

Corporate Strategy

2023-26

This document sets out Arhag's corporate objectives and our strategy for meeting them.





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1. About Arhag

Our social purpose is enshrined in our vision, defines our mission and informs our values.

Arhag was founded in 1979 as a campaigning organisation for the better treatment of migrants and refugees and to respond to an urgent need for housing and support amongst Britain's fast-growing refugee and migrant communities. The aim was to provide a stable, decent, and affordable home which would act as the platform for residents to improve their lives, support their families and make a positive contribution to their communities.

Arhag is a not-for-profit housing association. We are a business with social objectives, which means we invest every penny we make and more in providing good quality homes and services.

In 1989, Arhag was formally registered with the Housing Corporation and we have spent the next 30 years working to become a good housing association.

We have grown from those humble beginnings and now own and manage over 900 homes across 15 boroughs, 14 in London including a hostel in Stratford for people who need support and guidance to build a future in one of our communities.

Most of our tenants are nominated by the Councils in the local authorities where we work.

Our principal activity is still to manage, maintain, build, and grow our social housing accommodation stock for both renting and home ownership, but in November 2016 we decided that, whilst a stable and decent home was a good platform, the other needs of migrants and refugees were not being met.

One such unmet need was health where we noticed that for various reasons many migrants and refugees ("M&R") – particularly those who are undocumented – become isolated from the health service and often do not receive the service they need. Therefore, we decided to set ourselves up as a "go to" organisation and work in collaboration with partner agencies which provide a range of non-housing services as well as training and support for women suffering gender-based violence.

As part of our commitment and passion for the "go to" agenda, in early July 2019 we moved into The People's Place in Stratford, which is now our head office and where we are joined by our M&R partner agencies.



1.1 Our vision, mission and values



1.1.1 Vision

To ensure every migrant and refugee in London has a good home, is empowered to safeguard their individual rights, have their voice heard and make a full contribution to their community.



1.1.2 Mission

To provide the best housing services to our residents while developing the potential of migrants and refugees in London.



1.1.3 Values

To further our vision and mission, we have adopted five company values that underpin our aims and objectives:

Trust

We work hard to earn and keep the trust of those we serve.

Respect

We strive to ensure that everyone feels respected through our actions and the way we communicate.

Accountability

We recognise that no one is perfect and when mistakes are made, we put our hands up, own the issue and learn from what happened.

Customer care

We aim to treat everyone like we would like to be treated. We want our residents to feel engaged with us and their needs understood.

Innovation

We look for ways to make things better and are open to doing things differently through a range of methods including our use of technology.



2. Where we operate

Arhag is a London-based social landlord, with our business centre located in Stratford, East London.

Within our operating area, our properties are quite widely spread across 14 London boroughs and one borough outside London. The majority of our stock is north of the River Thames and over half of our stock is contained in just three boroughs, namely Newham, Tower Hamlets and Haringey.



General needs & intermediate rented	Supported housing	Shared owners & leaseholders	TOTAL	%
London Boroughs (North of the Thames)				
Newham	219	13	242	27%
Tower Hamlets	108	20	131	14%
Haringey	92		92	10%
Hammersmith & Fulham	63		63	7%
Enfield	56	6	62	7%
Camden	59		59	7%
Westminster	49		49	6%
Barnet	46		46	5%
Islington	40		40	4%
Kensington & Chelsea	30	1	31	3%
Brent	21		21	2%
London Boroughs (South of the Thames)				
Southwark	36	1	37	4%
Lambeth	12		12	1%
Lewisham	8		8	1%
Outside London				
Hertsmere	17		17	2%
Totals	856	33	910	100%

3. Strategic context

Arhag’s operating environment presents many challenges and opportunities for the organisation. Our strategic response to these factors has driven our priorities for the period of this plan.

3.1 Social

According to the charity Shelter, in the 35 years following the end of the Second World War, local authorities and housing associations built 4.4 million social homes. In 1980, 94,140 social homes were built but by 1983, supply had halved to just 44,240 new social homes. In 2021/22, just 7,528 new social homes were delivered and 1.1 million people remained on the waiting list for a home.

Combine the lack of new social supply with rising house prices and rising private rents, and it becomes clear why the government’s annual spending on housing benefit has more than doubled from £9bn in 1992 to £29.6bn now.

