



# Corporate Strategy Review

## Resident Scrutiny Group

RSG PROJECT LEAD: ANDY FROST

MARCH 2025

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### Review Project Team

**Involved Residents:** Andy Frost – Project Lead & Chair of Resident Scrutiny Group  
Debs Armstrong – Member of Resident Scrutiny Group  
Dot Clare - Member of Resident Scrutiny Group  
Sioux Mingaye - Member of Resident Scrutiny Group  
Emma Withnell - Member of Resident Scrutiny Group

**Abri RSG Team:** Gemma Gray – Scrutiny Advisor  
Kelly Metani – Resident Scrutiny Coordinator

**Involved Staff:** Gavin Jefferies – Director of Communications, Strategy and Policy

### Introduction

The Resident Scrutiny Group (RSG) reviews Abri's performance and decision making and makes recommendations to the organisation on how things could be improved in the future. As part of the Scrutiny Group's function, they are asked to review relevant strategies and processes. This year Abri is scheduled to refresh its corporate strategy therefore this has formulated part of the RSG's review schedule for the 24/25 year.

Corporate strategies are created by most organisations to define their overall direction and long-term goals. They are usually created by senior leadership and then the individual priorities will filter down amongst the relevant managers and teams for implementation.

Abri's corporate strategy, 'achieving together' covers the period of 2020-2025 and contains 9 priorities;

- build more homes
- invest in our homes
- get really good at customer service
- create thriving communities
- make all of our communities more inclusive
- create a great place to work
- manage our business to the highest standards
- create a sustainable future
- retain a local focus as we grow

A further breakdown of these priorities and findings can be found in the later part of this report.

It's important to note that during the 5-year period the nation has faced some unexpected circumstances; Covid, Brexit, a change of Government, increased interest rates and inflation all of which have had an impact on the overall delivery of the strategy.

## Approach

In November 2024, a development session was held for the RSG and was hosted by TPAS – the Tenant Engagement Experts. This training session focused on what scrutiny was, what it meant in housing and the different methods used to carry out scrutiny. The RSG acknowledged that as the organisation had grown and evolved, their ways of working also needed to evolve. A new method was designed as fit for purpose for both the RSG and organisation. The new “bootcamp method” for conducting a review was used for this review. This method adopts a more tailored and condensed approach to the review allowing the most time efficient and effective way for the RSG and Abri colleagues to complete reviews. Questions from a topic are chosen instead of the RSG reviewing whole topics at a time, this allows the RSG to review, make recommendations and monitor their implementation more effectively. Feedback from both members and Abri colleagues has been positive thus far.

Prior to commencement of this review the RSG project group met and devised a set of overarching questions;

1. Where has Abri succeeded in delivering its current corporate plan?
2. What things haven't been achieved?
3. What learning needs to be taken forward and reflected in the new corporate plan?

Documents were shared with the project group consisting of; the corporate strategy document, the commitment tracker and a presentation given at Abri's Group Board. Following review of these documents a session was held with the Director of Communications, Strategy & Policy to discuss the topic and to ask further questions, the findings from this can be found below.

