

Action on empty homes



Community Action on Empty Homes **Toolkit**

A Toolkit for Communities and Local Authorities
working together **May 2021**



Action on Empty Homes

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A Toolkit for action

In this Toolkit we aim to guide local authorities and communities working together through the process of bringing empty homes into use, to deliver affordable housing for local people. We will also highlight opportunities to achieve even more positive outcomes through provision of work experience and training and opportunities for community enterprise.

The Toolkit is intended to be used in collaboration, within local authorities and communities, and between local authorities and communities. It is a resource to support joint action and to establish communities as leading actors at the centre of local initiatives with local authorities playing a key enabling role.

We recognise there are different types of communities. Some communities are neighbourhood-based, tackling empty homes in their immediate locality. Some are more dispersed communities of people sharing a common experience such as people with mental health concerns, people in recovery or those leaving prison, or facing common challenges such as refugees, migrant workers or new entrants to the UK. Each type of community can bring empty homes into use.

Community housing groups start in many different ways. Local residents may be concerned about their neighbourhood as a whole, frustrated by empty homes and a poor quality private-rented housing, and want to act to improve things for their community.

Sometimes an existing community-based project recognises a need for secure affordable housing and can see the potential to provide this through bringing empty homes into use. Many households are not eligible for, or may have lost, social housing, leaving them with very limited housing options. Social housing may not be available in areas where people want to live, for family, work, education or preferred lifestyle. When communities are able to find common ground and shared goals they can work together to bring empty homes into use. Being able to form a stable community action group with a positive approach to problem-solving is, in our experience, more important initially and in the longer term than being experts in housing. Bringing empty homes into use is a learning curve for everyone involved: professionals, funders, owners and communities alike.

Many local authorities already engage and work with communities around, for example, provision of advice and information, good neighbour services, community meeting places, support for people with specific needs. Bringing empty homes into use is rarely included in this framework but we can see no reason to exclude it especially in areas where there are high levels of empty homes, and where there is a shortage of secure affordable housing for households unable to access social housing. The communities we have studied are evidence that communities can learn about housing and can take positive action to bring empty homes into use for local people.

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Empty homes matter

This Toolkit intends to support communities and local authorities who want to work together and collaborate to deliver affordable homes from empty homes and, by doing so, help to build strong, sustainable and resilient communities.

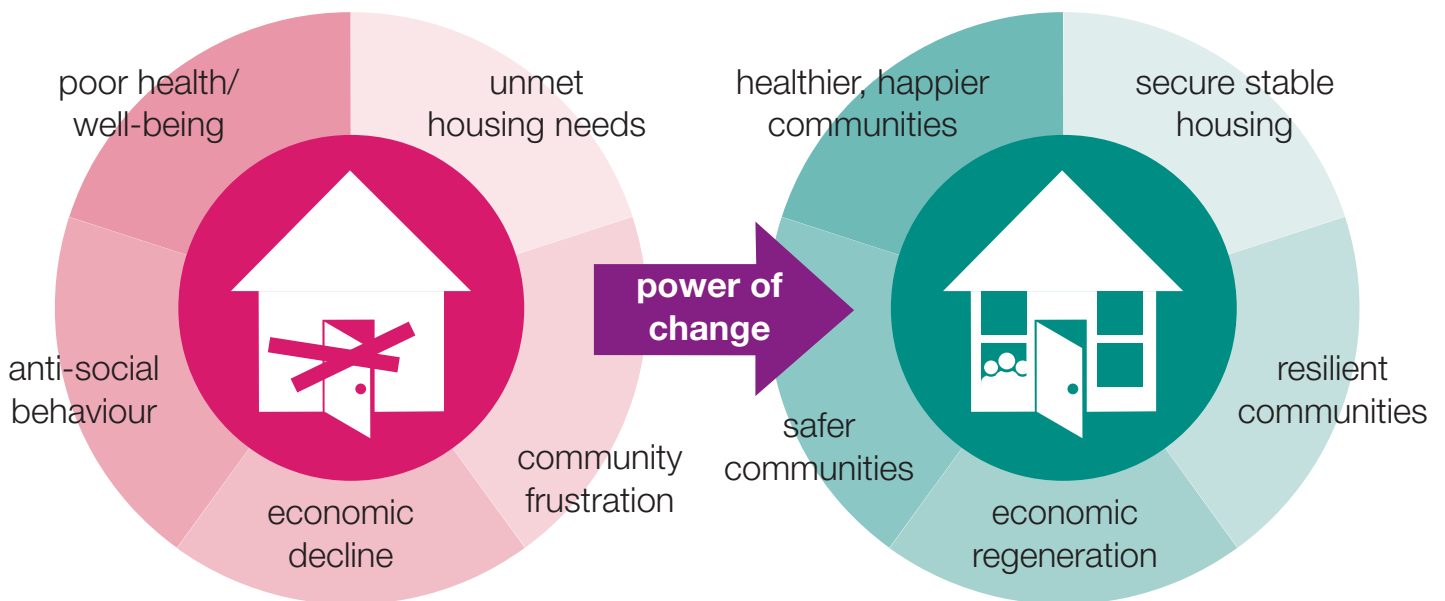
Homes standing empty are homes going to waste. We know that local authorities and the communities living with empty homes want change, both want to do something to bring empty homes in their area into use as secure affordable housing for local people. This is a shared concern, empty homes matter to communities and local authorities alike and recognising this can be the cornerstone of real progress.

Communities and local authorities working in partnership with others can act positively to

achieve real change, and can do so within existing policy and legal frameworks. Although striving for change, we don't need to wait for reform to significantly increase the number of empty homes brought into use as affordable housing. Action can be taken together now to rebuild communities, reinvigorate local economies and provide homes for local people.

What drives change?

In our experience, sustainable local change happens when key local forces combine, share knowledge, skills and resources to achieve shared aims and outcomes. They combine very often because the cost – social, economic and health - of homes standing empty has become too high.



Counting the cost of empty homes

In 2020 the number of long-term empty homes in England rose by 19% to 268,385, a 42,600 rise since 2019 and the fourth consecutive year to see a significant increase. In 2018, 'The homelessness monitor: England 2021' (Crisis) reported the number of people placed in temporary accommodation in June 2020 jumped to 98,300, a 26% rise on the previous year and double the number in 2012. The number of homeless households placed in B&B's rose particularly quickly, with a 17% rise from 2019, and 299% rise since 2010. These figures are well known, however, numbers alone do not seem to drive change at the local level.

Impact on lives

For communities, the cost of empty homes may be counted by the impacts on lives. The House of Commons Briefing Paper 3012 'Empty Housing (England)' published in October 2020 states:

“**High levels of empty properties are recognised as having a serious impact on the viability of communities... As the number of empty properties within an area increases, so can the incidence of vandalism, which acts as a further disincentive to occupation....This spiral of decline can continue as further households are deterred from moving into an area devoid of amenities, and where empty property and derelict shops add to a sense of neglect.**”

‘**The evidence that good-quality housing is critical to health is well established** (Public Health England 2017).’



A spiral of decline

Communities can become trapped in a spiral of decline. This has significant implications for their residents' physical and mental health, educational achievement and access to work. A recent report from the Human City Institute, "The Power of Place: Health Inequalities, Housing and Community in the West Midlands Conurbation", is just one quality research document of many to demonstrate the link between area deprivation and life-impacting inequalities.

Hidden costs

For local authorities and other public sector agencies, the hidden costs of homes standing empty and unused can be high, especially in areas with high levels of unmet housing need. Living in insecure, over-crowded or sub-standard accommodation has been shown to have significant impacts on health. The Kings Fund together with the National Housing Federation published a report in 2018: 'Housing and Health Opportunities for sustainability and transformation partnerships'. This report states that:

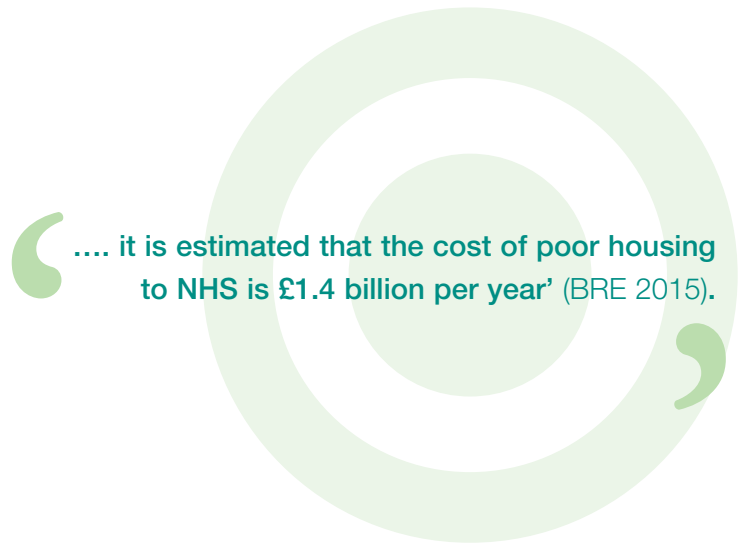
Public Health

Public Health England Guidance 'Improving health through the home' summarises the risks to both physical and mental health associated with living in poor quality and insecure housing.

The Public Health England Guidance is clear that a decent secure home can have a major impact not just on health but on the life chances of whole households:

The right home environment protects and improves health and wellbeing, and prevents physical and mental ill-health. It also enables people to:

- Manage their health and care needs, including long term conditions
- Live independently, safely and well in their own home for as long as they choose
- Complete treatment and recover from substance misuse, tuberculosis or other ill-health
- Move on successfully from homelessness or other traumatic life events
- Access and sustain education, training and employment
- Participate and contribute to society.



Unhealthy homes increase the risk of poor physical and mental health, poor diet and respiratory illness



Overcrowded homes increase the risk of stress, family breakdown and under-performance at school



Insecure homes increase the risk of poor lifestyle choices, debt and substance misuse

The cycle of reactive spend

In addition to these enduring often hidden costs, empty homes generate more immediate and direct costs for local authorities and local public services. Our community action on empty homes project highlighted that as well as locking communities into a spiral of decline, areas with concentrations of empty homes can trap local authorities and other public services into a spiral of reactive spend. Even if local authorities don't proactively invest in empty homes work, empty homes will be using resources and costing money responding to social and environmental problems caused by empty homes. Depending on local policy, there can be a loss of Council Tax.

Empty homes contribute little to the local economy and can deter inward investment.

There can be public health, social care and children's services costs, greater dependence on housing and other welfare benefits and, for young people, poorer performance at school. The cost of homelessness for local authorities is increasing year on year, both from the rising numbers of households requiring temporary accommodation and from the extended duties to prevent homelessness.

The effect of this is that the impacts – the costs and risks – of homes standing empty are largely shouldered by local people and local public services. Reactive spend is public spend. In reality, the home-owner is responsible for the property. We think this balance of spending is wrong and believe a review is overdue of where responsibility for the cost of empty homes should lie. We have devised an 'equation' to illustrate this:

Weighing up the costs and risks



Reactive spend isn't just a concern for local authorities. It occurs when police services respond to vandalism, antisocial behaviour (ASB) and substance misuse, when fire services respond to arson and firesetting, or when health services manage and treat the poor physical and mental health of people living in poor accommodation or deprived areas. Instead of picking up the costs of owner neglect, we think public funding should be

focused on investment in communities to make use of empty homes to meet their need for secure affordable housing, for providing work and training, for rebuilding community networks, fostering resilience and supporting opportunities for change and growth. This investment approach would provide better 'value for money' and help to reduce the amount of public funding currently pouring into reactive spend.

