**Hexagon Housing Association**

**Community Investment Strategy 2016-2019**

**1 Introduction**

1.1 Hexagon Housing Association makes investing in communities a key business priority. We want to create and support long term sustainable communities by providing homes people want to live in and by improving the prospects and opportunities of residents living in those communities.

1.2 We recognise that many of our residents are facing increasing financial, technological and employment challenges (i.e. increased pressure on long term unemployed and economically inactive to move into employment, and challenges of part time insecure work or zero hours contracts for those in employment). The introduction of further welfare reforms and austerity measures, including budget cuts, rent cuts, cuts to local services, will have an impact on residents and the communities where they live.

1.3 It is now more important than ever that we concentrate our efforts on supporting residents to sustain their tenancies. We are committed to supporting our residents and providing them with the resources, advice and opportunity to negotiate some of these challenges and not only survive but thrive.

**2 Where are we now – the Context**

2.1 Much has changed since the last Community Investment Strategy was put in place. It is important we consider these changes and how they may impact on our residents, the communities they live in and us as an organisation.

This section highlights some of these key factors which help explain the context in which this strategy is written.

2.2 Residents are facing increasing financial pressures, making it harder for many residents to pay their rent and household bills. Households have to manage with less money coming into the home – welfare reforms, tax credits, benefit cap, bedroom tax, freeze on working age benefits, and increased household expenditure - energy costs and food bills are rising.

2.3 The introduction of Universal Credit has started. Close to two thirds of our residents are expected to be affected by Universal Credit, upwards of half of the residents migrating to Universal Credit will need some sort of help.

2.4 A number of residents are going to be affected by the benefit cap for the first time, or losing greater amounts than currently. It is currently estimated that between 70 and 100 residents will be affected, as well as those already impacted losing around an extra £60 per week.

2.5 The cost of living has grown faster than earnings in recent years, and while this trend has now reversed, many people still have a lower income in real terms compared to five years ago

2.6 Half of 0 -19 year olds in London live in a family that receives tax credits. Many of these children are likely to be worse off based on the Government’s current plans to cut tax credits. ‘The majority of people living in poverty are in a working family. As employment has increased so has the number of people in a working family in poverty – from 700000 to 1.2 million in the last decade, an increase of 70%’

2.7 We continue to experience high demand from residents for 121 support to help unravel financial problems, often related to welfare.

2.8 There has been a low take up of the London Plus Credit Union by residents; however we expect this to change with the introduction of Universal Credit.

2.9 There is an increase in the number of people moving into employment; however we have identified an increasing number of residents moving into part time employment or zero hours employment.

2.10 There is increased pressure on individuals to secure employment due to welfare reforms. Our experience is that most people want to work, but some may lack the confidence, skills or opportunity. Some residents face various barriers which may prevent them from securing employment – childcare, poor mental and or physical health, and/or caring responsibilities.

2.11 We are experiencing a continued demand from residents for Business Start Up support; many residents exploring this route are either underemployed or lone parents; this reflects the national picture.

2.12 Lone parents in London are more likely to be out of work than lone parents elsewhere in England; this is partly because childcare is more expensive and less available in London. Over the last year, we have witnessed an increase in lone parents accessing employment support.

2.13 18% of jobs in London pay below the London Living Wage; this has increased for five consecutive years. Real incomes of the self-employed have been falling. Over the last 18 months we have observed an increase in underemployed residents (needing housing benefit to top their income up).

2.14 The Hexagon Digital Inclusion Survey 2014 found that 65% of Hexagon residents use the internet, compared to 87% nationally. Residents cited the most important barriers as a lack of interest and skills. Only 45% of residents are confident in carrying out all of four basic on-line tasks compared to 80% nationally. The importance of digital inclusion should not be underestimated, there is a common held view that in 5 years’ time, if an individual is not digitally included then they are not socially included.

2.15 The lack of digital skills can lead to individuals’ marginalisation in the labour market. Improving the digital skills of individuals can produce substantial benefits in terms of increasing the employability of individuals.

