

# The contribution of housing organisations to good health and wellbeing during COVID-19

Key opportunities and themes interpreted from stakeholder interviews in Summer 2020 and the COVID-19 Health and Social Care Learning System

## Place, Home and Housing

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Creating opportunities for housing, health and social care to be better connected and drive improvements in health and wellbeing



Healthcare  
Improvement  
Scotland

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# In this report.

# Our Approach.

Executive Summary

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Section Two: The role of housing\_ organisations in the COVID-19 response

Section Three: Supporting individuals

Section Four: Supporting communities

Summary

The Place, Home and Housing Team carried out a series of structured discussions between May and July 2020 with a wide range of stakeholders in the housing sector in Scotland. These included a regional housing forum, housing associations, a national care and repair organisation, national charities and local community link workers. The team listened to experiences and examples of how stakeholders in the housing sector were adapting to the COVID-19 context to understand impacts on health and wellbeing.

With the support of the Evidence and Evaluation in Improvement Team, we interpreted key insights emerging from these discussions, alongside relevant material from the ihub COVID-19 health and social care learning system, and identified ways in which participants described contributions to supporting health and wellbeing.

In this report we outline opportunities for the health and social care system to collaborate with housing organisations in the current context and beyond.



# Executive Summary.

## How housing organisations responded to COVID-19

Responding quickly and effectively, anticipating peoples' needs	Supporting individuals in a person-centred and responsive way
Coordinating and providing community support through partnership working	Acting as community anchors to funnel funding at a hyper-local level

## Key features described as enabling a positive response to COVID-19

A deep understanding of their communities and the people they support	Experience of supporting people on a journey that is solutions and outcomes focussed
Relationships that put people at the centre of communities and community support	Being embedded within communities in a way that is valued and trusted

## Ways in which housing organisations may be assets to the health and social care system

Anticipating and understanding individual and collective needs	Helping people access health and social care support	Supporting preventative, upstream health and social care approaches	Developing new community responses through directing funding
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The Place, Home and Housing Team carried out a series of interviews in Summer 2020 with a wide range of stakeholders in the housing sector in Scotland. From these interviews we drew out key themes and insights and identified opportunities for the health and social care system to support people's health and wellbeing by engaging with housing organisations.

## Opportunities in engaging with housing organisations

### Supporting individuals

1. There is an opportunity for health and social care to collaborate with housing organisations to take a **more systematic approach to understanding tenants' and communities' circumstance** and need, in a way that can **facilitate strategic approaches** across health and social care.
2. Housing associations are a key asset in **responding to new challenges** that might emerge within a community. The close individual relationships could facilitate **rights based approaches** which enables people to have their health and wellbeing needs met.
3. The trusted position of housing associations and the **person-centred support** they deliver put them in a strong position to **deliver preventative interventions**. Further collaboration across housing, health and care has the potential to enhance this.
4. Close relationships can be **enhanced through the use of digital services** and through trusted relationships housing associations can be a key partner in **building digital literacy and promoting benefits** of digital connectivity with family and friends as well as with services.

### Supporting communities

1. The strong partnerships with communities and reach that housing associations described may provide an opportunity to **coordinate strategic engagement** when considering the design and delivery of health and care services.
2. Through **place making** and the development of community activities, housing organisations may be able to identify health and care needs in context and engage people in informal, community settings. This may **build connectivity** within the system that allows for a **greater knowledge of needs and a wider reach** and has the potential to address health and wellbeing issues such as social isolation and loneliness.
3. The role of housing associations as **community anchors** is one that could be explored and developed further as a way of supporting community, place based approaches. Using anchor organisations to distribute funding can result in **more effective use of funds** and ensure hyper-local community needs are met.

# Section I: Context of housing organisations in health and care.

The role of housing within the integrated environment of health and social care is formally set out in statutory guidance on the responsibility of Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs) to involve housing in integration. There is recognition that the housing sector can significantly contribute to national health and wellbeing outcomes through:

- provision of good quality housing that meets diverse needs of individuals,
- provision of technology and adaptations to support self management at home,
- supporting people to maintain tenancies, and
- supporting access to welfare services such as befriending, advocacy support and money advice.