The pressing need for social homes has never been higher.

3.2 Technological

Over the last few years, we have seen an increasing use of technology in the context of housing and in the way that organisations communicate and manage data. This is set to increase as artificial intelligence drives rapid change in the way technology works for businesses. There are many benefits to this for organisations to support efficiencies and improved operations.

We recognise that there is much to be gained by embracing technology to support our journey to better understanding our assets, residents and their needs and our operational processes.

3.3 Economic

The economic situation, the cost-of-living crisis and stagnant wages have all put enormous strain on our residents’ finances. This is reflected in the level of rent arrears we experienced as an organisation – up to 5% from 4% last year. We also saw our rent collection as a percentage of rent due fall slightly this year to 98%.

Accordingly, our strategic response must include ensuring our financial resilience as an organisation..



3. Strategic context

3.4 Environmental

The National Housing Federation summarises the key environmental concerns for housing associations in its 2021 Paper “Defining net zero for social housing” as follows:

- » “In line with our international obligations under the Paris Agreement, and the advice of the Climate Change Committee (CCC), the government has legislated for the UK to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050, with intermediary targets of a 68% reduction by 2030 and a 78% reduction by 2035 (compared to 1990 levels).
- » Housing associations will play a critical role in our collective journey to net zero as to reach that goal, the CCC is clear that there must be complete elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from housing.

- » The road to net zero outlined by the CCC is focused on retrofitting all housing first, with the vast majority of fabric energy efficiency improvements being completed by 2035 (and all social homes reaching EPC C by 2028).
- » It is widely understood that EPC ratings are a flawed measure of energy efficiency and can drive awkward behaviour in their current form. We support the government’s intention to reform the methodology to address these issues.
- » This approach – of achieving a minimum energy efficiency standard as soon as possible, and then installing clean heat – sets out the minimum changes housing associations would need to deliver for their existing homes.”

3.5 Political and legal

Supply of social housing is depleted putting pressure on all providers of housing. Politically the emphasis is on stronger regulation of the sector rather than increasing supply. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act received Royal Assent in July 2023. This legislation strengthens powers to tackle failing social landlords and enables the Regulator to better support tenants living in unsafe homes. Damp and mould is a key issue. The Regulator published its report into damp and mould in 2023. This will remain a focus for Arhag as the set time limits for responding and remedying evolve.

The government has also announced a consultation on new “competence and conduct” standards for social housing staff, including qualifications requirements for senior housing managers.

Given Arhag’s core mission, it has been concerning to witness the government’s immigration policies and the attitude to and treatment of migrants and asylum seekers.

Our resolve and commitment to support migrants and refugees is strengthened in the face of this environment.



4. Strategic priorities

Supporting our residents and partners to deliver great landlord services and be a “go to” organisation for migrant and refugee issues is our overarching aim.

The direction of travel we are setting for Arhag reflects the sector’s recognised need for improved services and our emphasis on developing the potential of migrant and refugees across our sector and beyond.

In May 2023, the Board held their annual board strategy day and agreed four key priorities:



To improve our engagement with our residents and other key stakeholders
- so that everyone has a voice and is heard.



To develop our asset management approach and strategy
- so that we deliver improved homes and value for money for our residents.



To improve the integrity of our data on people and properties
- so that we understand your needs better and how best to shape our services for the future.



To improve our services to residents and achieve operational excellence
- so you have the best service we can provide.



4.1 We will improve our engagement with our residents and other key stakeholders – so that everyone has a voice and is heard.

Understanding our residents and our stakeholders is critical to our success as an organisation. We will do this by ensuring that the voices of our residents are heard at every level and that we engage appropriately with all our key stakeholders.

Key stakeholders also include local and national politicians, industry and housing organisations, our partnership organisations and pressure groups advocating on behalf of migrants and refugees.

Being a strong voice for migrants and refugees is an integral part of why we exist. It's important that our voice is heard on our residents' behalf talking about the things that matter to residents and seeking to influence positive change.

