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# ARHAG HOUSING ASSOCIATION

## Social Inclusion Strategy

2011 - 2014

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*“A positive living experience for migrants and refugees, in homes to be proud of”*



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## **Introduction**

This social inclusion strategy sets out key priorities for the period 2011 – 2014 and beyond. This includes more detail in the period December 2011 – December 2012 and Arhag's aspirations beyond that. The strategy seeks to involve residents in a range of opportunities to work study or engage in social or leisure activities.

Arhag has many ambitions within its social inclusion strategy. As well as empowering residents generally key aims are to both improve the employability of residents and enhance their economic and social well being. Employability at its simplest means to make residents capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. Whereas well being is about seeking to make our residents comfortable, happy or healthy.

The social inclusion strategy is based on the evidence of residents expressed needs. There are of course other needs not expressed that the strategy seeks to address. This evidence of need has been drawn from diverse sources that are set out in the strategy. With limited resources at our disposal it is vital that the strategy achieves the best fit that Arhag can between resident aspirations and our resources.

The Arhag board has expressed its desire for some of the work in this area to extend beyond the remit of Arhag residents. An attempt is made in the strategy to show how this might be realised. This work though remains in its infancy.

## **Present Context**

The strategy is written in the context of one of the most challenging environments for the residents that Arhag houses. The economy is experiencing one of the slowest recoveries from a recession since the great depression of the 1930's. This includes a slow recovery in jobs lost and the highest level of unemployment in 17 years. Youth unemployment has exceeded 1 million recently.

There are substantial welfare reforms proposed to reduce the benefit bill by £11bn within 4 years. It is anticipated that absolute and relative poverty will increase amongst working age adults and children between now and 2014.

As part of the strategy there will be a need to prepare our residents for the impact of the welfare benefit reforms. This includes an explicit aim to help residents maximise their income and manage their finances. In doing so this should assist in making Arhag more robust overall and mitigate the effect of the significant policy changes proposed.

## **Outcomes of Previous Strategy**

This strategy follows on from the social inclusion strategy of 2008 – 2010. This earlier strategy had at its heart several principle objectives. These were to

- Engage tenants to build community cohesion
- Support tenants to access education and employment
- Raise awareness of health and financial issues

The impact and outcomes of the previous strategy were found on review to be limited. This includes little or no take up of some initiatives by residents (e.g. Community Chest).

The most successful elements were

- Community events to bring people together
- The award of bursaries
- Articles to raise awareness about health issues

A key achievement of this previous strategy however was to create the post of the Community Engagement Officer. This gave a focal point for activities around both social inclusion and resident involvement.

The other tangible and sustainable outcomes though are more difficult to discern in terms of the guiding principles of the previous strategy. This suggests that there is a clear need to enhance the monitoring of outputs and outcomes in the present strategy.

## **Evidence of Demand**

An effort has been made to identify the aspirations of Arhag residents around the social inclusion agenda. Those areas in which they would like Arhag to make some provision. Evidence from a number of areas has been collated.

### Tenant Profile - Key Beneficiaries

The client groups that Arhag houses are largely disadvantaged. This is reflected in the fact that some 70% of residents are in receipt of either full or partial housing benefit. There are though some identified beneficiaries who will be targeted with specific initiatives in the strategy. A reason for this is that they remain relatively under-represented in existing initiatives and activities to date.

- Young People
- Female headed households
- Residents with disability
- Refugees and Migrants

### Conference 2010

Although just 39 residents attended this conference a number of clear requests were made which have been repeated subsequently. Residents wanted support for raising capital for businesses. There was a need for more business advice and support.

Residents were keen to see how Arhag could apply for funding for community projects to help improve the social and economic well being of tenants. **(N.B. Despite this Arhag achieved no take up of its own community chest funds).**

Residents were keen that in return for greater involvement with Arhag they would like to develop their skills and experience. One formal course that is being considered that would meet this need is the CIH Level 2 certificate in housing. This area of employment remains relatively buoyant.

### Local Offer Consultation

This detailed consultation of approximately 22% of residents (160) was carried out in the period October 2010 – March 2011. There were two details of note emerging that related to the social inclusion strategy. The first was assistance in applying for funding for community projects and holding local events/activities to bring the community together.

