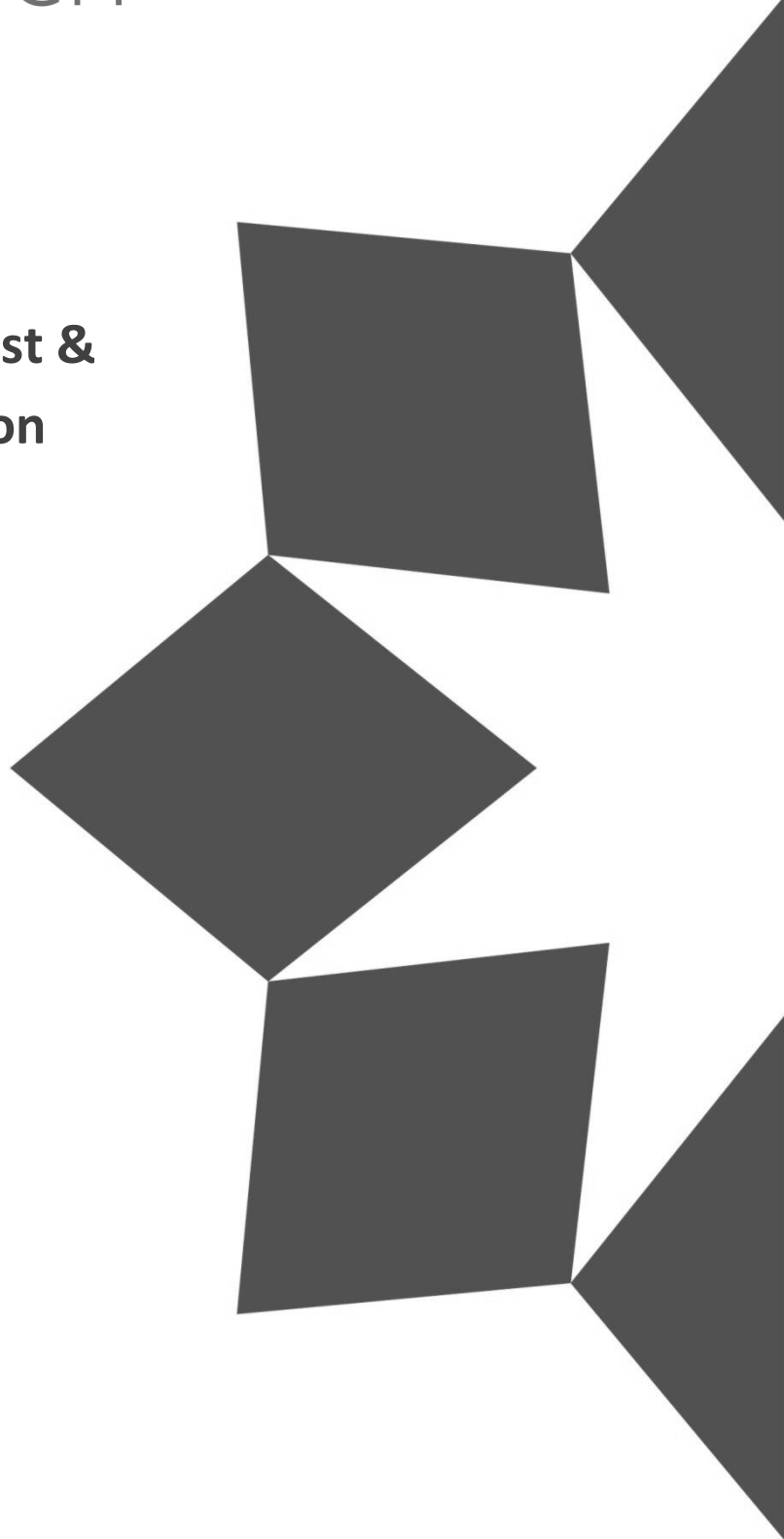




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**Fair Housing Futures Test &  
Learn Projects Evaluation**

**January 2023**



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# Project details

<b>Title</b>	Fair Housing Futures Test & Learn Projects Evaluation
<b>Client</b>	Fair Housing Futures Partnership Board
<b>Project number</b>	22064
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This Project has been delivered to ISO 9001:2015, 20252:2019 and 27001:2013 standards.



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## Key messages

- The Test & Learn Projects have each had **success in their own ways**. There is therefore much insight that can be applied to other local authorities and potentially across Greater Manchester. ACORN has shown how to empower tenants through mutual support; the Bond Board has engaged landlords to provide housing for those in need; Justlife has provided ongoing support to tenants with complex needs; Salford Council has delivered a wide range of online training materials; and Wigan Council has rooted a Tenant Champion in a local community.
- **One size doesn't fit all**. Depending on the particular local context, the PRS toolbox needs to contain various activities to cater for particular circumstances and outcomes. This also calls for collaboration, including between the council and local third sector partners. It is important to understand that there is no singular approach – different contexts and communities may require different undertakings. This report discusses in what context different activities can be successful and what approaches have been less effective.
- Providing information and advice to tenants is the first step. **Moving to empowered tenants is a longer process**, with drop-off on the way. For some activities this has relied on “radical” activists, people who are already involved and campaigning around these issues. Do these activities therefore empower already empowered people? For some tenants, simply sustaining their own tenancy is enough.
- **A segmented approach to landlords is required**. Intervention in the PRS can often be seen as anti-landlord, but many provide a good service and respond well to information and support. Some landlords are worried about rent arrears and property damage and so may not rent to ‘vulnerable’ people who they perceive as a risk. Opening up this market would benefit vulnerable tenants. Some landlords solely focus on financial return and provide poor quality accommodation to ‘vulnerable’ tenants. Therefore, there is a need to **segment landlords** and target particular landlords with specific communications/interventions.
- **Separating roles of supporting and enforcing**. Some landlords don't and won't comply with regulations, hence the need for enforcement from local authority. If councils are delivering PRS initiatives, they therefore have a dual, sometimes conflicting role. Third sector organisations often support tenants and those in housing need rather than private landlords. However, they also often engage with landlords in order to access housing. There is therefore a delicate balancing act between supporting and engaging landlords.
- **Low expectations of tenants**. Some tenants accept poor conditions, not knowing their legal rights and having always experienced similar conditions. Some projects changed their questioning approach to dig deeper, such as ACORN and Wigan Council. Instead of asking an overall question on repairs and maintenance, they asked more specific questions like have tenants seen a gas safety check.
- Understanding the **complex power dynamics** at play (tenants can feel very disempowered and fear eviction) as well as motivations (landlords may perceive intervention as extra work with little benefit) is crucial in understanding how to ensure information is accessible at certain points in

process. Communication needs to be simple and direct, especially for those who are at the point of crisis. In addition, signposting to the right information is important. Think through routes – where do people go – how easy is it to find the right resources.

