

Plan for better renting in Greater Manchester



Making Greater Manchester's
private rented sector work for all





Foreword

Tackling the challenges faced by vulnerable people living in Greater Manchester's private rented sector must be a major strategic priority for our region. The scale of the challenge cannot be underestimated.

The 2021 census showed that the number of households in the private rented sector has more than doubled in England in the last two decades and it now accounts for 19% of households. But there are persistent issues with housing quality in the sector. Approximately 25 per cent of all PRS homes in Greater Manchester are classed as 'non-decent'. And rent rises are increasingly making it unaffordable. England saw an average increase of 11% last year, but this is worse in some areas in Greater Manchester, which saw increases of over 20%. With little effective regulation and weak enforcement, vulnerable people who have least choice and least access to advocacy are worst affected by this broken market.

A decline in the availability of social rented homes, a lack of investment to build more, and barriers to accessing social rented housing for many tenants, mean that an improved PRS is vital for a functioning housing system in Greater Manchester.

We need a strategic approach to the sector, which drives improvement in the quality of housing in the PRS and provides effective interventions to protect the most vulnerable.

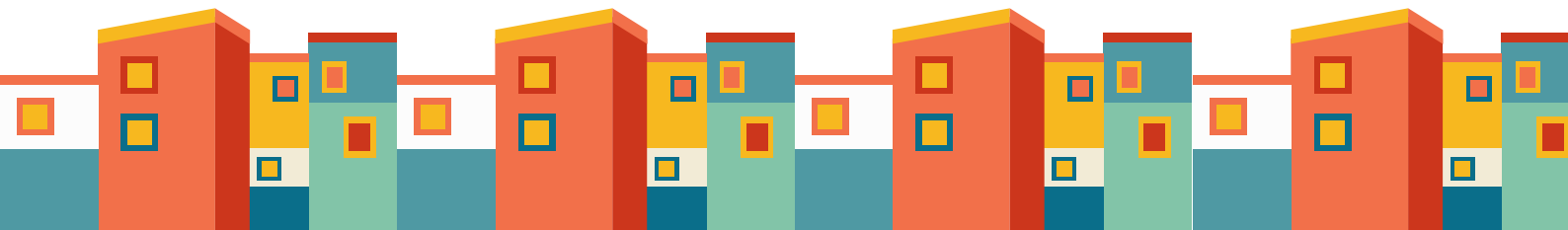
Fair Housing Futures is part of a national programme funded by the Nationwide Foundation aimed at improving the experience of vulnerable people in the Private Rented Sector and is managed by Shelter. As Chair of the Greater Manchester FHF Board, it has been a great pleasure to bring together tenants and landlords, as well as Local Authorities and advocacy organisations, in a unique partnership, to share ideas and consider findings.

We invested in pilot projects to test innovative solutions and commissioned research to gain a deep understanding of the PRS in Greater Manchester. This has given us a unique perspective on what will really make a difference.

These policy asks come directly from the research, pilots, and all the people involved in Fair Housing Futures over the last six years.

We are delighted to be able to share this plan with you. Together we'll help build a private rented sector that works for all in Greater Manchester.

Fay Selvan
Chair



Our asks

1 Renters' Reform Bill

We support the Government's proposed Renters' Reform Bill and want to see it implemented without further delay.

In addition:

- We ask that the Bill ensures local authorities have appropriate resources to enforce any forthcoming statutory duties properly.
- We propose a Greater Manchester pilot of the Property Portal (as set out in the future Renters' Reform Bill), with a Greater Manchester-wide register and accreditation of PRS landlords.
- We suggest that the Government remove the requirement for the Secretary of State to sign off selective licencing schemes larger than 20% of local authority area or by % of PRS households. These decisions should be devolved to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority.

2 Welfare reform

We are calling for significant reform of the Universal Credit system. The current system is failing PRS tenants who claim Universal Credit and landlords who want long term tenancies.

We want to:

- Replace the advance payment loan at the start of a Universal Credit Claim with a grant, so that vulnerable people are not forced into financial hardship to repay it.
- Trust people to know their own ability to manage their finances from the outset and provide them with the choice to decide whether to pay their rent direct to the landlord without having to demonstrate hardship. Get rid of the requirement for two-month rent arrears before transfer to direct payment of rent to the landlord.

3 Supply and affordability

If the need for affordable housing cannot be met solely by social housing then the Government needs to find alternative routes to ensure homes in other sectors are affordable. In the UK, the PRS is that alternative for most households but it is becoming less and less affordable. It is clear that rents are too high for vulnerable tenants living in the Private Rented Sector in Greater Manchester.

We want to see:

- An increase in Discretionary Housing Payments for Councils to support vulnerable tenants.
- An increase in Local Housing Allowance rates to be set at the 30th percentile of local market rates.
- A Greater Manchester Housing Commission to explore all options to improve affordability and quality of housing in the PRS. We want the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to work with the Government to explore innovative proposals to limit excess rent rises during the same tenancy and set a consistent standard and guidance for landlords on charging rent.



4 Investment

Greater Manchester has some of the worst housing stock in the country (89.4% of properties are EPC level C or below). It needs significant investment to address the challenges of sustainability and to reach targets for achieving the Decent Homes standards.

GMCA should:

- Explore the options to bring in additional investment through the Property Improvement Investment Model.
- Be given funding and devolved powers to deliver a region wide building safety, quality, and energy efficiency investment plan for the PRS in GM.



5 Enforcement/mediation/information

Many landlords benefit from additional information and advice and many tenants don't know their rights. When things go wrong information and mediation can help stop evictions and prevent homelessness. However, some tenants have experienced threats of eviction when asking for repairs or improvements. At times, contact from a local authority enforcement team may exacerbate this, due to the power imbalance with landlords.

Councils often play a dual and conflicting role of enforcement, mediation and support. There is a benefit in separating these roles and helping landlords and tenants to engage, while protecting tenants from retaliatory eviction, with a segmented approach to landlords.

We believe that:

- All Greater Manchester councils should adopt a standardised approach to enforcement and publish enforcement actions at GM level.
- Government should explore changing some court processes to give tenants easier access to remedies for disrepair. Costs and bureaucracy should be reduced to them as litigants in person, to support a pilot in Greater Manchester with the HMCTS.
- All councils should provide a single point of contact and a consistent joined-up, cross-departmental service for vulnerable tenants in the PRS. Council departments share responsibility for different aspects of the Private Rental sector – whether it be benefits, disrepair, HMOs, etc.
- The Mayor's Good Landlord Charter should be renamed the 'Good Renting Charter' to improve partnerships and help relationships between landlords and tenants.



This manifesto has been produced based on findings from pilot projects established across Greater Manchester. Evaluation of these projects can be found [here](#).

Funded by



As an independent charity, the Nationwide Foundation influences changes to improve circumstances for those people in the UK who most need help. Its vision is for everyone in the UK to have access to a decent home that they can afford, and the Decent Affordable Homes strategy seeks to improve the lives of people who are disadvantaged because of their housing circumstances. One key part of the Nationwide Foundation's strategy is the Transforming the Private Rented Sector programme. The Foundation has a commitment to transforming the private rented sector so that it provides homes for people in need that are more affordable, secure, accessible and better quality.

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