### Account3 Research

Arhag commissioned a research project to look at the employment and enterprise aspirations of its residents. The project was part funded by the Housing Associations Charitable Trust, (HACT). The remit included Arhag residents and refugee/migrants more generally. This research took place in the first half of 2011 and involved 210 participants, (Arhag and non Arhag residents).

A significant proportion, 19%, of residents said that they were interested in setting up a business (mainly via the route of self-employment). There was more interest in self employment than business creation. The majority of these participants wanted help with start up funding and finding affordable premises/equipment.

It was considered that the relatively low level of interest in social enterprise may have related to participants understanding of social enterprise.

The survey found that 52% of residents were actively seeking work.

The support that people indicated they would need to facilitate their route back into employment included

- English (ESOL)
- Employability training
- Job Brokerage
- Volunteering placements
- Vocational training

### Conference 2011

An attempt was made at the resident conference in 2011 to use the interactive voting exercise to gather further evidence to help draw up the social inclusion strategy. Although once again the sample sizes were relatively small they added more detail. Almost 60 residents overall attended the conference and some 39 responded to the afternoon interactive voting session. The answers to a number of the most relevant

questions are set out below. These have helped in forming some of the specific actions.

- 30% of residents had had a loan in the past 3 years. These tended to be from conventional sources, (e.g. banks)
- 44% had a weekly household income of less than £150 a week (£7,800 annually)
- In terms of paying utility bills a majority of 33% used pre-payment meter (often an indication of previous debt) A further 37% paid by direct debit.
- 33% of residents indicated that they were unemployed.
- 42% indicated they were employed in a full or part time capacity.
- A majority of residents (35%) indicated that they needed no support to get back into work. (N.B. ***This may correlate with those residents in work***).
- The greatest forms of support for gaining work were indicated to be qualifications (26%) and work experience (18%).
- 17% of residents had caring responsibilities.
- 72% of residents indicated that they had access to the internet at home.
- In terms of health and well being the majority of residents (68%) indicated that their health was either good or very good. Information and advice was desired on exercise, stress and diet in particular.
- 89% of residents indicated that they would like Arhag to provide activities based around health issues.
- The main barriers to residents being more involved included their confidence, their health and their dependencies (i.e. caring responsibilities).

## **Proposed Areas of Delivery**

There are a number of areas of delivery for the social inclusion strategy that arise naturally from a review of the evidence collated. The majority of these are fairly conventional and follow on from work already started. The main areas for inclusion within the strategy are set out below.

### Employment Support and Advice

There is a need to provide support to residents to assist them in their search for employment. This could range from signposting residents to running workshops around specific skills (CV writing). The support that residents indicated would be of use included.

- Improving their English Language Skills
- Job Brokerage
- Volunteering placements and vocational training.
- Careers Fairs – (annual)

### Business Support

There were a number of key areas of business support that were highlighted in the Account3 research study. These are set out in brief below and range from the provision of information to supplying practical assets (e.g. premises and funding).

- Legal aspects of setting up a company
- Understanding financial processes
- Developing a business idea and business plan
- Finding start up finance

It has been agreed that Arhag will run a start your own business competition that will provide a number of these elements. This initiative in particular has the capacity to be extended beyond Arhag's residents.

Finding affordable premises for businesses, (business incubators) is something that Arhag should explore in the longer term. One model for this is Unity housing association in Leeds who have developed this capacity through a new part of their association, Unity enterprise. In future Arhag could consider the provision of either business workspace or serviced office units.

In order to meet a number of the needs indicated it is likely that Arhag would need to work with a partner with more experience and relevant skills.

### Financial Inclusion

The money matters workshop at the 2011 resident conference was particularly over subscribed. This offered residents a model for managing their money. The vast majority of Arhag residents (70%) receive some form of housing benefit a large volume of who are in receipt of partial benefit.

There is much merit in providing more support to households to manage their money on a day-to-day basis. This will be particularly relevant when universal credit is introduced from 2013. The government proposes to pay universal credit as a monthly sum into residents' bank account. This includes the housing element, as in the governments present plans they proposed the end of direct housing payments to all except defined 'vulnerable residents'.

