

Paragon Community Housing Limited

# Community Investment Strategy 2016-2020

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**Paragon Community Housing (Paragon) is committed to equality and diversity. This policy has considered the Equality Act 2010 and its protected characteristics which are: race, gender, gender reassignment, disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, marriage, civil marriage and partnership, and pregnancy and maternity explicitly.**

**Paragon will make sure all our communication is fully accessible, and to achieve this if a policy or document needs to be available in other formats we will provide them.**

## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 Paragon's ambition is to add value to the communities in which we work and go beyond our core activities. We will provide funds, give time, skills and expertise to support communities in developing their sustainability and improve the prospects and opportunities of residents living in those communities.
- 1.2 Underpinning our community investment strategy is Paragon's corporate vision to be **an exceptional organisation improving neighbourhoods and building communities**. Together with our mission to make **a positive difference to our customers' lives by providing and maintaining high quality affordable homes and services**.

## 2 Challenges & Drivers

- 2.1 Much has changed in the last couple of years which has impacted on our residents and us as an organisation. Residents face increasing financial pressures making it harder for them to pay their rent and household bills. Households have to manage with less money due to the changes in benefits as a result of the welfare reforms. The government's implementation of the 1% rent reduction for housing associations means a £20 million loss of rental income over the next 4 years for Paragon. Digital exclusion for some housing associations residents remains high and the lack of digital skills can lead to marginalisation in the market place, social exclusion and reduced opportunities.
- 2.2 It is more important than ever that we concentrate and target our efforts on providing excellent core services as a landlord whilst keeping Paragon's vision of improving neighbourhoods and building communities alive.

## 3 Key Principles

- 3.1 Paragon is in good shape in terms of financial resources and proactive partners. We will deliver our community investment through focused and targeted work adopting a whole organisational approach. We will look at what services we need to deliver and how we can provide these, work in partnership with the statutory and voluntary sectors, seeking external funding to support this. We will work with our residents, neighbourhoods, and our local forums to shape the priorities and deliver the changes they want to see.
- 3.2 We will use social enterprise to develop new or existing activities that both generate income and increase impact for local communities. We will encourage the development of volunteering programmes both within Paragon and the communities in which we work. In the long term, we will work with the community in developing their capacity to be collaborative and self-sufficient.

## 4 What is our Community Investment?

- 4.1 Our Community investment will encompass a wide range of communities within London and Surrey. A large number of them will be geographical in nature, representing people who live, work or identify with an area. It can be residents who live in similar accommodation, have similar characteristics, may be unemployed or are vulnerable in some way.

- 4.2 Paragon's community investment will provide financial and service investment that we chose to make in communities that support the development and help strengthen communities in order to address identified social issues such as unemployment, digital exclusion, and low or out of date skills. We will provide financial investment, resources, time, skills and expertise, and use our influence to develop partnerships with the communities and other organisations.

## **5 Our Key Objectives**

- 5.1 Community Investment is a fantastic opportunity for Paragon to bridge the gap between individuals, neighbourhoods, and local decision makers in order to achieve our key objectives. Often we are the one organisation that regularly liaises with our residents and has a relationship with them. As a result we can provide a link with other third parties.

- 5.2 Our key objectives are:

- Creating real opportunity for our residents in order to tackle social exclusion, worklessness, financial exclusion and promote well-being.
- Seeking to make long-term quality of life differences and help to build more sustainable neighbourhoods that bring direct benefit to our residents and the wider community.
- Helping to create a climate where residents are able to start social enterprises that benefit their local community.
- Working with residents, local statutory and voluntary service providers to enhance existing and deliver new sustainable initiatives.

## **6 Our priorities**

- 6.1 Our objectives will need time to develop, so in order to focus on investment and direct our resources to where they are most needed, we have identified four areas where we will invest and empower our staff and residents to create positive changes. In order of priority they are:-

### **Employment, skills & training**

- Support our residents' learning, development, skills and employment capabilities
- Encourage residents to access free training courses to enhance & improve personal skills and confidence
- Support our residents to remove barriers to work
- Provide support for self-employment and new business initiatives
- Support access to apprenticeships, work placements and volunteering opportunities
- Maximise external employment links and opportunities
- Explore the creation of local social enterprises
- Work with young people and youth organisations to enhance educational opportunities and increase their skills.

