



better homes and better
services for better lives

More than bricks

**Are social housing providers best placed
to offer support to tenants?**

Report prepared for Acis Group Ltd
by Service Insights Ltd

March 2018



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Executive summary

It is a challenging time for social housing providers. In 2016/17, the annual government-imposed one per cent rent reductions started to come into force, ensuring registered providers had to tighten their belts once more. This, coupled with the need to continue developing new homes to ease the housing crisis, is believed to have led to many providers reducing or even halting the amount of wider support services they offer to their tenants.

At the same time, support services offered through the public and private sector have also decreased. From adult education, health to employability support, it is apparent many social housing tenants are struggling to find the help they need.

Acis, a registered provider which owns and manages almost 7,000 properties across the midlands and north of England, is not one of the providers to reduce or stop its support. In fact is quite the opposite. Recognising its tenants often present with multiple or complex needs, it has decided to enhance the services it offers in a bid to increase customer satisfaction and tenancy sustainment and fully deliver on its charitable objectives.

This report looks at why social housing providers may be best placed to offer support to tenants as they look to overcome barriers which face them in everyday life.

Set against the context of new challenges facing housing support in the social housing sector, this report is intended to generate focus and debate on the topic by asking *why are social housing providers best placed to provide support?*

Key findings:

The majority of social housing providers perceive that they are best placed to offer support to tenants. This was felt to be due to the proximity of working in communities - close enough to have some understanding of tenants' lives, the challenges they face and having a unique level of access. It was also acknowledged however that where appropriate, signposting to specialist support services may be best.

Although respondents were not requested to form a consensus on a definition of 'housing support', individual definitions suggested that **support should be available to all tenants** and be able to be accessed in multiple ways. It should have a focus on personalisation and be constantly reviewed to ensure that services are meeting tenants' needs.

It is clear **a wide range of housing support services are offered by organisations, including benefits and budgeting support, health and wellbeing support and various types of skills training.** While this is useful information, it is clear that to fully understand the scope and availability of housing support services across the UK, a larger scale mapping exercise would need to be undertaken. Similar initiatives have already begun (for example for health services via the National Housing Federation) and this could form a way for organisations to not only better understand the scope of service availability, but to also provide a foundation for collaborative working or funding.

There is a demand for greater levels of support, to help organisations sustain tenancies, maintain philanthropic aims and meet the needs of the community. The majority (60%) of organisational respondents stated they would like to provide support services which they are not currently able to do so.

More than 90% of organisations stated their **support services had been impacted by funding cuts** over the last three to five years, while the majority cited mostly negative expectations towards the future funding of support over the next three to five years. Despite such funding challenges, organisations overwhelmingly agree that support services should be delivered through the social housing sector.

Looking from the other side of the fence, **tenants' awareness of support services appears to be low,** however it is encouraging to see that a relatively high proportion of tenants say they would be willing to contact their provider for assistance if required. The majority of tenants also believed they knew where to find support in their local area if need be – but worryingly, 33% of tenants say they would not know where to go for help or support. This suggests a gap in awareness for a fairly significant proportion of tenants and implies there is still a need to offer and promote housing support services to those in need.

What Acis is doing

Customers – tenants, their families and the wider communities in which they work – are at the heart of what Acis does. The organisation has fundamentally reviewed and redeveloped its service offer to its customers over the last few years to ensure it is customer first and changes to customer need.

Following extensive insight from customers and analysis of data (including anecdotal), of the issues affecting customers, Acis understands that offering the right support at the right time is vital to sustaining a tenancy, and live a fulfilling life.

In 2017, Acis launched its 'Focus On' initiatives, designed to support customers in four key areas of their lives. Part of this included a new assessment process to help the organisation identify needs much earlier.

In a period between February-November 2017, 557 customer assessments were carried out. As a result of these assessments, 271 (49%) customers were found to have some level of support needs.

Some 107 (39%) cases of the 271 needed a high level of support so they were referred into Acis' Supporting Foundations service – a bespoke and personalised service aimed at improving the situations of individuals concerned. Going further, 122 referrals to external agencies have been made to get more intensive advice and support.

Acis believes this support is, directly or indirectly, increasing the duration of tenancies. In 2016, the average length of an Acis tenancy was 425 weeks. In 2017, following the introduction of assessments and subsequent enhanced support services, the average length of tenancies had increased by 17 weeks – almost four months – to 442 weeks. Although there could be other factors, the number of current and former arrears fell over a twelve-month period from 2.49% to 2.14%.

Acis understands it cannot work alone to achieve positive outcomes for its customers and has built up an extensive network of partner agencies to address any issues that might be affecting a customer's life.