There is a need to explore how to facilitate residents switching fuel providers. A lot of this availability is via the internet. There is a need to raise awareness of economic energy tariffs in pre-tenancy sign up or other interviews.

A range of other financial inclusion initiatives are,

- Provide financial capability training.
- Provide money and debt advice and creditor advocacy (i.e. management of non housing debts)
- Provide welfare benefit advice
- Provide transport for residents to venues/housing office for specific events/surgeries

- Run an annual welfare benefit take up campaign

### Volunteer and work placement

A substantial minority of residents expressed an interest in gaining work experience. This in practice could be with either Arhag or some of its partners. Arhag will need to spend some time identifying volunteer placements. An aim ideally should be to create a volunteer pyramid so that residents can be co-opted to support other residents.

### Qualifications

A large number of residents indicated that they would like qualifications to assist them to return to work. Arhag needs to commit to brokering places with partners on courses that deliver some form of accreditation upon completion. In some instances (e.g. CIH) it may be possible to offer places directly.

### Educational bursaries

This was one of the more successful elements of the previous strategy insofar as awards of up to £500 were made to residents. They were initially conceived as young people's bursaries but in practice have been distributed more widely. In 2010/2011 four awards were made but none to women which needs to be rectified. It is suggested that a minimum number of awards be made available each year.

It is proposed to revise the criteria used in the allocation of these awards.

It is also suggested that a separate fund be established to pay a comparable amount as a working opportunities fund to assist people at the start of employment.

### Digital Inclusion

At the conference 70% of residents indicated that they had access to the internet at home. This still leaves a sizeable minority (30%) without this access. The universal credit when it is introduced will rely mainly upon internet access. There is a need to ensure either that residents on universal credit will have the capacity or access to use the internet by that time.

## **Resources**

The previous social inclusion strategy was accompanied by an under spend of the monies allocated to resource the work. Although the CEO post was created there was a lack of capacity to generate demand and implement programmes of delivery. It is anticipated that working in partnership should boost Arhag's capacity both to deliver and therefore the rate of expenditure.

A significant part of the strategy will be in fostering and supporting key partnerships. A preference would be for some form of partnering framework with 3 or 4 key partners.

An effort should also be made in due course to train volunteers who can add to Arhag's capacity eventually.

In order to support an expanding ambition there is a need to identify the resources that will be used to fund the delivery of the social inclusion strategy. A cost of the initiatives proposed over the next rolling year has been considered. This indicates spend in the region of £40,000 - £50,000. The social inclusion budget spend over the next 12 months will be inflated by the need to fund the Start Your Own business competition agreed by the Arhag Board. This initiative alone will cost some £24,000. It is hoped to raise approximately £7,500 of this sum externally.

It is suggested that the social inclusion fund be restored to a minimum level of £30,000 a year from the 2012/2013 financial year. An element of funding from other sources will also be sought, legacy fund and external sources.

Resources may be better used in the context of partnerships with key external providers.

## **Social Inclusion Delivery**

### Partnership Working

The lack of capacity to deliver in the past has proved a constraint. Although some clear ambition and direction of travel has been laid out delivery has lagged behind. The one key element of infrastructure put in place has been the appointment of a full time CEO and the creation of an annual social inclusion budget.

There are some existing partnerships that Arhag will need to continue to build upon. In order to extend Arhag's capacity new sustainable partnerships will also be required.

An initial part of the action plan is focussed on consolidating this infrastructure. It is believed that the best approach would be to work in partnership with key agencies. Because of the sums of money proposed and the need to build in commitment there may be a need to either have some procurement process for the provision of employment services or at least some process of establishing through comparison value for money.

An intention is to work with partners with a clear track record of delivery in the key areas of social inclusion delivery service. This may mean on occasion that costs increase. A number of dialogues have been opened with potential partners but no final decision made.

A key part of the CEO role would be to manage these partnerships and their outcomes. A list of currently considered partners is set out in **Appendix A**.

It is suggested that where possible payment to partners should be made on the basis of outcomes achieved.

### Pathways

It is suggested as well that the objectives in the strategy be written with reference to the business plan but around the several pathways indicated below.

- Education
- Employment
- Enterprise
- Health
- Leisure

This would provide part of the framework for the social inclusion strategy action plan.

