

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



There are all sorts of different ways for churches to meet housing need. Over the course of the Commission's life, we have researched over forty projects, and no two were alike. Approaches range from affordable housing provision to supported accommodation, from engaging with new housing to campaigning. This resource will help you consider what's most suitable for your church.

There are two main considerations when deciding how your church can get involved: the need of the local area and the resources on which you can draw. Some of these schemes will require considerable time, money and expertise, but will deliver great outcomes. Others have a lower barrier to entry. Nonetheless, hopefully there is something here that most churches can deliver which is relevant to their situation. Check out our case studies for inspiration.

ASSESSING NEED

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



The housing crisis affects every part of the country, so most of these approaches are likely to be needed in some shape or form in all areas of the country. Therefore, assessing need is not about working out whether something *is* needed. Instead, it is important to think about what is needed *most*.

There are two main documents which can help you build up a picture of the housing needs of your community. Your local authority's Strategic Housing Market Assessment will generally be sufficient for understanding the current state of play. This is a short document which details the statistics for both the supply of housing – what types, and how much it costs – and the needs of the local community, with some basic data on the socio-economic makeup of the area. You should be able to find this document on your council's website. This may be a few years old, so check that the information is up to date. It's also helpful for many of these projects to look further ahead – to do this, you could take a brief look at the Ministry of Housing, Community and Local Government's [household projections](#) – broken down by local authority – to see how your area is going to change.

For some projects, you may need to be more precise. For example, if you are campaigning for new affordable homes – or building them yourself – you will need to know which sorts of homes or tenures are most in need. The advice given in [How to undertake a Housing Needs Assessment \(HNA\)](#) on Locality's website will be useful. For more complex work – especially complex campaigning – you may want to get your head round the [government's recommendations](#) for how housing need is assessed. This will show people you mean business, but it's very technical, so is only necessary in the most detailed discussions.

Above all, however, the main way to assess need is to listen to your congregation and the wider community and build up an understanding of how housing is affecting people. This can be done informally, but you could also try using 'community organising' techniques in one-to-one relational meetings. While these techniques were pioneered for campaigning, they have also been used to build up a picture of what services churches could provide themselves. Alongside helping you to understand the issues people face, they also give a sense of what issues your congregation are passionate about. Churches suggest that building these techniques into their church life helps to focus their mission and ministry, along with building fellowship. For advice on listening campaigns, see [this post](#) on the Leading Differently blog.

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



FINANCIAL AID



Need

Some churches will – formally or informally – cover financial needs of people to ensure that they stay in their homes. For example, if someone is at the point of eviction, they may pay their arrears. Alternatively, they may cover the costs required in order to get someone into accommodation – such as providing a deposit bond. This will be more in need in areas with a high proportion of renting, and where people are on lower incomes, but there's likely to be sporadic demand everywhere.

Resources

Finances

Financial resources are the key requirement for this service. However, there is no particular barrier to entry – depending on demand and your capacity, this could only be an occasional provision.

Personnel

Depending on the level of provision, this could require very little time, and even if it becomes fairly formalised, it's unlikely to require as much input as a support service.

For more info on providing financial aid, see [our case study](#).

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



Need

Almost all areas need more affordable housing. While prices may be higher in certain places, this is often balanced out by low incomes in other areas. However, there may be more urgent issues – with landlords or homelessness – which mean you prioritise another type of scheme, particularly if you are low on capacity.

Resources

This is probably the type of scheme which has the highest barrier to entry. While you could dedicate all your time to tenant's housing voice, you could also do relatively little in this area and still have an effect. By contrast, a house either gets built or it doesn't! This is, therefore, the most demanding of the schemes being suggested, but it can also be the most rewarding.

Finances and land

This, naturally, requires you to either have land or buildings already or to acquire them. The finances of such schemes vary greatly depending on the economics of housing in your area. In some cases, churches have been able to make money out of providing affordable housing, by selling land to a partner. In others, it may cost your church a fair amount of money to get the housing built, but you may feel that this is worth it to provide this sort of mission.

Personnel and time

It's likely that at least for one member of your team – whether ordained or lay – will have to dedicate the majority of their church-based time to the scheme in the short term, and it may take a long time for the scheme to happen – although there'll also be a lot of waiting, during which the requirements will be less strenuous. However, working in partnership can reduce the commitment considerably.

For more information on affordable housing, see [our guide here](#).

GETTING STARTED WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



ENGAGING IN NEW HOUSING



Need

Have you got new housing developments in your area? If you do, churches should engage with them to build community and show God's love to those moving in. Duplicating responses from several churches is unhelpful, so you may not need to do this work if another church is already engaging.

Resources

There's no hard and fast rule as to what this will require, but the more input you can give, the better. With larger developments, paid or unpaid pioneers moving in would be incredibly helpful. Increasingly, denominations are choosing to provide considerable funding for church planting or pioneering efforts. On the other hand, don't let lack of resources put you off from engaging.

For more info on engaging with new housing developments, see [our advice in conjunction with the New Housing Hub](#).

