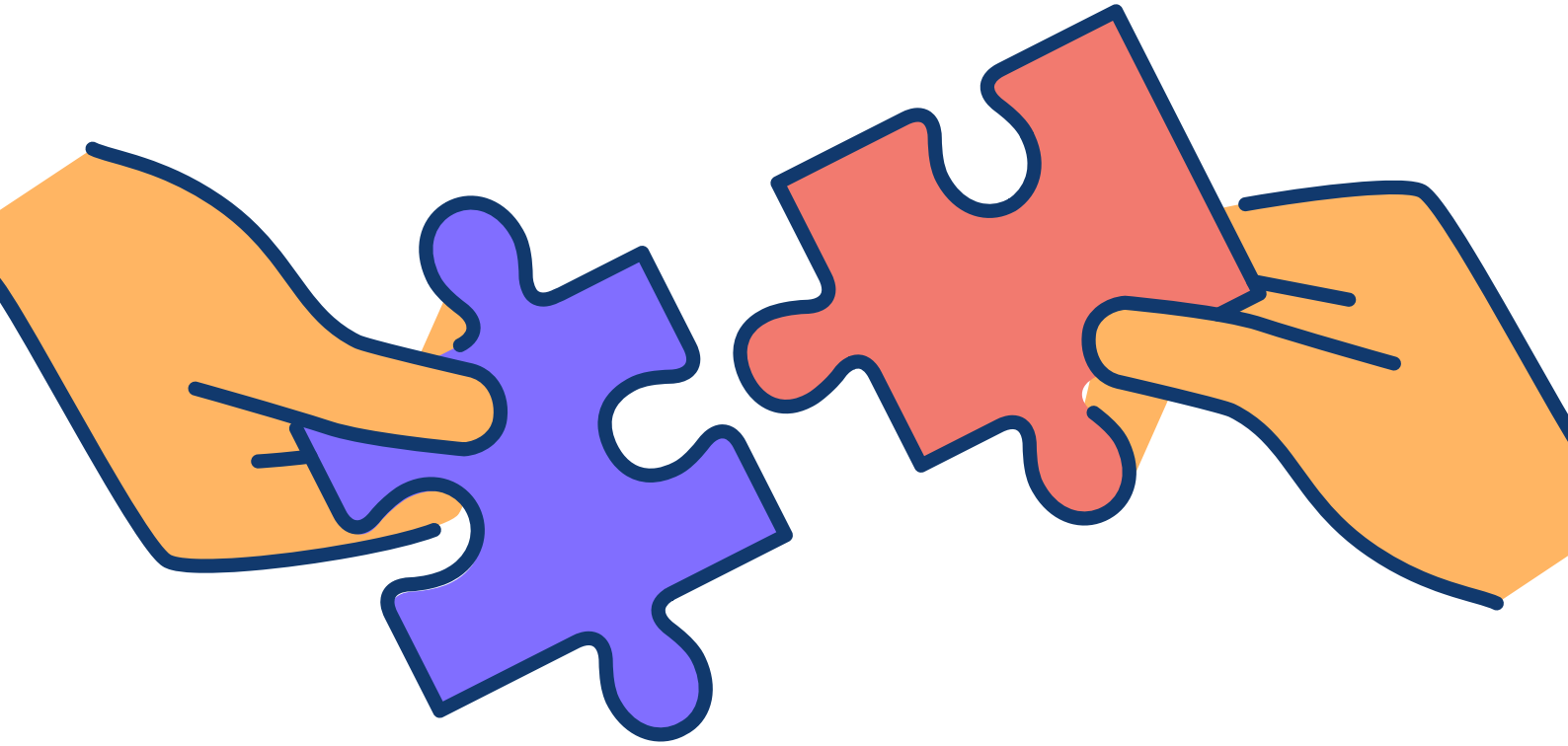
GWSF

Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations



Collaboration and Partnership Working between Community Based Housing Associations.

November 2026

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We would like to say a huge thank you to all our members who contributed to the research, either formally or informally, and helped to build a powerful picture of partnership working/collaboration across the CBHA sector.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Collaboration and partnership working have long been integral to community-based housing associations (CBHAs), enabling them to share knowledge, expertise and resources to support tenants and communities. Despite this history, perceptions that CBHAs operate in silos persist, and this can be exasperating for CBHAs to hear, particularly in a funding environment that increasingly emphasises partnership working and value for money (VFM).

This research explores how GWSF members collaborate, why they work together, and the benefits and challenges involved. The findings show that collaboration takes many forms, from informal peer support and knowledge-sharing to joint projects, shared services, and funding bids, most commonly – but not exclusively – with neighbouring associations.

Key motivations include shared values, improving services for tenants, making better use of resources, and achieving outcomes that may be difficult to deliver independently.

Successful collaboration relies on trust, clear objectives, effective communication and sustained commitment from staff and governing bodies. However, maintaining momentum, finding time, and managing different priorities can be challenging. Collaboration is not a one-size-fits-all solution: it works best when tailored to associations' needs and circumstances while preserving local accountability and community identity.

The case studies demonstrate the breadth and diversity of collaboration between CBHAs and provide tangible evidence which challenges head-on the misconception that they operate in isolation.

Fundamentally, the research demonstrates that collaboration is already an established and evolving feature of the CBHA sector and is one which continues to thrive.

SECTION 1 - BACKGROUND

1.1 Historical context

Collaboration and partnership working have long been part of the story of CBHAs[1]. The development of the CBHA movement is rooted in communities identifying housing needs, campaigning, organising collectively, and establishing local housing associations capable of responding to challenges in their neighbourhoods.

Although individual CBHAs developed in response to the circumstances and priorities of their own communities, they did not do so in isolation. The experience of establishing and managing associations created opportunities for learning between peers, the sharing of practical knowledge, and the development of common approaches to governance, housing management and community engagement.

This exchange of knowledge was particularly important as the sector expanded and new CBHAs emerged. Associations with established experience (the first wave) could share lessons with and offer practical assistance to newer organisations (the second wave – mainly in peripheral estates). All of this activity helped to strengthen the sector overall.

In addition, collaboration has also been supported throughout the years by sectoral networks and representative bodies – including GWSF and SFHA, as well as Share and EVH. All of these provide opportunities for RSLs to connect with peers, access training, exchange knowledge and explore shared challenges. These professional networks can also act as a catalyst which creates informal connections and these in turn lead to discussions about tangible partnership working or wider collaboration.

The history of CBHAs therefore provides us with an important starting point for understanding contemporary collaboration. Rather than viewing partnership working as solely a new response to financial pressures or funding requirements, it is better understood as an established feature of the sector that continues to evolve.

1.2 Why this research matters now

Despite the long history of collaboration between CBHAs, ongoing narratives about them working in silos still endure. These narratives suggest that CBHAs operate independently of one another, duplicate activity or fail to take advantage of opportunities to work collectively, even where they serve neighbouring communities. Fundamentally, this research seeks to debunk these myths.

Such assumptions present a false picture of how the CBHA sector operates in practice. The existence of separate associations operating in a specific geographical area does not mean that they are working in isolation.

CBHAs have distinct histories, governance arrangements, tenant populations and local responsibilities. These differences can influence the type and extent of collaboration that is appropriate. An organisation may work closely with one neighbour on a particular project while maintaining a different relationship with another association. Collaboration is therefore better understood by examining what different associations *actually do together*.

These misconceptions are also important when it comes to debates about VFM. There can be an assumption that smaller organisations must consolidate services, establish formal partnerships or operate at greater scale to demonstrate efficiency. However, as the Forum's Annual Charter Report always demonstrates, GWSF's member associations consistently out-perform larger regional and national associations, and local authorities,

[1] At the outset it is essential to acknowledge that whilst this report focuses on partnership working between CBHAs, our members' wider partnership work simply could not be achieved without their external relationships with colleagues and agencies across a range of other sectors.

not only on the responsiveness and quality of services but on efficiency and VFM too.

For CBHAs, VFM is reflected in the outcomes achieved for tenants and communities. This includes the quality and responsiveness of services, the ability to maintain affordable rents, effective investment in homes and neighbourhoods, and the contribution associations make to local wellbeing, in their role as Community Anchor Organisations.

Another key reason why this research matters now is the funding environment and an increased focus on the importance of being able to demonstrate effective partnership working. Funding programmes at local and national levels place considerable emphasis on collaborative delivery, joint applications, and evidence that organisations can draw on wider networks of expertise. Consortium bids and formal partnerships can provide access to opportunities that may be more difficult for an individual organisation to pursue alone.

This focus on partnership creates both an opportunity and a challenge for CBHAs. Existing collaborative relationships may provide a strong foundation for joint initiatives, but organisations must also ensure that partnership arrangements are meaningful, proportionate and aligned with their objectives. There is also risk that the value of established, informal or locally focused collaboration will be overlooked if external assessments concentrate primarily on formal structures or consortium arrangements.

Against this backdrop, it feels like the right time to develop a more detailed and evidence-based understanding of how CBHAs work together. This research aims to contribute to that by capturing the range of collaborative activity taking place and exploring how members themselves view it.

1.3 An Overview of the research

Aims and objectives

The overarching aim of the research was to develop a current picture of collaboration and partnership working between CBHAs, drawing on the experiences and perspectives of GWSF members.

The project was designed to achieve four main objectives. These are -

- **To understand the current landscape of collaboration.** The research sought to identify the different ways in which CBHAs work with their peers and other housing associations. This included exploring the range of activities undertaken, the relationships supporting them, and the different levels of formality involved.
- **To explore members' experiences and perspectives.** Understanding why organisations choose to collaborate, what they hope to achieve and what they find challenging is essential to assessing the practical value of partnership working. The research therefore sought to capture members' views on the factors that encourage collaboration, the benefits they experience and the barriers they encounter.
- **To share examples of good practice and innovation.** Different partnership approaches may have wider relevance to the sector. By documenting these examples, the research aims to support peer learning, encourage the exchange of ideas and help members identify opportunities to adapt successful approaches to their own circumstances.
- **To communicate the contribution of collaboration to external partners.** The report is intended to provide a resource for funders, policymakers, public bodies and other sectors interested in understanding how CBHAs work together. It seeks to demonstrate the breadth of activity taking place and contribute to a more informed discussion about the role of collaboration in the CBHA sector.