## Housing organisations within the integration of health and social care

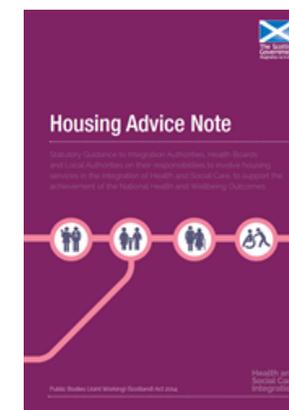
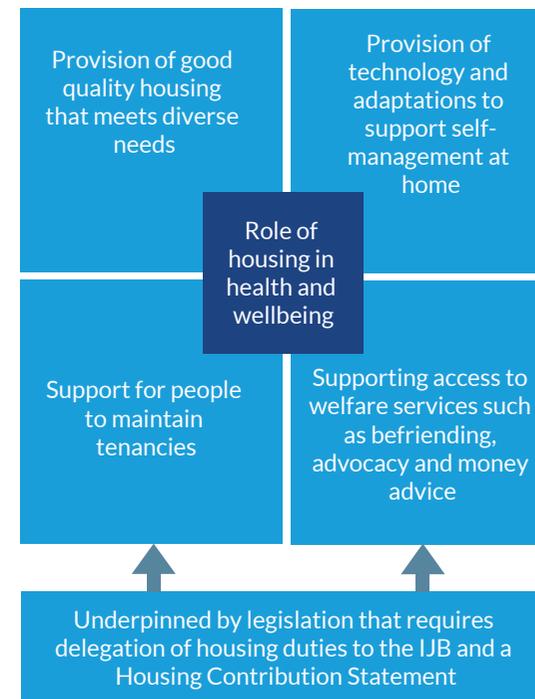
As part of the formal structures of health and social care integration, legislation requires a number of housing responsibilities to be delegated to Integrated Joint Boards (IJBs), therefore bringing them within the sphere of health and social care. Most delegated functions relate to adaptations to housing. Further to this, Strategic Plans developed by IJBs are required to include either a 'Housing Contribution Statement' or make reference to housing in the Strategic Plan. This should set out how housing organisations contribute to meeting the health and wellbeing outcomes.

Within this legislative framework, housing organisations leverage a range of skills and assets to support people with their health and wellbeing. Housing associations and other social landlords are key contributors in providing housing, however, they are supported by a broad range of housing organisations that support people to maintain tenancies through advice, advocacy and place based community activity.

The COVID-19 pandemic and related public health measures have put a spotlight on the health and social care ecosystem and how it responded to a surge in demand in a dynamic, unknown situation. Through the ihub COVID-19 health and social care learning system, the Place, Home and Housing team engaged with housing organisations to understand ways in which they had contributed to health and wellbeing in this context.

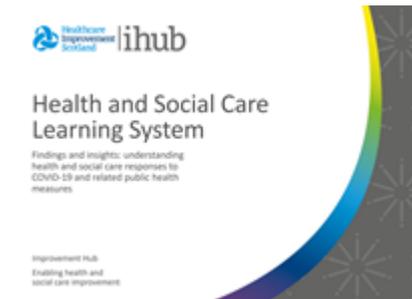
A recently published three year research study involved interviews with more than 70 tenants from three housing organisations in Scotland working to support tenants in social housing and private rented housing. The research demonstrated that at their best, housing organisations worked through trusted relationships to support households with aspects of their life and wellbeing beyond housing. As a result of this trust, housing providers are extremely well placed to provide emotional and practical support, which will be increasingly important in the context of COVID-19 .

### Overview of policy around the role of housing organisations in health and wellbeing



Housing Advice Note that lays out the statutory responsibilities of integration authorities with regards to housing

# Section 2: The role of housing organisations in the COVID-19 response



The COVID-19 pandemic and related public health measures are unprecedented in recent times. People's needs have been complex and have changed quickly over time. It is hard to predict how people will be affected and when. Through our COVID-19 health and social care learning system we heard that in this context, a range of services have developed ways to be flexible and responsive to people's diverse and emerging needs.

The most prominent challenges facing people were:

- isolation,
- loss of income,
- food insecurity, and
- lack of access to health and care services.

Housing organisations played a significant role in supporting people with these challenges.

