Third Sector Research Centre

Case Study Report (54)

Self-help housing – Towards a greater role

Case Study Findings Summary to inform Consultation at St George's House, Windsor Castle, December 2010

Professor David Mullins, Dr Patricia A. Jones and Dr Simon Teasdale

February 2011

Contents

Self-help housing – Towards a greater role

Case Study Findings Summary to inform Consultation at St George's House, Windsor Castle, December 2010

Abstract

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'.[1] It responds to the bigger picture of entrenched problems in society today including homelessness and unmet housing needs, empty homes, unemployment and low levels of construction skills, planning blight, neighbourhood dereliction and fear of crime, and low levels of local economic activity and enterprise. Yet despite these potential benefits self-help housing remains a small scale and largely unrecognised part of the housing third sector. TSRC research has been exploring the reasons for this limited and the ways in which its potential could be harnessed by local groups and key partners and the types of policies that might enable this.

This case study report is one of a series of outputs from TSRC research on self-help housing. It was produced to present evidence drawn from eight case studies of a variety of models of self-help housing in different local contexts to inform a consultation with policy makers, funders, umbrella groups and self-help housing projects held at St George's House, Windsor in December 2010. The report describes the case study projects and potential benefits of self-help housing in meeting a variety of public policy outcomes, and presents evidence on the barriers and enablers and critical success factors found in the case studies. It raises a number of questions that were explored further in the Consultation event leading to policy recommendations. It is published here to provide wider access to the TSRC research data on which the Consultation report to be published by BSHF draws.[2] The TSRC working paper that preceded this work (Mullins, 2010) and a separate briefing paper on implications for tackling homelessness (Teasdale et al, 2011) can be downloaded from the TSRC website.[3]

1. Self-help housing: the time is now

1.1. This report is one of a series of outputs from TSRC research on self-help housing. It was produced to present evidence drawn from eight case studies of a variety of models of self-help housing in different local contexts to inform a consultation with policy makers, funders, umbrella groups and self-help housing projects held at St George's House, Windsor in December 2010. The report describes the case study projects and potential benefits of self-help housing in meeting a variety of public policy outcomes, and presents evidence on the barriers and enablers and critical success factors found in the case studies. It raises a number of questions that were explored further in the Consultation event leading to policy recommendations. It is published here to provide wider access to the TSRC research data on which the Consultation report to be published by BSHF draws[4]. The TSRC working paper that preceded this work (Mullins, 2010) and a separate briefing paper on implications for tackling homelessness (Teasdale et al, 2011) can be downloaded from the TSRC website.[5]

1.2. The idea of harnessing community self-help to bring empty homes into use has never been more relevant to the policy agenda. Public spending cuts, stalled regeneration schemes, and support for localism and *'street level regeneration'* (Shapps, 2010) provide conditions in which self-help housing could play a greater role than it has done since its heyday in the 1970s and 80s. Commentators are arguing that short-life housing offers '*a legitimate, immediate and growing response to homelessness*',[6] and a recent on-line debate has recommended that '*a bigger proportion of HCA funds should be set aside for Temporary Social Housing Grant (TSHG)'* and that '*the HCA should allow access to TSHG to community organisations such as co-ops and self-help housing organisations. This would also fit the Government's Big Society agenda*'.[7] Furthermore, the Comprehensive Spending Review included provision of £100 million to bring empty homes back into use providing a potential opportunity for some self-help solutions to be implemented.[8]

1.3. Yet the existing and potential contribution of self-help groups to bringing empty properties into use is largely un-documented and the factors that have prevented them from playing a greater role to date have not been widely considered. This briefing draws on eight case studies undertaken with a variety of types of self-help housing organisations in summer 2010 to inform the current debate and begin to address the question of how this largely neglected sector could play a greater role. The case studies were selected to capture the full range of different approaches to self-help housing. Some had been in existence for 20 years, while others were in the early developmental stages. The cases provide a mix of emphases on the different elements of self-help housing: bringing property back into use, providing training and paid employment, letting properties, volunteering opportunities, and the involvement of beneficiary groups in the management of the projects. In total, 25 interviews were conducted with project champions, other staff and partner organisations. Focus groups were held with volunteers, trainees, apprentices and residents from the well established projects.

2. The bigger picture: potential benefits of self-help housing

2.1. 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'.*[9] This involves the procurement of empty homes from their owners usually on a time-limited licence or lease, but sometimes permanently. The workforce may be involved in undertaking or commissioning the work to make properties habitable, and there may be options for asset transfer. Social enterprise, community benefit and member benefit models co-exist in self-help housing.

2.2. Self-help housing responds to the bigger picture of entrenched problems in society today including homelessness and unmet housing needs, empty homes, unemployment and low levels of construction skills, planning blight, neighbourhood dereliction and fear of crime, and low levels of local economic activity and enterprise. Potential benefits are summarised in Figure A below based on examples from eight case studies.

Figure A: Potential benefits of self-help housing

Providing an affordable and accessible form of housing for people who are excluded from other housing options: single people and couples on low incomes and with no special needs, new migrants and other groups with limited or no access to social housing, market rental or home ownership. These groups often found self-help an attractive alternative to other options such as lodgings, sofa surfing or staying with family. Access was facilitated by relatively informal referral and access routes outside of rationing schemes.

Opportunities to gain construction skills and qualifications, thereby contributing to economic inclusion and combating the deficit in trained construction workers. Some organisations saw self-help housing as part of a pathway out of homelessness and worklessness; which would lead to long term housing, employment and training opportunities (e.g. through construction based social enterprises).

Benefits of active participation: sometimes those who benefited from the accommodation were also expected to contribute to renovation or other landlord functions on a voluntary self-help basis. This kept costs down but required provision of training and the harnessing of technical and management support skills to ensure that acceptable standards were met. It contributed to tackling the lack of participation in production, political engagement and social interaction found amongst socially excluded people[10] and helped build self-confidence. It was noted that 'the biggest issue of people engaged in these projects is self-confidence'.

Unanticipated benefits to residents included the perceived security of belonging to a community, even though the terms of housing occupancy were inherently insecure. The sense of community and mutual support partly overcame this insecurity. Wider issues of anti-social behaviour were addressed

in one example by involving children in creating traffic calming street sculptures. Local residents safeguarded the sculptures because the community had participated in their design.

Often unrecognised benefits accrued to owners of empty properties, whose interests were protected by improvements and basic maintenance works, by avoiding the need to protect their property from squatting or vandalism, and by providing income during a period in which their assets would have enjoyed no return at all.