- **Contact is often at the point of need or crisis, not proactive.** Understanding the full rental journey on both sides can therefore be a useful way to frame interventions. This applies to tenants and landlords, though may offer opportunities too. For tenants in a crisis, such as facing eviction, there are often other stressors at play, therefore making the situation even more difficult to overcome.
- **Breaking the stigma of private renting is hard.** It's a wider, cultural and societal challenge, not one for local projects in Greater Manchester alone. Some tenants don't believe there is stigma. However, there is discrimination – such as 'no DSS' – and there is an unequal power relationship between the tenant and landlord.
- **The private rented sector is complex and needs long-term solutions.** This includes work at a national policy level. For example, tenants at the co-production workshop favoured greater regulation like a rent cap (as seen recently in Scotland), and end to S21 notices (potentially being removed through the Renters Reform Bill) universal licensing brought in for private landlords. At a more local level, it takes time for initiatives to gain traction.

## Background

After decades of reduction during much of the twentieth century, the private rented sector (PRS) has grown since the deregulation of the Housing Act 1988, followed by the buy-to-let mortgage offer soon after. Today, this sector houses an estimated 19% of households in England.<sup>1</sup>

While the private rented sector has been growing, the social housing sector has been shrinking. Accompanied with this, local authorities can discharge a homelessness duty into the private rented sector, housing families in private rentals rather than former council stock. This means private renting has become the default housing option for many households.

While the PRS houses a wide range of groups, including working people, students and those new to an area, the sector is often associated with insecurity, poor living conditions, high rents and a lack of choice. This leads tenants to often experience instability and inequality, especially at the bottom end of the market, where financial means limit choices. Fair Housing Futures project focuses on the needs of vulnerable people in the Private Rented Sector in Greater Manchester. FHF research shows that 29% of PRS households have dependent children. 14.3% lone parents with dependent children. 27.9% are ethnic minorities (as of 2011) – much higher than social housing (17.9%) and owner occupied (12%). 7.6% over-occupied in PRS. Occupation profile of people in PRS is broadly similar to the overall population. However, earnings are lower than average across all tenures, with 25% earning less than £13,000 and 50% earning between £13,000 and £26,000. Our research also highlights that around 26% of the PRS ‘stock’ in Greater Manchester is classed as ‘non decent’.

As a large urban area, Greater Manchester (GM) experiences many of these challenges. Additionally, local authorities work more closely together sub-regionally than in many other parts of the country, offering opportunities to share and learn from each other. GM already has other initiatives in this area, such as the Good Landlord Scheme and Good Landlord Charter.

Fair Housing Futures (FHF) was funded by the Nationwide Foundation’s Transforming the Private Rented Sector programme. It is a place-based collaborative programme to test and learn from interventions which improve the experience of ‘vulnerable’ people accommodated in Greater Manchester’s PRS. It has been led by a Partnership Board with representatives of all key stakeholders (landlords, tenants, agents, landlord associations, VCSE services, Local Authority and GMCA), and managed by Shelter. It commissioned research to identify the issues, and subsequently funded five

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<sup>1</sup> DLUHC (Dec 2021) *English Housing Survey: Headline Report, 2020-21*

test and learn projects across Greater Manchester., It will use the finding from the mapping research and these projects to influence policy and practice locally, in GM and nationally.

## Five Test & Learn Projects

Fair Housing Futures has sought to explore ground-breaking solutions to the issues and barriers that vulnerable people face when private renting. FHF's ambition is for the private rented sector in Greater Manchester to provide more decent, genuinely affordable homes for people in need.

An early stage in the Fair Housing Futures programme was to map the PRS in GM to gain an up-to-date and evidenced understanding of the sector, in particular the key problems which are faced by private [renters](#). On the basis of the mapping exercise, the fund was set up to support projects to:

- **Empower tenants** by raising awareness of existing services, regulation and enforcement.
- **Improve communication** between tenants, landlords and letting agents to enhance the renting journey.
- **Support landlords** by improving their awareness of regulation and enforcement and help them manage their experiences and expectations of being a landlord.
- **Break the stigma** of vulnerable tenants in the PRS, particularly those in receipt of benefits.

Alongside the Test & Learn projects, FHF have run a Tenants' Voice programme that has engaged with tenants to amplify their voices in the development of policy and practice, and co-develop effective change.

## Evaluation aims

Fair Housing Futures wanted to evaluate the success of the Test & Learn Grant Fund projects in addressing the problems experienced by 'vulnerable' people identified during the mapping exercise. It is the intention to use the findings from this research to influence change in policy and practice in GM and nationally.

# Empowering tenants

Empowering tenants has been at the heart of the Test & Learn projects and of the evaluation itself. This key objective has been to empower tenants by raising awareness of existing services, regulation and enforcement. Three of the five Test & Learn projects focused on this objective.

In this and the next three sections, we outline the objectives using a realist evaluation approach. The ‘Realist Evaluation’ Approach seeks to unearth what works for whom and in what circumstances. Not every intervention works for everyone. This approach therefore looks to understand the context that enable activities (or ‘mechanisms’ in realist language) to achieve outcomes.

## Context

The context for this objective includes both national constraints and local models. At a national level, the key concern is the unbalanced power dynamics between tenant and landlord, a recurring theme in our evaluation. With the potential of landlords to evict somebody using Section 21 notices, tenants live in fear of retaliatory eviction if they raise concerns, such as the need for repairs. This key issue is also one of the main reasons that tenants need to be empowered in the first place.

**“A lot of [tenants] said that they were scared to bring up any issues with their landlords in case they got evicted. And I think that's just a really poor state of housing that you can't even get your housing up to a certain standard before you think like you'd be in trouble” ACORN staff**

There are local issues that affect the context for the delivery of these activities and achievement of the objective. The PRS has more non-decent homes than any other sector. For example, The English Housing Survey estimates that in 2019, 23% of PRS homes did not meet the Decent Home Standard – which compares with 18% of owner-occupied homes and 12% of social-rented homes<sup>2</sup>. This is exacerbated by a high proportion of older, often terrace properties in urban centres (including Greater Manchester). Moreover, absentee landlords or landlords living away from their rentals are not always on hand locally to inspect properties or resolve issues. This has led to the Government Department for Levelling Up expressing concerns:

**“The private rented sector in the UK has expanded significantly in the past 20 years and is serving an increasing number and diversity of households. It is also the tenure with the poorest quality housing. In this context, the expansion of the sector has**

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<sup>2</sup>Housing Conditions in the Private Rented Sector (2021); House of Commons Library [CBP-7328.pdf](https://www.parliament.uk/publications/2021/07/cbp-7328/) ([parliament.uk](https://www.parliament.uk))



**prompted concerns about persistent sub-standard conditions and poor management practices in some sections of the market.”<sup>3</sup>**

## Activities

Below is a summary of the activities relevant to this objective, taken from end of grant reports and the qualitative engagement we carried out with projects. Three projects specifically focused on this objective.

