

## Call for ideas: housing solutions to social injustice

### **Background**

Established in 2006, Commonweal Housing is an independent award-winning charity working to investigate, pilot and champion housing-based solutions to social injustice. By using charitable resources Commonweal Housing provide experts and partner organisations the opportunity to trial and test new approaches designed to enhance housing equality and justice.

For more than a decade, Commonweal has been supporting partner organisations to pilot property-based projects aimed at tackling some of the most intractable social injustices. Our [previous and existing projects](#) include housing for mothers released from prison and their children, step-down accommodation for female survivors of exploitation, and a cross-subsidy model for housing migrants with no recourse to public funds.

In 2020 one of Commonweal's primary goals is to identify and commence a new property based action learning project. To that end, we are looking for partners with innovative ideas to tackle social injustice through housing. We want to support organisations to carry out a short-term study to establish the feasibility of their proposed solutions, with the eventual aim of supporting a project or projects through a pilot phase.

### **What are we looking for?**

An innovative idea to tackle social injustice:

- This idea must be a housing based solution which could be piloted to address an identifiable social injustice;
- The proposed solution doesn't need to be complete – the initial feasibility stage is intended to explore whether or not the solution is feasible financially, operationally, and in terms of likelihood of addressing the social injustice;
- The idea must include an element of innovation – this could be around the delivery of the project itself or the client group, who may be previously overlooked;
- We are particularly looking for solutions to social injustices related to Commonweal's priority areas: the criminal justice system and violence against women and girls. We are also interested in systemic injustices that occur at points of transition in people's lives – be that transitions to adulthood, transitions in accommodation from institutions to independence or other 'life' transitions. We will, however, also consider exceptional applications that do not fall within these categories.

A committed, able and enthusiastic partner organisation:

- Partners must be a not-for-profit organisation;
- If the feasibility stage determines that the idea is suitable for a full pilot project, we want the partner organisation to deliver this with our support. Therefore, partners should have the expertise and capacity to eventually execute the project with the support of Commonweal;
- Partners should be aware that Commonweal's goal is to evaluate the project, share the learning and, where applicable, seek replication. We want potential partners that are committed to this goal, and want to have an impact wider than their organisation;
- Partners should be committed to engaging with Commonweal, independent evaluators, and any social investors, throughout the development and learning of a pilot project. This should include a commitment to supporting tenants to engage in this process too;
- There should be a commitment to any potential pilot project for the long term throughout the organisation.

## What will we offer in return?

### a) Support during the feasibility phase

In this initial stage, we would work with partners, supporting them to carry out a short term study to establish the feasibility of their property-based idea.

This support includes advice, shared learning from our previous projects, consideration of organisational capacity to deliver the pilot. We would not want funding for this study to be a barrier to applicants, so some funding may also be available for this piece of research if relevant or justified. We can also facilitate conversations with investors for this work or a potential project.

Completed feasibility studies will then be considered by Commonweal and their board of trustees, with some projects going on to be supported through the development of a longer-term pilot phase. It is expected that the applicant/partner organisation will be delivering this project, with Commonweal's support, and as such applicants must be committed to this.

### b) Support during the pilot phase

Commonweal has more than 14 years' experience supporting our project partners to run pilot projects in a range of ways. Some examples of support we have offered in the past, and which could be available to partners with successful feasibility studies are:

- **Access to social investment** to purchase properties – and an 'insulation' of risk from all that entails – the first step will be to work with partners to secure social investment to fund the project. Commonweal have previously [dealt directly with SI/held properties on our balance sheet] and leased properties to partners to allow them to focus exclusively on project delivery, while Commonweal takes care of the investment element;
- **Initiating the project**, helping partners to set up and commence work on the project, utilising accumulated learning from previous Commonweal projects;
- **Operational support**, including analysis of project data, space to contemplate what is going well, what isn't, capturing learning, suggestions, support, signposting, feeding into the evaluation;
- **Strategic support**, bringing together key stakeholders to review the projects progress and help come to key strategic decisions about future stages of the project, the evaluation and replication;
- **The commissioning of expert evaluation** partners to analyse and evaluate the project, against its aims and Commonweal's own evaluation framework. This will assist the applicant in the development of the project, as well as establishing the project's impact, and its feasibility for replication and growth;
- **Reduced rent** on properties owned by Commonweal, in order to run your project;
- **Support promoting the project**, from our communications and policy team, who will be closely involved from the outset. Previous projects have won awards, secured a range of media coverage, and been highlighted as good practice in a range of policy and practice reports.
- **Support to increase partners' organisational capacity to continue the project work after the pilot ends.** As well as seeking replication through sharing learning, we are also keen to ensure partners can continue (or even scale) the work after the pilot project is completed.

### **How can you apply?**

Organisations interested in putting forward an idea should download and complete the application form, and return it by email to [info@commonweal.org.uk](mailto:info@commonweal.org.uk) or post to Commonweal Housing, The Blackfriars Foundry, 156 Blackfriars Road, London, SE1 8EN.

Please be aware that Commonweal may follow up applications and seek further information or points of clarification before making any decisions.

Commonweal has a limited budget therefore we are unable to support or fund all ideas brought to us. We will be selecting those to support from proposals that most directly meet our areas of interest and can best demonstrate how they meet the requirements of this brief. Our aim is that this round of feasibility study funding will lead to longer term property-based action learning projects – subject of course to our future funding capacity.

### **FAQs**

We have endeavoured to answer any questions that may arise in this section of the document. If you have any further questions, however, or would like to have an informal conversation about the process, please email: [info@commonweal.org.uk](mailto:info@commonweal.org.uk).

#### **What is a feasibility study?**

The study is intended to ascertain whether or not your proposed housing solution to a social injustice is feasible. That includes:

- Establishing the hypothesis e.g. how will the solution address the social injustice
- Can the housing element be delivered?
- Does the organisation have the capacity to deliver it?
- Can it be funded?

#### **I have an idea, but it's not related to the core themes outlined. Should I still apply?**

Yes. While Commonweal is focussed on our core themes of those in contact with the criminal justice system, and the issues related to violence against women and girls, we also remain open to new ideas that align with our mission to find housing solutions to social injustice.

#### **Is funding available to carry out the feasibility study?**

There could be scope for a small amount of funding to give successful applicants the capacity to complete a feasibility study. This will depend, however, on what the funding is needed for. In the past, this has ranged from £1,000 to £10,000, but with a limited budget in 2020 we will have an eye on value for money when considering new proposals.

#### **If successful, how long would pilot projects run for?**

Our previous property based pilots have tended to run for around 7 years, with the evaluation to be completed within the first 3 years. However, there is no set rule here.

#### **What is the Evaluation and who pays for it?**

Commonweal's goal is to share the learning from our property based pilots so that other organisations can take this knowledge on board to influence or improve their services or, if appropriate, replicate the projects to help their service users. We commission independent

evaluators to work with ourselves and partners to research and write this evaluation over the first few years of a pilot.