

# Supporting Self-Help Housing

**Enabling community organisations to access the Empty Homes Programme**

The Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) is an independent research organisation that promotes sustainable development and innovation in housing through collaborative research and knowledge transfer.

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*BSHF – Promoting innovative housing policy and practice*

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# Executive summary

The government has allocated £100 million to an Empty Homes Programme. This funding would be ideally suited to enabling relatively small community organisations to bring empty properties back into use through a self-help housing approach. Self-help housing provides significant additional benefits to local communities and is compatible with aims and policies being adopted across government including broad localism objectives and the aim of creating a Big Society.

However, community organisations would struggle to access funding distributed through standard HCA processes for a wide range of reasons including:

- Application, reporting and regulatory requirements
- Awareness of opportunities and unarticulated demand
- Financial and asset constraints
- Perceived barriers

Funding should therefore be set aside for access by community organisations and administered differently. A successful mechanism will be one that is:

- Accessible
- Appropriate
- Open
- Responsive
- Flexible
- Holistic
- Fair
- Understanding

From these criteria, several possible mechanisms for the delivery of funding from the Empty Homes Programme to community organisations undertaking self-help housing activity have been identified:

- Individual community organisations to work in partnership with Registered Providers (RPs) on a case-by-case basis;
- Allocating the funding to a specialist team within HCA;
- Appointment of intermediaries to distribute funding.

Community organisations have previously found that establishing a partnership with an RP to work on a particular project can be very time-consuming, if it is

even possible. The approach of creating a specialist team within the HCA does not appear to fit with the development of the agency as a smaller enabling body. Consequently, appointing one or more intermediaries appears to be the most promising option.

The scale and form of possible intermediaries was considered in more depth. Due to issues of fairness and efficiency, a national intermediary appears most appropriate. Several different forms would be possible including using a Registered Provider as an intermediary. It appears that the appointment of an intermediary from the organisations in the government's framework for **civil society sector (aka third sector) grant fund administration** is a strong option for the creation of a suitable mechanism, as this mechanism was established specifically for initiatives like this.

Whichever distinct mechanism for funding allocation is adopted, it should be treated as a test bed to identify the best approach for the HCA to work with community groups in the longer term.

The body responsible for the funding should work with community groups and expert organisations in the field such as Self-Help-Housing.org to develop an application process and reporting mechanisms that are appropriate to the levels of funding being administered and the resources of community groups.

Other product options are available to RPs looking to bring empty homes back into use, so all of the £100 million fund should be used for community-level activity. A substantial proportion of it should be used specifically for self-help housing activity.

The programme should be supported by promotional activity and ongoing capacity-building work with community organisations.

If fully realised, the legacy of this funding programme could be to revitalise community-led housing activity, seeing it once more promoted and supported alongside (not instead of) the activity of larger organisations.

# Background

“Self-help housing involves groups of local people bringing back into use empty properties that are in limbo, awaiting decisions about their future use, or their redevelopment. It differs from self-build housing which involves constructing permanent homes from scratch”.<sup>1</sup>

The Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) co-ordinated a Consultation on self-help housing at St George’s House, Windsor Castle. It sought to explore how this approach could be supported more effectively, to maximise the contributions it can bring to tackling empty properties. The findings from the Consultation have recently been published as a report titled ‘Self-help housing: Supporting locally driven housing solutions’.<sup>2</sup> The report identifies several benefits that self-help housing can provide, which are summarised in Appendix A.

The Housing Minister, Grant Shapps, has expressed his support for self-help housing, making a statement noting the value of providing government funding to assist local communities to undertake this activity:

*“The superb work that these housing schemes are already doing shows the scale of what can be achieved when community self-help is combined with cash incentives from the Government. Not only are the empty properties that ruin neighbourhoods being lived in once again, but homeless people are getting a roof over their head and excellent training opportunities that will help them get a job.*”

*“People often ask me what can be achieved through communities working together– well here’s the answer. That’s why I’m calling on councils to back these schemes, because this is a win-win solution for everyone. There are over 700,000 empty properties across the country, covering every corner of our towns and cities – more projects like these will get people into housing, provide valuable employment skills, create better places to live, and at the same time give councils extra cash to tackle homelessness and spend on the local community.”<sup>3</sup>*

Shapps’ comments can be seen as an endorsement within the housing domain of broader aspirations across government of creating an environment for a thriving civil society sector that is empowered to “campaign for change, deliver public services, promote social enterprise and strengthen communities”.<sup>4</sup> Self-help housing activity is a tangible expression of these ideals, and has also been

identified by the authors as “a prime example of the government's vision of a Big Society”.<sup>5</sup>