## Financial & Digital Inclusion

- Improve residents' financial position and literacy
- Assist residents to maximise their household income with welfare benefit advice and guidance
- Assist residents to access appropriate banking, debt and money advice
- Improve access to affordable banking and credit
- Improve digital literacy
- Increase individual and community online access
- Increase the use of social networking
- Invest in energy efficiency of homes and energy saving advice

## Environment

- Improve our residents' immediate environment or situation – helping them to keep spaces attractive and well maintained.
- Sustain our community Hubs to develop essential services & support
- Support projects and activities designed to reduce anti-social behaviour and crime reducing initiatives.
- Utilise outdoor space, reduction of waste – recycling reuse, etc.
- Support and celebrate resident and staff participation in community support networks, such as volunteering schemes
- Promote internal and external award schemes for residents and communities to encourage new initiatives and spread best practice.

## Health and Well being

- Support opportunities for social interaction for those who are lonely or at risk of isolation
- Help residents to live independent lives
- Provide support for those with specialist needs
- Help residents to sustain their tenancies and stay in their own home

## 7 Our Investment

7.1 We have a number of budgets that provide funding for projects, initiatives and opportunities for individuals, groups and communities.

These are:-

- **Digital & online skills** - group, individual training and supporting digital champion volunteer programme
- **Employment Support** - individual coaching on employment related support, group training on setting up a business, help with practical costs to get back into work
- **Money management and debt advice** –individual support on budgeting, managing money and debt solutions
- **Environmental Improvements** – funds for the neighbourhood coordinators to carry out small improvements on the estates

- **Challenge Fund** – funds for residents to bid for to support local initiatives
  - **Youth projects** – support for local homework clubs and youth activities to help build confidence and skills.
  - **Resident Events** – support for local competitions and promotions of community events
  - **Hardship Fund** – emergency costs to help residents with immediate issues while working on long term solutions.
- 7.2 We will also generate income from the use of our community hubs and target these funds for further community investment initiatives.
- 7.3 In addition we encourage our staff to volunteer, and our partners to support local initiatives by providing time, resources and labour.
- 7.4 We want to ensure our investment goes further and achieves value for money, so where possible we will also seek further external funding streams.

## 8 How will we measure our success?

- 8.1 We will measure the impact of all major investment on an annual basis, reporting the outcomes to the Residents Council and Customer Services Committee. The measures will be quantitative as well as qualitative. Each project will have defined outcomes, relating to the impact – the difference that is made; the value (monetary and non-monetary) – what the difference is worth; and the return on investment – ‘value’ of social / economic / environmental outcomes.
- 8.2 We want to be able to identify our success in terms of **Business benefits** (maintain and improve value of the stock, reduce void turnover and rent arrears, deliver new business and increase reputation), **Residents & Community benefits** (individual life chances, financial prosperity, and digital access are improved), **Social wider benefits** (longer term benefits to the wider community and society so we create better places to live) and **Value for money benefits** (finding creative ways of working in communities, working in partnership with specialist organisations, creating long term and sustainable projects and attracting external funding). We are developing a social value tool that will help us to achieve this.

## 9 How will we deliver, promote and make this work?

- 9.1 The key to successfully investing and supporting our residents to deliver our community investment strategy is to establish appropriate structures and approaches.
- 9.2 Ultimately we want to ensure that the maximum amount of investment is delivered directly to benefit our communities, that residents are central to this and that the whole of Paragon is in on board. The Inclusion and Resident Involvement teams will be key to this, bridging the links between residents, other organisations and stakeholders. They will be crucial in ensuring our overarching strategy is aligned with residents, local and community priorities.

The Head of Income and Inclusion will oversee the delivery of this strategy, monitoring the action plan against targets.

- 9.3 Importantly, this strategy will be further supported and achieved through the neighborhood coordinators and tenancy solutions coordinators.
- 9.4 The new neighbourhood approach will enable us to build relationships with residents and communities, to try to understand their needs and offer the most appropriate support at the right time. Crucially developing trust with Paragon to enable an open dialogue between residents and our teams in the longer term. The new tenancy solutions team will deliver our support services, giving a specialist provision, helping residents to sustain their tenancies and keeping them in their own home.
- 9.5 In order to ensure our community investment works effectively we will work with our local communities to ensure that they can genuinely shape the priorities and deliver changes residents want to see.
- 9.6 We will do this through –
- Working with residents who are on our local forums.
  - Working with residents who are active in their local communities – either through recognised Residents Associations or other local community associations.
  - Using the data residents have shared with us to understand more of the community requirements
  - Working with local charities and statutory agencies to maximise income opportunities and partnership opportunities.
  - We will invite local partners to attend our Forums where beneficial for a specific project.