1. Introduction

Social housing has traditionally sought to meet some of the most basic housing needs of society. Through the current provision of 3.9 million homes in England¹, different models of support have developed over time including wide ranging support services for individuals to meet the sectors' philanthropic aims, but in doing so, also supporting business objectives via sustainable tenancy outcomes. As recently noted by McDonnell², "housing without adequate support is not a long-term solution" as "Associations have a responsibility to identify households that may be struggling to manage their tenancies and intervene early to help sustain their tenancies".

During the last decade however, new challenges to the viability of support have become apparent. These included a prolonged period of financial austerity resulting from the 2008 financial crash which directly influenced policy changes within the sector. These aimed at enabling housing associations and local authorities to deliver efficiency savings from the £13 billion annual subsidy received from the taxpayer and assist in reducing the welfare bill³. By enabling a 1% reduction in rent per year from April 2016, reductions of around £130m in housing association income were predicted along with government savings of around £4.3bn over a five-year period.

1 Department for Communities and Local Government (2017) English Housing Survey, Social Rented Sector, 2015-2016.

2 McDonnell, M. (2017) Housing without adequate support is not a long-term solution. Inside Housing, London, UK.

3 HM Treasury (2015) Policy Paper, Summer Budget 2015.

As housing associations often have more than half of their revenues coming from housing benefit⁴, it was widely recognised that the sector faced a period of new uncertainty and change.

Resulting from such cuts in funding, the sector is now beginning to adopt more commercial business models⁵ which a decade ago would have seemed unthinkable.

Set against this wider context and new operating environment, this report aims to provide a timely assessment of perceptions of housing support by asking *why are social housing providers best placed to provide support?*

Taking a customer perspective, housing support can be defined as providing *“help to enable you to manage day-to-day while living in your own home”*⁶. Building upon this, **for the purpose of this report, the concept of support is seen as added value support, described by Acis as “help given to customers (those who are tenants, their families and the wider communities in which we work) over and above the landlord responsibility”**.

An example of the kind of support provided in the sector is illustrated by the four areas provided by Acis, seen as follows:

- A tenancy support service is available for anyone who may have not rented before or need an extra bit of support to manage their tenancy. This may include aspects such as budgeting, setting up utilities, debt

advice, ID, and support with wider issues like mental health, confidence, or family breakdowns.

- An Energy Management Officer can support tenants to understand their energy bills, look at how tenants can be more energy efficient in their home, and check they have the best energy deal.
- Acis’ online ‘Infohub’ offers hints and advice on a wide range of topics, designed to make the customer’s life a little easier. It offers help with heating systems in the home, healthy eating, money advice, for example.
- Acis works with local employers and training providers to help tenants find work that is right for them, starting with volunteering opportunities and gaining experience for their CV.

While this provides some context to the types of support offered, as is seen throughout this report, support can take many forms to assist tenants. It is worth noting that there are few centralised resources providing a national picture of support services, however examples are beginning to be founded (for example, see the National Housing Federation’s *‘Health interventions by housing associations’*⁷). Such examples could form part of the future of support service delivery.

4 Financial Times (2015) Whitehall eyes sweeping housing benefit cuts.

5 Financial Times (2017) UK housing associations use the lure of luxury in social mission.

6 Shelter (2015) Help with housing support. Available online.

7 National Housing Federation (2017) Health interventions by housing associations. Available online at <https://www.housing.org.uk/topics/health-care-and-housing/what-do-good-partnerships-look-like/>

2. Methodology

In order to answer the central question of *“Why are social housing providers best placed to provide support?”*, two further research questions were identified as follows:

- *In terms of delivering support to social housing tenants, what services are being provided, who provides them, and what is perceived to be successful?*
- *What do social housing providers contribute in their offer of support?*

A mixed methods research design blending quantitative and qualitative questions was developed using telephone interviews and an online survey seeking to better understand perspectives of both tenants (users or potential users of support) and the view of organisations providing support.

Firstly, for the tenant survey, telephone interviews were undertaken with a randomised sample of 250 Acis tenants using a question set developed between Acis and Service Insights Ltd. Analysis was undertaken using Snap Survey software for quantitative questions and thematic analysis was undertaken for qualitative questions.

Secondly, for the organisational perspective, an online survey was circulated via Acis to a purposive sample of approximately 30 previously known contacts in social housing organisations deemed able to answer questions on the topic of housing support. This question set was also developed between Acis and Service Insights Ltd, with analysis undertaken using Snap Survey software for quantitative questions and thematic analysis undertaken for qualitative questions.

3. Findings

– organisational perspective

This section provides the findings from the organisational perspective of support. A total of 21 responses were gained from the online survey request sent from Acis. These are presented below with the three sub-headings used in survey –

Part 1: A background to support

Part 2: Support services provided, and

Part 3: Understanding success.

Part 1: A background to support

Are social housing providers best placed to offer support to tenants?

Firstly, this question sought to establish a fundamental question of whether the housing sector perceives it is best placed to offer support to tenants. A total of 90.4% of respondents agreed with the question, from which 33.3% 'strongly' agreed. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

A further 9.6% stated they 'neither agreed nor disagreed'. Importantly, no respondents stated they disagreed with the question.