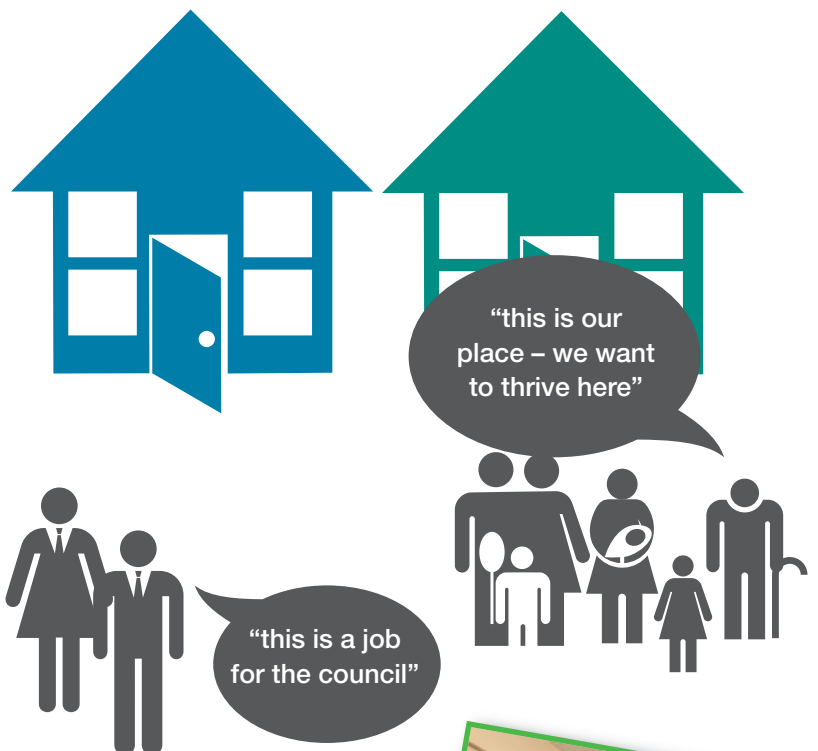
The need for new thinking

It is time to broaden our vision, to see not just the empty homes but the effect they have on those living near them, and on those who need decent secure housing and a chance to thrive. Action on Empty Homes is often asked why local authorities don't do more to bring empty homes into use. Our experience is that many local authorities work very hard to bring empty homes into use, however relying on enforcement can take a huge amount of time and effort for each property.

Through our work with communities, we have found that most local authorities act when an issue has become acute. This extends to empty homes. Local authorities also traditionally look inward when facing challenges. They ask the question: *'how can we tackle empty homes?'* and they see themselves as the main, sometimes the only, agency that can intervene.

By the time an issue such as empty homes has become acute for a local authority, communities have lived with persistent concerns, sometimes for many years. Typically communities look outward when seeking help to solve problems. They may ask the question: *'why are these homes standing empty—this is our place?'* but may see themselves as powerless to act.

There is a need for a change of thinking. Local authorities and communities rarely look to each other as equal partners with shared aims, asking the same question: *'how can homes from empty homes help make this a better place to live and enable local people to thrive?'* When they do, as our study of community action on empty homes demonstrated, they can achieve a great deal together.



Understanding how communities return on investment

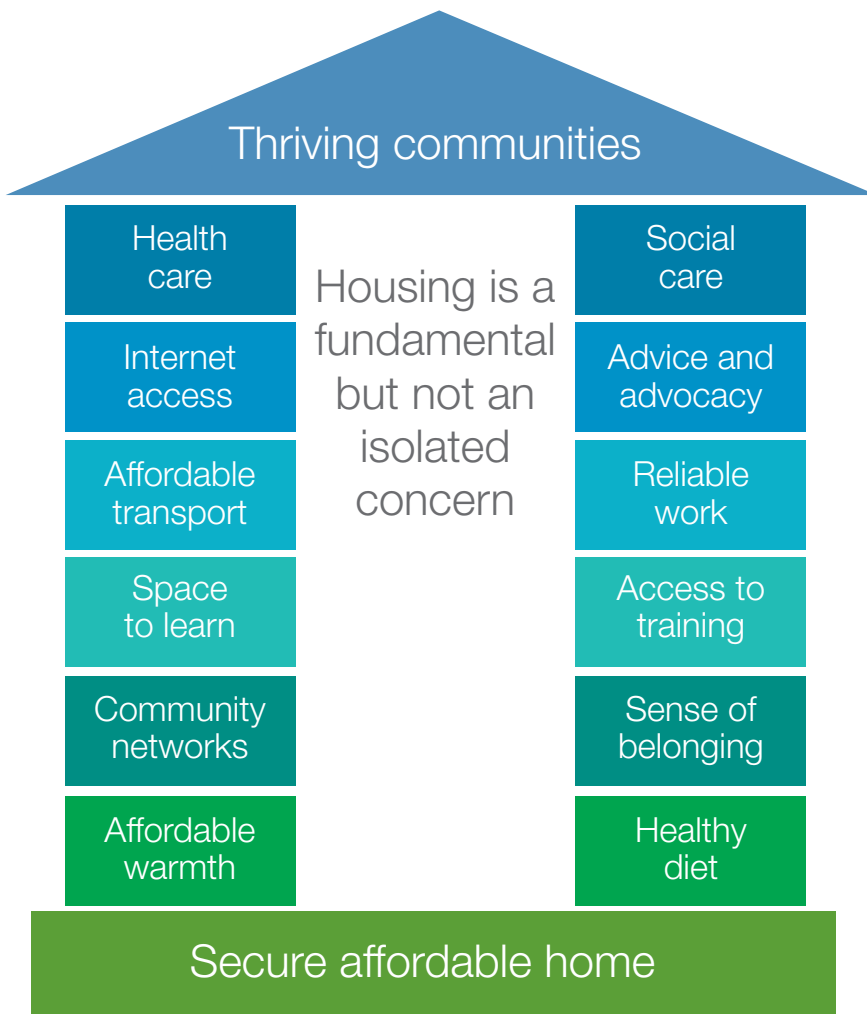
Between 2016 and 2019, Action on Empty Homes received funding from Esmee Fairbairn Foundation to follow the work of six community-based projects across northern England, each bringing empty homes into use for local people. We found communities



were driven by their own needs and a vision of the solutions that would make a real difference to them. Housing, or rather having a secure affordable home, emerged as a fundamental need underpinning the resolution of other needs. The initiative to bring empty homes into use was their own. Although community groups can and do grow to the stage when they successfully bid for local authority contracts, such as managing properties brought into use through the Empty Dwelling Management Order (EDMO) regulations or creating accommodation from empty homes for care leavers, none of the projects we followed had initially been 'commissioned' by a local authority to bring empty homes into use.

Improving quality of life

The community projects we followed aimed to improve quality of life in the round, housing being a fundamental but not an isolated concern. Some of the communities were neighbourhood based, some were communities of people who shared needs, for example being at risk of homelessness or being new entrants to the UK. Most of the members of the communities we followed did not have priority for local authority housing services but were nonetheless in need of support and a safe stable home. They had a broad range of needs, not just housing. They needed help to access education, training and work, to gain social skills and the confidence to develop positive social networks and join in with community activities, and they wanted to play an active part in building homes and places where they and their families could live and thrive.



Community intelligence

One of the most valuable contributions communities make to bringing empty homes into use and delivering affordable housing is their understanding of what local people need and what can make a real difference to them. We found that the communities most likely to bring empty homes into use were those that understood the breadth of challenges they faced and had a clear idea of how access to secure affordable housing from empty homes could help bring about the long-term changes they needed. For example, they used the process of bringing empty homes into use as an opportunity to provide work experience, mentoring and training. They provided advice and information help prevent and manage debt, they ensured the homes delivered were affordable to heat. Some provided free broadband access and services such as tenancy support, child-care and parenting classes, social activities and kids' clubs.

We call this '**community intelligence**'. This is knowledge that can be shared with the local authority and other partners. It is valid and valuable intelligence. Communities understand

the impact of empty homes for them, and the benefits the process of renovation itself and the provision of secure affordable housing can bring for local people.



The communities we followed understood how best to target funding to deliver outcomes that would make a real difference for them and so made very effective use of resources. They wasted nothing. They recognised what can be achieved through bringing empty homes into use, engaging people with different interests and helping diverse groups to collaborate on shared goals. For people seeking a secure affordable home to rent, being involved with refurbishing empty homes could help meet their need. Those seeking access to work, developing skills through helping to refurbish properties will be valuable. For those in recovery, or leaving criminal justice, involvement in projects can rebuild social networks, providing a transition into education or employment. Empty homes projects work with and accommodate people with diverse needs, those with mental health challenges, young care-leavers, new entrants to the UK and those facing homelessness. These projects drew together agencies who support vulnerable people, encouraging partnerships and sharing of resources.

Return on investment

In our experience, free from the local authority interdepartmental tensions around budgets, targets and conflicting priorities, when bringing empty homes into use communities developed integrated schemes which deliver a range of outcomes. Further, by providing secure affordable homes in the context of community life, help to ensure local people were able to make more effective and more enduring use of their household resources, to gain more from education and training and rely less on health and social care services We call this Community Return on Investment[®].

The six projects we followed received investment - financial and in-kind – from a range of sources, including from their local authority. Much of the funding was targeted towards housing, however communities used this investment as a springboard to develop a range of projects to support the overall rebuilding of their community infrastructure. Because communities looked at the whole picture, not

just housing, they were able to attract complementary funding to ensure local people didn't just have a home – advice and support was made available to support tenancies, there were work experience, training and volunteering opportunities, there were places to meet and learn new skills, access to broadband, and, importantly, community enterprises were encouraged to help reinvigorate the local economy.

These six community projects pulled in total investment in excess of £3.09m. Some community groups purchased empty homes, others leased and renovated empties, and one both purchased and leased. The condition of properties varied considerably, from homes in need of minimal upgrading to those empty for long periods and requiring complete renovation.

One project was in its very early stages and did not yet have any properties in management but attracted small but valuable amounts of 'seed corn' funding to help fund the early stages of its development.

Using mixed capital investment, the five projects actively renovating empty homes delivered 65 units of accommodation during the three years we followed them. In addition, they provided either work experience or vocational training and mentoring support for 644 volunteers. All the volunteers were unemployed to start with, yet one fifth (21.1%) continued into further education, training or work. Twenty of these volunteers were housed by the projects. To prevent tenancy breakdown and so prevent future homelessness, the projects offered money management advice, life skills training and tenancy support to their more vulnerable residents. In addition to providing affordable housing and work-related training, the community projects also contributed to economic regeneration and sustainability, for their members and others. They developed community gardens and pocket parks, they delivered small work-spaces from empty commercial buildings, and they established community cafés and bakeries, cycle repair shops and handmade wooden garden furniture schemes. Two ran street markets and had second-hand furniture and household equipment shops.

Community Return on Investment (CROI) is not intended to financialise the value of community action on empty homes. It is intended to validate the real and lasting impact of communities when they work together and in partnership to address and resolve those issues of more importance to them. CROI is determined, devised and delivered by communities. It is not commissioned by local authorities or other partner agencies. We are developing a means of assessing the value[®] of CROI, however, this will be intended as a useful tool to help articulate the value of the returns on investment made by communities, not to define this return in purely financial terms.



Collaboration – what gets in the way?

Community action on empty homes is inherently holistic. At its core are local people - the lives they lead and their opportunities to thrive. They are not service users or residents, tenants or patients. They are our local communities. They understand what is needed and how best to target resources to achieve the maximum impact. As such communities can be very effective partners for local authorities and others

We believe many local authorities understand the value of collaboration with communities, but something seems to get in the way. In autumn 2019, we surveyed 232 local authorities, to better understand the extent to which they were involved with community action on empty homes. One third (77) local authorities responded, and of these 23 said they were working with community organisations to bring empty homes into use. Our survey also asked if local authorities were interested in community action on empty homes: 49.8% of the respondents said they were, however, 45.4% said barriers existed that prevented partnerships being formed

Finding common ground

Starting from different perspectives is perhaps to be expected. The important thing is finding common ground. Our case studies show how local authorities and communities can work very positively and creatively together. The community projects and local authorities we followed collaborated very closely, and they extended their networks to include other agencies that could also help to ensure bringing empty homes into use delivered value beyond the sums of money invested.

Although sometimes appearing to be different, the issue of empty homes is equally pressing for both communities and local authorities. Many local authorities have a problem with the sheer numbers of empty homes, along with all the concerns and costs that flow from area deprivation, poor living conditions and the shortage of local housing supply. Many communities have restricted access to secure affordable housing in areas where homes stand empty, and are immersed in the social and economic impacts of area deprivation.