Wider neighbourhood benefits were provided by tackling dereliction and blight through *'street level regeneration'* (Shapps, 2010). One Project co-ordinator described the positive effect that more houses and more jobs had on the community and importantly the "*visibility of local people working on local eyesores*". In another project tackling the negative impact of empty properties on crime and fear of crime was seen as a major benefit.

Source: Case Studies, Summer 2010

3. Introducing the case studies: types of self-help housing project

3.1. Short descriptions of the eight case study projects are included below and the essential characteristics are summarised in Table 1. The histories, activities and achievements are presented in greater detail in the pen portraits in Appendix A. We are grateful to the projects for providing the information on which the pen portraits and following analysis are based and for the opportunity to visit and interview project champions, volunteers, employees, residents and partner organisations in Summer 2010.

Figure B: Case study descriptions

Latch is a self-help housing organisation set up by students in 1989 that has developed a more formal structure to provide housing and support to people at risk of homelessness or in housing need. The organisation secures properties mainly from local social landlords, and has a property expansion programme working with a workforce comprising trainees and volunteers to bring properties back into use. Future plans include the setting up of a community building firm to specialise in sustainable construction. Current barriers are potential cuts in Supporting People which could threaten 50% of employed staff, and the reluctance of social landlords to provide replacement properties.

Riverlink Housing Co-operative is a short life housing co-operative formed in the late 1970s. They originally operated across four London Boroughs but have become increasingly focused on a small area where a major road widening scheme led to long term planning blight. The organisation is characterised by a strong ethos of '*helping each other'* and '*doing building works in a mutual way'*. Riverlink brings empty properties into use and maintains them 'at no cost to the housing organisation'. Reliance on voluntary labour helps them offer low rents. Volunteers are able to access training. Despite the insecurity of short term leases residents have enjoyed a strong sense of security through mutual support. Following the abandonment of the road scheme, Homes and Communities Agency

funding was secured by a large housing association to regenerate the area. This led to Riverlink having to hand back half of their properties and cope with an increase in rents by the new owner.

Tamil Community Housing Association was set up to provide short-life housing for refugees who did not qualify for social housing. The association identifies strongly with 'self-help' which is about *'communities doing things for themselves and not relying on Government'*, an idea that has particular resonance for forced migrants. Over time the association refocused on settled families, registered as a housing association, developed permanent housing and its asset base. The organisation is still involved in short-life housing, as bringing empty homes into community use is a core value. It works with many of the largest housing associations in London, but has recently noted a reluctance to offer new management agreements or to transfer properties for short-life use at below market rents. Tenants are not directly involved in management of the properties.

Fresh Horizons is a community based social enterprise set up with funding from a housing and land asset transfer to residents on a local authority housing estate. It is involved in facilities management, construction, and employment and training activities for local residents. The organisation began to explore self-help housing in response to a high incidence of derelict and abandoned properties. Local, privately owned empty properties have been targeted and seven options developed to encourage property owners to bring empty properties back into use. This generates work for the construction employment and training team and also provides an additional housing opportunity for the local community.

Community Campus 87, a social enterprise working with young people, was set up in 1987 to respond to youth homelessness. It provides supported tenancies and training opportunities in four local authority areas and a key skills project to give young people accredited construction based skills. The organisation has been very successful in acquiring assets including tenanted properties and a former night club building which is used as a base for the organisation. Following a recent award of a £250,000 TSHG to a stock transfer housing association partner to renovate 10 empty privately owned properties, Community Campus will provide accredited training and on-site construction experience to young people. The young people will also have the opportunity to rent the improved properties on assured shorthold tenancies during the six year lease periods negotiated with the landlords and will receive tenancy support services from the stock transfer partner.

Centrepoint is a housing association and the national charity for young homeless people, providing housing, advocacy, support and training. They are exploring self-help housing as a temporary housing option to be combined with skills training and work experience. Young people would be expected to work alongside professional construction workers to deliver renovation works to empty properties. Funding would be drawn from TSHG, charitable fundraising and Supporting People. Participation in self-help housing is seen as a temporary stage on a housing and employment pathway out of homelessness to a settled life. Access to training and skills support would be through the association's regional learning hub while properties would be managed through the regional office rather than by the young people themselves.

B4Box is a social business bringing empty properties into use and delivering accredited construction skills training and paid employment to socially excluded local people. Trainees are paid at the minimum wage until they secure accredited qualifications, at which point they can work with less supervision. Over a two year period the business has brought around 100 properties into use, and trained 12 people to NVQ level 2. Properties are secured through local authorities and housing associations that retain the ownership and management of the properties. After renovation properties may be sold, for example to key workers.

Shekinah Mission is a charity initially set up to serve rough sleepers that has developed into a regional training and housing provider for homeless people, ex-offenders and other groups at risk of exclusion. Interest in self-help housing has come from their subsidiary social enterprises providing training and employment opportunities in the construction, cleaning and maintenance fields. The model here would be to renovate empty properties primarily as an employment and training initiative. Properties would be managed by a housing association partner but might be let to the middle market rather than to homeless people.

Source: Case Study Visits Summer 2010

3.2. From Table 1 it can be seen that while several of the projects date back to the 1970s and 80s, others are more recent and that self-help housing has often developed from other organisational activities. All of the case studies are involved in refurbishing empty properties. However, there is a clear division between types of associated functions that are provided. Most are involved in providing an access route into housing, usually for non-priority single homeless people, and in managing the housing either on behalf of or in participation with the residents. The two projects that do not provide access to or manage the housing are new projects focusing on the employment and training activities. Meanwhile, several other projects are also concerned with employment and training benefits.

3.3. Table 1 also clarifies some of the variations between the projects in relation to the five essentials of self-help housing:

- **Property.** Local authorities, housing associations and ALMOs are the main sources of property. Private owners have been approached in five cases. Transport for London was a long standing owner in two cases associated with road widening schemes.
- **Funding.** Rents were a key source of income for all of the projects providing housing management. Only two cases were seeking or had secured Supporting People funding; this could enable a wider range of potential residents with support needs to be housed. Other sources of funding such as grants, charitable funding and construction contracts appear to differ considerably between the projects. There is scope for sharing information on and broadening funding options.
- **Workforce.** There are differences in the types of training provided and the employment status of those participating.

- **Residents.** In some cases there is an overlap between residents and volunteers/trainees/employees; in others these are clearly separate categories.

- **Partners.** Local authorities are generally the most important partners, reflecting their responsibilities in relation to empty property strategies, homelessness and local communities. Housing associations and ALMOs are mainly involved as sources of property. Business links may be drawn on to access skills and expertise (e.g. mentoring and pro bono work).