### Place

It is proposed that the social inclusion strategy work be clustered on key areas within which Arhag works. This would require that residents outside of these key 'places' would be required to travel further. Depending of

the success of initiatives these might be rolled out further. An initial focus should be on an 'East' London quadrant embracing, Newham and Tower Hamlets (approximately 363 properties)

A central, northern and western quadrant covering, Camden, Westminster, Islington and Haringey, (approximately 251 properties)

### Target Groups

There is a need as well to consider social inclusion initiatives that are targeted at key client groups. These have been identified through a review of the tenant profile and the understanding gathered of the types of household that we house.

**Female Headed Households** - Arhag continues to house a large volume of female headed households. These households will often have caring dependencies that would need to be considered as part of the strategy.

**Young people** – A recurrent feature is the under-representation of young people (16 – 25) in activities carried out by Arhag. At this year's residents conference, by the time the interactive voting took place, there were no people below the age of 25 either participating or whose vote was registered.

**Residents with disabilities** – historical tenant profile data indicates that a large volume of residents (25%) have some form of disability. An offer is needed in the social inclusion strategy that addresses the specific needs of this community.

**Wider refugees and migrants** – Arhag retains a 13 unit hostel facility with residents who have particular needs around building capacity and providing support to. There is an ambition to work with this group overall. The Account3 research study included some work around the needs of refugees and migrants that were not Arhag residents.

### **Timescales**

It is proposed that the plan runs over the period 2011 – 2014 in terms of detail but that some aspirations for beyond this period are set both to inform future strategy and business planning. A review of the action plan on annual basis should be carried out to refresh it.

Some provisional timescales for delivery are set out partly as a means of managing expectations. A key reason for this is the need to build capacity in some areas before initiating longer term programmes.

**Quick Wins (6 months)** - It is suggested that during this period those items with the capacity to deliver by next summer be identified. This includes some research but also fulfilling any outstanding commitments. A key one of these would be the Start Your Own Business competition.

**Year 1 (April 2012 – March 2013)** - This year should see the launch of Arhag's main programmes of activity linked to a possible increase in funds.

**Year 2 (April 2013 – March 2014)** – review and continuation of main programme activity.

## **Key Strategic Objectives – Social Inclusion**

The key strategic objectives set out have been written with reference to the proposed areas of delivery. These provide the key headings around which the action plan is organised.

- To provide Employment Support Advice and Signposting Services.
- To provide support/assistance to residents to set up their own businesses or social enterprises.
- To help our residents manage their money resources through financial inclusion advice and welfare benefits advice provision.
- To help residents improve their educational outcomes
- To engage with a diverse range of corporate and key partners around delivery and the CSR agenda
- To improve the well being of residents through a wider range of health and leisure activities.

The strategy is accompanied by a detailed action plan. A framework for monitoring is suggested with quarterly (bi-annual) monitoring. This would help more clearly establish the track record for Arhag's performance in

these areas. A mechanism/forum for monitoring is suggested. The CEO would retain the responsibility for collating information on the outputs and outcomes. A small suite of monitoring reports/sheets would need to be prepared in conjunction with the Quality and Performance Manager.

## Measurement of Impact

There is a need to ensure that the impact of the social inclusion strategy and the extra value that it provides is measured in some way. This should include a small suite of both output and outcome measures. These will be related to the outcomes set out in the action plan. A summary of some of the expected targets are set out in the table below.

Service Delivery Area	Targets
Employment support	X volume of residents to attend employability training
Financial Inclusion	X residents to receive debt advice
Financial Inclusion	X residents to receive money guidance/energy and welfare benefits support
Financial Inclusion	X% of residents join a credit union
Employability	X work experience placements (Arhag/partners)
Education	X residents using computers (not previously doing so).
Education	X residents having access to computers (not previously with access).
Partnership	X funds of cash and in-kind support brought in from private sector partners

It is vital as well to ensure that the action plan is reviewed on a periodic basis. Insofar as the objectives contribute to the corporate business of Arhag there should be some update to an established forum and included in the annual forward plan calendar. The recommended forums are could include a mix of the following; the senior management team, the Arhag board and the Equality and Diversity Steering Group.