Research by Tinder Foundation found that 90% of all new jobs require digital skills, with almost three quarters (72%) of employers revealing they would not even interview a candidate who does not possess basic computer skills.

**3 Our approach**

3.1 We want to make sure the Community Investment offer is open and accessible to all residents; we will therefore make efforts to reach out and actively engage with residents, especially those who have not previously accessed the Community Investment offer.

3.2 We recognise that posters and Residents Newsletters will only be attractive to a certain type of resident; we are also aware that sometimes those individuals who are most in need of a service are the least likely to access it.

3.3 We will spend time in the different communities, getting to know residents, building relationships, listening to residents gaining trust and finding out what their interests and priorities are. We will do this through a combination of door knocking, targeted mailing, community activity or similar.

3.4 This approach means we will work in small concentrated areas. We will seek to prioritise the areas we work in by considering - whether there is an identified need from residents and/or Housing Officers; a partnership opportunity that could benefit residents; or a new development where residents have recently moved in.

3.5 We are just one resource that is available to residents. There are various other resources, services and organisations (assets) that exist within different communities, much of which is ‘under radar’. We will seek to work with residents, organisations and others in communities to identify the resources that already exist, to build relations and explore how these ‘assets’ may benefit residents and our work.

3.6 We aim to increase the number of residents who access community investment services, and raise awareness among residents of the non- Hexagon services and activities available within communities.

We will do this by:

* Developing a community outreach programme where the Community Investment Team will spend dedicated time of up to six months concentrating in specific areas.
* Before working with any given community we will get to know the community and build our understanding of the community and its residents.
* We adopt what is referred to as an ‘asset based’ community development’ approach to our community investment activities, seeking to identify the ‘assets’ that exist in communities (assets may be individuals’ skills, knowledge and experiences; community groups, facilities, organisations who provide services in these communities, partnerships).
* We will also utilise the knowledge held within Hexagon teams to help ‘target’ areas and residents who may benefit from the community investment offer.
* We will work with residents within the specified communities to organise an activity to help bring residents together over a common interest or project idea.
* We will continue to work in partnership with organisations such as WEA (Workers Educational Association) to promote community learning opportunities based on residents’ interests and/or needs.
* We will make contact with and explore the development of partnerships with different services and organisations operating in the area which could benefit our residents.

**4 Working in Partnership**

4.1 We will work with local partners to ensure that we can support the ideas and aspirations of local people, helping to ensure that every resident, wherever they live, can access and benefit from the support we offer.

4.2 In the context of reduced public funding, we will work even more closely with our voluntary sector, corporate and supply chain partners to generate opportunities and social value for Hexagon residents.

4.3 Effective partnerships with community groups, voluntary organisations, other housing associations, local authorities, health providers and many more bodies will be key to effective delivery of this strategy. We already have some excellent partnerships and we will continue to develop these. We will also explore new partnership opportunities. Prior to committing to any partnership, we will consider how the partnership can help us achieve the aims of this strategy; we will also seek to determine our role, taking into consideration the amount of stock we have in a geographical area.

4.4 With more scarce resources across the sectors we are starting to see a growth in appetite amongst many organisations to work in partnership.

4.5 We are starting to see an increase in housing associations working in partnership in communities, and consortia being formed to submit joint funding proposals or to bid for a public sector type contracts such as health or employment. We are currently involved in a funding and delivery partnership which has recently secured 3 years funding from European Social Fund.

4.6 We will continue to explore such opportunities, considering how they can support the delivery of our objectives.

**5 Love London Working**

5.1 “Love London Working” is a partnership of 16 Social Housing Providers based in London, which seeks to progress those in long-term employment and economic inactivity into work by addressing their often multiple disadvantages in obtaining employment through a support programme that is both tailored to individual needs and delivered at scale.

5.2 Hexagon is one of the 16 partners in this new pan London project funded through the European Social Fund over 3 years.