BSHF's previous report included several recommendations that would help to deliver the minister's vision, for community action supported by government funding:

- Government funding should be accessible to local community groups and other organisers of self-help housing. The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the HCA should ensure that qualifying criteria and reporting requirements are proportionate to the amount of money being distributed, either directly or through intermediaries.
- Specifically, designated funding for self-help housing should be made available from the £100 million Empty Homes Programme due to the wider community benefits of this approach. Consideration should be given to outsourcing the distribution of this money to an intermediary vehicle in order to ensure that, as the capacity of relevant organisations increases over the duration of the programme, there will be funding available for new schemes.

These recommendations can also be seen as being compatible with, and analogous to, the wider government policy of seeking to make its procurement accessible to smaller organisations.<sup>6</sup> Self-help housing organisations are typically very small local groups, although some self-help housing activity is carried out under the auspices of larger community organisations such as development trusts. In these instances, the self-help housing project itself is still typically relatively small and sits within a broader organisation that is not predominantly a housing provider.

The primary focus of this paper is to consider how the government's £100 million Empty Homes Programme might best be made accessible to community groups.

# Accessible funding

As noted above, it is important that community groups undertaking self-help housing should be able to access government funding. In fact, a viable funding model was identified in research to be one of the key success factors for self-help housing<sup>7</sup> (see Appendix B for further information).

By their nature, the organisations undertaking self-help housing are very different from the developing housing associations that typically access the HCA's Affordable Housing Programme. Many of these differences are outlined in the table below.



**Table 1: Comparison of self-help housing organisations and developing housing associations**

<b>Issue</b>	<b>Self-help housing organisations</b>	<b>Developing housing associations</b>
Organisation size and scope	Small community organisations operating at a very local scale; each may prefer to continue operating only in a particular area. (Benefits accrue from self-help housing being able to provide a local response to the problems of empty homes and other issues.)	Generally substantial organisations, frequently with an appetite for growth.
Regulatory framework	Very unlikely to be Registered Providers. May fear becoming one. The regulatory requirements for Registered Providers may not be proportionate for community groups undertaking small projects.	Already Registered Providers, familiar with regulatory requirements and with the resources to meet them (including staff whose jobs include dealing with regulations).
Ability to handle reporting requirements	Will typically have limited resources to comply with the substantial reporting requirements that come with statutory funding. In addition, community groups are typically more familiar with the types of funding processes used by charitable trusts.	Experienced in reporting to regulators and funding bodies and have the capacity/resources to handle reporting requirements.
Resources to develop proposals to HCA specifications	Preparing proposals / bids for funding and identifying suitable properties could be substantial activities, relative to the size of the organisation. Could stretch the available resources in terms of time and experience if these are required in the normal detailed format.	Experience of preparing the information required from HCA is likely to be present within the organisation, as is some capacity to undertake the work.

**Developing housing associations**

**Self-help housing organisations**

<p>Awareness of opportunities to access funding / unarticulated demand</p>	<p>Some existing self-help housing organisations may not be well enough connected to HCA processes to be aware of the opportunity. Furthermore, other local community groups that could undertake this type of activity are likely to develop their interest in this area over the period of the programme, and are very unlikely to be able to articulate a demand for it at present.</p>	<p>Will be very conversant with the existence and methods of the HCA, and will keep informed of relevant funding streams. Trend over an extended period of HCA's (and previously the Housing Corporation's) funding becoming increasingly expended on fewer and larger housing associations.</p>
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<p>Financial resources</p>	<p>Unlikely to be able to access commercial loans or to have other revenue streams, reserves or asset bases from which to subsidise this activity. Consequently may struggle with payment on completion and making up any shortfall from grants.</p>	<p>Substantial organisations, typically with strong financial bases from rental income, agreed bank borrowing facilities, and sometimes even having participated in bond issues. Able to use other funding sources to cover development if payment is made on completion.</p>
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<p>Existing assets (providing potential for re-lets)</p>	<p>Organisations will have few, if any, homes at present. Unlikely to be significant numbers becoming available for re-let. Where re-lets are available, may choose not to participate rather than re-letting at Affordable Rent</p>	<p>May own thousands or tens of thousands of existing homes. A significant number may come available for re-let in any given year, providing potential for some to be let at higher Affordable Rents to support development.</p>
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**Issue** **Self-help housing organisations**

Rent setting  
 In some instances a requirement to charge an Affordable Rent at up to 80 per cent of market rents may be incompatible with community needs. Due to the strong voluntary nature of many such organisations, participants may choose not to participate rather than undertake self-help activity that they believe will not benefit their community.