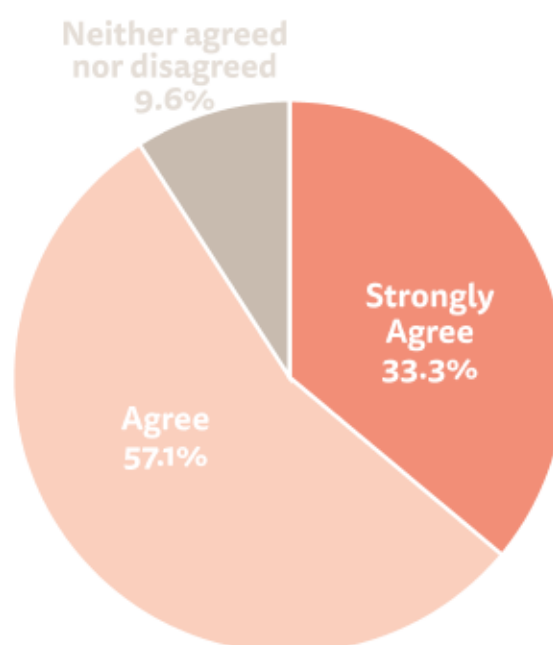


Figure 1: Are social housing providers best placed to offer support to tenants?

A follow-on question was posed asking to "briefly tell us why you gave that answer?". Sixteen respondents provided comments, from which all cited the strong and unique position social housing providers find themselves in terms of knowledge and understanding of support issues. A selection of examples are seen below:

"We're close enough to have some understanding of tenants' lives and challenges."

"We have a unique level of access to our tenants and can see first-hand through our engagement with them the issues they face and the support they may need; be this financial, employment or other such assistance."

"Housing associations are in a good place to understand the needs of their tenants and either directly support them or refer them to other agencies."

"I think that social landlords are not (or at least our organisation and I hope other Registered Providers too) motivated by profit. The housing association (and then the sector) was created to catch the most vulnerable and poor in society and offer good quality secure homes. That's why we should be leading on providing support for the elderly, disabled and those claiming welfare benefits..."

Limitations of providing support were also noted alongside the ability of social housing providers to sign-post to other agencies where necessary, for example:

"In certain cases, social landlords are in a great position to support tenants - managing their tenancy, paying rent, etc. However, where there are very specific needs, there needs to be links with specialist support providers who are in a better position to assist."

Definition of support

Ten respondents answered this question with aspects cited such as the importance of offering support to all tenants which is accessible in multiple ways, the importance of *personalisation*, and finally, identifying the need to constantly review service offers to ensure support services meet tenant's needs. Examples of each of these are seen below:

"I would define support as being integrated into everything we do. Our customers are our first priority and this is clear in our mission, vision and everyday services. Support is available to tenants via all methods of contact from simply a telephone call to more in-depth and specific support, e.g. financial advisory service, mental health specialists."

"Most of our support services are tailored to individuals. We offer benefit and money advice, help to start up a business, grow a business and into employment. Our older people care services offer packages of support depending on need. Overall, we are firm but fair to help customers sustain their tenancies."

"We are constantly looking at our service offer including what and how we interact with residents. We carry out customer surveys to check how we are performing on a regular basis. We support our residents in various ways from offering wellbeing checks, morning check calls, debt management, welfare advice to arranging activities."

Part 2: Support services provided

The second part of the organisational survey further explored the current support services provided.

Types of support services offered

Respondents were asked about the types of services offered by their organisation. Using a list of six pre-determined variables agreed with Acis, all were ranked by more than half of the organisations asked. The majority (92.3%) stated they provided benefits and budgeting support, 84.6% stated they provided tenancy support, and 76.9% provided social inclusion support. Additionally, nearly 70% (69.2%) stated they provided digital inclusion support, thereby addressing the relatively new concept of digital inequality. Finally, 69.2% provided health and wellbeing support, and 61.5% provided employability support. This is illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Of those who stated 'other' (23.1%), responses included technology adoption through telecare and telehealth; help with starting or growing a business; and training courses in ESOL (English as a second language), confidence building, addiction support services, and other specialised support.