Together, these objectives mean the research is both a snapshot of current practice and a potential resource for future development. Its purpose is not simply to describe existing arrangements, but also to identify learning and opportunities that could help strengthen collaboration across the sector.

Research methods

The research adopted a member-focused approach, combining a survey with follow-up discussions and collection of case studies. This enabled the Forum to gather a broad overview of activity while also exploring selected experiences in greater depth.

Member survey

A survey was circulated to all GWSF members to gather information about their experiences of collaboration and partnership working. The survey provided an opportunity to identify the types of activity taking place, the factors motivating organisations to work together, and the issues members considered most important.

We received a response rate of 32% which represents 23 of our 68 members. However, in many cases one member replied on behalf of wider partnership groups. In reality this meant that around half of the Forum's members were included in the survey.

Follow-up interviews

Members who wished to discuss the issues in greater depth were invited to participate in one-to-one interviews, conducted either online or in person.

These conversations provided an opportunity to explore the experiences behind the survey responses.

The qualitative element was important because the effectiveness of collaboration often depends on factors that are difficult to capture through a survey alone. Trust, organisational culture, leadership, local relationships and the availability of staff time can all influence the way partnerships function (as is evident in the case-studies).

Case studies

The research also gathered in case studies illustrating collaborative activity across a range of initiatives.

1.4 The reality of collaboration across the sector

Feedback from GWSF members indicates that CBHAs are engaging in a diverse and evolving range of collaborative activities. Furthermore, the underpinning relationships extend beyond traditional networking and information-sharing to include more structured partnerships, joint initiatives and innovative projects.

This breadth of activity is important. Collaboration is not a single approach that can be measured solely by the number of formal agreements between organisations. It encompasses different levels of engagement, from sharing knowledge and providing informal peer support to jointly developing services, pooling of resources and delivering projects.

The best approach will depend on the issue(s) being addressed. Some ideas or the resolving of challenges may be taken forward most effectively through a more informal conversation between colleagues or the sharing of an existing resource. Others may require a formal agreement, a shared budget, clear responsibilities and sustained joint delivery. GWSF members acknowledge the value of different approaches along with the recognition that there is no 'one size fits all' model.

An appetite for innovation and an enthusiasm for trying new ways of working are woven into the fabric of the CBHA movement's DNA. Our research highlights that this is certainly the case in relation to collaboration. Members are taking this forward every day and are always on the lookout for further partnership opportunities.

SECTION 2 - FINDINGS

2.1 Different approaches to collaboration

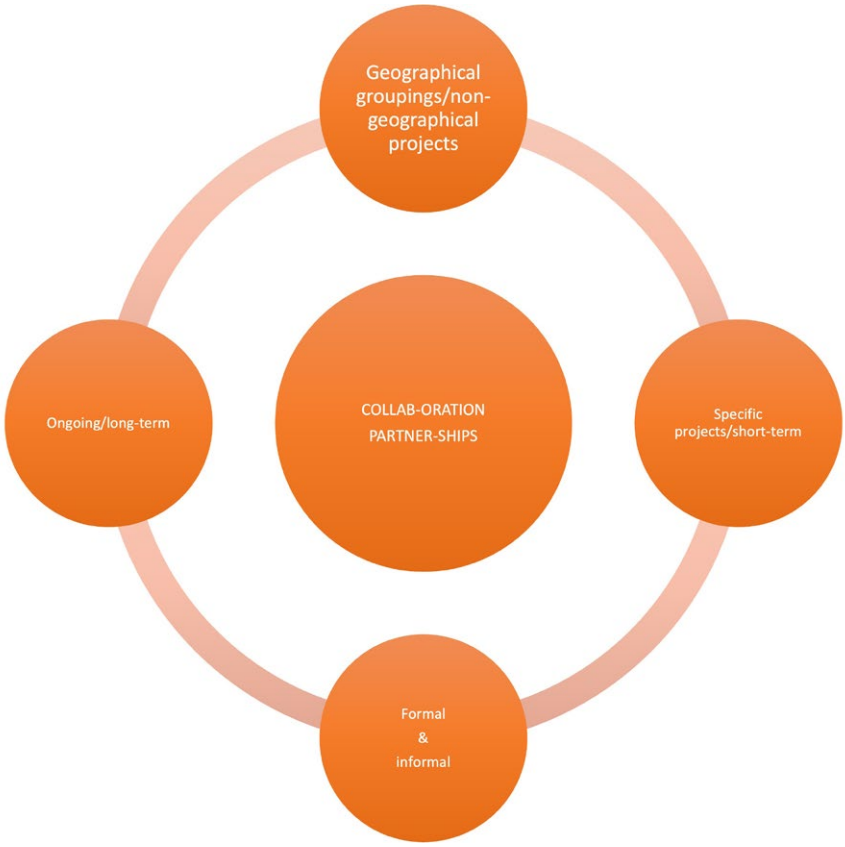


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the varied and flexible nature of collaboration and partnership working between CBHAs. It highlights four interconnected dimensions: the geographical basis of collaboration, the duration of the partnerships/relationships, the nature of the activity being undertaken, and the degree of formality involved. Together, these facets demonstrate that collaboration is not a single, uniform approach, but a spectrum of activity that can be adapted to best suit the needs of the partners and their communities.

Geographical groupings and issue-based projects represent two different ways in which partnerships can develop. Some collaboration is rooted in geographical proximity, with associations working together because they serve neighbouring communities or face similar local challenges.

However, collaboration is not necessarily limited by geography. Associations may also work together on specific issues or projects because they share expertise, interests, or strategic objectives, regardless of where they are based. This demonstrates that the potential for partnership sometimes extends beyond immediate neighbourhoods and can bring organisations together in a way that transcends proximity.

The Figure also distinguishes between ongoing, long-term collaboration and specific, short-term projects. Some partnerships develop into sustained relationships that provide a continuing basis for knowledge-sharing, mutual support and joint working. Over time, these relationships can build trust, strengthen understanding between organisations and create opportunities to respond collectively to emerging challenges.

Other forms of collaboration are more focused, bringing organisations together to address a particular issue, deliver a defined project or pursue a specific opportunity. These arrangements may be time-limited, but they can still generate significant benefits, including new learning, practical outcomes and relationships that may provide a foundation for future collaboration. The distinction highlights the importance of recognising both longer term partnerships and more targeted initiatives as equally valuable forms of joint working.

Another key feature highlighted by members was the value of both formal and informal collaboration. Informal arrangements may involve sharing knowledge, exchanging advice, discussing common challenges or drawing on the experience of colleagues in other associations. Such activity may require little formal structure, but nonetheless, members told us informal partnerships and relationships can be hugely beneficial in relation to peer support for both staff and committee members.

More formal partnerships tend to be predicated on agreed objectives, defined responsibilities, shared resources, joint project delivery or collaborative funding applications. These can be particularly important where activities require sustained commitment, financial investment or clear accountability.

Crucially, formal and informal approaches are not mutually exclusive: an informal relationship may develop into a formal project, while a formal partnership can be strengthened by the trust and open communication that develop through informal contact. In addition, the flexibility to successfully weave between both approaches is an innate skill which CBHAs are proficient in.

Ultimately, the central message is that effective collaboration is shaped by purpose, relationships, and context rather than by a single 'one-size fits all' model.

2.2 Range of collaborative activities

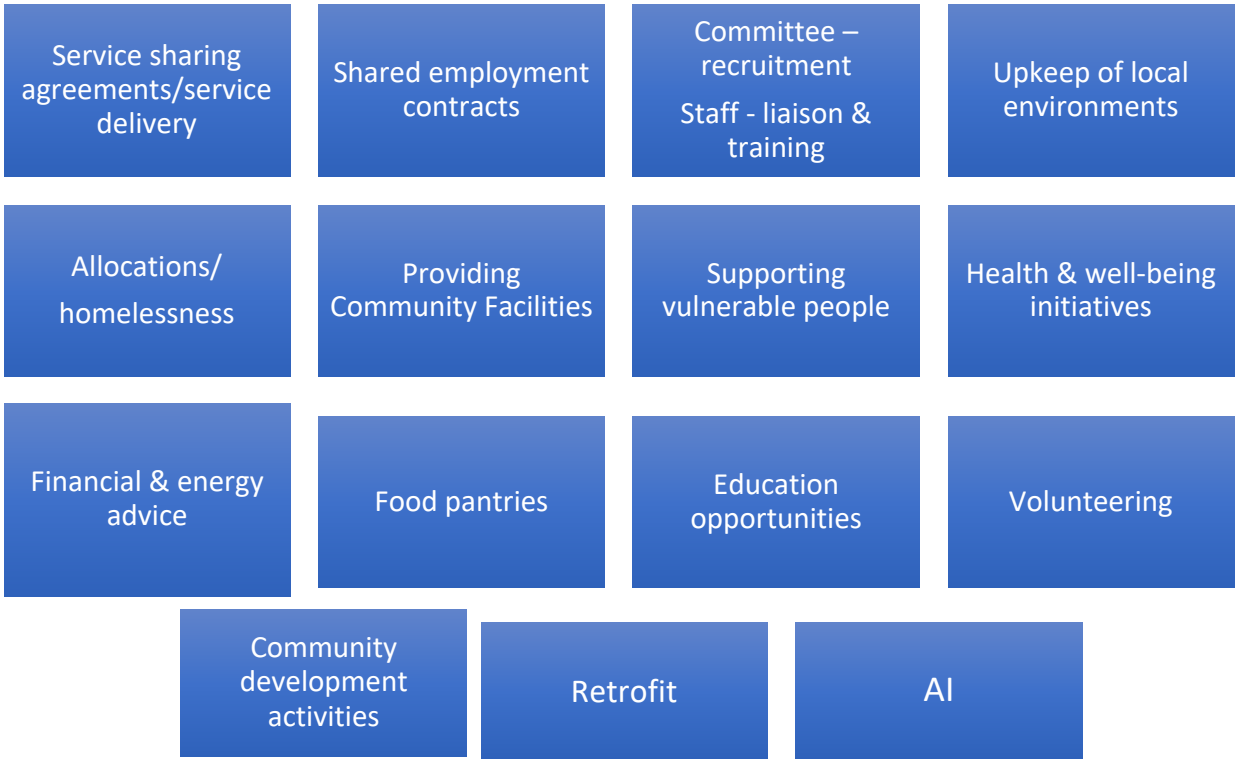


Figure 2

Figure 2 illustrates the breadth and diversity of collaborative activity taking place between CBHAs. The examples demonstrate that partnership working extends well beyond traditional housing management functions, encompassing shared services and organisational development, the delivery of services to tenants, and wider initiatives designed to support local communities and improve wellbeing. This breadth reflects the multiple roles that CBHAs play as housing providers, employers and Community Anchor Organisations.