Delivery-readiness and established networks  
 Various states of readiness to participate in delivery. Many will need time to develop local partnerships, for example with local authorities and housing associations.

Scale and duration of likely projects  
 Opportunities to acquire empty properties are often reactive and ad hoc, so may not be a good fit for HCA processes that typically deal with large organisations making large bids, often for a multi-year programme of activity.

**Developing housing associations**

In some instances a requirement to charge an Affordable Rent may be incompatible with a housing association's charitable status.<sup>8</sup> However, due to the large professional nature of most such organisations, with established development teams, there is an inherent pressure to seek to deliver where possible.

Established organisations, with existing links (both formal and informal) to other bodies active in their areas.

Operate at a suitable scale that they are able to make at least outline proposals for delivery over a multi-year period, and in some instances will have a pipeline of potential developments enabling quite detailed projections for a few years.

**Developing housing associations**

Will tend to be familiar with the systems and processes, and have an understanding of the factors that actually affect the success or otherwise of proposals.

**Self-help housing organisations**

May perceive that a funding allocated through normal HCA mechanisms is “not for them”, for example thinking that any bid they make will not look competitive against those submitted by Registered Providers due to the scale and existing experience.

Value for Money judgements

Value for money may be hard to quantify, with many of the benefits accruing to wider policy areas such as training, employment or social cohesion (sometimes referred to as ‘additionality’).

Will typically be able to demonstrate what level of financial value is delivered, for example via the amount of subsidy required per home built. In some cases, may be able to draw on existing resources to keep the required subsidy low, improving apparent value as measured on that scale.

In summary, the current funding mechanisms were designed to suit substantial bids from a limited number of relatively large organisations (Registered Providers). The application process and reporting requirements reflect a level of scrutiny that is appropriate for sizeable projects. This system is not designed to receive large numbers of small bids from community organisations. The result may be that community groups are not able to access this funding, despite the multiple benefits they deliver in their work.

Consequently, it appears that delivery of the £100 million Empty Homes Programme through the normal HCA channels could unintentionally exclude small community organisations (and small housing projects within larger community organisations).

# Criteria for a successful funding distribution mechanism

Table 1 above highlights how the normal HCA channels are likely to unintentionally exclude community organisations from the Empty Homes Programme. Consequently BSHF has sought to identify alternative mechanisms that might allow community organisations to be included in the Empty Homes Programme.

This analysis has been undertaken by first seeking to identify criteria that any selected mechanism should meet for the benefits of the programme to be maximised. These criteria were developed with reference to existing literature addressing the distribution of funding as well as to research that has been conducted on community organisations undertaking self-help housing activity.

- **Accessible.** The process for applying for funding should be commensurate with the amount of money being distributed; the application process should be streamlined, as lengthy application procedures have been found to be problematic, especially for smaller and less experienced organisations.<sup>9,10</sup> Safeguards should be proportionate, providing a fair degree of protection for public monies but not making funds too hard to access. Funding should be accessible to relatively small organisations. If support is available throughout the funding process it helps small organisations make the most of the funding.
- **Appropriate.** The mechanism should be appropriate for the nature and (relatively small) scale of the community organisations that will be involved in self-help housing activity. Small organisations handling a few empty properties should not be required to become Registered Providers of Social Housing (RPs), (nor should regulatory requirements be put in place that require a similar level of compliance whilst merely avoiding the classification of 'RP'). Monitoring and reporting processes should not be burdensome, but rather aimed at helping organisations to make best use of funding.<sup>11</sup>
- **Open.** There are existing pockets of self-help housing activity around the country. There are also many small community organisations that might be interested in developing this type of work. The funding mechanism should be able to support delivery anywhere in the country, and able both to work with groups already undertaking self-help housing and to tap into enthusiasm elsewhere. One pre-requisite for this will be awareness-raising

activity to create good 'visibility' of both the programme and of self-help housing as a concept.<sup>12</sup>