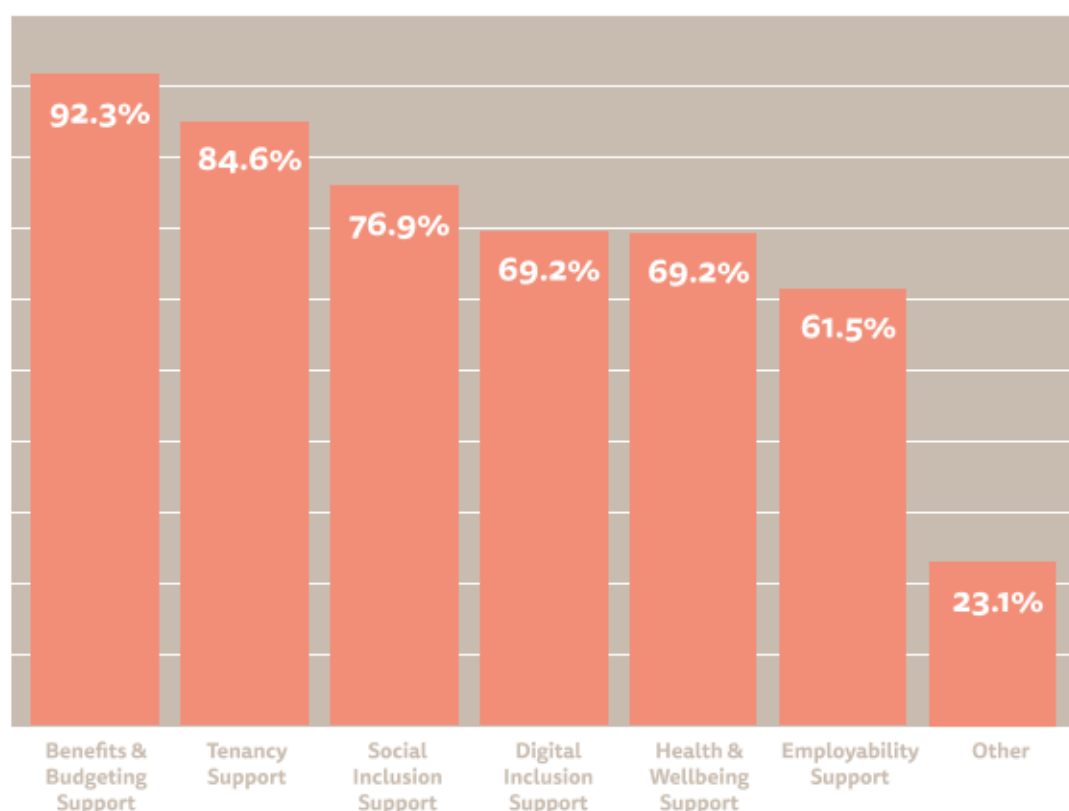


Figure 2: Types of support services offered



Types of support services offered – additional detail

Respondents were asked to provide more detail about each of their support services. The responses, illustrated in Table 1, could be said to reflect the diversity and range of support provided by different social landlords.

Types of support provided

"Digital inclusion café, helping people get online and use our services through internet training on Universal Credit, budgeting."

"There is actually too many to mention. Tenancy support to help people keep their tenancies, help with benefits, helping refugees settle with support in learning English, training and jobs; support for ex-offenders, support for young people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless; community groups for those at risk of social isolation; training courses for all our client groups; activities for client groups and many more."

"Within community centres we offer a variety of initiatives for tenants to enable them to feel included ranging from Tai Chi to digital inclusion classes. We have a Money Management Service providing benefits and financial inclusion support coupled with the ability to deliver DROs and other insolvency work if needed. We also offer tenancy support initiatives around reducing hoarding, maintaining tenancy conditions and access to drug and alcohol misuse workers where necessary. We also offer digital support through drop-in sessions and one-to-one support alongside a series of roadshows designed to engage with customers in their own communities - providing direct access to a range of support staff."

"Volunteer Support: To find, suitable opportunities, develop activities in the community and support with any issues or challenges during the volunteering process. Supported Volunteering: 1:1 mentor support for those who find their mental health to be a barrier to volunteering. Social prescribing: Offering 1:1 Navigator support to individuals and/or their families to identify activities in the local community that can help to improve mental or physical health, and to reduce unnecessary access to clinical services. Also promoting pharmacies and group support activities that can enhance wellbeing."

Table 1: Detail of support services provided

Identifying gaps in support services currently provided

Respondents were asked if there were any support services they would like to provide but may not currently be able to do so. A majority of 58.3% stated that there were additional services they would like to provide, compared to 41.7% who stated there were not. This is illustrated in Table 2 below.

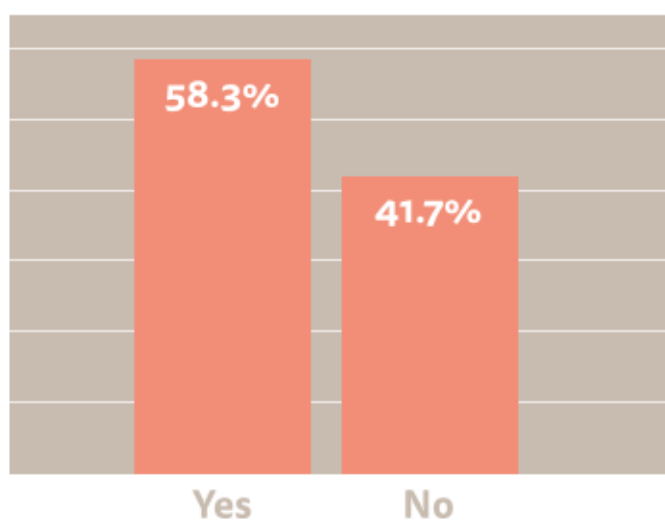


Table 2: Landlord's perception of gaps between current and desired support provision

