

Shelter's contribution to the Renters' Rights Act

An evaluation and learning review of Shelter's campaign to end section 21

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1. Executive Summary

The campaign to secure the Renters' Rights Act (RRA) 2025 is a great example of an effective and well-executed political campaign. Across a period marked by political volatility, ministerial changes, and shifting public sentiments, Shelter and its partners succeeded in shaping, strengthening, and securing the most significant reform of private renting regulations in a generation.

Our evaluation suggests the campaign succeeded because several elements aligned and reinforced one another at the right moment. Evidence, coalition discipline, public mobilisation, political opportunity and organisational capability converged in a way that amplified their impact and is uncommon in political campaigning. While we cannot determine the exact weight of each causal factor, we are confident that Shelter played a valuable role across the board, with its tactics landing at the moment when they could have the greatest impact.

Drawing on the Kingdon 'policy-windows framework',¹ the RRA can be seen as three streams converging:

1. **The Problem Window:** A widely recognised 'crisis'.

Over more than a decade, insecurity, unaffordability, and poor conditions in the private rented sector (PRS) became impossible for policymakers to ignore. Evidence from Shelter's research, casework, stories from campaign supporters, litigation, and its media work, alongside advocacy by renters' unions and grassroots groups, helped establish a narrative that the PRS is structurally unfair.

2. **The Policy Window:** Credible, workable solutions

Shelter's policy and legal expertise was cited by civil servants, parliamentarians, and Coalition partners as influential. Shelter provided drafting, legal interpretation, and amendment text that directly shaped the content of the Act. We feel especially confident that in this way Shelter contributed to the content of the Act.

3. **The Politics Window:** A moment of political alignment

- The last 10 years has been a period of political instability at the national level. At times this has slowed progress down, but it also created opportunities. By April 2019, the political conditions for action on Section 21 had begun to coalesce. Following the 2017 election, the Conservative Government increasingly framed housing insecurity as a fairness issue

¹ [Policy Windows: What They Are And When They Occur – ij](#)

affecting ‘just about managing’ households, while sustained public debate and advocacy had shifted abolition of no-fault evictions from a marginal demand to a politically credible reform.

- Theresa May's government (2016-2019) announced plans for renters' rights reforms but made no legislative progress on an actual bill. During this time, Shelter continued to campaign and produce evidence in support of reform, including coordinating responses to Government consultation.
- During the 2019–2024 Conservative Government, the Renter’s Reform Coalition (RRC), with a unified position shaped in part by Shelter, helped build sustained pressure for reform, reinforced by a Secretary of State who was broadly receptive to change. However, Conservative back benchers allied with landlord representatives sought to limit and resist reform. This led to a critical moment in 2024, when the Coalition decided to withdraw support for the Government’s bill prevented a diluted version from progressing.
- The 2024 election then opened the new window of a Labour Government publicly committed to abolishing Section 21 and receptive to the various elements of Shelter’s long-standing policy positions. Shelter’s relationships with Labour during opposition meant it could support them move quickly and effectively once this window opened. During this time shelter also worked to mobilise Labour backbench support to create momentum and push the Government further on the substance of reforms.

The convergence of these three windows helps explain why the campaign succeeded at the time it did and the importance of this may well be appreciated in the fullness of time, when / if a less sympathetic Government is elected and the window closes again.

Shelter’s role

Across the campaign, we think the main ways in which Shelter contributed were:

1. Policy and legal expertise

Shelter’s technical input shaped the content of reform through helping to refine the Bill under Conservative and Labour governments and through drafting amendments. Shelter’s drafting, legal interpretation and parliamentary coordination were directly linked to several provisions in the final Act, including the rent-in-advance cap, anti-discrimination measures and elements of the landlord register. This was described by stakeholders inside and outside the charity as a unique and indispensable contribution.

2. Coalition leadership and stabilisation

Shelter was valuable to the RRC’s credibility, coordination, and unity. A key moment was leading the Coalition's decision to withdraw support from the weakened Bill in 2024.

‘Without Shelter, the Coalition wouldn’t have happened... their brand and credibility were needed to bring the wider sector in’ (Coalition partner)

3. Narrative shaping

Shelter's brand, media reach, and ability to humanise the issue helped shift public narratives over the long term (for example from 'rogue tenants' to 'structural unfairness'). While this influence is harder to be certain about, external stakeholders consistently recognised Shelter as a major driver of public sentiment.

4. Public mobilisation

Through its networks, community organising work and renting champions, Shelter were able to recruit and mobilise a wide spectrum of renters and supporters across the country to share their experiences and lobby for change. This grounded the campaign in real experience, strengthened its messaging and ultimately made it harder to ignore.

5. Political mobilisation

Shelter and coalition partners built strong relationships with MPs and other politicians, both those directly involved in reforms and others who provided back up at key moments in the policy process. This entailed both support and challenge as the debate moved back and forth. Shelter's sustained engagement, including dozens of MP meetings, targeted constituency briefings and visible supporter pressure, helped create the political momentum and backbench appetite that enabled reform to progress.

6. Credibility through evidence, casework and lived experience

Shelter's research, frontline insight, and strategic litigation gave weight to its arguments. Involving people with lived experience strengthened the authenticity and legitimacy of the campaign.

Was this a 'model' political campaign?

The evaluation highlights several reasons why this campaign stands out as an example of effective political campaigning:

- Clear, tangible goals that were easy to communicate and defend.
- A disciplined coalition that amplified influence and that, once established, maintained its unity.
- A long-term narrative shift that made reform politically viable.
- Technical input into the detail of the bill that meant Shelter was an important partner for policymakers.
- A strategic approach to the legislative process, using each parliamentary stage to build pressure, shape debate and secure political commitments.
- Agility in responding to political change and new opportunities as they arose.
- Strong cross-functional working inside Shelter, particularly between Policy, Campaigns, Public Affairs, Legal, Communications, and Services.
- Effective use of supporter power, combining emotional storytelling, credible evidence, as well as a sense of fun.

Taken together, these elements created a campaign that was coherent, politically effective, and operationally strong.

Key learning for future campaigns

The evaluation identifies several lessons that Shelter can carry forward.

1. Invest in long-term agenda-setting

Agenda change takes years and there is a need to be patient. However, the case of Renters' Rights does show how early groundwork, research, casework insight, media / narrative framing and continued effort can pay off when political windows open.

2. Maintain policy and legal capability

Technical credibility has been one of Shelter's strongest assets. Policymakers relied on Shelter because it could provide solutions, alongside demands. This emphasises the need for an organisation like Shelter in the system, as well as the charity's investment in frontline, legal and policy capability.

3. Being part of coalitions strategically

Coalition working can be challenging and consume resources, but this is a case where it has really paid dividends and is a helpful reminder of how well it can work if things go right. Moreover, Shelter's stabilising role in the RRC was critical and offers lessons around how to balance leadership with humility and compromise where needed.

4. Be willing to take risks

The 2024 withdrawal was a pivotal moment, demonstrating the effectiveness of strategic boldness when grounded in evidence and coalition alignment. Shelter also took an experimental and creative approach to its campaign actions such as media output and service user engagement. Inevitably, some of these worked better than others, but overall, this creativity encouraged people to engage and take notice and helped maintain team enthusiasm.

5. Strengthen internal cross-functional working

Cross-team collaboration was one of the campaign's quiet strengths. Policy, Legal, Campaigns, Communications, Services and Research reinforced each other, creating a coherent influencing engine. Some key lessons for future campaigns are:

- Build in cross-team integration from the outset, with shared planning, clearer roles and earlier alignment to help maximise impact when political windows open.
- Embedding monitoring and learning earlier, to help teams better adapt in real time.
- Ensure that organisational commitments, such as antiracism, are understood and consistently applied across teams.

6. Continue elevating lived experience

Involving people with lived experience gave the campaign authenticity, legitimacy and emotional impact. However, this was done inconsistently. Future campaigns could embed PWLE involvement earlier and more systematically, ensuring their views shape strategy, messaging and evidence, as well as storytelling.

7. Prepare for political volatility

The campaign worked because Shelter stayed agile amid ministerial churn, shifting alliances and changing political incentives. This adaptability was a major strength. Future campaigns should plan on the basis that volatility is normal, building strategies, relationships and decision-making processes that can flex quickly when political conditions change. This needs to be balanced alongside investing in long-term agenda setting. Ensuring that it's not at the expense of longer-term horizon scanning and agenda setting work.

Overall conclusion

We do not believe the Renters Rights Act was inevitable, and certainly it was unlikely to have happened so quickly in the current parliament without significant efforts from organisations like Shelter. Rather the success of the Act was due to persistence, technical / legal input, coalition discipline, and political opportunity all aligning at the right moment.

Shelter acted alongside many other organisations, and with the help of over one hundred thousand supporters. As such, some claims about Shelter's role are necessarily partial, because ultimately, we cannot *measure* the relative significance of different factors. However, we can say with some confidence that the organisation played an important part in shaping the content, momentum, and political possibility of reform, in particular, we think, through its active role in the later / amendment stages of the bill.

2. Introduction

2.1. Purpose of this evaluation

This evaluation was commissioned to help Shelter understand its contribution to securing the Renters Rights Act, and to identify learning that can strengthen future political campaigns. It examines how Shelter sought to shape policy, build momentum and work with partners over the lifespan of the campaign (2019–2025), leading to the eventual passage of the Act in 2025.

The evaluation focuses both on external influence, including Shelter’s role in shaping the content, timing and political viability of the legislation, and on internal delivery, exploring how Shelter organised itself, collaborated across teams, and sustained a long-term campaign.

We do not assess the merits or impacts of the legislation itself, but rather reflect on how change happened, the role Shelter played, and what can be learned for future campaigns.

2.2. Scope and evaluation questions

The core learning question guiding this report is:

What was distinctive about Shelter’s contribution to securing the Renters Rights Act?

To answer this the evaluation explored the following areas:

- How the campaign developed over time (2019–2025), including key political moments, constraints and opportunities.
- Which tactics and approaches were most effective in shaping the bill as it evolved.
- How Shelter worked internally across Campaigns, Policy & Public Affairs, Communications, Legal, Services, Digital and Research teams.
- What supported or hindered effective collaboration, both internally and externally.
- The role of the Renters Reform Coalition (RRC), including Shelter’s contribution to it.

These areas sit alongside the central learning question to build an understanding of Shelter’s contribution and the conditions that enabled the campaign to succeed.

2.3. Methodology

We used a mixed-methods approach and aimed to build as rigorous a picture as possible. The central methodology is Contribution Analysis: a theory-based approach suited to complex situations where results cannot be attributed to a single organisation or factor. Contribution Analysis examines whether the available evidence supports a credible argument that Shelter contributed materially to observed outcomes, while considering alternative explanations.

Document and evidence review

We reviewed documentary evidence provided by Shelter to understand the evolution of Shelter’s strategy, internal decision-making, and external influence. This included:

- Campaign planning documents, strategy papers and theory-of-change materials.
- Internal evaluation outputs and project group documentation from Shelter teams involved in the campaign.
- Publicly accessible materials, including mentions of Shelter in Hansard across the lifespan of the campaign and media coverage referencing Shelter.

Workshops with Shelter staff

Two workshops were conducted with Shelter staff:

- **An exploratory workshop:** involving a wide range of staff from Campaigns, Community Organising, Policy & Public Affairs, Communications, Services, Legal, Digital, and Research. In this workshop we:
 - Mapped the campaign timeline, key moments, internal ways of working and tactical choices.
 - Gathered cross-functional reflections on what supported or hindered progress.
- **A hypothesis-testing workshop:** with a smaller group of current and former staff. In this workshop we:
 - Tested and refined the hypotheses generated through early analysis.
 - Explored alternative explanations and strengthened causal reasoning in line with Contribution Analysis.

External stakeholder survey

An online survey was sent to a targeted group of external stakeholders with direct involvement or insight into the Renters' Rights Bill, including:

- Members of the House of Lords and MPs
- Civil servants within the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Special Advisers
- Coalition partners and civil society organisations

The survey sought perspectives on; the wider development of the bill; what and who influenced the process; Shelter's contribution; experiences of working with Shelter; and the role and functioning of the wider coalition.

Although we only received nine responses, the results provided an indication of Shelter's role from an external perspective.

In-depth stakeholder interviews

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals closely involved in shaping or scrutinising the bill:

- Senior civil servants
- Special Advisers
- A member of the House of Lords
- Leaders from Coalition partner organisations

These interviews explored; campaign moments; Shelter's distinctive contribution compared with other actors; coalition dynamics and areas of tension or alignment; and the effectiveness of Shelter's strategies and tactics.

Supporter survey

Shelter sent a survey to c.14,000 supporters asking for their perceptions of the campaign and received 227 responses. While this response rate is not high enough to draw firm conclusions it adds a valuable perspective from a cohort that would otherwise be unrepresented.

Methodological limitations

Together, these methods provide a broad body of evidence, enabling a reasonably confident assessment of our research questions.

The main weakness is that we would have preferred more corroboration from sources outside Shelter. However, we did engage 15 external stakeholders in total, all of whom helped deepen our understanding and contributed to our broad conclusions. Overall, we feel confident in conclusions but have also caveated findings where the evidence seems less robust.

AI tools were used to support interview transcription, document searching and initial thematic clustering. All analysis, interpretation and judgements were conducted by human evaluators.

3. Background and context

3.1. The Renters Rights Act – summary of the legislation

The Renters Rights Act 2025 represents the most significant reform of private renting in more than a generation. It received Royal Assent on 27 October 2025 and will begin to come into force from 1 May 2026. Its core purpose is to end ‘no-fault’ evictions, improve security and fairness for England’s 11 million private renters, and rebalance the relationship between tenants and landlords.

3.2. What the Act achieves

Abolition of Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions

- The Act ends Section 21 evictions entirely. Landlords must now provide a valid reason to evict, and tenants gain stronger protections against retaliatory or arbitrary eviction. This is the most substantial change delivered by the Act.

Shift to open-ended periodic tenancies

- Fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies are abolished. All private tenancies become periodic, giving renters greater stability and enabling them to end their tenancy with two months’ notice.

Fairer rent rules

- The Act requires rents to be increased no more than once per year and makes small changes to the rent increase challenge process (Section 13). It also requires landlords to stick to the advertised rent, in an attempt to prevent ‘bidding wars’.

Ending discrimination and barriers to accessing a home

- The Act introduces several measures that aim to reduce discrimination and unfair barriers to accessing a home:
 - A ban on discrimination against renters with children or those receiving benefits.
 - A cap on rent in advance at one month.
- New rights allowing tenants to request pets, which landlords cannot unreasonably refuse.

New landlord accountability and enforcement tools

- The Act introduces:
 - A Private Rented Sector Database, requiring all landlords to register themselves and their properties. Rollout begins from late 2026.
 - A new Private Landlord Ombudsman, providing free, independent dispute resolution without going to court.
 - Stronger rent repayment orders and expanded investigatory powers for local authorities.

Raising standards in rented homes

- Future secondary legislation will apply:
 - The Decent Homes Standard to the PRS.
 - ‘Awaab’s Law’, requiring timely action on hazards such as damp and mould.

Together, these reforms are intended to form a more coherent, enforceable framework to give tenants more security, safety and clarity.

3.3. Where the Act falls short of Shelter’s and the Renters Reform Coalition’s ambitions

No action on unaffordable rent increases

- Shelter and the RRC argued for rent stabilisation (limits tying rent increases to wage growth or inflation) to prevent large rent hikes. The final Act does not include measures to cap or limit in-tenancy rent rises beyond existing tribunal powers.

Limited action on affordability overall

- While the Act improves security, it does not directly address the steep rise in private rents or tackle affordability pressures.

Slower improvements to housing conditions

- While the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab’s Law will apply to the Private Renting Sector (PRS) in future these changes rely on further consultation and secondary legislation.

Protections for tenants facing eviction not complete

- The RRC continues to argue that further safeguards are needed to prevent misuse of possession grounds and to support tenants displaced through no fault of their own.

3.4. Overview of Shelter’s Renters’ Rights Bill campaign (2019 – 2025)

Shelter’s formal campaigning to abolish Section 21 and secure stronger rights for private renters began in 2019. However, this work built on more than a decade of earlier activity to expose insecurity, poor conditions and discrimination in the PRS through research, casework, litigation, media work and public campaigning.

Although Shelter was not the first organisation to call for the abolition of Section 21, with grassroots organisations such as Generation Rent playing an early leading role, Shelter entered the 2019–2025 period with strong policy capability, public recognition and established relationships with decision-makers.

From 2019 onwards, Shelter’s campaign unfolded against a backdrop of political volatility with frequent changes in Prime Minister and housing ministers, requiring repeated relationship-building and adaptation. The COVID-19 pandemic further disrupted legislative progress but also heightened public and political attention on renters’ insecurity, particularly through the introduction of temporary eviction protections. These conditions shaped both the pace and form of Shelter’s campaigning.

3.5. Phases of Shelter’s campaigning²

- **2019–2021:** Following the Conservative Government’s initial commitment to abolish Section 21, Shelter focused on policy development, evidence-gathering and maintaining public and political pressure during a period of delay and uncertainty, including through the pandemic. This included mobilising supporters and keeping public pressure high despite slow government progress.
- **2021–2023:** Shelter became a core member of the RRC, working with a broad alliance of organisations to articulate shared demands, contribute policy expertise, and inform the government’s White Paper and draft legislation. Shelter’s policy development, media reach, credibility and public mobilisation all supported the broader Coalition.
- **2023–2024:** Growing political instability under the Conservative Government led to attempts to weaken the Bill. Shelter worked closely with coalition partners to maintain a united position, culminating in the collective decision to withdraw support from the weakened Bill ahead of the 2024 general election.
- **2024–2025:** After Labour were elected, Shelter shifted to a ‘critical friend’ role, providing policy input, tabling and supporting amendments via supportive politicians, mobilising backbench MPs, renters & supporters, and working through the Renters Reform Coalition to hold the government to its commitments as the Bill progressed.

Throughout this time, other campaigners pushed for renting reform. In particular, the Renter’s Reform Coalition (RRC) was established by 18 charities³ to campaign for change and provided a vehicle for sustained collective action during this period. Section 4 explores how Shelter’s strategies and tactics contributed to securing the Act, with the role of the Coalition covered in hypothesis 3.

The Renters’ Rights Bill was introduced within months of the 2024 election and became law in October 2025. Many of its central provisions reflect long-standing aims of Shelter and the RRC.

Shelter’s approach

Looking back at the campaign, Shelter summarised their approach as

- Mobilising renters around the issues affecting them to build political pressure in key parliamentary constituencies

² A more detailed timeline of the campaigning period can be found in the Appendix.

³ The Coalition is hosted by Generation Rent, and alongside Shelter includes a range of organisations from Crisis, Z2K, Citizen’s Advice, the Lloyds Bank Foundation and London Renters Union. For more information see - [About us | Renters Reform Coalition](#)

- Building allies across civil society, courts, and local government to surround the Government with broad coalition calling for action
- Mobilising key politicians to shape the bill's progress and amendments to the bill
- Delivering policy solutions to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG, previously Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities) to show change is possible
- Neutralising opposition by contrasting 'reasonable' calls against landlord lobby hyperbole,

In practice, Shelter's activities were constantly reviewed and adapted to the political situation. From 2021 onwards the team conducted regular evaluation sessions and updates to the Campaign theory of change.

4. Evidence of change and Shelter’s contribution

4.1. Introduction

This section reviews the evidence around two broad questions:

- What factors contributed to the achievement of the Renters Rights Act 2025 and informed the content of the Act?
- What role did Shelter play?

When evaluating policy campaigns, it is rarely possible to reach definitive conclusions about questions of attribution. Instead, as outlined in Contribution Analysis and similar guidance.⁴ The task is to assemble as much relevant evidence as possible, assess what it collectively suggests, consider plausible alternative explanations, and state clearly how confident we are in any resulting judgements.

Drawing on the advice available to us we have developed and refined 11 causal hypotheses about the Act and Shelter’s role, discussed in turn below. In each case, we briefly elaborate on what the hypothesis means, summarise the evidence both for and against it, reflect on possible alternative explanations and conclude on how far the hypothesis is supported using the ‘process tracing’⁵ inspired four-part scale below. We understand that these assessments are subjective and we are open to further discussion / feedback. It should also be noted that, by their nature, some hypotheses are harder to be sure about than others.

Level	Definition	Question to consider
Level 1: ‘Straw in the wind’	Suggestive but weak evidence	‘Does this evidence only suggest we might have influenced something?’
Level 2: ‘Hoop test’	Evidence that must be true for the hypothesis to hold	‘What evidence would almost certainly be needed if our causal hypothesis were true?’
Level 3: ‘Smoking gun’	Strong evidence that supports the hypothesis	‘Do we have evidence that strongly supports this hypothesis?’
Level 4: ‘Doubly Decisive’	Confirms one hypothesis and rules out alternatives	‘Does this evidence rule out alternative explanations?’

⁴ [No Royal Road: Finding and Following the Natural Pathways in Advocacy Evaluation - Center for Evaluation Innovation](#)

⁵ [Process tracing | Better Evaluation](#)

4.2. Summary of the hypotheses

The hypotheses we developed are listed below along with our current assessment of how well they are supported. These were developed out of the research material and then tested and refined through a workshop with Shelter staff and again as we drafted this report. The hypotheses are distinct enough to stand alone, although there are intersections between them which we acknowledge in the detailed discussion below.

Ref	Hypothesis	Summary of our confidence in this hypothesis
H1	Shelter helped raise awareness of renters' rights and change the narrative over the long-term (2012–2024).	Level 2: 'Hoop test'
H2	Shelter provided policy and legal expertise that directly shaped the content of the Act.	Level 4: 'Doubly Decisive'
H3	Shelter working in coalition was a success factor. A) The Renters Reform Coalition played a key role in securing the Renters Rights Act by amplifying the sector's leadership capacity and influence. B) Shelter was central to the Coalition: legitimising, providing resources and helped maintain unity at critical moments.	Level 3: 'Smoking gun'
H4	Having clear, tangible, achievable goals was a factor in the campaign's success.	Level 1: 'Straw in the wind'
H5	Shelter directly influenced the wider political landscape to support reform.	Level 2: 'Hoop test'
H6	Withdrawal of support for the Conservative bill A) Strategic withdrawal for the 2024 bill created the conditions for a more robust Act under Labour in 2025 b) Shelter played a key role in this decision	Level 3: 'Smoking gun'
H7	Shelter shaped Labour's thinking during opposition and into Government.	Level 2. 'Hoop test'
H8	Creativity, variety and emphasising the 'human side' helped the campaign to 'cut-through' and increased engagement amongst renters and wider supporter audiences.	Level 2. 'Hoop test'
H9	Research projects, casework insight and strategic litigation brought credibility to Shelter's arguments.	Level 3: 'Smoking gun'

Ref	Hypothesis	Summary of our confidence in this hypothesis
H10	Involvement of renters with direct experience of bad private renting strengthened legitimacy, authenticity, and improved supporters' experience	Level 2. 'Hoop test'

4.3. Each hypothesis in detail

H1. Shelter helped raise awareness of renters' rights and change the narrative over the long-term (2012–2024)

The first hypothesis relates to Shelter's longer-term efforts to make private renting politically salient and shift public attitudes through building grassroots pressure, collecting and publishing evidence and building alliances.

Under this heading we explore the evidence around how the 'problem stream' of the policy window gradually shifted towards a greater understanding of the systemic unfairness faced by tenants and the changes in regulation needed.

Supporting evidence

The prominence and nature of discourse on renters' rights has changed over the last 10-15 years. Both the officials and Coalition partners we spoke to tended to characterise the later Renters' Rights legislation as the culmination of a long buildup of pressure from the public, charities and the media which made tenants' rights something governments could not ignore. Indeed, the fact that it was Conservative Governments—not instinctively supporters of regulation—that made the first commitments and began the policy work, supports the view that reform was becoming inescapable, especially when you consider that it was not a manifesto commitment

Regarding Shelter's role in this, we know that the charity has been a longstanding voice on the PRS and tenants' rights, and we can point to a range of early foundational work and subsequent campaigning. For example, the 2012 *Stable Renting Contract*⁶ which set out a blueprint for PRS reform, followed by continued campaigns and evidence production such as *Time for Change*⁷ has sought to frame private renting as structurally unfair and change how the problem is perceived and understood.

⁶ [Report: A better deal - towards more stable private renting - Shelter England](#)

⁷ [Time for change: Making renting fairer for private renters - Shelter England](#)

“Shelter were hugely influential on getting tenancy reforms as a political objective... before the May government.” (Policy maker)

‘Right from the start you have been working tirelessly to get the renters’ rights act in place, because our country is one of the worst places for homelessness and unfair unsafe housing’. (Supporter)

‘Their [Shelter] reputation and ability to mobilise and influence the public kept the need for the Act at the forefront of people’s minds’ (Coalition partner)

Shelter’s media work over the same period may also have contributed to the changing narrative and helped define renters as a major political constituency. An example of this is how phrases such as ‘11 million renters’ and ‘no-fault evictions’, became widely used, in line with Shelter’s framing⁸. Another has been a significant change in the media’s focus when discussing the PRS.

‘The media went from talking about rogue tenants to rogue landlords and unfair structural problems’ (Staff member)

Moreover, the officials we spoke to explicitly credit Shelter with helping get tenancy reform ‘on the political agenda’ and creating a public consensus that the status quo was unfair.

‘Private rented sector used to be considered... ‘not really for us to get involved in’... to being a significant policy concern.... Shelter and Generation Rent... have upped the ante of the focus on the private rented sector.’ (Policy maker)

In the early 2010s no one got that private renting was awful - Shelter made it mainstream and campaignable and led the policy development. (MP)

Interviewees explicitly linked the public and press interest generated by campaigning organisations to the sense that reform of the PRS had become politically salient and increasingly unavoidable. One interviewee described this period as having ‘political salience and [laying] the groundwork for the kind of intervention that we eventually saw.’ They added ‘I think it is fair that Shelter considered themselves to be instrumental in shaping the climate where this became a reality’.

‘Media: journalists proactively come to us for comment’ (Internal report)

Of course, Shelter was only one of several organisations campaigning for rental reform. However, there is a strong case that its brand, visibility, and public trust gave the agenda a level of scale and credibility that helped amplify and mainstream tenants’ concerns — particularly given that renters have historically had limited prominence in public debate.

⁸ For example, see [The Renters’ Rights Bill is now law! 11... - Deirdre Costigan MP | Facebook](#) and [Guide to the Renters’ Rights Act - GOV.UK](#)

'Once we were in there, other people started coming to us.' (Staff member)

'They are the only organisation, in my opinion, who have fought relentlessly for change to the legislation' (Supporter)

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

The main alternative explanation is that the narrative change described above may be due in large part to important contextual factors including:

- The increasing numbers of people living in the PRS⁹, which has meant that many more people are affected by these issues and made PRS tenants a more significant interest group and political constituency. Arguably it is inevitable that these issues would come to the fore.
- Since 2010, Housing has gained salience as a general issue in media and public narratives³, mainly because of increased scarcity and cost. Moreover, there has also been a growing sense that private renters get an especially raw deal: higher costs, greater insecurity and vulnerability to poor housing conditions. The sense of injustice has also been compounded by the fact that poor conditions in the PRS tend to affect younger people, families and those disadvantaged in other ways.
- The 2020 Covid-19 lockdown raised the prominence of these PRS issues further because tenants suffered disproportionately from being stuck in inadequate homes, while anyone facing eviction was at risk of being unable to comply with lockdown restrictions. The Government's response at the time, in response to lobbying from Shelter and other organisations, included a temporary ban on new evictions / possessions and longer notice periods. These measures set an important precedent for Government action to improve the conditions for tenants and supported the view that problems in the PRS can and should be addressed.
- The Grenfell fire also raised the significance of housing management and safety, and the power of landlords / companies as issues, in particular for renters.

Shelter has helped to amplify these issues, but maybe they have been pushing on an open door? Ultimately, this is an argument about causality that cannot be resolved, but it is worth nothing that even within Shelter there no consensus about how far Shelter has driven the narrative vs been led by it.

⁹ The PRS has broadly doubled since the year 2000 and is now estimated at 4.7 million households, which is about a fifth of all households. [Chapter 1: Profile of households and dwellings - GOV.UK](#)

'I don't think that we consciously took people on that journey... we got there organically.' (Staff member)

'Campaigns control the Overton window, not the other way around' (Internal document)

A further point which is important in the context of the Coalition (H3) is that Shelter was not the first organisation to campaign on Section 21, rather it was grassroots groups led very early stages of the campaign. Moreover, Shelter has never been alone in asserting the importance of reforming the PRS, but rather a prominent voice amongst many.

'We were not at the forefront... Generation Rent and grassroots' groups were calling for it first.' (Staff member)

Overall assessment

Level 2 'Hoop test'

Overall, we think the evidence meets the threshold for a hoop test: the campaign's success required a long-term shift in how the PRS was understood, and Shelter's sustained work was a necessary part of that shift. While we cannot isolate Shelter's contribution from that of other organisations, the combination of early agenda setting (e.g., the 2012 Stable Renting Contract), consistent media presence, casework driven storytelling, and the organisation's ability to frame renting as a structural rather than individual problem all appear from a range of different sources. Stakeholders described a political environment in which reform had become "inescapable", and Shelter's decadelong efforts are consistently cited as part of the reason why. Taken together, this suggests that without Shelter's contribution to the problem narrative, the political conditions underpinning the Renters Rights Act would have been materially weaker.

H2. Shelter provided policy and legal expertise that directly shaped the content of the Act

Shelter aimed to shape the content of the Bill / Act and ensure it reflected their concerns and goals for tenants. They did this by offering legal expertise, collecting evidence and being actively involved amendment drafting.

We begin this section by picking out some common themes of Shelter's role in the process, before going into greater detail on how exactly Shelter influenced the course of the legislation.

Part 1: Common themes

Providing expert input into the process: There is very strong evidence that Shelter's policy, legal and amendment writing input made a unique contribution that directly affected the policy development process. Civil Service participants in our research described how this went back to the Conservative period when PRS issues became more visible, and then into the Labour period when policies were developed and refined. Across all interviews and sources, we heard about Shelter's perceived credibility as a source of influence, based on frontline experience, access to tenant voices, and the level of legal and policy expertise within the Shelter team.

'To be able to write the actual amendment is a unique contribution.' (Staff member)

'Shelter, RRC and Gen Rent had the most resource, connections and ability to do detailed follow up and were across the level of detail required' (Coalition partner)

'Shelter's legal expertise is of huge value' (MP)

Internal reflections also emphasised Shelter's influence on the framing of parliamentary debate:

'We significantly influenced the Second Reading debate. We established some clear MP advocates/relationships we could work with in the upcoming stages' (Internal evaluation report)

This qualitative evidence is strongly corroborated by the more detailed description below, which shows Shelter drafting amendments, speeches and technical rebuttals used at every legislative stage, and coordinating parliamentary engagement at a level unmatched by other organisations.

Direct effect on policy. Going further, there is also strong evidence that Shelter had attributable influence on specific provisions such as the anti-discrimination measures (eg. bans on refusing to let to people who receive benefits), limitations in rent in advance, Landlord Register and notice periods, which is described in detail below

'That area [anti-discrimination] was where... it sort of wouldn't exist without our campaign... we were sort of the like leading voice, the sole voice for that in the early stages.' (Staff member)

'Feedback from MHCLG that we were fundamental on Landlord Register being included' (Shelter evaluation document)

'NEWS FROM JANUARY – Government have adopted Alex Sobel's Rent in Advance amendment. This is a huge win for us' (Internal report)

Providing continuity. Shelter's policy work, and its efforts to build support and policy expertise, continued over a sustained period, covering several parliaments and multiple ministers. This continuity across political churn is regarded as an important asset that helped keep up momentum, offset risks of delay and help make Shelter and the wider Coalition part of the policy process. It was valuable to the civil servants who needed to negotiate the changing landscape to deliver on reforms and for politicians who were keen to make progress on commitments. Essentially, there is real value to being a steady voice with consistent messages (see H4) and recognised level of credibility.

'The number of housing ministers we went through... civil servants were the consistency, and we were there with them.' (Staff member)

Building relationships. Both shelter staff and external stakeholders felt that they developed trusted relationships with officials and politicians, which found the right balance between support and challenge. For example, civil servants described regular, open engagement with Shelter, even sometimes *relying* on them for advice on technical matters and with external support to get things through. The word 'constructive' was used to describe the nature of the relationship: meaning the right mix of pressure and willingness to problem solve that helped keep the reforms moving through difficult stages.

'Shelter had the ear of the front bench and key relationships' (Coalition partner)

'Providing frank evidence and challenge, but also politically realistic, workable suggestions that fitted within ministers' constraints' (Policy maker)

'I think they've generally struck the right balance...If there's too much antagonistic behaviour, it's quite hard to engage with that on a very, very frequent basis. So, I think they strike the right balance in terms of continuing to press, continuing to set out where they think the policy decision should be different, and why, but doing it in a very constructive way, maintaining good relationships with people' (Policy maker)

'We tend to meet the policy team, I think monthly, but then separately, each of the detailed policy teams... will often set up more detailed conversations and meetings... So yes, as a team, we're talking to them [Shelter] pretty frequently. (Policy maker)

Part 2: Shelter's legislative influence in practice (2019–2025)

Across the passage of the Bill, Shelter played a sustained and hands-on role in shaping the content of the legislation.

Strategic engagement across legislative stages

Shelter approached the legislative process strategically, revising its approach at each key stage as follows:

- **Second Reading** - shaping the terms of debate and establishing core issues.
- **Committee Stage** - securing technical rebuttals and keep key amendments alive.
- **Report Stage** - applying maximum political pressure;
- **Lords Stages** – preventing dilution and secure final concessions.

This structured approach was not replicated by other organisations in the Coalition, and several partners explicitly relied on Shelter to secure parliamentary champions for amendments.

Building political relationships and credibility

Shelter's long-term relationship-building with Ministers and officials appears to have been a significant asset. Internal evidence from Shelter describes how they provided drafting support, policy advice and speech material to Ministers well before the current parliament (see H7), which helped establish trust and credibility and enabled Shelter to influence the new Government's thinking on Renters' Rights and secure invitations to key government roundtables immediately after the 2024 election.

Civil servants also indicated that visible political pressure from MPs created "more scope to explore policy levers", suggesting that Shelter's mobilisation work (see H5) directly affected the policy space available to Ministers.

Mobilising MPs and shaping parliamentary debate

Shelter engaged MPs at a scale and depth that is perhaps unusual for a charity campaign. During the Commons stages alone, Shelter held around 60 one-to-one meetings with MPs, supported by targeted localised briefings for constituencies with high renter populations. Ahead

of Second Reading, Shelter met 38 MPs, briefed the full House, and secured interventions from 24 MPs who used Shelter's statistics, arguments and drew on Shelter's support to draft their own material.

Shelter also wrote speeches for several peers and MPs, including Carla Denyer, and provided lines, statistics and rebuttals used by others such as Florence Eshalomi, Gideon Amos, Naushabah Khan and Chris Curtis. This helped ensure that the debate focused on issues Shelter prioritised, including rent in advance, guarantors, the PRS database and affordability.

Drafting amendments and coordinating parliamentary action

Shelter was the only Renters Reform Coalition organisation to secure amendments tabled at every legislative stage. Evidence shows that Shelter drafted amendments for MPs and Peers, negotiated their tabling, and coordinated sign-ups through phone-banking, WhatsApp groups and direct outreach.

At Report Stage in the Commons, Shelter secured:

- 115 MP signatures across its amendment package;
- 35 MPs backing rent caps;
- 34 MPs backing PRS database changes;
- 32 MPs backing limits on rent in advance;
- 17 MPs backing guarantor restrictions.

These were among the most-supported amendments tabled, second only to those with guaranteed frontbench backing. The Government ultimately adopted the rent-in-advance cap and committed to further work on guarantors and database categories.

Influence in the House of Lords

The Lords stages posed the greatest risk of dilution. Shelter met 16 of the c.30 active Peers, secured tabling of amendments by Baroness Lister, Baroness Kennedy, Baroness Greender, Baroness Thornhill and others, and drafted speeches used in Committee and Report.

Shelter also played a decisive role in four critical votes at Consideration of Amendments, where the Government overturned earlier defeats on:

- Reducing the no re-let period.
- Expanding student eviction grounds.
- Introducing a carers eviction ground.
- Allowing additional pet deposits.

These votes were extremely tight (e.g., 204–215 on the no-relet period). Ministers directly referenced Shelter's arguments in the chamber, citing Shelter's evidence and urging Peers not to water down protections. Peers also used Shelter's lines extensively. Without this mobilisation, it is plausible that several of these amendments would have passed, significantly weakening the Act.

Evidence snapshot: Shelter's legislative influence

In summary, the following provides an indication of the scale of work and influence which Shelter invested.

- 60+ MP meetings during the Bill's passage.
- 38 MPs engaged before Second Reading; 24 used Shelter's material in the debate.
- 115 MP signatures on Shelter-drafted amendments at Report Stage.
- Amendments tabled at every stage by MPs and Peers working directly with Shelter.
- 16 active Peers engaged; multiple speeches drafted by Shelter delivered in the chamber.
- Four critical Lords votes turned in favour of stronger tenant protections, with Ministers quoting Shelter directly.
- One major policy win (rent in advance cap) and two areas kept open for further reform (guarantors; database categories).

Part 3: Challenging / limiting evidence

While the evidence for this hypothesis appears strong, it is important to recognise that influence was distributed across the wider sector. Several organisations contributed to shaping the debate, and at certain points others, such as Generation Rent, had better access to ministers. This complicates attempts to attribute impact to any single organisation. However, the dynamic can also be understood as part of Shelter's broader role in coalition building (see H3): By helping to align partners' positions and strengthen the collective voice, Shelter influenced these conversations indirectly, even when it was not the organisation in the room.

Another alternative explanation is that once it was set in motion, Government and civil servants may have continued work on renters' rights regardless of who engaged and perhaps even irrespective of political change. However, the detailed evidence of Shelter's drafting, parliamentary coordination and direct engagement with Ministers and Peers provides strong grounds to conclude that Shelter's contribution was both distinctive and necessary for several of the outcomes observed..

Overall assessment

Level 4 'Doubly decisive'

For this hypothesis we have opted for the strongest level of confidence. On the basis that:

- We can point to specific provisions that Shelter lobbied for that are in the Act.
- External interviewees described Shelter as experts whose policy and legal work materially influenced content of the Act, particularly in the later and amendment stages.

H3. Shelter working in coalition was a success factor

Overview of the Coalition

The Renter's Reform Coalition (RRC) was launched publicly in late 2020, with the headline goal of ending Section 21 evictions. The Coalition is hosted by Generation Rent, established with funding from the Nationwide Foundation, and Shelter have been one of 18 charities involved from the outset. A wider group of partner organisations added their name to the Coalition, though active involvement varies.

Working in coalition is not unusual in campaigning circles and can be highly effective, although this is sometimes offset by the work needed to manage relationships and reconcile different positions. The Renters Reform Coalition appears to be a standout example, with very stable membership, a strong sense of common purpose and the significant achievement of the Renters Rights Act now under its belt.

This hypothesis has two parts which we review separately:

- A. The Renters Reform Coalition played a key role in securing the Renters Rights Act
- B. Shelter was a central to the Coalition: legitimising, providing resources and helped maintain unity at critical moments.

A) The Renters Reform Coalition played a key role in securing the Renters Rights Act by amplifying the sector's leadership capacity and influence.

Supporting evidence

Interviewees consistently described the Coalition as an important vehicle for collective influence. There are several arguments as to how the Coalition supported calls for change.

Coherence and consistency. Across all our interviews and other research, the existence of the Coalition, and in particular the way that members sang the same tune, added significant weight and focus for the cause of renters' rights. The Coalition helped broaden the movement, while Government and other stakeholders understood that the sector was aligned on the policy changes needed, which meant they were harder to ignore.

"Everyone stayed together... no one left the coalition... everyone pulled their own weight."
(Policy Maker)

This sense of common purpose, and consistency of arguments prevented divergence, digression and limited the scope for opponents to use 'divide-and-rule' to undermine the cause.

'Ministers asked 'what does Crisis think?' — we had agreed lines to stop that' (Staff member)

'The coalition model was great as it prevented the govt from picking and choosing which org to listen to on each issue when it suited them' (Coalition partner)

'Whole sector voice that meant organisations couldn't split off and allow weaker measures'
(Coalition partner)

Coordination: At key moments it seems that the coalition was able to work effectively in unison and play to the different strengths of its members.

'We coordinated our oral evidence with other organisations in the RRC to ensure that we managed to cover all of our priority issues and asks in the limited time' (Internal report)

'Shelter are also pragmatic and evidenced - which gave space for Generation Rent to appear to complement them as the voice of renters, drawing on renters groups around the country, and the RRC to co-ordinate action' (MP)

Resources. Through working on Coalition, the sector was able to maximise its collective resources through strategic decisions about who was best placed to take certain actions and reducing duplication. Working in coalition also added extra funding, for example from the Nationwide Foundation¹⁰.

Diversity of views. The diversity of the Coalition, and the mix of organisations and voices within it, also increased the movement's power and the quality of its outputs. For example, the Coalition was in a good position to reflect different experiences of different renting circumstances, and wider geographies, which ensured its outputs and argument better reflected different peoples' experiences.

Renters voice. Bringing the sector together in the Coalition also meant the greater numbers of people were brought into the campaign and had opportunities to participate, as well as a stronger sense of collective purpose.

A further piece of evidence on the quality and effectiveness of the Coalition is that an earlier version of the Coalition won 'Best Coalition' in the 2020 SMK Campaigner awards

B) Shelter was central to the Coalition: legitimising, providing resources and helped maintain unity at critical moments.

From the interviews and internal conversations there is good evidence that Shelter made a meaningful and distinct contribution to the Coalition, in three ways:

Legitimacy. Coalition leaders say Shelter's presence was essential to giving the Coalition legitimacy and breadth. Shelter can be seen as having operated a 'big brand anchor' within the Coalition adding weight to interactions with ministers and officials. Shelter was also seen to have helped in broadening the basis for the Coalition through encouraging more organisations to join.

'Shelter had a quite important role bringing some of the other bigger, more established charities, into the Coalition' (Coalition partner)

Resources. Interviewees highlighted Shelter's resources, authority, and expertise as critical to coalition effectiveness and keeping it together. Shelter brought important capacity and capability that could plug gaps, for example policy / legal capacity which others lacked. Coalition members

¹⁰ Generation Rent (Renter's Reform Coalition) - Nationwide Foundation

also reported valuing Shelter's level of commitment to the Coalition and Staff consistency in attendance and engagement.

'We worked well with Shelter through the campaign - sharing our expertise, frontline insights and legal and housing knowledge with each other to develop and progress policy positions' (Coalition partner)

'In my opinion, Shelter were basically invaluable in the Coalition. The main thing [was] just a real sense of institutional buy-in, and the sort of resulting amount of resource put towards it. It would have looked, I think, very different without that' (Coalition partner)

Unity: Shelter seems to have played a central role in holding the Coalition together, ensuring clarity and consistency of the combined positions and helping to organising activities. Named Shelter staff were singled out for resolving internal tensions and negotiating shared positions. An example of this was Shelter playing a role in persuading the Coalition to withdraw support from the Conservative bill (see hypothesis 6).

'We literally had to convince [parts of] the Coalition... we were instrumental.' (Staff member)

Shelter was also felt to have consciously mediated potential disputes and compromised themselves where needed - by bringing their own positions into line with other members. A good example of this was agreeing to work towards capping rent increases as a way to find common ground with those advocating for a more strident position on rent controls.

'I really appreciated the contributions that Ruth and Tarun made around promoting healthy movement dynamics within the housing movement. They listened to smaller organisations, were clear where Shelter stood, and treated smaller orgs with dignity and respect and appreciation' (Coalition partner).

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

A main challenge to the first part of the hypothesis on the significance of the Coalition is whether other stakeholders played a more decisive role?

- Local Government was involved, in particular through the LGA¹¹ and the GLA¹². And there appears to have been a degree of collaboration between the Coalition and local government, for example in 2024 the Coalition coordinated a letter to Michael Gove from over 100 Council leaders¹³.

¹¹ [Renters' Rights Bill, Committee Stage, House of Lords, 22 April 2025 | Local Government Association](#)

¹² [Khan launches £400,000 fund ahead of Renters' Rights Act | Property Reporter](#)

¹³ [Councils back stronger renter protections, as evictions rise by 50% - The Intermediary - Latest UK mortgage news](#)

- Think tanks contributed to the debate, but the main players such as New Economics Foundation and Nationwide Foundation were themselves associated with the Coalition.
- Some major housing charities did not join the Coalition, for example St Mungo's and Homeless Link, but we can't find any evidence that they campaigned for renters' reform independently.

Based on a search of the online information we do not find this alternative hypothesis particularly persuasive, and it is hard to conclude that the Coalition was not the main vessel in which civil society was brought to bear over the political process.

Turning to the second part of the hypothesis on Shelter's role, an alternative explanation might be that unity was a function of the Coalition's inherent alignment rather than the work of any individual members (including Shelter). Certainly, the context for the Coalition can be seen as fortuitous (consensus on what is needed and a sense that goals were within reach). However, against this argument we also heard how Coalition working had challenges, particularly around agreeing priorities in the early stages (see section 6), and that Shelter is widely regarded, among the people we spoke to, having an important role in resolving these issues.

'When the Coalition came together - had to rationalise asks - needed strong conversations with partners to agree priorities' (Staff member)

A final challenge is that working in coalition did mean quite a lot of work for Shelter, especially in the early stages: Could these resources have been better deployed on working independently? This seems unlikely as we had no sense or evidence from the internal documents that Shelter's was limiting its own activities in order to engage with the Coalition.

Overall assessment

Level 3, 'smoking gun'

This means that we are fairly confident about both parts of this hypothesis on the basis that coalition unity was generally seen as a decisive factor in the campaign, and nobody we spoke to disagreed that Shelter was an important member that influenced both the direction of the Coalition and the resources it had available.

H4. Having clear, tangible, achievable goals was a factor in the campaign's success

Although it cuts across the whole campaign, we have treated this hypothesis as separate as it seems to have been an important factor in success. Some campaigns are weakened through having too general or unrealistic goals. In contrast, this campaign settled upon a coherent and reasonable set of goals under the umbrella of renters' reform.

Supporting evidence

The story of the development of the campaign's goals, as described by Shelter staff and Coalition interviewees, was how the Coalition moved from earlier, more ambitious or diffuse demands (e.g. long fixed terms, broader rent control measures) towards a sharper, shared focus on abolishing Section 21, and a set of complementary, 'winnable' reforms. Having clear priorities are felt by many to have helped maintained alignment and motivation in the following ways:

- Staff reported having clear internal priorities.
- Reducing internal conflict and distraction (within Shelter and the Coalition) that might have occurred when trying to win everything at once.
- Helped keep peoples' motivation up because we felt a sense of progress and that success was within reach.

Civil servants emphasised that Shelter's influence was strengthened by its ability to prioritise from amongst several goals. This disciplined focus made it easier for officials to act on core asks. Moreover, participants in this research felt that giving the Coalition and parliamentary allies a clear 'headline' ask made arguments more compelling externally.

'Met with lots of journalists across the campaign, they understand what we were calling for' (staff member)

They'd often push across 20 [ideas], but be willing to sort of say these are the things that really matter (Policy maker)

Having clear goals did not mean that Shelter and the Coalition, did not, at times, try to go further (e.g., rent stabilisation, guarantors), but this was done tactically as a way to test the water, while securing the objectives that remained at the heart of the campaign.

'We were calling for things we knew we weren't going to win, but that shifted the debate.' (Staff member)

In terms of Shelter's role in ensuring this clarity, Coalition partners credit Shelter's policy capacity and strategic judgement with helping to define what was realistically winnable and holding the line on that shared agenda when other ideas risked splitting the Coalition or muddying the message.

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

There are some counterpoints that limit our confidence in this hypothesis. These include:

- The idea that the campaign’s clarity was less of a strategic choice and more imposed by the bill timetable, and the urgency of getting something done.
- Internal evaluation reports which express frustration that Section 21 dominated coverage at the expense of other demands.
- Some partners and service users felt the Act has not gone far enough, and that the level of focus actually meant a lack of ambition (see section 4.1.2)

‘The PRS Ombudsman is a sham and will weaken renters’ access to meaningful redress. Applying Decent Homes Standard to PRS is as far away as it has been. Accountability for council enforcement action is weak’. (Coalition partner)

From these perspectives, clarity and consistency might be seen as less of an asset and more of a limiting factor.

It is also the case that there may have been other ways to combine policy asks that had better results. For example, could the packaging of right to rent, cap on rent in advance and guarantors (discrimination amendments) have been more effective?

Finally, we have the more general challenge that it is difficult to isolate the specific effect of ‘clarity’ alongside other factors (media, coalition, political context).

Overall assessment

Level 1. ‘Straw in the wind’

While there is evidence that message coherence and discipline was valuable to campaign success, these arguments are anecdotal, and we cannot rule out the idea that argument that other approaches could also have delivered similar results. We are perhaps more confident in Shelter’s part in securing and working with this level of focus, but this still seems one of the weaker hypotheses.

H5. Shelter directly influenced the wider political landscape to support reform

Though the Coalition and independently, Shelter aimed to directly influence politicians thinking and actions both before and after the 2024 General election. The main tools for this were supporter mobilisation, evidence gathering and media pressure. Shelter tried to keep tenancy reform in the limelight and build the wider political support needed for reform.

Supporting evidence

In this section we provide a brief summary of the evidence around several different campaign actions aimed at reaching politicians directly and indirectly (i.e. through media). We aim to paint a picture of the variety and weight of Shelter's campaign, and its effects on politicians.

Traditional media. Shelter's ability to get consistent stories and commentary into traditional media is explicitly credited with creating the climate in which reform became politically hard to ignore. Interviewees commented on how because of Shelter's brand profile and relationship with journalists, this was something other actors could not easily replicate. Examples of this in action include pieces in the Guardian, BBC, Sky News, The Sun, Daily Mail, Huffington Post and the Mirror. These stories often featured case studies generated from Shelter's campaign actions and local work, illustrating an effective pipeline from campaigners to case studies and on to wider coverage (see also H10)

'Rayner picked up Natalie's story from our media coverage and stats in PMQs.' (Internal report)

Supporter Actions. There were multiple instances of supporter actions (postcards, petitions etc) reaching policy makers, possibly even overwhelming them, which was acknowledged by MPs. A tangible example of this in action was Florence Eshalomi quoting from a Shelter supporter during the 2nd reading of the Bill in October 2024¹⁴.

In a survey to Shelter supporters, 77% of those surveyed believed that the direct lobbying of MPs (in which they played a significant role), was the most impactful campaigning activity Shelter took. In the same survey, 94% of supporters described Shelter's overall contribution as significant or very significant (see Appendix 8.2 for charts from this survey).

¹⁴ See Renters' Rights Bill - Hansard - UK Parliament

‘Two really key moments for me that was telling me it was working. I was with a group of politicians on the night of the second reading, and they when they found out that I worked for Shelter, their reaction was, oh, my god, you guys have done an absolute number on us. I’m sick of hearing from you guys. And then the second one was Matt Pennycook telling off our CEO at a conference, saying ‘pack it in with the postcards.’ (Staff member)

‘Lots of great pressure on MPs and Lords, through campaigns and petitions, which added a lot of pressure on the Government’ (Shelter Supporter).

Local work. Shelter also ran effective local projects through their Community Organising programme, which sought to raise awareness, increase and mobilise supporter actions to reach MPs through their constituents, as well as other local stakeholders.

Examples of this in action are the Bristol Fair Renting campaign², Jonny Mercer ([Plymouth Moor View](#)), Luke Pollard (Plymouth Sutton and Devonport), Jonny Reynolds (Stalybridge and Hyde³), Tom Hayes (Bournemouth East⁴) and Chris Webb (Blackpool South⁵). This combined well with political analysis conducted in 2022 that sought to raise the profile of the renter population within constituencies¹⁵.

‘It’s worth noting that the emphasis on non-urban areas was really important and successful at an MP lobbying level. A really inclusive campaign touching every part of the country’ (Coalition partner)

“The constituency nature of the polling made it feel quite personal when speaking to MPs who are likely to lose their seats” (Internal report)

There is also evidence from around the General Election campaign period of very active local engagement and activity by Shelter Hubs, although it also highlighted a need to build campaigning skills and capacity at the Hub level.

‘Hubs ‘competed’ with one another to deliver local actions... drove innovation.’ (Internal report)

Proactive engagement of MPs. During both the Conservative and Labour Governments, Shelter organised meetings with MPs, roundtables and events that brought renters and MPs together, all of which were important in keeping ministers aware that renters were watching and expecting change.

As the formal policy process developed, Shelter identified key points where they wanted MPs in the Commons or Peers in the Lords to either push for the Bill to go further or shape the terms of the debate to prevent it being watered down (see also H2). Lessons from other legislation, for example on ‘assisted dying’, demonstrates the value of significant backbench support in preventing delays and ensuring the Act reflects campaigners’ goals.

¹⁵ <https://polimapper.co.uk/2025/11/shelter-polimapper-case-study/>

Civil servants noted that visible political pressure from MPs created “more scope to explore policy levers”, suggesting that Shelter’s mobilisation work directly affected the political space available to Ministers. Further evidence for Shelter’s influence is that all three MPs that responded to our survey said that Shelter’s Parliamentary engagement & direct lobbying of MPs was influential.

MP roundtable Well received by MPs, it was attended by: Lola McEvoy, Florence Eshalomi, Danny Beales, Luke Murphy, Joe Powell, Antonia Bance, Chris Curtis, Naushabah Khan, Clare Hazelgrove, Chris Bloore (Internal report).

Shelter also sought to put direct pressure on MPs / Ministers working on the Bill. For example, email and postcard actions were targeted at Matthew Pennycook over the summer in 2025, including stories from renters, and asking him to speed up passing of the bill. Following this, he spoke to the Shelter CEO at Labour conference to acknowledge the communication and say he was going as fast as he could. Shelter felt that targeting specific ministers worked well for both engaging supporters and helping them put a 'face' to the bill, as well as putting more pressure on key decision makers, for example between Shelter and the Minister in February 2025, in response to backbench pressure, enabled significant progress on the issue of guarantors.

After the 2024 General Election, Shelter targeted Labour backbenchers. The team initially invested in engaging ‘high-potential’ new MPs through briefings and a roundtable, but this generated less activity than hoped, likely because many were still finding their feet. Shelter then pivoted to a more selective strategy, focusing on a small number of already-aligned, credible MPs (such as committee chairs) who were both willing and able to speak out and push for a stronger bill.

Across the Commons stages, it is estimated that Shelter held around 60 one-to-one meetings with MPs, helping to build a cohort of parliamentary advocates and maintain political momentum behind reform. Then ahead of Second Reading, Shelter met 38 MPs and secured visible parliamentary engagement, helping to frame renting as a political priority early in the Bill’s passage.

Target to meet with 22 MPs. We have easily surpassed this and met with around 40 MPs (Internal evaluation report)

Research and evidence. Shelter provided numerous statistics and real-world evidence that fed into the narrative of systemic unfairness, in the various stages of the bill (see also hypothesis 9).

‘Our stat was referenced in the debate itself... rent in advance was brought up several times.’ (Shelter staff)

Creating allies in different places. Another facet of Shelter’s influencing strategy was to work with centre right media and think tanks during the Conservative government period to ‘kick the government from its own flank’ (see discussion in H11).

‘We invested time in those relationships... it paid dividends.’ (Staff member)

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

The evidence summarised above tells us that Shelter was very active through the course of the campaign and had direct tangible impact on many MPs and potentially the wider political class. However, in trying to determine how much of an effect this actually had we must also take into the argument that the party-political context was already favourable. In particular, a new Labour Government with a big majority and after over a decade in opposition will always look for popular ‘policy wins’, and renters’ rights very much fits this bill. Given the scale of political alignment after 2024, it is difficult to isolate the specific impact of individual mobilisation tactics, even when MPs directly referenced Shelter’s actions.

A similar argument is that success was driven by the resolve and fortunes of key politicians.

- Michael Gove, as Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, pushed a Conservative version of the bill—somewhat in opposition to the views of his Party—and a lot of the policy work that contributed to the Act was done under his tenure.
- Angela Rayner made Renters’ Rights a focus of her time as Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government
- Mathew Pennycock as Shadow / Minister for Housing and Planning since 2021 has provided rare political continuity and has been broadly supportive of the reforms.
- Meanwhile the political fortunes of those who might have opposed the Bill / Act waned – most notably Liz Truss.

Perhaps the only political headwind has been frequent ministerial change (10 Secretaries of State and 16 Ministers of State since 2010) which has meant that campaigners having to frequently adapt their approach to both opportunities and setbacks. The Shelter campaign team characterised this process as like a game of snakes and ladders.

Another limitation to this hypothesis is that it is impossible to measure relative causal impact of particular media, supporter and other actions on politicians’ views – especially when there have been so much of them happening at once and alongside external factors. So, while we have evidence of lots of activity and engagement, we struggle to find a direct link between these things and decisions made (in contrast to the work under hypothesis 2 which is more tangible).

The politician... is never going to admit that that was significant in their decision making (Staff member)

Overall assessment

Level 2 ‘hoop test’

Our main source of confidence is having lots of specific examples of actions taken and MPs / politicians responding directly to Shelter’s actions and echoing Shelter messages / talking points. It is also undeniably true that Shelter was one, if not the main, voice influencing the wider political process. This evidence would need to be true for this hypothesis to hold, but the inherent difficulty of attributing these kinds of activities to results and the potential significance of alternative explanations inclines us towards being more conservative here.

H6. Withdrawal of support for the Conservative bill

A) Strategic withdrawal for support for the 2024 bill created the conditions for a more robust Act under Labour in 2025

b) Shelter played a key role in this decision

An important moment that contributed to the eventual success of the 2025 Act was the decision by the RRC to withdraw support from the Conservative version of the Bill in March 2024, because of various amendments to weaken the bill and the perception that it was being influenced by landlords. This withdrawal by the Coalition effectively meant that—with a General Election pending—the Bill was abandoned.

This strategy was risky because it meant surrendering some gains in the hope that a stronger bill would become possible in the next Parliament. This paid off, in part because of Labour's victory and their support for a more robust Bill (which is discussed in the next hypothesis)

Supporting evidence

Both those within Shelter and external interviewees felt confident that withdrawing support in 2024 was strategically the right choice as it forced a reset of peoples' thinking and ultimately was a factor in achieving a better outcome two years' later.

'The bill not making it over the line before the election enabled a stronger bill — almost undeniably.' (Staff member)

'We have had indications from officials that our strong stance has an impact. We've been asked why we hadn't been so strongly displeased sooner. To us, this shows we can have this approach and still have a good relationship with DLUHC our clarity in message has cut through' (Internal evaluation report)

"The fact we had withdrawn support was spoken about in the debate and used to show why it must be improved." (Internal evaluation report)

An argument in support of this view is that, had a weaker bill been passed, politicians would likely have treated the issue as either resolved or something they could safely deprioritise. In particular, there would have been a strong incentive to 'wait and see' whether the weaker bill worked, thereby delaying any further reform for several years. Under the 'policy windows' framework, this would have been disastrous, as the political opportunity created by a new Labour Government seeking early policy wins is essentially a once-in-a-generation moment. Additional evidence for this analysis can be found in other policy areas where weak legislation has pushed issues into the long grass.⁶

A less significant result of the withdrawal, but worth mentioning, is how it provided a story for traditional and social media to keep the issue in the limelight at a time when people were especially interested in national politics.

This hypothesis also highlights a further dimension of Shelter and the Coalition playing a long game of building understanding and consensus around policies even when the political context is unfavourable, so that real progress can happen when the time is right. Specifically, the work done in good faith under the Conservatives created a floor Labour couldn't row back from.

'We won battles in the Conservative bill that set the floor Labour couldn't go below.' (Staff member)

In terms of the second part of the hypothesis on Shelter's role, internal and external stakeholders describe Shelter as 'instrumental' in orchestrating the sector's collective move, using its political credibility and media weight to raise the cost of proceeding with a weakened bill, and undertaking bilateral work to bring other groups to the same position. At the same time, these accounts also stress that the final decision was made jointly, with other partners also arguing for this course of action.

'We literally had to convince the Coalition, and organisations within the Coalition, that it was the right thing to do at that moment in time. We were instrumental in the sector's decision to collectively withdraw support from the bill. Even though other, more grassroots organisations had been saying it wasn't worth the paper it was written on before we were, we had to orchestrate the action' (Staff member)

'Shelter actually in some ways precipitated that, because there'd been talk about doing that from some of the more radical members of the Coalition, but once Shelter said that they were thinking about doing this, that set in motion trying to make sure that everyone else would support it' (Coalition partner)

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

A counterpoint to this hypothesis is that, in hindsight, the withdrawal was unnecessary because an election was called shortly afterwards and the new Labour Government may have been willing to work on improving it anyway.

However, it seems just as plausible that Labour would have simply waved through the Conservative version, as they did with other legislation such as the Online Safety Act. Equally, with support in place, the Tories could have chosen to push the bill through in the pre-election "wash up" process that allows incumbent governments to get priority legislation through quickly. Conversely, the opportunity for a fresh start was important to securing Labour's interest in the issue.

Overall assessment

Level 3, 'smoking gun'

The 2025 Act is more robust than what seemed possible in 2024 and that the Coalition's withdrawal of support compelled Labour to look the issue anew. Nobody we spoke to challenged the idea that Shelter was instrumental in this decision. However, we would need more testimony from external sources, particularly the politicians involved, to be fully confident of this hypothesis.

H7. Shelter shaped Labour's thinking during opposition and into Government.

The companion to hypothesis 6 is that Shelter's 'inside track' work, both independently and as part of the Coalition, was significant in influencing the Labour Party's thinking and shaped positions that they later carried into government.

Arguably, this goes back over decade. Building on hypothesis 1, Shelter's long-term policy outputs and evidence on private renting is cited by interviewees as a factor in raising the salience of renters' issues within Labour circles and making a more ambitious renters' rights package politically appealing and credible to the party. Post 2020, as reform began to look like a possibility, Shelter's work became more focussed on specific themes and policy asks, and thereby more directly shaping the ideas that Labour took forward.

Supporting evidence

Labour echoing Shelter's messages and tone. Labour in opposition actively used attack lines on private renting and drew heavily on Shelter's support. This elevated the issue, built trust with Labour, and increased pressure on the Conservative Government. Commitment on Renters' Rights were also included in Labour's Manifesto, all of which created a foundation that later enabled Shelter and the wider sector to hold Labour to account once in government, establishing a political baseline that was difficult to retreat from. After the election, Labour's language became more forceful, aligning closely with Shelter's framing.

'Pennycook spoke a lot about the 'tenant trap'. We could link this externally to our cost of moving research when live tweeting.' (Staff member)

24 MPs pushed at least one of Shelter's policy asks in the Second Reading debate (Internal report)

Labour taking on Shelter's positions. More tangibly, interviewees credit Shelter as being a central policy actor in the Coalition whose work fed into the Shadow Housing team's thinking. Examples including:

- Discrimination
- Rent in advance.
- Rent stabilisation became a major public focus during the Labour phase.

'The Labour Government came into office committed to the Act and got it through despite resistance especially from the Conservatives who opportunistically U-turned. I am sure the continued pressure from the renters organisations (and Shelter) also played a part and was acknowledged by MPs in Parliament when the Bill finally passed.' (Supporter)

Relationships with figures within the Labour Party. Shelter invested early in building relationships with Labour parliamentarians, well before a Labour Government seemed likely. Key figures included Matthew Pennycook and Angela Rayner, and this groundwork paid off: Shelter was asked directly for input and was well-placed to act as a 'critical friend' during Labour's transition into government.

We worked very closely with then shadow Housing Minister, Matthew Pennycook... in opposition, you don't have any staff... so he was relying on us for briefings and amendments. (Staff member)

Timing. In the later stages of the campaign, Shelter also played a role in accelerating the Bill's passage. Through targeted pressure on the Minister, public facing accountability tactics, and coordinated supporter mobilisation, Shelter helped maintain political urgency and reduce the risk of legislative delay. Internal accounts suggest this pressure was noticed by ministers and contributed to maintaining momentum at a critical moment

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

While Shelter influenced Labour's thinking, it is ultimately impossible to determine which factors were decisive. An important alternative explanation is that civil servants working on this policy area played an equally significant role by developing workable proposals before and after the 2024 General Election, which Labour could quickly adopt.

"Because the bill was clearly drafted within the department, it was easy for them to pull it for the civil service. Say, here you go, Minister. Here's a sort of like virtually drafted Bill, you know." (Policy Maker)

Another interviewee noted that, organisations such as Generation Rent sometimes had greater visibility and influence with Labour politicians, and that politicians also relied heavily on their own polling and political judgement alongside NGO input.

"Shelter don't loom as large as they would perhaps like to... Gen Rent are probably now seen as a more prominent stakeholder." (Policy Maker)

We should also acknowledge the unusually favourable circumstance of having, in Matthew Pennycook, a Shadow and then Minister for Housing and Planning with whom Shelter and other campaigners could build a sustained, constructive relationship. In another scenario, a ministerial reshuffle could easily have placed someone in the role with a very different outlook.

Overall assessment

Level 2 'hoop test'

Strong relationships with Labour and the evidence that the party adopted Shelter's positions is the minimum evidence we would need to support this hypothesis. To go further we would need more direct testimony from key Labour politicians themselves. In the absence of this we cannot rule out alternative explanations.

H8. Creativity, variety and emphasising the ‘human side’ helped the campaign to ‘cut through’ and increased engagement amongst renters and wider supporter audiences.

Over what was a long campaign, Shelter took a two-sided approach to public facing activities.

1. A creative, trial-and-error approach to engaging people. The tone of many outputs was playful, bold, irreverent and perhaps even risky. Examples include *Shelly the Shelter Snail*,⁷ *Only Choice Lettings*,⁸ the *exploding Section 21 notice*⁹, and the *Spill the Tea* exposé of landlord MPs.¹⁰ Shelter staff themselves felt this was somewhat unusual for the housing sector. At the same time, Shelter put a lot of effort into emphasising human interest and how the problems with renting are affecting people, by centring renters' stories of their housing situations and the impact renting had on their lives
2. More earnest and traditional tasks such as strategic litigation and research, which is discussed in hypothesis 9.

The contention is that the two strands worked well together, enhanced media attention and levels of support, and backed up the ‘inside track’ work with politicians described above.

Supporting evidence

Shelter staff consistently described humour, stunts and creative storytelling as a distinctive and valuable feature of the renters' rights campaign. Evidence suggests these tactics played an important role in sustaining supporter engagement, generating media attention and keeping momentum during long periods of political uncertainty¹⁶.

Several staff explicitly framed humour and creativity as central to the campaign's identity. One reflected that *‘it was a funny and fun campaign’*, while another noted that stunts *‘went alongside all of these things’* and helped *‘pull us up.’* Social media and Campaigns teams also reported unusually high engagement on creative content, with one staff member observing that *‘comedy kept supporters engaged’*. This aligns with wider evidence that renters were Shelter's most active audience throughout the campaign.

Staff also highlighted strategic advantages of the humour-based approach. They argued that it:-

- Differentiated Shelter from other NGOs
- Neutralised landlord lobby hyperbole
- Made the campaign more memorable for both media and supporters
- Helped keep the keep the team motivated and enjoying themselves

¹⁶ An example being the [‘price of a chicken’ Instagram post](#) which received 2000+ likes

Taken together, the evidence indicates that creative tactics were not peripheral but contributed meaningfully to the campaign's visibility, supporter energy and overall cut through.-

Human Interest. Across the interviews and workshops, participants described human-interest content as one of Shelter's most effective tools. Shelter was in a position to do this through the way its services and supporter insight could feed directly into media lines, parliamentary briefings and evidence submissions, ensuring that technical arguments remained grounded in lived experience.

"There is no doubt the role of shining a light... has transformed the landscape." (policy maker)

"Home Truths: stories were powerful and meant we could develop strong case studies" (Internal report)

Lived-experience testimony from supporters was felt to have given the campaign moral weight and immediacy, with several interviewees noting that policymakers *'paid attention when real renters spoke'* and that stories *'cut through where data alone didn't.'* Staff explained that the media team prioritised story-led content because it kept the issue visible during periods of delay, and because journalists were more likely to run pieces anchored in a renter's experience than in policy detail. Workshop participants also highlighted that these stories helped align Coalition partners around the everyday realities of renting.

'A brilliant campaign by shelter and people with lived experience to put the focus on Children, unfairness and a great polarisation of David vs Goliath' (Coalition partner)

'Shelter's contribution was transformative and indispensable. They acted as the vital bridge between my personal struggle for physical stability and the legislative heart of Parliament. By amplifying authentic voices like mine—those of us navigating complex disabilities and seeking a 'New Design of Protection'—Shelter ensured that the Act was not just a legal document, but a human one' (Supporter)

Media take-up. We also found concrete examples of Shelter's outputs generating media-ready moments. Staff referenced the [BBC exclusive](#) on rent in advance timed to second reading, the *'Spill the Tea'* exposé of landlord MPs, and the exploding Section 21 stunt. *'Snail mail content – was fun to do and also be more playful in tone to our target and put a spotlight in a different way. No responses, but we know that Pennycook was rattled and trying to hurry things up.'* (Shelter Internal Document)

Supporting teamwork and motivation. Creative work also appears to have had internal benefits. Several staff members described the campaign as *'fun,' 'energising,'* and *'galvanising,'* with creativity helping to maintain morale during periods of political delay. One Community Organiser explicitly linked the creative tone to team cohesion: *'it really galvanised us having that sort of fun atmosphere.'*

Supporting the Coalition. Finally, there is evidence that creative tactics helped maintain trust and alignment within the Coalition. One Coalition leader noted that Shelter's willingness to adopt bolder tones and tactics reassured more *'radical'* groups that the Coalition was moving in

the right direction and helped prevent fractures. Similarly, many supporters were pleased with Shelter’s approach and persuaded that Shelter was on their side.

‘Shelter expresses itself very candidly, bring up truths that otherwise aren’t spoken about and support us renters for a better quality of life and affordability’ (Supporter)

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

Most of our evidence for this hypothesis comes from conversations with Shelter staff themselves and not externally validated. However, one useful metric is the number of views and likes for online content and we note that more humorous content like *Only Choice Lettings* (66K hits) had a very high level of engagement compared to the norm for Shelter content.

Our interviews also highlighted limitations. Staff acknowledged that some things didn’t work, and in some internal documents we found the argument that Shelter tried to do too much, although this should perhaps be expected when the aim is to be creative. In terms of the relative contribution of creativity compared to other tactics, some noted that creative tactics were only effective because they were backed by credible policy work (see H9), which is not to downplay their role but rather emphasise the value of a campaign with several different elements and tones.

“We threw a lot of actions at the wall... there was a lot that didn’t work that well.” (Internal report)

Overall assessment

Level 2. ‘Hoop test’

There is a strong belief amongst team members that the creative approach contributed to supporter mobilisation, media visibility, internal cohesion and Coalition trust - all of which were important enabling conditions for the campaign’s effectiveness. However, without more external testimony we must be cautious about how decisive this aspect of the campaign was.

H9. Research projects, casework insight and strategic litigation brought credibility to Shelter's arguments.

Throughout the long campaign Shelter was active in producing evidence to support the cause of renters' rights reform. This included legal advice and service user and supporter insight; strategic litigation; research reports; polling; policy analysis; and data from services. Highlights were.

Year	Evidence
Before 2012	<u>Safe and Secure? The Private Rented Sector and Security of Tenure - Shelter England (2005)</u> <u>Shelter's input into the Review of the Private Rented Sector (2008)</u> Research report: a route to homelessness? (2008) <u>The Impact of Welfare Reform Bill measures on affordability for low income private renting families (2011)</u> <u>Private rent watch report 1 - Analysis of local rent levels and affordability (2011)</u>
2012	<u>A better deal - towards more stable private renting</u> an analysis of the scale of the issues facing private renters and articulation of policy positions <u>Housing in transition: Understanding the dynamics of tenure change (2012)</u>
2013	<u>What works? Tackling rogue landlords and improving the PRS</u> <u>Campaigns briefing Growing up renting: A childhood spent in private rented homes</u>
2014	Report: Can't Complain looking at housing standards in the PRS <u>Report: Safe and Decent Homes</u>
2015	<u>Making renting fit for families: the impact of different forms of rent regulation</u>
2016	<u>Research with YouGov</u> showing large numbers of renting families in England had moved three or more times in five years, that renting parents had borrowed money or fallen behind on other payments because of their last move, and how families had changed their children's school when they moved. This was used as direct evidence for longer tenancies and greater security. <u>YouGov survey of private landlords</u> <u>Research report: Five years of renting</u> <u>Renters put at risk – a review of possession claims that have been lodged in a court in the previous twelve months</u>
2017	<u>The Rising Political Salience of Young Renters</u>
2018	Marshalling a tenant response to the Government's consultation on <i>Overcoming the Barriers to Longer Tenancies in the Private Rented Sector</i> <u>Ending DSS Discrimination</u> (blog)
2019	<u>Evaluating changes to rental agreements in Scotland</u> <u>Research Note; Private rents and family incomes – an economic modelling of rental costs compared to incomes</u>
2020	The <u>Time for Change</u> report with Nationwide was a major project setting out the arguments and drawing on a range of research methods including public polling and stakeholder interviews.

2021	The <u>Renters' Reform Bill report</u> with Onward was a write-up of a round table setting out the arguments for reform. Significantly, this covered the arguments from a centre-right perspective to broaden the political coalition for reform.
2022	<u>MRP and public polling with Stack</u> ("Rent Quake") provided evidence on the political importance of renters and in which constituencies their votes might prove significant. <u>Briefing on no fault evictions</u>
2023	
2024	<u>Work with Polimapper</u> to map levels of homelessness in each constituency <u>Research on cost of moving</u> <u>Research on No Fault Evictions</u>

Moreover, throughout this period Shelter produced and promoted detailed legal guidance on unlawful eviction, retaliatory eviction, and tenancy-security issues, which helped both practitioners and policymakers understand the weaknesses in the existing framework.

Supporting evidence

Across the interviews, there is clear and consistent testimony that Shelter's influence on the Renters Rights Act (H2) relied upon on a combination of research-based evidence, frontline casework insight, strategic litigation, and policy expertise. These strands reinforced each other and positioned Shelter as a trusted and authoritative source of insight and information.

A central component of this evidential foundation was Shelter's 2020 report, *Time for Change: Making Renting Fairer for Private Renters*. Shelter staff described how this report '*spelled out everything we were going to campaign on*' and became '*the backbone of everything we've done since*'. The report provided a comprehensive, evidence-based blueprint for reform that shaped Shelter's internal strategy, informed its public messaging, and offered a shared platform for Coalition partners. Its development, in partnership with the Nationwide Foundation, also helped build the relationships and credibility that later enabled the formation of the RRC.

'Shelter produce clear, measured and reliable information that's incredibly influential and always supportive of renters' rights.' (Supporter)

Civil servants corroborate the importance of this evidence base. One senior official emphasised that Shelter's power came from its ability to combine policy analysis with frontline insight' which gave their policy positions credibility and made Shelter a valued partner for officials.

We rely on their evidence... they can back up what they say with facts (Policy maker)

More tangible evidence for this hypothesis is available through the extensive references to Shelter research and published outputs by influential external sources including:

- *The end of 'no fault' section 21 evictions (England)* by the House of Commons Library (2022)
- The Government's published response to *Overcoming the Barriers to Longer Tenancies in the Private Rented Sector* consultation. In which, of the c.9,000 responses received, 6,000 were organised by Shelter, who ran a survey with the aim of collecting tenants'

views. Tenants' responses acted as a direct rebuttal of the rest of the findings, which were dominated by landlords.

- Coverage of Rentquake analysis

Shelter's service **user and supporter insight and legal services** also played a role. Staff and Coalition partners highlight that Shelter's direct experience supporting renters facing eviction, discrimination and unsafe housing allowed it to identify and articulate problems early. For example, on the topic of discrimination, interviewees credit Shelter's strategic litigation on DSS discrimination with shaping the anti-discrimination provisions in the final Act¹⁷.

'Shelter, as we've been going through the detail, have huge expertise: they have strong policy knowledge, but they also have people working on the front lines providing legal advice. That gives them real credibility, because they can back up what they say with facts and what they see in the real world' (Government official)

Shelter's evidence also shaped parliamentary scrutiny. Staff describe how Shelter's policy and legal teams drafted amendments and provided detailed briefings to MPs, particularly Matthew Pennycook during the Conservative bill's committee stage. One participant noted that Pennycook 'was relying on us for briefings and amendments,' and that this work fed directly into the Labour's thinking (see hypotheses 2 and 7).

Shelter staff also felt that the Coalition appreciated the value of Shelter's evidence in helping to maintain unity and credibility within the RRC. Shelter's research, legal expertise and casework experience reassured larger charities that the Coalition's positions were robust.

"One of our big... persuasive tactics... was to talk about the... reflections of our case workers... as a source of credibility and legitimacy and helping persuade [Coalition] organisations to make that decision." (Staff member)

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

While Shelter's evidence was strong on insecurity, discrimination and tenancy reform, it was less developed on the economic dimensions of renting — a point that created some tension within the Coalition and may have constrained the campaign's ability to push for affordability measures.

Shelter was also not the only organisation producing research on this topic. Other NGOs, public bodies members of the Coalition also contributed, as is neatly summarised in this resource¹⁸,

¹⁷ No DSS: Landmark court ruling confirms housing benefit discrimination is unlawful - Shelter - Shelter England

¹⁸ Evidence - Renters Rights London

and the Government itself carried out polling of tenants.¹⁹ However, judged simply in terms of quantity, Shelter have clearly been one of the leading sources of evidence on this topic.

Overall assessment

Level 3 ‘Smoking gun’.

It is clear that Shelter’s influence over the policy process was backed by its production and use of evidence. Initially, *Time for Change* provided policy foundations; casework and legal services supplied real-world insights; strategic litigation established legal precedent; and policy expertise helped Shelter to shape amendments and respond quickly to political developments. Moreover, Shelter have been one of the leading research organisations on issues associated with renting.

Evidence and experience of strategic litigation gave Shelter a level of credibility and authority that strengthened the Coalition, informed parliamentary debate, and helped shape the content of the Act.

¹⁹ [Private rented sector tenants: research report - GOV.UK](#)

H10. Involvement of renters with direct experience of bad private renting strengthened legitimacy, authenticity, and improved supporters' experience.

Shelter is committed to involving people and communities in its work. The 2025–29 Strategic Plan¹¹ states that ‘lived experience insight is at the heart of our strategy,’ and that its goals have been co-created with people who have experienced housing problems or homelessness. The organisation talks about building a coalition for long-term change with lived-experience and anti-racism ‘at its heart,’ signalling that centrality in both campaigning and policy work.

Efforts to engage supporters in the renters’ rights campaign began, somewhat falteringly, with the *Housing Activist Network*, which staff felt lacked a clear purpose, tried to serve too many different audiences, and didn’t give people a defined role or pathways for engagement. Those frustrations directly prompted a shift to the idea of *Renting Champions* in 2022/2023, which had a simpler, more structured offer. Champions had a clear brief to share stories, front actions, and support lobbying efforts, which internal evaluations indicate were easier to organise and more effective in practice.

Supporting evidence

Across our evidence sources, there is evidence that the involvement of people with lived experience of renting played a meaningful role in the renters’ rights campaign. Staff consistently describe PWLE contributions as central to the campaign’s legitimacy, emotional resonance and supporter mobilisation, even if their direct effect on legislative drafting or parliamentary decision-making was more limited.

Several Shelter staff emphasise that case studies and renter testimonies were at the heart of the campaign’s media work. One media lead noted *that ‘there was a lot of heart in those stories,’* and that journalists were always interested in hearing directly from renters affected by Section 21, discrimination or unsafe housing. These stories were often used in national media coverage.

‘Was the campaign better because they were involved? Yes.’ (Staff member)

PWLE involvement also appears to have strengthened supporter engagement and mobilisation. Staff working on digital mobilisation and paid social media describe renters as Shelter’s ‘most active audience,’ and attribute this partly to the campaign’s ability to speak directly to renters’ lived realities. Creative content that featured or echoed renters’ experiences generated high engagement. Shelter staff believed that PWLE involvement helped make the campaign feel authentic and relatable, which in turn supported mobilisation efforts.

There is also evidence that PWLE involvement influenced political engagement. Staff describe events where renters met MPs, including a large gathering in London where renters ‘filled a hall’ to question the Housing Minister. While no interviewee claims that these events directly shifted specific votes or amendments, they do describe them as important for maintaining relationships with decision-makers and demonstrating the breadth and depth of renter support for reform. One participant noted that MPs often referenced Shelter’s case studies in debates, and how PWLE stories helped keep political attention focused on the human side of insecure renting.

As mentioned in H5, **local campaigns** were also a key mechanism through which people with direct experience of the issues could get involved. For example, campaigns in Plymouth, Lancashire, and Bristol, as well as the hub campaigns at the general election contributed significantly to centring renter voices with politicians.

'Community Organising Campaigns such as Bristol Fair Renting, Renters Rights Lancashire and Plymouth, as well as local mobilisation through Shelter's hubs at the 2024 General Election also created opportunities for renters to engage directly with politicians and turn frustrations into demands for change'. (Staff member)

PWLE involvement also played a role in **Coalition cohesion**. Several Coalition partners highlight that Shelter's ability to bring forward credible, real-world examples of renters' experiences helped ground the Coalition's discussions and built trust by reassuring members that everyone was working towards the same goals.

Another important argument for involving renters and other supporters in the campaign is that it is 'the right thing to do' and that it not only supports campaign outcomes but benefits supporters themselves. There is some evidence of this from the supporter survey Shelter ran in February 2026. Amongst some of the feedback, with direct quotes from supporters, were the arguments that:

Shelter visibility on this issue contributed to people feeling represented:

'At least there is an organisation fighting for us renters and giving us a voice.'

'You are giving these people a voice that would otherwise be ignored'.

Feeling empowered through personal involvement:

'Emailing the House of Lords was innovative (sic). At least seven Lords and Ladies responded directly to my email about the Bill :)'

Feeling personally supported or protected:

'Without you we had no chance of renters rights'.

Feeling that their own story or experience mattered:

'Having been the victim of a private landlord and knowing that I was not the problem, but the section 21 was the problem'.

'You are the only organisation that have ever reached out to me'.

Feeling gratitude or emotional connection to the campaign:

'Keep up the good work. It's invaluable in a largely cold, selfish, and uncaring world.'

Feeling that the Act will personally improve their life:

'Freedom from a section 21 just by asking the landlord/letting agent to do what they should do.'

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

From internal evaluation documents it is apparent that not all efforts to engage supporters worked. Particular barriers were felt to be:

- Reluctance amongst supporters to get personally involved out of fear it could affect their personal circumstances / tenancies.
- Challenges recruiting from certain populations
- The level of effort needed to recruit people and then maintain their engagement through regular contact and things for them to do. Also knock on effects of these challenges on other parts of the campaign.
- Occasional concerns about wellbeing amongst volunteers.
- Teams struggled to recruit storytellers experiencing racism in renting, and anti-racism aims were not consistently embedded across outputs.

These issues are perhaps not surprising as there is always an element of trial and error with supporter engagement. Moreover, documents and testimony also indicate that Shelter adapted and improved their approach as the Campaign continued. Nonetheless, there is also the sense from some accounts that staff would have wanted PWLE to greater involvement, and to have had a more mixed group of volunteers across different characteristics.

‘Very few supporters attended training or downloaded our campaigner packs.’ (internal document)

‘Perceived foregone conclusion of the election result meant that many supporters didn’t see the point in getting involved’ (internal document)

Our discussions also revealed some limits to PWLE influence. No interviewee suggested that PWLE directly shaped the technical content of the bill or the detailed policy negotiations. Civil servants describe being influenced primarily by evidence, legal analysis and political pressure, rather than by individual testimonies. Staff also acknowledge that while it is likely that PWLE involvement strengthened legitimacy and narrative authenticity, it is not possible to draw a direct line from involvement to actual policy change.

This is partly a function of the way the policy process happens and is understood: i.e. it is a technical exercise in which those with the necessary expertise translate people’s experiences into workable legislation. From this perspective it might be hard to see how PWLE involvement and testimony could tangibly direct policy details.

From Shelter staff themselves we also heard the policy timetable meant that Shelter had to prioritise speed, insider negotiation, and evidence-based drafting. This meant that PWLE were sometimes brought in after decisions had already been made, limiting their ability to shape the policy content directly. At times this led to frustration amongst supporters themselves.

“Having lived experience feeding into policy development was excellent, however we failed to include them in our campaigns planning.” (Internal report)

'I was asked to join a working group for Shelter (on the development of the Bill for people with Lived Experience) but found it quite patronising and all the decisions had been made before my involvement.' (Supporter)

A further issue is the feeling among some supporters and team members that Shelter's approach to the issue of affordability remained underdeveloped and ambiguous. Evidence suggests that affordability is *the* top issue for renters, and some staff felt that the focusing on renters' rights meant downplaying affordability in a problematic way and 'a gap' in the campaign's messaging. This does not challenge the hypothesis directly but rather an aspect of the dynamic between Shelter and its supporters that could be more explicitly addressed in future.

'I think it would have been more open of Shelter to have acknowledged that though we were being asked to send supporting rent control messages, the chances of that being accepted was unlikely in view of the government's position... Your supporters are adults and I think it is not treating them as such to give them false hope by continuing to ask them to support a position which you know has very limited prospects of success.' (Supporter)

Overall assessment

Level 2 'Hoop test'

Taken together, the evidence suggests that PWLE involvement shaped the campaign's emotional resonance, legitimacy and public visibility, and helped sustain supporter mobilisation. It also humanised the issue for journalists and MPs, provided compelling narratives for news stories.

That said, PWLE involvement could have been deeper, and there is some evidence of uneven planning and delivery. Where it worked well, it acted more as an enabling condition, boosting credibility and reach, rather than a direct driver of policy change. For these reasons, we conclude with lower confidence in this hypothesis.

H11. Shelter helped neutralise the opposition to reform.

Alongside building public and political support, Shelter also pursued a deliberate strategy to reduce the influence of organised opposition to reform. Staff described this as an important complement to the campaign's positive case making. Through evidence-led rebuttals, targeted media work and the use of humour, the campaign sought to expose exaggerated claims from landlord lobby groups and reframe them as unreasonable. As one staff member put it, the campaign worked partly because it *“took apart our opposition as well as made our case.”* Another noted that this approach helped *“drive down the power of the against.”*---

Supporting evidence

Shelter's approach. Staff themselves describe this as a distinct and essential strand of the campaign. For example, Shelter's activities often focussed on rebutting landlord counterpoints, questioning their motivations and sincerity (for example exposing how many Conservative opponents were landlords themselves), and occasionally included an element of ridicule.

‘There was a whole branch of work pushing the opposition down... that was really key.’ (Staff member)

“Painting them as hyperbolic... chicken-little-sky-is-falling.” (Staff member)

Engaging the opposition. An important part of Shelter's strategy was playing a long game of relationship-building with officials and parliamentarians across the traditional political divide. This included working with centre-right think tanks such as Onward, more sympathetic Conservatives and journalists in more right-wing outlets.

‘A lot of the effort we were putting in at that point [2024] was around building relationships with right wing and centre right journalists. I'm thinking places like The Sun, there's like an interest on their side to kind of like kick the government, even though they would normally support them. And the Renters' Reform Bill was kind of a way of doing that.’ (staff member)

Challenging the opposition with evidence (see also hypothesis 9). Shelter insiders and external partners described how they used robust evidence and legal expertise to; challenge claims from groups like the NRLA; reassure sceptical politicians that reforms were manageable; and narrow the space for outright obstruction. Interviewees also highlighted moments when Shelter's campaigning—for example on discrimination and security of tenure—forced government to acknowledge tenant harms and accept stronger protections than landlord groups preferred. Taken together, these actions were seen to raise the political cost of siding openly with the landlord lobby.

Limiting evidence / alternative explanations

We lack evidence from external accounts that support the idea a deliberate strategy of systematically weakening or delegitimising landlord organisations, landlord MPs or the Conservative Party. Rather, landlord interests are described as a persistent structural constraint that remained relevant throughout the process.

Despite some successes at engaging potential opposition, internal documents do sometimes point to disappointment in reaching right-wing press or media. Moreover, we found few, if any, supportive articles in the Mail, Telegraph or Times, suggesting that success at neutralisation was only partial. Similarly, internal documents point to frustration at how some media tended to ‘both sides’ their coverage.

“Lack of coverage in conservative leaning press.” (internal report)

“BBC give big landlords have the same weight as us” (internal report)

Another counterargument is that the landlord lobby was quite weak, not well organised, and lacking public sympathy. Certainly, there was no parallel coalition of landlord groups that could match the organising and messaging power of the RRC. That said, the NRLA is still a large well-funded organisation with chapters throughout the country, and feedback from politicians suggested that they heard from them regularly. We also tested this idea out with one or two respondents who were inclined to disagree and still felt that the opposition was a real force. But we would welcome further reflections on this argument.

Overall assessment

Level 2: ‘Hoop test’

Overall, the interviews support the idea that the opposition lost both the arguments and the public / political mood and that Shelter played a part in this. However, the evidence only supports a more modest formulation of the hypothesis: Shelter’s sustained, evidence-based engagement and moments of targeted pressure helped contain some opposition and created pockets of political space for a stronger bill, but we cannot be certain that Shelter decisively weakened or delegitimised its opponents over time.

5. Internal ways of working

5.1. Cross-team collaboration

Across all evidence sources, Shelter's internal ways of working were a major factor in the success of the Renters Rights Act campaign. Staff described the project as one of the most effective cross-organisational efforts Shelter has delivered in recent years, marked by strong collaboration, creativity, and strategic discipline. At the same time, some gaps and tensions emerged that offer learning for future campaigns.

5.2. Where Shelter's ways of working were strong

High-functioning cross-team collaboration

The internal collaboration between teams working on the Renters' Rights Bill was consistently described as exceptionally strong by the staff working in these teams. Staff across campaigns, policy, public affairs, comms, digital, research, legal and services felt aligned around shared goals, with clear communication and a sense of collective ownership.

Staff noted, in the online workshop, that 'all our pieces of work worked in tandem', enabling teams to 'back up and amplify each other's actions'. The SEAD project group was regarded as a high-performing project group, enabled by structured agendas and inclusive decision-making. This was all enabled by a high level of trust that grew within the project team and encouraged interdependency and shared ownership.

This was reflected in the feedback from the workshop as well as the internal SEAD project group survey.

Team members said:

'We worked 'to the project' rather than to our functions- so collaboration and loyalty was high'.

'The best functioning project group I've been a part of at Shelter'.

'[The group was] not hierarchical, siloed or precious about our disciplines - the group encouraged creative ideas from anyone in the team, regardless of their area of expertise.'

Cross-functional ways of working helped integrate evidence from services and legal work into campaigning and policy outputs, giving Shelter credibility and authenticity in meetings with Ministers, MPs and civil servants.

A culture of creativity, trust and autonomy

Teams referenced a culture that combined trust, humour and experimentation. This sustained morale during a long, politically volatile campaign. The culture built in the project group not only enabled the team to work well together, it was also referenced as a factor in maintaining trust and energy when staffing changed over the years. This was noted by SMK in the second Hypothesis workshop when former staff returned to contribute to the evaluation. The warmth and depth of relationship between former and current staff was notable and the same culture of trust and creativity was on display in the workshop despite the years that had passed.

Staff reported that the culture made them feel relaxed and able to contribute their ideas and perspectives. They also described a culture of creative experimentation and delegated

ownership, which helped generate new angles and keep the campaign dynamic. Humour also played a role maintaining morale and momentum during periods of political stagnation. This contributed to the overall culture as well as being referenced as a key tactic.

This was reflected in the feedback from the workshop as well as the internal SEAD project group survey.

Team members said:

'Culture reinforced itself over time- new people came in and were expected to behave a certain way'.

'Strategy development was extremely inclusive of members from all levels and teams'.

'There was a lot of, trust and autonomy given to the group. I think that trickled down and was also demonstrated in the subgroups. I think people felt like it was a project where they could take ownership and have fun'.

'The cast rotated over time, but the culture persisted'.

'I remember someone mentioning how we all seem to be having fun in the chat.. and I think that sort of a culture kept people motivated - it was a fun place to be'.

A clear strategy, message discipline and adaptation

Internal teams operated with a high degree of strategic focus. Message discipline was highlighted as a defining strength, keeping core priorities in mind even when other organisations took scattergun approaches. Creating a shared campaigning framework, informed by early policy development (2019–2020), provided clarity and direction across teams. A shared framework was important and enabled adaptation as the political context shifted. The team had to continually recalibrate its approach as staff adjusted plans based on what was happening in Westminster, particularly following the shift from a Conservative to Labour government.

Effective project management

Staff reported that good project management was a factor in helping to maintain a high performing project team. Strong facilitation and good governance structures kept the project cohesive and enabled team members to be trusted in their areas of responsibility. Subgroups were well organised and project team members were clear on their roles. The facilitation of the main project group and the subgroups was seen as excellent by staff and leadership was distributed well.

Team members said:

'I think we had great PMs, with lots of clear structures and updates'.

'It's a really good way of working. It helped drive forward a lot of really collaborative, innovative and detailed work that we did. I think a project group structure for a campaign is really helpful'.

'The development of governed subgroups is good for Shelter's campaigning. It gives different colleagues a chance to lead something and also parcels away work to colleagues who are directly delivering'.

Staff lived experience

A further strength to the culture of the team everyone who worked on the campaign had rented at some point in recent years, with majority of people being renters as they worked on the campaign. It is actually quite unusual for campaigners, in larger charities, to also be the people directly affected by the issue, and this not only drives commitment but also offers authenticity and a sense of 'permission' to be more creative (as discussed in H9).

'We had skin in the game, which I think helped motivate us, but as we were experiencing it there and then, we could effectively communicate the problems renters face' (Team member)

5.3. Areas for development

Despite many strengths to the project team's approach and culture, several areas were identified as areas for development.

Overextension, capacity and prioritisation

By the team's own admission, they 'did a lot'. Shelter invested a lot of resources into this campaign to achieve the strongest result from the legislation. This led to teams sometimes feeling stretched across several channels or strands of work. During some of the slower periods under the Conservative government there was a risk of overloading activity at a time when the benefits were less clear.

Staff also reported that there were times when the campaign competed with other Shelter priorities. This created capacity bottlenecks and a lack of clarity about what was a priority, particularly when campaigns targeted the same decision makers. Staff expressed a desire for greater engagement from senior leaders to provide clearer prioritisation and capacity. There was also recognition the project group needed to bring some senior leaders into plans sooner.

Team members said:

'As a housing organisation, we have multiple campaigns which are often broadly targeting the same decision makers. Sometimes I think there are internal doubts about how priorities are made'.

'There were points in the last 6 years where the prioritisation of the campaign wasn't clear'.

'Some doubts/queries about how the campaign interacted with the General Election campaign - this is wider Shelter about clear prioritising when campaigns have the same political target (which is a regular occurrence)'

'At times it felt like we had a lot to deliver and not enough capacity'.

Gaps in real-time evaluation and prioritisation

Shelter threw a lot at this campaign across several years and a broad range of channels and tactics. The project team expressed that they lack a systematic approach to testing what worked and stopping what didn't work.

'Supporters like taking actions esp. when reactive and time sensitive. but there were also times where actions wouldn't have been effective. Balancing supporter engagement in the bill process and effective actions was a bit difficult'.

'We should evaluate our campaigns throughout the year and not just at the end of the year'.

'We threw a lot of actions at the wall over that period of time, just to see if any of them stuck'.

'You need all the actions together that win a campaign. So, there are some that work better than others, and there was a lot that didn't work that well'.

Difficulty maintaining engagement during technical phases.

As the campaign moved into the more technical legislative phases, some staff expressed that they found it difficult to stay engaged and that engagement was largely based around updates. Refresher training on how bills pass through parliament was mentioned as something that staff would have found helpful.

5.4. Key learning for future campaigns

Nurture and replicate project team culture

The culture within the multi-disciplinary project team was a foundation of the high-performing team that delivered this campaign. Nurturing, maintaining and replicating the high-trust, low hierarchy, creative, collaborative culture of this project group will enable future campaigns and project groups perform well. Future projects should consciously design for the conditions.

Introduce a structured 'test-learn-adapt' approach

Across workshops and staff reflections, teams highlighted that while creativity and experimentation were strengths, the campaign lacked a consistent way to evaluate tactics in real time, identify low-impact work early, and confidently decide what to stop.

To support more agile and effective influencing, Shelter should introduce a simple, repeatable test–learn–adapt model for future campaigns. This would allow teams to experiment confidently, while ensuring evidence drives decisions about where to focus effort.

This could include introducing After Action Reviews (AARs) to create a habit of reflecting after key tactics without creating heavy bureaucracy.

Strengthen senior leadership engagement and prioritisation for long-term campaigns

Across the workshops and internal surveys, staff highlighted moments where inconsistent senior leadership engagement affected momentum, clarity and capacity within the project. This included delays in replacing key roles, competing organisational priorities, and periods where the campaign did not receive the senior-level attention needed to match its strategic importance. However, the high autonomy of the group was a contributing factor to its success and the trust displayed by senior leadership and the space given to the project group should be repeated in future campaigns.

To build on what worked well in this campaign, Shelter should:

- Ensure appropriate and consistent senior sponsorship for long-running influencing projects. Senior leadership should have enough engagement throughout the campaign lifecycle to enable them to ‘clear the space’ and provide the direction, prioritisation and resources needed.
- Set clear organisational prioritisation early, so that major projects receive the time, resource, and leadership bandwidth needed alongside other Shelter priorities.
- Create a structured mechanism for senior leaders to stay close to political developments, enabling quicker decision-making, horizon scanning, and strategic adjustments.

6. Shelter's role in the wider Coalition

This section goes into more detail on what we learned about Shelter's role within the RRC, drawing on the evidence presented earlier in the report. It focuses on how Shelter worked within the Coalition, the strengths and challenges of this approach, and the implications for future coalition-based campaigning. Detailed assessment of the Coalition's influence on the Act is set out in Section 4 (Hypothesis 3).

6.1. Strengths of Shelter's approach

A central pillar of the Coalition

Whilst it was noted that it took Shelter some time to fully engage in collaborating and engaging with the Coalition, interviews and survey responses described Shelter as an influential and key member of the Coalition.

In a survey of key stakeholders, 62% of respondents said that Shelter's collaboration with other partners in the campaign was effective or very effective, with 25% saying that Shelter's collaboration was mixed (see Appendix 8.3 for charts from this survey).

- Shelter's brand, expertise and reputation helped to build the legitimacy, stability and political weight of the Coalition.
- Shelter brought resources, capacity, scale - and were willing to share them.

Mediator and bridge between grassroots and large charities

Shelter played a distinct role in bridging differences between grassroots renter unions and large national charities. This was often highlighted in interviews:

'They were a constructive, efficient, participative member of the coalition.' (Policy maker)

*'I always use the example of in Scotland, you have Living Rent, which is one of the tenants unions, and you have Shelter Scotland, and they're like, **at each other's throats**. We never had that because the RRC existed and [Shelter] handled relations. There were no divisions, and never anything publicly criticising other organisations in the coalition, which I think was really important'* (Coalition partner)

Shelter's relational approach was celebrated by partners for building trust, maintaining alignment and helping to bridge challenges between tenants unions and other large charities. Individual staff were mentioned as effective at building strong relationships within the Coalition and negotiating with other Coalition partners and within Shelter internally to agree policy positions and hold the Coalition together.

Strategic discipline and credibility

Coalition partners and civil servants consistently described Shelter's policy expertise as a major asset. Within the Coalition, this expertise was seen as helping to support clarity and shared understanding around policy positions, especially during complex legislative phases. Shelter's willingness to listen, clarify trade-offs and compromise where needed was also noted as contributing to sustained alignment among partners with different perspectives.

As explored further in Hypothesis 4, while this sense of discipline was valued by participants, the evaluation finds limited evidence that it can be identified as a decisive causal factor in the campaign's success. Shelter's detailed policy analysis, amendment drafting and legal insight were nonetheless widely regarded as strengthening the Coalition's confidence and effectiveness during both the Conservative bill's amendment stages and the development of Labour's bill.

6.2. Challenges and tensions

Early hesitation and internal alignment within Shelter

Some partners recalled early caution from Shelter around joining the Coalition which initially caused frustration. Shelter was seen to be resistant to joining the Coalition at first and interviewees perceived that Shelter staff weren't agreed on how to engage with the Coalition or the campaign. Other organisations, such as Generation Rent, were campaigning to abolish Section 21 before Shelter adopted the position and Shelter was viewed as more conservative and less ambitious in the early stages of the campaign.

'Shelter coming on board with the need to end Section 21 was a big step.' (Coalition partner)

'If you talk to people who were doing this campaigning in 2014 to 2017, they say Shelter, Crisis, etc [were] nowhere, and it was impossible to get them to push on this. There's like degrees of [pause]... not resentment, but maybe a feeling like you're sort of bandwagon jumping late in the day.' (Coalition partner)

'Earlier in the campaign Shelter took a more conservative view on some policy asks particularly around affordability measures and didn't feel willing to compromise, but this changed over the years.' (Policy maker)

Perceived power imbalance

In the interviews and survey responses we received, Shelter's size and resources were recognised as significant and a part of the success of the campaign. The early stages of the Coalition were seen as difficult and there was some nervousness among smaller organisations about losing their voice within a coalition with larger and better resourced organisations. The RRC staff seemed to play a part in those early days reassuring other Coalition members about the involvement of larger and better resourced organisations.

The responses we had didn't suggest Shelter had active dominance of the Coalition; in fact, the hard relational work of Shelter staff is cited as a component of building trust within the Coalition.

'The power dynamics around asks and demands within the RRC often weren't great. This isn't something that Shelter specifically is accountable for.' (Coalition partner)

Limited transparency around government access

Some Coalition members expressed concern that Shelter did not always share the full picture of its meetings with ministers or officials. Whilst this may have been a pragmatic approach to ensure long-term relationships were protected, it created an area of tension that sometimes affected the trust within the Coalition.

'They [Shelter] wouldn't share everything they were doing. And I think [that drove the renters unions] mad a little bit'. (Coalition partner)

'Something [Shelter and] all members of the Coalition could improve on, is being aware and willing to share what they're what they're up to'. (Coalition partner)

'I worry sometimes that Shelter's policy positions are overly shaped by the need of the public affairs team and the org as a whole to maintain relationships and 'respectability''. (Coalition partner)

6.3. Learning for future collaboration

Whilst the early stages of Shelter's involvement in the Coalition were slower and more tense, investing time into the relationships, being willing to listen and compromise and investing expertise and resources, all helped to build trust and unity. Shelter's staff paid attention to the power dynamics and this helped them to engage well and hold other larger organisations within the Coalition. This is a strong foundation for future coalition working. The strength of unity within the Coalition, as well as the diversity of organisations, was a significant factor in helping to win this campaign and this learning should be applied in future campaigning. These are some lessons to consider:

Invest early in relationship building and role clarity

Shelter's later success in coalition working stemmed from relational leadership, humility and clarity about its role. The trust built by Shelter staff with other organisations and within the Coalition was built from listening well to smaller organisations and bridging the gaps between other large charities and more grassroots groups. Future campaigns would benefit from:

- Earlier clarity on what Shelter will lead, where it will support, and where it will step back.
- Early, proactive engagement with groups whose priorities differ from Shelter's.

Maintain transparency to manage power imbalances

While Shelter's scale is an asset, there was nervousness from other organisations about losing their voice and being drowned out by a much larger organisation. Future coalition working would benefit from:

- Clearer communication with partners about:
 - Government meetings and political intelligence
 - Strategic decisions or shifts in positioning.
- Recognising and acknowledging the strengths of other partners and what they enable that Shelter is unable to do on its own.

Support shared strategy development earlier

Partners emphasised the value of compromise but noted this was sometimes hard-won. Earlier facilitation of structured conversations around contentious positions (e.g. affordability, rent caps) would help avoid protracted tensions.

Resource coalition support in the same way as intentional functions

Shelter's staff time, policy capability and convening were cited as crucial for helping the Coalition to achieve the policy wins in the Renters Rights Act. Future campaigns should:

- Treat coalition support as planned work, not discretionary effort
- Ensure staff leading coalition engagement have capacity and senior backing.

Continue to balance insider and outsider roles across partners

The campaign and the Coalition were successful because organisations played complementary roles. This is seen in other successful campaigning, such as the 'Keep Counselling Confidential' campaign. Campaigning within coalition and with a wide range of partners can deliver significant impact when organisations recognise the unique role they can play and complement each other well. Shelter should continue:

- Using its credibility to open political doors
- Supporting, not diluting the sharper campaigning tactics of grassroots partners
- Playing a role holding partners together with humility and openness
- Pay attention to power dynamics and proactively work to avoid overpowering smaller organisations.

This balance was identified as a key factor in the Coalition's success.

Summarising Shelter's role in the Coalition and learning

Shelter played a central, stabilising and often decisive role within the Renters Reform Coalition. Its credibility, staff expertise, national reach and diplomatic relationship-building were regarded as essential to the Coalition's influence and cohesion. While tensions emerged (e.g. caution in the early stages, power imbalances, and transparency gaps) these did not undermine the Coalition. Instead, Shelter's approach improved markedly over time, and its ability to mediate, collaborate and compromise was core to the Coalition's success.

The learning from this experience provides a strong foundation for how Shelter can continue to work well in alliances, balancing influence with humility, shaping strategy while preserving diversity of voice, and strengthening trust through transparency and intentional partnership-building.

7. Learning & recommendations

Based on all the evidence collected and reviewed, we can highlight several learning points that may be useful for future campaigns.

Long-term strategy and narrative building

- The campaign's success rested on years of work reframing private renting as structurally unfair - the implication of which is that sustained agenda setting does pay off.
- Similarly, early launch and continuous engagement meant Shelter could act quickly when opportunities emerged, including during the 2024 election and periods of ministerial churn.
- Internal evaluation reports indicate that the campaign may have benefited from earlier cross team involvement in the Theory of Change work, clearer prioritisation, and a more disciplined approach to messaging from the outset.
- Messaging was revised several times through the campaign. In future it may help to settle on key messages earlier and look for greater consistency across channels.

Political influencing and policy windows

- Officials repeatedly described Shelter's legal drafting along with servicer user, supporter and casework insight as central to shaping workable proposals, suggesting that maintaining this technical capability is essential for future campaigns.
- The decision to withdraw support from the weakened 2024 bill proved to be a turning point; it showed how well-judged escalation, backed by evidence and coalition alignment, can materially shift outcomes.
- Feedback from civil servants indicates that Shelter's constructive, non-combative style helped preserve access and influence across political cycles.
- The campaign unfolded in a context of constant political and ministerial churn. Future strategies should probably assume this level volatility is the norm.

Coalition working and sector leadership

- The RRC held together partly because governance was established early with clear expectations about roles, decision-making and the distinction between policy and tactics, all of which helped avoid fragmentation.
- Shelter's credibility and convening power were stabilising forces within the coalition, though this required significant time, diplomacy and some emotional labour from staff.
- Interviews suggest that smaller organisations sometimes felt less informed about Shelter's internal thinking, pointing to the value of more explicit norms around transparency in future coalitions.
- Coalitions tend to lose momentum once the legislative goal is achieved, so identifying a shared "next horizon" early may help sustain alignment.

Internal cross-functional working-

- Staff consistently described the cross-team collaboration as unusually strong, with Policy, Public Affairs, Campaigns, Legal, Comms, Digital and Services working very well together. However, it relied on goodwill and informal coordination. In future, clearer governance and more consistent senior-level involvement might reduce pressure on individuals.
- The project group model—with rotating leadership, clear outputs, disciplined project management—appears to have been a genuine enabler and worth trying to replicate.
- Internal alignment on key policy positions was not always secured early enough, which occasionally slowed external influencing and created friction with coalition partners.

Supporter mobilisation and public engagement

- Supporter actions such as petitions, webinars and personalised MP emails delivered strong engagement, though some activities struggled to gain traction.
- Creative and playful content consistently outperformed more traditional approaches, indicating that experimentation with tone and format can help achieve cut through.
- Outside Hub areas with Community Organisers, it was harder to deepen supporter involvement, and the pathways from initial engagement to more sustained activism were not always clear.
- Constituency-specific actions proved particularly effective, reinforcing the value of localised, personalised political pressure.
- Some digital channels, including SMS, were underused, and testing of new formats was inconsistent.

People with lived experience (PWLE)

- PWLE involvement strengthened the campaign's authenticity and narrative credibility, but the approach to them did not always work.
- Legal constraints, unclear roles and late integration into plans sometimes limited the extent to which PWLE could shape the campaign's strategy.
- In future, Shelter could aim to embed PWLE earlier and more systematically, with clearer expectations and stronger support structures.

Evidence, casework and litigation

- Frontline insight from advice services and legal services was a main source of authority that policymakers explicitly relied on it when assessing the feasibility of proposals.
- Protecting and resourcing these evidence pipelines will be important for future influencing work.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

- Internal evaluation reports suggest that real-time learning was limited by the fact that evaluation was not embedded early enough, meaning some opportunities for adaptation were missed.

- Also, staff felt that some actions were launched without clear hypotheses or success measures, making it harder to assess what was working.
- For future campaigns, Shelter could move to having more formal KPIs, regular reviews and structured test-learn-adapt cycles, as well as the organised collection, compilation and synthesis of ongoing information (which would ideally be available for a report like this). Moreover, while Shelter was focussed on things that were going well / badly at any one time, there was less tracking of the broader trends and assessment of whether Shelter was being effective at 'moving the dial'.
- All these observations broadly suggest the need for taking a more robust evaluation approach in future.
- **Organisational capability, culture and resourcing**
- Capacity constraints were a recurring challenge; with several teams feeling stretched to the point where being reactive took priority over strategic thinking.
- Teams noted that the anti-racism strand of the campaign lost clarity over time, with some uncertainty about what the agenda required in practical terms and how it should be applied in day-to-day delivery.
- Senior leaders were not always closely connected to narrative and creative decisions, which occasionally slowed things down and caused missteps.

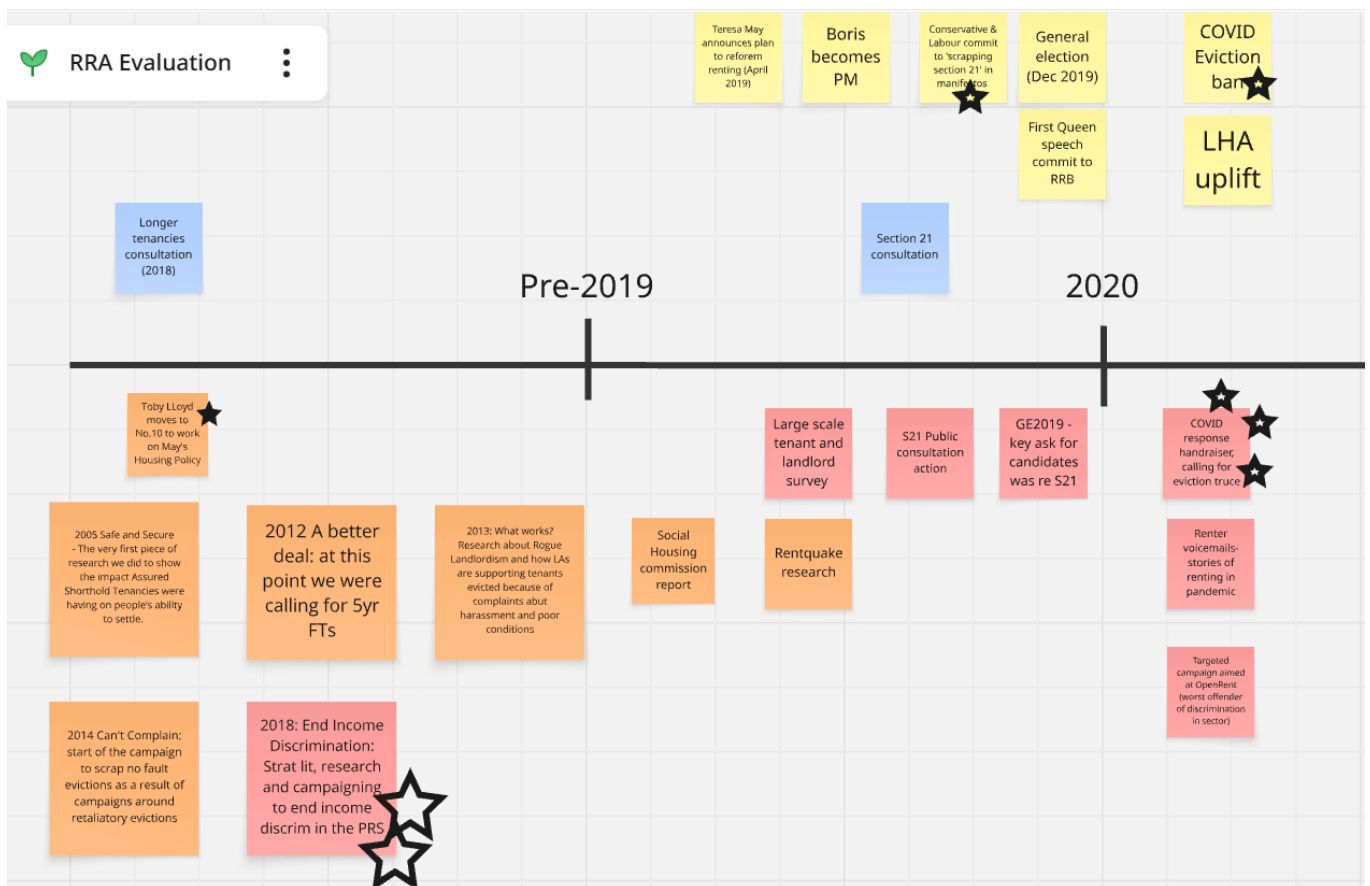
Sustaining momentum after the legislative win

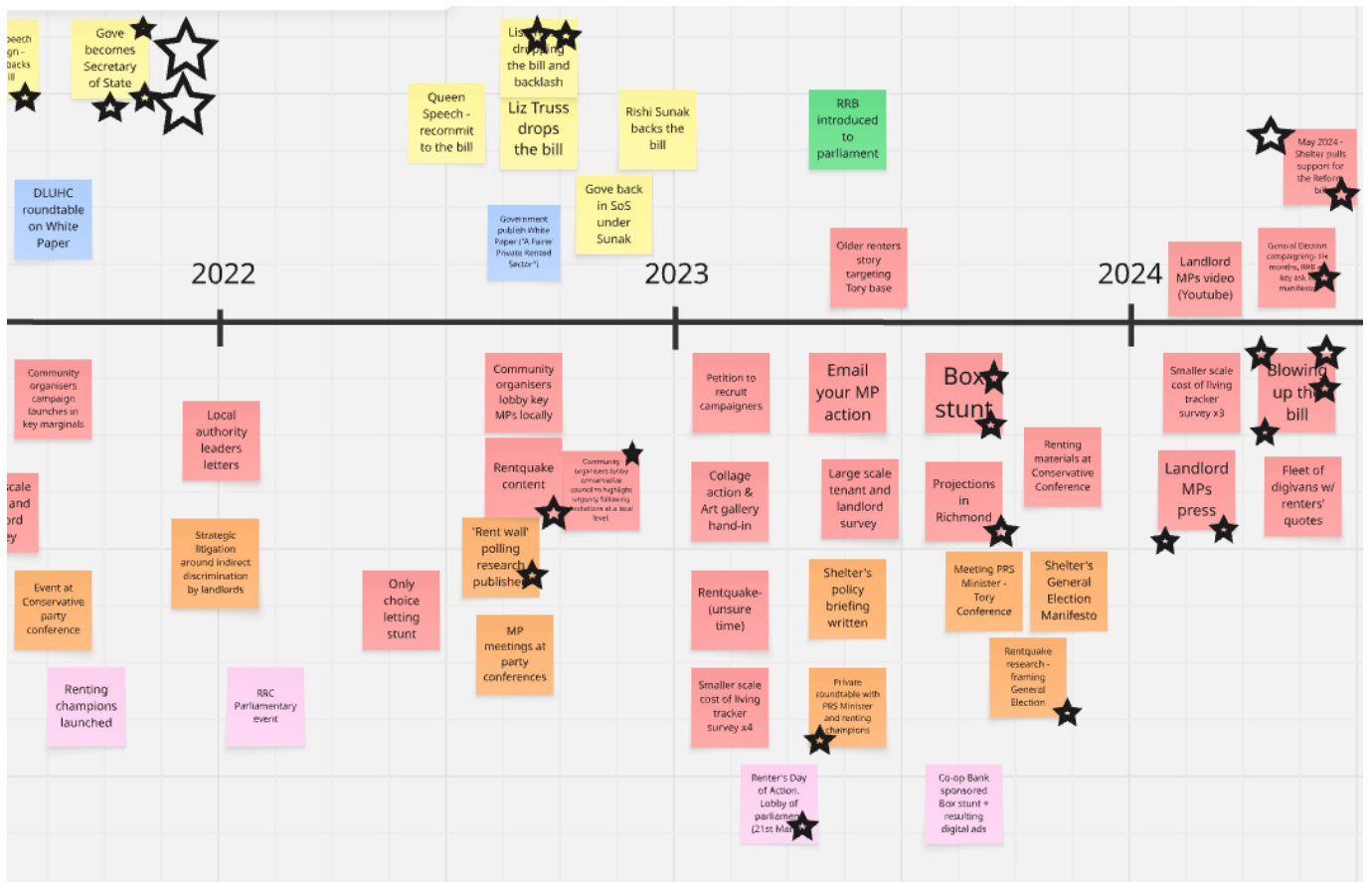
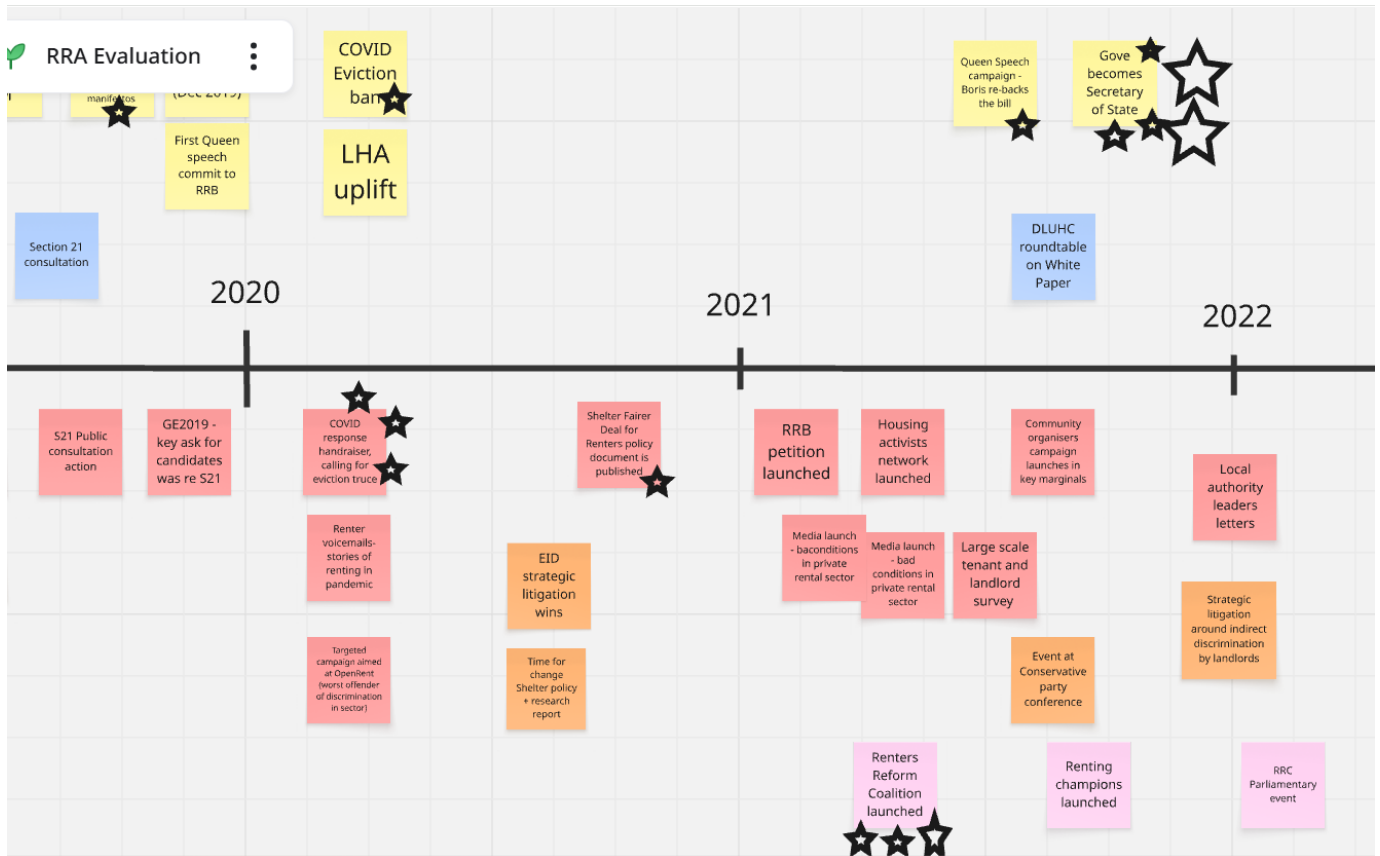
- The Renters Rights Act's impact now depends heavily on secondary legislation and implementation, which can easily be delayed or diluted without continued pressure.
- However, coalitions do tend to lose coherence once a unifying goal is achieved, and partners did express concern that Shelter and the RRC's focus might now drift
- This can be mitigated by consciously planning for the "post-win dip" and articulating a shared post-legislative purpose. Moreover, visible and consistent leadership signals from Shelter will help maintain confidence and momentum during the next phase.

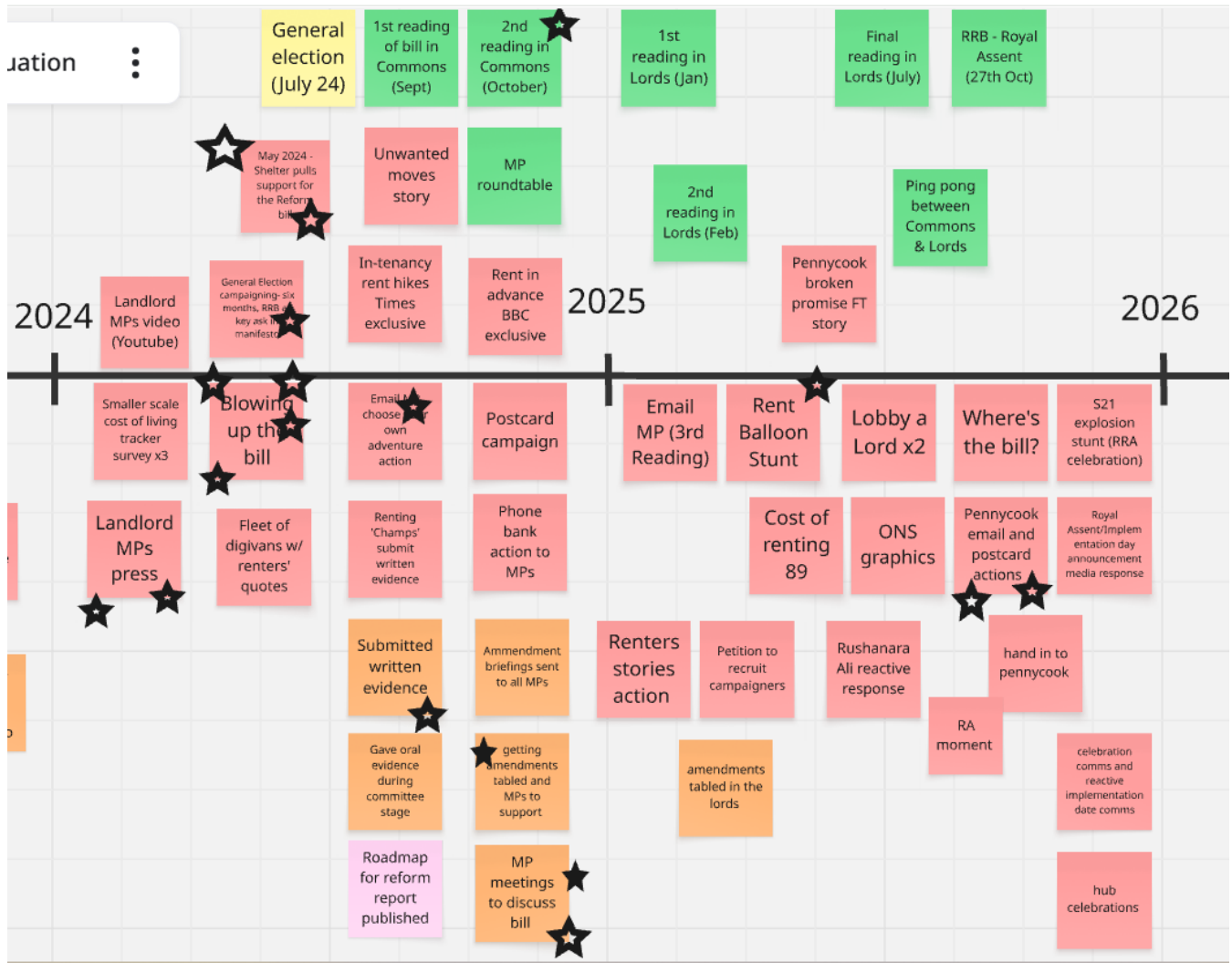
8. Appendix

8.1. Renters' Rights Bill Timeline

The below images are taken from the Miro board that was produced in the staff workshop showing the timeline of the campaign.







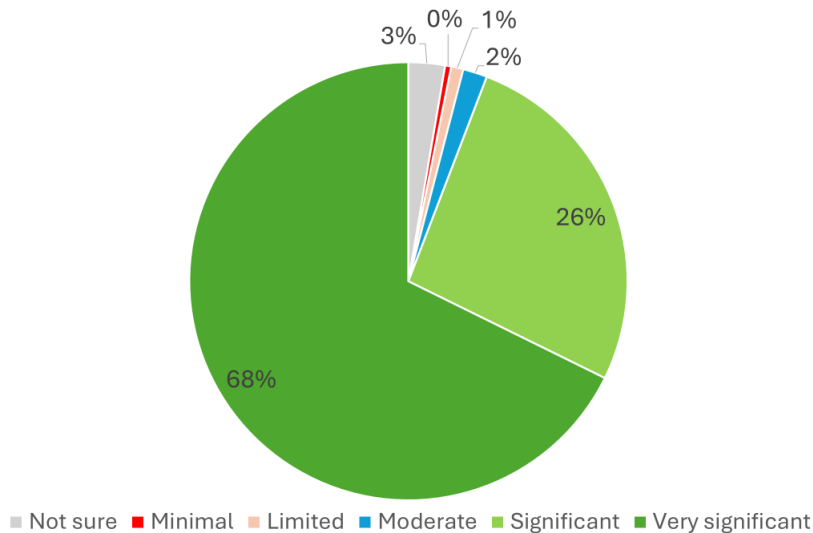
8.2. Charts from Shelter's Supporter Survey

Which campaign actions or moments do you believe had the greatest impact on making sure the Renters Rights Act became law? (Select all that apply)



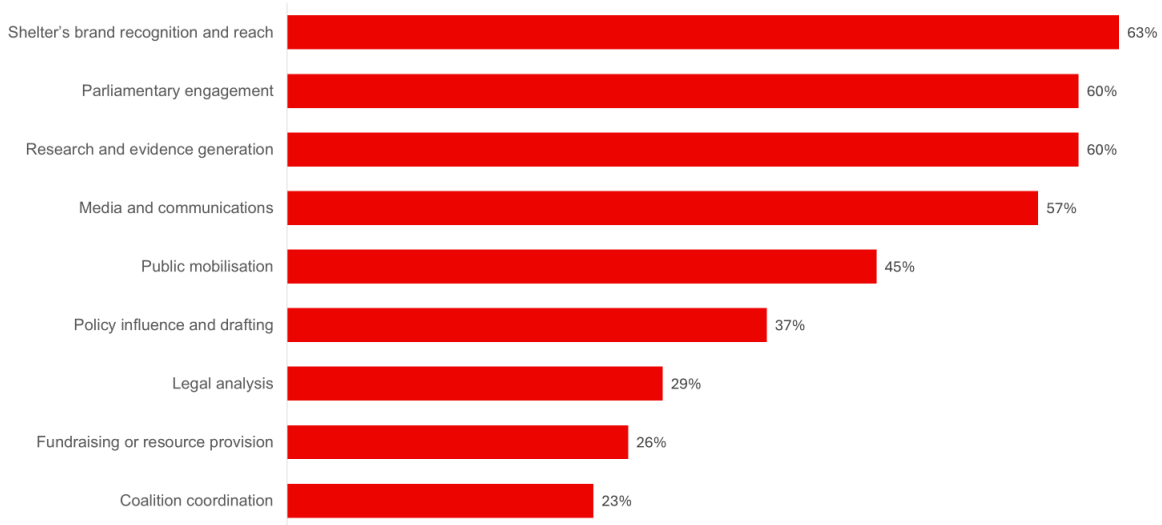
Base: 227 Shelter supporters in Feb 2026

How would you describe Shelter's overall contribution to the Renters Rights Act campaign?



Base: 227 Shelter supporters in Feb 2026

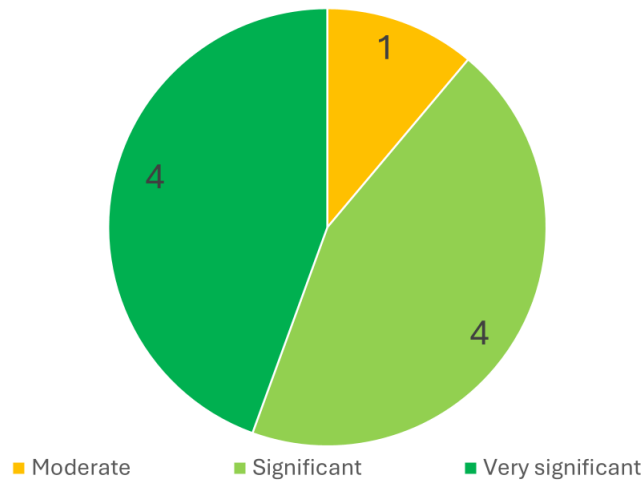
**In which areas do you believe Shelter had the strongest influence (if any)?
(Select all that apply)**



Base: 227 Shelter supporters in Feb 2026

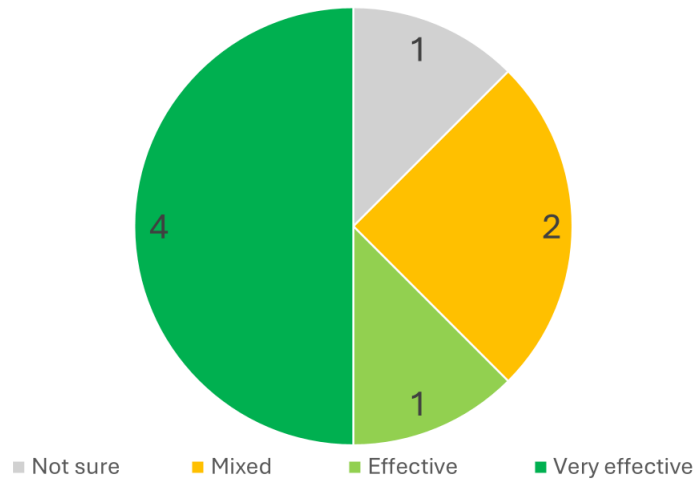
8.3. Charts from Stakeholder Survey

How would you describe Shelter's overall contribution to the Renters Rights Act campaign



Base: 9 stakeholders in Feb / March 2026

How would you describe Shelter's collaboration with other partners in the campaign?



Base: 8 stakeholders in Feb / March 2026