One important area of collaboration involves sharing services and resources. For instance - service-sharing agreements and joint service delivery, shared employment contracts, committee recruitment, and staff liaison and training. The case-studies in Section 3 provide examples of all of these.

Another important theme captured in the Figure is the focus on joint working to improve housing services and local environments. Collaboration around allocations and homelessness, as well as the upkeep of local neighbourhoods, illustrates how associations can work together on key issues that affect tenants and communities. These activities may provide opportunities to coordinate approaches, share local knowledge and respond to common challenges. While each association retains responsibility for its own tenants and communities, working with neighbouring or like-minded organisations can help identify practical solutions and support more joined-up responses to local needs.

The Figure also highlights the importance of community support, inclusion and wellbeing. Collaborative activity here includes providing community facilities, supporting vulnerable people, developing health and wellbeing initiatives, establishing food pantries, offering financial and energy advice, and creating education and volunteering opportunities. All of this activity creates opportunities for participation and contributes to stronger, more resilient communities.

Fundamentally, Figure 2 provides a practical illustration of the breadth of partnership working across the CBHA sector. It challenges narrow perceptions of collaboration as simply a means of sharing costs or delivering services at greater scale, demonstrating instead its potential contribution to organisational resilience, service improvement, innovation and community wellbeing.

2.3 Key drivers and benefits of collaboration

The research points to several interconnected factors which encourage CBHAs to work together. These include shared values and ambitions, opportunities to learn from peers, the ability to share costs and risks, and the potential to improve services and outcomes for tenants.

Shared values, vision and ambition

A shared commitment to community-based housing provides an important foundation for collaboration. Although associations have different organisational histories and serve distinct communities, they often face common challenges and share a broad ambition to provide good-quality, affordable housing and support thriving local neighbourhoods. This common purpose can make it easier to identify opportunities for joint working.

As one participant described it, ‘collaboration is underpinned by a shared mindset’. This suggests that successful partnership working depends on more than identifying a practical opportunity. It also requires a degree of alignment in values, priorities, and expectations.

Sharing expertise and learning from peers

The opportunity to learn from others is another important driver which yields benefits. CBHAs operate in a complex environment in which they must respond to changing policy, regulatory requirements, financial pressures, and evolving tenant needs.

Working with peers provides access to a broader pool of knowledge and experience. It allows organisations to draw upon approaches that have been tested elsewhere, seek advice from colleagues, and identify opportunities to improve their own practice.

This can be particularly valuable when considering unfamiliar or emerging issues or developing new services. Rather than 'starting from scratch', associations can build on existing knowledge, adapt relevant learning and avoid repeating mistakes made elsewhere.

"Collaboration can also provide an opportunity to reflect on your priorities, test assumptions and gain a wider perspective and worldview. It's a good method of 'sense checking'."

Sharing costs and risks

Collaboration may enable associations to share the costs associated with developing a project, accessing specialist support, or delivering an activity. By combining resources, participating CBHAs may be able to pursue opportunities that would be difficult to justify delivering independently.

Sharing risks can also make it more feasible to explore innovative approaches. Where a project requires investment, new expertise or a departure from established practice, collaboration can allow partners to combine capabilities and consider the implications collectively.

Improving outcomes for tenants and communities

For CBHAs, the definitive aim of any collaboration is always connected to serving the needs of their tenants. This can be in relation to improving services, supporting individuals or helping to create stronger communities.

Working together can create opportunities to do all of the above through the development of innovative responses to local issues and more effective use of available resources. It can also help to identify shared challenges that extend beyond individual neighbourhoods and consider how a coordinated response might be beneficial.

Value for money

Value for money is a particularly significant driver in the current operating environment, fraught as it is with financial challenges. CBHAs must balance competing priorities while seeking to maintain affordable rents, invest in homes, and provide effective services. On top of their core landlord functions, they also want to continue in their Community Anchor capacity providing the vital activities which help to support communities and individuals to thrive and flourish.

"We sit in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Scotland and these activities…all the community development that we do, and tackling fuel and food poverty, and the opportunities we can offer tenants and other local people – these aren't just nice wee 'add-ons' they make such a big difference, and are so important"

As one member commented, collaboration 'allows us to do more than we could do alone – so basically we get more bang for our buck!'

This observation captures an important aspect of partnership working: its value may lie not simply in reducing expenditure, but in increasing what organisations can achieve with the resources available to them.

A meaningful assessment of value for money should therefore consider both inputs and outcomes. Relevant questions include whether collaboration improves the quality or reach of an activity, enables better access to expertise, reduces avoidable costs or creates opportunities that would not otherwise be available.The emphasis should be on demonstrable value rather than collaboration as an end in itself.

Funding opportunities and external expectations

The increasing emphasis on partnership working across funding bodies is another important factor. Funders now look for evidence

from applicants which demonstrates that they can work collaboratively, reach wider groups, and combine expertise to deliver a proposed initiative.

For CBHAs, established relationships can provide a foundation for developing credible joint bids. Organisations that understand each other's strengths and priorities may be better able to identify complementary contributions and develop a coherent proposal.

"Being able to demonstrate collaboration to funders is more crucial than ever, in fact it's often a given. So, we are always prepared to do the groundwork, have early discussions with our potential partners [other CBHAs]. Though sometimes this can be really challenging when application timelines/turnarounds are tight."

This highlights the growing importance of communicating partnership activity effectively. However, it also raises a wider question about how collaboration is recognised and assessed. Informal knowledge-sharing, longstanding peer relationships and locally focused cooperation may provide substantial value even where they do not form part of a formal consortium.

The reality is, though, that funding requirements often encourage and look more favourably on more formal collaboration structures, rather than informal partnerships.

2.4 Challenges in collaborating

As we have noted, collaboration offers significant benefits for CBHAs, but unsurprisingly the research also highlighted several challenges that associations need to navigate to ensure partnership working remains both productive and sustainable.

Maintaining momentum

Maintaining momentum beyond the initial enthusiasm can be difficult, particularly when partners face competing priorities and operational pressures. Regular communication, clear responsibilities and visible progress are crucial when it comes to keeping collaborative projects on track and ensuring partners remain committed over time.

Dedicating resources

Collaboration requires an investment of staff time, capacity and, in some cases, funding. For smaller associations with limited resources, attending meetings, coordinating activities, and managing joint projects can place additional pressure on existing workloads. Partners need to share responsibilities fairly and ensure that the anticipated benefits justify the resources invested.

"Though the way we look at it is that the ongoing staff resource is worth it – because we wouldn't be able to do what we do [community development activities] if we weren't a part of the bigger picture/network."

Staying on the same page: clear objectives

Partners need a shared understanding from the outset of what they want to achieve, and the contribution expected from each organisation. Priorities can change, so objectives and progress should be reviewed regularly. Clear goals and responsibilities help prevent misunderstandings, maintain direction, and ensure the collaboration stays on track.

Managing staff changes

Staff turnover (especially at senior level) can disrupt relationships, reduce continuity and result in the loss of knowledge about existing arrangements. Documenting processes, sharing information, and involving a wider range of colleagues can help ensure that collaboration is embedded within associations, rather than being dependent on specific individuals.

"Directors/CEOs are crucial to success when it comes to collaboration. They lead the charge and make the initial decision about doing it, and then choose to keep doing it. So, if a new CEO doesn't see the value, or wants to go in another direction then that's it over really."

Securing staff and committee buy-in

Successful collaboration relies on the support of both staff and committee members. They need to understand the purpose of the partnership, its expected benefits, and any implications for their associations. Clear communication and evidence of positive outcomes can help build confidence, address any concerns about losing independence, or about increased workloads.

The case-studies in Section 3 help to bring the benefits and challenges of collaboration alive with on-the-ground examples covering a range of issues.

2.5 Final reflections and next steps

Final Reflections

The research reinforces the fact that collaboration has long been an important feature of the CBHA sector. Relationships between associations have always existed and culminated in partnership and collaboration. Furthermore, members indicated that they are always open to more collaboration and continue to seek these opportunities out.

The findings also challenge simplistic narratives that portray CBHAs as isolated entities. While the nature and intensity of collaboration vary, members describe a diverse range of relationships and activities that demonstrate ongoing and flourishing partnerships and collaborative working.

A key reflection is that collaboration should be understood in its full breadth. Formal partnerships and consortium arrangements are important, but they represent only part of the picture. Informal knowledge-sharing, peer support and established professional networks can also provide significant value, even where their contribution is less visible to external partners.

The research further suggests that there is appetite to do more. Members recognise the potential to strengthen relationships, develop innovative projects and respond collectively to the pressures facing the sector. This ambition is grounded in a practical understanding of the challenges involved, including limited capacity, competing priorities and a funding landscape which is more pressured than ever.

An important point for the Forum to consider is the need to continue communicating what is happening with collaboration in the CBHA sector. If collaboration is to be recognised by funders, policymakers and other external partners, it needs to be 'shouted about', and the publication of this report is part of that process.

Next steps

We will share the report widely –

- With all GWSF members and also provide them with opportunities for discussion using our existing network groups and other events.
- With colleagues in the wider housing sector and in the third sector.
- With Glasgow City Council, the Scottish Government, and other external partners including funding bodies.

SECTION 3 – CASE-STUDIES

The following case-studies feature a range of examples which illustrate the diverse scope of collaborative work being carried out by our members in their organizations and across their communities.

CASE STUDY 1 - CASSILTOUN GROUP

"Obviously aside from regulatory expectation there is an appetite to collaborate and endless opportunities to do so - basically it just makes sense in an area like Castlemilk, where resources are scarce and need great,"

The four Cassiltoun based CBHAs – Ardenglen, Cassiltoun, Craigdale and North View, (with input from Thenue HA too) have not formed a separately constituted alliance but have long worked closely on a range of initiatives.

