Tackling Tenancy Insecurity in the Private Rented Sector

What works to prevent homelessness?

by Stephen Green, Ed Ferrari and Guillermo Rodriguez-Guzman
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About this report

Regulation in the private rented sector (PRS) is changing across the nations of the UK. The PRS is also increasingly the tenure relied upon by people facing homelessness and by local authorities to accommodate households impacted by homelessness. Security of tenure, and its relationship to homelessness therefore demands scrutiny to ensure that the PRS can provide appropriate secure housing for households who might otherwise be at risk of experiencing homelessness.

This report summarises key findings, opportunities and interventions relating to security of tenure within the PRS. It considers how Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs) and in particular the mechanism for regaining possession in England and Wales under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 have become a key focus for policy makers and practitioners involved in trying to tackle homelessness. Drawing on evidence collected through the CHI’s Evidence & Gap Maps1, as well as learning from the social rented sector, the report considers a number of critical studies, systematic reviews and impact evaluations to examine the primary drivers of tenancy insecurity and its relationship with homelessness in the UK.

About the authors

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The Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI)

The Centre for Homelessness Impact is an independent organisation that supports the use of data and evidence in bringing about a sustainable end to homelessness. As a member of the What Works Network, the Centre supports leaders at local and national levels across the UK to make evidence-led decisions and adopt evidence-led practices.

The Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research (CRESR)

The Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research is a leading UK applied policy research and evaluation centre. For over thirty years, CRESR has undertaken critical, theoretical and empirical research into key regional, social and economic patterns within the UK and internationally to influence policy design. Utilising a deep understanding of policy evaluation, the Centre helps to establish the impacts of programmes, interventions and strategies, whilst working in close collaboration with academic and private sector research organisations to deliver research of the highest rigour and impact.

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1 Evidence & Gap Maps (homelessnessimpact.org)
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Section 1: Why is this report relevant now?

Everyone deserves a safe, stable place to call home; a place where they can eat, sleep, raise children and attend to their own personal needs in comfort and security. But for many renters living in the Private Rented Sector across the UK, ‘home’ isn’t something they can be sure of – due to the widespread use of provisional contracts, short-lived ASTs and living with the possibility of eviction from landlords who have the power to end contracts, often with little justification.

The Covid-19 pandemic has focused the attention of policy makers and practitioners on renters’ rights and security of tenure. This has been an important response to the disproportionate impact of lockdowns and economic downturn on renters. But, for a range of reasons, addressing the question of tenure insecurity and its role in causing homelessness has been long overdue. Among these reasons are:

1. The Private Rented Sector has grown and now plays a mainstream role in meeting housing need

Across the UK the PRS has expanded significantly in recent decades, broadly doubling in size since the early 2000s. The sector’s rapid expansion following the turn of the century owes much to access to credit and the growth in key demographic demand groups, including students and migrants. But much of the increase also occurred in the ten years following the Global Financial Crisis of 2007-08, with difficulties in accessing homeownership adding to the already-incipient trend and diversifying the range of groups effectively constrained to renting privately.

Over 4.5 million households now live in the PRS, with a share of households of over 20%. For around 10 years now, renting privately has been the second most common tenure after owner-occupation, overtaking social renting in 2011/12. Correspondingly, the social rented sector, housing 4 million households (17%), is now the smallest tenure following a downward trend over more than 40 years which has only stabilised in the last decade.

Whilst the growth of the PRS in proportional terms has been relatively static for the last five years, it continues to play a significant role in the housing market of every nation of the UK and has diversified into distinctive submarkets serving every type of household and geography. Several drivers explain this expansion and diversification. First, owner occupation has become increasingly out of reach for a larger proportion of households, with average prices and deposit requirements increasing much faster than incomes. In 2021 the UK house price to earnings ratio for first time buyers surged to a record high of 9.5.

