# Shared Learning from the You're Home Investment

## Hosford Community Homes | East Belfast Mission

## Seminar held at Clifton House, Belfast, September 2026 | Policy Brief

This brief summarises the findings of a seminar on Hosford Community Homes (HCH), part of East Belfast Mission (EBM), and how it used finance from Commonweal Housing to spot-purchase five houses to support move-on options for clients in their main hostel. The *You're Home* experience has helped develop a wider project involving around 18 properties supported by the Department for Communities Loan to Acquire Move-on Accommodation (LAMA) using Financial Transactions Capital (FTC).

The seminar heard from **Aidan Byrne (EBM)** and **Tom Dinnen (HCH)** on the specifics of Commonweal and FTC finance;
**Dr Andrew Grounds**, Queen's Communities and Place (QUB), the project evaluator; and
**Dr Lynne McMordie,** Heriot Watt University, on the wider research and policy environment.



### Context

The project sits in the context of a severe and deteriorating housing problem in Northern Ireland. By June 2026, 50,891 households were on the Northern Ireland social housing waiting list, of whom 34,091 were classified as statutorily homeless, representing 67% of applicants. Statutory homelessness has increased by around 150% since 2015. Affordability pressures, the reluctance of private landlords to accommodate some groups and the points-based social housing allocation system can leave single people and newcomers waiting for years for a stable home. But the supply side is also a challenge. Official statistics on new housing starts in Northern Ireland showed that there were just 578 social houses completed in 2025. The *You're Home* Hosford model was specifically designed to address this market failure.

The wider UK evidence presented by Lynne McMordie showed that temporary accommodation has become a permanent feature of the homelessness crisis. Around 154,000 households were living in temporary accommodation across Britain, compared with approximately 64,000 previously, while more than 169,000 children were in temporary accommodation in England

alone. This creates rising financial costs for local authorities as well as significant human costs for the people and families affected.

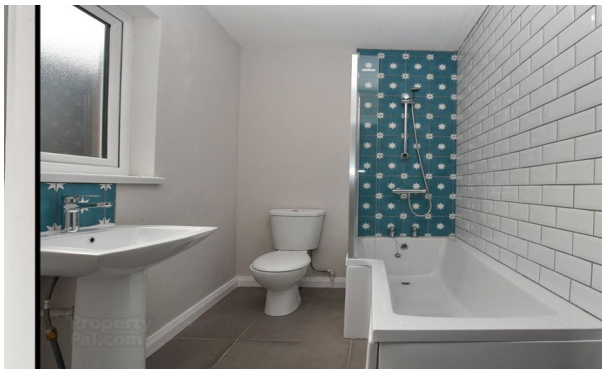
Even good-quality temporary accommodation can be damaging precisely because it remains temporary. Problems become more severe when accommodation is poor quality, distant from family and support networks, disrupts employment or education, or separates residents from communities and services. Congregate accommodation can create additional problems associated with lack of privacy and autonomy, noise, social isolation, intimidation, conflict, exposure to violence or exploitation, negative peer effects and vicarious trauma. Dr. McMordie concluded that while individual circumstances such as health, substance use, relationship breakdown and social support can affect homelessness, poverty was identified as the strongest predictor of crisis homelessness.

But there are also important initiatives to draw on nationally and globally. Fair Way Scotland provides a housing-led response for people excluded from mainstream support, combining community-based accommodation with legal advice, specialist casework and financial assistance. It operates through partnerships involving housing providers, third-sector organisations, specialist legal and casework organisations and state and philanthropic funders. Access to secure community-based accommodation enables people to rest, feel safe, cook, maintain routines, engage with support, obtain healthcare and progress legal or immigration cases. This is very much the support that anchors the You're Home model.

**A different model of housing**

The Hosford model is also based on this graduated approach to wraparound care to support clients to transition from the hostel to mainstream independent living. Tenants retain autonomy while being able to access services when required. The physical proximity of the homes to the Skainos Centre was found to be particularly valuable because it enabled effective wraparound support. Through Commonweal's involvement, EBM developed substantial in-house knowledge of property acquisition, refit and housing management. The five properties purchased followed rigorous consideration of 23 potential houses. This acquisition process produced valuable local intelligence, strengthening EBM's ability both to assist tenants and to identify stable markets in which the approach might subsequently be expanded. This capacity-building is important because it leaves Hosford with assets, expertise and institutional capability beyond the original pilot.