Table 1: Self-help housing case study projects – summary of essential elements

NAME & PRIMARY DESCRIPTOR	MAIN FUNCTIONS[1]	ORIGINS	FUNDING[2]	PROPERTY SOURCES[3]	WORK-FORCE[4]	KEY PARTNERS[5]
LATCH Self-help housing organisation	P, H, S, C, A	1989 student co-op	R, S, C	L, O, H	R, T	LA, HAs
RIVERLINK HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE Short-life co-operative	P, H, C, A	1970s housing co-op	M, R, V	A, P, O (TFL)	R, V	LA, TFL, HA
TAMIL COMMUNITY HOUSING ASSOCIATION BME housing association	P, H, A	1980s refugee action group	T, M, R	H, L, O (TFL)	R	Refugee Action Group HAs, LAs
FRESH HORIZONS Community based social enterprise	P, C, E, H, S, A	2000s SE funded from housing asset transfer	R, O, CCW, OG, L	A, P, O	T, E, R	LA, ALMO, Asset Transfer estate.
COMMUNITY CAMPUS '87 Social enterprise working with young people	P, H, S, C, A	1980s youth homelessness	T, R, O, OG	P, L	R, T	HA, LA, B
CENTREPOINT National housing association	P, H, S, C, A	1960s youth homeless charity	T, R, S, C	P	R,T	HCA, LAs, B, CRASH, developers
B4BOX For-profit social business	P, C, E	2000s individual entrepreneur	O, CCW	L, H	E, T	LA, HAs
SHEKINAH MISSION Charity for rough sleepers	P, C, E	1990s rough sleepers day centre charity	C, O, E, L, OG	P, H	T, V	LSC, HA, B

Source: Case Studies, Summer 2010.

[1] Property refurbishment (P), Housing management (H), Support (S), Construction Training (C), Paid Employment (E), Access to housing (A).

[2] Charitable Funding (C), (CCW) Contracts for construction work. European Union (E), Learning And Skills Councils (LSC), Loans (L), Mini-HAG (M), Other Grants (OG) Rents (R), Other trading income (O), Supporting People (S) TSHG (T), Volunteer Labour (V),

[3] Private Owners (P), Local authorities (L), Housing Associations (H), ALMOS (A), Other (O) TFL (Transport for London).

[4] Residents (R), Trainees (T), Employees (E), Volunteers (V).

[5] ALMO (Arms Length Management Organisation), B – links with businesses (e.g. pro-bono work) CRASH (Construction and Property Industry Charity for Homeless), HAs (housing associations), LA (local authorities), LSC (Learning and Skills Council), TFL (Transport for London).

4. The five essentials of self-help housing

4.1. There are five essential conditions that all self-help housing projects require: property, funding, workforce (employees, volunteers or trainees), residents and partners.

4.2. **PROPERTY** Although most empty properties are in the private sector, self-help groups have generally been more successful in negotiating short-term leases with social landlords (local authorities, housing associations and Arms Length Management Organisations). However, maintaining a pipeline of new hand-overs to replace hand-backs is a perennial problem and one that appeared to becoming worse for some of the case studies who faced increasing difficulties in finding a replacement supply of properties. Contrary to the expectation that deferred regeneration schemes might increase the supply of empty properties suitable for temporary use, case studies were experiencing a declining supply of social housing stock coming into short life use recently. Several factors may be important here:

- as decent homes standards were achieved, there were fewer properties that landlords needed to take out of their main rented stock;

- more commercially driven asset management made property owners reluctant to accept lower returns on empties (this applied to both commercial property owners and social landlords);

- tighter demand had led to a greater reluctance to let any social housing properties outside of choice-based lettings and nominations systems;

- very few self-help schemes have stable partnerships with large social housing developers who might generate a constant pipeline of temporary properties for use by self-help groups.

The concept of 'Meanwhile use' (Figure C) is not well established in the housing sector, but could provide a useful way to draw attention to the special features associated with the temporary use of vacant assets in the housing sector.

Figure C: Meanwhile use

> **'Meanwhile use'** has been defined as '*the temporary use of vacant buildings or land for a socially beneficial purpose until such a time that they can be brought back into commercial use again. It makes practical use of the 'pauses' in property processes, giving the space over to uses that can contribute to quality of life and better places whilst the search for a commercial use is ongoing'.*[11]
>
> One of the case studies had been part of the Development Trust Association and former CLG Meanwhile Use programme, which focused mainly on vacant retail premises but included offices, pubs, housing and building sites. They had used a small grant to refurbish and sub-let premises prior to disposal by the owner.

Meanwhile use is a concept that might be used in discussions with the Homes and Communities Agency and large housing association developers. It would highlight the need to agree terms that reflect the temporary nature of the use and that this is for a period when the property is not in a condition to generate a commercial return. The emphasis is on joint interests rather than conflict between property owners and the workforce.

Source: Fresh Horizons Case Study and www.meanwhilespace.com

4.3. **FUNDING** may include grants, loans, rents and other earned income, implicit subsidies (such as reduced rents) volunteer labour and charitable funding (including donations and charitable trusts). Case study organisations generally found it difficult to bring in sufficient income to cover all of their project activities. Projects varied considerably from those relying on grant funding for initial works to those who covered costs of refurbishment mainly from rental income and volunteer activity. The use of Temporary Social Housing Grant (TSHG) to cover some of the initial refurbishment costs of self-help housing projects was seen as a critical success factor by some projects. The current requirement for TSHG to be channelled through a registered housing association was seen as a problem by some projects, while others had developed successful partnerships with the housing associations who have direct access to these funds (Figure D).

Other forms of income and subsidy were also important in some case studies. The practice of property owners offering rent free periods and low lease charges in return for the protection of their properties was a key success condition for some projects, but this appeared to be under pressure from competing business drivers on property owners who were seeking a greater financial return on assets (even those in dilapidated condition). Smaller community based projects found it difficult to access wider sources of funding, but some larger and more broadly based social enterprises and charities were able to secure charitable funding (sometimes through their own fund raising); grants from a variety of sources, many of which are no longer available (former Regional Development Agencies, former CLG Meanwhile Use fund, local authorities); loans (e.g. Big Invest, Charity Bank, Venturesome); and contracts (e.g. to refurbish properties for other landlords such as an ALMO and a New Deal for communities). Financial sustainability is limited by general lack of ownership of assets. In this respect two of the projects (Tamil CHA and Community Campus 87) who had taken opportunities to purchase assets in earlier periods enjoy a more sustainable position than had they focused entirely on refurbishing and using properties they did not own.

Figure D – Temporary Social Housing Grant (TSHG)

While the TSHG has been in operation for a number of years as part of the Homes and Communities Agency's National Affordable Housing Programme, its use for self-help housing has to date been quite limited.