These include –

- 'Castlemilk Together Food and Fun for Summer' Programme
- Castlemilk Community Football Trust which runs the Extra Time Camp and Barlia Soccer Camp with meals provided.
- Homestart Glasgow South (Early Years Hub) runs physical theatre, yoga, and healthy food fun at a local church for ages 0-5.
- Regular outdoor community pop-ups and breakfast/ lunch clubs across different neighbourhood hubs.

The involvement of the five organisations means activities are provided every weekday, with shared responsibility and one body taking on overall co-ordination each year.

From the array of ongoing work in Castlemilk we have selected two innovative examples which demonstrate CBHAs' continuing desire to 'push the envelope' in relation to collaboration and partnership working.

Castlemilk Housing & Human Rights Lived Experience Board - supported by Ardenglen, Craigdale, Cassiltoun and North View HAs

Background

The Castlemilk Housing & Human Rights Lived Experience Board (CHHRLEB) developed from initial conversations between the CEOs of the four Castlemilk CBHAs and Carole Ewart, Public Policy and Human Rights Consultant, centred around the potential for taking an approach which promoted housing as a human right.

The Board was established in 2023 with the CBHAs providing in-kind administrative and financial support, and is led by voluntary committee members from the four associations who are supported in their work by Carole Ewart.

Alongside housing, the Board's focus has subsequently widened to incorporate other local issues and community needs, including the lack of access to a local supermarket in the area. Whatever issue they are exploring the key purpose of the Board's work is –

"To close the gap between human rights theory and people's everyday experiences."

The Board's work is guided by the PANEL principles, a framework used to put a human-rights based approach into practice. These are –

- ✓ Participation
- ✓ Accountability
- ✓ Non-discrimination
- ✓ Empowerment
- ✓ Law

Achievements to date

In the short 3-year period since it was set up, CHHRLEB has attained phenomenal success with a string of impressive key achievements to date. These include –

- » The publication of a Human Rights Handbook outlining the principles which guide the Board's work alongside insights about how these should operate in practice in communities.
- » Campaign to bring a supermarket to the 'food dessert' in Castlemilk to serve the 14,000 strong community and give residents access to fresh, affordable food.
- » As part of the supermarket campaign the Board made a written submission to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights which resulted in an invitation to speak about the key issues at an online session with the Committee.
- » In addition, the Board secured an Early Day Motion Debate in the House of Commons about the topic, as well as extensive media coverage.

'It has been accepted by the United Nations that our community has the right to fresh, affordable nutritious food, a right that we are currently being denied. We have petitioned everyone from our local MP and MSPs to the Scottish Human Rights Commissioner and have built up real momentum to try and give our communities access to the quality of food they deserve." (Chair of the Board, Anna Stuart MBE)

- » Extensive strategic advocacy and engagement work with key agencies and actors. These include: the Scottish Parliament; Castlemilk Law Centre; the Scottish Poverty & Inequality Commission; the Scottish Human Rights Commission; and a range of housing sector bodies.
- » Since its inception the group has also received recognition within the housing sector, this includes winning Share's 2026 Community Impact Award.

"The group members are able to draw upon their vast experience and knowledge of campaigning and activism gained over so many years with the CBHA movement. All of this and their enthusiasm for seeing things through a new lens and using a human rights approach to consider local issues and how to tackle them is what makes CHHRLEB so successful and special."

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Into the future

The Board is keen to build upon their success and to continue its work in Castlemilk, using a human-rights based approach to campaign on existing issues and identify new ones. Better access to local health services is high on their agenda moving forward.

Another key driver is to continue raising the profile of the Board and its work with external agencies, different sectors, and with politicians both locally and nationally. Board members were also passionate about

"Talking to local people, so that we can let them understand what we are doing and let them know how this [approach] can help bring about the positive changes we all want to see here."

Crucially, the group is keen to share its knowledge and experience with colleagues in the sector, about how a human rights approach can help to both frame and challenge local issues. There are clear parallels here with the CBHA movement, rooted as it is in local activism and people's own lived experience, and the Board aims to continue 'spreading the word' to other CBHAs.

Ongoing collaboration will remain an essential lynchpin of CHHRLEB's work. The smooth partnership working arrangements which underpin the group's success are predicated on the continued buy-in, support and commitment of the four CBHAs themselves; alongside all of the aforementioned in relation to the board members themselves.

"None of us could have predicted the level of success that the board has realized…it is a shining example of the unique position CBHAs hold within their communities and demonstrates the good that they continue to do with that."

To find out more contact – David Byfield - david.byfield@ardenglen.org.uk

AI Damp & Mould Sensors Project

Background

The collaboration builds upon the success of Craigdale HA's own pilot project which utilized '5G sensors to Tackle Damp, Mould and Data Silos'.

The objectives of the pilot were to -

- Deploy 5G-connected IoT sensors to monitor humidity, temperature, and air quality.
- Use AI models to detect early signs of damp and mould risk.
- Integrate property, maintenance, and tenant data in one system.
- Evaluate operational impact, tenant satisfaction, and scalability.

The challenges it sought to tackle -

- Rise in damp/mould complaints; high remediation costs.
- Fragmented data across systems (asset, maintenance, tenant).

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» Limited predictive insight — reactive rather than preventative approach.
» Need for reliable, real-time data from hard-to-reach homes.

AI in Action

» Deployed 20 sets of sensors across all property types (random).
» AI detected abnormal humidity-temperature patterns before visible mould.
» Risk-scoring engine prioritised properties for inspection.
» Predictive model updated daily as new data streamed in.

Key successes

» Enabled the association to collect data set from multiple sources.
» Created a new platform to communicate with tenants.
» Sensors have made positive changes to tenants' habits.

Taking forward the collaboration

Strong partnership working already exists amongst the five Castlemilk CBHAs, and the other four associations are keen to collaborate with Craigdale to build upon the pilot initiative and roll it out across all CBHA stock in the area. East Kilbride HA is also a partner in the project.

"CBHAs [here] have never been precious about sharing ideas, projects, knowledge and resources, and that's definitely the case with the AI project…there is a real appetite to take it forward."

Funding and Scaling Up the Project

At the time of writing, an application has been submitted to the Energy Redress Fund under its innovation strand. The proposal seeks funding to support the expansion of the project across the area, including the recruitment of two dedicated members of staff: an Energy Adviser and a Project Manager. The proposed programme would cover approximately 5,000 properties.

The funding would essentially provide the capacity needed to coordinate the project, and support participating housing associations and tenants, in relation to implementation and roll out.

If their Energy Redress Funding bid is not successful the partners plan to explore alternative funding sources, including Lottery programmes. They are also prepared to scale back the project initially, to reflect the funding available, with the possibility of some costs being met internally.

Regardless of the final funding outcome, there is a firm commitment to continue progressing the work. Furthermore, the technology will definitely be included in Craigdale's 31 new development properties, providing a further opportunity to deploy and develop the system.

The Technology: Hubble System

The project centres on the Hubble system, which incorporates sensors into household equipment to collect information that can help identify potential property-related issues.

The proposed equipment includes smoke alarms, window sensors, temperature indicators and a Hubble communications hub. The sensors collect relevant information, which is then transmitted through the system, anonymised and presented as aggregated data. The housing associations receive information requiring attention when the system identifies a potential problem.

An important element of the approach is the integration of sensors into smoke alarms. As smoke alarms require replacement every ten years, the intention is to incorporate the sensor technology into replacement units, making it possible to introduce the system as part of normal asset replacement programmes.

The system is intended to support earlier identification of issues such as potential property defects, for instance in the pilot phase roof defects were picked up in some of Craigdale's stock. This creates opportunities for housing associations to take preventative/proactive action rather than relying solely on tenants reporting problems or indeed waiting until damage becomes more serious.

The technology also includes a Tenant Hub, which provides an accessible conduit through which tenants can communicate with their housing association and report problems. This is an important complement to the sensor technology, and ensures that tenant feedback and communication is a key element of why the system is so effective.

The Hubble system and associated equipment are based on Craidale's own design and were developed working alongside an expert in the field. The ownership of the system and its equipment provides greater control over its future development and also offers a potentially more affordable alternative to other more expensive AI and technology providers.

Key aims and potential benefits

The key aims and associated potential benefits of the collaborative project are –

Proactive Asset Management and Cost Reduction - The technology will enable the partner CBHAs to identify potential property issues earlier and intervene before problems escalate. Subsequently, this could reduce repair costs, prevent further property deterioration and improve the long-term management of housing assets.

Enhanced Tenant Satisfaction - By improving the ability to identify and respond to property-related problems, the project aims to improve tenants' experiences of their homes and their interactions with their association. The Tenant Hub will also provide a greater sense of agency in relation to communicating concerns and reporting issues. But it is important to note that the technology will complement and not replace the in-person tenant support and communication that are intrinsic to the CBHA approach.

Operational Efficiency and Resource Optimisation - Better access to relevant property information could help housing associations direct staff time and resources towards the issues that require attention most urgently. In the longer term, this could improve working practices, support more efficient maintenance planning and reduce unnecessary visits or investigations.

Data-Driven Strategic Planning and Investment - Aggregated data will provide housing associations with a clearer understanding of patterns and trends across their housing stock. This information could support decisions about planned maintenance, asset investment and future service priorities.

The importance of tenant and staff engagement

Tenants

The most important message was to ensure that tenants knew that the aim of the sensor project was to help the association understand and address issues more effectively, rather than to scrutinise tenants' behaviour.

"Getting the messaging right is crucial because if we get it wrong it will fail. We need to be transparent about how we use the data and explain things clearly [for instance using video clips] – it's not about blaming tenants, but about opening a dialogue and explaining how the technology can help us to fix things – the problems we found with the roofs in some properties in the pilot phase is a great example."

Privacy and individual circumstances must also be considered. While the system is intended to provide anonymised and aggregated information, it is important that tenants understand how information is processed and the circumstances in which an alert may lead to a response from their housing association. Clear explanations of these arrangements will remain essential to maintaining trust moving forward.

The project must also remain flexible and responsive to individual needs. Some tenants, including people experiencing severe mental health difficulties, may not wish to participate, and participation may be detrimental to their health or wellbeing in certain circumstances. In such cases, the intention is to offer an exemption from the connected monitoring element of the scheme, with the Hubble system left unconnected. This would not remove the obligation to install the required smoke alarm but would allow the tenant's circumstances to be taken into account.