- **Responsive.** Local situations, the capacity of community organisations and the availability of suitable empty homes will change over time. Individual projects may comprise small numbers of properties. The mechanism should be responsive to the resulting pattern of funding requirements, and be able to make relatively small grants, which "aim to meet very local issues and can make a real difference to people's lives".<sup>13</sup> This will require a mechanism that is responsive to changing demand over the period of the programme.
- **Flexible.** The mechanism should be able to reflect the range of activities undertaken, and particularly the range of outcomes that are sought, by community organisations participating in self-help housing. It should make as few assumptions as possible about the structure of community organisations that will be able to apply. As there is variable interest from housing associations to partner in this activity the mechanism should not be reliant on a community organisation finding a willing RP partner, but equally it should not preclude it where there are enthusiastic partners that are able to add value.<sup>14</sup>
- **Holistic.** Self-help housing provides benefits beyond simply supplying a house; community organisations seek a wider range of social benefits through this activity. The mechanism should facilitate consideration of the additional ways in which this activity adds value: those things that might otherwise be considered to be side issues in the context of housing funding, but are of real benefit to the local community, and might meet other government objectives (e.g. providing training or addressing unemployment). It should, however be appreciated that some parts of the activity will not be easily countable.<sup>15</sup>
- **Fair.** If the best outcomes are to be achieved, the mechanism should be able to fairly reflect the broader costs associated with the programme's activity, and provide funding on a full cost basis.<sup>16,17</sup>
- **Understanding.** Self-help housing is inherently an activity that is well-suited to being undertaken at a very local scale, and hence by relatively small organisations. Whilst some community organisations might have growth potential, the mechanism should understand the special ethos of the sector and not seek to unduly expand groups beyond their natural scale. Specialist knowledge of the activity will also be important if the benefits are to be maximised.

Many of these criteria can also be viewed as being in line with the government's policies in relation to procurement of commercial services. It has adopted policies to specifically promote Small Business procurement, which include making information on procurement opportunities more accessible to small organisations, removing the need for pre-qualification where possible, allowing small organisations "to 'pitch' innovative products and services", and seeking to remove "unnecessary complexity in the procurement process". Furthermore, each department will be required to publish a set of specific, targeted actions to increase their dealings with small organisations.<sup>18,19</sup>

# Developing a suitable funding mechanism

From the identified criteria several possible mechanisms (and variations thereupon) for the delivery of funding from the Empty Homes Programme to community organisations undertaking self-help housing activity have been identified.

- Individual community organisations to work in partnership with RPs on a case-by-case basis.
- Allocating the funding to a specialist team within HCA
- Use of intermediaries

Each of these is considered in more detail below.

## **Case-by-case partnership working**

The opportunity for community organisations to work with RPs on a case-by-case basis has been possible under previous funding programmes. It has worked in the past, albeit infrequently; anecdotal data suggest that more commonly community organisations have spent a lot of time trying to identify and secure a partner, but found RPs generally not interested.

One theme that can be seen repeatedly in the comparison of self-help housing organisations and developing housing associations is the difference in scale of their operations. Whilst most housing associations maintain links with communities at a local scale, and hence the discrepancy will be smaller than it is for a national agency that more typically works with local authorities and large housing associations, many would still find it difficult to engage on a partnership basis with this type of activity, and many now have little or no recent experience of renovating street properties.

## **Dedicated HCA team**

As there is some overlap with core competences of the HCA, in distributing funding to support the provision of housing, options for including this function within HCA should be considered. However, the substantial differences between the main affordable homes programme and providing funding to community organisations to undertake self-help housing activity would make it difficult for the two programmes to be administered within the same team. Given the very



different scales of the programmes, the focus would inevitably be on the financially more significant main programme. Consequently, the most suitable option for administering the funding within the HCA would appear to be to establish a dedicated team within the agency, distinct from the general programme.

If established, such a team would need to adopt different procedures, compatible with the criteria identified above. Most notably, its application, regulation, monitoring and reporting procedures are likely to need to be substantially different, to be proportionate and accessible. The requirement for bodies receiving funding from the HCA to be RPs is likely to be incompatible with the criteria.

This option was not analysed further as it was noted that government policy is for the HCA to become a “smaller enabling body”, and hence that this would not be compatible with general developments of the agency.<sup>20</sup>

## Intermediaries

Two broad issues have been considered in relation to the potential use of intermediaries for this programme:

- The scale at which intermediaries should be appointed;
- The form that the intermediaries should take.

Regarding **scale**, either one national body or a series of bodies operating at a smaller scale could be responsible for delivery of the funding and associated support. The default position in relation to programmes of work involving small community organisations should be to favour a local approach wherever possible, to be close to the organisations being funded. It appears, however, that there are barriers that would make local distribution bodies difficult to implement in this instance.