## Overview of how housing organisations responded to needs in the context of COVID-19

Communities and statutory services mobilised around the issues mentioned above and to support people's unique circumstances. Within this, housing associations played a key role. One of our key reflections was that housing organisations were meeting health and wellbeing needs both at an individual level and at a community level. This was facilitated by their strong connections with communities and ability to develop trusted relationships with individuals.

**A key feature of housing associations is the regular, often informal, contact they have with people in community based settings.** This puts housing associations in an arguably unique position as a trusted community-based organisation with a wide reach into communities. Our stakeholders described ways in which the housing sector has developed or accelerated ways to be responsive to people's diverse immediate and emerging needs in the current context.

They reported **supporting their tenants directly through money advice and small cash grants, along with connecting them to community services, and contributing to the growing ecosystem of community support through developing new networks with community groups,** offering the use of community spaces and directing funding.

This report sets out how we have seen housing organisations support individual needs and community ecosystems.

ihub report on how the health and social care system responded to COVID-19 and related public health measures

“Housing associations and community groups have been able to take a different attitude to risk and managed that in such a way that has enabled community support provisions that show the value of social housing sector.”

– Scottish Federation of Housing Associations

“Millbank Housing Association have been able to be very proactive and they have a vulnerable persons register. It was felt that this kind of thing should be the norm across the housing sector”

- Policy Lead, Glasgow West of Scotland Housing Forum

# Section 3: Supporting individuals.

Housing organisations described supporting individual needs through a rapid and person centred response.

## Role of housing organisations supporting individuals

As COVID-19 and the related public health measures impacted people in different ways, housing associations responded to emerging and changing needs quickly, and addressed fundamental needs that were perhaps not being met elsewhere. It was commented that housing associations 'have their finger on the pulse' with regards to what support people need. Similarly, housing organisations such as third sector advice providers, reported having **relationships with people that are centred on understanding a person's circumstances and working with them to achieve a particular outcome** (such as finding suitable accommodation). This type of relationship appeared to be of value in addressing immediate challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing for a quick, person-centred response.

### A rapid response

Housing organisations described quickly mobilising to ensure that vulnerable tenants were contacted and supported.

Activities included:

- conducting welfare checks with tenants
- arranging food deliveries
- providing money advice, and
- developing risk registers of people identified as vulnerable to organise and coordinate support.

We interpreted from other insights shared that they were uniquely placed to provide this support due to:

- long standing relationships with the wider community
- close relationships with people that are not intervention based and centred on achieving outcomes
- experience supporting people with a range of challenges from system changes such as the 'bedroom tax' and Universal Credit, to more personal changes such as bereavement and unemployment, and
- experience supporting people who have health conditions such as dementia.

"Staff have been providing clients with a lot of emotional support. There has been a greater emphasis on checking in with clients to see how they are doing. Staff have been doing things like arranging shopping for people, sending them flowers etc"

- Housing Options Scotland

"We were able to help outside of the box, a family with a child who has asthma had a broken Hoover so we fixed the Hoover, this type of need isn't met by existing services."

- Linstone Housing Association

### A person centred response

As people's experiences of COVID-19 and 'lockdown' varied and changed as time went on housing associations reported they were able to be person-centred in how they supported individuals.

Housing organisations shared that they:

- met fundamental needs such as access to food
- embedded continual check-ins with tenants to support with isolation and identify any new needs
- provided support to small but significant individual needs through small grants
- took time to understand people's challenges and discuss what was important to people, linking them with appropriate community groups, and
- with the reduction of many formal services, housing associations have been able to access more informal channels for getting support for people.

The importance of the trusted relationship between people and staff within the housing associations was emphasised:

- they aren't seen as formal services so people feel they can be more open and have a dialogue
- they operate in an informal space, creating supportive dialogues rather than intervention based interactions, and
- for most tenants, housing associations will have a good track record in responding positively to them.

# Section 3: Supporting individuals.

Opportunities through engagement with the housing sector.

Based on the insights shared within interviews and the COVID-19 learning system we interpreted a number of ways in which health and social care services might benefit from greater collaboration with the housing sector to contribute to supporting needs at individual level

1

There is an opportunity for health and care to collaborate with housing organisations to take a more systematic approach to understanding tenants' and communities' circumstances and need, in a way that can facilitate strategic approaches across health and social care.