Arhag's key stakeholders

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
Residents	Actively engage
Colleagues	Actively engage
Board members	Actively engage
Contractors	Actively engage
Local councillors and MPs	Actively engage
Hub partners	Actively engage
Regulatory bodies	Comply and report
Sector organisations (eg BME National)	Actively engage
Pressure groups and political lobbying organisations	Monitor and communicate
Local council executives	Actively engage
Other housing associations	Monitor and communicate
Press	Actively engage

Actions

- » Resident engagement strategy – we will continue to develop our profile raising and engagement strategy. We will empower our Board and our staff to proactively engage with our residents at every opportunity to ensure residents have influence and a voice at all levels within Arhag.
- » We will actively listen to what our residents say matters to them and demonstrate that their views shape our services through regular satisfaction surveys and service feedback.
- » We will increase the effectiveness of our communications with residents – proactively focusing our content and channels according to residents’ preferences.
- » We will increase Arhag’s profile with our key stakeholders, actively engaging and advocating for our residents and migrants and refugees with all our strategic stakeholders and intermediaries.

Outcomes

Our success delivering this objective will be measured by:

- » Assessing overall satisfaction with our services, as well as the level and inclusivity of resident engagement activities, from their feedback and improvements made as a result.
- » Raising our profile and strengthening our collaborative relationships with our key stakeholders.

What success looks like

Focusing on residents + active listening + acting on feedback
= improved engagement



4.2 We will develop our asset management approach and strategy – so that we deliver improved homes and value for money for our residents

Having accurate data about our homes will enable us to deliver value for money because we will be able to prioritise and focus our efforts and investment in the right places.

Actions

- » Develop our asset management strategy: we will use our stock condition survey data to create a focused asset management strategy to enable us to deliver this objective.
- » We will ensure that the homes we offer are fit for the future and have the flexibility and adaptability to meet the ongoing needs of current and future residents.
- » We will use our stock condition survey data to procure better value for money and quality property investment/ improvement works.
- » We will prioritise investment to ensure our homes remain a safe and enjoyable place to live.
- » We will share future improvement plans for residents' homes and the public realm around them.
- » We will actively work towards becoming a Net Carbon Zero housing provider in line with the current government standards.

Outcomes

Our success delivering this objective will be measured through:

- » Demonstrating that we are managing and maintaining our homes to Decent Homes Standards as a minimum and seeking to improve the public realm and communal areas around our homes.
- » Ensuring our governance arrangements are fit for purpose, maintaining the Board's risk appetite and ensuring the right level of organisational resilience and financial capacity to deal with a wide range of adverse scenarios.
- » Regularly reporting to stakeholders on how we are complying with statutory and regulatory measures concerning health and safety, safeguarding and Consumer Standards.

What success looks like

Better asset management + improved homes + better governance
= improved value for money

4.3 We will improve the integrity of our data on people and properties – so that we understand our residents’ and people’s needs better and how best to shape our services for the future

Understanding our residents’ needs, knowing our people, identifying opportunities to improve our skills and processes and having a clear view of our assets and organisational metrics is essential if we want to accurately shape our priorities for the future – all these things depend on having reliable information and accurate data.

Actions

- » Digital strategy: We will develop a digital strategy so that we can continuously collect and use data to ensure our services reflect deliver on our mission and vision. This will cover how we collect data including through an annual survey of our people, formal and informal feedback mechanisms with residents and technical data on our homes and the effectiveness of our relationships with our contractors.
- » We will invest resources into systems and processes to improve our data integrity and make it easier for residents to access our services.
- » We will empower our people by enabling them to connect, collaborate and innovate, in a trusting and supportive workplace.
- » We will use data to benchmark our services and social activity to help understand the value of our work and focus on what matters.
- » We will use improved data to better scrutinize and make decisions on our strategic priorities.
- » We will prioritise investment following the objectives and the data emerging from our Asset Management Strategy.

Outcomes

Our success delivering this objective will be measured through:

- » Gathering and using feedback data to measure our success in engaging with residents, retaining and training our people, and understanding the effectiveness of engagement.
- » Using data to optimise the operating cost of each home we own or manage, to enable us to make judgements about efficiency and value for money, and to inform future priorities.

What success looks like

Better data collection + better collaboration + increased empowerment = improved services

4.4 We will improve our services to residents and achieve operational excellence – so our residents have the best service we can provide.