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



Need

Advice and advocacy are generally going to be more in need in areas with high proportions of renters, or where people are on low incomes and need help accessing welfare. But, the stats may hide need. Do dodgy landlords keep coming up in your conversations?

It's also important to think about how else people might alternatively access advice. Is there a Citizens Advice office nearby? If there is, you may simply need to signpost people to this better. If it's inaccessible, though, providing an alternative may be crucial even if it's only serving a few people.

Resources

Finances

This is unlikely to require considerable financial resources. For a twice-weekly advice session of a few hours, run by up to four volunteers, St Ed's in Nottingham found that the basic overheads cost around £50 a month – mainly on stationery and printing. Because they ran it at times that the church was often in use anyway, lighting and heating costs were very minimal. Memberships of important networks such as LawWorks and AdviceUK are of minimal cost. Professional liability insurance may cost up to a couple of thousands of pounds, but you may be able to find ways round this. For example, St Ed's technically run their advice as pro bono support under a legal firm which employs a member of the congregation, and so they are insured through this firm.

Personnel

The main requirement is people with the right welfare and/or housing rights knowledge. This may, for example, be thanks to legal training, or it may have come through other professions. LawWorks provide training to boost skills in this area. If you don't have these skills, providing access to IT will still be incredibly helpful to people, as those without IT cannot access many services now.

Other resources

IT infrastructure is therefore crucial, but you can simply use your existing church systems if necessary.

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



For more on providing advice and advocacy, check out [our advice](#).

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION



Need

Supported accommodation is needed almost universally around the country. In urban areas, you may be more likely to have local need for rough sleepers to be housed, but throughout the country, people are in need of housing and support.

Resources

There are all sorts of different ways that churches get involved with supported accommodation, and these are laid out in more detail in our supported accommodation section. While you could go out on your own, we'd advise you to work with an existing scheme if possible, either through a local charity or a model such as Green Pastures or Hope into Action.

Approach a local charity to see how you can help. You may choose to buy or lease a house to them – something which requires money or existing property, but no time. On the other hand, you may be able to provide befriending to the residents, help with decorating, or donate toiletries.

Neither Green Pastures nor Hope into Action require the church to commit financially – although you can if you wish. Hope into Action promise that their model means that the time requirements mean that it shouldn't affect other areas of your ministry, whereas Green Pastures requires slightly more from the church, but this could lead to faster results.

For more information on supported accommodation, [see here](#).

HOUSING VOICE

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



PART 1. RESPONDING TO PLANNING CONSULTATIONS

Need

Every community could benefit from a Christian voice in consultations, but this is particularly important if you feel that local development is currently not happening in a fair way.

Resources

This has perhaps the lowest barrier to entry of all the schemes listed here.

Finances

It doesn't cost anything!

Personnel and time

The level of time required is also relatively minimal, and there's no commitment – you can respond to as many or as few as you like. It's great if you're knowledgeable about your area and about planning and housing, but there'll be people replying with very little knowledge at all, so don't worry too much about this.

For our information on consultations, check out [our guide here](#).

PART 2. CAMPAIGNING

Need

If you believe that there are structural issues which you can't address alone in your area, then campaigning is a way to change that. Nonetheless, it's important to think about what you can change. It's likely that, as an individual church, you'll be campaigning for change in a local organisation – your local council, for example. Remember what powers they have. You can't, for example, change the welfare system, but you can change what types of housing are built and why, or the housing and homelessness services being provided.

GETTING STARTED

WHAT RESPONSE IS RIGHT FOR YOUR CHURCH?



Resources

This also has a low barrier to entry, but your campaign can be expanded if you have more resources.

Finances

This is unlikely to require much money, but it is also unlikely to be free like replying to a consultation! You may choose to run events or advertising campaigns, and this of course has costs. If you choose to join a campaigning group, this may come with membership costs. For example, it costs around £2000 a year for a church to join Citizens UK. However, this will get you access to great resources and a local community organiser who will be able to make your campaign more effective.

Personnel and time

Campaigning doesn't necessarily have to require too much time either. It does require regularity in a way that responding to planning consultations doesn't, but the amount of time dedicated can vary depending on capacity. One church member in Ealing really caught the campaigning bug and ended up doing four or five one-to-one listening meetings every week!

The one thing that campaigning around housing is likely to take is patience. While you may not have to dedicate much time, it's likely to take a while to see considerable results in your local area, because both councils and the planning system can be slow.

For more information on campaigning, check out [our guide here](#).

PART 3. COMMUNITY VOICE

Need

Do you have large numbers of tenants of the same landlord in your area? Some churches have worked – through boosting existing structures or establishing them if they don't already exist – to rebalance the relationship between tenants and landlords, particularly on social housing estates.

Resources

If you're helping to build community voice from nothing, this will take a long time. The first step is simply building confidence and relationships within the community, before you even get to making change. Like any outreach, therefore, the more resources you can put in the better – both in terms of personnel and funding for events. For example, you may feel that moving a pioneer into the area may be appropriate. However, some churches have had success for relatively little input.

For more information on housing voice, [see here](#).

All of the advice and guidance provided in these resources is based on conversations with churches and organisations that are directly involved in responding to housing need in their local area.