Of those who stated they would like to provide additional services to their current provision, there was little consistency between organisations. A summary of responses is illustrated in Table 3.

| Desired support service |
|--|
| Employability training |
| Practical trade skills courses like plumbing, decorating etc, and also office-based training such as IT, admin, office skills. |
| Access to online or digital support |
| Budgeting |
| Mental health support |
| Offering 'buddy' support as part of a supported volunteering scheme |
| Wellbeing support |

Table 3: Summary of desired additional support services



Why social housing providers offer support services

Social housing providers were asked to describe why their organisation offers support services to tenants. Issues such as sustaining tenancies were identified (for example, *"If we don't, it would leave a significant gap in services locally and this could have a detrimental effect on the sustainability of tenancies which ultimately would have a greater impact on the business"*); maintaining the philanthropic aims of the social housing sector (for example, *"We are there to support client groups that others may not be able to/wish to support. We are there to help people to change their lives for the better"*); and also the acknowledgment that social housing providers may be the only provider of such services to their tenants (for example, *"[it's in] our organisation's values and purpose. If we don't who will?"*).

Perceptions of the impact from funding cuts in the last three to five years

Social housing providers were asked if they felt their support services had been impacted by funding cuts in the last three to five years. The majority of respondents (90.9%) stated 'yes', that support services have been impacted, 9.1% stated 'don't know', while none responded 'no'. This is illustrated in Figure 3.

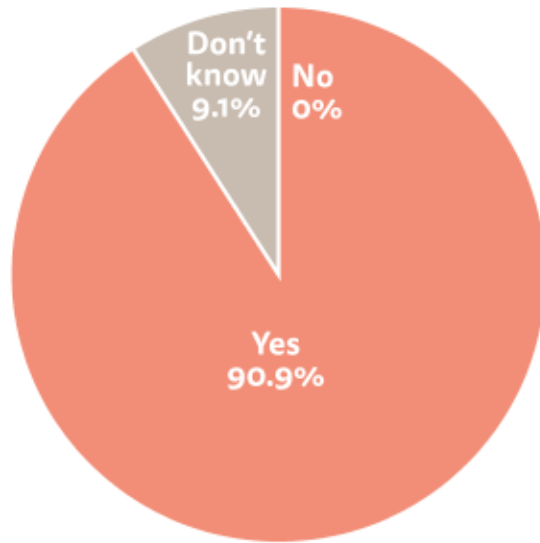


Figure 3: Social housing providers perceptions of funding cuts on support services in the last 3 to 5 years

When asked why they gave their answer, responses included finding that some support services were cited as having been reduced or withdrawn completely (for example, *"we have had to withdraw services in the care market around services for people with disability"*) or having had pressure put on their viability (for example, *"I understand a number of contracts have been lost and in one of our areas there are likely to be redundancies"*), whereas the ability to expand support services has been limited (for example, *"we haven't been able to expand them in the way we would have hoped - especially around health inequalities, anti-poverty initiatives and mental health support"*).

Finally, adaptability and diversification to find new ways of funding whilst working in a more agile capacity appears to have been the response of one social housing provider (for example, *"funding has become more project focused - it has become more difficult to cover core costs without diversifying and creating new project activities to continue to meet the needs of individuals"*).

Perceptions of future funding in the next three to five years

Of the respondents who answered this question, the majority cited negative perceptions towards support funding over the next three to five years. Core business pressures were cited here (for example, *"it's difficult to justify spending profit on employability schemes when you could be spending it on new homes or improving existing stock"*), however there was also hope that the political situation may be the foundation of a more positive approach (for example, *"Over the next two years it will continue to be a matter of balancing the demand with what we can offer; however with the changes to rent setting from 2020 we would hope these services will be in a position where they can be expanded as needed longer-term"*).

Finally, (and potentially of some significance given the current financial climate towards support), creative approaches were also identified as solutions, for example, *"organisations will need to be more creative and forward thinking with how they deliver services, and attempt to move away from grant funding as a default option"*.



Perceptions of the requirement to deliver support services through the social housing sector

On asking social housing providers whether they felt support services were still required to be delivered through the social housing sector, there was overwhelming agreement with 100% stating 'yes'. This is illustrated in Figure 4.