Its potential as a catalyst for new growth in the sector is, however, demonstrated by the recent award of £250,000 to Coast & Country (a housing association) to work in partnership with a self-help group, Community Campus 87, to renovate a minimum of 10 privately owned properties, each with a life of six years. The properties are across the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland, generally in areas of high housing demand.

Community Campus and East Cleveland Youth Housing Trust, will work with young people mainly to provide training and on-site construction experience, and there will be training and employment opportunities, linked to accredited training and on-site experience, for all those involved. Young people working on the project will be given the opportunity to rent the property if they require accommodation on an assured shorthold tenancy agreement. This will be used as an opportunity for some young people to prove that they can sustain a tenancy.

Source: Community Campus '87 Case Study

4.4. **WORKFORCE** Self-help housing projects need a supply of volunteers, trainees, employees or contractors to improve and maintain the properties. Here there was a clear divide between more co-operative housing models where members were volunteers/residents and construction training based social enterprises where works were undertaken by trainees or employees who were not necessarily residents. Some projects were primarily geared to employment and training and some offered accredited qualifications including modern apprenticeships. One project saw the key business idea as bringing together empty properties, unemployed people and the severe shortage of skilled construction workers. Another project working with young people saw it as a temporary housing option with a skills training component and expected the young people to work alongside professional construction workers to deliver TSHG funded works to renovate empty properties. The case studies demonstrated clearly the benefits of self-help housing to the workforce who gained skills, knowledge, experience and confidence as two of the Fresh Horizon's trainees attest:

"I knew what it were like working on construction, I've done it for the last eight years, but I've always wanted to do an apprenticeship and no one's really offered that up too quickly, they've always held back. So when I first started here I started as a decorator and within a couple of months we started college, we've had loads of training, we've all got us maths and English, or we're getting it, just stuff in different things. We've got all us manual handling, we've just done a lot of training, it's good" (FH1).

"That were when we first started and we got straight away to work on four flats and it were good, and then we got signed up and that were also good for us college and got enrolled and started straight away" (FH2).

4.5. **RESIDENTS** Often overlapping with the workforce, employees and volunteers working on refurbishment are the residents. Clearly, a supply of residents, able and willing to live in the properties is required for self-help housing to succeed. Focus groups and interviews with residents identified a number of attractions that often outweighed the disadvantages of living in temporary housing located in areas affected by blight. Ironically one of the advantages was a sense of security provided by living in a community despite the inherent insecurity associated with the possibility of property handbacks. This is well illustrated by two focus group participants from Riverlink:

"the co-op is for single, generally homeless people, whether they're living on the streets or living with friends somewhere or in a hostel or whatever" (R1). "*It's very stressful and yeah, it's a sanctuary when you get here. It does give you a bit of time and space just to recover from that"* (R2).

"It's not just supportive people; you've got to have a roof over your head and pay the rent but in addition to that, it's non-judgemental' (R3). "'Riverlink for me means that I have the ability or the opportunity to have a say in the issues that affect my life, which is housing. I'd like to have that involvement as well, you see, because it's not just being told what to do"' (R4).

For many residents self-help seemed to be one of the few options to secure a home; most single people are excluded from social housing and valued the lower rents they had to pay for self-help in return for their voluntary input in comparison to private sector rents and hefty rent deposits. More affordable rents also made it easier for self-help residents to take paid employment. This suggests that there are advantages in seeing self-help as an additional and alternative source of housing supply to that allocated through choice based lettings (CBL), and local authority nominations and referral schemes. However, it must be recognised that self-help and the generally shared nature of the dwellings is not for everyone, nor would it be acceptable to allocated unimproved properties to CBL applicants or local authority priority nominees.

4.6. **PARTNERS** A key finding of our scoping work (Mullins 2010) was that 'help from within' needs to be supported by 'help-from without' (Archer 2009, Vanderhoven and Archer 2010). It is through partnerships that the first four essentials are most likely to be secured.

4.6.1. The need for partners to secure properties and funding has been discussed earlier, but the importance of links to the supply of volunteers and residents came through strongly in the case studies as well, as the case of Community Campus illustrates.

"The volunteers we get for the construction, they come from a lot of the training organisations in the area. We work with some voluntary organisations in the area. Colleges, schools… we've been involved in a few NEET programmes, and we work with kids who are on the verge of exclusion as well, and trying to… well, basically what the school wants to do is they want to give the kids something else to do." (CC1).

The opportunities arising from locally embedded relationships was clear to LATCH who had secured trainees, volunteers and tenants through links to Groundwork, Social Services and the Probation Service "*flows of people coming and going between those various organisations*" (L1) and who acknowledged that "*it's not about LATCH giving or doing something for somebody, it's about a partnership with the community*" (L2). Links with business were also important in giving access to skills as evidenced by Shekinah Mission who secured job coaches and trainee placements with 12 local employers "*it looks nice in their annual report and they're doing their bit*" (S1); and who had also been able to call in construction and legal skills on a pro bono basis. Similarly, Centrepoint, had worked with CRASH (the construction sector charity for homeless people) and with a leading construction company to provide trainee opportunities on a mainstream hostel build programme and hoped to apply a similar approach to future empty homes work.

4.6.2.   Our case studies included some interviews with partners as well as with the self-help organisations themselves about the support provided by partners. Partners particularly valued the complementary roles played by self-help in relation to meeting housing need and making use of underused resources:

"they've always been willing to take on properties that other people hadn't been willing to take on 'they've always been a very good partner in bringing back empty properties into use, and being our eyes and ears on the (ground)' it makes them a different type of organisation than possibly some of the larger RSL's (housing associations) *that are not so willing to take on the properties in that condition, or those tenants even because you know it's not what they get funding for"* (Anonymised case study partner).

However, tensions were more likely to arise where interests were seen as conflicting, for example when properties had to be handed back or when there was pressure to allocate all available supply through choice based lettings schemes and nominations agreements.

"there aren't as many tenants in priority as actually we thought there would be. And so where did those priority…those tenants actually…where did those nominations come from?" (Anonymised case study partner).

5. Barriers and enablers

5.1. Despite the clear evidence that self-help housing can provide a wide range of benefits as discussed above, the development of the sector has so far been very limited; indeed it is considerably less extensive than in the 1970s and 80s. It is clear from the research that further development of self-help housing faces a number of barriers which can be considered in relation to the essential conditions considered in Section 3.

5.2. Case studies provided useful opportunities to learn more about some of them and how they might be overcome if self-help housing is to play a greater role in the future. The boxes throughout this report have drawn on discussions with case studies to highlight factors enabling barriers to be overcome.