For both local authorities and communities to make real progress, local people need safe secure and affordable housing, access to work and training, to amenities and leisure facilities, and the chance to contribute to their wider community. Local economies need workers and entrepreneurs of all types. Each of the local authorities we followed during our study understood the importance of supporting their partner communities to deliver the holistic outcomes relevant to them rather than simply 'commissioning' communities to deliver local authority targets. They could see that when empowered to do so, communities can effectively deliver comprehensive solutions which address the underlying issues that lead to homes standing empty for long periods. Similarly, the communities recognised that they could act positively alongside the local authority to reduce the numbers of empty homes while at the same time delivering broader outcomes to support their community and enable local people to thrive.

A common language and common perspective is needed, one which plays to the strengths of local authorities and communities together, and provides support or fills the gaps through training, resources or extended partnerships for both sides.



Don't 'spend' - invest

As resources have reduced, many local authorities have come to associate being proactive with spending they can scarcely afford. This need not be the case. Local authorities are uniquely placed and have the capacity to support communities to act rather than directly acting themselves. *This is not commissioning communities to deliver local authority outcomes.* It is working together to deliver shared aims and collaboration to enable communities to achieve outcomes that will make a real difference to them.

Discussions about bringing empty homes into use often begin with money: the lack of funding to recruit Empty Homes Officers, to make grants and loans available, carry out enforcement activities or undertake compulsory purchase. This can frustrate creative vision and ambition, from local authorities and communities alike.

We suggest these discussions could more helpfully begin with considering opportunities, looking at ways in which empty homes can be recognised as a potential resource and how to achieve the best outcomes from this resource. This requires engaging the strengths of both communities and local authorities together. Local authorities bring to the table their expertise in bringing empty homes into use, their powers of enforcement, their ability to show leadership and influence strategic direction and decision-making about resources. Local authorities have a wealth of cross-departmental knowledge and experience which can be harnessed to ensure homes currently standing empty can be brought into use to revitalise communities and provide local people much-needed secure affordable housing. Communities bring their understanding of how to make sustainable improvements to local living, and their ability to have a different sort of conversation with partners and owners of empty homes. In negotiations with owners of empty homes, communities can convey value in terms of making a difference for people. By doing so they can often develop more co-operative relationships with owners, backed by but separate from the local authority.

One of the community projects we followed, Giroscope in Hull, provides a good demonstration of how investment in

communities to bring empty homes into use can 'yield' much broader outcomes than housing alone:

Case study: Community return on investment



'Giroscope has worked in the Boulevard area of West Hull since the mid-1980s. They were the only project we followed that was set up specifically to bring empty homes into use. In addition to delivering affordable housing from empty homes, Giroscope supports local enterprise. In the late 1990s, they bought and renovated an



old stables and yard to create the Arthur Street Social Enterprise Park. The building has both solar thermal and solar electric technologies and provides space to small enterprises and community businesses, including a bakery, a learning centre and Giroscope's own vegetarian café. In 2013, it bought and converted a second yard in Selby St which houses Giroscope's bicycle repair project and its wood shop as well as other small social enterprises.

Between 2016 and 2018, Giroscope took over the management of Boulevard Village Hall. The Village Hall has become a local meeting place, and also now has a fully equipped computer suite supported by volunteers. Giroscope initiated a project to refurbish personal computers and then

place them, together with free internet access and support, back into the community. In late 2018, Giroscope completed the purchase of the former St. Matthew's Church on Boulevard, West Hull. Some of the services offered at Boulevard Village Hall will be continued at St Matthew's Church.



Giroscope also develops partnerships to ensure secure housing is the cornerstone for stability and the chance to thrive. In partnership with Vulcan Boxing Gym, Giroscope has secured funding from the Comic Relief 'Safe, Secure, Settled' fund, to support young people aged 16-25 in Hull who do not have somewhere safe and secure to live. The project will support young people into long term safe accommodation while also offering personal development and training opportunities to help them to gain the skills and resources to lead safe and positive lives.

By looking at opportunities and building up a business case, the scope for partnership working and the potential for funding can be identified. This stage would never be reached if

initial discussions were halted because of immediate departmental funding issues or the lack of existing housing knowledge in the community.

Communities do understand housing

Housing is generally seen as a quite specialised area of work and knowledge. There are indeed technical and legal aspects to housing but of the six community projects we followed, only one had originally been set up specifically to deliver housing. The other five grew from existing community projects that had each identified that meeting housing need was fundamental to meeting their broader objectives and outcomes. Communities can take on and

work positively around many complex issues and challenges – bringing empty homes into use is no different. Wherever the idea comes from and whatever the starting point it is

important that local authorities and communities together understand what each partner hopes to achieve from the collaboration.

Case study: Meeting local needs

Methodist Action North West (MANW) was a charity created in 2010 and linked to the Methodist Church in Preston, Lancashire. MANW supported people facing multiple deprivation, including homelessness, into housing. Unfortunately, MANW experienced a particular range of challenges and is now no longer operational however its achievements and

work to bring empty homes into use cannot be overlooked.

In 2012, in collaboration with Preston City Council, MANW started to bring empty homes into use to provide affordable housing and support wider opportunities for communities, making use of Empty Homes Community Grant Programme funding (EHCGP). By 2015, MANW had leased 107 empty properties and refurbished them to bring them back into use, creating 222 bedrooms. The average length of time these properties had been empty was three years. They provided accommodation with support for over 250 people, most of whom were vulnerable and in need of a secure affordable home. MANW also developed a 'one-stop shop' solution for empty home-owners. It leased properties from them, managed the refurbishment works and let



the properties at rents based on local housing allowance rates.

When MANW ceased to operate in August 2019, it worked with partner agencies to transfer management of the housing stock and minimise disruption for tenants. Their legacy of homes provided from empty homes to meet the needs of local people lives on.



Local authorities can trust others to help resolve enduring problems

We have spoken with local authority officers and politicians who believe if they can't deliver solutions then it's unlikely anyone else can. This view may be a product of diminishing local authority funding and stretched resources, and it is indeed the case that many local authorities have had to prioritise areas of spend. However, local authorities have a very important enabling role in their communities and are uniquely placed to encourage and support community action on empty homes, and to work with them to help pull in external funding for the acquisition and renovation of homes by communities.

Working with communities to bring empty homes into use, especially with the associated delivery of work experience and training and community enterprise can help address and resolve enduring problems facing communities and revitalise local economic activity, promoting greater resilience and a stronger sense of place. The potential return on investment and associated savings may not only be housing related. For example, access to work experience and vocational training for vulnerable people can help reduce on-going costs for local authorities, as people are enabled to live more independently, and here may be Public Health savings derived from the delivery of warmer

homes in safer environments, with more opportunities to be involved with community life and physical activities.

Local authorities can also gain competent active partners in the community, to help target and

deliver services where they are most needed and have the most impact. North Ormesby CLT in Middlesbrough, for instance, works in collaboration with Middlesbrough Council to help tackle poor housing in the private-rented sector.

Case study: Community health and well-being



North Ormesby CLT is based in the North Ormesby area of Middlesbrough and is linked to the community-run North Ormesby Neighbourhood Development Team (NONDeT). In 2018, in Middlesbrough 1.6% (1,016) of homes was recorded as empty and there were 2965 households on the local authority housing register. When North Ormesby CLT was set up in 2014, the neighbourhood had a concentration of empty homes and a poor quality privately rented sector, with a high population turnover. In 2015, North Ormesby was ranked in the lowest decile of the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), and in the second lowest decile for 'living environment'. In 2017, the average lower quartile house price was £78,000, giving an affordability ratio of 4.34 times lower quartile residence-based earnings.

North Ormesby CLT initially aimed to purchase six empty homes from a local housing association which had consolidated its portfolio and no longer required them. Agreement to dispose of the homes was reached with Homes England and the Charity Commission, and North Ormesby CLT secured them for £80,000, below market value. Working in partnership with Thirteen Group and Middlesbrough City Council, North Ormesby CLT renovated the properties and, in the process, provided



training and work experience for local young people. This wider partnership involved Community Campus 87, Open Doors and East Cleveland Youth Project. The completed homes included new electrics, damp-proofing, central heating, fully fitted kitchens and carpets throughout. Tenants also gained a free connection to the community broadband service.

Both the CLT and NONDeT have grown as organisations and by May 2018 moved to

larger premises opposite the central market place in North Ormesby. NONDeT took over management of the street market as part of broader regeneration works in the area. The CLT has established a social lettings agency, to manage its own stock and to offer housing management services to currently ten local private landlords. There is increasing take-up from landlords in the area. North Ormesby CLT manages nine properties where owners have made use of the Council's Refurb and Rent Scheme. Under this Scheme, owners of empty homes, vacant for over six months, can apply for up to £16,000 of match grant funding per property for renovations. In return they are required to lease their property to a management organisation for a five-year term, and at an affordable rent.



Who owns the assets?

It is important to agree on ownership and control of the assets: homes brought into use by communities from empty homes. We believe community action on empty homes delivers these assets to the communities themselves. Community outcomes are likely to be concerned with the overall well-being of their community members. They seek to improve their living conditions and environment, and to provide secure affordable homes where local people want to live, learn, work and thrive, together. Secure housing is a fundamental requirement but not the only focus. It is a cornerstone to support the achievement of a range of 'quality of life' outcomes for local people where they live.



Many models of community-led housing are in fact led by housing associations or local authorities. The housing assets are not owned and controlled by the community, but by the housing association or local authority. Communities may be consulted and involved but they do not drive the initiative, handle the funding, influence design, determine the outcomes or define what is of value. We could see the importance of genuine community ownership from the projects we followed, as they delivered social and economic outcomes far beyond any target housing outcomes, and they owned the assets. Local authorities have an important role, but it is an enabling and facilitating role rather than a controlling or determining role.



Our Community,
Our Homes

Temporary accommodation

To say a word about temporary accommodation. Some local authorities have looked at areas with concentrations of empty homes as potential for providing interim accommodation for homeless households. This should be seen as a different exercise from community action on empty homes. To address the underlying issues that lead to areas being blighted by empty homes, enabling communities to stabilise and rebuild is fundamental. Increasing the supply of secure affordable housing for people at risk of homelessness or living in insecure or unsuitable accommodation helps to prevent homelessness and is a positive initiative in its own right.

Community Action on Empty Homes: The Toolkit

In this next section, we will look at how local authorities and communities can get together to bring empty homes into use as affordable housing for local people. If you start to read

this document at this point please go back to read the foundation pages first as they give the rationale for why we suggest you approach community action on empty homes in the way described here.

Getting together: Local authorities and communities

Perhaps one of the most challenging stages of community action on empty homes is right at the very start - getting together to talk about the issues. It doesn't matter who initiates the contact, the main thing is to begin a conversation about empty homes. A good way of getting to know each other is to do some joint work together to explore immediate issues and concerns. This can be followed up with doing some research – locating and mapping empty homes, looking at the types of properties standing empty and noting their condition. This can lead to a discussion about which properties, on the face of it, could be brought into use at a reasonable cost and how they might help meet community housing needs. This is a practical and useful exercise in itself, but importantly it helps to develop team working between the local authority and the community.



Funding to get started

When supporting a community group to engage with empty homes, the initial funding required is not renovation funding, it is funding to support learning and capacity building. This can involve enabling community groups to visit similar projects in other areas, providing assistance to apply for external community development or community-led housing related growth grant

funding, provision of meeting spaces and assistance with training. Even relatively small amounts of funding can be of great assistance to communities in the early stages of project development. This funding may be drawn from across a range of local authority budgets, and invested in developing partnerships to enable community action on empty homes.

Staying focussed

The process of building a good working relationship is not without risks. Each partner may have their own starting point, looking at things from only their own perspective. Each may be aware of areas where empty homes could be brought into use through community action but they may have very different outcomes in mind to best meet their own needs.

Local authorities may focus on internal priorities: empty homes targets; pressure to reduce the

cost of temporary accommodation; the need to increase the supply of affordable housing for people not eligible for social housing or for whom social housing is not suitable. While these are valid motivations for bringing empty homes into use, they are not an appropriate base for community action on empty homes. To measure value or success through departmental targets alone will miss the opportunity to achieve broader community-defined outcomes, and can undermine the nature and potential of community action.