It is not anticipated that there will be a large number of exemptions. Nevertheless, the ability to make appropriate individual arrangements is essential. Participating housing associations will be able to identify tenants who may require similar consideration within their own housing stock.

Staff

At this stage, as well as the CEOs of the participating CBHAs, other senior staff, including those with responsibility for asset management, are supportive of the project.

Moving forward the challenge will lie in translating this high-level commitment into broader staff involvement in all of the associations. The partners recognise that wider staff engagement and implementation planning are more difficult to progress until funding is secured and the resources needed to support the work are in place. Nonetheless, they are confident that this will happen as the project progresses.

"We understand that there might be an initial anxiety for some staff about using the new technology, but we [will all] provide a supportive environment to support staff as it rolls out."

Wider lessons for the sector

As well as the partnership project with the other Castlemilk CBHAs and East Kilbride HA, Craigdale is keen to share its knowledge and experience with the wider sector. To that end training is available on AI and damp and mould to other RSLs who might be interested.

To find out more contact – Linda Chelton - linda@craigdaleha.co.uk

CASE STUDY 2 - CLOCH, BARRHEAD, DALMUIR PARK AND OAK TREE HAs

Cloch & Oak Tree - Service Sharing Agreement

Background

Cloch HA entered a group structure and partnership with Oak Tree Housing Association in 2012/2013 before **becoming fully independent again in 2021.**

During this time period, and indeed until recently both associations shared a finance team and subsequently an IT specialist.

The shared IT service in practice

Ewan Barr, who is now Head of IT & Corporate Services at Cloch HA, was initially recruited into the joint IT position. Ewan's role meant that both associations had access to in-house IT expertise and support.

The joint service came to an end with the arrival of a new CEO at Oak Tree HA, who wanted to take things in a different direction in relation to IT.

Subsequently, Ewan's role has evolved as Cloch folded its Corporate and IT services into one function. In addition, he now provides a consultancy service to smaller associations (at cost price) to assist with their IT journeys. Cloch's philosophy is 'to be generous with our time, talent and ideas to help others in the sector when we can…since others have done the same for us along the way.'

Shared services - shared lessons

Reflections on the shared service arrangements highlighted several crucial points in relation to getting it right. These included –

» The importance of being clear about what the role involved in terms of working for two distinct organisations, with different cultures, different CEO leadership styles and physically working in two different locations.

"Not everyone is suited to that [split role and way of working] and some people might struggle and won't be able to 'switch it up' between the associations, and at particularly busy times the person might be really stretched."

» The importance of good communication between the partner associations themselves and with the shared employee(s), so that they don't risk getting too overextended or burnt out.

» More effective if both organisations are moving at the same pace and in the same direction or there can be a risk of one 'feeling pressured/dragged along'.

» Flexibility and a degree of 'give and take' is crucial since at certain times one organisation may require more from the shared service than the other. Therefore, there needs to be a joint acknowledgment of this and an understanding that both will benefit in the long run and get the resources they require over the course of the partnership.

» A recognition that the shared service agreement may come to an end and therefore it is essential to build contingency plans in from the start.

Benefits

» Being able to recruit a more experienced/higher calibre candidate since pooling of resources means potential candidates can be recruited on a higher band.

» Value for Money – especially for smaller HAs.

» Economies of scale and economies of learning: the latter specifically applies for the post-holder since doing tasks/ projects twice allows them to build up skills, and to see what does and doesn't work more quickly.

» Negotiating power for potential savings much better because 'you're not just going into negotiations on behalf of one small organisation'.

» Opportunities to learn from HA partners – innovation/knowledge exchange.

» Good for CEOs, as well as other staff members, in terms of peer support.

» Back-up for both systems – in relation to both continuity and contingency.

Challenges

"The challenges are basically the opposite of what makes it work effectively – buy-in, willingness, flexibility, good communication, clearly defined plan, moving at the same pace in the same direction etc – if these aren't in place then it won't work."

Barrhead, Cloch and Dalmuir Park HAs - Joint Human Resources Employee Contract

Background

Cloch HA made the decision to employ an in-house Human Resources (HR) member of staff which subsequently led to discussions with Barrhead and Dalmuir Park HAs about the possibility of the three organisations doing this together. The intention was that the employee would work between the three associations and also be employed by all three.

The arrangement was formalised via a pioneering Joint Employee Contract, underpinned by a written framework, agreed upon after the three partners had sought legal advice independently, and were satisfied with how the initiative would operate in practice.

"We know that there are lots of examples in the sector of associations working together in partnerships and/or sharing services, but a joint employee contract is taking things a step further and [we believe] it is pretty unique in the sector. We would encourage others to consider it and we can confirm that it is an effective way to do things."

How it works

In early 2025, highly experienced HR professional Richard Fairley took up the new position of Head of People & Culture across all three organisations.

Crucially, Richard's post provides a specialist, in-house HR service, which means that the three associations don't have to pay for consultants to deliver this. As a result, the CBHAs have been able to accelerate their culture change programme. In addition, having on-hand, easily accessible HR support has made a huge difference to staff wellbeing and morale.

In general, smaller RSLs don't require a full time 'people and culture' post or indeed have the resource to support it. However, the Joint Employment Contract allows the three associations to facilitate this, with Richard splitting his time between the three.

"It works because the partners all see the bigger picture and are flexible and accommodating, because sometimes one HA needs more of the employee for whatever reason. And that's fine, it all evens out [and the] VFM cannot be overstated – we basically get double the resources for half the costs."

Another key advantage of having an on-site HR resource is the ability for Richard to be proactive with HR changes and new legislation etc. This means that the three associations are well-prepared and on top of new developments and 'any required changes can be implemented quickly and effectively."

"Upcoming changes in employment law make having this specialism in-house even more valuable than ever."

Why it works

» "There are two crucial ingredients: the first, is finding the right partners with an enthusiastic attitude and flexible approach; the second is finding the right person for the job who has the skills and experience to be able to operate across the three associations."

» The aligned ethos and cultures in the partner organisations foster a 'closeness and understanding that just makes everything easier' – from recruitment processes to general communication, and ongoing decisions about the focus of the role.

» CEOs being willing to 'go with the flow' and 'leave any egos at the door'. When it works well it can be a real source of support for CEOs as it provides a 'ready-made peer network.'

Key reflections

» *"Pooling our resources allowed us to attract Richard for the post. Having that bit extra meant that we could advertise for someone more experienced and appoint on a higher salary. So the calibre of the employee was almost guaranteed from the outset."*

» Protecting the employee – so they are not too stretched/burnt out – communication crucial between employee and all the partners – issues/ stretched too much – quarterly check ins with all the partners/good relationships

» Cost saving in areas like joint training and the creation of a peers' network are further ongoing benefits.

» The success of the HR initiative has also led the three partners to consider potential opportunities for introducing JECs in other areas of their work – for instance, in governance.

To find out more contact – Robert Pollock - rpollock@clochhousing.org.uk

CASE STUDY 3 - DRUMCOG - SUSTAINING LOCAL COLLABORATION IN DRUMCHAPEL

Background

Drumcog is a partnership of CBHAs operating in Drumchapel, in the north-west of Glasgow. Membership has evolved over time and currently comprises Cernach Housing Association, Drumchapel Housing Co-operative, Kingsridge-Cleddans Housing Association and Pineview Housing Associations. The group also works with the Wheatley Group's Locality Director for the area, bringing together community-based and wider housing sector perspectives.

Members (including Wheatley) contribute a small annual amount towards administration and specific activities, such as training. This shared approach helps sustain the partnership and supports practical collaboration while allowing each association to retain its own identity and independence.

Drumcog collaboration in action

Drumcog's collaborative activity spans strategic discussion, staff and committee development, joint procurement, and services for local residents.

Senior officer meetings take place at least quarterly, providing a regular opportunity for associations to discuss shared priorities, exchange information and identify opportunities for joint working. These meetings help maintain relationships and ensure that collaboration remains connected to the organisations' evolving needs.

Joint committee training provides both financial and organisational benefits. Bringing committee members from different associations together helps reduce duplication and creates opportunities to share experience, discuss common governance challenges and learn from different approaches. It can also build confidence and reinforce a sense of shared purpose.

Joint staff training offers similar benefits for employees, supporting professional development, knowledge-sharing and stronger connections between colleagues across the participating associations. These opportunities allow staff to learn from one another and draw on the wider experience available across the group.

Drumcog also collaborates on practical housing services. Cernach, Drumchapel and Pineview have a **joint reactive repairs framework** which helps them coordinate their approach to repairs while supporting the continued involvement of smaller, local contractors. This demonstrates how collaboration can support efficiencies while remaining responsive to the local economy. Further collaboration includes a joint gas contract.

Another important example is the **Common Allocations Policy (CAP)**, involving Cernach, and Pineview Housing Associations. By

applying a shared set of allocation rules and providing a common website through which prospective applicants can register their interest, the associations make the process more straightforward and accessible. The approach offers a more joined-up experience for applicants while enabling participating associations to work within an agreed framework.

A previous Drumcog initiative was having a staff member spending one day a week at the local food pantry at a time when this was seen a local need. This provided an accessible point of contact for housing-related queries and enabled people to be signposted to relevant organisations or services where appropriate. It illustrated how partnership working can connect housing expertise with wider community support and beyond.

Benefits of collaboration

A key benefit of Drumcog is the opportunity to draw on the collective knowledge and experience of participating associations.

"The collective sense checking you get from collaboration is basically invaluable."

Joint training and shared contracts can also help reduce costs and duplication, while the relationships developed through regular contact strengthen communication and mutual support.

The partnership's practical initiatives demonstrate that collaboration can deliver benefits both internally, through staff and committee development, and externally, through more coordinated services for tenants and local residents.

Challenges and lessons learned

Despite these benefits, sustaining collaboration requires ongoing commitment. With members facing increasing and varied priorities, maintaining the engagement of all participating associations can be difficult, and responsibility for progressing joint initiatives may fall disproportionately on one or two organisations. At the same time, increasing pressures on individual associations can make it challenging to dedicate sufficient staff time and resources to partnership activity.

Securing committee member involvement can also sometimes be difficult. Governing committee members already carry significant responsibilities, and additional training or joint activities may be perceived as a further demand on their time as volunteers.