**Outcomes for tenants**

Seven households were supported through the pilot and two have already moved on to independent accommodation. Tenants secured new employment and career progression; a

young mother obtained a stable environment in which to raise her children; and a single father was able to reconnect with his son. Another service user moved from Hosford hostel accommodation into a Commonweal property following a period of incarceration and subsequently progressed into his own social housing home. With support from Hosford, he obtained full-time employment while maintaining a relationship with his three children. Support continued through financial advice, practical assistance and counselling, although his need for engagement reduced because of his employment commitments. One tenant describes receiving the keys as 'life-changing', expressing disbelief that the keys were genuinely theirs, while another describes being 'amazed and blessed' at the opportunity to move into a new home and start again. The physical proximity of the homes to the Skainos Centre was particularly valuable because it enabled effective wraparound support and reduced isolation as users transitioned to independent living.






The evaluation showed that Commonweal invested a total of £570,886 in the project. The evaluation estimates that this generated £2.39 of value for every £1 invested. The initial investment also produced a significant leverage effect. A further £553,800 of funding was secured to advance EBM's wider community-led housing activity. This is an important outcome as the pilot acted as a demonstrator, helping the organisation establish credibility, develop expertise and attract additional resources.

**LAMA and Financial Transactions Capital finance**

The experience with Commonweal laid the foundation for the development of the LAMA application, which released £2m of FTC capital to spot-purchase around 18 properties, based on the same model. Initially, the organisation planned a £1m investment, not least given the risk involved, but it proved more efficient to draw down the larger loan. Without the experience of Commonweal, this would be a challenge, but Hosford pointed out that there were significant barriers to LAMA, including the need to secure a substantial 20% of the capital cost; technical expertise in business planning and finance; surveying, property evaluation and repair tasks; rising house prices and access to good-quality stock; and ongoing costs to cover planned maintenance and bad debt.

Hosford and EBM emphasised the positive impact of Commonweal and FTC on the morale of staff as well as the finances of the organisation; the positive experience with both funders and the collaborative support across the sector; and ultimately the impact this investment has had on homeless people. It also demonstrates the potential of community-led housing to tackle homelessness across the UK and Ireland, although scale and replication need front-loaded technical support (and the budget to support it), competitive finance and the development of this collaborative approach across government as well as within the sector.

**Wider lessons and replication**

The seminar raised a number of implications for wider policy and practice in tackling homelessness:

- **Technical assistance** is vital at a project and organisational level. Commonweal were able to offer surveying support, legal advice in conveyancing and links with estate agents to get viable properties to purchase. Hosford also had to skill up in key areas such as finance, economic appraisals and business planning; legal structures and compliance; and risk management.

- The Board of EBM also **understood the risks** to the wider organisation and the value of a separate trading company to protect the core charity and bring assets within a single legal entity.

- **Investment readiness** training across the sector is also important, particularly for organisations with less experience of debt finance and income generation.

- This underscores the need for **brokerage to bring a mix of experts together**, tailored to each project, with the Community Academy identified as a successful subsidised model of support across capital projects in the government's Urban Villages programme.

- **Brokerage also relates to finance**. The requirement for a 20% deposit in FTC leaves a considerable sum to be found by the applicant, often delaying schemes and creating competition across the sector for the same funders. A single financial brokerage service could better connect supply and demand, while contributors felt that the deposit could be reduced to 10% or eliminated altogether, or a lower (say 1%) interest rate extended over a longer term.

- The innovative importance of LAMA was recognised by the sector as well as other funders. However, it was suggested that the **process could be fast-tracked**, especially in the initial stage on the suitability of the scheme. In processes similar to procurement, LAMA (DfC and SIB) could undertake the initial technical assessment, including due diligence, which would give certainty to the applicant and other funders regarding the 20% match. If there is a negative response, donor organisations could more effectively plan and coordinate such investments.

- It was also recognised that there are significant **recurrent costs** that need to be factored into any loan deal. These included Change of Tenancy costs, the impact of new (fire, electricity, energy) standards and refurbishment and planned maintenance, emphasising the need for contingency planning.

- It was recognised that there was significant **collaboration across the homeless sector** in practice, knowledge and ideas, which improved the supply of accommodation. Organisations are stretched, but building a stronger learning network could help build expertise, develop a more corporate approach to loan finance, develop skills and knowledge, and support new entrants and smaller organisations in such schemes. This network also needs to include government agencies, social finance providers and intermediaries in the social economy as well as the homeless sector.