## Findings and Recommendations

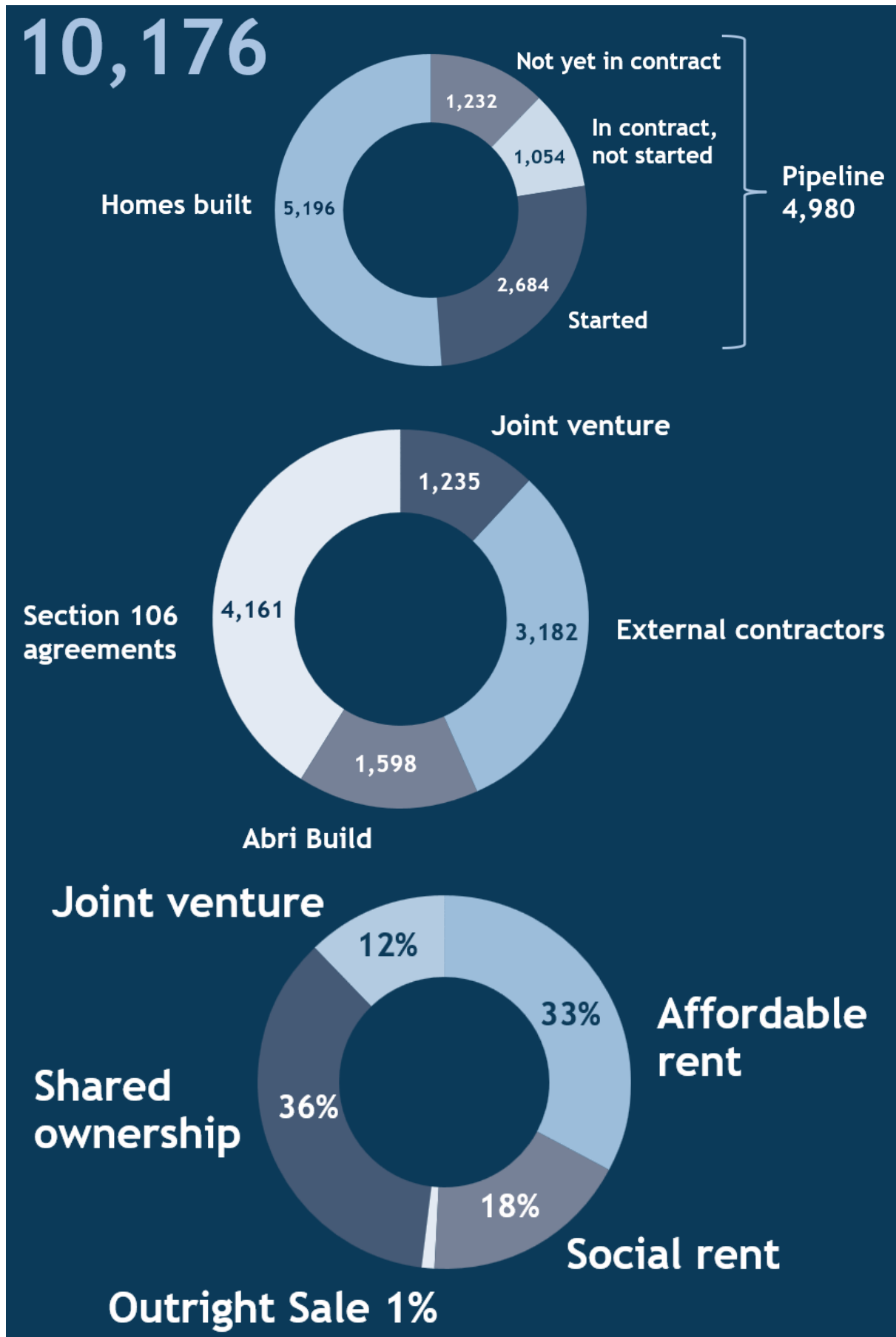
In the session each of the nine corporate priorities were discussed in more detail including the detailed plan that sits alongside to assist with the delivery and the methods used for quarterly monitoring of these. It was clear that some priorities were straightforward to measure and had been delivered, that some had been partially delivered, whilst others were harder to measure making an assessment of delivery more difficult.

Abri has reviewed and made amendments to the strategy 3 times over the 5-year period. The RSG were in support of making amendments where necessary and felt the Plan should be reviewed at least annually, or after any major event. Any changes, including explaining the rationale for making them, should be communicated to residents.

### **Build more homes**

The RSG felt that this priority had been broadly met.

Abri has invested £250 million from Homes England plus additional revenue into building homes for those in need. Whilst a lot of Housing Associations pulled back on delivering more homes due to rising costs of materials and land, Abri set themselves an ambitious target to build 10,000 homes by 2030. Whilst recognising this sits outside of the 5-year strategy timeframe, there is strong evidence to suggest the organisation will meet this target.



\*Images above taken from a presentation given at Abri's Group Board

Abri had committed to devote 75% of new homes to social and affordable housing and was on-track to achieve this.

Another commitment under this priority was to achieve a minimum customer satisfaction level of 90%, regardless of tenure, for new build properties. Unfortunately, this was not met and satisfaction currently sat at 85%.

Social housing is the first choice for Abri, but it comes with a cost and relies on funding or other revenue activities. As a Housing Association, Abri does not make a surplus profit, money is reinvested back into the organisation to deliver what is needed. It is recognised the organisation has to strike a balance between meeting planning permissions and affordability and need.

The RSG felt the ways in which residents' money is reinvested and spent was not communicated effectively and it would be beneficial to do this going forward.

### **Invest in our homes**

The RSG felt that this priority had been broadly met.

The biggest focus of this priority had been on improving the energy efficiency of all homes. Abri have been successful in bidding for the Government 'Warmer Homes Fund' grant to support increasing the number of homes with an energy performance rating of C or above. The RSG has reviewed this process in more detail in one of their previous reviews.