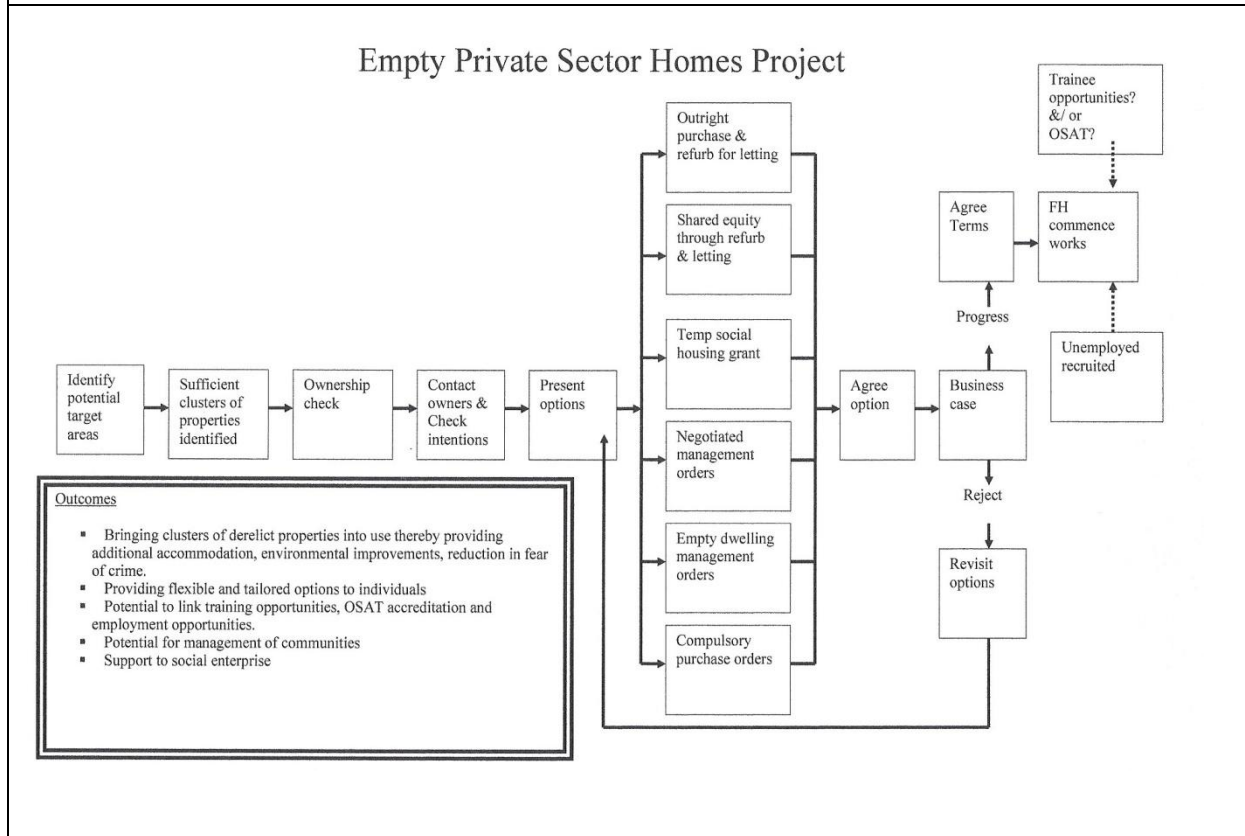5.3. **Property related barriers and enablers**

From the discussion of property sources in Section 3 it is apparent that there are a number of barriers that are preventing the growth in the portfolios managed by self-help housing organisations and that these relate both to social housing landlords where most supply has traditionally been sourced and to private sector property owners who constitute most of the potential supply. These barriers may be tackled using some of the following approaches:

- identifying empty properties and negotiating with owners for temporary use;
- convincing property owners that temporary use is in their interests;
- agreeing terms of temporary uses that reflect the contribution that self-help will make;
- overcoming uncertainty about when properties will need to be handed back and whether replacement properties will be possible to procure;
- developing an effective pipeline of properties so that the need to hand back is less of a problem.

Figure E provides an example of an approach to overcoming barriers to accessing empty private sector properties that recognises the organisational requirements (to identify clusters of suitable properties), incentive structures (to include both carrots and stick) to enable private owners to bring their properties into use, the business processes (agreeing options and contract terms) and user engagement arrangements (to engage trainees and unemployed people). By tackling these barriers in a comprehensive way the Empty Property Project at Fresh Horizons aims to generate a set of outcomes for the local community, individuals and the local environment that is capable of community management and to operate as a social enterprise.

One project was attempting to attract private property owners and had developed 7 options to encourage private owners to participate. These included liaison with LA empty property team on CPOs and Empty Dwelling Management Orders but also more incentive based approaches such as 'meanwhile use', shared equity and purchase and TSHG funded improvements.

Source: Fresh Horizons Case Study

5.4. Finance-related barriers and enablers

- Improving and managing properties that you do not own does not make for organisational sustainability (some of the more successful self-help groups had secured ownership of assets (houses, offices and commercial premises) from which they could generate independent income.

- Because properties are often in a poor state of repair there is usually a need for some up-front funding to undertake improvements to make them habitable for a period.

  - While owners will benefit from this investment they often do not have the funds to undertake the work or are reluctant to do so.

  - Self-help groups relying mainly on rental income may not have the accumulated reserves to finance major repairs to newly acquired properties.

  - TSHG has not been used very widely to invest in newly acquired self-help properties.

- There is also a need to put a value on the use of empty properties that reflects the benefits to the owner (repair and maintenance, protections from vandalism and squatting) as well as to the user.
  - One of the case study organisations lost half of its managed stock and faced higher rents as a result of transfer of ownership to a housing association. Problems associated with this change in the value placed on using the asset was as great as the (inevitable) need to hand it back.
- Rents paid by residents need to be set at a level that covers management and maintenance costs and the rents paid to property owners. Organisational sustainability also requires the accumulation of reserves to cover some of the costs of new acquisitions and renovation work.
- Close working with the welfare benefits system is essential to ensure that self-help housing volunteers, trainees and residents are not financially disadvantaged. Accessing Supporting People funding may also widen the range of residents who can take advantage of self-help housing.
- While a wide range of funding options has been used across the case studies, individual projects' awareness of options is quite limited and smaller projects appear to have fewer options to harness grants, loans or charitable fund raising. There is scope for sharing of information and perhaps a broadening of options to recognise the social investment contribution (for example through the social impact bond concept).[12] The potential public benefits in relation to homelessness, worklessness, crime and the environment suggest that there may be potential for this.