Case study: Getting started in Sincil Bank

Sincil Bank is a compact area of the cathedral city of Lincoln. It was originally a mixture of terraced housing and small industrial premises. The area has experienced considerable economic decline and community fragmentation over a long period and now has a relatively high concentration of empty homes and vacant commercial premises. Sincil Bank was initially identified by Lincoln City Council as in need of regeneration in 2001, and since then there have been successive interventions with associated funding, including the development of a neighbourhood plan in 2014.

The Sincil Bank Neighbourhood Board has been active and engaged with the regeneration of the area. The underlying

problems persisted however, and in 2016 the City Council commissioned the development of a Sincil Bank, Revitalisation Framework which was published in April 2017. The Revitalisation Framework included a recommendation to encourage the formation of a Community Land Trust (CLT) to engage in a community-led response to a range of physical and social issues including a response to empty homes in the area.

Following the publication of the Framework, Lincoln City Council set up an internal team (Community Development, Housing, and Private Sector Enforcement) to work in partnership with local community representatives, the Neighbourhood Board and East Midlands Community Led Housing (EMCLH) to establish a 'Homes Working Group'. This comprised public, private, third sector and community stakeholders, and was chaired by EMCLH. This group formed the foundation for the new CLT. There was universal support for the concept and in December 2017 a Steering Group began working towards incorporation, preparing local publicity and recruiting wider community membership.



The CLT Steering Group was successful in securing £1,800 start-up grant (funded by City Council and Lincolnshire Economic Action Partnership), and EMCLH was invited by City Council to submit a proposal for revenue grant to support the emerging CLT. The City Council and Investors in Lincoln targeted two empty homes, with the intention of selling – at cost – renovated units on a turn-key basis to the new CLT. The property owner however disposed of the properties independently. Discussions are ongoing with the City Council and others to identify empty homes to be brought into use during the initial phase of the scheme.

The formal establishment of the new body is now complete with a Community Benefit Society as the legal base for operating as an urban Community Land Trust – registered as Sincil Community Land Trust.



Finding empty homes

Council Tax register

Local authorities are aware of empty homes that are notified to them in their area. This information comes mainly from the Council Tax register which shows homes declared to be empty and unfurnished. This may not give a complete picture of all homes standing empty for long periods. Local authorities cannot disclose the personal details of the owner but can contact them about their empty homes. Communities have access to local knowledge about empty homes which may include details of some properties not shown as empty on the Council Tax Register.

Empty social housing

Local authorities may own housing which is standing empty, as may other public bodies such as health authorities and the Ministry of Defence or large institutions such as church bodies or commercial companies.

Where housing association or council homes are standing empty, the owner can be contacted to understand why the home is empty and if it may be available for a period of years for community renovation and use.

Many housing associations are 'consolidating' their housing stock with many focussing on their newer housing rather than older properties which may be dispersed in inner-urban areas, in more remote rural areas or for various reasons no longer suits their purpose.

We support the National Housing Federation call for housing associations to ensure ethical disposal of their stock including prioritising sale to communities, and where possible direct transfer to communities to deliver community benefit.



Privately-owned empty homes and their owners

The majority of empty homes are privately owned and it can be difficult for both local authorities and communities to contact the owner. Communities can use local knowledge and ‘collective memory’ – including local estate agents, newsagents and so on - to try to track down owners. Communities can also write to the owner at the address given on the Land Registry search in the hope that the letter will be forwarded. A letter from a community group outlining the help available and the positive contribution the renovated property could make to local people can achieve a more positive outcome than a less personal approach from the local authority.

Land
Registry



Finding owners of empty homes

Finding out who owns empty properties can be problematic for local authorities and communities alike. The Land Registry is the government register of land and land ownership in England and Wales. The register is “open”, meaning that anybody can see details held on any property in the register. The Land Registry can be viewed on-line for a small fee. The details include a title plan showing the boundaries of the land, and a title register showing ownership and details of anybody who has a financial interest in the property such as mortgagees. Some owners, however, give their address as the address of the empty property.

Getting the right homes

Not all empty homes will be suitable for every community project. Empty homes should be evaluated to ensure they can deliver community benefit to the community project, either because of the location, size and type, the extent of repair required, or a combination of all these. Many empty homes are in very poor condition, however many are not. Some require only updating and some modernisation to be brought into use. If community action on empty homes is a new initiative for both local authority and community, empty homes requiring modest works would be a positive start.

Communities and local authorities can work together to map empty homes in target areas and agree on a joint approach to encouraging the owners to bring them into use. This may involve the local authority contacting the owner with an offer from the community to explore ways their home can benefit local people through bringing it back into use. Where empty housing is in corporate ownership, the

Old Road Community Group

Dear Owner of 33 Old Road,

Your house has been empty now for over 7 years. The Old Road Community Group is working with empty homes owners to help local people. Your house would make a great family home. We can raise funds to carry out repairs and improvements and can organise all the works. We also manage tenancies and on-going maintenance.

We would like to talk with you please about how your empty home could be brought into use.

Kind regards,
Harry Helper

Old Road Community Group
Contact details.....

community may approach the organisation directly, or the local authority can help broker two- or three-way negotiations to enable empty homes to be transferred or leased to the community.

Community action on empty homes is focussed on bringing empty homes into use for a purpose. This purpose may be to provide affordable housing for a particular group of people for example young people facing homelessness, people in recovery, ex-service personnel or people with mental health challenges. If the community is neighbourhood-based then provision of secure affordable homes for local people may be a priority.

From the local authority perspective, it is important to be mindful of the wider community objectives and to work in partnership to help deliver community-led outcomes. The local authority has a key role in helping to broker the partnerships communities need to successfully achieve their outcomes. This means, for example, a large property in considerable disrepair would not on first glance be appropriate as a first renovation scheme for a new community group seeking to provide small flats for young people. If however a housing association or the local authority itself could be brought on board to help support and manage renovation works, then such a scheme may be viable.

Putting forward a proposal to owners

Having identified a property and the owner, the next step will be to engage with the owner to allow the community to lease or purchase it. The more you can show the benefits not just to the owner but the community as well of bringing the home into the use, the more likely the owner will be to co-operate.

A useful resource is the Self-Help Housing website which provides clear guidance about how to approach this. Self-Help Housing is an organisation which was set up to raise the profile of community-led housing, to map what's



currently going on and put existing projects in touch with one another. They also campaign to increase the resources available to self-help housing. Some of today's housing associations began as small groups of people and communities getting together to meet their housing needs, often through bringing empty homes into use.

Self-Help Housing advises that whether or not you get a meeting with the owner, you're eventually going to need to put forward a written proposal and possibly make a presentation of some kind. The things to include are set out in the 'Proposals to Owners' chart on the next page. You could include these details in a letter or perhaps as a separate document. If you do the latter, Self-Help Housing suggests you perhaps put a picture of the building(s) on the front cover.



Proposals to owners (self-help housing)

1	Details of your group/organisation:	Your suitability as a group/organisation to take on responsibility for managing a property. You need to say enough to demonstrate that you're properly organised and led and that you're capable of taking and carrying through decisions.	
2	Who will be housed	Details of who you intend to house and how it will benefit them	
3	Financial benefits	The financial benefits to the owner in terms of bringing the property back into use in terms of; income arising from the use of the property, savings in terms of vandalism, security and maintenance and the overall protection of the value of the property.	
4	Community benefits	The benefit to the community arising from bringing the property back into use in relation to the surrounding area.	
5	Technical competence	Your ability to carry out any necessary repairs	
6	Financial viability	Your ability to raise the necessary money and manage your financial affairs	
7	Your integrity	Your trustworthiness when it comes to honouring your undertaking to hand back the property at the end of the agreement.	
8	Referees	If you've got contacts with people who the owners may trust, then it might be worth asking them to act on your behalf to support your proposal. This may include the local authority and other partners.	

To lease or to buy?

Before setting out to find empty homes to bring into use, be clear of what you want and of the proposal you are making. The core of your proposal – your aims and objectives - will be in your business plan. It is helpful to decide whether you are looking for homes to lease and renovate or to buy. Some community groups can raise enough funding to purchase their initial properties. As property prices increase and funding resources decrease, this is becoming more difficult especially for community groups who are starting out. Leasing can give access to properties which

would otherwise be unavailable. Buying can help to build a secure asset base against which to raise further funding. Both have advantage and constraints.

Leasing arrangements

There is no standard length of lease. Much depends on the ownership, and on nature and amount of funding required to renovate a property. A corporate owner may be willing to lease a property at a peppercorn rent for periods of 5-10 years or more. Private owners are more likely to prefer shorter leases, possibly with the option to renew following the initial period.

Getting organised

Types of community organisations

Community action on empty homes may be triggered by concerned residents, or there may be an existing community organisation that now wants to find ways of delivering secure affordable housing for local people to meet housing needs.

There are a range of options to consider and the kind of organisation you become should support the outcomes you want to achieve. Some communities start straightaway with a formal, legal structure, others develop and change as they progress.

The National CLT Network (NCLHN) can give further information about how to get started, how to set up your organisation, and to write business and financial plans. They also have model rules for the different organisation types.



1 An informal association

This is the most basic form of organisation and can be a useful way of 'testing the water' as it doesn't require formal registration as a legal entity. You will need to set out your Terms of Reference:

- the purpose of your organisation: what you aim to achieve and the principles of how you will go about this
- who can be members and what the membership should be
- who will be responsible for running the organisation (chairperson, secretary and treasurer)
- the minimum number of members to be present to make decisions (the quorum)
- how the meetings will be conducted and minuted.

- how decisions are to be made (eg who can vote)
- how the organisation can be wound up and what would happen to any assets (funding, equipment, property)

An advantage of starting with an informal association may be that it can give time to think through the type of organisation that would be most appropriate to help achieve your broad aims, to explore partnership opportunities and to consult with others about priorities and target outcomes.

Remaining an informal association in the longer terms may be limiting. You would also not be a legal 'entity' and would not have any of the limited liabilities or protections that come with the various formal options. More information can be found on the Locality website.



2 Company limited by guarantee



The most straightforward formal structure would be a Company limited by guarantee. This is a company, registered at Companies House and entered on the Register of Charities. Registration is inexpensive and each member of the company undertakes (guarantees) to pay a nominal sum (normally £1) towards the company's debts should it go into liquidation. This means the liability of each member is limited to the sum guaranteed (£1). The Company would be established on a 'not for profit' basis which means that payments could not be made to members of the Company.

This structure has the advantage of giving legal status and clearly setting out how the

organisation should operate to ensure it is democratic and accountable. This helps to give the organisation credibility and a level of assurance when approaching outside bodies for funds or resources, and when working with the owners of empty homes. It limits the liability of individual members and directors and trustees and ensures roles and responsibilities are clear.

A community organisation may simply remain a company limited by guarantee, however many also take on another level of structure, to become co-operatives, community interest companies, community benefit societies or community land trusts.

3 Housing co-operative



An informal association may want to form a housing co-operative. Co-operatives are set up to operate for the benefit of their members. There are two main types of housing co-operative:

- Fully mutual – where only members of the cooperative can be residents of the cooperative
- Management cooperatives – both members and non-members of the cooperative can be residents of the cooperative.

Housing cooperatives must be registered with the Financial Conduct Authority and the Regulator of social housing. The registration process can take some time and the cooperative can't start to operate until the process has been completed. Members of the housing cooperative buy a minimum £1 share in the cooperative.

By becoming a housing cooperative, the organisation becomes a legal entity, able to enter into contracts and raise funds in its own right. The Confederation of Housing Cooperatives has model runs which can be referred to and used.

4 Community benefit society



Unlike a housing cooperative which is set up for the benefit of its members, a community benefit society is set up for the benefit of the community. This may be a defined community but the benefit should extend to society as a whole. Community benefit societies are generally defined by the FCA registration guidance which sets out four key characteristics:

- The conduct of a community benefit society's business must be entirely for the benefit of the community
- There can be no alternative or secondary purposes, including any that may

preferentially benefit the members. While community benefit societies have members who hold shares, no particular members or groups of members can have greater rights over any others (one member, one vote)

- Any profit made by a community benefit society must be used for the benefit of the community.
- Any assets held must be used for the benefit of the community.

If the CBS objectives are charitable then it can have 'Exempt Charitable Status'. Although not a registered charity, it can benefit from, for example, tax and rates relief.



