

## RHA: Community involvement and organisational collaboration

This case study has been produced by the [Buying Social Justice](#) research project as part of its exploration of how public procurement is being adopted by public sector organisations to advance equality in employment. It is one of a series of case studies that feature good practice in the use of public procurement by infrastructure and transport bodies, local authorities, housing associations and universities in England, Scotland and Wales. The purpose is to present examples of good practice in how public procurement can incorporate objectives to promote equality, diversity and inclusion in the workforce. By presenting a selection of examples from public bodies of different sizes and sectors, it is intended that other organisations may consider adopting similar measures in their procurement practices.

All the case studies, together with other publications and outputs from the project, are available on the [Buying Social Justice](#) website.

### Background to the organisation

RHA is a housing association in the South Wales Valleys, which was founded in the context of the Welsh miners strikes. It employs about 80 staff, provides about 2,200 homes and acts as a commercial landlord. The majority of RHA's internal construction team, as well as its Director of Development and Regeneration are female, creating visibility of women and potential role models in a male-dominated sector. Based in Rhondda Cynon Taff, RHA operates in an environment shaped by experiences of disadvantage, exclusion and deprivation. Embedded in this context and founded against that background of poor housing conditions, social justice has been a core concern of RHA since its inception. This commitment is grounded in the perception that providing housing is not just about "placing someone in a property" but, as the Head of Communities and Enterprise stated, needs to account for "how tenants live in that property, how they engage with their wider community." True to this commitment, RHA is engaged in the local community and town regeneration projects, and it provides a range of support for tenants.

Its *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy* sees the commitment to these values as a core underpinning principle of strategies, decisions, actions, and values in every part of the organisation and the responsibility of each member of the organisation, including "all employees, contractors, volunteers and Board members" (p. 4). The Strategy identifies five focus areas: leadership, governance, the working environment, the tenant experience, and the natural environment. To promote equality, RHA provides training for its staff on equalities. To foster a deeper understanding of different lived experiences among its staff, RHA invites individuals from different walks of life to share insights into their lived experiences with the team of the organisation. As part of a commitment to promote issues such as sustainability and equality, RHA has established a network of champions, employees who are particularly passionate about certain causes (e.g., promoting equality) and receive additional training.

RHA, furthermore, has a commitment to *Community Investment* (featured under the heading 'Giving Back'). For RHA, community investment means "that when we tender for construction, services or supplies contracts, each contract must contribute to our strategic goals by assisting our tenants and communities to thrive" (p. 3). RHA further commits to leveraging its position and its investments to "support local business and projects, offering employment, training and skills initiatives that tackle poverty, exclusion and inequality" (p. 5). The strategy explicitly draws on and is guided by the Welsh

Government's Guidance on *Community Benefits Delivering Maximum Value for the Welsh Pound*, the *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act*, and the *Good Economy – Affordable Housing* economic and social governance (ESG) criteria. It aims to integrate social value in all operations. With particular reference to procurement, the Community Investment Strategy states that Community Benefits and the Foundational Economy, as part of its commitment to supporting the local economy, are central to the purchasing of works and services. It references the Welsh Government's Guide [Community Benefits Helping Suppliers Deliver Maximum Value for the Welsh Pound](#), which states that “[t]he inclusion of ‘community benefits’ or ‘social requirements’ in public sector procurement is designed to ensure that wider social and economic issues are taken into account when tendering construction, service or supplies contracts.” The Annex of the Procurement Policy defines the Foundational Economy as “[t]he activities which provide the essential goods and services for everyday life, regardless of the social status of consumers. These include, infrastructures, utilities, food processing, retailing and distribution, health, education and welfare” (p. 15). Based on an approach that centres collaboration, the Community Investment Strategy outlines that social value is to be delivered in cooperation with contractors, external partners, tenants and members of the broader community.

Likewise, RHA's *Procurement Policy* features a pledge “to ensuring that resources are used in the most efficient and effective way – obtaining the maximum benefit for RHA and its stakeholders, not simply in terms of cost/price but also qualitatively in respect of the wider social aims and objectives that add value to RHA's activities and improve the wellbeing of our employees, tenants and the wider community” (p. 4). Thereby, RHA commits to leveraging procurement to support the local economy, foster local communities and sustainability.

## Procurement stages

Specifying requirements and pre-tendering

RHA's *Procurement Policy*, when deciding on the particular specifications of the object of purchase, requires that those undertaking the procurement take into account RHA's commitments in relation to Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking, the Foundational Economy and the promotion of the local economy, sustainability, community benefits, the Living Wage, and equality, diversity and inclusion, as well as health and safety, data protection and IT security standards and compatibility. RHA's policies also place importance on including lived experiences. The *Community Investment Strategy* for instance states that:

“[t]o deliver social value we know we must listen to and understand the needs of our tenants and communities. This requires knowledge that is gained through building personal relationships. To build relationships and ensure we are delivering the right kind of social value, we will carry out consultation with tenants and residents and use this insight to direct our work. We will also use the insight and knowledge we have from our work in communities, to identify those that would benefit from community investment work, focusing our resources most effectively” (p. 6).