- Existing self-help housing activity tends to occur in pockets across the country, and an aim of this programme should be to promote the technique to community organisations that have never previously undertaken self-help housing. Consequently, calculating **fair allocations of the funding** to different areas would be difficult; in the worst case this might result in the funds being heavily oversubscribed in some areas and undersubscribed in others.
- As identified in the criteria for developing a suitable mechanism, **substantial skills** will be required of the administering body if the best use is to be made

of the funding. Creating the capacity to be able to act as required in hundreds of localities across the country, particularly in times of reducing funding, would be challenging.

- Further, developing the relevant skills and knowledge across the country would be **inefficient**, given the relatively small sums in the programme. If the full £100 million from the Empty Homes Programme were dedicated to this type of activity, it would amount to approximately £100,000 p.a. over three years in each local authority area, and local administrative overheads would not be insignificant in relation to those sums.

There does not appear to be a particularly strong case for considering a set of intermediaries at a larger-than-local scale: these would have many of the disadvantages of local distributing bodies (such as duplication of effort and potential inconsistency between areas) without really providing the advantages associated with being close to community organisations.

Consequently, and particularly in the interests of being able to adopt a consistent approach across the country, a single national intermediary appears to be most likely to achieve the desired outcomes. In any event, engagement at a local level will, of course, remain important.

In considering **forms** that might be suitable for an intermediary body to be responsible for the distribution of the funding, it was felt helpful to focus on bodies that it would be relatively easy for the HCA to distribute monies to. It was identified that, as well as RPs (which of course the HCA frequently funds), there is a helpful **government framework agreement** which the HCA's sponsoring department (DCLG) is party to, titled "**Civil society sector (aka third sector) grant fund administration**".<sup>21</sup> This framework appoints several "'arms length' organisations able to assess and distribute central Government grant monies". The official description of the framework talks enthusiastically of "work across government to support the environment for a thriving civil society sector (aka third sector), enabling the sector to campaign for change, deliver public services, promote social enterprise and strengthen communities."

The definitions included with the framework description clearly include most, if not all, community organisations seeking to undertake self-help housing activity:

*"The purpose of this specification is to seek service providers able to support [several government departments including DCLG] in the investment of programmes to support the [civil society] sector's development and promotion. The OCS is seeking Service Providers to manage the process of making and managing grants to civil society organisations."*

*Civil Society Sector organisations can be defined as sharing common characteristics. They are:*

- *non-governmental,*
- *value-driven,*
- *principally reinvest any financial surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives.*

*The term therefore encompasses voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals.”*

The appointed bodies were:

- Big Lottery Fund
- Community Development Foundation
- PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP
- Russell Commission Implementation Body operating as 'v'
- Social Investment Business
- Tribal Education Ltd

These bodies have been judged against a number of criteria (“including staff competences”) to be suitable to manage the process of making and managing grants to civil society organisations. Consequently, there is a strong case for considering selecting one of these bodies to act as an intermediary.

As noted above, the other class of bodies that are well-placed to receive HCA funding is RPs. The bulk of concerns noted previously about the potential mismatch in scale of developing housing associations would not apply if one were to be appointed as a national intermediary body for distribution of funding, as they would have demonstrated substantial interest in this programme of work. Concerns remain, however, around the suitability of an RP to fill this role alone. Specifically, even the very largest RPs tend to have geographic concentrations of properties (and hence areas of interest). If a single RP were appointed to act as an intermediary, significant care would be needed to ensure a perception were not created of the funding being primarily targeted at its current main areas of benefit. It is also noted that allocation of funding to community organisations is not in general a core competence of RPs.

Beyond the overall identification of bodies that might be suitable to lead a mechanism for the allocation of funding to community organisations, it was noted that the broad expertise required to meet the criteria identified above may merit a consortium approach. This idea has not been analysed in depth, but on the face of it, it would appear that if, for example, an intermediary body were

appointed from the list identified above, that its strengths would be complemented by the involvement of a subject expert (such as Self-Help-Housing.org) and an RP.

## Conclusions

Creating a funding mechanism that will be able to enable community organisations to undertake self-help housing activity will require careful attention if the benefits are to be maximised. Some models of funding mechanisms may present greater challenges than others.