Figure F: Overcoming barriers to social housing property supply

A Planning Pipeline

A recurring theme in the case studies using social housing properties was the need to hand back properties to owners when development opportunities arose for them. This prompted the idea that rather than sourcing empty properties on a one off basis from a variety of different property owner partners, there could be mutual benefits to housing association developers and self-help groups from planning a pipeline of temporary use and hand backs. Some case study groups had already developed close partnerships with specific property owners, but this had not moved on to a more strategic forward planning footing.

A planning pipeline could work to the mutual benefit of housing association developers and self-help housing groups, enable more effective future planning and reduce local blight, vandalism and squatting associated with the regeneration cycle. It could also assist local authorities and the Homes and Communities Agency to achieve their strategic, enabling and programme objectives within the localism agenda.

Source: Case Study Discussions Summer 2010

5.5. People-Related Barriers related barriers and enablers

- Self-help housing is not very well known, and there are not enough opportunities for those who might benefit to find out about it.
  - Unemployed migrant workers in the construction sector might be seen as an ideal target group, but routes to this option are not well trodden for this group.
  - People don't know that it is possible to negotiate with owners to make temporary use of empty property.
  - Centrepoint was developing its plans for self-help housing as part of a pathways model that would enable young people to move out of homelessness and worklessness in a series of stages. These could include a period of residence in a self-help property and acquisition of construction training skills, perhaps leading to employment in social enterprises.
  - The provision of information and access via locally based offices at the grassroots where "*faces are familiar…and the trust is already there*" (L6) resulted in successful promotion and local engagement.
- Self-help housing is not for everyone because of the level of participation and the insecurity involved
  - Some case studies were offering different ways of engagement (as trainees, as employees, as temporary and supported residents) which enabled a wider range of people to benefit
  - Self-help housing can also create opportunities to participate 'outside the box'. One female tenant was impressed with the challenge to traditional male roles when two female workers turned up to decorate her house: *"Wow!'..it's not always for the boys and for the men"*(CC4)
- Self-help housing could suffer from becoming too integrated into the social housing system
  - If access were based on the same housing need criteria as mainstream social housing, the very groups who have benefited from it might be excluded.
  - Links between employment training and volunteering opportunities are also important.

It is important to establish and improve 'flows of people' coming and going to match the employment, training and housing opportunities provided by self-help housing projects. It is hard to see how this can be incorporated into CBL and housing nominations systems:

- Homelessness referral agencies provide one mechanism through which people who might benefit most can be steered towards self-help without the disadvantages of a rationing approach.
- Pathways approaches linking housing and training steps can provide another solution.
- The self-help housing approach to shared accommodation is often negotiated on a 'consent principle' and treated as an additional stage in the allocations process to ensure that prospective tenants are more likely to integrate with existing ones.
- The provision of 'community space' in shared accommodation is considered vital to promoting good relations.

Source: Discussions and Reflection of Case Studies

6. Critical success factors

6.1. The case studies provide a variety of recipes for success in self-help housing. Many of the key ingredients have been discussed already to reflect on how the five essentials of self-help housing can be delivered and barriers overcome. In this section we highlight a further set of factors that the research team has drawn out of discussion with the case study organisations, service users and partners. We end with a consideration of how these success factors can be linked to the current emphasis on localism in the development of future policy.

6.1.1. **Values and ethos**. One of the distinguishing features of all of the case study organisations was a strong sense of social purpose. As one interviewee put it bringing empty properties into use is 'morally right'. Although it was viable for another self-help organisation to continue on trading income alone, they were not prepared to sit back and "tread water" when they were surrounded with "wasted resources" (empty properties and homeless people). In another project the emphasis on green construction methods and taking young people out of their local environment (including international visits) highlighted the distinctive value base.

6.1.2. **Effective leadership**. The role played by project leadership, sometimes collective sometimes associated with individuals, was an important factor. One of the leading participants cited his main achievement as enabling people to return to a position of strength "*watching members move on with a complete new skill set with confidence".* This was a fairly typical example of the long-term ambition expressed by effective leaders.

6.1.3. **Linkage of activities and benefits - 'getting it'** One case study highlighted the importance of building on partnerships with local landlords, social enterprises and the local authority to get

people to see the win-win benefits of activities tackling employment, training and housing aims through community based initiatives. Investing in people as well as place was a common refrain.

6.1.4. **Critical mass** Self-help housing organisations can benefit from scale to some degree (e.g. in relation to networks to procure properties and secure funding and find volunteers and tenants); but case studies also indicate limits to the ideal size of self-help groups particularly where there are co-operative forms of governance and where community identity is a valued feature:

- One case study organisation demonstrated the possibility of working at two levels (as a well resourced know-how body within a social enterprise and as a small scale delivery body working on clusters of up to 30 locally based properties).
- Another had at one time grown too large to be governed in a participative way; instead of changing the mode of governance it had decided to split into several smaller and more locally based co-operatives.
- The ability to accommodate members' active participation in co-op management meetings where priorities and influence could be more easily exerted removed the need for surveys and other arms-length 'customer'-based consultation methods.

6.2. **Localism** Self-help housing is by definition a grassroots initiative and the advantages the case study projects derived from working at neighbourhood level are several.

- The use of local labour was considered a key factor in decreasing theft of materials and equipment from building sites
- A reduction in time and travel getting to and from sites meant that one case study was able to issue the workforce with bicycles and incorporate a green agenda into their thinking as "most people lived within a two-mile radius".
- Commitment to local labour even where sub-contractors were commissioned to do some of the major works meant local job opportunities flourished
- Staff recruited from the local community quickly engendered trust and reinforced issues of staff accountability: *"The scariest part for me personally, being the caseworker up there in the office smack bang in the window was you're not inclined to mess people about...I'm not going to spin you a line to make you feel better today because....chances are I'm going to walk past you on the street at the weekend".*
- Links with local authorities were generally strong, and partner interviews suggest that the benefits of self-help are recognised by local authority partners and this could influence future service commissioning.

As the details of the new policy framework emerge, for example through the Localism Bill, it will be important to identify any specific structural changes that will enable the benefits of self-help housing to be realised.

7. Questions arising from the case studies

- What are the main benefits of self-help housing and how big a contribution could it make?

- Which barriers need to be tackled if self-help housing is to play a greater role in the future?

- Do these relate mainly to property, funding, people or partners?

- Which of the enablers identified by the case studies could help tackle these barriers more widely?

- How can we share the learning about critical success factors that the case studies have highlighted?

- What policy changes could harness the potential for self-help housing to play a greater role in meeting housing need within the localism agenda?