These challenges reflect the wider pressures facing CBHAs as they seek to keep rents affordable, maintain good services and respond to growing expectations around their wider community role.

"There are myriad pressures on HAs, we're trying to keep rents as low as possible whilst delivering good services and also dealing with 'role creep' […] but collaboration can help to potentially ease some of this."

To find out more contact – Joyce Orr - j.orr@pineview.org.uk

CASE STUDY 4 EHRA - EASTERHOUSE HOUSING AND REGENERATION ALLIANCE (EHRA)

EHRA was set up in 2011, replacing the original Greater Easterhouse Community Ownership Forum (GECOF), with a broad remit extending beyond housing management to neighbourhood renewal, social welfare, local employment, training and community development. It is a forum for discussion, representation, lobbying and joint working on housing and regeneration issues affecting Greater Easterhouse.

EHRA's membership has changed over time, with current membership comprising all seven community based associations in Easterhouse:

- Blairtummock HA
- Calvay HA
- Gardeen HA
- Easthall Park HA
- Lochfield Park HA
- Provanhall HA
- Wellhouse HA

Working collectively allows the members to retain their organisational independence while coordinating matters of shared concern. Activities have included campaigning and lobbying, shared housing access arrangements through a partial Common Housing Register (no longer in operation), service improvement and benchmarking, staff and committee training, joint procurement, welfare initiatives, and employment and training opportunities for local people.

In recent years it has organised election hustings and gala days, engaged with ministers, the local authority and other public agencies, supported charitable and community events, and campaigned for responses to poverty and the unequal effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

It is fair to say participation in EHRA has had its peaks and troughs. In common with the wider housing association sector, turnover among committee members of EHRA's seven associations has been significant in recent years and the tradition of being involved in a collective group may not be quite what it once was. This has affected things like the level of participation in chairs' meetings and joint training sessions.

Views on how to deliver services in the future may vary among the member associations more than was perhaps the case many years/ decades ago. As with other regional groupings of associations, it seems likely that the future may see more partnership working on specific projects – such as joint contracts – between, say, two or three member associations rather than all seven at the same time.

To find out more contact - Alan Hume – alanhume@provanhall.org.uk

CASE STUDY 5 EYDENT/AYRSHIRE GROUP

Eydent collaboration across Ayrshire

Eydent (Ayrshire word for 'doin things richt') came into being around 15 years ago, with a launch at the Scottish Parliament. Its current members are Atrium Homes, Ayrshire Housing, Cunninghame HA, Riverside Scotland HA and Shire HA.

Amongst other things Eydent used to have an annual conference, but around 8-10 years ago much of the original momentum with the alliance had faded. Reasons for this type of loss of momentum can vary, and may be partly about the enthusiasm of particular senior staff, and with there sometimes being a possible tendency for long serving chief officers to be more isolated from other associations. Sometimes it may be about competition (for funding), or perceptions of competition, between local associations.

The more recent re-emergence of Eydent and several inter-HA collaborations, as detailed below, seems largely to have been down to the initiative of some newer senior staff who wanted to see more partnership working and were well enough networked to make this happen.

Energy Advice Service

This was originally set up post-Covid by Atrium, Ayrshire Housing, Shire and Cunninghame, funded through the Scottish Government fuel support fund managed by SFHA.

Cunninghame provide the service through an energy advice worker as part of their Citrus Energy/LemonAid subsidiary.

The service dealt with issues such as high fuel debt and capped meters. An impact paper has been produced and is available from Jen McCann – jmccann@chaltd.org.uk

After funding ran out, Ayrshire Housing decided to make their own funding available to continue to buy the service, now shared between the two associations.

Community Wellbeing Officer

A 2025 collaboration between Ayrshire Housing and Atrium, through National Lottery funding matched by each association, has funded a Community Wellbeing Officer.

The focus of the work is to support vulnerable tenants in sustaining their tenancies, managing their homes independently, and overcoming financial or personal crises.

The Community Wellbeing Coach delivers a wide range of practical and emotional support directly to tenants:

- **Financial & Energy Support:** Helps tenants access emergency gas/electricity vouchers, the community care grant, and debt management assistance.
- **Crisis & Welfare:** Provides direct assistance for those navigating addiction, mental health, and family changes.
- **Community Connection:** Assists tenants with registering for a GP, joining local community groups, and accessing digital inclusion resources.
- **Tenancy Management:** Works with young people and struggling families to navigate taking on a first tenancy and responding to any early signs of crisis.

Shared Mediation Service

This is a new collaboration being developed between Atrium, Cunninghame, Riverside and Shire. Two existing housing officers from each association are being trained by SACRO to deal with tenant disputes/anti social behaviour, creating a bank of eight trained mediators.

A service level agreement covers how requests for mediation are responded to. The involvement of the four associations means that a mediator from an association not involved in the dispute in question can be sourced, giving a greater sense of independence on the mediator's part.

The total cost of the training, at £5,000, meant that only £1,250 was needed from each association.

Shared subscription to Grantfinder for identifying funding sources

All five Eydent partners in this initiative were able to split the £7,000 annual cost of this subscription, which facilitates access to a wide range of funding sources, e.g. for retrofit works, community services. Tie-in is for three years, and none of the participants feel that they could justify carrying the full cost on their own.

Reactive repair and void maintenance contract

When Shire HA was looking to re-tender their own contract, they felt it made sense to engage with Atrium, who were already using the same contractor for part of their stock. This is now a shared contract, with Ayrshire Housing a partner too. Each association manages its own lots.

The added value is that with a bigger contract, the service can be Ayrshire-based rather than being delivered from further afield, meaning better service quality, and there is combined 'clout' from the three partners working together to get any problems sorted quickly and effectively.

This contract began in April 2026 on a five year plus two basis. [Cunninghame are not involved as they have a direct works function.]

Common Housing Register

Atrium, Cunninghame, Riverside and Shire are long-term partners in the CHR with East Ayrshire Council. The four associations believe their perspectives are more likely to be heard when presented as a united front in discussions with the Council.

Other collaborations have come on the back of these bigger projects, for example:

- Using Eydent to reach the staff of the five member associations with an advert seeking board members for the Cunninghame Furniture Recycling Company, resulting in four new volunteers
- Cunninghame and Riverside teaming up with Wheatley Group and Loreburn HA to set up a Community Fun Day in Dumfries on 15 July 2026 – 200 participants signed up, which is bigger and better than any one association could have achieved on its own

Concluding thoughts

- Different projects will suit different associations at different times – it makes total sense for each partner in Eydent to be involved in some projects and not in others, and some collaborations extend to other associations outwith Eydent
- There is a definite sense of a greater culture of collaboration now existing, and more than anything else this is largely down to what newer senior staff have brought to their organisations

To find out more contact - Jennifer McCann - jmcann@chaltd.org or Julie Allison - jallison@shirehousing.org

CASE STUDY 6 - FLAIR – FEDERATION OF LOCAL HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS – RENFREWSHIRE AND EAST RENFREWSHIRE

Background

FLAIR is a long-established collaboration between CBHAs, which has been operating for almost 30 years. Its longevity reflects a sustained commitment to partnership working.

A defining feature of FLAIR is that the collaboration has transcended its original roots. Current chief executives and managers were not involved when the partnership began, yet they continue to recognise its value and support its activities.

The partnership provides a well-established example of how CBHAs can retain their individual identities and local accountability while working collectively.

How the partnership works

FLAIR operates across a broad range of activities, combining strategic collaboration between chief executives with opportunities for staff and governing body members to work together.

Chief executives meet approximately every six weeks to discuss issues, exchange ideas and consider shared challenges. This is complemented by forums, bringing together managers and other staff. The partnership also organises an annual conference and supports the FLAIR Academy, which provides dedicated training on a range of topics for both staff and committee members.

This broad engagement is central to the partnership's sustainability. Governing bodies are particularly supportive of FLAIR and recognise the benefits it brings.

"Board members have a real affection for FLAIR and are protective of it too…they see the benefits of it. They're quite precious about FLAIR and all the good that it's done, and continues to do"

FLAIR's work demonstrates how an established partnership can translate shared commitment into practical benefits across a wide range of areas.

Joint procurement and service delivery

The associations have collaborated on procurement and service delivery, including a dynamic purchasing system (DPS) for reactive repairs and void works. This arrangement also involves Inverclyde associations, including Cloch and Oak Tree, extending the benefits of collaboration beyond the original grouping.

The partnership is exploring further opportunities for joint procurement, including for insurance and internal audit services. This could be particularly beneficial for smaller associations which can sometimes struggle to attract sufficient interest from suppliers when tendering independently. Working collectively can help broaden the pool of potential bidders and improve the terms available.

Sharing expertise and avoiding duplication

The professional forums provide an important mechanism for exchanging knowledge and learning from one another's experiences. Rather than each organisation developing solutions independently, staff can draw on approaches that have already been tested elsewhere.

This can help associations respond more effectively to new challenges, improve existing services and avoid repeatedly reinventing the wheel. For example, the partnership has provided an opportunity to learn from another association's experience of delivering estate management services.

This exchange of practical knowledge is particularly valuable to smaller organisations, which may have limited internal capacity or fewer opportunities to access specialist expertise independently.

Joint funding and tenant support

FLAIR has also demonstrated the value of collaboration in securing funding and developing services that individual associations might struggle to provide alone.

A recent example involved a joint funding application relating to homelessness and tenancy sustainment, with Paisley managing the funding arrangements on behalf of the partnership. The funding has supported access to specialist assistance, including welfare rights and energy advice.

This illustrates how collaboration can create additional capacity and extend the range of support available to tenants without requiring every association to employ its own specialist staff.

Shared services for local communities

The partnership also supports services that benefit tenants and communities across the participating associations. One example is the Care and Repair service, which is managed by Bridgewater HA but available to tenants across the wider group. This provides access to practical assistance, including a handyperson service.

A collective voice and shared responses to emerging issues

FLAIR provides the associations with a stronger collective voice when engaging with local authorities and the Scottish Government. By working together, the organisations can raise common concerns, share perspectives and make their collective experience more visible to decision-makers.

"FLAIR gives us a louder and stronger voice, which is more powerful in any dialogue with the Council, the Scottish Government, or funders."

