for the physical and social regeneration of Goscote by tapping into the economic development priority and maintaining an excellent relationship with the local authority.

6. Housing associations

Key discussion points:

- Linking up of approaches – there was broad consensus in support of the LIFE (Lead, Influence, Follow, Exit) model, ethical disposals policy, and duty to collaborate, but agreement that these would work best if linked up.
- Pressures on the sector – some housing associations feel they are being pushed into a more commercial space and then face questions about their social purpose; and organisational size and geographical focus are often mentioned in this context. There is a need to focus less on numbers and figures and more on people, but external factors and regulatory pressures must allow this to happen. There is too much focus on financial metrics and a lot of scepticism around social purpose calculations, but housing associations need to be given the flexibility to focus on people as well as numbers and figures – we also need to get better at telling our sector's story in this area.
- Skilled boards – it is vitally important to have a broad range of skills on boards, including people with different lived experiences and backgrounds, and a range of technical and non-technical skills. This should not be solely driven by the regulator's focus on governance and viability.
- Organisational culture – addressing these challenges requires new ways of thinking at all levels, from board to staff level, and organisational culture change must be applied consistently throughout an organisation to be meaningful.

- Ethical disposals – most organisations are already looking at more than financial metrics when appraising assets, but there are issues in low demand areas and possibly in how decisions are communicated to stakeholders. Other organisations may be better placed to deliver; we need to balance competing priorities and scant resources; sensible decisions are being made about stock swaps and rationalisation.
- LIFE model – it could make sense to build on what's already out there, and look at ways to bring partners together in new ways, which could then expand into other areas once the relationships and mechanisms are in place.

7. Next steps

The Great Places Commission is meeting on 18 March to discuss feedback on the interim findings from housing associations, civil servants and other partners. The Commission will then get to work on its final recommendations, which are due to be published in spring 2019.

The final recommendations will be an integral part of the Federation's influencing work around the 2019 Comprehensive Spending Review and will contribute to the Federation's new three-year business strategy, due to take effect from April 2019. During 2019/20, the Federation will focus on implementing the Commission's final recommendations and applying the Commission's insights to other relevant topics.

8. Further information

Online: <https://greatplaces.housing.org.uk/>

[Great Places Interim Report, November 2018](#)

[Great Places Blog](#)

[Great Places Commission - visits and short films](#)

[Great Places Resource Library](#)

Twitter: #GreatPlacesCommission

Email: greatplaces@housing.org.uk