It is expected that this project is the start of much more closer collaborative working across Housing Association employment programmes, which we expect to create an enhanced service and improved opportunities for residents.

5.3 This new project will see our community investment resources increase from one to two Employment Support Workers.

**6 Themes, Objectives and Goals**

6.1 The Community Investment Strategy identifies the key thematic priorities for the period 2016-2019. The objectives and goals set out more specifically what we will do and the difference we aim to make.

6.2 The focus of the strategy is primarily money matters, employment and skills and digital inclusion . This work is underpinned by community outreach and concentrated work in specified communities.

6.3 The strategy highlights the context for each theme; explaining why the three themes are to be our focus, before setting out objectives and goals relating to each.

6.4 The strategy sets out a monitoring and evaluation framework for the team to show how well the work it is engaged in represents value for money and the social value to our residents and service users can be demonstrated.

6.5 There are many competing priorities, though with limited resources it is important that we focus our investment and direct our resources where they are most needed, and where we can feel we can have the greatest impact.

6.6 We have identified 3 priority themes:

**6.6.1 Money matters**

Aims to increase the financial skills and wellbeing of residents, sustain tenancies and reduce costs to the organisation. To achieve this, we provide money and benefit advice to residents to help them improve their financial situation, as well as working in partnership with other organisations to ensure that residents have access to the services they need

**6.6.2 Jobs, learning and skills**

Aims to support as many residents as possible into employment as this is the key route for residents to become more financial secure.

**6.6.3 Digital Inclusion**

We aim to increase the number of residents online with at least basic digital skills.

**7 How will we get there?**

**7.1 Theme 1 - Money Matters**

* To increase the financial skills and wellbeing of residents, sustain tenancies and reduce costs to the organisation. We will do this by:
* Supporting residents (including those affected by Welfare Reform) to build their capacity to manage their money effectively, securely and confidently
* Supporting residents to plan for the future and cope with financial pressure, by managing their finances to protect against short-term variations in income and expenditure, and to take advantage of longer term opportunities, and deal effectively with financial distress, should unexpected events lead to serious financial difficulty.
* Building on our relationship with London Plus Credit Union to promote the services available which can benefit residents. We will also explore the promotion of real life stories of residents who have benefitted from the Credit Union offer, as those who directly receive or benefit from a service are best placed to promote it.
* Embedding the Credit Union offer across the organisation so all customer facing staff have an awareness of Credit Unions and how they can benefit residents.
* Maintaining partnerships with debt advice agencies and other money advice services which complement our Financial Inclusion offer.
* Working in close partnership with other Hexagon teams to maximise the resources available to help guide residents through the transition to Universal Credit.
* Working in close partnership with the Stock Improvement Team to build on such schemes as the Winter Warmth Packs and Green Doctors to help residents to reduce their fuel costs. This will include the promotion of such schemes as Warm Homes Discount and Winter Fuel Payments. We will also seek to reduce energy bills by raising awareness of practical steps that can be taken such as ‘stop using standby’ and switching energy providers.
* Helping to sustain those in low paid employment by removing financial barriers.

**Goals**

* In 2016/17, 80 residents will receive support from our Financial Inclusion Advisor, rising to 240 (cumulative) by January 2019.
* By January 2019, 50 residents will be members of the Credit Union.
* By January 2019, 250 residents will have accessed energy efficiency advice and support.
* All Hexagon residents identified as at risk due to the transition to UC will be offered face to face or telephone support
* No residents lose their home due to a lack of support with their transition to Universal Credit