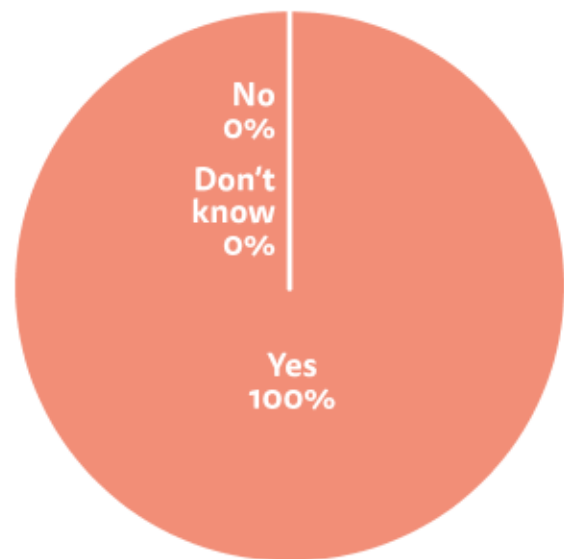


Figure 4: Should support services still be delivered through the social housing sector?

Part 3: Understanding success

This third part of the social housing provider survey explored the concept of success in providing support services.

Perceptions of a successful support service

Respondents were asked how they would describe a successful support service. A range of responses were provided which can be summarised as capturing aspects of performance management (for example, *“one that can clearly demonstrate specific outcomes as a result of the support being provided”*), accessibility to all (for example, *“positive engagement. Available to all social groups especially vulnerable and ethnic minority sectors. Making a difference”*), and one which offers both business and social benefits (for example, *“a positive benefit to the costs of the association; generates cost savings and has a genuine measurable social benefit”*). A concise summary of service attributes was provided by one respondent as follows:

“A successful support service is reliable, present, consistent and honest. They commit to do what they can do, and actually do it. Success is where the needs of the individual are effectively met, and not just the number or percentage of people who have accessed a service.”

Finally, the importance of the customer-focus cited was also noted by another respondent: *“[a successful support services should be] one that achieves meaningful outcomes for our tenants”*.



How success is measured

A broad range of approaches were cited here with little consistency between support providers. For example, responses included SROI (social return on investment), informally talking to clients to gain feedback or using examples of case studies, and 'hard' measures such as children attending school, the number of antisocial behaviour issues resolved or employment obtained.

The ability to measure the success of support services was cited by one respondent as being *"very difficult as most measures are financial so for example financial training is measured in the decrease in arrears. Measurement of softer outcomes is harder"*.

Understanding of what has not worked so well

Drawing upon their previous experience, respondents were asked which support services worked less well. The answers provided to this question provided little consistency between the respondents. Useful insight however was gained from two respondents in particular, one of whom suggested that less successful support services were seen in those *"that just signpost tenants to other services, not providing specific support that can be clearly shown as leading to specific outcomes"*, while another provided the following example:

"Projects that attempt to be all things to all people are generally less successful and sustainable. Good support does not have to be all things to all people, but should know how to access the experts that already exist in the community. Collaboration is key to success here."

Additional respondent comments

Only one respondent offered additional comments, but in doing so, neatly summarised the raw nature and simplicity of the challenge facing housing associations funding housing support:

“The social housing sector is well placed to provide access to people needing support but does not always have the funding to be able to provide this.”

Going forward, the social housing sector could pose the question of how more creative solutions could be identified when providing support, thus retaining their expertise and close proximity to their customer base but enabling future needs to be met.



4. Findings

– tenant perspective

This section describes the findings from the tenant perspective towards support services.

Tenants' awareness of Acis support services

Tenants were firstly asked about their levels of awareness regarding the selection of support services Acis currently provides. A list of these services was described in advance of the question being asked for context and clarification.

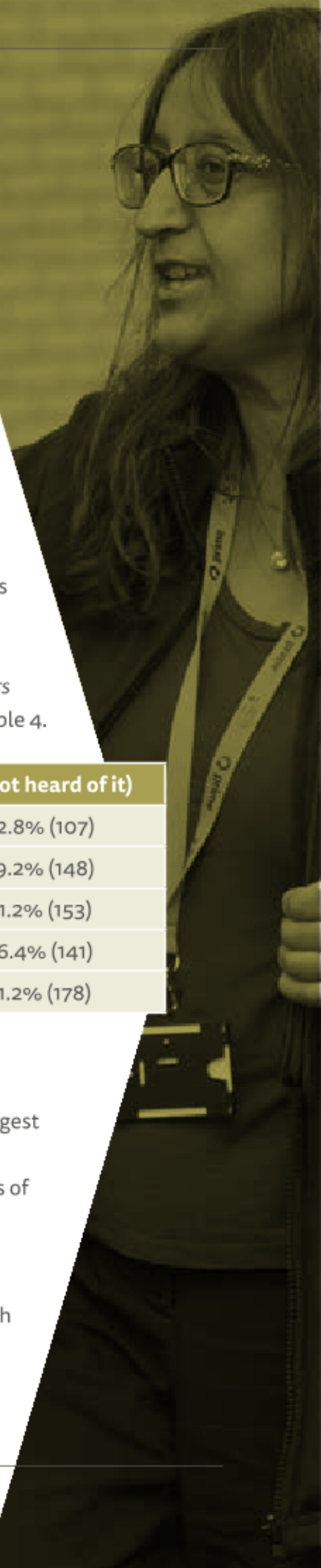
From this, the majority of tenants stated they had not heard of the support services currently offered, with four out of the five areas measured (*tenancy support, debt advice, help with energy efficiency, and support with work experience*) reflecting more than 50% of respondents stating 'No'. Only one area of support (*support with repairs and maintenance*) ranked above 50% for those stating 'Yes'. This is illustrated in Table 4.