Within the original commitment, there was an aspiration to ensure 100% of the homes met the decant homes standard or above. Abri holds data on stock condition of all of their properties, with 84% having had a survey within the last 5 years.

Homes that are not capable of meeting the required standards are sold once they become empty, and the money is taken and reinvested into better quality, modern homes. The housing market has been extremely difficult during this time, meaning that the anticipated level of income within the original strategy had not been achieved and so this was revised and amended by Abri during the 5-year period.

There had also been the launch of the 'see something, say something' initiative which encourages all colleagues to report conditions that don't meet the required standards. Over 900 reports had been made, and repairs or actions have been taken because of this. This was taken as assurance that colleagues are taking steps to improve the standards of homes for all residents however, the RSG felt it would be helpful to also evidence the impact of this work on residents,

Abri had committed to conducting a review of 1,200 homes for regeneration viability. Although the Sawyers Close regeneration project indicated good progress, the RSG was not able to determine whether this commitment had been achieved or the impact of the work on residents' lives going forward.

### **Get really good at Customer Service**

The RSG felt it was harder to measure progress against this priority and quantify the outcomes.

Abri's customer satisfaction performance, whilst not where they'd like it to be, was performing well in comparison to other Housing Associations. This strategy saw a focus on the quality of repairs, and Abri has achieved 94% satisfaction in this area. However, Abri remains slightly below target for average time taken to complete the repair.

A strong call centre performance has been seen over the period, but the RSG felt that just because targets had been reached with number of calls taken, it doesn't truly show if residents have had the result they needed from these interactions.

The complaints team are working towards the service level agreement (SLA) but there are still issues with the customer satisfaction in this area.

These are both areas where process measures or actions are being used to measure success, rather than there being a focus on the quality of the service and getting things right first time.

Shared ownership is another area that is underperforming, and Abri has established working groups to understand the reasons behind this and create action plans to increase the service in this area. It is too early to see the benefits from this work.

The RSG is consistently seeing issues arise relating to communication with residents. The group felt that it wasn't the activity that was happening but more so the impact of the activities that needed to be communicated better. There is also more work to be done regarding the tone of voice used in the letters to residents and the communications on social media. It was noted however, that there has been a positive improvement seen in Trustpilot reviews. Abri should use customer feedback to help shape any future amendments to communication methods.

The RSG felt that 'get really good at customer service' didn't really set the best intentions as 'good' is a mediocre word. The RSG would like to see Abri holding themselves to a higher standard and striving for words like 'exceptional' in the next corporate strategy.

Overall, the feeling was that there remained some unanswered questions over completion and success against this priority. In future the plan against this priority must be more specific and measures should be outcome, not process focused.

### **Create thriving communities**

The RSG found that Abri had delivered what they said they'd do against this priority.

There were some clear targets regarding how much they'd spent and where the money would be invested.

Abri had so far successfully helped 2,143 people into employment or a better job and additional support had been given to help tackle food and fuel poverty. The tenant arrears and tenancy sustainment position also held up well during these challenging times. A target for external funding had also been achieved.

Abri had requested an independent review on the strategy externally by experts who agreed this priority had been achieved.

It was clear to see that Abri had achieved what it said it would do to create thriving communities, but this is another area where the RSG feels there remains a challenge on evidencing and understanding the impact this has had on resident's lives.

## **Making all of our communities more inclusive**

Abri had found this priority challenging to deliver and whilst a lot had been done the RSG felt that it was less clear about exactly what had been achieved against this priority.

Abri committed to having fully comprehensive protected characteristic data for customers and colleagues by the mid-point of 2022. In 2022 they carried out a customer consultation to find out what residents were experiencing around things like food and fuel poverty, Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and discrimination. A baseline of data had been established for customers and colleagues, but it requires constant refreshing and remains incomplete.

There was a commitment made to ensure all service delivery reporting, all main service delivery standards and satisfaction metrics, segmented by key protected characteristics be reported at Board level and this had been achieved.

A further commitment was made to continue a successful Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity (EDI) committee and a new independent chair had been appointed for this. This committee has implemented and tracks an action plan that sits underneath the corporate strategy.

The RSG felt that Abri has tried to do too much against this priority and had not been clear enough about intended specific outcomes at the start. There had been a lot of activity, but not enough time had been spent on understanding how this had impacted residents.