**7.2 Theme 2 Jobs, learning and skills**

* To support residents who are unemployed, economically inactive or underemployed (in receipt of a top-up benefit, such as housing benefit) in developing skills and accessing training opportunities in order to get nearer to, enter into, and sustain, employment. We will do this by:
* Providing sustained support for residents who are further away from the labour market, supporting them over a period of time. We will offer a mentored approach, focusing on the strengths, skills and aspirations of individuals; we then work with them to develop a pathway to their goal(s), identifying any barriers that may prevent them from moving forward, and developing plans to help get over the barriers and reach their goal. We believe this approach will help to increase the number of residents who move into sustainable employment.
* Working with partners to make the most of opportunities to provide access to training and jobs.
* Offering quality assured work experience placements across all our organisations departments. We will aim to enhance our Silver Level to a Gold Level Award for Quality Work Experience Placements.
* Continuing to invest in the Academy, providing a person centred approach supporting residents back into employment. The Academy is Hexagon’s core employment support service, focussed on work experience placements, information advice and guidance ( IAG) support and access to training. We will expand the Academy offer to also include volunteering opportunities, first rung/community learning opportunities and business start- up support.
* Continue to work in partnership with specialist providers to offer a Start Your Own Enterprise Programme.
* We will integrate digital skills into employment support, to help increase the number of residents who are online.
* We will continue to invest in the Young Peoples Employment Support Programme for young people aged 18 to 24 years old. We will seek to work in partnership with other organisations who can offer support and opportunities to Hexagon’s young people.

**Goals**

* In 2016/17, 95 residents will access our Employment Support Programmes, increasing to 420 cumulative) by end of year 3.
* In 2016/17, 25 residents will secure employment, rising to 130 (cumulative) by end of year 3.
* In 2016/17, 10 residents will be sustainably employed (measured after 6 months employment) rising to 78 (cumulative) by the end of year 3.
* By the end of year 3, 30 young people will secure employment (including apprenticeships)
* In 2016/17 we will gain the Gold Level Award for Quality Assured Work Experience Placements.

**7.3 Theme 3. Digital Inclusion**

* Digital inclusion will be integrated into the broader Community Investment offer and weaved into all Community Investment activities where possible.

Supporting residents to get online is vital for promoting social and financial inclusion. It is also vital to boosting employability.

* We know there are resources in many local communities to help individuals get online and develop basic digital skills. We also know that there is a preference to access digital skills training at local level. We will promote such resources as UK Online Centres and libraries to broaden the access points for residents.
* We will continue to run the Digital Inclusion Programme, whereby residents attend a 4 session training course and on completion receive a refurbished laptop and wireless dongle. However, we are aware that training courses alone have limited impact in getting residents online and confident being online. We are currently carrying out an evaluation, the findings of which will help inform future provision. Anecdotal feedback from residents has highlighted the need for some ongoing support, especially in the early stages of residents getting online. One of the options being explored offers an e-learning portal and telephone support in addition to the classroom based learning.
* We will use a mix of 1-2-1 training, training courses, volunteers, drop-ins, sign posting and partnerships with other organisations to help residents get the confidence, skills and access they need to use the internet and get online.
* We currently have one Digital Champion, and we would like to build on its success to develop a Network of Digital Champions who could offer one to one training and support. However there has been limited interest from residents in becoming Digital Champions. We will seek to further explore how we can develop a Network of Digital Champions, possibly in partnership with other organisations.
* We will work in partnership with larger programmes such as Go on Lewisham and Go on Croydon, which are part of a national programme supporting individuals to get the motivation, opportunity, access and skills to get online.
* We will also weave digital inclusion into the Community Investment offer and where possible other services and build a strong two way referral mechanism.

**Goals**

* Partnerships with different IT Training organisations and Centres established which can benefit our residents.
* In 2016/17, 100 residents will access IT support either through signposting, direct delivery or online learning. This will increase to 600 (cumulative) by Jan 2019.

**8 Value For Money**

8.1 In the development of this strategy, we considered the needs and priorities of residents and those of Hexagon as an organisation. We assessed the environment we are working in, spending time considering what opportunities may be ahead, but equally what threats. The introduction of further welfare reforms and austerity measures, including budget cuts, rent cuts, cuts to local services, will have an impact on residents, our communities and Hexagon’s income streams.