2

Housing associations are a key asset in responding to new challenges that might emerge within a community. The close individual relationships could facilitate rights based approaches which enables people to have their health and wellbeing needs met.

3

The trusted position of housing associations and the person-centred support they deliver put them in a strong position to deliver preventative interventions. Further collaboration across housing, health and care has the potential to enhance this.

4

Close relationships can be enhanced through the use of digital services and through trusted relationships housing associations can be a key partner in building digital literacy and promoting the benefits of digital connectivity with family and friends as well as with services.

# Section 4: Supporting communities.

Housing organisations described contributing to community ecosystems that support health and wellbeing.

## Role of housing organisations supporting communities

We learned from our Health and Social Care Learning System that community groups are key drivers of the COVID-19 response, with new and existing networks of small and large community-based organisations at the centre. Housing associations described contributing to this through **strengthening existing relationships with organisations or developing new ones**. Similarly, they have been able to offer physical spaces to facilitating the logistics of food collection and delivery as well as providing financial support to community groups. A key feature that interviewees from housing organisations reported is the **regular, often informal, contact they have with people in community based settings**. We interpret that this puts them in a somewhat unique position as a trusted community-based organisation that can engage with communities at pace. We heard ways in which organisations in the housing sector have developed or accelerated ways to be responsive to people's diverse immediate and emerging needs in the current context.

## Vital community relationships

As communities mobilised to support people through community groups and networks, housing associations were a key part of this ecosystem. Housing associations contributed to community support through:

- linking people with community groups to ensure that people got to the right services with minimal touchpoints
- working in partnership to develop new community services such as wellbeing packs, virtual cafes and other small scale put meaning supports, and
- providing community spaces to support logistics around collection and distribution of support packages

Housing associations were able to contribute in this way due to:

- existing relationships with community groups
- having a recognised value base that facilitated trust and expanded their reach, and
- being visible and active within communities, arranging social events like street bingo and online exercise classes.

"We have been able to act quickly due to the existing partnerships and community structures. As a community organisation we know Drumchapel and our intuition and local knowledge has allowed us to identify those most in need. We cannot do this on our own and we are only a part of the jigsaw. We see Cernach Housing Association as a hugely important part of that jigsaw"

– Community Connector, Cernach Housing Association

"We are providing small, informal funds for people to start a wellbeing project in their street or immediate community. For example, £50 to help start a book swap."

– Cassiltoun Housing Association

## Community anchors

Housing associations became trusted organisations that distributed centrally allocated funding to communities.

- Though deep knowledge of communities, housing associations were able to channel funding to where it was most needed
- They supported informal community groups who would otherwise be unable to access funding
- Small grants allowed for small but significant initiatives (such as book groups and community cafes) that support wellbeing to flourish

The corporate structure of housing associations enabled this role as community anchor due to:

- strong governance and audit frameworks that allow for the receipt of funding from Scottish Government and other sources
- values that underpin the trust needed to be confident that funding will be distributed fairly and effectively, and
- strong community presence and relationships.

# Section 4: Supporting communities.

Opportunities through engagement with the housing sector.

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1

The strong partnerships with communities and reach that housing associations described may provide an opportunity to coordinate strategic engagement when considering the design and delivery of health and care services.

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Through place making and the development of community activities, housing organisations may be able to identify health and care needs in context and engage people in informal, community settings. This may build connectivity within the system that allows for a greater knowledge of needs and a wider reach and has the potential to address health and wellbeing issues such as social isolation and loneliness.

3

The role of housing associations as community anchors is one that could be explored and developed further as a way of supporting community, place based approaches. Using anchor organisations to distribute funding can result in more effective use of funds and ensure hyper local community needs are met.

We are unable to carry out our normal activities during Covid-19 and the Scottish Government gave agreement to look at other ways we can support the community. We have been able to access supporting communities funding of £40k and we are working with partners in Housing, Education and community organisations such as Food Banks, Asian Forum, and Scottish Refugee Council to identify where support is required.

- Community Connector, Cernach Housing Association

# Summary.

Housing organisations are a relatively diverse set of organisations and include social landlords, private landlords and letting agents and third sector advice and support providers. The interviews and interpretations have focused on social landlords, in particular housing associations.