Ongoing communication –

- This Strategy will be presented to the Local forums and Paragon's Resident Council on initial launch and all projects will be reported quarterly to the local forum and yearly to the Resident Council.
  - Each local forum will be asked to agree the measurement of successful outputs for schemes in their area within our priority areas.
  - We will use our regular Door-Knocking and other event activity to encourage wider support or involvement for a project.
- 9.7 We will encourage local people to become Community Champions for their project and to take the lead on maintaining the project once the initial funding has ended. The local Neighbourhood Coordinator will support this work.

## **10 The Action Plan**

- 10.1 This strategy is a 4 year plan and is attached in **Appendix 1**. Our overall objectives are ambitious and there are a number of different steps we need to take to get us to where we want to be. We need to be flexible in our approach. External factors will have influence and bearing on what can be achieved and we will respond to these. The plan therefore not only details the direct actions required, but actions to explore and initiatives to pilot and test.

10.2 The 4 year plan will be reviewed annually to ensure we are on track, responding to changing circumstances and lessons learnt along the way.

## **11 Finally**

11.1 We will report back providing information on our progress. It will inform residents of the work we do, demonstrate our accountability, celebrate successes and keep us on track.

## **12. Linked policies**

Resident Involvement Strategy – July 2015

Affordable Warmth Strategy – 2014

## Appendix 1

### Action Plan, Objectives and Outcomes – Year 1: 2016-2017

Actions and Objectives	Outcomes	Timescales
Our overall objective is to focus our resources on residents and communities affected by Universal Credit and take preventative action that will support those that are vulnerable and at risk of increasing rent arrears.	Achieve 1.4% net / 3.8% gross arrears target	March 2017
<b>Employment, Skills and Training</b>		
1. Provide individual employment support ranging from CV skills to training courses through our partnership with ETHOS.	Provide support to 100 residents assisting them in getting into employment	March 2017
2. Run a Job Fair targeting local businesses, employment opportunities and promoting employment support and skills.	Assist 30 residents with employment support and opportunities	Autumn 2016
3. Run a second Enterprise Cube event providing training to help residents set up and develop their own business.	12 residents to complete the course. 4 to set up their own business within 12 months of completion.	September 2016
4. Target and Promote Paragon's online free training courses for residents, helping them to build their online skills, confidence and employability. <a href="https://www.paragonchq.co.uk/residents/free-online-training-residents">https://www.paragonchq.co.uk/residents/free-online-training-residents</a>	Recruit 40 residents to sign up to Paragon's online training courses	April 2017
5. Explore how to run Stamp out Boredom Holiday programmes specific to certain areas where we have identified high levels of anti-social behaviour, social deprivation and worklessness to ensure we are having as much impact as possible for young people across the Paragon area.	Finalise a plan and partnership to deliver. Help to reduce levels of anti- social behavior and improve employment opportunities.	December 2016
6. Review the provision of Duke of Edinburgh Awards, target, support and promote amongst targeted young people in Paragon Households to develop their skills, confidence & reduce ASB.	Engage with 4 young people to complete their bronze. Start a further 4 on their Bronze Journey.	February 2017

7. Open up our Community Hubs to local voluntary providers. For example pre-school child care facilities to promote affordable local childcare and further employment opportunities.	Maintain the provision at St Johns and open up new opportunities at Thames View House.	January 2017
8. Review and Develop our Youth programmes at Fulmer Close (Homework Club) & St Johns (Reemo's Café) so that both centres remain fit for purpose, engage fully with the local young people, develop their skills and reduce ASB in the local area.	Ensure our youth programmes are relevant and focused. Engage with 40 young people providing them with skills	December 2016
9. Launch and further trial social value tool with staff (and Us Creates) Launch social value tool with volunteers (at Forums) to share their stories and promote the great work of these community projects to encourage other users.	Identify the social value of projects and use to prioritise and target future resources.	September 2017
Also see points 16, 18, 19, 21 and 23.		
<b>Financial &amp; Digital Inclusion</b>		
10. Provide welfare benefits advice to Paragon residents through referrals, promotions & targeted campaigns.	Additional Housing benefit and benefits obtained for 400 residents. Stabilise & reduce rent arrears to help maintain their tenancy.	March 2017
11. Provide relevant financial advice services such as money management and debt advice through MAP and CAB.	Assist 60 residents to obtain budgeting advice and debt solutions, improving their financial position.	March 2017
12. Improve access to digital services and wifi. Explore partnering with Virgin Media to provide affordable broadband.	Affordable broadband to be provided to 40 Paragon Households.	March 2017
13. Improve residents' digital skills by providing training and 121 coaching through informal and formal ways. Information and support on reasonable and affordable options to access the internet, including connectivity, hardware and software options.	Improve the digital skills and online access to 100 residents potential affected by Universal Credit.	April 2017