True to its commitment to collaboration, involvement and the inclusion of lived experiences, RHA includes the voices of tenants and the broader community in the process leading to the development of an invitation for tender. Particularly in relation to bigger community projects, such as the Big Shed, the needs of the community and desired areas of improvement are assessed through consultation. The Big Shed, which is a major project linked to community benefits, involves the conversion of a derelict building in the centre of Tonypany into a mixed-use building, which features an educational facility as well as apartments, including several for adults with learning disabilities. Additionally, the voices of tenants are included at different stages of the procurement

process whenever feasible and appropriate. The involvement of tenants is channelled through specific tenant groups.

Tendering, evaluation and contract award

RHA integrates social value and community benefits in all of its tenders. Depending on the size and value of the contract, the specific requirements differ.

Overall, community benefits are achieved via three routes: the [Can-Do-Toolkit](#), a community benefit payment and the Menu of Options. The Can-Do-Toolkit is an externally developed resource launched by the Chartered Institute of Housing Cymru's i2i project and aimed at social landlords. It comprises toolkits for including social value and employment-related aspects in particular in public procurement. Targeted recruitment and training, measured in person weeks, are core features of this approach. The *Can Do Toolkit Targeted Recruitment and Training for social landlords Model Material* defines "[p]erson-week is the equivalent to one person being employed for five days either on the development site or on other sites (with the agreement of the Employer)" (p. 7). Thus RHA places importance on creating long-term perspectives and routes for progression as part of community benefits. One aspect of this is the use of a shared apprenticeship scheme, which enables contract overarching apprenticeships.

Building on and adding to the requirements set by the Can-Do-Toolkit, RHA furthermore requires a community benefit payment, which is used to finance measures that promote positive change for tenants and the wider community, for instance for community projects or regeneration projects such as the Big Shed project.

In addition, RHA uses a Menu of Options, which is based on the Welsh Government's Guide for Community Benefits, from which contractors can select a number of further contributions to community benefits. These include, for instance, targeted recruitment and training, targeted work placements, providing interview training for people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), events in schools which aim to raise awareness of employment opportunities in the sector the contractor operates in or supporting community initiatives.

Social value and community benefits as part of bids are scored in the evaluation. When evaluating social value aspects, RHA places importance on incorporating internal and external subject expertise. Internally, RHA draws on networks of subject champions. Based on a particular commitment to specific issues (e.g., fostering equality or sustainability), individual members of staff can volunteer to receive additional training beyond the general training offered to all staff and subsequently act as champions of their particular issue, including for the evaluation of bids:

"We split the evaluation up so we've got, as you would expect, an evaluation based on price that we pay in per unit comparatively with different contractors. [...] And then for all those different sorts of component parts of the social value evaluation, we get the members of staff, who have extra training and expertise in those areas to evaluate... if a prospective contractor submits the ED&I policy, I wouldn't be involved in reviewing that and neither would the technical team, it would be the members of staff who have the appropriate expertise. And the same if somebody submits the environmental policy, our environmental champions get involved in evaluation."  
(Procurement Business Partner)

In addition to internal champions, where possible and appropriate, tenants are involved as external experts in the evaluation of the social value part of the bids for individual projects, a feature that was perceived as highly beneficial by the Head of Communities and Enterprise:

"I think that's really important, to have tenants who help us score the Community Benefits, targeted commitment and training aspect. You've got our equality and

diversity champions who look at the equality and diversity commitment in the bid, to ensure what they commit to they deliver. It's a fairer way to score and it is a big commitment from RHA." (Head of Communities and Enterprise)

RHA has Codes of Conducts, which providers are asked to adhere to. This includes a Code of Conduct which outlines expected behaviours such as punctuality, as well as a guide *Working with Compassion*, which has been developed with the Samaritans.

Contract management and monitoring

The procurement policy includes commitments to contract management, including the monitoring of all key performance targets, at least yearly reviews of checks undertaken before the award of the contract, and formal contract management meetings with contractor at least once a year.

RHA engages with its contractors during the delivery of the contract. While RHA reports on community benefits, it has however identified monitoring and reporting as an area of improvement and a field where practices could be aligned across the organisation. Currently, RHA is undertaking proactive steps to improve its practices in these areas. This involves collaboration with external partners to develop internal knowledge and skills relating to monitoring, measuring and reporting of social value further and increase consistency across the organisation. To support the existing work on social value, and monitoring of it, RHA is furthermore seeking to create a dedicated Social Value Officer post.

"So actually, in our new structure that we just pulling together at the moment, we included a designated Social Value Officer because at the minute [...] it's not very coordinated. So, I think this is definitively for us an area of improvement, the will is 100% there, but we haven't been amazing at documenting what we're doing and reporting on it." (Director of Development and Regeneration)

## Good practice highlights

RHA has a strong commitment to social justice, collaboration and involvement, which is reflected in its work. Some key highlights of good practice are:

- The use of a shared apprenticeship scheme for training opportunities created through community benefits. This scheme ensures that apprenticeships can be completed on different projects and enables RHA to include apprenticeships also in shorter contracts.
- Valuing of knowledge about equality and the inclusion of passionate and trained internal subject champions in evaluating the social value parts of bids.
- A female-led construction team creating visibility and role models in a male-dominated sector.
- A strong embeddedness in the community and a commitment to promoting positive change in their communities.
- A collaborative approach with strong engagement with external partners.
- Training activities on equality for all members of staff, which include among others training on lived experiences.
- A commitment to and practice of involving tenants at various stages of the procurement process.
- A continuous improvement approach, which builds on scrutiny of existing practices and brings in external knowledge to improve practices.