- What types of funding would make the greatest difference?

Appendix A – case study pen portraits

LATCH – a self-help housing organisation set up by students in 1989 that has developed a more formal structure to provide housing and support to people at risk of homelessness or in housing need. The organisation secures properties mainly from local social landlords, and has a property expansion programme working with service users, trainees and volunteers to bring properties back into use. This organisation has a strong local presence and good Local Area Agreement links which enabled it for example to secure 25 year lease on building that has been converted into a community workshop. The community workshop seeks to raise awareness about energy efficiency and the link between environmental and personal sustainable. Future plans include the setting up of a community building firm to specialise in sustainable construction. Current barriers are cuts in Supporting People which threaten 50% of employed staff, and reluctance of social landlords to provide replacement properties. The trend amongst local authorities and social landlords to sell properties at auction for the best price is a major barrier for self-help housing since 'without property self-help can't happen'. Opportunities may arise to access Temporary Social Housing Grant (TSHG) and to manage private sector empties properties.

RIVERLINK HOUSING CO-OPERATIVE – a short life co-operative formed in the late 1970s following a split of a larger co-op into five smaller organisations in order to encourage greater participation among members. They had operated across four Boroughs but have become increasingly focused on a small area where a major road widening scheme led to long term planning blight. The organisation is characterised by a strong ethos of 'helping each other' and 'doing building works in a mutual way'. There is a particular emphasis on independence and bringing empty properties into use and maintaining them 'at no cost to the housing organisation at all'. Volunteer labour, low long term rents (including initial rent free periods) underpin the business model, but volunteers are able to access training and to claim travel costs. Management and maintenance expenditure is kept low through self-help. Despite the insecurity of short term leases residents have enjoyed a strong sense of security through mutual support, and many had been in their properties for a long time due to the delayed road widening scheme which was eventually abandoned. However, the organisation faces a current crisis since following the abandonment of the road scheme, Homes and Communities Agency funding was secured by a large housing association to regenerate the area. This has resulted in hand-back of half the co-op's properties and an increase in the rents charged by the new housing association owner in the interim. This highlights the need for an ongoing pipeline of properties and the potential risks of moving to a higher rent regime when short-life properties change ownership.

TAMIL COMMUNITY HOUSING ASSOCIATION – a BME housing association with its origins in short-life housing for refugees. Short-life was one of the few options at the outset in the 1980s for single refugees who did not qualify for social housing. The association identifies strongly with 'self-help' which is about 'communities doing things for themselves and not relying on Government', an

idea that has particular resonance for forced migrants. Over time the association refocused on settled families, registered as a housing association, developed permanent housing and built its asset base (including fully owned offices and community hall). Thus short-life use of empty homes provided a route for this organisation to become established and to build a long term asset base. Despite this shift the organisation is still involved in short-life housing bringing empty homes into community use which is 'morally right'. It has been involved in both the main funding schemes available for short-life (Mini-Hag and TSHG) since the 1980s and works with many of the largest housing associations in London. But recently it has noted a reluctance for them to offer new management agreements or to transfer properties for short-life use at below market rents. In this association short-life housing is seen as another way to generate homes for the workforce but does not currently involve greater levels of user participation than longer term rented accommodation.

FRESH HORIZONS – a community based social enterprise set up with funding from a housing and land asset transfer to residents on a local authority (now ALMO) housing estate. It plays a key role in providing sustainable outcomes for local residents through facilities management, construction, and employment and training activities, all of which deliver financial as well as social returns for the organisation. This focus led the organisation to explore self-help housing, partly in response to the very local incidence of derelict and abandoned properties (by private owners, the church and businesses). Local private sector empty properties have been targeted and seven options developed to encourage property owners to bring empty properties back into use. This generates work for the construction employment and training team and also provides an additional housing opportunity for the local community, one that was much appreciated by tenants who valued a small scale community responsive landlord. While initial empty homes activity has been on a small scale, the aim is to achieve work packages based on local clusters of around 30 properties, and to assemble the funding to achieve this from a variety of sources including the property owners themselves. The project is embedded in partnership working and this is constantly generating new opportunities (e.g. to work on empty ALMO properties in the local area and New Deal for Communities properties further afield). Innovative proposals to share increases in values with owners have yet to be tested, and TSHG has not yet been secured. Further barriers arise from the difficulties the local authority faces in getting empty property owners to respond.

COMMUNITY CAMPUS – a social enterprise working with young people set up in 1987 to respond to youth homelessness. It provides supported tenancies and training opportunities in four local authority areas and a key skills project to give young people accredited construction based skills. Its business model has been increasingly based on trading and asset management, with 70% of costs now covered through contract delivery and income from property ownership, including office accommodation. Its mission and activities take young people out of their usual environment; including through a partnership with an international organisation which brings together local practitioners delivering person-centred development across the Commonwealth. The organisation has been very successful in acquiring assets including tenanted properties and a former night club building which is

used as a base for the organisations' support services, youth project, key skills training project, computer room and administration centre. Following a recent award of £250,000 TSHG to a stock transfer housing association partner to renovate 10 empty privately owned properties, the organisation will provide accredited training and on-site construction experience to young people. These young people will also have the opportunity to rent the improved properties on assured shorthold tenancies during the six year lease periods negotiated with the landlords and will receive tenancy support services from the stock transfer partner. This project has been described as 'win win for all concerned' by the stock transfer partner association and was well received by the regional office of the Homes and Communities Agency.

CENTREPOINT – a national housing association that specialises in working with young homeless people to provide housing, advocacy, support and training. This association is exploring self-help housing as a temporary housing option with a skills training and work experience component. Building on its earlier partnerships with CRASH (the construction sector partnership to provide skills training to homeless people) and a leading construction company partner, young people would be expected to work alongside professional construction workers to deliver TSHG funded renovation works to empty properties. TSHG is seen as the main source of funding but the association could draw upon charitable fund raising and borrowing, and would also be looking to Supporting People funding for residents' support needs. Participation in self-help housing is seen as a temporary stage (up to two years) on a housing and employment pathway out of homelessness to a settled life. Access to training and skills support would be through the association's regional learning hub while properties would be managed through the regional office rather than by the young people themselves. Planning is at a relatively early stage. The association is in discussion with partner organisations and local agencies with a view to developing such a scheme to renovate empty street properties.