5 Community Interest Company (CIC)

A community interest company is a business with primary social objectives. Any profits after salaries, costs and overheads are reinvested in the business to the benefit of the community. CIC's can address a wide range of social and environmental issues and operate in all parts of the economy. CIC's must be a company limited

by guarantee. CIC's cannot also have charitable status, however, some charities set up associate CIC's to enable them to operate a more commercial model, for the benefit of the community they serve. This can bring the advantage of being able to sell services or trade to raise or maintain funding.



6 Community land trust

A community land trust (CLT) can bring empty homes into use, and can also build new or protect existing buildings. A CLT is not a particular legal structure; companies limited by guarantee, community interest companies and community benefit societies can all be established as CLTs.

A CLT must be set up expressly for the purpose of furthering the social, economic or environmental interests of a local community by acquiring and managing land and assets in

order to provide a benefit to the local community. It must ensure that the assets are not sold or developed except in a manner which the CLT's members think benefits the local community.

A CLT must also be set up under arrangements which are expressly designed to ensure that any profits are used to benefit the local community. Individuals who live or work in the specified area when the CLT operates must have the opportunity to become members of the trust. The members of the CLT also have overall control of the CLT.



7 Charitable status

A charity is a not-for-profit organisation whose primary objectives are philanthropy and social well-being e.g. educational, religious, or other activities serving the public interest or common good. The people running a charity must not, however, be the same as the people benefiting from the services it provides. This means becoming a charity wouldn't be an option for projects where people living in the properties also want to run the organisation (such as a housing co-op).

To secure charitable status you must register with the Charity Commission. Registration depends on you having charitable objectives (e.g. relief of poverty- which would include providing housing for people on low incomes) and being run in a charitable manner (e.g. any surplus money is used to further the objectives of the organisation and not distributed to shareholders or members). There's no fee for registration, but you must have an income of at least £5,000 and the Charity Commission will want to look carefully at everything about the organisation to make sure that it is fully compliant.

There is now one main option for charitable status:

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)

A CIO is a corporate form of business designed for and only available to charitable organisations. New or existing charities can apply to the Charity Commission to become a CIO. The main benefit of being a CIO is that the charity has legal personality. This means it can hold property in its own name rather than in the name of its trustees. A CIO can enter contracts, and take legal action (and have legal action taken against it). The members have limited liability which means their liability in the event the charity becomes insolvent is limited or nil. CIO's do not have to register with Companies House – they need only register and file accounts and returns with the Charity Commission. This helps to reduce the bureaucracy involved.

There is a disadvantage of the CIO option for larger charities in that, unlike for charitable companies, there is no public register of lenders' charges over the corporation's assets, and this can make it harder to arrange finance.



Your business plan

Whichever type of organisation is decided upon, to move forward and secure resources you will need a plan that sets out what you want to do and how you're going to do it. The 'what you want to do' element should be at the heart of how you form your strategy. The 'how you're going to do it' is your plan of action. This is usually referred to as your 'business plan'.

A business plan has a job of work to do, to support your project, keep you reviewing progress and help keep things on track. Think about how you want to use it, what you want it to say and show about your project, and importantly who is going to read it. Your business plan will also show you if your ideas stack up, in terms of time, resources and funding. It is your proposition to the world. Understanding these things will make a difference in how you write and present your plan. Your focus might change, or different aspects of it come to the fore, depending on the purpose of the document and stage of development of your project.

The process of business planning in itself is a chance to use your collective experience and passion to work out how on earth you're going to achieve your aims and outcomes. The best business plans are the product of discussion

and collaboration within the team or partnership. Potential barriers or problems are identified and resolved together, to be then agreed and captured in the business plan. In short, a business plan is a:

- live document that you refer to regularly and which can be changed and updated
- guide to steer your actions towards your aims
- great way to showcase your organisation, passion and creativity
- opportunity to work out your finances and demonstrate your financial sustainability
- way of showing how you achieve social impact
- statement of where you are now and where you want to be. Keep your business plan under regular review. It should be a working document and be kept up to date.

The various parts of a business plan are described here in some detail. They are intended as a guide to help you get going. Business plans often grow and develop over time: don't worry if your early business plans seem less formal 'working documents'. They will develop as your organisation develops. Remember – the NCLTN can help you with business and financial plans.



What goes into a business plan

1 Executive summary

This summarises the key points of your strategy supporting your business plan. It gives the 'first impression' of your project. Keep it

clear, and concise, with an overview of who you are, what you want to do and why, and how you plan to do it.

2 A description of your organisation

Give details of who your organisation is and what you do. This should include:

- Your vision, mission, values and aims

- The background and a brief history of your project
- Evidence of need for your project
- The current stage of development of your organisation
- Your legal status

3 Operational plan

Give an overview of the day-to-day operations of your organisation. This may include descriptions of:

- The resources you need to run your business

- The people and organisations you work with (eg partners and suppliers)
- Your premises and the equipment you use
- Any legal requirements that your organisation needs to meet
- Any insurance you have or will need.

4 People

Give an overview of your organisational structure and who is involved with your organisation. This should include the management structure, including trustees and board structure as appropriate. You may include biographies of people in key roles. Evidence the skills you have

in the organisation to show you are competent to deliver your aims and if there are skills gaps, show how you will meet them. Most organisations need to grow over time and add to their skills base. The important thing is to show you recognise this and say how you plan to fill any gaps in knowledge or expertise in a timely way.

5 Social impact

In order to attract support, funding and other investment, in addition to the financial aspects of your business plan you should also show your social impact. Social impact is the difference your project will make for the people and communities you work with. The first step here is to evidence the need for the social impacts your project will bring: what are the issues, how do

these impact on people now, what do you intend to do and what will the social impacts – the positive changes for people and communities – be. Back this up with details of how you will measure, learn from and communicate your impact. This should include each change you want to make, what you plan to measure, how you'll measure it, how you'll use what you learn and how you'll tell people about it.



What goes into a business plan

6 Financial plan

Your financial plan will give a summary of your finances and should cover short, medium and longer-term planning. A financial plan is not the same as an annual budget. An annual budget is a guideline to follow with regards to spending. It breaks down expenses into categories (i.e. rent, electricity bills, etc) for a certain time period (usually monthly and yearly). A financial plan is a tool to help you achieve long-term financial objectives.

In your financial plan, you set out your actual or anticipated costs and expenditure first. If you are developing a new activity or project then you will need to think through the practical process of delivering your project, thinking at each stage what you will need in terms of staffing, equipment, funding for works, support for volunteers, training, legal advice and so on. Not all these costs will be cash costs, for example, the local authority may be able to second staff or provide free legal advice and technical training. A partner may donate equipment or a volunteer may give their expertise free.

Even if something is being donated or given free or at low cost, it should be included in your

financial plan. This will ensure you can demonstrate your understanding of how each element of your project delivery plan will be resourced. Where revenue or capital funding is required, show how much is needed and how it will be sourced. Show which funding is in place and which is not. If you are applying for funding to fill a gap, it is important to show that all other funding and resources required are in place around your application.

A financial plan should be underpinned by a financial forecast. A financial forecast includes a costs table showing what you expect to spend and when, and a cashflow forecast showing how funding going out sits against money coming in month by month over the life of your plan. As well as showing operational viability, together these are also important management tools. Monitoring the costs table you can keep actual against projected costs under review – how much you expect to spend against what you actually spend, and when you spend it against when you expected to spend it. Monitoring the cashflow will show if there are likely to be any shortfalls in income against expenditure at any point in the life of your plan, enabling you to take action to avoid a cashflow shortage, possibly by adjusting expenditure in your cost plan.

7 Risk management

All business activities involve risk, especially new businesses. This need not be a concern or barrier provided you have a robust risk management plan based on a good understanding of what could go wrong and have planned effective remedial action. You will need a risk management plan for insurance purposes and also for most funding bids.

The aim is to identify and assess potential risks to your organisation and project/s and then put a plan in place to manage them, should they arise. Risk identification and assessment involves looking across your whole operation and thinking about what could go wrong and, if it went wrong, how this would impact on your business.

This should include consideration of:

- Governance risks
- External risks
- Regulatory or compliance risks
- Financial risks
- Operational risks

Some risks carry greater impacts than others and most organisations use a scoring system, sometimes using traffic lights, to differentiate between low (green), medium (amber) and high-impact (red) risks.. Each identified risk can then be discussed and a management plan put in place that has a realistic chance of minimising the impact of each risk, should it occur.

Planning the works

Preliminary work and costs

The costs of renovation start before works commence on site. In addition to the legal fees associated with acquiring the property, it is possible Council Tax and utility costs will continue to be levied. Some organisations may be eligible for charitable relief on Council Tax. The property will also require insurance, which should be varied to cover renovations once work does start.

It may seem obvious to say but the first step to carry out renovation works is to fully understand the works required. These may not be apparent from a visual inspection of the property, especially if the property has been empty for some time. A professional survey should be carried out, one which checks for any structural issues and tests electrical and other services.

Based on the structural survey an initial specification of works can be drafted. If the property requires modification and modernisation these works can be layered in. Consideration should be given to energy efficiency and affordable warmth and environmental sustainability.

If planning permission is required for alterations or extensions this should be assessed and sought at the preliminary stage. Planning permission is the permission required from the local authority Planning department in order to be allowed to build on land, or change the use of land or carry out certain works. When bringing empty homes into use, planning permission may be required for example to change the use of a building, to enlarge it or to demolish any part of it, convert a loft space or

put in sky lights or additional windows. If the empty home is in a conservation area or is a listed building (of historic or cultural value), the local authority Conservation Officer must be consulted before any works are planned or started.

The contract for works

When drafting the contract for the works, any community benefits such as work experience and training should be added. If for example it is intended that local people should be offered work experience and vocational training or apprenticeships created, these should be included in the contract for works.

A requirement to collaborate with partners such as local colleges and training bodies, organisations providing trainees such as probation services and other relevant core partners should be included in the contract before invitations to tender are sent out. When the tenders are evaluated these social impact aspects of the contract can be included in the scoring and be a key factor in determining to whom the contract is let.

Writing specifications

The importance of accurate and consistent writing of specifications usually only becomes clear when something goes wrong. If possible to ensure consistency in language and phrasing, specifications are better written by one person. Even then, they should be thoroughly checked to ensure there are no contradictions or vagaries about what is required, the standards to be met and the timescale for respective works. Here are some standard guidelines:



Writing specifications – some standard guidelines



1 The layout and grouping of subjects should be logical

This needs planning out beforehand. Think about the order in which works would be carried out. For example, you would not plaster a wall before you had installed a damp proof course. If rewiring or replumbing is required, you would not lay new floors or put in a new kitchen or bathroom until this had been done. If payment is staged, then works should be broken into stages, with payments being made as each stage is completed.

2 Requirements for each subject should be stated clearly and checked to see all aspects are covered

This means being clear about what you actually want and in a logical order. It isn't enough to say 'rewire the kitchen'. You should state clearly how many plug sockets you want, and their position eg above counter or below counter, skirting board level. You should also state the types and positioning of lights, whether they are recessed or spotlights for instance, and whether you want two-way switches or dimmer switches. The final positioning may vary in practice, but the specification should be clear about type, quantity and intended positioning.

3 Language and punctuation should be checked to see they cannot give rise to ambiguity

You may have heard the story of the panda accused of injuring a café owner: the panda eats, shoots, and leaves. What the sentence meant to say was: the panda eats shoots and leaves. The misplaced commas completely change the meaning of the sentence! Other examples might be: *'Put up 4x wall-lights after painting'* – What has been painted? The wall-lights or the wall? *'Install 3x light switches in the hallway, living room and dining room'* – Is that 3x switches in each room or 3x switches, one in each room?

4 Legal terms and phrases should not be used unless they are essential

The contract you have with your contractor/s is the place for legal terms and phrases. In a specification, they would only really be used if there is a legal standard that must be adhered to or complied with.

5 To define obligations use the words 'shall' or 'must'

If it is essential to you, or an external regulator such as Building Control, that certain standards are achieved then avoid words like should which are open to interpretation and therefore difficult to enforce. For example: *'All on-site health and safety regulations must be adhered to at all times'*, not should. *'The site 'must' be left clean and tidy at the end of each working day'*. The same applies to time scales, eg *'Phase 1 of the works (which you will have defined under (1) above) shall be completed by (date/within x weeks of commencement of works on site)'*.