8.2 We have identified three priority themes where investment is most needed and will achieve the best social value benefits.

8.3 Our approach of working in smaller geographic communities for periods of time aims to strengthen communities, placing an emphasis on people and social interaction, is likely to make the management of the task easier, helping to make the costs lower.

8.4 Working in partnership with others is key to the success of this strategy. We will seek to continue to build on the good partnership working with organisations such as the WEA (Workers Educational Association) whereby we are able to offer free or low cost training for residents.

8.5 In the context of reduced public funding, we will work even more closely with our voluntary sector, corporate and supply chain partners to generate opportunities and social value for Hexagon residents.

8.6 The organisation sets aside a total of £389359 (direct costs is £235016) per annum for community investment activities (based on 2015/6 budget). A total of £164446 over 3 years has been secured through ESF (European Social Fund) bringing the annual budget to £450890.

8.7 During the period of the last Community Investment Strategy, the Financial Inclusion Service raised a total of around £275,000 for residents in the form of a wide variety of additional support for residents. The rate of income generated for residents has continued to increase throughout the time that the service has operated, and this is expected to continue. Much of this income comes in the form of Housing Benefit and Discretionary Housing Payments for residents. This means that as well as promoting our social values, the service is also very good for business. In total, over £235,000 of the income generated for residents has been repaid to Hexagon, which in turn has helped a number of tenancies be sustained. This income also means that the service generates more income than the cost of the service.

8.8 The Love London Working project effectively means our Employment and Skills Resources will be doubled for the next three years. The project is funded by European Social Fund, which has a 50% intervention rate; the total cost of the Hexagon element of Love London Working is £365,559, and we will receive £164446 ESF match funding towards this (little less than 50% to account for management resources).

During this period we will have the benefit of an additional Employment Support Worker, increasing our resources to two workers, and the Love London Working partnership is also expected to generate benefits through increased support and opportunities for our residents.

8.9 We will measure the impact of our investment to enable us to assess the extent to which the need is being met and in ensuring value for money. We will use the HACT model for measuring Social Value.

8.10 The tool will be used to specify a planned social value of community investment activities and the difference we hope to make over the period.

We can then use the tool to measure the social value of our activities.

8.11 Based on a budget of £300000, a social value of £624663 was achieved in 2014/15. Another way of putting this is for every £1 spent, we achieved social value outcomes worth £2.208.

8.12 For the period 2016/17, based on a budget of £300,000, we have projected a social value of £810586 will be generated. Another way of putting this is that for every £1 spent, we expect to achieve social value outcomes worth £3.70.

8.13 Sometimes the impact of community investment activity is not realised in the same financial year as the main expenditure or investment. A social value impact assessment of the Business Start Up Programme was undertaken in April 2015 for the period 2014/15. As this activity relies on external training providers/consultants, we also included 20% of the Community Investment Managers time in the budget expenditure.

Based on the budget expenditure of £21843, a social value of £48809 was achieved. So for every £1 spent, a social value of £2.23 was achieved.

The exercise was repeated for the same cohort in January 2016 and the social value had increased to £127567, so for every £1 spent, £5.78 of social value was achieved.

**9 What difference do we hope to make?**

9.1 As part of the writing of this Strategy, we will review our KPIs and put in place new measures for 2016/17 to help inform our understanding of the impact of our activities. Indicators are now more closely linked to a project’s outcomes; for example, focusing measures on the support provided to an economically inactive person (who may be further away from the labour market with barriers which prevent them from moving into employment, which has more long-term benefit, rather than initial engagement.)

9.2 We will produce an annual Impact Report which raises the profile of the Community Investment projects and partners and measures the value for money of each initiative.

9.3 We will also produce a social impact statement demonstrating the social value of our work.

**10 Reporting our Impact**

We believe it’s important to be open, transparent and accountable. To this end, we will report on our community investment activities, impact and expenditure quarterly. We will work produce a new Local Offer and report to the Performance Review Group.