

## **Clusters of Empty Homes Programme – Frequently asked questions**

### **What is the aim of the Clusters of Empty Homes Programme?**

The Clusters of Empty Homes Programme seeks to tackle clusters of empty homes that can often attract anti-social behaviour, vandalism and fly-tipping to neighbourhoods.

### **How much funding is available?**

£50m of Government funding is available to tackle concentrations of empty homes as announced on 21 November 2011 by the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister as part of Laying the Foundations – a Housing Strategy for England. Local authorities will be expected to match fund - bringing the total investment to £100m.

### **What can this funding be used for?**

Funding is available to areas with clusters of empty homes which have good market prospects but require an intensive approach to return them to a liveable standard. This includes refurbishing and reconfiguring homes, as well as improving the public realm.

### **Can Clusters of Empty Homes Funding be used to fund revenue or capital works?**

Funding is available to support capital works (including environmental improvements) required to bring empty properties back into use for housing. Revenue support is not available.

### **Who can bid?**

The programme is open to Local Authorities and HCA Investment Partners who can demonstrate that proposed schemes meet the necessary criteria.

### **What are the funding criteria?**

- A minimum of 100 homes brought back into use over the lifetime of the project ;
- Delivery is within a distinct, compact area (ward or smaller) with over 10% of homes empty, and each cluster representing more than 25 empty homes;
- Clear and demonstrable high level strategic fit and community support - as well as evidence of local authority commitment if the local authority is not the lead bidder;
- In principle commitment to providing 100% match funding.

### **How does the application process work?**

To make quick progress, and avoid wasted work, we are adopting a two stage process for allocating the funding.

The first stage is to invite Expressions of Interest against the above criteria. The HCA will conduct an initial assessment against the above essential criteria and a shortlist of successful applicants will then be invited to submit more detailed Stage 2 applications by the end of April 2012.

### **Where can I get the expression of interest pro forma?**

Those wishing to apply to the Clusters of Empty Homes Programme should complete an Expression of Interest pro forma and email this to [clustersofemptyhomes@hca.gsx.gov.uk](mailto:clustersofemptyhomes@hca.gsx.gov.uk) by noon on Monday 12 March 2012.

### **How does this differ from Housing Market Renewal?**

The HMR programme was targeted at large scale market restructuring including demolition, new build and refurbishment. The Clusters of Empty Homes Programme is specifically available for remodelling and refurbishing existing empty properties.

### **Can the areas include empties which are in social and private ownership being brought back into use?**

A co-ordinated approach is desirable, though bidders should note that funding from the Clusters of Empty Homes Programme is not available for social housing.

### **Is the fund only for bringing empty houses into use or can empty commercial properties be considered?**

Empty commercial properties, where they are brought back into use for housing, can be considered as part of a co-ordinated neighbourhood scheme which also tackles clusters of empty homes

### **Do empty homes have to be brought back into use as affordable housing?**

Homes may be brought back into use for rent, shared ownership or outright sale for owner-occupation in line with local demand.

### **Do properties brought back into use have to be offered at affordable rents or can social rents be considered?**

Where homes are brought back into use as affordable housing we would expect these to be offered at an affordable rent.

### **Can private leasing be considered as part of the proposals to bring properties back into use, so that an acquisition does not have to take place?**

Yes - private sector leasing can be considered.

**Is there a maximum level of funding which will be considered per unit?**

We would expect providers to demonstrate that they are maximising the value for money offered in their bids, particularly those shortlisted to submit detailed applications by the end of April.

**Does match funding have to be in place now?**

In principle commitment to provide match funding is required at the Expression of Interest stage.

**Is there a formal definition of low demand being used for the programme?**

Distinct, compact areas (ward or smaller) with over 10% of homes empty, and each cluster representing more than 25 empty homes, are eligible for the Clusters of Empty Homes Programme.

**We've submitted an offer for the main Empty Homes 2012-15 Programme administered by the HCA. Can we submit an Expression of Interest for the Clusters of Empty Homes Fund?**

Provided your proposal meets the stated criteria and does not duplicate the offer you have made to the Empty Homes 2012-15 Programme (ie is a different set of properties which meet the programme criteria), then an Expression of Interest would be welcomed.

**Is there any flexibility on the minimum number of homes required? Must these be in the same local area / ward area or can these be spread across a wider geographic location?**

Preference will be given to applicants who are able to meet all of the funding criteria. Whilst clusters of 25 homes must be within a distinct, compact area (ward or smaller) the aggregate total of 100 homes may be spread over a wider geography ie Local Authority.

**Can we offer a mixture of firm and indicative properties or must there be a minimum of 100 properties which we can name / identify to qualify for the second stage?**

We expect that Stage 2 applications will incorporate a mix of firm and indicative properties. Deliverability will be a key consideration at Stage 2 and preference will be given to those applications with strong pipelines identified.

**Can we use this funding to create revolving loan schemes to tackle clusters of empty homes?**

Yes, we wish to encourage resources being recycled to bring further empty homes into use.

**Can we bid as a consortium across a number of Local Authorities?**

Yes

### **Can community groups bid for Clusters of Empty Homes funding?**

While Clusters of Empty Homes funding is available to Local Authorities and HCA Investment Partners (as the lead applicant), we envisage that a range of partners will be involved in delivery including community groups.

A separate bid round for community-led developers, such as charities, smaller not-for-profit organisations and community and voluntary groups was announced by the Communities Minister, Andrew Stunell, on 24 January 2012. This is part of the £100m Empty Homes 2012-15 Programme and is being managed by Tribal Education. The [application guidance](#) is available on the DCLG website.

### **What time period is this funding for?**

Funding is available for bringing empty homes back into use up to March 2014.