



Building a truly modern
housing association

Apprenticeship Strategy

How providing life
skills will help drive
the journey

2021-2026





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Introduction to the Strategy

We have an ambitious five year Corporate Strategy which builds on the strengths that come from our history to develop a business which will be fit for the future of our customers and communities.

Our strategy identifies **six themes** that will support us in our journey to become **a truly modern housing association**:

This Apprenticeship Strategy is designed to support the delivery of the new Corporate Strategy and reflects the passion we have for helping Apprentices develop the skills, behaviours, experience and confidence they need to understand their individual purpose and to go out and make our localities a better place.



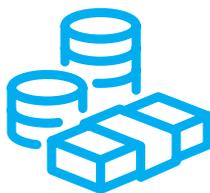
Our Customers



Culture of People and Continuous Improvement



Sustainability, Environmental and Social Value Creation



Economic Value Creation



Digital and Intelligence



Leader, Partner and Influencer





Our Apprenticeship Vision

We aim to give our apprentices the skills, behaviours, experience and confidence to understand their individual purpose and to go out and make our communities a better place.

There are **five** fundamental pillars that underpin this **vision**:

► **Social mobility**

Whether this is apprentices, trainees, or existing colleagues, we want to open up choices and opportunity for people.

► **Help people find their purpose**

Help people understand why they come to work each day and the contribution that they make.

► **Making our communities a better place**

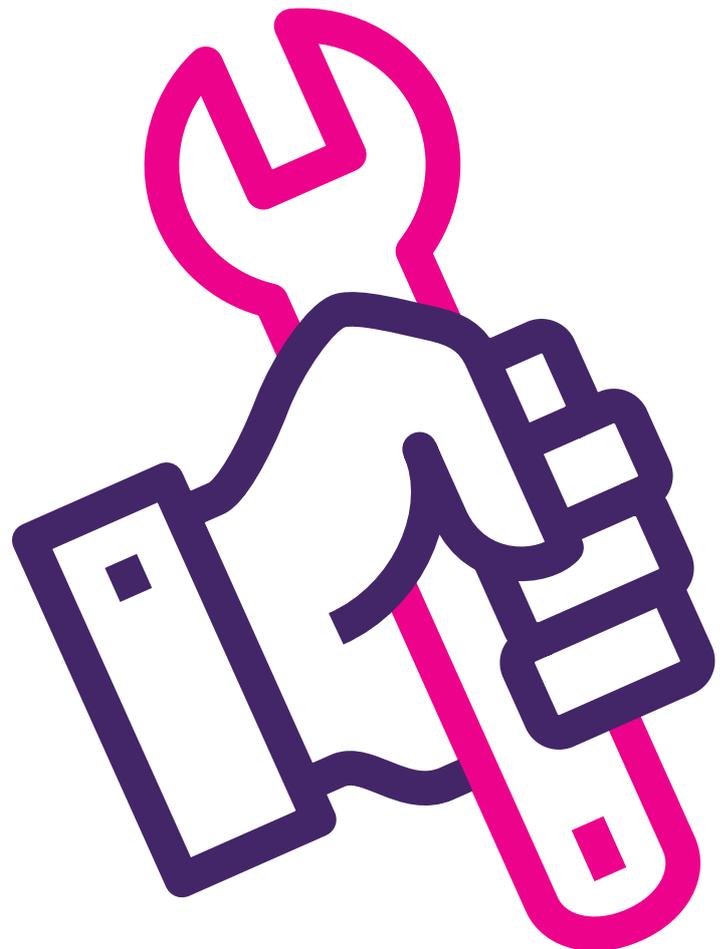
We want to give every Apprentice that comes through our doors the skills and experience to go out and make our communities a better place.

► **Maximise uniqueness**

We want to make sure the development that we provide helps people find their unique voice and maximises their contribution in the business.

► **Bring your best**

We want everyone across the business to feel as though they have a responsibility to be the best that they can be. We want to make it easier for people to give their best - every day. We want people to reach their potential.





The primary aim of this Strategy is to increase the number of apprenticeships that we offer as an organisation in a planned, managed and sustainable way. We will work closely with our partners to support the growth in apprenticeships, champion diversity, support greater social mobility, reduce skills gaps and ensure that future skills are developed for the organisation, the local economy and the wider community.

This Strategy sets out a balanced approach to planning Apprenticeships and Levy Management that ensures a sustainable year on year programme which is impactful and measurable. This is not a numbers game; it should be and will be linked to identified skills requirements, retention, recruitment strategies and business needs.

Our Apprenticeship Programme will support people at the start of their careers and also gives existing colleagues the opportunity to up-skill by using apprenticeship standards provided via the Apprenticeship Levy. We aim to have apprentice opportunities in each area of the business, contributing to the creation of a forward looking, innovative business full of ambition and new ideas.

Our apprenticeship model has been designed to be forward thinking and deliver true benefits to the organisation, our employees and the communities in which we work. We will deliver a programme that can be mapped from level 2 to level 7 demonstrating quality learning that enables people to reach their full potential.

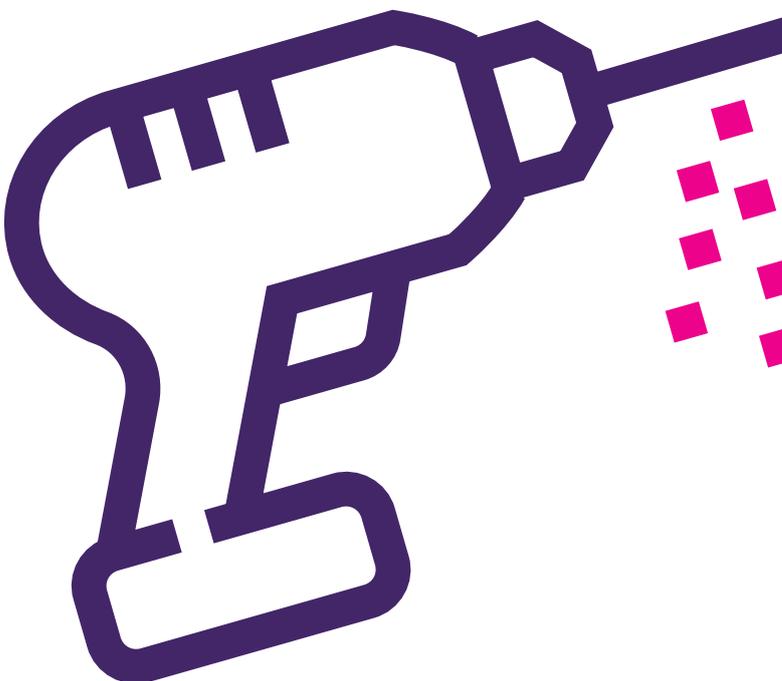
As a significant employer, across a wide geography we have a real opportunity to give people multiple opportunities to get to know the world of work, understand what work is, explore their options and build real confidence about their future. We will commit to working with a number of stakeholders so we are seen as key in promoting the benefits of apprenticeships and the “world of housing” and its career opportunities to all.

We will work with government initiatives, National Apprentice Service (NAS), schools, colleges and other providers to support young people through this challenging time and beyond.

This strategy outlines what we aim to achieve through to 2026.

Our Key Aspirations

- By 2026, 10% of our workforce will be studying an Apprenticeship Standard – we will support people in every area of the business from entry level right up to Level 7.
- We will commit to paying our apprentices over and above the apprenticeship minimum wage.
- We will make sure that we set our Apprentices up for success by providing over and above the minimum criteria for off the job training and study.
- We want to be recognised as the go to place for quality apprenticeships.





People and Workplace

Learning is a very human thing, so it's important that we create an environment where our Apprentices can be successful and be the best that they can be.

Making sure that we create a support network that ensures our Apprentices move through their development plans and pathways smoothly and have regular progress touchpoints along the way will help to flag any potential risks and challenges that may have an impact upon successful completion.

Our support structure will help our Apprentices feel confident as they explore and push their boundaries, and help them to keep on track.

Apprenticeships don't just bring benefits to the learner. Apprenticeships also give our colleagues opportunities to supervise and mentor people - opportunities that they previously may not have had.

They are also a great opportunity for new and existing colleagues to share and pass on knowledge and experience (and that's a two way thing).

Our objectives are to have an apprenticeship programme that supports people at the start of their careers and gives existing colleagues the opportunity to up-skill by using apprenticeship standards funded via the Apprenticeship Levy allowing us to fully utilise the funds available.





Our Commitments

We will...	How will we make this happen?
<p>Create an Apprenticeship Programme that is open to everyone.</p>	<p>We will work across the organisation as well as with schools, partners and suppliers, to ensure apprenticeships are open to candidates from all backgrounds, as well as increasing representation from BAME candidates, women in construction, candidates with learning difficulties or disabilities, and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.</p> <p>We will apply to be members of the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network (ADCN) - a network of employers committed to widening participation in apprenticeships, championing diversity and supporting greater social mobility.</p> <p>We will conduct outreach to promote apprenticeships in schools and within our communities.</p> <p>We will identify and work with schools with high levels of diversity.</p>
<p>Design programmes that set our Apprentices up for success.</p>	<p>We will appoint a dedicated person to drive and manage the Apprenticeship agenda.</p> <p>We will establish an internal peer mentoring network to support all of our Apprentices - whatever the level, whatever the role.</p>
<p>Develop Apprenticeship Learning Communities across the business that enable connection and collaboration.</p>	<p>We will create forums and networks (digital or face to face) that connect our Apprentice Learning Community.</p> <p>We will make sure that our Apprentices have the opportunity to get involved in 'impact projects' as a part of their Apprenticeship - giving them an opportunity to make a difference.</p>
<p>Build an approach to Apprenticeships that creates sustainable impact across the business.</p>	<p>Establish and support a network of Apprenticeship Ambassadors from across the business that will help us deliver this Strategy.</p>
<p>Enable all Apprentices to maximise their uniqueness and help them discover what makes them stand out.</p>	<p>We will encourage our Apprentices to get involved in areas and groups outside of their role, so that they can build their knowledge of business operations and develop their self-confidence.</p>
<p>Celebrate and evaluate our achievements and successes.</p>	<p>We will create opportunities and mechanisms to celebrate the successes of our Apprentices both internally and externally.</p> <p>We will ensure that our Apprenticeship Programme is continuously evaluated to monitor success and ensure that areas for improvement are identified.</p>



People and Communities

From the work that we do, it is evident that some communities and groups suffer more than others in terms of unemployment and so there is a need to identify ways to concentrate effort among those neighbourhoods and groups who are experiencing particular hardships in terms of accessing training and the labour market.

The provision of **'earn and learn'** training opportunities is key. Young people from all backgrounds must be made aware of the many technical and vocational options available today. 'Earn and learn' training opportunities, such as apprenticeships, offer people the chance to be paid whilst training on-the-job and can provide long term, fulfilling careers – they give people the chance to work towards a qualification whilst being paid, such as apprenticeships and degree apprenticeships.

We will commit to working with our Partners (for example, schools, colleges, Careers and Enterprise Company and Local Enterprise Partnerships) to give young people multiple opportunities to get to know the world of work, understand what work is, explore their options and build real confidence about their future. The quality of these experiences has a high impact on employability.

Having a diverse workforce, which encompasses many different talents, backgrounds and experiences is crucial if we are to develop an evolving organisation. Put simply, improving social mobility is vital for the future of individuals, employers and the country as a whole.





Our Commitments

We will...	How will we make this happen?
<p>Actively work with schools and providers to support and improve individual schools ability to meet their Gatsby Benchmark requirements and increase apprenticeship numbers across our areas of operation.</p>	<p>We will strengthen our relationship with the schools within our communities and provide practical help to enable students to have encounters with us an employer.</p> <p>We will have representation at an Enterprise Advisor level to ensure that we have strong connections between us as an employer and identified schools/colleges.</p>
<p>Be Champions of Apprenticeships as a route to successful careers.</p>	<p>We will work with schools and partners to improve awareness and understanding of what apprenticeships are, what they offer and the levels available to address outdated perceptions.</p>
<p>Promote a culture of supporting work experience opportunities.</p>	<p>We will put in place a robust framework for managing work experience requests and placements across the business.</p>
<p>Champion all that the 'world of housing' has to offer.</p>	<p>We will work with schools, colleges, universities and partners to raise the profile of the great career opportunities offered not just by us but within the 'world of housing' and the opportunities we provide for alternative routes to gaining qualifications.</p> <p>We will be proactive in seeking out opportunities to develop external networks and attend external events that promote what we do.</p>
<p>Ensure that our model encompasses a social mobility strategy where people with all levels of skills and qualification are included. We look at the whole person.</p>	<p>We will develop strong links with schools and colleges in deprived areas within our localities and increase the access young people in those areas have to workplaces, mentors and work experience.</p> <p>Mapping the areas and communities that we cover against our operating areas social mobility cold-spots, enabling us to work with young people who have the greatest need for our support.</p> <p>We will work with people at the Pre-Apprenticeship stage so that they understand the importance of attaining English and Maths qualifications. We will support people to develop these skills through working with schools and colleges and providing real life insights into routes to careers.</p> <p>We will pay over and above the apprentice minimum wage for everyone on an Apprenticeship with us. We will design an appropriate and effective pay structure for Apprentices that supports development and progression.</p> <p>Work across the business and with stakeholders to identify opportunities to develop employability skills and provide coaching to future talent.</p>



Impact and Planning

To ensure that we really benefit from this Strategy and achieve our key aspirations, we will need to progress an approach that has alignment with and strong links to recruitment, talent management and succession planning.

We need to make sure that we have effective processes in place to understand and identify the skills needed within the business over the next 2-5 years.

Through putting Apprenticeships at the heart of workforce planning we will be able to identify business unit intentions with regards to Apprenticeships.

Once we have established this as a starting point, we then need to make sure that the relevant and appropriate Apprenticeship Standards are in place to support our skills needs – making sure that we work effectively with providers to get high quality training in place. Our approach needs timely oversight on quality and continual improvement.





Our Commitments

We will...	How will we make this happen?
Ensure that we make effective use of the Apprenticeship Levy.	<p>We will map our existing training programmes, courses and qualifications and identify corresponding opportunities to utilise the apprenticeship model.</p> <p>Within the funding rules, we will seek to transfer any unused Levy funds to support businesses either within our supply chain or non-supply chain organisations, identifying opportunities that fit with our Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR).</p>
Support the Governments drive to increase the number of Apprentices.	We have set ourselves the ambitious target of achieving 10% of our workforce studying an Apprenticeship by 2026.
Work with teams across the business to make sure that Workforce Planning is effective in identifying skills gaps and identifying posts that are suitable for Apprentices.	<p>We will identify the roles that are likely to need recruitment over the next two years (either existing roles or those with a natural turnover).</p> <p>We will work with managers to identify the skills that we are currently outsourcing and whether we could bring those in-house.</p>
Have an effective approach to attracting and recruiting Apprentices.	<p>We will work with managers and schools to establish a practice of managing recruitment campaigns in line with school leaver patterns.</p> <p>Working in partnership with teams across the business, we will assess every vacancy to see if it can become an apprentice opportunity.</p> <p>We will review our current recruitment practices to make sure we attract a diverse talent pool with a focus on assessing future potential, instead of past achievement.</p>
Ensure that we embed Apprenticeships into our Talent Management strategies.	We will adopt apprenticeships as part of a wider talent management strategy, and will commit to nurture talent from within the business.
Make effective use of data management and reporting.	We will develop a set of key metrics that will allow us to track the success of our programme and the Apprentices themselves.

Our Partners

By working with key stakeholders and partners, both inside and outside of the organisation, we will look to actively strengthen the relationship we have with the schools and providers across our areas of operations.

We will seek opportunities to influence the local and National Apprenticeship Agenda and drive forward the Government's plan for developing and growing 16-24 Apprenticeships, including Advanced and Higher/Degree Levels.

We have a significant responsibility to the Apprentices in our workforce and the students that trust us with providing their work experience – they need smooth management and clear learning effectiveness.

Through effective partnering we can, for example, provide students with opportunities to work side by side with our very own subject matter experts, enable students to emerge from these experiences with real world knowledge and application and also give our very own colleagues the opportunity to give back to their occupations by nurturing and directing tomorrow's professionals.





Our Commitments

We will...	How will we make this happen?
Ensure that value for money and quality are critical decision-making factors.	<p>When selecting and working with external providers and partners for the first time, we will undertake due diligence and quality assessments.</p> <p>We will undertake negotiation of contracts, price and agree our organisational requirements with our providers to ensure business fit.</p> <p>We will create Service Level Agreements (SLA's) to manage effective working relationships with our providers, clearly setting out the responsibilities and duties of each partner, including measures and deadlines.</p>
Support the development of new Apprenticeship Standards Pathways.	We commit to actively identifying and taking part in Trailblazer Groups where we can influence or develop an Apprenticeship Standard for occupations that are relevant to our business.
Develop strategic partnerships that will benefit our Apprentices and colleges.	We will identify opportunities for partnering with colleges to share skills and provide work experience.
Work with providers to allow them the opportunity to pilot with us new areas of delivery that will help us fill our skills gaps.	We will identify appropriate opportunities for piloting to support our apprenticeship programme, delivery of our strategy and identification of skills gaps. This could be new areas of delivery or methods of delivery.
Be visible as an active employer who advocates Apprenticeships.	<p>We will support and participate in National Apprenticeship Week.</p> <p>We will be an active panel member on the National Apprenticeship Awards Judging Panel – gaining valuable insights on current best practice.</p>
Recognise that we are a key part of the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS), Provider and Employer relationship triangle.	We will take every opportunity to provide feedback to the NAS on improvements and opportunities for future developments.
Be at the forefront of influencing future skills requirements and how to meet them.	We will have representation on, for example, the Future Skills Board, and the West Midlands Apprenticeship Ambassador Network (WMAAN), both of which actively engage in a range of activities and events that promote and demonstrate how Apprenticeships enable progression opportunities to both Apprentices and employers.



For further information on Apprenticeships please contact:

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