We have heard that housing associations have a **dynamic relationship both with their tenants and the communities in which they operate**. Interviewees described close relationships with individual tenants through supporting their housing needs and through supporting their wellbeing. Many also described working closely with communities and community groups, supporting local activity, offering spaces for meetings and groups, and organising networks of support.

This **dual connection at an individual and community level may enable them to better support individuals by helping them find out about and navigate a range of support available**. Similarly, through supporting individuals, housing associations have a strong understanding of the challenges and issues people are facing, which can inform community activity.

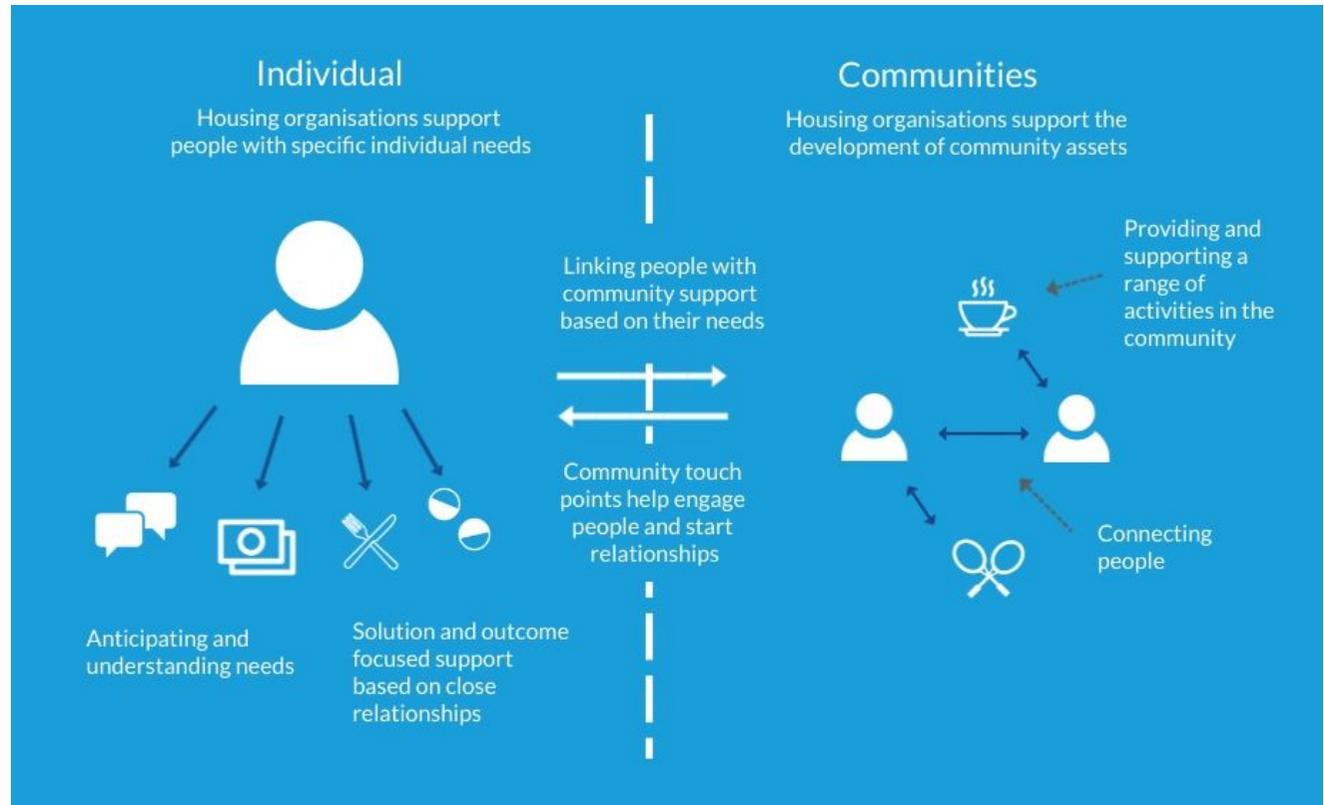


Diagram to show the role of housing organisations with regards to individuals and communities, highlighting how these two elements are linked.

## Get in touch.



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[Place, Home and Housing website](#)

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