As central government has undertaken a process specifically to identify organisations that are well-suited to the distribution of funding to civil society organisations, there is a strong case for favouring that approach. This approach would be **pragmatic**, as it would be relatively easy to work with one of these organisations, **efficient**, as the process to establish a scheme could be lightweight, and **safe**, as the bodies have been sanctioned by government as suitable for this type of work.

However, there is also a strong case for ensuring the involvement of other bodies in the mechanism, whichever model is selected. Specifically, Self-Help-Housing.org, HACT and Locality would bring substantial knowledge of the types of community groups that are likely to be involved in this activity, and a substantial community-focused housing association could bring housing-specific knowledge.

The need to undertake branding and awareness-raising activity around self-help housing (discussed in more detail below) may also represent a further benefit of appointing a single national body as it could increase the potential of building a critical mass of awareness.

# Recommendations

As described above, community groups would struggle to access funding from the Empty Homes Programme if it is administered through the normal HCA procedures. As a minimum, some or all of the £100 million Programme should be allocated and ring-fenced for use by this type of organisation. However, following the analysis above, it appears that a better approach may be to appoint an intermediary to handle the funding.

Whichever distinct mechanism for funding allocation is adopted, it should be treated as a test bed to identify the best approach for the HCA to work with community groups. This could be undertaken in combination with a review of HCA application and reporting procedures to ensure that its main fund is accessible to community groups by the next spending round. Many RPs started off as small initiatives and, following the period of growth and scaling up among RPs, many benefits could be gained from ensuring that community-led activity is once more promoted and supported alongside (not instead of) the activity of larger organisations. Through this approach it may be possible to create a legacy from this funding programme, in the shape of a revitalised community-led housing sector, and a set of funding and other mechanisms that are better suited to supporting it.

In establishing the ultimate design of the mechanism, it is recommended that close attention be paid to the criteria identified above for a successful approach, namely that it should be:

- Accessible
- Appropriate
- Open
- Responsive
- Flexible
- Holistic
- Fair
- Understanding

The body responsible for the funding should work with community groups, and expert organisations in the domain such as Self-Help-Housing.org to develop an application process and reporting mechanisms that are appropriate to the levels of funding being administered.

## Scope

The programme of activity examined within this paper would fall within the £100 million Empty Homes Programme. It will be necessary to decide how much of that Programme should be set aside for the use of community organisations undertaking self-help housing.

Although estimates of the number of community organisations that might be interested in this type of activity are inevitably approximate, it is possible to gain some idea of scale. Self-Help Housing.Org is a national project which is currently working with around fifty organisations, although there are likely to be many more local groups using this approach, and many more community organisations that would be interested in addressing problems in their areas using this technique if it became accessible to them.

The 2011-15 Affordable Homes Programme Framework provides an indicative figure of 3,300 homes to be brought back into use with the Empty Homes Programme funding over three years.<sup>22</sup> Hence, if just 100 community groups across the country, working on just 11 properties each per year, were able to access this scheme, the entire indicative total could be met. There is, therefore, a strong case for allocating a substantial proportion of the £100 million to this type of activity.

More generally, the HCA has stated that “RPs wishing to bring empty homes back into use can also use the standard range of product options to create permanent affordable housing”; they are, therefore, able to undertake activity such as the purchase and repair of properties.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, it seems appropriate that the £100 million fund should be specifically focused on self-help housing, other innovative community-level projects and activity that cannot be funded through other budgets.

In defining the scope of the programme, further care needs to be taken in deciding which properties will be eligible. Persuading private sector owners of empty properties to participate can be very resource intensive, so including any categories of public sector empty properties within the scheme is likely to help to maximise its impact.

## Promotional activity

As noted above, there are existing pockets of self-help housing activity around the country, and many more community organisations that might be interested in developing this type of work. A pre-requisite for the funding programme to be

open to communities across the country is that there should be good 'visibility' of both the programme and of self-help housing as a concept.

Whichever mechanism is selected, it should include a programme of promotional activity to create the necessary awareness. This should seek both to make groups already undertaking this activity aware of the funding and to tap into enthusiasm elsewhere. This promotional activity should extend beyond a narrowly-defined programme of marketing work; for community organisations, an important element will be an extended period during which community-led groups can receive some capacity-building to help them engage as they are finding out about these funding opportunities. Through its empty homes Capacity Building Programme the HCA has demonstrated its recognition for the need for this type of activity for community groups.<sup>24</sup> It is important that this work receives ongoing support.

