

# Blog

## The Strategic Network

November 2018

### **Making council housebuilding great again**

As someone who has only been working in local government since January, the challenges facing councils to develop new homes has felt pretty overwhelming and impossible to navigate at times.

In my first few weeks, I was attending meetings on developing a council housebuilding company and desperately trying to get my head around how we build something when we have land and money in the General Fund, no borrowing capacity in the Housing Revenue Account but some land, and a proposed housing company with no access to cheap funding or land. And on top of that, working in an area of low value making it hard to achieve viability on sites.

I was badly in need of help from those in the know and those who were making it work. This is where the recent council housebuilding event organised by this network came in.

If I was struggling, surely others were too and, sure enough, a couple of weeks ago around 30 delegates attended an event which considered the opportunities and barriers to council housebuilding.

We heard from a range of speakers who took us through the options, the finances, legal issues, and shared what's working for them and what's not. Overall, I took away three things:

- Be really clear on what you want to achieve, you can build houses for a whole host of reasons: to generate a capital income, create a revenue stream, regenerate areas, replace outdated stock, increase density on sites, make best use of land, tackle other public policy issues such as enabling those with varying specialist needs to live independently for longer, meet a wider range of housing needs such as market and intermediate rent. What you certainly mustn't do is set up a housing company just because everyone else is
- Identify the approach that best suits what you want to achieve above and don't worry if this looks different to what everyone else is doing, there are so many options available

- Be in it for the long term. Getting a programme up and running is far from an overnight process; many councils have limited development experience in recent years (decades, even). Be clear from the outset on the timescales involved with the key players and persevere

If you're thinking you wish you'd been at this event, then you're in luck as we're running it again in January – and there's even an option to have a HQN associate deliver a workshop based on this event in-house, tailored to your needs.

***By Emma Lindley, HQN associate***

## About the author(s)

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