Staff and committee development

The FLAIR Academy, annual conference and joint training opportunities help strengthen the skills and confidence of staff and governing body members. They also create opportunities for colleagues from different organisations to build relationships and learn from one another.

These relationships are an important part of the partnership's wider value. Collaboration is not confined to formal meetings or specific projects; it is also sustained through the connections that develop between people who understand similar challenges.

The benefits of collaboration

FLAIR demonstrates several important benefits of sustained partnership working.

- **Greater organisational capacity:** Sharing resources, expertise and services enables associations to undertake activities that may be difficult to deliver independently.
- **Improved value for money:** Joint procurement and shared service arrangements can create opportunities to make more effective use of available resources.
- **Access to specialist support:** Collaborative funding and service delivery can make welfare rights, energy advice and other forms of assistance available to tenants across the partnership.
- **Peer learning and professional development:** Forums, training and the FLAIR Academy enable staff and committee members to exchange knowledge and develop their skills.
- **Reduced duplication:** Associations can learn from one another's experience rather than repeatedly developing solutions to similar problems.
- **A stronger collective voice:** Working together enables the organisations to raise shared issues with local and national government and demonstrate the value of their combined experience.
- **Stronger relationships and cohesion:** Regular engagement helps build trust, maintain connections, and reinforce a shared commitment to community-based housing.

Into the future

FLAIR demonstrates that collaboration between CBHAs can be both long-standing and continually evolving

After 27 years, FLAIR provides a compelling example of what sustained partnership working can achieve when participating organisations recognise its value and remain committed to making it work.

"Basically, FLAIR's success lies in the continued buy-in, and support of the partner CBHAs - and the proof is in the pudding – it's still going strong nearly three decades later."

To find out more contact – Andy Thomson - **athomson@bridgewaterha.org.uk**

CASE STUDY 7 - GEL GROUP – GOVAN, ELDERPARK AND LINTHOUSE HAS

Background and evolution

The GEL Group brings together three CBHAs in Govan: Govan HA, Elderpark HA and Linthouse HA. While there has long been an aspiration to work more closely together, progress has at times been limited by competing organisational priorities and the practical challenges of coordinating joint activity.

A significant example of collaboration came during the COVID-19 pandemic, when GEL secured £400,000 to support emergency community responses, including food provision and assistance to residents. This demonstrated the potential of partnership working, although activity was initially driven by the immediate demands of the crisis.

More recently, the associations had renewed discussions about how collaboration could develop, including through committee and senior staff workshops however in the meantime this will primarily be Govan and Elderpark which progress this. The aim is to move beyond individual initiatives towards a clearer, shared approach based on common priorities and opportunities.

Opportunities for collaboration

A key focus is identifying where the associations' business plans align and where their different strengths and expertise could complement one another.

The GEL associations currently collaborate on wider-role initiatives, including an energy advice project funded through the Energy Redress scheme. The project supports three posts, with staff employed across the participating organisations. This illustrates how working together can help associations deliver services and access resources that may be more difficult to secure individually.

Looking ahead, there is potential to explore further shared services, particularly in back-office functions.

"The focus should be on identifying practical opportunities that work for us all."

Challenges and lessons learned

The GEL experience highlights that geographical proximity alone does not alone guarantee effective collaboration. Partnerships depend on trust, strong relationships and a genuine willingness to work towards shared goals together while recognising each organisation will also have its own priorities and challenges at any given time. Different organisational cultures, histories and levels of appetite for collaboration can make it challenging to maintain momentum, particularly when individual priorities take precedence.

"It's about recognising that partnership working occasionally involves compromise and that benefits may not always be distributed equally in every individual project. Sometimes I'll win, sometimes you'll win, sometimes I'll not make particular gains […] but you need to accept that it's 'swings and roundabouts' and over the course of it all everybody wins."

This highlights the need for partners to look beyond immediate organisational gains and maintain a longer-term perspective on the value of collaboration.

The group also recognises the importance of being realistic and honest about what could be achieved and what the motivations are for each partner. Rather than, for example, seeing merger as an end point and the three associations diminishing their distinct identities, the focus at the outset should be on being at the start of a journey with the destination unknown and identifying areas where working together can deliver practical benefits.

Looking ahead

Over the recent months there has been recognition that timing isn't right for the three to progress together therefore Govan and Elderpark have committed to working with a consultant to establish a clearer picture of shared priorities, complementary expertise and realistic opportunities for joint working. Reviewing the associations' business plans provides a starting point for developing common objectives and assessing where collaboration could make the greatest difference.

In addition, the recent opening of the Govan-Partick Bridge has brought increased connectivity with neighbouring RSLs and there is appetite, given our shared challenges, around working more closely together with an independent consultant reviewing business plans and having conversations with each RSL about their interest, aspirations and opportunities that this could bring so there is a strong understanding at the outset of where collaboration could occur.

For these associations, the potential extends beyond cost savings and efficiencies. The associations share a commitment to their communities, and closer collaboration could help them pursue common ambitions more effectively.

"Partnership to me is about… within a community, how you strive to make it the best place it can be."

The key lesson is that successful partnership working requires a clear understanding of both the starting point and the desired destination. By building trust, agreeing realistic objectives, and identifying tangible opportunities, Govan and Elderpark, and those partners across the Govan/Partick Bridge hope to turn the longstanding aspiration for closer collaboration into sustained practical action.

To find out more contact – Gary Dalziel - **gary.dalziel@elderpark.org**

CASE STUDY 8 - MARYHILL/QUEENS CROSS – NORTHWEST PARTNERS STRATEGIC ALLIANCE

Background

Northwest Partners Development Hub

The history of how this Alliance evolved goes back to 2017 when Maryhill and Queens Cross HAs were both experiencing the same key issues in relation to their development programmes. The overarching concern was how to maintain and sustain their development footprint in their local area in the face of encroachment from private developers and other RSLs. Additionally, there was an overall shortage of development staff, who were often more likely to be attracted by the higher rates of pay offered by the private sector.

The two associations explored the idea and subsequently set up the Northwest Partners Development Hub and recruited a Head of Development in 2018.

"The fact that the role was badged as being responsible for development activity across the Northwest Partners' was definitely part of the attraction for him [the successful applicant] as it allowed him the opportunity to apply his skills, knowledge and experience on a bigger canvas."

Initially the Hub staff shared a co-location space, though this was no longer possible when the Covid pandemic happened. However, the working together part continued. The partners also shared a consultant, who could readily pick up development opportunities when these occurred and 'ride the highs and lows of development as and when required, because it's not necessarily linear'. The Hub also provided/sold services to other RSLs, including CBHAs in the Paisley area and to Glasgow West HA.

The benefits of the Development Hub included an experienced development team which both associations could use, shared resources and costs, and shared learnings.

"The Development Hub gave us a bigger and stronger voice, especially when it came to regeneration."

Due to their established, close working relationship the partners successfully applied for Scottish Government net zero funding and used the Hub to take forward the resulting project, which also included the other HAs previously mentioned.

Crucially, the net zero project also involved the investment teams from both Maryhill and Queens Cross, who have continued to work together since 2021.

Creating the Strategic Alliance/getting 'buy-in'

Due to the success of the Development Hub, Maryhill and Queens Cross were keen to consider what else they could potentially do together, and this led to further discussions about how this might be achieved.

Initially, this exercise focused on mapping the existing similarities in relation to shared visions and values as well as mutual priorities and pressures (e.g. pressures on keeping rents affordable in an increasingly challenging financial landscape, and improving services).

"We felt that a merger was not the way we wanted to go but that a stronger partnership would allow us to build resilience against some of these challenges."

Boards of both associations were taken thorough a rigorous information/discussion process which outlined the thinking behind the partnership, how it would operate, and its potential benefits.

"Following [the consultation] both of our Boards embraced the partnership with a degree of comfort and optimism. As well as seeing how it could generate VFM… they particularly liked the opportunity it would give them to have a 'wider pool of colleagues/peers."

In keeping with the strong tradition of tenant engagement and participation embedded in CBHAs, it was crucial for the partners to consult their respective tenant bases to get their feedback on the proposals. This exercise was carried out by TIS, and when tenants realised that the plans were for a closer partnership, and not a merger, their positive responses echoed those received from the Boards.

"We wanted to embed and reignite that CBHA ethos. Tenants agreed [that] having tenants on boards matters, being local matters, we don't want to lose our connections with our communities – the opposite in fact. And it's also the opposite of a 'roadmap to merger' – we are building strength and resilience so that this doesn't happen."

Clear communication was essential to securing staff buy-in for the Alliance. Information sessions outlined the aims and potential benefits for both the associations and their employees, with senior management teams subsequently responsible for cascading the approach to their staff.

Although there were initial (understandable) concerns about job security, staff now view collaboration as an opportunity rather than a threat. Joint working has created opportunities for shared training, knowledge exchange and peer support, without adding to staff workloads.

How it works in practice

Governance

The strategic alliance is non-constitutional and operates through a formal agreement to work together. Each association retains its own independent Board, with no formal merger of governance structures. However, a joint steering group brings together three Board members from each association and both Chief Executives to oversee the alliance and guide its development.

The steering group meets three times a year, while the full Boards come together annually. These meetings provide an opportunity to review progress, reflect on what the alliance has achieved and identify areas for future collaboration.

The associations have also aligned their business plans to establish shared priorities and provide a clear direction for joint working. This was designed to avoid creating additional work for staff, instead identifying where existing priorities could be taken forward collaboratively. Although the plans look five years ahead, a three-year timeframe is considered more realistic, with identified priorities reviewed and rolled forward as needed.

The associations do not jointly employ staff. Instead, they take turns in employing staff and providing services to one another.

Key successes

A key success has been the introduction of **Find My Home,** a shared choice-based lettings system that simplifies the application process for tenants and improves the efficiency of allocations. As housing associations operate within a highly regulated framework, their allocation policies are already very similar. Bringing these processes together has helped streamline turnaround times and provide a more straightforward experience for applicants.

The associations are also working towards greater alignment of their systems, including CX and their new housing management system, with hardware and software becoming increasingly consistent.

In addition, the Alliance has strengthened continuity and contingency arrangements, enabling the associations to take comfort in the fact that they can rely on one another for support during emergencies or periods of disruption.

North West Partners: Preventing Homelessness in North Glasgow project.