More broadly, BSHF has previously identified an enhanced role for a national facilitator as potentially "[i]ncreasing awareness and support for self-help housing, particularly amongst other organisations such as housing associations, ALMOs, co-operatives, local authorities, private property owners and construction companies."<sup>25</sup> Each of these categories of stakeholders should be viewed as important audiences for promotional activity, and work should be undertaken to highlight the benefits to those different audiences. This will include the general development of self-help housing as a 'brand'.

# Appendix A – Benefits of self-help housing

BSHF's Consultation built on new research from the Third Sector Research Centre (TSRC),<sup>26</sup> which identified many benefits associated with this approach. Self-help housing provides:

- an additional source of affordable and accessible housing to meet local housing needs;
- opportunities to gain construction skills and training;
- a sense of community, common purpose and mutual support for residents and the workforce;
- an opportunity for owners of empty properties to bring them back into use;
- a means to tackle dereliction and blight which contributes to wider neighbourhood regeneration.

Self-help housing provides a concrete example of many of the policy priorities of the Coalition Government including 'street level regeneration', building the Big Society, a localist approach to housing, supporting social enterprise and developing training opportunities for people who are unemployed. However, organisations that are undertaking self-help housing face significant barriers to their development.



## Appendix B – Barriers and enablers for self-help housing

Analysis of self-help housing case studies found an interconnected group of barriers to and enablers of their development. The success factors for self-help housing were considered to be a committed group of people organising projects, available property, a viable funding model, local housing need, a willing workforce and support from partner organisations.

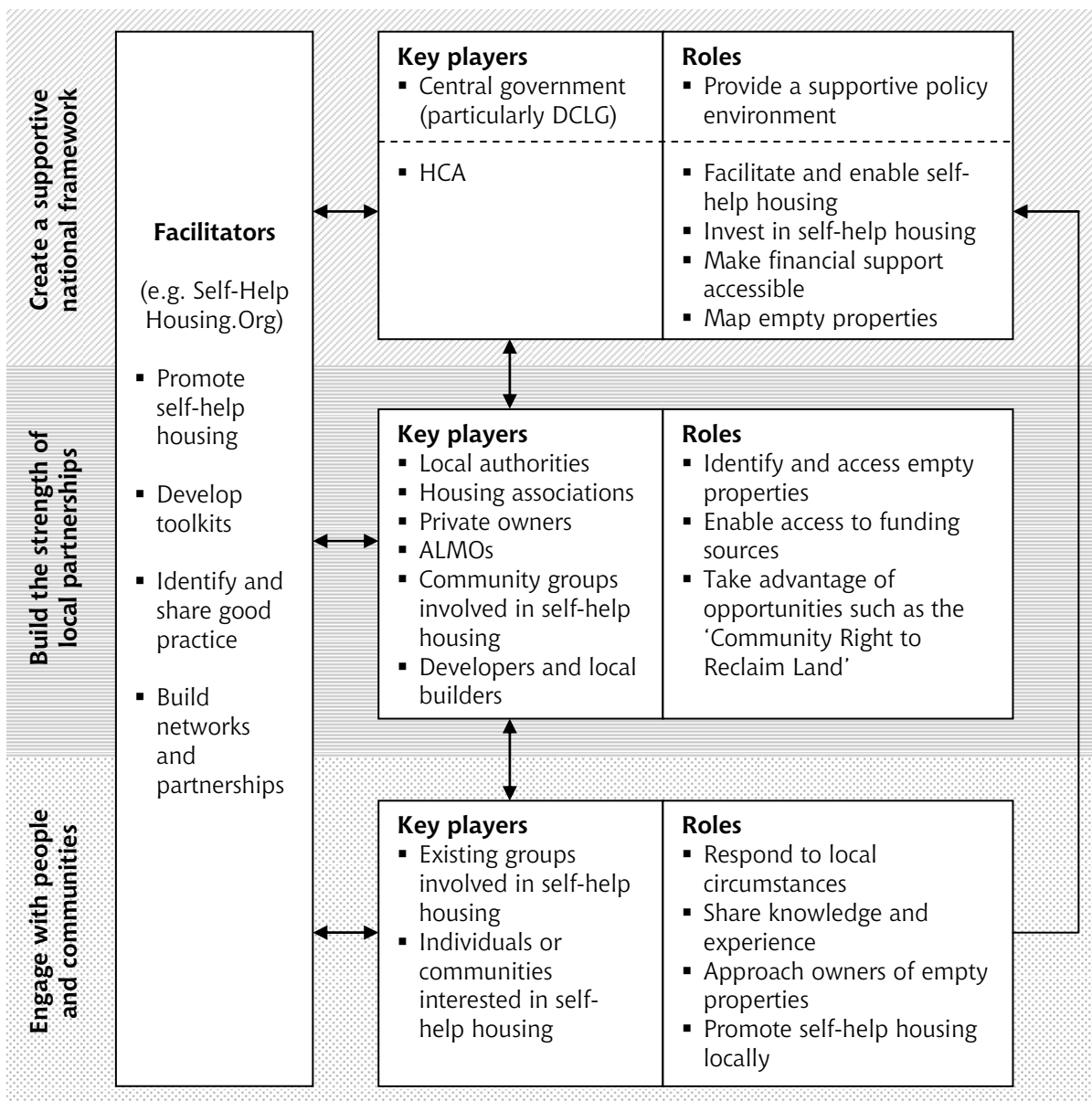
Working to assemble all of the key ingredients will require different types of responses by individuals, communities, charities, local authorities, central government and others. These are outlined in full in Figure 1 (see below), but can be divided into three broad areas for action:

- engage with people and communities;
- build the strength of local partnerships;
- create a supportive national framework.

There are several key areas where greater support for self-help housing could enable it to deliver more of the benefits identified earlier.

- The DCLG and HCA should play an enabling role to build up the capacity of self-help housing to contribute to tackling empty properties. They should play a brokering role to facilitate an environment in which local partnerships can develop.
- A national facilitator, such as Self-Help Housing.Org, should deliver support to develop and promote self-help housing. This should have a particular focus on developing and sharing sustainable financial models and developing local networks.

**Figure 1: The key ingredients for self-help housing**



Major changes in housing and welfare policy are being introduced such as the Localism Bill, the Public Services (Social Enterprise and Social Value) Bill and the Home and Communities Agency Affordable Homes Programme Framework. These provide an opportunity to implement many of these recommendations.

# Notes and references

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- <sup>8</sup> Charity Commission (n.d.) Affordable Rents, [http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/RSS/Updates/affordable\\_rents\\_response.aspx](http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/RSS/Updates/affordable_rents_response.aspx) (accessed 12 April 2011),  
“[I]n principle, charitable housing associations can provide an Affordable Rents product. However, the extent to which the product will be used to relieve poverty may determine whether it is able to satisfy the public benefit requirement and one aspect of this will be the extent to which housing benefit will cover the rental. Charitable associations operating in areas of high market rents will therefore need to look at this aspect in detail to see whether the affordable rents can provide a means of relieving poverty.”
- <sup>9</sup> Suchet, L. (n.d.) What is good grantmaking? <http://www.dsc.org.uk/NewsandInformation/News/Whatisgoodgrantmaking>, (accessed 29 March 2011), “Streamlined application processes”

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“The varied landscape of available grants, and individual application procedures, criteria and eligibility is potentially confusing and hard to negotiate from the perspective of the small community organisation.” (p.71)
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“the importance of making information about grants readily available” (p.71)
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“Furthermore, they argue, some of the really intractable social issues of our time do not lend themselves to easy measurement, and indeed require persistence and a reliance on process and not simply outcome for maximum impact.” (p.57)  
“Identified problem: Limitations of measurement. Mitigation: Willingness by both funder and funded to develop ways of assessing progress that do not rely solely on measurement” (p.58)  
“An understanding of the provider organisation, its strengths and its weaknesses not simply as provider of specified services.” (p.59)  
“In arguing that metrics have inappropriately been applied to the messier world of social change, Sievers highlights what for many has been the biggest obstacle to generating a sensible debate about the measurement of impact, namely the need for a language that goes beyond numbers in describing the complexity of success or failure.” (p.78)
- <sup>16</sup> Unwin, J. (2004) The Grantmaking Tango: Issues for Funders, The Baring Foundation, <http://www.baringfoundation.org.uk/GrantmakingTango.pdf>,  
“Lots of funders behave as if they are going into Marks and Spencer and trying to buy a jumper without being prepared to pay for the design, or the advertising costs, or the laboratory testing of the new yarn, and are actually rather unwilling to meet the cost of the right hand sleeve. Then they’re surprised that they have bought a rather grotty jumper.” – Unattributed CEO of medium sized

voluntary organisation in workshop on core cost funding (p.55)

“Identified problem: Funding a starved organisation. Mitigation: ...Willingness to pay full costs by the funding organisation.” (p.58)

“A financial calculation of likely cost that considers real costs over time without artificial constraint.” (p.59)

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