6 Quality must be precisely defined

Quality must be precisely defined, not described as 'best', for example, if you want a particular quality of materials to be used or finish achieved, then clearly state this. This may mean for a bathroom wall, not just saying 'tiles' but specifying *'white ceramic tiles: 10cm x 20cm, minimum depth 0.8cm, maximum spacing of 3mm'*. The aim is to ensure you and your builder clearly understand what is required. It can also safeguard against a builder using cheaper materials or cutting corners.

7 Stay focused on essential works and keep the level of detail consistent

Ensure your specification stays on point and has the same level of detail for each area or type of work.

8 Management of works and progress reporting

Make it clear how works will be managed and the reporting mechanisms, between contractor/s and community group/s, that will be in place.

9. Payment Schedule

Include a 'payment schedule' which clearly sets out whether and how much any payments will be made upfront for materials, and sets out the stages of works when payments will be made. For example, a payment may be made up front to purchase new kitchen units, however, payment for assembly and installation will not be made until this work has been completed to the required standard.

Local authorities, and housing associations, have extensive experience of specifying building works and of drafting, tendering and evaluating contracts. A collaborative partnership between local authorities and community groups can help build capacity within communities to identify required works, draft specifications, let contracts and manage works.

Other fees and costs

In addition to the preliminary costs, there can be fees and charges associated with completing and signing off the works.



Other fees and costs include...

1 Building Control fees

The Building Control process is a legal requirement that must be obtained before carrying out work that involves the erection, extension or alteration of a building. The process ensures that building work is carried out in compliance with the Building Regulations and allied legislation. Building Control Approval should not be confused with Planning Permission and vice versa. Planning permission relates to the appearance of the development and its impact on neighbouring properties and the surrounding area. The Building Regulations promote minimum standards for most aspects of a building's construction. They include the energy efficiency in buildings, the needs of all people, including those with disabilities, in accessing and moving around buildings. For information about Building Control in your area and details of fees, contact your local authority Building Control team.

2 Reconnection fees

It may be necessary to connect or re-connect gas, electricity or water supplies, when you take possession of the property or after the works have been completed. Remember you are likely to need a water and power supply during the works. There can be a significant gap between the time you request reconnection and the connection being made or meter/s installed. This is something to request as early as possible. There will be connection fees which will vary depending on where you are and the supplier.

3 Valuation fees

If you are borrowing funds to renovate a property, the lender will require a property valuation. You may also need a valuation for insurance purposes and/or for your accounting processes.

4 Council tax

You are likely to be liable for Council Tax on the property throughout the process of renovation. If renovation works are extensive, it may be possible to achieve a period of exemption but check first with your local authority.

5 Professional fees

Expect to incur a range of professional fees, including planning permission and Building Control approval, a variety of surveys, structural engineer reports and any other professional fees (e.g. tree surveys). Be sure to include them in your budget.

6 Contingency fund

Make sure you have some extra cash on hand to deal with anything unexpected that may arise (and when renovating a house, it is absolutely to be expected)

Funding for renovations

Action on Empty Homes has launched a coalition calling for a national investment programme bringing empty homes into use. In the absence of this, pulling together funding can seem a daunting task. In practice, it is more like solving a jigsaw: the aim (the picture) and the pieces are all there – the trick and the challenge is putting them together. Remember that as well as capital funding you will also need revenue funding to support the staffing required to manage projects, do your accounts and support volunteers.

The communities we followed accessed a very wide range of funding for very differently sized projects. You can read more about how they funded their work in our report, 'Community action on empty homes – Using empty homes to regenerate communities, however, we outline

two case studies here. The first, Cultures CIC in Stockton-on-Tees, brought three properties into use with very limited funds; the second, Gyroscope in Hull, brought a series of empty properties into use with funding from a number of sources.

Cultures leases the homes it brings into use, and as such is entirely dependent on grant funding. Gyroscope purchases most of the housing it renovates, which means it can raise its own loan funding. Both projects succeeded in providing much-needed secure affordable housing for local people. These case studies show how community projects can raise both small and large amounts of funding to enable them to bring empty homes into use to meet their local housing needs.

Case study: Funding for Cultures CIC in Stockton-on-Tees

In 2017, Cultures CIC piloted a project to bring four empty flats into use to provide secure affordable housing for people newly arrived in the UK. Although already an established community group, this was the first time Cultures CIC had ventured into bringing empty homes into use. The properties were leased from the housing association Thirteen Group, who had, in turn, leased them from private owners. The empty homes selected did not require major structural works, but did need to be modernised and fitted with new kitchens and bathrooms, and have new central heating installed.

Funding for the pilot project was a primary challenge. Cultures CIC secured a total of £6,000 from Thirteen Group to lease and refurbish all four flats. To top up this funding, Cultures CIC resourced support in kind from trade professionals, for example, decorators and plumbers, who gave some of their time free to carry out works and provided training for community volunteers who were also working on the properties. B&Q were approached and provided materials at a considerable discount. This reduced the overall cost of labour and materials and enabled the homes to be delivered within a very small budget. All the



flats were completed to standard and were occupied by the members of the community with the most housing need.



Case study: Funding for Gioscope in Hull

During 2017 Gioscope bought and renovated five long-term empty homes and began work on three further properties which had been empty for up to 17 years. Gioscope also started a project with LandAid, the property industry charity which has a primary focus on ending youth homelessness, to provide 14 bed spaces across five properties for young people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness. The total funding required was £278,773.

This was made up from:

- LandAid grant (£40,679)
- Hull City Council Right-to-Buy Replacement Grant Fund (£88,094)
- Gioscope loan finance (£150,000). In partnership with the local Vulcan Boxing Club,

Gioscope also secured funding from the Comic Relief 'Safe, Secure, Settled' fund, to support young people aged 16-25 in Hull

GIOSCOPE
Turning empty houses into homes

who do not have somewhere safe and secure to live. The project supports young people into long term safe accommodation while also offering personal development and training opportunities, which helps them to gain the skills and resources they need to lead safe and positive lives



Sources of funding

Revenue funding

Revenue funding will be required by community groups to pay for staffing, volunteer expenses, stationery, training, any office equipment and so on.

Capital funding will not cover Council Tax liabilities – so there is a need to include this as revenue. There are a number of possible sources.

Funding availability varies with the priorities of funders. Do monitor potential funders, on at

least a quarterly basis. Although funding may not be available for your project in one funding round, it may be in the next one. Regularly check on 'fund finder' websites and local grant funding digests for revenue grant availability.

These provide information about funding available on a national and local level. Some charge for this service, others do not. A good place to start when looking for community funding resources may be your local Voluntary Action Centre, Community Council or Community-Led Housing Hub. You can also look at or talk with similar projects to your own to understand how they are funding their work.

Revenue funding sources



Support in kind from local authorities and/or other key partners. This may be serviced office space, seconded staff, free training and mentoring



Local authority community grants, community chests or business sponsorship may provide pump-priming funding to enable communities to develop a business case for bids for further funding



Government grant funding – at the time of writing Locality had revenue grant funding available to help start-up community-led housing projects



National Lottery funding may be available to help set up a community-led housing groups, especially those aiming to meet health and well-being needs through the provision of affordable housing



Charitable grants may be available to support community action on empty homes which aims to provide affordable homes for particular groups, for example, people leaving prison, young people, people with mental health challenges and veterans.



Once the project has been established and properties are being renovated and let, it is possible to create an income stream by including an element in the rent to cover property-related revenue costs such as housing management and maintenance costs.

Capital funding

This is the funding required to carry out the renovation works and cover the associated professional fees.

Much of the success in accessing capital funding lies in delivery of broad community-based outcomes, rather than the renovation of empty homes per se. Bringing empty homes into use, and the process of renovation itself, can contribute to improvement in the health and well-being of vulnerable or excluded people and ‘left behind’ communities. This takes the discussion beyond bricks and mortar to the creation of safe secure homes for people housing need. This is



particularly the case when homes are created for households who struggle to access social housing, or for whom social housing is not available where they want or need to live.

It is our recent experience that most capital funding for community action on empty homes is made up of a 'package' of charitable or foundation funding, local authority funding and, in some instances, Homes England funding that

has been channelled through housing associations (Registered Providers).

Capital funding may be non-repayable grant, repayable or recyclable grant, and/or repayable loans. Some of the funders listed below may offer a mix of revenue and capital funding, depending on their aims and the projects they want to support. Do check the eligibility criteria and type of funding available.



Charitable and foundation funding

Some charities and foundations will fund the renovation of empty homes which provide opportunities for social inclusion and training and result in delivery of secure affordable homes for their target group. Typically charitable trusts and foundations aim to invest in the renovation of empty homes to provide secure homes for people who have significant housing needs or are homeless, such as young people leaving care, those trapped in poor quality or over-crowded private rented sector accommodation, or people rebuilding their lives after domestic

abuse, addiction or mental health issues. They recognise that many community projects provide support to help people live independently, to sustain their tenancies and stabilise their lives. They also recognise that bringing empty properties into use regenerates streets and improves neighbourhoods for all residents, making them safer, more inclusive places to live. Opportunities to gain new skills through training, education or apprenticeships are valued and supported as a way of supporting people, including local unemployed people and school leavers, into paid work or further education.



National Lottery funding

It is worth looking at current National Lottery funding programmes, some of which may provide capital funding to provide housing with support for vulnerable and excluded groups, or to help regenerate communities. Funding programmes may be targeted towards individual countries within the UK: grants available in Scotland and Wales may not be available in England and vice versa. Funding is unlikely to be

available simply to renovate empty homes. If, however, it were to be demonstrated that the process of bringing empty homes into use could provide work experience, mentoring, basic skills development and vocational training for excluded groups and that this process would deliver secure affordable homes for vulnerable people, then the renovation of empty homes becomes something of value far beyond housing.



Homes England

At the time of writing, the Homes England Community Housing Fund no longer provides capital funding for community housing projects. Revenue funding is available, primarily to enable community organisations to work up bids for capital funding from the Affordable Homes Programme. To be eligible for Affordable Housing Programme funding, you would have to be a Registered (Housing) Provider.

By working in partnership with a registered provider, unregistered organisations may be able to access capital funding to renovate empty homes through the Lease and Repair fund.

Registered Providers (housing associations) are still able to make use of the arrangements which were put in place during the 2011-2015 Empty Homes Programme, which made it possible for them to lease vacant properties from private owners and claim funding to cover the cost of renovation. Unregistered organisations that own empty properties in need of repair can work with a registered provider to access funding, while still retaining ownership and management of the property, by means of a lease back arrangement. Not all registered providers are willing to collaborate in this way, however some will. North Ormesby CLT, for example, benefited from this approach.



Recycled grant and/or rental income



Grant received to enable renovation works to be carried out can be recycled through the rental income stream. The rent you charge for accommodation will include an amount for repairs and on-going maintenance, housing management, insurances, bad debt, and void periods. The difference between the amount required to meet

these costs and the actual rent paid can be recycled back into the grant pot and used for investment in future works. Similarly, where there has been no grant, the difference between the amount required to meet these costs and the actual rent paid can be used for investment in future works, helping projects to become more sustainable over the longer term.

Local authority capital grant

New Homes Bonus



New Homes Bonus (NHB) is a grant paid by central government to local councils to reflect and incentivise housing growth in their areas. It is based on the amount of extra Council Tax revenue raised for new-build homes, conversions and long-term empty homes brought back into use. This income is not ring-fenced for housing, and in the context of budget constraints, many local authorities use NHB for purposes other than housing. It is possible however to direct NHB towards 'invest to save' initiatives. Examples of this would be:

- homelessness prevention: by providing stable secure affordable homes for people at risk of homelessness and/or those in housing need but unlikely to access social housing, local

authorities can reduce demands on homelessness, mental health, substance misuse and children's service.

- alternatives to residential care for young people: the cost of residential care for young people, especially 16/17 years old is significant, in many instances over £140,000 per child per year. Young people made homeless at 16/17 years old fall under s20 of the Children's Act (1989) rather than Homelessness duties of care. Accommodation provided through the renovation of empty homes can provide a more appropriate and more cost-effective option. The value of secure housing in the community applies equally to 16/17 year olds already in the care system for whom residential care no longer meets their needs and they seek more independent living.