14. Run 3 Targeted Campaigns around Digital and financial inclusion to include promoting the benefits of being on line. Involve the local Neighbourhood Forums to deliver these campaigns.	Raise awareness of the Services Paragon provides to 100 households	2 Autumn Campaigns 2016 1 Winter campaign 2017
15. Implement the Rental exchange which can provide residents with a digital footprint, improving their credit rating and helping them to access affordable mainstream credit and services.	85% of Paragon residents are able to participate in the programme.	Autumn 2016
16. Establish and develop a network of volunteers from staff and residents, for example Digital and UC Champions. This will help to improve and develop resident volunteer's own digital and employment skills and their confidence including through the provision of support and training.	Maintain 8 Volunteers and recruit a further 10 more volunteers from staff and residents.	March 2017
Also see points 4, 9, 18 and 23.		
<b>Environment</b>		
17. Work in partnership with Community Café or other providers to maintain local provision at St Johns. Explore the potential for further external funding.	Provide affordable fresh food and a place where local residents can come for further information and support.	Autumn 2016
18. Develop the Walton Community Allotment project, raising awareness amongst staff and external partners, holding promotion days to recruit new volunteers and seeking out new opportunities for its growth within the community.	Recruiting 8 resident volunteers for the project, increasing their skills and confidence.	April 2017
19. Host Paragon in Bloom 2016 competition for residents and communities– showcasing how green spaces can be transformed and inspiring residents to try out and develop new skills and confidence.	30 residents to enter the competition promoting the benefits of gardening and transforming the local environment. Assess the social impact of this work.	Summer 2016

20. Complete revamp of the Cromwell Centre in partnership with the community and external partners, so it can continue to be a positive asset and resource to the local community.	Re-decoration and improvement of the internal rooms.	Summer 2016
21. We will support and encourage communities that have been identified as an area of social deprivation to utilise unused sites for green initiatives – for example Fulmer Close allotments, Molesey and Arran Way allotments Encouraging and facilitating access to affordable and healthy food.	2 green areas to be developed with the local community and bought back into use to grow food and develop new skills.	February 2017
22. We will continue to promote the Fund in order to maximise potential for the Challenge Fund to deliver community investment projects for customers and staff	Use of £25K to fund community projects and review impact by using the social value tool.	March 2017
23. Neighbourhood Forums – to establish relationships and work with residents in their areas to help those shape and influence priorities for their local area.	Develop projects and initiatives to feed into the action plan from year 2 2017 – 2018.	September 2017
Also see points 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 25		
<b>Health &amp; Wellbeing</b>		
24. Link up with Health services to provide local services and outreach units at our community centre. For example (e.g. Healthwatch, Meulberry Centre, etc.)		November 2016
25. Forums to raise awareness about environmental issues and mental health within their communities.	Issues are discussed at the local forums, awareness raised and improvements sought and delivered.	Spring 2017
Also see point 23.		

### **Action plan and outcomes for Years 2, 3 and 4**

- We will continue to develop the above projects over the next 2 to 4 years.
- We will explore and understand the local business environment using our links with ETHOS, Surrey County Council and establish links with the local businesses that will benefit residents.
- We will work with financial institutions for example, Credit Unions and banks, to offer banking products which our residents will find beneficial
- We will work with the England Illegal Money lending team and Trading Standards to combat loan sharks in order to promote the dangers of illegal money lending.
- We will run further target campaigns around financial inclusion, including energy switching
- We will explore and pilot a social enterprise project (Community Café, community cleaners etc.) seeking out external partners and support
- We will explore with residents at the community allotment a social enterprise initiative to sell their surplus allotment food at the local market.
- We will develop relationships with local schools and colleges where relevant to support partnership delivery of opportunities for young people.