This project secured more than £177,000 from the Scottish Government's Upstream Homelessness Prevention Fund (administered by SFHA). The initiative's key aim is to develop a new North Glasgow Homelessness Prevention Service. The service focuses on early intervention, helping tenants access practical, person-centred support before housing difficulties escalate into a crisis.

It will also promote wider adoption of the "Ask and Act" approach, encouraging housing and other services to identify potential homelessness risks and take action at an early stage.

The project combines joint working between the two housing associations, with stronger links to local services and community partners. It includes £87,057 in direct cash-first support to help individuals and families maintain their tenancies and prevent homelessness.

Benefits

- **Proactive joint working:** Enables the associations to share ideas and respond collectively to challenges.
- **Staff development:** Creates more career pathways, learning opportunities and knowledge-sharing across both organisations.
- **Shared resources:** Enables the associations to jointly employ staff, including a Learning and Development Officer who works across both organisations.
- **Consistent approaches:** Supports a joint training plan and aligned ways of working, making it easier to provide staff cover when needed.
- **Further collaboration:** The associations are exploring the possibility of employing a Procurement Assistant.

Challenges

- **VAT costs:** The associations must still pay VAT on services provided to one another, limiting the financial incentive for strategic collaboration.
- **Communication and time:** Maintaining regular communication and finding time to sustain joint working can be challenging.
- **Measuring savings:** Quantifying the financial benefit and savings generated through collaboration has proved to be difficult.
- **Limited resistance**: Anticipated opposition from Boards and staff has largely not materialised, with fewer challenges than initially expected.

Final reflections

- Building an effective partnership takes time, with trust and strong working relationships developing over several years.
- These foundations have been essential to sustaining collaboration and enabling the associations to identify shared priorities.
- With the Alliance approaching its tenth anniversary in 2027, there is an opportunity to capture its journey and demonstrate what effective collaboration can achieve. A "story so far" report could showcase key successes, including Find My Home, supported by evidence of its impact.
- This could act as a toolkit to help other housing associations develop similar approaches.

"Sharing our experience would also challenge the perception that community-based housing associations operate in isolation, highlighting instead successful long-term partnership working in action."

"The Alliance was signed in 2025 and so far we have certainly achieved our aims and so much more…and now we're looking to the future."

To find out more contact - Shona Stephen/ Rebecca Wilson - **sstephen@qcha.org.uk rwilson@maryhill.org.uk**

CASE STUDY 9 - SPIRE VIEW, BLOCHAIRN AND HAWTHORN HAS

Financial capability service

This service began in 2015 as a partnership between Spire View HA, Copperworks HA, Blochairn HA and Hawthorn Housing Co-op – now between the three associations after the merger of Spire View and Copperworks.

The partnership is managed by Spire View through a Service Level Agreement, with the service itself provided by GEMAP – Greater Easterhouse Money Advice Project, with whom the participating associations meet on a quarterly basis.

The main purpose of the project differs from welfare rights advice as it focuses on budgeting and managing debt, including getting debt written off wherever possible. The project also works in schools and with lone parents and other groups.

It was previously funded through the Scottish Government's People and Communities Fund, and now by £30,000 pa from the SG's Investing in Communities Fund. Funding bids were made with the support of Community Links.

The main costs are £39,000 salary for four days a week, plus office and management costs of £6,500, with the three associations sharing the costs not covered by the ICF.

Experience of individual cases indicates that people are often cross-referred to other support from the association which can help sustain tenancies, and the participating associations believe this fully justifies investing their own money – i.e. from rental income – in such services.

Tenancy sustainment service

This service goes back to 2014. It was originally a collaboration involving Spire View HA, Copperworks HA, Cadder HA, Blochairn HA and Hawthorn HC, but as things have evolved over the years is now a joint project with Spire View and Cadder.

Spire View has two days a week of the service and Cadder one day. It mostly involves home visits, and sometimes entails joint visits with a housing officer. It often involves supporting tenants with multiple, complex needs, including mental health issues, addiction and hoarding. There are some great success stories around the sustainment of tenancies which could never have happened without the intensive support from the service.

The service itself is provided by the Simon Community. Spire View manages the partnership through a Service Level Agreement which requires quarterly meetings with the service provider. The SLA outlines all monitoring and reporting requirements as well as service delivery expectations etc.

The annual cost of this service is £19,397, split proportionately between the two partner organisations. There is no funding in place for this service and the partners therefore fund 100% of costs.

Overall lessons/conclusions

For Spire View HA, the key driver for collaboration with others is a desire to deliver the very best for its tenants, and to achieve value for money and to make a difference to people's lives. Partnership for smaller associations often means providing a service which wouldn't otherwise have been viable.

Collaboration doesn't just happen automatically or easily. It requires work and dedication and always having tenants' best interests at the heart of decision making.

To find out more contact – Fiona Murphy – **fionamurphy@spireview.org.uk**

CASE STUDY 10 - RUTHERGLEN & CAMBUSLANG AND WEST OF SCOTLAND HAS

Purchase of welfare rights service from West of Scotland HA

In 2026 RCHA wanted to provide a welfare rights service but was looking to buy in a service and so was seeking an association with potential capacity to sell a service.

A chance media article on WoSHA's welfare rights service led to an enquiry and a positive outcome, as extending the service to RCHA met with WoSHA's growth strategy. The provision of a two days a week service to RCHA enabled the employment of a further member of staff. Ongoing training and the provision of cover for sickness etc. is included in the service.

A key focus is providing tenants with help with claiming some of the more complex benefits: helping increase the payment of rental income is not the main purpose of the service in this case, although this is part of the service offer.

Factored owners are covered, as well as tenants. This helps owners to maximise income to then meet their share of maintenance costs which would otherwise be covered by tenants in their rent.

The project began in mid-July 2026 and amongst its early successes was a backdated benefit payment of £11,000 for one of RCHA's tenants.

The Partnership Agreement can be shared with anyone requesting it (**aspence@randcha.co.uk**).

Family support project

In February 2026, a RCHA strategic planning day saw staff highlight the number of families struggling with sustaining their tenancy for a wide variety of reasons. RCHA operates in an area of significant deprivation, and the idea of providing greater support was consistent with RCHA's new approach to 'wider role' activity.

Coincidentally, at the same time West of Scotland HA was looking to partner with another association to provide family support in a project part-funded by Advice UK. The pre-existing relationship between the two associations meant that RCHA were fully confident in seeking emergency Board approval to enable the sign-off which was needed promptly.

The result is that RCHA receives a half of a full-time equivalent member of staff, who started in April 2026.

Families can be identified by housing officers as well as both WoSHA and RCHA welcoming self-referrals. A case example involved a single parent who had seen her children removed from the household because of her alcohol abuse. Following intensive input from the service, she had now started to get her children back home – a great success story.

Joint reactive repairs and voids contract

Since 2024 RCHA has had a shared reactive repairs and voids framework contract with West Whitlawburn Housing Co-op and East Kilbride HA. The three associations have the same lots and several contractors are involved, attracted by the greater volumes of work.

The contract is based on 3+1+1 years.

'Take a break' service

This too is a collaboration with West of Scotland HA, starting in May 2026, where both associations have access to funding for families to enable a break/holiday, usually for families who face particular barriers, including families with disabled children.

The project can result in helpful crossover too, with some recipients subsequently getting help from the Family Support Project.

General lessons around collaboration

A simple 'pick up the phone' approach is one RCHA says can be so effective, along with not being afraid to talk to a larger association.

Different associations have different experience of particular types of activity/service and it feels wasteful not to capitalise on others' areas of expertise, especially where it could bring huge benefits to tenants which could not otherwise have been achieved.

There are a number of areas RCHA feel could be a focus for greater collaboration in the sector:

- Joint procurement of insurance, given the much increased costs of this
- Development via the lead developer model
- IT services/procurement: provision of backroom services from a larger RSL which is knowledgeable of the sector
- Wider collaboration in component procurement to drive efficiencies and reduce fees and on-site management risks (e.g. clerk of works provision)

To find out more contact - Angela Spence – **aspence@randcha.co.uk**

CASE STUDY 11 - THE VALUE OF INFORMAL COLLABORATION: SENIOR OFFICERS GROUP

The Senior Officers Group originally began as a small, informal network of housing association Chief Executives who were relatively new to their role and who already knew one another well. Initially bringing together around six people, the group provided a space for open and honest conversations about shared challenges, exchanging advice and identifying opportunities to work together. As relationships strengthened, members invited other CEO colleagues to join, and the network gradually expanded to its current iteration of around 20 participants.

The group has supported practical collaboration, including joint work on governance good-practice audits and internal audit programmes, enabling associations to share costs, expertise and learning.

It also provides a valuable forum for seeking advice on day-to-day organisational issues. For example, when a member recently asked colleagues for recommendations on recruitment agencies and their costs, the network offered an opportunity to draw on others' experiences rather than each association having to undertake the research independently.

As the network has grown, its character has shifted from a close-knit group towards a broader information-sharing and discussion forum, with less frequent informal engagement between all members.

This illustrates both the value and the limitations of informal collaboration: trusted relationships can provide a strong foundation for joint working, while smaller, established groups may find it easier to maintain deeper connections. The experience highlights how informal networks complement more formal partnership structures by creating opportunities for collaboration to develop organically around shared interests and needs.

To find out more contact – Gary Dalziel - **gary.dalziel@elderpark.org**

Further examples

The Activate Course is a 10-to-12-week community development programme (free to participants) for local people, run by the University of Glasgow in partnership with local CBHAs and other community organizations.

To find out more contact – Jonathan Giddings-Reid - **jonathan.giddings-reid@elderpark.org**

Working Rite are a charity that gives young people (15-25) structure and support to start their working lives. Many CBHAs have a long history of partnership working with WR by providing employment, training and mentoring opportunities for local young people.

To find out more contact – Michael Fullerton - **michaelfullerton@newgorbalsha.org.uk**



Glasgow and West of Scotland Forum of Housing Associations

GWSF is the leading membership and campaigning body for local community-based housing associations and co-operatives (CBHAs) in the west of Scotland. The Forum represents 68 members who together own almost 88,000 homes. Along with providing this decent, affordable housing CBHAs also deliver factoring services to around 33,000 owners, mostly in mixed tenure housing blocks. For over 40 years CBHAs have been at the vanguard of strategies which have helped improve the environmental, social, and economic wellbeing of their communities.

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