Right to Buy Receipts



An increasing number of local authorities are using Right to Buy Receipts (RTBR) to fund bringing empty homes into use. The Government's revised RTB scheme, introduced in 2012, committed to replacing all social homes sold through Right to Buy on a one to one basis. This meant a proportion of the RTBR from sales would be returned to local authorities able to utilise their own Housing

Revenue Account (HRA) to fund new homes. The funding can be used to build new homes, buy-back existing council homes and to renovate longterm empty homes. Leeds City Council and Hull City Council who pioneered using RTGR to support community action on empty homes have clarified the legal process to permit the use of the funds for this purpose and it is now accepted practice.

Commuted Sums (Planning)

Commuted sums are payments made to local authorities by developers of new housing, to discharge requirements under the planning system to build affordable housing on new housing sites. Instead of the developers providing affordable homes on their site, they pay an agreed amount to help the local authority provide affordable homes elsewhere. Commuted sums are usually agreed through a 's106 Agreement' as part of the process of obtaining planning permission.

Because the s106 money is raised in the context of planning for new homes, commuted sums are intended to increase the supply of housing and so would be unlikely to be available to simply renovate an existing single dwelling to create an improved, lettable single dwelling. Commuted sums may, however, be used to for example create accommodation from existing storage space over a shop, divide a single dwelling into flats, or create housing from an empty commercial building. This is because the supply of new housing is increased, even though existing buildings are being used. Any homes created must be affordable.



Local authority empty property grants

Under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, Local authorities have the power to provide funding for the purpose of bringing empty privately owned properties back into use. This

funding may be a grant or an interest-free or low-interest loan, or a combination of grant and loan depending on the costs of the works and length of time the refurbished property would be available for affordable rent.



Donated labour and materials

Some community groups have been able to access free labour from local contractors to carry out aspects of renovation works, for example, free installation of central heating, plumbing and electrical works. Some have benefitted from donated or cost-price material from DIY stores. It is also possible to obtain usable recycled or or

surplus-to-order materials. Donations of labour and material can help to significantly reduce capital costs. Coordinating donations, scheduling works and keeping track of materials can be complex and add to the revenue cost of staff time, however especially where the works required are not extensive or structural then this can be a good option.



Letting the homes

Where they have contributed funding, many local authorities use the accommodation to discharge their homelessness duties or to nominate people from their housing register. Where community action has helped encourage empty home-owners to bring their property back into use it would be more appropriate to agree a Local Letting Scheme, to enable community groups to determine lettings. This will ensure community groups are able to achieve their outcomes and house members of their target community. While in these circumstances local authorities may not have direct access to the accommodation, they do benefit in terms of homelessness prevention and provision of affordable housing for vulnerable people and for people whose housing is currently unstable or unsuitable.

Setting up a tenancy

When setting up a tenancy, you need a written tenancy agreement – informal oral agreements are not lawful. In most instances, homes

brought into use through community action will be let in the same way as ordinary privately rented accommodation, on assured shorthold tenancies. You can find a model agreement for a shorthold assured tenancy on the Gov.uk website.

Assured shorthold tenancies are of a fixed length of time, the minimum time being 6 months. To end the tenancy you serve a valid 'notice requiring possession' giving at least 2 months' notice. The tenancy agreement should be signed before the tenancy begins and

an inventory carried out with the tenant/s when they move in. A shorthold tenancy means:

- You have a guaranteed right to get your property back after six months
- You can calculate the rent up to a market rent
- You can get your home back before six months if the tenant doesn't pay the rent – but there must be at least eight weeks owing
- If your tenant paid a deposit on or after 6 April 2007, you must use a tenancy deposit protection scheme
- In most cases, you're responsible for all major and structural repairs
- You must arrange and pay for all safety checks on gas installations and appliances at least once every 12 months

Granting a tenancy to occupy accommodation is a commitment for at least 6 months. It is advisable to carry out some checks before letting to someone you do not know. This should also apply if you are receiving a referral from a partner organisation, although they may be able to undertake these checks on your behalf.



Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement

For a flat or house
Valid in England and Wales
Solicitor approved

Please note:

Enclosed in the original pack you will find two copies of the document or, if you have a downloadable version, please print two copies. One copy is for the landlord and one for the tenant.

The checks to undertake may include a credit history check, confirmation of income, personal references or references from partner agencies.

As you will collect personal information about prospective tenants, you will need to ensure you keep this safe and secure and have a system in place for managing confidentiality. The handling of personal data is currently covered by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which replaced the Data Protection Act 1998 on 25 May 2018. You can find guidance about how to ensure you comply with the Regulation on the Information Commissioner's Office website. Regulations are likely to change following the UK departure from the EU.

Home size and affordability

Welfare Benefit rules regularly change. If the new tenant expects to rely on welfare benefit assistance, it is important to check that the rent is affordable for them. Understanding this is not just a question of the rent itself. The tenant must be eligible for the size and type of accommodation as well. In other words, if the property has more bedrooms than they are entitled to or it is self-contained when they are eligible only for a room in a shared house then it is unlikely their benefits will be enough to cover the full rent. If the rent charged is above the Local Housing Allowance level then again welfare benefits are unlikely to cover the full cost.

Pre-tenancy training

When letting to people who are vulnerable, have previously lost or have never held a tenancy, it is worth considering 'pre-tenancy training' to support them into their new tenancy. Pre-tenancy training can be one-to-one sessions or group workshops, ensuring people understand their responsibilities and rights as a tenant, how to manage their money and ensure they budget for rent and utility bills, which repairs they are responsible for and so on.

It is also an opportunity to explain how to get involved with any volunteering or vocational training opportunities, social groups and

projects, to help them feel part of the community. It's also an opportunity to understand if they will need support to maintain their tenancy and discuss possible options with them.

Assured Shorthold Tenancy Agreement Room Only

AST agreement for letting individual rooms in a shared flat or house



Tenancy management

When you rent out property, as a landlord you must:

- keep your rented properties safe and free from health hazards
- make sure all gas and electrical equipment is safely installed and maintained
- provide an Energy Performance Certificate for the property
- protect your tenant's deposit in a government-approved scheme
- check your tenant has the right to rent your property if it's in England



- give your tenant a copy of the How to rent checklist when they start renting from you (you can email it to them)

Repairs

In most cases, you will be responsible for making all major and structural repairs. This is in accordance with the Landlord & Tenant Act 1985, s11-17, which stipulates that landlords must keep the structure and exterior of the property in repair. This would include walls, floors, roof and windows (including frames). You are also responsible for fixed heaters, electrical wiring and gas piping and repairs to plumbing, basins, sinks, toilets and baths.

Safety checks

You must arrange and pay for all safety checks and any necessary work to be carried out on appliances at least once every 12 months. The checks must be carried out by a person who is registered with the Gas Safe Register. You must keep a record of inspection dates, any defects identified and any remedial action taken. You must also give a copy of this record to your tenant.

Electrical appliances

You also have responsibility for ensuring that any electrical appliances supplied with the accommodation are safe. This includes heaters, cookers, kettles, and any other electrical goods. Since 2018, all privately-rented homes must have electrical installations and equipment checked every five years.

Tenants are usually obliged only to take reasonable care of the property. Reasonable care means carrying out minor jobs such as gardening, and general housework. The cost of repairing any damage beyond reasonable wear and tear that is caused by the tenant can be requested from the tenant. It may also be recouped from the deposit is necessary at the end of the tenancy.

Work experience and training

Through the process of bringing empty homes into use, local people can be offered work experience and training. Through mentoring or simply working alongside others, people can develop their social skills and confidence; and people in recovery, or with mental health difficulties or moving away from the criminal justice system can re-establish a positive role in community life. Each of the projects we followed saw this wider picture and built the case for funding investment by showing how local people could develop skills for work and prepare for further education and training.

If pulling together funding for the renovation of empty homes feels like piecing together a jigsaw, building a work experience or training programme is more like assembling a spider's web. There are some key elements which are outlined in the flow chart. The order in which they are put in place will vary from project to project: they must all, however, be accounted for to ensure success. Sometimes securing homes to renovate opens the door to new partnerships. Either way, the marrying together of community action on empty homes with work experience and training for local people maximises the value of resources invested and helps to rebuild community resilience.

1 Business plan

As with any other project proposal, a work experience and training scheme needs a plan. In addition to the elements included in the flow chart, there are additional considerations to take account of:

- **Scheduling of works:** Building works that involve training usually take longer than when carried out by a skilled workforce. This is



largely for three reasons: the time taken to explain and train can slow progress; there may be trainee induction and performance reviews and assessments; and there may be attendance issues which can take time to resolve. Work scheduling and delivery timetables should take account of this. The extent of additional time required will depend on how many trainees there are, the planned

rate of 'turnover (how long the trainees stay), and the existing skill level of trainees on entry to the scheme.

- **Scheduling of recruitment:** It is important that trainees are able to 'start on site' shortly after expressing their interest and being recruited. This means it's important to have a realistic start-date and arrangements in place for the renovation works ahead of actually recruiting trainees. People can lose interest or become anxious if delays are extended. Co-ordinating timings can be a balancing act, however, it is something to be aware of and to plan for.
- **Health and Safety:** Trainee and voluntary workers must be provided with the same level of health and safety protection as employees on paid contracts. It is important to be clear which partner agency has overall responsibility for trainee welfare, however, on-site, the community empty homes project will be responsible for health and safety. Local authorities are in an excellent position to provide advice, guidance and training to

community groups to ensure they remain compliant. Health and safety requires risk assessments to be carried out and kept up to date, with appropriate action taken to minimise risk.

When trainees are on site there are key things to keep in mind:

- **Problem-solving:** Problems can arise with all aspects of training schemes and building works. The more you can work with partners to anticipate difficulties, the more quickly they can be resolved. Typical issues include non-attendance of trainees; misconduct, personality clashes; delays in work scheduling; bad weather stopping works and so on. If your training scheme/s include people with vulnerabilities or support needs, ensure there is a proper agreement in place between partners, including with contractors, about how any problems will be reported and who will take the lead in resolving them.

Instructions are clear and any essential training given

Correct equipment is available and operational

Consider language / comprehension needs

Processes are in place for reporting and managing accidents

2 Empty homes for renovation

There is guidance earlier in this Toolkit about identifying and securing empty homes for renovation. An essential consideration when offering a work experience and training scheme is to ensure the works required to the property support and facilitate the training to be delivered, and are manageable in the time available. For example, a trainee learning about painting and decorating and on a two-week work placement should be in the property when this is the work being carried out, not when the floors are being ripped up.

3 Funding for renovation works

There are opportunities to add to the 'value' of your empty homes schemes by offering work experience and training for local people, and for vulnerable or excluded communities. If there is the intention to offer training, this should be explained in your bid/s for capital funding, and if you have funding for training agreed or an application in progress, this too should be referred to in your bid.

4 College of Further Education / Training body

The extent to which community projects engage with Further Education (FE) colleges depends on the type of work experience and training they aim to offer.

FE colleges will be able to advise on the range of courses and schemes they provide and to explore whether there are opportunities to partner around empty homes work. If the training would be part of courses leading to

vocational qualifications or for example basic skills NVQ's, then there will be a curriculum to be followed and external verification and assessment will be required.

A FE college can assist with all of this. In addition to FE colleges, there are independent or charitable groups that help to support work experience or provide training.

These may be groups that work with young people, people with mental health and other support needs, people leaving prison, and people in recovery.

Case study: Training for young people



In Middlesbrough, North Ormesby CLT has a partnership with East Midlands Youth Housing Project (ECHYT), which work with young people in East Cleveland and North Yorkshire. ECHYT is involved in the renovation and refurbishment of empty properties and community buildings to provide homes which are then rented by young people in the local community. ECHYT also undertakes building works for community and voluntary organisations in the local area; such as renovating empty

homes, village halls and sports clubs. Young people have the opportunity to learn and develop skills in various building trades, e.g. plumbing and joinery. The project also offers opportunities for personal development in a supportive and friendly environment. All of the courses offered aim to build confidence and experience. They work closely with a variety of training providers and colleges, to ensure young people have access to a wide variety of learning experiences.



The empty homes in North Ormesby are owned and managed by the CLT, however, the youth training scheme is managed by ECHYT.