We exist to provide homes and support for our residents. Delivering operational excellence is not just a way of ensuring that it is easy to do business with us, it means that we are able to focus on the positive outcomes we want for the people who live in our homes

Actions

- » We will invest in frontline service delivery to ensure services are accessible, responsive and that we get the basics right every time.
- » We will collaborate with others to provide shared services so that we maximise the impact of the work we do.
- » We will embed a shared performance culture covering every service delivered in our name, based on ownership and accountability.
- » We will procure services and recruit staff who reflect our values. We will promote and retain the best talent to ensure we have the necessary customer focus, delivery skills and operational capacity. We will actively promote recruitment from within the communities we serve.
- » We will do what we say we will do and we will keep our promises.

Outcomes

Our success delivering this objective will be measured through:

- » Scoring more highly in our residents' satisfaction scores
- » Demonstrating that the numbers of complaints has reduced and the time taken to deal with complaints tracks to our complaints handling improvement plan.
- » Optimising the operating cost of each home we own or manage which will enable us to invest in frontline service delivery and inform future priorities.
- » Demonstrating operational excellence through building the operational and financial efficiency of our business.
- » Ensuring we have the resources available to operate the business day-to-day, to fund our rolling investment programmes and as a barometer of overall financial health.

What success looks like

Focusing on efficiency + proactive resource management + acting on feedback = improved operations

5. Measures and targets

Target setting and measuring performance are critical to understanding our progress towards our delivering on our strategic priorities and objectives, and to ensuring we are accountable to our residents and regulators. Arhag uses many key performance indicators and measures at the operational, management and governance levels. To support us in assessing progress against our objectives we have selected what we believe to be the core, critical measures which relate to our key objectives set out in this corporate strategy.

5.1 Improve our engagement with our residents and other key stakeholders

KEY MEASURES	BASELINE	TARGET 24/25	TARGET 25/26	TARGET 26/27
Resident satisfaction with listening and action	(Q2 23/24) 51%	60%	68%	75%
Resident satisfaction – treated fairly & with respect	(Q2 23/24) 73%	80%	80%	90%
Increased engagement across communications channels	22/23 total engagement LinkedIn - 639 Facebook - 5 X – (Dec – Mar 23) – 4.6% Website visitors: 5,000	LinkedIn -800 Facebook - 35 X – 20% Website visitors: 6000	LinkedIn -800 Facebook - 35 X – 20% Website visitors: 6000	LinkedIn -900 Facebook - 50 X – 25% Website visitors: 6500

5.2 Develop our asset management approach and strategy

KEY MEASURES	BASELINE	TARGET 24/25	TARGET 25/26	TARGET 26/27
Homes to minimum EPC Band C	82%	—————→		100% by 2030
Resident satisfaction with communal areas	(Q2 23/24) 68%	70%	73%	76%
Void turnaround times (days)	(22/23) 25	13	12	11
Gas safety certificate	100%	100%	100%	100%

5.3 Improve the integrity of our data

KEY MEASURES	BASELINE - % complete/ no. of gaps	TARGET 24/25	TARGET 25/26	TARGET 26/27
Ethnicity data	95% / 39	98% / 18	100%	100%
Nationality data	88% / 112	92% / 74	96% / 37	100%
Preferred contact method (over 16s)	96% / 41	97% / 30	99% / 15	100%
Preferred language (over16s)	77% / 215	89% (100)	95% (45)	100%
Religion	92% / 72	95% (48)	98% (24)	100%

5.4 Improve our services to residents and achieve operational excellence

KEY MEASURES	BASELINE	TARGET 24/25	TARGET 25/26	TARGET 26/27
Residents' overall satisfaction score	60%	65%	70%	75%
Residents' satisfaction with responsive repairs	65%	80%	85%	90%
Complaints – total number	70	60	50	40
Complaints handling satisfaction	Q2 23/24: 30%	40%	45%	55%
Social housing cost per home	£5,850	£6,250	£6,568	£6,845
Operating margin (%) - Overall	26.8%	28.2%	28.5%	28.0%
Turnover (from social housing lettings)	£7,046k	£7,498k	£7,720k	£7,948k
Current tenant rent arrears	5%	4%	3%	2.5%
Rent collection as % of tent due	98%	100.6%	100.6%	100.2%