3 Ibid. p. 22.
6 ONS (2021) Working and Workless Households in the UK (Labour Force Survey), Table D (Households by housing tenure and combined economic activity status of household members).
9 Julie Rugg and David Rhodes’ comprehensive review of the PRS provides analysis of the diverse geographic and demographic segments represented by the sector, noting that, despite this, “the very particular rental characteristics of Greater London have tended to dominate narratives of private renting and in many ways have overwhelmed policy attention directed towards the PRS, to the detriment of issues that are more pressing outside the capital.” See chapter 4 of Rugg and Rhodes (2018) The Evolving Private Rented Sector: Its Contribution and Potential, University of York.
10 Chan and Thompson (op. cit.) contains a useful summary of these drivers (see pages 15-16).
Whilst the ratio is high everywhere, it masks considerable regional variation in accessibility to owner-occupation: Nationwide Building Society estimates that on average it will take a first time buyer over 8 years to save a 20% deposit in the Midlands and nearly 16 years in London.12 Second, the long-term decline – although recently arrested – in the social rented sector, both through stock lost to right to buy and demolitions, and low levels of new supply, has residualised social rent as a tenure whilst focusing attention on how the PRS could meet a wider range of housing needs.13 Third, and relatedly, has been the use of the PRS since 2011 by local authorities to discharge their homeless relief duties.14 Fourth, there have been shifts in demand resulting from economic and demographic change, including population growth, changes in household composition, economic migration and student demand. Fifth has been a range of supply-side factors incentivising investment in the PRS and influencing the forms that investment takes – such as historic tax relief, increased interest from institutional investors, including for Build to Rent, and, especially in England, minimal regulation of landlords.

2. Those in the Private Rented Sector tend to be employed and are at every level of the income distribution

Households that rent privately are overwhelmingly in work. The proportion of privately renting households that work is 58%, about the same as those in the owner-occupied sector (59%).15 Although given the dominance of retirees within properties that are owned outright, the level of mortgagees in work is higher). The PRS has a well-known role in supporting labour market mobility, and for some groups the tenure's flexibility and availability in major employment centres are important characteristics. Yet, given the increased diversity of PRS tenants and the increasing lack of alternative housing options for many households, this does not mean that the PRS is necessarily the most affordable or suitable accommodation.

Levels of in-work poverty have steadily risen throughout the last two decades: the likelihood that a working household is in poverty rose from 13% in 2001/02 to over 17% in 2019/20.16 Although the in-work poverty rate is highest among social renters (40% of in-work households), it is also very high for private renters (just less than 30%) and, moreover, of all tenures, the PRS in-work poverty rate has increased most (by about 50% since 2000/01).17

12 Ibid.
13 See, inter alia, Paddy Gray and Ursula Mcanulty, The Increased Role of the Private Rented Sector in Catering for Low-income Groups in Northern Ireland, European Journal of Housing Policy, 8 (4), pp. 361-377; Rugg and Rhodes op cit.
15 ONS (2021) Working and Workless Households in the UK (Labour Force Survey), Table D (Households by housing tenure and combined economic activity status of household members).
16 IPPR (2021) No longer ‘managing’: The rise of working poverty and fixing Britain’s broken social settlement, p. 12.
17 Ibid. p. 15.
3. But housing costs are very high for people living with low incomes

The increased diversity of the PRS masks much higher rates of poverty among those on low incomes, not least because housing costs have been driving poverty rates and represent a much higher proportion of household income for those with lower incomes. In 2020 in England, households in the lowest income quartile needed to spend 30% of their income on rent for the lowest priced properties, whilst those on the highest income quartile need to spend 21% of income on the highest priced properties indicating a regressive relationship between rents and incomes.18 Unsurprisingly the proportion of income spent on rent in London is highest of all English regions: 47% of rent for those in the lowest income quartile (albeit that this has declined from a peak of 63% in 2016).19 For those on very low incomes – the lowest income decile – housing costs are virtually unmanageable by any common yardstick: comparable data across Britain (albeit from 2018) shows that such households spend 64% of income on rent in England, 68% in Wales and 57% in Scotland.20

The poorest households are increasingly within the PRS. Analysis by IPPR found that the poorest fifth of households were twice as likely to be private renters now than they were at the turn of the century, whilst housing costs for renters have increased by almost half in real terms and housing costs for poor working households have risen faster than for those on higher incomes.21

4. The Private Rented Sector is relied on heavily by councils to meet their homelessness duties

As noted above, the growth of the PRS has occurred alongside a long-term reduction in the availability of social rented housing and a rise in the use of private rented accommodation to house those in the most serious housing need, including people experiencing and threatened with homelessness. Increasing challenges in finding suitable accommodation within the social rented stock have led many local authorities to make more use of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast (B&B) style settings, much of which is provided by the private rented sector. The numbers of households in temporary accommodation in England has increased steadily since 2011, presumably in part as a result of legislation permitting greater use of the PRS to discharge homeless duties. In June 2021, 96,600 households in England were in temporary accommodation, the majority (63%) in London.22 Nearly 60% of households in temporary accommodation have children, totalling some 124,290 dependent children in England.23 Proportionately, there is an even more intensive use of temporary accommodation in Scotland, housing 13,097 households as at March 2021.24 Stays in Scottish temporary accommodation have been lengthening, now being 199 days (or over 6½ months) on average.25

In around 30% of homeless cases in England in 2021 the local authority’s relief duty ended by securing accommodation in the PRS. This is an increase from a quarter of cases (25%) in 2018/19.26 The proportion of these households who are settled in PRS properties which are ‘self-contained’ (i.e. not homes in multiple occupation or lodging) has steadily fallen recently, from around three-quarters in 2018/19 to around 65% in 2021.27

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19 Ibid. Table 3h.
21 IPPR (2021) No longer ‘managing’: The rise of working poverty and fixing Britain’s broken social settlement.
25 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
5. But loss of tenancies in the Private Rented Sector is also the leading cause of homelessness

Placing households at risk of homelessness in private rented accommodation runs the risk of being a short-lived solution because of the lack of security afforded by the vast majority of tenancies. Evidence suggests that the short-term nature of ASTs in England (and their equivalents elsewhere in the UK) – which are the dominant agreement used by private landlords, offering as little as six months’ security – has been the ‘reason for loss, or threat of loss, of last settled home’ for a significant proportion of statutory homelessness applications in the last decade.28 The Homelessness Monitor produced by Suzanne Fitzpatrick and colleagues for Crisis reports using official statistics reports that 31% of applicants judged to be homeless or threatened with homelessness were in that position because of loss of their existing tenancy – 22% in the PRS and 9% in a social tenancy.29 In Scotland, statistics show that the most common reason given for making a homelessness application was being ‘asked to leave’, accounting for 27% of cases.30 During the six years before the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 (HRA) came into effect in England in April 2018, official statistics showed that AST-loss was the single biggest immediate trigger for homelessness.

The recent disruption and new measures generated by the global Covid-19 pandemic have thrown the issue of AST loss into sharp focus, with concerns across the sector about the number of tenants struggling to meet housing costs. In this respect, the temporary cessation of evictions during the initial stages of the pandemic on public health grounds may have served to ‘store up’ a glut of eventual evictions.

The concurrence of robust rents, economic disruption particularly to low-income households during lockdowns, and rises in living costs are almost certainly a reason why rental arrears have increased recently. Among renters in arrears in England, 25% say that they have fallen further behind in the last six months, whilst a further 18% say that they fell into arrears for the first time.31 The increase in the number of people facing the ending of their tenancies as a result of the pandemic remains, which, given the reasons for homelessness discussed above, is likely to fuel a further rise in homelessness in both the short and longer term. At present, landlords can use a Section 21 notice to evict tenants without grounds after the initial fixed term provided they give a minimum of two months’ notice, although in 2019 the Government announced the intention to remove these ‘no fault’ evictions in England and Wales (Scottish renters have had open-ended tenancies since 2017).

Section 2: Factors contributing to tenancy insecurity in the Private Rented Sector

Broadly speaking, tenancy sustainment for those renting privately is worse than for those renting from social housing landlords. The English Housing Survey 202132 also shows that the average length of tenancy in social housing is almost 2.5 times longer than in the private sector (10.8 years vs 4.2 years). To some extent the diversification of the PRS, as a corollary of its growth, partly explains this as it arguably plays a wider range of housing roles than the social rented sector. Yet, if the focus is narrowed to tenants moving out of homelessness significant differentials in tenancy length remain apparent.

For example, in their study of single homeless peoples’ experiences, Maureen Ann Crane and colleagues found that less than one half (47%) of private renters in their sample were still in the same accommodation 15-18 months after resettlement from homelessness – compared with more than four-fifths of social housing tenants.33

There are many factors, influences and drivers of tenancy insecurity, many of which are yet to be fully quantified. However, the following summary of some of the key drivers gives an example of the complex nature and scale of the issue.

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29 Ibid. p. 47.
1. Affordability and quality

As highlighted above, housing costs represent a higher proportion of income for people with lower incomes, and particularly for those renting in the private sector. This is particularly pernicious as it creates a ‘pincher effect’, where unaffordability creates a barrier to access at the same time as preventing tenancy sustainability. Although the evidence suggests that the majority of landlords tend not to exercise their contractual right to review rents upwards at each renewal (e.g. yearly in the case of most ASTs), over one-fifth did increase rents for existing tenants – and where property is managed by a letting agent this proportion is even higher (31%).

In addition, whilst landlords in general do not oppose the principle of offering longer tenancies, there are a number of practical concerns which mean that few do – and, again, where a lettings agent is involved the tendency is to steer landlords away from offering longer tenancies and towards the standard 6- or 12-month terms that are sector norms. The precise role of letting agents in facilitating access to tenancies and tenancy sustainment is complex (and probably merits further investigation) but some stylised facts can be highlighted: agents tend not to deal with the lowest income tenants (which may of course reflect their policies), but are also associated with shorter tenancies.

In addition, affordability problems might expose people on lower incomes to lower quality standards. Although more precise reasons why tenancy failure might be more prevalent in the PRS are not clear on the basis of existing studies, the most recent review by Julie Rugg and David Rhodes suggested that people with the most limited housing options were exposed to the worst PRS housing. The review found that tenants in the lowest rent quintile faced the worst property conditions and management. Although the law has recently been strengthened, the threat of ‘retaliatory’ (or ‘revenge’) evictions against tenants who complain about property maintenance remains present.

As such, those with the least power, least choice and greatest vulnerability face greater tenancy insecurity.

2. The UK welfare system

The UK welfare system is constantly evolving, but evidence suggests that the current structure may be contributing to poor tenancy sustainment outcomes. Rent arrears, for example, are a threat to sustainment as both private and social landlords can evict tenants in arrears and reports by Crane and colleagues show that rent arrears accrued in the months after resettlement following homelessness often stem from problems with Housing Benefit administration. Another study, based on workshops with front-line workers, identified Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates as a barrier to tenancy sustainment, indicating that the only accommodation affordable to people in receipt of LHA was in property types and neighbourhoods where people impacted by homelessness who have additional needs would find it difficult to sustain a tenancy.
A number of features of welfare reforms in the UK over the past decade have potential impacted on tenancy sustainment. The benefit cap, which limits the aggregate amount of social security payments that a household may receive depending on its circumstances, may particularly disadvantage households with multiple needs or large numbers of dependents, and may have contributed toward increased levels of child poverty and homelessness.\(^\text{44}\) Moves to increase the direct payment of housing benefits to tenants (rather than to landlords), partly in an attempt to ‘responsibilise’ tenants, introduced budgeting problems for some households and may have contributed to arrears,\(^\text{45}\) especially among social tenants who may then become at risk of homelessness.

Whilst it is very difficult to compare welfare benefit systems internationally, it has been noted that household circumstances – and in particular whether households have children – play a big role in assessing the comparative generosity of systems. The UK is considered relatively generous in terms of its protections to households with children, but particularly high housing costs (rents) and the relatively unusual system of having a specific housing benefit (as opposed to more generous income supplements and employment protection)\(^\text{46}\) contributes to it spending probably the most amongst its peers on social protections on housing.\(^\text{47}\) Therefore high rents in the private housing market not only cause affordability problems for tenants but may have indirectly contributed to political pressure to reduce Exchequer costs of welfare benefits.

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### 3. Landlord perceptions of risk

The past decade has seen an increasing reliance on the PRS to meet housing need. However, surveys in England and Scotland have shown that a very large proportion of landlords are not willing to rent to people with experiences of homelessness, or those who are receiving benefits more broadly.\(^\text{44}\) This is likely to be a result of a higher perception of risk of arrears, damages to the property, stigma and other issues.\(^\text{48}\)

When asked about the barriers to providing housing for homeless households in a recent survey, 30% of housing associations cited a higher risk of arrears and 28% cited higher costs of providing support or services to formerly homeless tenants.\(^\text{49}\) Similarly, recent research with social landlords in England reported reluctance to accept people with ‘higher support needs’.\(^\text{50}\)
4. Evictions

In England – and, with some minor differences, Wales – landlords may regain possession of their property typically through the use of Section 8 or Section 21 of the Housing Act. Section 21 is typically preferred by landlords because, as long as various technical conditions are satisfied (e.g. in relation to timing, the use of the tenant’s deposit and so on), landlords do not have to specify the grounds on which they are seeking possession.52 This stands in contrast to using Section 8, where higher standards of evidence of the grounds on which possession is being sought must be presented to a court.53 A two month notice period is typically the minimum using Section 21. So-called ‘no fault’ evictions using Section 21 are normally cited, therefore, as a significant source of insecurity amongst tenants. Social landlords do not have recourse to similar flexibilities, and therefore, in contrast to the social rented sector, the path to evicting PRS tenants is typically much easier. The process and grounds for evictions in Scotland are quite different, and generally provide more protection for tenants. In Scotland, there are 18 specified grounds for eviction, for which a tribunal requires evidence.54 Most tenancies that started on or after December 1, 2017 are known as private residential tenancies and are open-ended; evictions must adhere to the process and grounds; landlords cannot simply regain possession after a period of time as they could with the older short assured tenancies.

5. Individual characteristics

Issues of tenure security and sustainment are more challenging for some groups compared to others, with a longitudinal study by Crane and colleagues55 offering useful insights. The study’s sample group of 400 was “characterised by high rates of personal problems and disadvantages”, and found that certain characteristics and housing pathways appeared to have greater influence on housing outcomes after individuals’ initial resettlement from homelessness.

Several factors were identified as being correlated with tenancy failure amongst the sample, including, among other things, being aged 20-24, having stayed in temporary accommodation such as hostels and supported housing before being resettled, and being rehoused in the private rented sector.

53 Rugg and Rhodes, op cit.
54 See Scottish Government website, Private residential tenancy: information for landlords.
Section 3: Interventions to improve tenancy success

While tenancy insecurity is a complex and multifaceted issue, several key interventions can be promising to improve tenancy sustainment. This section highlights some of this good practice, offering possibilities for policy and service development that recognise the importance of secure housing in resolving and preventing homelessness.

Support for tenants

Financial assistance

An important characteristic of the welfare system in the UK is the existence of ‘Housing Benefits’ to cover all housing costs for some households living with low incomes. Housing benefits, along with a substantial social housing sector and the statutory homelessness system are lauded as key reasons why the UK has relatively positive housing outcomes in comparison to other developed nations. This availability of social housing and support to housing costs is likely to be a key factor mitigating some of the negative outcomes of poverty among low income households.

This setup where housing benefit awards cover the full rent for some households (subject to some restrictions and service charges) is an unusual arrangement by international standards: most housing benefit systems, if they exist at all, cover only part of the cost of rent rather than the full amount. Notwithstanding the above, the level of generosity of housing benefit entitlements is lower for some groups including young people and single households (see section on the ‘UK Welfare System’ above).

Offering welfare payments to contribute towards housing costs has been shown to be an effective way to support people living on low incomes. Looking at the international evidence base, amongst certain groups of people in the United States, the provision of housing vouchers was shown to reduce homelessness and improve housing stability when compared with usual services or case management. A study by Gubits and colleagues examined 2,282 families affected by homelessness for around 37 months in order to assess the impacts of housing and services interventions for families experiencing homelessness over a three-year period, and found that housing schemes significantly improved housing outcomes when compared to other interventions. Families given the housing subsidy experienced less than half as many episodes of homelessness, alongside improvements across a set of measures relating to residential stability. These benefits included non-housing outcomes such as reductions in emotional distress and domestic violence, more food security and less economic stress. Another study by Wood and colleagues carried out an experimental evaluation of the effects of providing housing subsidy (in the form of Housing Vouchers) to households in need between 2000 and 2004, and demonstrated that the vouchers significantly reduced homelessness, overcrowding and household size, as well as the incidence of living with friends or family. They also increased mobility, while reducing the number of subsequent moves. Other forms of targeted state aid in the US were similarly shown to improve housing stability, with the roll-out of Medicaid leading to a decrease in evictions thanks to the greater financial protection it afforded its recipients.

Mediation and legal assistance to prevent evictions

Legal assistance, in the form of legal advice or mediation services, can play a role to prevent evictions and improve tenancy sustainment. In the UK, the Housing Possession Court Duty Scheme (HPCDS) offers free ‘on-the-day’ legal advice to anyone in danger of being evicted from their home or having their property repossessed. The Ministry of Justice is currently working on a package of measures to improve the delivery of this scheme and expand legal advice and representation before court proceedings and include other types of support, including information on welfare payments that may be available. The plans to expand legal advice are currently being finalised as part of a consultation with the public (Ministry of Justice, 2021)61. Additional legal aid may also be available for people living with low incomes, including people receiving benefits.62

As part of the programme to extend legal support for renters, MoJ and DLUHC63 launched in February 2021 a new mediation scheme operated by the Society of Mediators as a telephone service, which would be part of the current court process for housing possession cases. The mediation pilot was free to use for landlords and tenants involved in a housing possession court case and aimed to resolve cases without the need for a face to face court hearing. At the time of writing, MoJ and DLUHC are exploring expanding this pilot and commissioning an evaluation of the scheme. Similar mediation schemes are available elsewhere in the UK, for example, the services offered by Housing Rights which are piloting Northern Ireland’s first housing mediation service for the private rented sector.64

Despite the number and variety of services available, there are very few robust studies exploring the impacts of interventions to reduce evictions. A systematic review by Holl and colleagues65 only identified three studies about these preventative measures. One could not be assessed for its quality and the other two suggested that legal assistance and debt advice are promising interventions that seem to be effective in decreasing the risk of eviction. However, the evidence remains scarce and of limited methodological robustness.


Even if the evidence of effectiveness is limited, a randomised controlled trial conducted in New York City showed representation helped tenants secure significantly more favorable judgments in housing repossession cases and that representation reduced the number of days in court66. A second randomised controlled trial done in Massachusetts67 found similarly encouraging results where approximately two-thirds of occupants in the group that received more substantial advice, versus about one-third of occupants in the control group, retained possession of their units at the end of litigation. Importantly, this offer of support was available for clients that had been previously screened by the legal providers where they thought full representation would transform the outcome of the case from unfavorable to the occupant for the occupant.

However, a third study68 suggests that there could be other aspects at play to explain the effectiveness of legal advice. In this third study, more extensive legal representation did not result in better outcomes. The authors remain tentative in their interpretation of the findings but suggest that a less assertive approach (one that favours ‘facilitative, non-confrontational style’) could have played a role in the less favourable outcomes of this group.

66 Seron, C., Frankel, M, Van Ryzin, G., & Frankel, J. (2001). Impact of Legal Counsel in Outcomes for Poor Tenants in New York City’s Housing Court: Results of a Randomized Experiment. Law & Society Review 35(2): 419-434
Pre-tenancy support

Across the UK, pre-tenancy support has become an established intervention that prepares people to manage a tenancy better. Organisations such as Crisis, Shelter, and others running ‘help to rent’ schemes provide pre-tenancy training that include aspects such as paying rent and bills, managing the tenant/landlord relationship, understanding a tenancy agreement and residing harmoniously with others in a neighbourhood. An evaluation of the government-funded Sharing Solutions programme delivered by Crisis found that ‘help to rent’ schemes used training effectively with people who had no previous experience of managing a tenancy and who had no choice other than shared accommodation in the PRS. In fact, many Sharing Solutions projects made pre-tenancy training a prerequisite of a housing offer.

The provision of such support could provide the foundation of successful resettlement into independent accommodation, as suggested by an evaluation of a hostel resettlement service for young people in Merseyside, which emphasised the importance of pre-tenancy assistance for homeless people in temporary accommodation. The researchers argued that the resettlement process needed to begin in advance of the physical move, assisting people to develop key life skills, access training and employment, and get support with the practical aspects of moving house (e.g. obtaining furniture).

Likewise, Crane and colleagues argued that advice and training on money management should happen before resettlement, and that where possible, people should also be involved in education, training and employment activities (ETE) before they are rehoused, as “people who had been involved in ETE at the time of resettlement were significantly more likely to be engaged in ETE at 60 months” (p. 96). This report also emphasised the importance of being financially prepared for independent living, including having reasonable debt repayment plans in place.

Pre-tenancy support programmes are commonplace in the UK. However, there is a dearth of robust evaluations assessing their relative effectiveness and cost-effectiveness against other models of support. Recent trials with UK landlords undertaken by Kolker and colleagues suggest that having completed a pre-tenancy training programme might not be sufficient to convince landlords to let their properties to people in receipt of benefits, or those at risk of homelessness more broadly. The authors conclude that this does not necessarily mean that pre-tenancy training could not play a role to improve tenancy sustainment, but alone it might not be sufficient to guarantee access to the PRS for people who are facing other types of barriers.

Providing strong support systems - case management

Case management is a form of care coordination where a case manager or team helps to assess, plan, and facilitate access to a range of services for an individual beneficiary. Most homelessness services adopt some type of case management approach to coordinate the provision of services. There are five formalised models of case management. These include Broker Case Management (BCM), Standard Case Management (SCM), Intensive Case Management (ICM), Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) and Critical Time Intervention (CTI). Some of these models share some common characteristics, but evidence is unclear on which of these specifically explain their effectiveness. Yet, as the authors note, multiple systematic reviews have shown that they can improve outcomes for people experiencing homelessness. More specifically, more intensive models (ICM, ACT and CTI) were more effective in terms of improving housing stability and had more promising impacts in other domains. For example, ICM was found to reduce substance use in several studies and CTI to marginally reduce psychological symptoms. In contrast, time limited interventions such as SCM only showed some limited short term gains.

Importantly, these offers of holistic support should be an integral part of the resettlement offer for households moving into tenancies both in the social and private sector. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive identifies a range of challenges to tenancy sustainment, which frame the value of different approaches which may be part of a personalised offer. For example, support for digital inclusion, the specific needs of rural residents, and the interaction of food poverty with tenancy sustainment for different at-risk groups are recognised.

75 Ibid.
77 Ponka et al. (op. cit.).
Giving staff the skills to provide support

Working with people affected by homelessness, and those who would benefit from more intensive support requires experience and empathy, and there is evidence to suggest that staff skills and expertise are a key factor in encouraging people to engage with support.

Green and colleagues for example, explored workforce development issues amongst those who worked directly with people with high support needs. In projects funded by the Rough Sleeping Grant initiative and the Rough Sleeping Social Impact Bonds, they found that initiatives were best able to meet the needs of this group when staff could be empathetic and patient with service users, and maintain positive relationships without resorting to the use of sanctions. This was summarised by one manager as ‘stickability’ – the idea of never giving up on an individual and maintaining an unconditional offer of support.

Similarly, other studies (Carver et al., 2020; Holly, 2017) stress that non-judgemental, compassionate staff are crucial to successful relationships and service delivery. In addition to the skills that professionals bring to tenancy support, some projects across the UK have used peer support, drawing on the resources and skills of people with lived experiences of homelessness and citing the advantages that this brings for engagement. Some organisations, included Crisis, have promoted the use of peer support in its own services and amongst others that it works with, and this has been found to provide better engagement and support resulting in tenancy sustainment. Further studies have found that service design and delivery benefited from co-production with people who had lived experience (Cream et al, 2020), helping to design and deliver services which were accessible and effective for people who benefit from high levels of support (Cream et al, 2020, p. 26).

Supporting Housing First schemes in the Private Rented Sector

Housing First has been a recent focus of homelessness policy in the UK, with a growing body of research and evaluation into its efficacy. Although the evidence base in the UK is still limited compared with the body of robust international studies, it has already demonstrated positive housing sustainment outcomes. Intensive support and unconditional housing model is highlighted as beneficial by recent systematic reviews. Indeed, a systematic review of outcomes confirmed that Housing First participants – usually people with multiple needs – experienced high levels of housing retention; reductions in homelessness; and were housed quicker. The review concluded that there was strong, consistent evidence that Housing First was successful in improving housing retention for people who were typically considered to be difficult to rehouse and who might otherwise struggle to sustain accommodation. Moreover, further major reviews of international evidence also concluded that evidence of the potential of Housing First to end homelessness was strong – “far stronger than is true of any other housing-related intervention targeting rough sleepers.”

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### Supporting Housing First schemes in the Private Rented Sector

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Other researchers, including Pleace attest to the strength of international evidence being a sign that Housing First can be successful across different national contexts with varying housing, health, welfare and political landscapes. However, the author cautions that Housing First is not entirely effective for all single people experiencing homelessness with high support needs, and that it is important to be aware of the differences between the UK and other countries, stating that “in terms of the international evidence base for Housing First, the successes are being measured in relation to existing service models that are not widely used in the UK.” The service models being referred to here are interventions centered on behavioural modification and abstinence, or with basic homelessness services, whereas the UK homelessness sector generally embraces service-user choice, personalisation, co-production and harm reduction.

Housing First was one of the key pillars of the 2019 Conservative manifesto for government, including the investment in England of £28 million in three Housing First pilots in Greater Manchester, Liverpool City Region and the West Midlands. In Scotland, the Housing First Pathfinder was launched in 2019 and is supporting schemes in the cities of Aberdeen (and Aberdeenshire), Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling. Schemes in Wales are supported by Welsh Government guidance, and there has been a longstanding Housing First project in Belfast supported by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Whilst models vary, it is recognised that an increasing proportion of housing first units may need to be procured through the PRS. For example, in Greater Manchester, a split 60:40 between SRS and PRS was expected.

Support for landlords

Incentives for landlords to rent to people on low-incomes

With the growing number of people seeking housing support outpacing the provision of affordable housing options, local areas face mounting pressures to access the limited number of units that are affordable - particularly in areas with higher property prices and rents. As a response to these challenges, many local authorities have started offering financial incentives to landlords to rent their properties to people with specific housing needs, including those who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness. Some of these practices have been reported in the press and advertised by many councils (e.g. Westminster, Greenwich, Anglesey). The incentive schemes vary substantially across councils and sometimes include multiple components, but these offers usually include four types of support as described by Kolker et al (2021).