5 Funding for training activities

Funding for training is predominantly revenue funding. Sources of funding are usually linked to providing opportunities for and meeting the needs of specific groups of people. A very diverse range of organisations provide revenue funding which can be used for training and development schemes, however, the type of organisation you are may affect what you can

apply for, for example, some funding is only available to registered charities. Because the revenue funding is unlikely to be housing specific as such, you will need to do some 'parallel thinking', and consider where the capital funding for the empty homes and renovation works may come from. For example, if you want to provide secure affordable housing from empty homes for young people at risk of homelessness and also be able to provide

young people with work experience and training, you would look for two complementary funders – one for the housing capital and one for the training revenue. A sample pairing may be LandAid, which is focussed on young people, for capital funding, and Comic Relief for revenue funding to provide training and support.

Developing partnerships can be invaluable when developing training schemes. Funding not available to one organisation may be available to another, and together the full funding ‘package’ can be achieved.

6 Supportive contractor

Not all contractors are willing to work with trainees, and not all have experience of delivering on-the-job training. It’s important to choose your contractor/s well and ensure they

know what is expected before signing a contract with them. The community groups we followed included the requirement, and ability, to deliver training and work with trainees in their contract specifications. The contract put out to tender should explain the training scheme, the average number of trainees at any one time, the expectations on the contractor and the other partner agencies involved.

7 Internal supervision resource

Even if an external partner is delivering your work experience and training scheme, you will need enough resource to be able to properly supervise the scheme. The more involved with the training you are, the more supervision you will need to provide. Each community project is different and has different needs.



Case study: Giroscope in Hull

Giroscope in Hull manage their own training scheme which hosts over 200 voluntary trainees a year. Their volunteers come from a wide range of backgrounds and with a wide range of differing aspirations. These include ex-offenders, refugees, long term unemployed

people, school work experience, people with learning difficulties, university graduates and college students To help manage this, they employ Support Workers for their volunteers and trainees. Giroscope started as a housing project and moved into offering training as it developed.



Case study: Cultures CIC in Stockton-on-Tees



Cultures CIC in Stockton-on-Tees, on the other hand, started as a training and support project for people newly arrived in the UK, then moved into using empty homes to meet their housing needs. Cultures CIC already had the internal infrastructure and partnerships to support training when they started to renovate empty homes

8 Trainees

Identifying and recruiting trainees is, of course, fundamental to offering work experience and training. There are a number of ways of approaching this. Some community projects simply advertise, others partner with specific organisations, others do both. The type of trainee you work with may relate to the funding secured for your project.

The approach taken by Latch provides a lot of information up-front to potential trainees and clearly explains what's involved. This will enable them to attract people who are ready and able

to join a training scheme. When advertising your training opportunities, think carefully about the people you aim to work with. In Stockton on Tees, Cultures CIC works with people newly arrived in the UK who may have limited English language skills (see overleaf). Both approaches are effective as each is tailored to the needs and profile of people they aim to provide training for. Many community projects offer training to specific groups of people, for example, young people leaving care, people with mental health vulnerabilities, ex-offenders and people in recovery. They form partnerships with their local authority and other dedicated support agencies.

Case study: Advertising for trainees - Latch



Latch (Leeds Action to Create Homes) advertise some of their training opportunities. In a friendly and accessible way, they clearly set out the nature of the training and who is eligible to apply:
Extract from the Latch website:

“Trainees will attend one day per week, gaining experience on a real project in a range of skill areas. Depending on when they join the project, these may include painting and decorating, plastering, joinery, fitting insulation, fitting kitchens and bathrooms.



What's Latch offering?

- One day per week on site, learning practical skills and gaining experience, for up to 6 months.
- PPE (safety boots, overalls etc), travel and meal expenses provided.
- Support to gain CSCS card and accredited training in Health and Safety, First Aid and more.
- One to one support to move on to a job, apprenticeship or further training in construction.
- Help with producing a CV, interview skills, job searching and career development.
- A reference if the placement is successful.
- Temporary six-month jobs with Latch for two trainees at the end of their placement.
- Links with sector-leading construction partners and opportunities within their services.

Who are we looking for?

People can apply if they:

- Have either done some construction training (at any level) and are looking



for some experience to help them find a job, or have worked in construction or similar job in the past, whether in a skilled or unskilled role, or have lots of DIY/informal experience.

- Have been unemployed for over 6 months.
- Live in Leeds
- Have the right to live and work in the UK.
- Can commit to attending on a regular day every week and can get to Chapeltown for a 9.30am start
- Speak English well enough to understand instructions and information on site
- Are not already participating in an ESF funded project.”

Case study: Cultures CIC

CULTURES HOMES

OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN TO LEARN CONSTRUCTION SKILLS

Cultures CIC is providing an exceptional opportunity for women who would like to into construction but have no experience as well as learning about British Work Ethics. Working on our Cultures Homes project, you will be given the opportunity to work on refurbishing properties that will be open up for rental.

Working alongside qualified professionals you can learn skills in Plastering, Painting & Decorating, Plumbing, Electrical Work, Joinery, Bricklaying, Plastering and Tiling & Flooring

This would be an excellent addition to your CV and will enhance your chance of finding work in this field in the future.

For more information or to register your details please contact Tracey on 01642 605838 or email us on info@culturescic.co.uk or leave your details on our website www.culturescic.org.uk

Cultures CIC
66 Dovecot Street
Stockton
TS18 1LL



Cultures CIC advertises its training opportunities slightly differently, aiming to encourage people to contact them in the first instance to find out more. They also have a specific approach to encourage women into the construction industry. Details of the scheme can then be explained face to face, with translation if required.

CULTURES HOMES

LOOKING TO REFRESH YOUR CONSTRUCTION SKILLS OR UPDATE YOUR CV

Cultures CIC is providing an exceptional opportunity for those who have experience in the construction field but want to polish their skills, update their CV and get familiar with work ethic's in the UK.

Or

Are you looking to going into the construction field

This would be an excellent addition to your CV and will enhance your chance of finding work in this field in the future.

For more information or to register your details please contact Tracey on 01642 605838 or email us on info@culturescic.co.uk or leave your details on our website www.culturescic.org.uk

Cultures CIC, 66 Dovecot Street, Stockton, TS18 1LL

Do you have experience in the following skills:
Plastering, Painting & Decorating, Plumbing, Electrical Work, Joinery, Bricklaying, Plastering and Tiling & Flooring

Giroscope and Latch, for example, work in partnership with their local Probation Services to provide work experience and training to support ex-offenders into the workplace, and in some cases into housing as well. Groundwork GM working in Rochdale provide work experience and training for young people leaving care. In addition to providing work-related skills trainees develop more confidence and social skills, and have the opportunity to form new community networks and to make friends – essential for establishing a secure and stable life in the community.

9 Exit to work or further education and training

To be of real value, work experience and training should lead on to something else, whether that's more work experience, further education or a job. Although a trainee will have left your scheme, it is important to keep the momentum and set up opportunities for them to continue their journey. This support can take various forms. Latch for example provide:

- Support to gain a CSCS card (Construction Skills Certification Scheme) and accredited

training in Health and Safety, First Aid and more.

- One to one support to move on to a job, apprenticeship or further training in construction.
- Help with producing a CV, interview skills, job searching and career development.
- A reference if the placement is successful.

On some projects such as Latch, trainees can be offered temporary six month jobs at the end of their placement. A partnership with your local Job Centre Plus or FE college may help to support transition onto an apprenticeship scheme.

Partner building contractors or housing associations may be able to offer extended training through temporary placements or even permanent work.



CONSTRUCTION SKILLS CERTIFICATION SCHEME

Appendix 1

Links to Community-led initiatives and resources

Community action on empty homes

- Cultures CIC <https://culturescic.wixsite.com/cultures-cic>
- Giroscope <https://giroscope.org.uk/>
- Sincil Community Land Trust
<https://www.sincilbankcommunity.co.uk/community-land-trust>
- Groundwork Greater Manchester
<https://www.groundwork.org.uk/hubs/greatermanchester/>
- Granby 4 Streets CLT <https://www.granby4streetsclt.co.uk/>
- Homebaked CLT <https://homebaked.org.uk/>
- Latch Housing <https://www.latch.org.uk/>
- Back on the Map <https://backonthemap.org/>
- Canopy Housing <http://canopyhousing.org/>

Resources

- HM Land Registry
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/land-registry>
- Self-help Housing <https://www.selfhelphousing.org.uk>
- Confederation of Cooperative Housing
<https://www.cch.coop>
- National Community Land Trust Network (NCLTN)
<http://www.communitylandtrusts.org.uk/>
- The Charity Commission
<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/charity-commission>
- Community Led Homes
<https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/make-it-happen>

How to write a Business Plan

- <https://mycommunity.org.uk/a-business-plan-for-community-led-housing-projects>
- <https://www.heritagefund.org.uk/good-practice-guidance/business-plan-template-and-guidance>
- <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-write-a-business-plan-for-your-charity>
- <https://www.powertochange.org.uk/get-support/resources/starting-out/business-tools/>

Financial planning and budgets

- <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/organisation/financial-management/planning-and-budgeting/writing-a-financial-strategy>
- <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/budgets-for-community-groups/>
- <http://smallcharityfinance.org.uk/budgets/>

Risk management and other policies

- <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/risk-assessments/>
- <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/studyzone/how-to-carry-out-a-risk-assessment-1>
- <https://www.smallcharitysupport.uk/index.php/example-policies>

Planning the works

- <https://www.thenbs.com/knowledge/how-to-write-a-specification>
- <https://www.homebuilding.co.uk/advice/building-regulations>
- <https://www.self-build.co.uk/how-to-write-a-construction-contract/>
- <https://www.fmb.org.uk/find-a-builder/ultimate-guides-to-home-renovation/how-to-choose-a-builder.html>
- <https://www.bre.co.uk/filelibrary/Briefing%20papers/98660-Sustainable-Refurb-Briefing-Paper.pdf>

Applying for funding

- <https://locality.org.uk/services-tools/funding/>
- <https://mycommunity.org.uk/funding>
- <https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/make-it-happen/get-funding>
- <https://www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/>
- <https://www.charity-fundraising.org.uk/grant-fundraising-top-bid-writing-tips>
- <https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/writing-a-funding-application/>

Letting and tenancy management

- <https://www.communityledhomes.org.uk/sites/default/files/resources/files/2019-10/housing-management-policy-guidance.pdf>
- <https://www.gov.uk/renting-out-a-property>
- <https://www.depositprotection.com/learning-centre/landlord-resources/landlords-renting-checklist/>
- https://england.shelter.org.uk/housing_advice/private_renting/how_landlords_and_letting_agents_check_tenants
- https://england.shelter.org.uk/legal/rents/determination_of_fair_rents

Work experience and training

- <https://www.citb.co.uk/>
- <https://builduk.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Build-UK-Work-Experience-Guide.pdf>
- <https://www.cscs.uk.com/about/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employers-could-you-offer-work-experience/work-experience-employer-guide>
- <https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg364.pdf> (health and safety)

Appendix 2

References

'Community action on empty homes – Using empty homes to regenerate communities'

- Action on Empty Homes, May 2019

'The homelessness monitor: England 2018'

- Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Hal Pawson, Glen Bramley, Steve Wilcox, Beth Watts & Jenny Wood, Institute for Social Policy, Environment and Real Estate (I-SPHERE), Heriot-Watt University; City Futures Research Centre, University of New South Wales, April 2018

'Empty Homes (England)'

- House of Commons Library Briefing Paper no: 3012, October 2021
Wendy Wilson, Hannah Cromarty, Cassie Barton

'The Power of Place: Health Inequalities, Housing and Community in the West Midlands Conurbation'

- Human City Institute
Guy Daly, Jill Jesson, Kevin Gulliver, June 2018

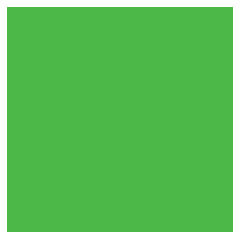
'Housing and health Opportunities for sustainability and transformation partnerships'

- The King's Fund, supported by the National Federation of Housing Associations
David Buck, Sarah Gregory, March 2018

'Improving health through the home'

- Public Health England
Updated, 3 August 2017

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