



How Broadland is meeting its Homes for Cathy commitments so far...

Broadland joined Homes for Cathy (H4C) back in 2016 when it was about marking the 50th anniversary of the first screening of *Cathy Come Home* and reminding people that homelessness is still a cancer in our society. It was relatively safe to become members, beat the drum and perhaps feel warmly complacent about how much we were actually doing to address homelessness in our communities.

A year later, the anniversaries were over: H4C members had held events, debates and plays nationally and locally to encourage politicians, professionals and communities to focus on homelessness. Collectively we had lamented the wrongs of the 'system' and called for meaningful changes to public policy. Was that it? Had we done what was needed or was the real work still to come? We concluded the latter.

In 2017, we opened up H4C membership to any housing association frustrated about increasing homelessness and is willing to do something about it. Working with Crisis, we developed 9 challenging actions for housing associations to commit to that we believe will make a significant difference. [See www.broadlandgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Commitments-homes-for-cathy.pdf](http://www.broadlandgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Commitments-homes-for-cathy.pdf)

These actions are all about partnership working – not just with local authorities and policy makers – but most importantly with people at risk of homelessness and those who are already homeless.

We went to our Board and asked them to commit to all 9 actions, including the potentially more challenging ones, which for us were:

- * Not making any tenant homeless who was seeking to prevent their homelessness.
- * Helping to meet the needs of vulnerable tenant groups.
- * Working in partnership to provide a range of affordable housing options which meet the needs of all homeless people in our local communities.
- * Contributing to ending migrant homelessness in our area.

To prevent making tenants homeless means avoiding evictions for arrears that are hugely damaging, especially for children, and also expensive for us. Where tenants

positively engage we will freeze arrears, subject to regular reviews and rent being paid in the future. When circumstances improve, a sustainable repayment plan is agreed. We hope that this will enable people to stay in their homes.

Regarding vulnerable groups, we decided to focus on single people – primarily under 35 – working with partners, we wanted to identify initially 10 properties for shared housing.

Working in partnership with Norwich City Council and St Martin's Housing Trust, we proposed identifying six properties for a Housing First pilot, so we can meet the needs homeless people locally.

Working with Norfolk County Council, we asked to make 4 properties available, at a peppercorn rent if necessary, for migrant families who have been judged to have no recourse to public funds, while they resolve their situations.

The Board has always supported our Homes for Cathy involvement, but we asked for a commitment that will cost us money and expose us to different risks. I couldn't take approval for granted, but I got 100% support. Our Board felt the commitments helped deliver our social purpose and that while the health of the balance sheet is vital, it is primarily a tool to deliver our purpose.

Michael Newey, Chief Executive, Broadland Housing, February 2019