## **Create a great place to work**

The RSG agreed that good progress had been made against this priority, Abri set some clear targets and has delivered these.

Abri achieved Platinum in Investors in People and further enhancements had been made to the employee package.

There were many in house training sessions given to colleagues within Abri and through this strategy, Abri had launched the internal Housing Professional of the Future Programme (HPoF). This was a self-guided training programme promoted internally with all colleagues encouraged to complete it. This was to enhance skills and knowledge and make all colleagues a 'housing professional'.

Various surveys had been carried out and used to benchmark against other Housing Associations. These had shown that Abri has consistently high levels of colleague satisfaction.

## **Manage our business to the highest standard**

The RSG felt that Abri had made good progress against this priority.

Abri had been involved in 3 successful mergers over the duration of the strategy. The first was Radian – Yarlington to become Abri in 2019, the second being Silva – Abri in 2023 and the most recent being the Octavia partnership in 2024. These partnerships had taken a lot of effort for all colleagues within Abri.

During this time, Abri had maintained a Governance and Viability rating of G1/V1.

Two highly rated surveys for external stakeholder feedback had been carried out with the findings all showing that Abri was well managed, good to work with, ambitious and financially strong.

### **Retain a local focus as we grow**

Another commitment made by Abri was to remain large but local as the organisation grew. This led to a regional model being developed and implemented in the Southeast. Customer panels were also developed alongside this, allowing for customer voice to be heard in this region. The overall goal was to achieve better customer satisfaction scores across the region. An increase in customer satisfaction of +9.9% for Abri and +8.2% for Silva had been achieved which was positive in an area where traditionally satisfaction had historically been low.

The RSG agreed whilst there was strong evidence to suggest this had a positive impact on customer satisfaction in the Southeast, not enough time had passed to be able to truly understand or track the benefits and impacts this had made.

### **Creating a sustainable future**

The RSG found that Abri had partially met this priority as it had a longer lifetime than the strategy.

Abri set some specific targets relating to a reduction in carbon and getting the necessary funding required to complete these which tied into the commitment to invest in homes.

The RSG found that it was difficult to understand where Abri needs to be in order to be on track for the longer term goals of this priority but were happy to see that good progress had been made so far.

### **What learning needs to be taken forward and reflected in the new corporate plan?**

For the next Corporate Strategy, it is important that Abri ensures there is alignment between the evidence and action of each priority. Expectations must be clear from the start and evidence led. Overall, they should focus on outcomes and not process measures and should have clear, measurable expectations against each priority from the start.

The RSG understands that some aspects of the delivery of the strategy can be affected by external factors but feel that it would be helpful to residents if they were clearer and transparent about this, and made stories come alive for residents.

**Recommendations**

<b>Action Ref</b>	<b>Recommended Action</b>	<b>Officer Responsible</b>	<b>Sponsor</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
CS0425.01	Ensure that the new corporate plan is relatable to residents, explaining how the priorities and actions impact them.	Strategy Manager	Chief Strategy & Resource Officer	31/12/25
CS0425.02	Use a checklist / framework when developing the new plan to ensure goals and statements are clear, resident relatable, relevant and measurable	Strategy Manager	Chief Strategy & Resource Officer	31/12/25
CS0425.03	Abri should rely on insight and root cause analysis to highlight issues, targets and expectations ensuring outcomes and resident insight are used in conjunction with process measures.	Strategy Manager	Chief Strategy & Resource Officer	31/12/25
CS0425.04	The Corporate Strategy should be evidence / resident priority and needs based, and activity should clearly respond to that evidence / need. There should be context, explanation and a clear rationale rather than listing existing work / activity that aligns to priorities being clear about expectations and using examples and case studies to illustrate when appropriate	Strategy Manager	Chief Strategy & Resource Officer	31/12/25
CS0425.05	Abri to review the Corporate Strategy annually, or after any major event	Strategy Manager	Chief Strategy & Resource Officer	31/12/25
CS0425.06	Ensure any changes made to the Corporate Strategy are communicated effectively to residents (and colleagues if appropriate)	Strategy Manager	Chief Strategy & Resource Officer	31/12/25

**Conclusion**

Overall, Abri's 'Achieving Together' strategy has been successful in helping it grow as an organisation. However, for the next reiteration Abri could be more ambitious, focused on outcomes and move to a place where the Corporate Strategy is driving activity. Abri should ensure that the next version of the strategy is communicated with all residents in a meaningful way, focusing on the impact it will have on all residents' lives.