 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face to face is undervalued, with COVID there are a lot of Facebook groups and online communities, but in person events are lacking and allow for more nuanced interaction and discussion</li> </ul> <p><b>Doing stalls which is "a great way to get members involved and speaking to each other" ACORN tenant</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement with tenants has been a priority – nobody making enquiries went unheard.</li> <li>Tenants are more informed and can develop a more powerful position when interacting with landlords</li> </ul> <p><b>“I turned to ACORN because it was important for me to have community support in resisting this rent hike. While I knew that I was entitled to better treatment from my landlord &amp; letting agent, I didn’t feel confident that I could successfully fight for that outcome alone. I’m really grateful that I’ve been able to access ACORN’S support, especially since we had no meaningful response from the letting agent until after ACORN got involved.”</b> End of grant report, p6</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Huge momentum made during pandemic: ACORN had 375 donating members in Manchester but grew to 763.</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engagement with tenants has expanded. 83 tenants have been worked with resulting in 1,050 interventions and actions made including, eg support to attend appointments, referrals to foodbanks and phone calls to check wellbeing. 427 money management interventions have been made for 61 people. 609 housing actions have been made with 56 people – including help to register for housing, 9 people supported to move into new accommodation 13 times (a number have moved more than once). (end of grant report, p6)</li> <li>Information packs have been provided to 50 tenants information in the packs about different services available to residents has given them the tools to access these independently. (end of grant report, p6)</li> <li>The funding has helped Justlife shift to empowering tenants to seek accurate information independently.</li> </ul> <p><b>“This new approach has encouraged a real step change for Justlife – moving further away from a ‘hand-out’/ crisis service, to a more empowering independence fostering one”</b> End of grant report, p7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Justlife has made 225 referrals to other services for 57 people: 2 mental health, 4</li> </ul>
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<sup>3</sup> Kesia Reeve and Emma Bimpson et al (2001) *Local authority enforcement in the private rented sector*

**“We saw a lot of growth during the pandemic as members joined to be involved in the mutual aid and eviction resistance work”** End of grant report, p5

- Offered multiple learning and development opportunities – online case support training, negotiation training, committee leadership training, resisting eviction training. 85 people attended resisting eviction training.

**“Building the power to tenants individually and collectively”** ACORN staff

- Tenants who have received training will be more informed of their rights and communication skills when interacting with landlords and lettings agent, such as negotiation.

**“I used to just accept things, the government is doing this, the council is just this, the landlord is just doing this to me, the toilet won't be fixed but now I'm part of a union and I won't take it because I have power ... it trains members up to be powerful”** ACORN member

- Empower by giving responsibility, by asking people to do things; they'll support tenants through training; help tenants learn to identify where problems are coming from.

**“We have seen people who have been really empowered by understanding and knowing their rights and then they're helping other people with the issues they face. It's quite powerful to see”** ACORN staff

**“It's nice to feel like you're not alone in that situation. It's hard to come by information, like what's the right thing to do? It's nice to feel like you're amongst people who would be able to help you out**

physical health, 9 legal advice, 2 meaningful activity referrals, 1 substance misuse service, 10 tenant referrals to supported accommodation, 97 other housing providers.

- Working more closely with people leaving prison: in the last six months working more closely with GM probation and GMCA, such as working closely with 9 referrals.

**with support or information or knowledge” ACORN tenant**

- Some members are developing leadership

**“We are pleased with the engagement of our membership, and particularly pleased with the development of leadership that we have seen. Many members now lead on case support, and our committee have developed into excellent leaders who are now taking much of the responsibility for running an effective renter support network in the city.” End of grant report, p9**



- Residents were given small cards that contained information on the housing standards they should be expecting from private landlords.

**“When we started, some tenants didn’t even know who their landlord was or have tenancy agreements. We can see a positive change and its reassuring that the approach does work. But there’s still so much to do” Wigan staff**

- Working towards it; regular catch up; giving lots of communication – very proactive and positive; lots of engagement – conversation; tenants champion in each area
- In the summer months, the Tenants Champion expanded their network using an outreach approach. Community engagement was paying off.

**“Working closely with Leigh Neighbours and speaking to the local schools enabled the Tenants Champion to carry out several engagement events, either at the end of the school day in all three schools to support residents as well as Leigh Market and Spinning Gate in Leigh town centre” End of grant report, p2**

- Slow steady work can build trust.

**“The project found that by door knocking 1–2 times a week it helped to increase the trust in the area and establish the Tenants Champion as a familiar face in the area. This has been possible with the support of different agencies i.e. wellbeing team, housing standard team, ethical lettings staff and environmental team as well as different stakeholders portraying a visible outreach in the community. This then encouraged residents on the project area to speak to staff when out and about and engaging in polite conversation that provided invaluable information to the staff.”**

- Individual tenants feel powerless against a private landlord - if they have support from people on their street - a collective strength to support each other. The tenants champion can facilitate that - support them (stakeholder)

- Provides reassurance to tenants or somewhere to go, a safe space to speak to somebody; build trust
- Believes the project has worked well; having someone designated - a go to person really helped Wigan stakeholder
- Area walk-about with project worker and environmental health officer to identify properties in a poor state, then contacting landlords to spell out issues that need addressing. This led to improvements, with about 6 or 7 of 10 properties identified

## Challenges

There have been varying levels of empowerment across the projects, though also limitations based on the scale of engagement.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ACORN</b> <small>ASSOCIATION OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS FOR REFORM NOW</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Huge momentum made during pandemic but was a challenge to sustain or capitalise later in pandemic.</li> </ul> <p><b>“During the second half of the pandemic we grew less quickly, with Zoom fatigue and some continuity problems due to staff turnover.”</b> End of grant report, p5</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not able to do door-knocking during early pandemic.</li> </ul> <p><b>“Due to COVID-19 lockdowns, we had to suspend door knocking for much of the grant period; since lockdown has eased this has restarted.”</b> End of grant report, p2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ People exhausted after Covid, including other mutual aid provided.</li> </ul> <p><b>“Such a hard time for everyone”</b> ACORN staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pursuing difficulties with landlords can still be a lengthy legal process. Not always straightforward, which people can find intimidating and stressful.</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"> <b>Justlife</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Empowering tenants with information packs doesn't work for everyone.</li> <li>▪ Tried to provide tenants forums but they didn't happen.</li> <li>▪ Tenants with complex need can limit their engagement with wider services.</li> </ul> <p><b>“Challenges do, of course, remain for people with multiple and complex needs living in this unregulated and at times chaotic accommodation and low levels of confidence and managing drug/alcohol addictions and poor mental health can still prevent people from addressing their issues or engaging with the services that are available to them.”</b> End of grant report, p7</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Looking at how quickly people can be evicted, so talked about reasonable notice, court orders etc</li> </ul>
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- Building trust in communities is slow. Referrals totalled 77 but most (56) came in the last six month of the project. (end of grant report, p2)

**“They have achieved a lot in the short time they’ve had. The fault is the amount of time, it should be extended, this was a trial. It needs to be longer”** Wigan stakeholder (community group)

- Litter-pick events were mainly attended by individuals connected to organisations but not residents.
- Drop-in sessions, especially during Covid, didn’t work.
- COVID-19 limited engagement.

**“The main challenge faced was Covid-19 and the subsequent omicron variant this prevented the staff from attending the project area and engaging with residents and then stopping us delivering the project as planned. We noticed a shift in the community sensitivity around engagement and the residents were extremely cautious when taking part in events or even answering questions on their doorstep.”** End of grant report, p8

- The Queen’s death impacted ability to promote work.
- Some tenants don’t know where to go for support and have no access to the internet to find this information.
- Some tenants are scared, reluctant or don’t know where to ask for help.
- To identify who is the landlord, “a lot of legwork that goes in, a lot of admin”



## Realist summary

Pulling together the findings from above, this summary (and in later sections) outlines the particular context and activities that have led to the outcome, this time on empowering tenants. We've done this project by project. Presenting it in this way should help to transfer the findings to other settings where the context is comparable.

Project	Context	Activities
ACORN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor state of (older) properties</li> <li>Unequal power relationship, especially S21</li> </ul> <p><b>"[landlords] know you are struggling so they know you won't complain"</b> Tenant survey</p> <p><b>"I can't afford rent rises which will happen soon, I'm less likely to talk about my concerns as [my landlord] will put up my rent more"</b> Bond Board tenant</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covid and desire for mutual aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach + door knocking</li> <li>Support around individual cases</li> <li>Training up tenants to collectively support each other</li> <li>Public accountability</li> </ul>

Project	Context	Activities
Wigan Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closeknit community in Leigh</li> <li>Condition of the properties “is really, really poor” (Wigan staff)</li> <li>Tenants sometimes have a very basic level of information: some residents didn’t even have landlord’s details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Persistent face-to-face engagement in the community, including existing community events</li> <li>Tenant champion in the community</li> </ul>
Justlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenants with complex needs</li> </ul> <p><b>“It’s probably not at the forefront of their mind, they’ve probably had other issues going on, mental health, there’s a couple of complex cases, and Covid as well, they might have just pushed it out of their mind, they have that bubble and they don’t want to let anyone in, that was a bit of an eye opener” Wigan staff</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rather than empowerment, ongoing support is needed, including partnership working with other agencies</li> </ul>



# Improving communication

Improving communications between tenants, landlords and letting agents directly is considered key to improving the renting journey for tenants. Good communication between all parties enables a transparent relationship, where everyone knows their responsibilities and that each party is keeping to their agreements. This objective is considered crucial in avoiding misunderstandings, misconceptions and generating suspicion and fear between parties.

## Activities

All five funded projects covered this objective although this was seen as more of an aspirational and long-term goal. Moreover, whilst the projects did cover this objective, staff commented that it was difficult to monitor in their work as often any direct communication tenants had with their landlord or letting agents was more personal and outside of their scope.



- Empowering tenants through training and face to face workshops with other tenants was considered crucial in increasing tenants confidence to liaise directly with landlords and letting agents.
- Raising tenant awareness regarding their rights and responsibilities as well as landlord/letting agents responsibilities allowed for greater clarity regarding raising issues with landlords/letting agents.
- Mutual tenant support for each other through face to face tenant workshops, fairs, campaigning and tenant forums increased tenant knowledge and expectations of the renting journey.

**“When we come together we help each other out. We’re here to support each other and can help each other...There’s people that have been through it [PRS] so can offer first hand advice”** ACORN member



- This specific project was designed to learn more about landlord perspectives and to assist landlords with difficulties they may face including communication with tenants
- Training sessions with landlords discussing their roles and responsibilities and clarifying tenants roles contributed towards clearer communication and expectations.

**“Covid gave us opportunities”** Bond Board staff

- The provision on mediation to help landlords and tenants was considered a good way to bring parties together and to try and help resolve issues and improve communication

**“Working with landlords was a new role for us....it was good to learn more about how they see things and what their concerns are”** Bond Board staff





- Activities mainly focused on empowering tenants and raising their awareness of the renting journey, although attempts to engage more with landlords was developed to broaden understanding and build relationships.
- Have decided it's better to meet at community centres/cafes - encourages them to engage in local community
- A landlord forum was set up as a network for landlords to share experiences and offer ongoing advice and support.

## Salford City Council

- This project focused on supporting landlords and assisting them to improve their experiences of the renting journey including retaining tenants.
- Although the project aim was to look at issues relating to anti-social behaviour, the activities were able to cover a range of topics.
- Through online training and online resources, landlords were able to access a range of tools and techniques which will also help them respond to tenant queries and avoid misinterpretations.

**“We laid out what landlords should do, the steps to take, their roles - its all part of improving the experience”** Salford staff



- Organised numerous landlord events to build relationships
- By working with both landlords/letting agents and tenants the project was in a strong position to understand all perspectives.
- The landlords forum and associated ethical letting agents (although the latter was not funded as part of the project) was able to generate landlord/letting agents concerns, difficulties and provide peer led advice and support.
- A multi-agency MS Teams group working with environmental health, housing standards and the police.
- Saw role as in between tenant and landlord, “in the middle”; don’t want to create more tension, “want things to flow”

**“Where Section 21 given, landlords have been willing to talk and negotiate”** Wigan staff

- Information packs were provided to landlords/letting agents and tenants outlining key rights and responsibilities.

**“The information pack was really good. The style, tone, everything. It’s a really good resource”**  
Wigan landlord

- Door-knocking was the most effective way to engage with residents locally, to hear about issues.

## Challenges

Overall all projects found this objective very hard to measure. All project encountered difficulties in engaging directly with landlords and found building and maintaining regular contact and relationships difficult especially as this relationship was new to the organisations.

<div data-bbox="338 461 657 539" data-label="Image"> </div> <ul data-bbox="209 566 775 1171" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ This objective was considered more problematic in relation to others as it was felt direct communication per se was layered with power dynamics which was hard to capture and monitor</li> <li>▪ Tenants reported feeling more confident in raising issues directly with their landlords</li> <li>▪ Whilst tenants felt more empowered and had more awareness regarding rights, responsibilities and communicating with landlords. No tangible evidence was produced to measure how direct communication was improved during the project as this was not specifically monitored.</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="209 1211 759 1361"> <b>“This is a tough one really. It’s not just about the communication, you have to address the power dynamics. Unless you deal with that, communication will always be fraught.”</b> </p> <p data-bbox="209 1373 357 1402">ACORN staff</p>	<div data-bbox="903 468 1289 580" data-label="Image"> </div> <ul data-bbox="815 620 1386 857" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mediation is seen as positive to help improve direct communication and to understand each other’s perspectives. This activity</li> <li>▪ Actively promote the needs of tenants when illegal evictions are at play</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="812 893 1391 1498"> <b>“We have advised landlords and managing agents around the threat of illegal evictions and the repercussions - one particular case referred to the project was from a tenant child's school advising that the child had reported a threat of eviction. We were able to contact the letting agent and landlord and advised them of the Protection from Eviction &amp; Harassment Act and provided a mediation role - assisted the tenant with referrals to CAB for debt advice; updating Universal Credit with correct tenancy details and declarations in order to get the correct amount of housing costs paid to reduce rent arrears.”</b> End of project report p10         </p>
<div data-bbox="312 1507 678 1601" data-label="Image"> </div> <ul data-bbox="209 1624 751 1984" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No specific issues from landlords were raised regarding how to improve their communication with their tenants</li> <li>▪ Engaging and keeping regular communication and momentum with landlords was reported to be harder than initially anticipated</li> <li>▪ This objective was not specifically monitored as it was felt defining what is</li> </ul>	<div data-bbox="826 1507 1374 1621" data-label="Image"> </div> <ul data-bbox="815 1641 1382 2000" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There was no specific module on improving direct communication with tenants, although it is expected that by attending the training communication will be improved</li> <li>▪ Evidence has been produced regarding the effectiveness of the training; however, there was no direct follow up work to measure how relationships and direct</li> </ul>

<p>‘improved communication’ including from what baseline was very difficult to establish</p> <p><b>“We’ve been asking tenants about this objective and it’s still unclear at this stage. It’s hard to determine if communication has improved although they do tell us their experiences have improved”</b> Justlife staff</p>	<p>communication between landlords and tenants was improved, seen as beyond the scope of the project.</p> <p><b>“I would like further longitudinal attitudes studies to really measure the impact of this. I feel this outcome is further down the line”</b> Salford staff</p>
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- Communication between Wigan council and landlords and Wigan Council and tenants saw improvements over the course of the project due to activities. However, direct communication between landlords and tenants was difficult to measure.
- Planned Q and A sessions between landlords and tenants did not take place. Overall it was felt that more time was needed to build the relationships of trust with individual tenants and relationships before bringing people together for this session.
- By working with both landlords and tenants equally can create a difficult relationship as can the Council realistically provide equal support to both groups.

**Residents in area “notoriously reluctant” to come forward** Wigan stakeholder

**“Lots of people just keeping their heads above water, every day is a struggle, the stress and emotional strain is so hard on people, you need to appreciate that. Everything feels overwhelming - so someone asking about their house is hard to engage with.”** Wigan community organisation

- Loads to do to educate, inform, make aware

**“We found this hard to monitor. We tried to support tenants and landlords separately but not sure whether or how their direct communication with each other was affected.”** Wigan staff

- An ongoing issue with one local resident had limited the project’s ability to engage in that neighbourhood.

## Realist summary

Project	Context	Activities
ACORN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of transparency of decisions</li> <li>▪ Delays in landlord actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Training up tenants</li> <li>▪ Mutual tenant support</li> </ul>
Bond Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of a focus on landlords</li> <li>▪ Need to get landlords on-side</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Provide individual support to landlords</li> <li>▪ Mediation between landlords and tenants</li> </ul>
Justlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Both landlords and tenants acknowledge there is a need to improve the renting journey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Landlord forum + continued need to build relationships with landlords</li> </ul>

Project	Context	Activities
Salford Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of understanding among and resources for landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online training modules act as a resource as and when issues arise</li> <li>Wider range of topics than originally planned</li> </ul>
Wigan Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Previous disengagement with council</li> <li>Lack of understanding among some landlords and letting agents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working directly with tenants, landlords and letting agents allows the council to create a holistic understanding of different perspectives</li> <li>Intermediary role between tenants and landlords</li> <li>Multi-agency working</li> </ul>

# Supporting landlords



A key focus of this programme has been on empowering tenants. But supporting landlords was another objective that stemmed from the earlier mapping exercise. This was particularly to improve landlord awareness of regulation and enforcement, supporting improved communication with tenants (the last objective) and therefore changing landlord behaviour with priority tenants.

## Context

The private rented sector is complex and landlords and letting agents working in this field have a range of motivations, behaviours and practices. This is not a homogenous group of people and there is often a risk that stereotypes and assumptions persist with this group. We know there is an increase in the number of landlords with small portfolios and those who inherited properties. There are many individuals who are new to the sector and may be unfamiliar with legislation and where to find help. In addition, recent legal changes, legislation and local licencing compliance can also add to confusion to landlords. The Fair Housing Futures funding allowed local projects to support landlords through these changes and provide one to one support to ensure they know where to seek clarity.

## Activities

Four funded projects covered this objective, with two turning to online training due to the Covid pandemic.

 <p>Engagement with landlords was strong</p> <p><b>“We successfully delivered this outcome: we delivered group training to 226 landlords and PRS professionals over the course of the project. A further 24 landlords and PRS professionals have had 1:1 support and advice around Universal Credit and housing costs - this has covered a total of 32 tenancies.”</b> End of project report</p> <p><b>“Providing support for landlords takes time - new approach - working with landlords was a</b></p>	 <p><b>“Landlords are important, they matter, they are part of this and you can't ignore them - we can't be anti landlord”</b> Justlife staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Intensive support for residents in a small number of properties</li><li>Landlord forum has evolved and has included presentation from Groundwork on making buildings more energy efficient</li><li>Provided hard copy of landlord pack to 15 landlords</li></ul> <p><b>“Feedback from landlords regarding the landlord pack was limited but positive</b></p>
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**new role for us....it was good to learn more about how they see things and what their concerns are”** Bond Board staff

- Shift to online working – here for the long term

**“Online learning ... made training more accessible ... Landlord feedback has been positive indicating an increase in knowledge on the relevant training subject attended”**

End of project report

- Went to court hearing with landlord after 13 months of unpaid rent, with the Bond Board staff member advising
- Want to create a menu of choices for landlords, floating support, empty property, advice for landlords – about getting tenant in through the door – proud of being market leader in ideas; help to broaden reach for Bond Board

**“It gave us an opportunity to renew some of the intangible work with landlords”; about building up trust and relationship.** Bond Board staff

**comments were received about how the information was presented. The feedback received indicated that landlords were not consulting the packs for information relating to housing rights or complaints procedures, but there were instances where service information was referred to.”** In-house evaluation p6

- A landlord asked for help from Justlife about financial abuse of a tenant, resulting in advice about legal steps and how else to support the abused tenant

**“We cannot be certain that the Landlord isn’t continuing to take illegal actions ‘in support’ of his residents, but it was good to be able to have a frank and open discussion about this with him and to explain that by taking these action she was not only acting illegally and removing financial independence from his resident, but that he was also opening himself up to a criminal investigation.”** End of grant report p7

## Salford City Council

- Engagement with landlords – good numbers

**“To date over 50 landlords have been trained in professional tenancy ASB management covering 700 properties and 2,000 tenants”**

End of grant report, p6

- Online engagement is useful for landlords

**“The online training was launched in April 2022 and there remains much potential to vastly increase training uptake amongst landlords due to the accessibility of the training product developed.”** End of grant report p8

**“I went on the [Salford] course and thought it was brilliant, I learnt a lot from it and**



- Staff have discovered that landlords are inclined to leave the market due to increased regulation, compliance on top of frequently encountered scenarios where tenants are leaving properties in extensive disrepair. These situations have presented opportunities to promote the ethical landlords agency.
- Developing dialogue with landlords helped to resolve issues without the need for enforcement action, in six cases, with a further one resolved after progressing to enforcement
- Landlords started asking for help around compliance on property conditions and sending tenant agreements

**really enjoyed the process. I definitely feel more prepared and equipped”**

Salford landlord

- Covid prompted online delivery which now represents opportunities for scaling up

**“Covid forced us to develop the product into an online training platform but this in turn means the product can be made more easily available. There is an ongoing need to promote the free training offer and to support landlords to complete the training. We have not incentivised the scheme but this remains an option for taking the training forward”**

**“A high quality bespoke training product has been produced which allows landlords to self certify their competence.”** End of grant report

- A landlord said she “loved” the training and thought the Council officer was especially helpful, someone she could go to as and when she needed something or for advice.

**“Landlords have improved ASB case management for individual referrals”** End of grant report

- Provided support around non-legal interventions, eg tenancy sustainment, enforcement, tools and powers

## Challenges

Several projects stated that they wanted a larger engagement with landlords, though struggled with this at times.



- Sector changed with Covid; “affordability blown out of the water”, rent going up higher than benefits; bond scheme



- Lower turn out than expected at landlord engagement events

**“We lost contact with some landlords during the pandemic due to various reasons such as**

<p>changed, eg £300 bond won't get you anywhere now; sector harder to engage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Somewhat limited feedback following courses</li> <li>▪ Engagement with some councils better than others</li> </ul> <p><b>In Oldham PRS sits separately from homelessness and housing advice; it can become "quite messy"</b> Bond Board staff</p>	<p><b>the temporary or permanent closure of the hostels"</b> Internal evaluation, p10</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Resistance from some landlords</li> </ul> <p><b>"Some landlords are resistant to receiving support themselves or for their tenants to receive support."</b> End of project report</p> <p><b>"Some landlords seem suspicious about engaging with us. This makes it hard"</b> Justlife staff</p>
<p><b>Salford City Council</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hard to get landlords to do training - need more to be trained</li> <li>▪ Feeling from staff that good landlords want to do training but "rouge" landlords are not interested yet need training the most</li> </ul> <p><b>"We find that good landlords want to do it, but the more, let's say 'rogue' don't. This is a challenge for anyone working to build up standards"</b> Salford CC staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not in a position to show that the training has stopped evictions, something they hoped to be able to demonstrate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Wigan Council</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Engagement with landlords has been limited, with further impact due to the Queen's death and it's knock-on effect on council communications</li> </ul> <p><b>"Although, the relationship with landlords has improved, we still feel that there is further work to be carried out."</b> End of project report, p5</p>

## Realist summary

Project	Context	Activities
Bond Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Covid interrupted in-person training</li> <li>▪ Wider changes in the sector</li> </ul> <p><b>Renters Reform Bill a prime opportunity to "engage with landlords again"</b> Bond Board staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online training for landlords</li> <li>▪ Menu of choices for landlords</li> </ul>
Justlife	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tenants, who have additional challenges, often accept poor conditions and are too afraid to ask questions</li> <li>▪ Resistance from landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Closer working with a small number of landlords</li> </ul>



Project	Context	Activities
Salford Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Covid interrupted in-person training</li> <li>▪ Landlord need for practical support and tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online training for landlords. Allowed landlords to access at a time convenient to them and as and when issues arise</li> </ul>
Wigan Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Landlords inclined to leave the market</li> <li>▪ Landlords not always told of issues by letting agent</li> <li>▪ Sometimes landlords and agents don't know what their responsibilities are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Face to face work with the community allowed opportunities to raise questions and seek advice informally</li> <li>▪ Providing support to landlords facilitates a more nuanced relationship with the council and increased likelihood of cooperation</li> </ul>

# Breaking the stigma

Breaking the stigma of renting privately was another of the objectives that came out of the original mapping exercise, particularly for vulnerable tenants and those in receipt of benefits. 'No DSS' is still seen in adverts for rentals.

## Context

Stigma in the private rented sector has been reported by tenants for many years although specific research on this, how it manifests and its impact is more limited. The process of stigma involves negative stereotypes, labelling and for many, this stigma means private rented sector landlords will not take certain individuals as tenants. The most notable is when landlords refuse to take tenants who are in receipt of certain benefits due to assumptions that their tenancy will be more complicated and potentially more problematic. Stigma may sometimes be explicit but is more often implicit and hidden.

**“No compassion or caring for others”; good housing: “it’s a human right” Wigan staff**

However, some people we spoke to said that there isn’t stigma or that it’s “not as bad as made out”, a council employee said. Some landlords do prefer tenants on benefits as this can provide guaranteed rent.

## Activities

Three of the five funded projects covered this objective; however, all three reported that this objective was difficult to measure. Stigma is social and attitudinal, requiring time to address and alter negative perceptions.



- Actively engaged around stigma by focusing on structural drivers, such as systemic inequality, and not just individual actions
- Carrying out campaigns on the principles of an issue being broadly and deeply felt and winnable. Property standards are an example, eg kids with mouldy duvets, or evictions, which can be “very stressful and damaging”



- Actively promoting the needs of tenants when illegal evictions are at play
- Although some landlords said they didn't want to take anyone on benefits, speaking to them individually has highlighted the little difference between tenants who are or are not working

	<p><b>“We’re still finding some landlords can be funny about talking to certain tenants. To be honest they’re mainly worried about the money but we explain to them that they’ll definitely get paid”</b> Bond Board staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fine line about rents going up, including how to raise rent responsibly and supporting tenants around DHP support</li> </ul> <p><b>“Didn’t duck difficult subject matters but we did it in a responsible way”</b> Bond Board staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relationships have been developed with other councils</li> </ul> <p><b>“A lot more progress has been made on this. We have developed a good working relationship with Bolton, Rochdale and Wigan Local Authorities taking on cases for mediation and providing a soft touch approach with landlords to improve property conditions without the need for council enforcement.”</b> End of grant report, p10</p>
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- Gathering intelligence on the issues being faced

**“The data gathered has helped us create a greater idea of the PRS properties within the project area as well as holding the correct information for the landlords.”** End of grant report

- Engagement with other departments in the council, local businesses and third sector
- Although beyond the scope of the Test & Learn programme, Wigan Council also runs an ethical lettings scheme. It has about 80 properties on its books, leased for five years. They give properties to people on their housing register. After five years, the tenancy can either continue or the tenant can then apply for a council property.

## Challenges

For this objective, a number of the challenges are external, including around Covid.

 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More abstract subjects are harder to get involved with, such as charters of standards and a landlord register</li> <li>Originally hoped to deliver a 'Yes to DSS' campaign but didn't have the capacity for this with the pandemic</li> </ul>	 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covid 19 created large-scale challenges across the sector and for those working in the sector.</li> </ul> <p><b>"Covid 19 created a huge challenge during the period of the grant, in particular the closure of the housing market for rentals, changing housing legislation relating to landlord legal requirements, the restrictions in seeing people face to face and working from home and furlough for many individuals, creating financial hardship and needing assistance"</b> End of grant report, p11</p>
 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building trust in communities is slow</li> </ul> <p><b>"It takes time to build that trust"</b> Wigan staff</p> <p><b>"They have achieved a lot in the short time they've had. The fault is the amount of time, it should be extended, this was a trial. It needs to be longer"</b> Wigan stakeholder (community group)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Some tenants still don't want to rock the boat, so reluctant to engage</li> </ul>	

## Realist summary

Project	Context	Activities
ACORN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Unequal power relationship, especially S21</li> </ul> <p><b>Tenants are willing to put up with mould and other problems "so long as it's not dilapidated"</b> ACORN tenant</p> <p><b>"[landlords] know you are struggling so they know you won't complain"</b> Tenant survey</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Focus on structural drivers like inequality</li> <li>Campaigning</li> </ul>

Project	Context	Activities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Covid absorbing energy</li> </ul>	
Bond Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Challenges caused by Covid</li> <li>▪ Challenge of rents rising</li> </ul> <p><b>“I can’t afford rent rises which will happen soon, I’m less likely to talk about my concerns as [my landlord] will put up my rent more” Bond Board tenant</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Actively promoting tenants on benefits</li> <li>▪ Balance between advising landlords and supporting tenants</li> </ul>
Wigan Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Building trust takes time, which is limited with this funding</li> <li>▪ Some tenants remain reluctant to engage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wider engagement with other stakeholders</li> <li>▪ Ethical lettings scheme</li> </ul>

# Conclusions

This evaluation set out to show the learning from the Test & Learn Grant Fund projects in addressing the problems in the private rented sector. Importantly, this is about influencing changing in practice and policy in Greater Manchester and nationally.

## Learning from the projects

The first section here is to show the learning from the five funded projects. They have all worked in different ways and different circumstances. We've therefore highlighted a top success for each project below and some of the key challenges they've faced. This is a fairer presentation in a realist evaluation approach.

Project	Top success	Challenges
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mobilising mutual support among tenants who alone feel powerless</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited face-to-face engagement during Covid</li> <li>People exhausted after Covid</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engaging with landlords, opening up opportunities to house tenants from their other work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>External pressures to the market with Covid, rent rises and future reform</li> <li>Engagement with some councils better than others</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing support to clients with additional challenges who need extra support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Everyday challenges of tenants with complex needs</li> <li>Resistance from some landlords</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Delivering a wide range of online training materials for landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Still lots of landlords to educate, including "rogue" ones</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rooting Tenant Champion in the community and becoming trusted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Building trust in communities is slow</li> <li>Covid limited some engagement</li> <li>Some tenants simply don't want to engage</li> </ul>

## Driving practice

One element of this evaluation has been to draw out lessons to expand practice across Greater Manchester and further afield. Lots of evaluations simply try to show the success of projects and then seek to transport those same initiatives elsewhere. Instead, we've used a realist evaluation approach to present the findings around practice. This seeks to unearth what works for whom and in what circumstances.

For both tenants and landlords, there is often a demand for information, advice and support at a point of crisis. This can be the threat of an eviction or following months of rent arrears. It leads to reactive rather than a proactive response from all concerned. While this may be inevitable, it can be useful to focus on different points in the rental journey when considering activities with landlords, letting agents and tenants. Alongside this, there is real merit in understanding your local PRS, including a more segmented approach towards landlords. For example, new landlords and the large proportion owning just a single property should be some of the most receptive to information to increase their awareness.

The summary below therefore pulls out the relevant context and activities that have led to objectives being achieved. It therefore provides a sounder way to match the local context elsewhere and attempt to repeat the same activities to achieve the intended outcomes.

Context	Activities	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Poor state of (older) properties</li> <li>Unequal power relationship, especially S21</li> <li>Covid and desire for mutual aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outreach + door knocking</li> <li>Support around individual cases</li> <li>Training up tenants to collectively support each other</li> <li>Public accountability</li> </ul>	Empowering tenants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closeknit community in Leigh</li> <li>Condition of the properties "is really, really poor" (Wigan staff)</li> <li>Tenants sometimes have a very basic level of information: some residents didn't even have landlord's details</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Persistent face-to-face engagement in the community, including existing community events</li> <li>Tenant champion in the community</li> </ul>	Empowering tenants
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenants with complex needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Rather than empowerment, ongoing support is needed, including partnership working with other agencies</li> </ul>	Supporting tenants with complex needs

Context	Activities	Objectives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of transparency of decisions</li> <li>Delays in landlord actions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Training up tenants</li> <li>Mutual tenant support</li> </ul>	Improving communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of a focus on landlords</li> <li>Need to get landlords on-side</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide individual support to landlords</li> <li>Mediation between landlords and tenants</li> </ul>	Improving communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both landlords and tenants acknowledge there is a need to improve the renting journey</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landlord forum + continued need to build relationships with landlords</li> </ul>	Improving communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of understanding among and resources for landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online training modules act as a resource as and when issues arise</li> <li>Wider range of topics than originally planned</li> </ul>	Improving communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Previous disengagement with council</li> <li>Lack of understanding among some landlords and letting agents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Working directly with tenants, landlords and letting agents allows the council to create a holistic understanding of different perspectives</li> <li>Intermediary role between tenants and landlords</li> <li>Multi-agency working</li> </ul>	Improving communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covid interrupted in-person training</li> <li>Wider changes in the sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online training for landlords</li> <li>Menu of choices for landlords</li> </ul>	Supporting landlords
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tenants, who have additional challenges, often accept poor conditions and are too afraid to ask questions</li> <li>Resistance from landlords</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Closer working with a small number of landlords</li> </ul>	Supporting landlords
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Covid interrupted in-person training</li> <li>Landlord need for practical support and tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online training for landlords. Allowed landlords to access at a time convenient to them and as and when issues arise</li> </ul>	Supporting landlords
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Landlords inclined to leave the market</li> <li>Landlords not always told of issues by letting agent</li> <li>Sometimes landlords and agents don't know what their responsibilities are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Face to face work with the community allowed opportunities to raise questions and seek advice informally</li> <li>Providing support to landlords facilitates a more nuanced relationship with the council and</li> </ul>	Supporting landlords



Context	Activities	Objectives
	increased likelihood of cooperation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unequal power relationship, especially S21</li> <li>▪ Covid absorbing energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Focus on structural drivers like inequality</li> <li>▪ Campaigning</li> </ul>	Breaking the stigma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Challenges caused by Covid</li> <li>▪ Challenge of rents rising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Actively promoting tenants on benefits</li> <li>▪ Balance between advising landlords and supporting tenants</li> </ul>	Breaking the stigma
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Building trust takes time, limited with this funding</li> <li>▪ Some tenants remain reluctant to engage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Wider engagement with other stakeholders</li> <li>▪ (Ethical lettings scheme)</li> </ul>	Breaking the stigma

## Influencing Policy

A key part of this evaluation has been to draw out insight to support wider influencing activity, especially by the Fair Housing Futures Partnership Board. Here we summarise the key points pulled across all elements of this evaluation.

- **Actively engaging with landlords is crucial.** There remain newcomers to the market who do not fully understand their responsibilities as a landlord and sometimes aren't informed of problems by their letting agent. While there remains an anti-landlord stance generally, this can also increase the stigma of renting privately.
- **Enforcement** hasn't been a key feature in the Test & Learn projects – with Wigan as a notable exception – but landlords who are least likely to safeguard their tenants are also the hardest to engage with. It is here where enforcement needs to concentrate on, especially given that the PRS exhibits the highest proportion of non-decent homes of any tenure.

While this has been a Test & Learn programme, it has been a **time-limited** one by design. However, there are real challenges in this around funding, particularly for local authorities as they brace for further funding challenges in the next few years. A move back to focusing on just statutory services will often result in perceived add-on services being lost or forgotten. This includes more proactive engagement with private landlords and wider support for tenants.

**“I hope it sustains...but that is an ideal world”** Wigan staff

**“When the funding stops the project will die. The council won't take it on as they are already reducing housing staff. There is a need for all this work but who will take it forward?”** Salford CC staff

**Housing is not an issue in isolation.** It also affects health and wellbeing, schooling, neighbourhood safety and much more. This therefore demands strong engagement and collaboration across service.

Landlords have reported to project that they are concerned about rising costs and fear future rental reform. Both could motivate landlords to **pull out of the private rented sector**. If others are not willing or able to take over these rentals, it can lead to increased evictions, rising homelessness and a more limited stock to house people in the sector. Although these may be empty threats, deregulation (Housing Act 1988) and new financial products (buy to let mortgages) spurred the growth in the PRS from 1989, so regulation and financial limitations could do the opposite today.

**“It’s a housing crisis for tenants, not landlords”** ACORN staff

**“A safe, stable, healthy home rather than an asset to generate profit”** ACORN staff

The **tone** when working in the PRS **is important**. There can be a difficult balancing act for projects or organisations supporting both tenants and landlords. This doesn’t preclude organisations from doing this but it does need considering. A similar message is needed for local authorities, which both deliver both enforcement activities towards landlords and engagement opportunities. For charities working in the sector, there is a need to recognise that landlords are still needed in order to house tenants in private rentals. Yes, delivering a higher supply of social housing is an alternative – as made clear from the co-production workshop – but not an immediate one, nor a viable one given current government policy.

A recurring theme we have seen throughout the evaluation has been the **unequal power dynamics** between tenants and landlord. For some tenants, they still feel there is more to lose than gain. This fear is likely to be exacerbated over the coming months with the cost of living crisis, inflation and expected recession. People are genuinely worried their rent will increase and become unaffordable. Landlords are also wary of increasing mortgage costs. The Renters Reform Bill provides some further safeguards in this area, though it remains a Bill and will need to be policed locally.

The Fair Housing Futures Test & Learn projects have managed to test different approaches to addressing challenges in the private rented sector in parts of Greater Manchester. They offer guides about what has and hasn’t worked to empower tenants, support landlords, improve communications and look at stigma of renting privately. There is still plenty more work to tackle these challenges in the local authorities they were tested and across Greater Manchester more widely. We hope this report provides further evidence to provide a legacy from these projects.

# Appendix 1 – Research approach

## Research aims

The aim of the research is to understand what approaches are and aren't effective in addressing problems in the PRS at a local level. Your more details objectives for this project have been:

- Drawing on the Test and Learn Grant Funded (TLGF) projects, build an understanding of what works and what doesn't when addressing challenges in the PRS at a local level. This should be done by speaking to both landlords and tenants within Greater Manchester and considering challenges from both angles.
- Understand and analyse the specific approaches taken by each project and the problems in the PRS they were seeking to address (linking back directly to the problems identified in the mapping exercise).
- Understand to what extent the approaches taken by each project were effective in addressing problems in the PRS, assessing effectiveness from the perspective of the tenants engaged in each project.
- Bring tenant's voices into debates around the PRS in GM by engaging them closely in the research, including using peer research approaches as appropriate, to understand their experiences of the TLGF projects.
- Suggest potential recommendations for policy and advocacy to be considered by the Programme Board of FHF.
- A clear definition of what success looks like from a tenant's perspective when projects seek to resolve problems in the PRS.
- A comprehensive review of the TLGF projects' approaches and outcomes, answering the question of what approaches have been successful and what have not in addressing problems in the PRS.
- Clear learning from FHF as a whole, linking together the problems identified during the mapping exercise and the solutions tested by the TLGF projects, and foregrounding tenants' voices in this learning.

## Methodology

In order to explore the views of perspectives of stakeholders and tenants we adapted a qualitative approach. Particular attention was given to hear the voices of tenants and we tried to establish co-production panels and peer researchers as set out in the original plans. Each project established a key contact and identified staff members who could act as gatekeepers to help identify the sample. As the project progressed, it became clear that engagement of tenants, landlords and staff would prove problematic for the following key reasons:

- Staff were extremely busy with their own workloads and pressures of their job, plus planned leave during the summer months, which impacted on their availability.
- Some of the projects had finished and staff involved in the project has since left the organisation. Other projects were coming to an end and staff were moving on to other opportunities.

- Some project had done their own evaluation and felt that additional asks of staff, tenants and landlords would be detrimental to their work and relationships.
- Tenants have more pressing issues and concerns. This research was conducted during a cost of living crisis, whilst the country is in recession and in the aftermath of COVID. As a consequence, tenants often find hard to engage in and commit to research. In addition, as this report will discuss, many tenants get involved at times of crisis and their exchange with services is often transactional. This leaves many tenants quite apathetic to discussions.
- The majority of projects had experienced low engagement from landlords which was also reflected in this research. Again, landlord relationships appear very transactional and engagement appears to be at key moment in the renter journey. Given their busy lives and often other work commitments, there was a reluctance to commit to any level of involvement.

Although the total number of participants was lower than originally planned, we were able to engage with the following, who's views, experiences and opinions form the basis of this analysis.

Total Staff: 15

Total Tenants: 17 for the evaluation + 20 in analysis workshop

Total Landlords: 2

Total Stakeholder: 3

Fieldwork was conducted between July and October 2002.

We held both face to face and remote individual and group interviews for all projects. We arranged staff shadowing days at three of the projects, which also included visiting tenants in their communities (Wigan and Justlife) and attending a tenant's fair (ACORN). We also designed a short online survey for landlords and tenants to help capture initial thoughts.

In October 2022 we conducted a workshop bring tenants across Greater Manchester together with representative from Shelter's Renters Voice Network. The two hour workshop discussed the initial research findings. By using co-production techniques the workshop was able to enabled tenants to engage in the findings and allowed them to rank and priorities what they agreed with and any further recommendations. Tenants were able to share their individual experiences as well as work in groups to find group consensus on key topics.

Initial research findings were presented to the Fair housing Futures Board meeting in September 2022.

## Appendix 2 - Tenant workshop asks

In the co-production workshop, tenants voiced their own priorities. To ensure we do justice to them, we summarise them here.

Objective	Priorities
Empowering tenants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tenants organising for political representation</li> <li>▪ Tenant security of tenure is needed to rebalance the power</li> <li>▪ Accessible source of information on rights, with another suggestion to provide a Tenant Rights Pack should be given as soon as a tenant signs a tenancy agreement</li> <li>▪ A support officer is needed to give advice on the PRS</li> <li>▪ Landlords should face enforced consequences following complaints</li> </ul>
Improving communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Applications for housing should be blind, to address discrimination</li> <li>▪ Who is responsible for things needs to be clear, particularly between the landlord and agent</li> <li>▪ There need to be clear timeframes for when work will be done</li> <li>▪ An inventory should be produced and then reviewed with the landlord or letting agent every 6 or 12 months</li> <li>▪ Unreasonable expectations from landlords need to be challenged, such as wear and tear at the end of a tenancy</li> <li>▪ More funding is needed so councils can enforce priorities?</li> </ul>
Supporting landlords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A rating like Trustpilot could differentiate landlords</li> <li>▪ Training around housing standards, regulations and best practice</li> <li>▪ Support with damage to property and bad tenants</li> </ul>
Breaking the stigma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There should be no requirement to state you are on benefits</li> <li>▪ Workshops for young people to educate them on their housing rights</li> <li>▪ Face-to-face meetings to ensure interaction is personal</li> </ul>



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.