B4BOX – a social business aiming to bring empty properties into use and deliver accredited construction skills training and, and paid employment to local people; around 80% of whom have been on benefits. Trainees are paid at the minimum wage until they secure NVQ level 2 at which point they can work with less supervision. Over a two year period the business has brought around 100 properties into use, and trained 12 people to NVQ level 2. Properties are secured through local authorities and housing associations who retain the ownership and management of the properties. After renovation properties may be sold, for example to key workers. Since the people working on the properties would not generally live there, the self-help dimension relates primarily to training and work experience. Barriers have been experienced in accessing properties and 'being paid for social outputs', such as training people with autism and former drug users. Procurement policies that wrap up refurbishment works into large contracts with open tenders are also seen as a potential barrier. While the business has secured a turnover of around £1.5million, profit levels are relatively modest. There may be potential for wider partnerships to include a welfare to work provider and housing options for trainees.

SHEKINAH MISSION – a charity set up to serve rough sleepers that has grown through Learning and Skills Council and European grants into a regional training and housing provider for homeless people, ex-offenders and other groups at risk of exclusion. Interest in self-help housing has come from linked social enterprises providing training and employment opportunities in the construction, cleaning and maintenance fields. The model here would be to do up empty properties primarily as an employment and training initiative, properties would be managed by a housing association partner but might be let to the middle market rather than to homeless people. The key success factors are to secure TSHG and possibly training funding. There are also possibilities of securing properties from the Ministry of Defence and from a local stock transfer housing association (which because of the recent transfer date has a number of non-decent home properties that are likely to be demolished and could therefore form a short-life supply).

End notes

[1] Definition from http://self-help-housing.org/

[2] Building and Social Housing Foundation (2011 forthcoming)

[3] http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/

Working Paper 11 Housing Scoping Papers: Self-Help Housing: Could it Play a Greater Role?.

http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=OOND3GyKPPA%3d&tabid=500

Briefing Paper 53 Connecting the Dots: The potential for self-help housing to address homelessness.

http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/Research/ServiceDeliverySD/Canselfhelphousingaddresshomelessness/tabid/782/Default.aspx

[4] Building and Social Housing Foundation (2011 forthcoming)

[5] http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/

Working Paper 11 Housing Scoping Papers: Self-Help Housing: Could it Play a Greater Role?.

http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=OOND3GyKPPA%3d&tabid=500

Briefing Paper 53 Connecting the Dots: The potential for self-help housing to address homelessness.

http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/Research/ServiceDeliverySD/Canselfhelphousingaddresshomelessness/tabid/782/Default.aspx

[6] Bill Randall 'Waste not want not' Inside Housing September 24th 2010 p. 15.

[7] Homes and Communities Agency (2010) How do we maximise the use of empty homes? Summary report from the HCA's debate place discussion that ran from July 12 to August 31 2010; p.6 and p.3.

[8] Spending Review-Settlement for Housing- letter sent by email from CLG, signed by Grant Shapps Minister for Housing and Local Government to Local Housing Authorities, October 20th 2010, p.1.

[9] Definition from http://self-help-housing.org/

[10] Burchadt, LeGrand and Piachaud (2002) cited by Teasdale, Jones and Mullins (2010) who provide a more detailed analysis of potential benefits to homeless people from participation in self-help housing projects.

[11] www.meanwhile.org.uk/useful-info/misc/SQW%20-%20Meanwhile%20Use%20Report%20May%2010.pdf p.2.

[12] Social impact bonds are based on contracts between social investors and public sector bodies to finance social incomes. In March the Ministry of Justice agreed to support a bond based on reducing re-offending rates http://www.socialfinance.org,uk.

References

Archer, T. (2009) *Help from within: An exploration of community self-help.* London: Community Development Foundation.

Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF) (2004) *Recycling the city: Unlocking the potential of empty properties.* Consultation at St Georges House Windsor, June 2004. Coalville: BSHF.

Burchardt, T., Le Grand, J., & Piachaud, D. (2002) "Degrees of exclusion: Developing a dynamic, multidimensional measure", in J. Hills., J. Le Grand., and D. Piachaud (Eds.), *Understanding social exclusion* (pp. 30–43). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Homes and Communities Agency. (2010) *How do we maximise the use of empty homes? Summary report from the HCA's debate place discussion that ran from July 12 to August 31 2010*, London: HCA. http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/public/documents/Empty_homes_debate_summary_report_Sept10_1.pdf

Mullins, D. (2010) *Self-help housing: could it play a greater role?* Birmingham: TSRC Working Paper 11. http://www.tsrc.ac.uk/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=OOND3GyKPPA%3d&tabid=500

Shapps, G. (2010) *Home Truths.* London, Conservative Party. http://www.com/reports/Home-Truths-final.pdf.

Teasdale, S., Jones, P.A. and Mullins. D. (2010) *Connecting the Dots: the potential for self-help housing to address homelessness*. Third Sector Research Centre Briefing Paper 53 and report for CRISIS.

Vanderhoven, D. and Archer, T. (2010) *Self-help: A discussion paper on how to grow self-help.* London: Community Development Foundation.

About the Centre

The third sector provides support and services to millions of people. Whether providing front-line services, making policy or campaigning for change, good quality research is vital for organisations to achieve the best possible impact. The Third Sector Research Centre exists to develop the evidence base on, for and with the third sector in the UK. Working closely with practitioners, policy-makers and other academics, TSRC is undertaking and reviewing research, and making this research widely available. The Centre works in collaboration with the third sector, ensuring its research reflects the realities of those working within it, and helping to build the sector's capacity to use and conduct research.

Third Sector Research Centre, Park House, 40 Edgbaston Park Road,
University of Birmingham, Birmingham, B15 2RT

Tel: 0121 414 3086
Email: info@tsrc.ac.uk
www.tsrc.ac.uk

Service Delivery

From housing, to health, social care or criminal justice, third sector organisations provide an increasing number of public services. Working with policy makers and practitioners to identify key priorities, this work will cut across a number of research streams and cover a series of key issues.

Critical understanding service delivery by the third sector is important to policy-making as the third sector now provides a major - and very different - option for public services, which may be more responsive to the needs of citizens and service users. At the same time, there are dangers inherent in the third sector becoming over-dependent on funding from service contracts – particularly in terms of a potential loss of its independence. The Centre's research will help to inform the debate on the way in which service delivery is developing, the potential role of the third sector in commissioning as well as contracting, and the implications of different approaches to service delivery on the overall impact of the third sector.

Contact the authors

David Mullins	Patricia A. Jones	Simon Teasdale
d.mullins@tsrc.ac.uk	info@tsrc.ac.uk	s.teasdale@tsrc.ac.uk
0121 414 3348		0121 414 5278

Hosted by:
UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM   UNIVERSITY OF Southampton

Funded by:
Cabinet Office
Office for Civil Society   BARROW CADBURY   E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL