

Research summary

What works: Successful community housing

This research identifies key success factors for community housing, drawing on four in-depth case studies of established community land trusts. It builds on the Power to Change Research Institute's annual study of the size and shape of the community business sector in England.

Community housing takes on various forms including self-help housing, which largely involves the renovation of empty homes; co-housing, a form of cooperative housing, which involves co-ownership and people sharing facilities and living space; and community land trusts, which typically involves a local community buying land and developing properties. This report focuses on community land trusts (CLT) and the factors for success that underpin this model of community housing.

Key findings

The research found that there are a number of high-level success factors common across community businesses in the housing sector. Below are the most significant of these, grouped under three headings:

Business

- **Effective business planning.** An aspect of effective business planning for community housing is the collection of evidence of local housing demand/supply and of local support for the project. This evidence is used to access funding and secure political support.
- **Access to funding.** Successful CLTs have accessed seed funding to set up the business and employ a paid member of staff. Without an initial small grant, CLTs find it difficult to establish or continue to develop new housing projects. Funding has also been successfully sourced to purchase land and/or properties to build or renovate affordable houses for rent or sale.

People

- **Board with a range of skills and expertise.** The boards of successful CLTs benefited from members who have expertise in community-led housing, construction, property, law and finance.
- **Paid staff.** There were two specific roles that were identified as important to success. The first was a project manager, which was important to have during the construction or renovation phase. The second role involved coordinating and increasing the membership base of the CLT. Having a dedicated member of staff responsible for generating awareness and support of the CLT was crucial as it often required significant periods of time and effort to develop communication plans, set up membership meetings and fundraising events.

Community and external environment

- **Legislation and regulation.** Housing legislation creates both barriers and opportunities for success. The housing market is believed to have benefited from ongoing government commitment to increasing home ownership. The research uncovered examples of CLTs using legislation, such as Section 106 of the Town and County Planning Act 1990, to support housing development.
- **Community support.** Through demonstrating the key benefits of community housing, founders of successful CLTs have been able to reduce opposition from the local community to building or renovating homes. Across the case studies, board members reported undertaking a variety of activity to gain community buy-in. This included holding public meetings, producing leaflets, promoting the CLT's website that set out the purpose of the CLT, and board members themselves proactively meeting with residents of the community to discuss their issues or concerns about housing development.
- **Political support.** The research found that sympathetic local authorities facilitated success through providing resources and guidance. Supportive councils provided grants to help set up the business, supported needs assessment surveys and agreed the transfer of assets from the council to the CLT.
- **Access to affordable land.** CLTs need to be able to purchase land below market rate or through asset transfer from the council or a private property owner.

About the research

The report was researched and written by NatCen Social Research working with WPI Economics. The findings in this report are based on stakeholder interviews, a literature review, four in-depth case studies of successful community land trusts and publicly available data.

The case studies are:

Community Land Trust	Legal form	Year established, location
Bishops Castle and District CLT	Industrial and provident society	2007, Shropshire
Bristol CLT	Industrial and provident society	2011, Bristol
Granby Four Streets CLT	Industrial and provident society	2011, Liverpool
Homes for Holsworthy CLT	Company limited by guarantee and registered charity	2005, Devon

The full report can be found at www.thepowertochange.org.uk/research/research-publications/