

## **Phoenix Development Fund: Themed Report Summary**

### **Themed Report Title: Housing Associations**

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#### Context

Eight housing association projects were included in the lessons learned project

#### Lessons Learned

##### *Role of PDF and SBS*

In most cases, projects reported that they would not have been able to deliver the project without PDF. In some cases PDF funded the entire project, and in some cases PDF funding enabled partnership projects to be built to deliver significantly more/different activities than would otherwise have been funded.

Many projects highlighted key feature of the PDF/SBS staff team- their flexibility in allowing for variations to planned activities, when experience from the projects showed that planned activities were no longer appropriate (e.g. viring money from furniture budget to delivery budget). Regarded as being a very different experience to other sources of public funding and highly valued by the projects.

Two projects felt that “light touch” approach of the PDF team was a little too distant - would have appreciated more support at either appraisal time (project was agreed which later proved to contain significant elements which were undeliverable) or at monitoring stages. More networking amongst projects also cited as something that would have been desirable.

#### Outcomes/Findings

##### *Range of models used*

Projects used a range of different intervention models to deliver their projects. The most often used and most effective models were all based around intensive one to one support, with most projects reporting that significant lead times were required to build trust and relationships before “business advice” content could be introduced. It was felt vital that project staff had ability to deal holistically with clients, i.e. were comfortable dealing with difficult life issues as well as business issues.

#### Useful points for the Project

PDF funded projects have all highlighted benefits of housing associations acting as regeneration agencies, but at least three of the respondents reported difficulties in convincing all levels of housing association staff and board members of the benefits and appropriateness of engaging in this type of “non-core” activity. For others it was a question of convincing overworked and sceptical housing officers why they should try and add yet another activity to their packed caseloads. For some it was lack of support and buy-in at senior management and board member levels.

If housing associations are to be used more often and more effectively as regeneration agents, more work needs to be done in sharing the positive outcomes of these PDF projects. One suggestion would be for more networking amongst housing associations (this is already happening with HAs and social enterprise with a network being proposed).

##### *Overall impact of PDF on the theme*

Housing association tenants are amongst “hardest to reach” target group for business support. There are numerous barriers facing them, ranging from poverty, cultural isolation, discrimination (age, race, gender) and many of them have a distrust of mainstream business support agencies. Housing associations already have an established relationship with their tenants. More often that not it is a relationship based on trust and positive experiences, although there are tensions between the role of “landlord” and wider activities.

If government wants to reach “hard to reach” groups, business support interventions from bodies such as housing associations must be developed nationally. Many housing association tenants will not readily access

mainstream support, and the ability of the mainstream to access them, as a client group will always be limited. By using (and up-skilling where necessary) a trusted intermediary, in this case housing associations, then success stories like those delivered via PDF funded projects will be able to be replicated in far greater numbers across the UK.

A huge opportunity exists to exploit the role of housing associations as regeneration agencies. They have access to hundreds of thousands of people who will not use mainstream services, and who may not consider self employment as an option unless the kind of intensive and personally supportive services that can be provided by trusted intermediaries are made more widely available.

Many housing associations have under-utilised skills sets (project planning, project management etc.) and they provide immediate physical access to deprived communities. This provides an opportunity for housing associations to play an increasingly important role in enterprise development.

Opportunities for partnership working also exist e.g. with established mainstream or specialist business support providers and other "local players" such as primary care trusts.

#### *Messages for policy makers and commissioners*

This PDF theme has demonstrated that housing associations are an obvious and effective intermediary to effect economic and social change by "being the bridge" between their tenants (and others living in deprived communities) and the "mainstream" business support sector.

#### Policy and Service Delivery Implications

-What is SBS's role in relation to mainstream business support in the context of the Report's recommendation?

- How could the impact of PDF be embedded, given that the role of SBS has moved further away from delivery and given that funds are limited?