| Area of Support | Yes (heard of it) | No (not heard of it) |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Support with repairs and maintenance | 57.2% (143) | 42.8% (107) |
| Tenancy support | 40.8% (102) | 59.2% (148) |
| Debt advice | 38.8% (97) | 61.2% (153) |
| Help with energy efficiency | 43.6% (109) | 56.4% (141) |
| Work experience | 28.8% (72) | 71.2% (178) |

Table 4: Tenants' awareness of Acis support services

When exploring this further by cross-tabulating the data by tenure, the results suggest that it is general needs tenants who lack the greatest awareness of support, with sheltered accommodation and affordable rent tenants showing much higher levels of awareness.

When assessing responses against duration of tenancy, better levels of awareness could be noted with newer tenancies, with the strongest awareness being seen with tenancies of less than one year, while the weakest was those with tenancies of 20 years or more.



Tenants' likelihood of contacting Acis for support

Following on from assessing tenants' awareness of support services, it could be argued that tenants may not be aware of support services due to the fact that, for the majority, they may not need to access them. To explore this theme, tenants were asked about their likelihood of contacting Acis if they needed support. This is illustrated in Table 5.

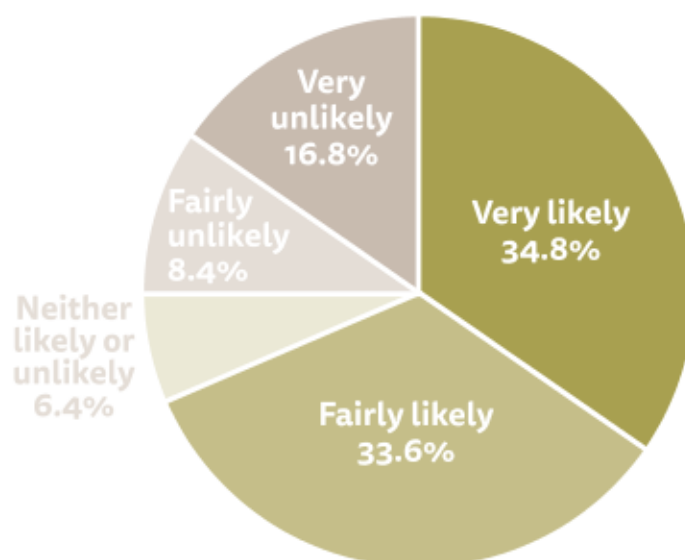


Table 5: Tenant's likelihood of contacting Acis for support

From this, it was encouraging to see that nearly 70% of respondents stated they would be 'very' or 'fairly' likely to contact Acis for support if they needed any help. While a relatively small proportion of tenants responded that they would be 'neither likely or unlikely' to contact Acis for support (6.4%), a total of 25.2% stated that they would be unlikely. When exploring this further by cross-tabulating by tenure, very similar scores were seen for general needs tenants as for all tenures, while slightly higher scores were seen for sheltered and affordable rent tenures. Additionally, no significant differences were seen when the data was split by length of tenancy.

Tenants' knowledge of finding support

This question for tenants investigated the concept of assessing tenants' knowledge of finding support in their local area. A total of 63 tenants responded to this question, from which the majority (66.7%) stated that they would know where to go for help. However, a fairly sizeable proportion of respondents (33.3%) stated they did not know where to go for help for support within their local area. This suggests there may be a gap in awareness for a significant proportion of tenants of where to find support when required. This is illustrated in Table 6.

| Tenant Response | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------|
| Yes | 66.7% (42) |
| No | 33.3% (21) |

Table 6: Tenants' knowledge of finding support

When undertaking cross-tabulation of the data by tenure, there was very little difference from the data presented for all tenancies. For duration of tenancy, the best levels of knowledge were perceptible for tenancies of less than one year, however for this question, tenures of 20 years plus also reflected high levels of knowing where to go for help within the local area. This may be a result of higher level support needs for this group.

Why would tenants be likely to contact Acis?

Finally, tenants were asked why they may be likely to contact Acis for support. It was interesting to note that some of the participants in the survey had heard about the support provided by Acis for the first time by participating in the survey, for instance:

"I've not had anything to say that they offer any support"

"Now that I know that they do all of these things I might be more likely to do it"

"Did not realise that they had all of this, I have a meeting with the job centre this month, if I do not get good advice there I will try Acis"

Some tenants cited the fact that they would depend on others first before contacting Acis, such as family (for example, "close family members who live nearby would help me"; "I would turn to my family first"); while a small number of tenants cited other support services (for example, "my first port of call would be Citizens Advice Bureau or a mental health group where we give support to people on where to go"; "I would go to Citizens Advice"); however others appeared very grateful of the support Acis offered (for example, "I think it is very good that the support is there if needed"; "living on my own I would appreciate their advice"; "any help is much appreciated").

This suggests that for some, there is clearly a need for support and/or signposting to other support services.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

This report has sought to generate focus and debate on the topic of housing support by asking *why are social housing providers best placed to provide support?* In order to answer this central question, two further research questions were posed:

- *In terms of delivering support to social housing tenants, what services are being provided, who provides them, and what is perceived to be successful?*
- *What do social housing providers contribute in their offer of support?*

It can be concluded that social housing organisations are providing a wide range of support services, and these seem to differ substantially depending upon the organisation's perception of local need and their ability to deliver to meet those needs. While the findings in this report provides some indication of the types of services offered by many housing associations, there will be hundreds more offered around the UK. Using the example of the National Housing Federation's interactive online tool 'Health interventions by housing associations', it is arguable that further work needs (and should) be done to register support services together into a centralised system, thereby maximising understanding of services available, assist with funding, and promote accessibility for tenants.

Perceptions of success of housing support was seen as being able to demonstrate specific outcomes, having a support service which is accessible to all, one which offers both business and social benefits, and ultimately one where the needs of the individual are effectively met.

It can also be concluded that social housing providers do contribute a significant amount in their offer of support. This can be seen through history in the sector of providing support, the wide range of services provided through different organisations, and due to having an existing tenant focus, there is the infrastructure in place for social housing providers to have the capability for a good understanding and monitoring of individual support needs. Above all else, there is still a very strong willingness to help to provide support – despite new challenges in the sector, this will no doubt assist in finding new ways of adapting (becoming more innovative and more agile) to ensure the philanthropic tradition of providing housing support services continues long into the future.

In response to these findings, this report makes a number of recommendations with potential actions falling to Acis, the wider social housing sector and government.

Acis should:

- Promote the impact its support services has on the people and communities it serves through a customer awareness campaign, highlighting the potential benefits from engaging in its services to tenants, their families and wider communities.

Social housing providers should:

- Promote, offer and deliver their successful wider support services and specialist housing support to other sectors outside of housing, working in partnership with sectors including health, employment and skills.
- Actively seek learning opportunities from successful social housing providers as well as from other sectors, embracing innovative and cross-sector partnerships to deliver holistic support for those who need it.
- Where possible and within boundaries, share access to the wealth of information held about tenants and their families with partner organisations, helping with early intervention to create truly customer-centred support and a one-assessment approach so customers don't have to repeat their stories.
- Consider more consortia or joint venture arrangements across the social housing sector, and wider, to encourage effective collaboration to develop large-scale, value for money support projects to help customers when and where they require it.

- Continue to identify creative solutions to provide support for customers, particularly around digital engagement, as a core service offer when developing new tenure models.

The government should:

- Formalise a standard within the regulatory framework ensuring all social housing providers report on support activity within the annual self-assessment.
- Define a clear and consistent measurement for support services (for example, social return on investment) within the sector, helping to demonstrate specific outcomes and the impact it has made whilst being able to effectively benchmark its performance.
- Make it a mandatory requirement that Social housing providers be on the framework for bidding opportunities on wider support service tenders (for example, employability support) due to their access to those hard to reach and hidden customer groups, and their ability to monitor customers once the support has ended in a value for money way.
- Register support services delivered by social housing providers together in a centralised system to maximise understanding of services available, assist with funding and partnership working and promote accessibility for tenants.

Limitations of the research

Research limitations should be acknowledged in the context of the volume of responses gained during the research. For instance, while a sample of 250 tenants was used, a much larger sample would be required to make it statistically representative of all Acis tenants or indeed the UK tenant population more widely.

Additionally, for the organisational perspective, only a small bespoke group of social housing providers known to Acis were consulted in the research. As such, these findings may be considered more akin to a large focus group, i.e. they have the ability to offer new insights and can provide a basis for further research.

As previously stated however, the main aim of this report was to generate attention and debate on the issue of support in social housing at a time of ongoing funding constraints. We hope that whilst taking the research findings into context, this aim will be achieved.



A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light-colored cardigan over a dark top and a lanyard, is smiling and looking towards a man whose back is to the camera. They appear to be in a meeting or collaborative work environment. The entire image has a warm, golden-yellow color cast.

**For more information, or to discuss how
Acis can work in collaboration with you:
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