These are:

- Cash upfront, where councils offer landlords a sum of money for agreeing a tenancy with a prospective tenant.
- Rent guarantees, where councils offer an assured rental payment for a period of time in the case that the property is void or a tenant falls behind with payment.
- Deposit bonds, where councils offer bonds to cover any costs a landlord may incur during the course of the tenancy, for example, costs due to damages to the property or cleaning fees. A report from the Making Every Adult Matter Coalition recommended that local policy should support and encourage landlords in the PRS by creating loan deposit schemes and insurance policies to cover landlords for damage.
- Dedicated ‘landlord liaison officers’, whose role is to be a dedicated resource that acts as a single point of contact for private landlords who need support with a tenancy and can help to reduce frictions and conflicts.

100 MEAM. (2015). op. cit. p.26
New types of hybrid organisation can be helpful in providing a bridge between the PRS and households in housing need. For example, Social Lettings Agencies (SLAs) are not-for-profit high-street-style lettings agents that specialise in supporting low-income or vulnerable households into secure and sustainable tenancies with private landlords. A review of SLAs in England\(^\text{101}\) found around 100 schemes of varying models and sizes, spread throughout the country. Whilst barriers to the SLA model may restrict its wider adoption at the current time, the authors nevertheless noted the potential for SLAs to "make a considerable difference to the options available to specific groups, particularly homeless people."

Other organisations such as Capital Letters have been created to work in partnership with London councils and private landlords to secure affordable housing for families at risk of or experiencing homelessness which bring all these services under a common umbrella. Among their services, they offer non-returnable cash incentives when the property is let, unique points of contact to facilitate the relationship between tenant, council and landlord, additional support for tenants and landlords to avoid arrears and other problems during the tenancy, among other services.

Kolker and colleagues designed an online experiment with a sample of over 2,800 landlords that found that cash upfront and rent guarantees had the largest impact on increasing willingness to rent to people on low incomes. Compared to these options, liaison officers and bonds for damages were far less impactful in increasing the likelihood of landlords to accept an offer. While councils may wish to consider exploring these options, the authors caution that a more thorough review is warranted to assess the impact of each of these strategies in tenancy sustainment, and the effective cost of each per tenancy achieved and sustained over time. There are also questions to be answered about the specific traits of these schemes including the value of the incentives offered, the length of any guarantees given, as well as any barriers for the implementation of these schemes.\(^\text{103}\)

An analysis by Clarke and Oxley for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation\(^\text{104}\) also outlines potential incentive schemes that could be considered to incentivise private landlords including a) Offering tax breaks to offset a portion of the rental income for properties let at a Local Housing Allowance rate; b) Increasing incentives to improve the quality of property by allowing some improvements to be deductible against income tax, rather than Capital Gains Tax because the first one is taxed at a higher rate; and c) Issuing housing vouchers to priority households to cover rent payments but this is very similar to the prerogatives that councils have when allocating Discretionary Housing Payments.\(^\text{105}\) These different incentives schemes remain untested.


\(^{102}\) Ibid. p. 2.


Section 4: Conclusion

The PRS in the UK continues to be precarious for its tenants, and the nature of its insecurity has been thrown into sharp relief by the Covid-19 pandemic. While the government moved quickly to shore-up the threat of eviction due to rent arrears, this was only a temporary measure— and the future of renters who have struggled to pay their housing costs as a result of the pandemic is not yet clearly understood.

England’s path to ending ‘no fault’ evictions has been slower than in Scotland and Wales. The publication in February of the much-anticipated Levelling Up White Paper strongly signals a commitment to strengthen protections for tenants against Section 21 and tackle ‘rogue landlords’ through registration. Nevertheless, whilst abolishing ‘no-fault’ evictions will be welcomed by many, it will represent just one incremental step towards greater tenancy security.

There will continue to be a need for further reforms in the PRS and beyond to make private renting a safe, fair, secure, and affordable experience for the low-income households who continue to rely on it. Section 2 of this report outlined key drivers for, and barriers to, tenancy sustainment to highlight the broader attention that is required across different policy domains— from housing supply, affordability and access, to the operation of the welfare system and the need for transformation of key social and health services. Furthermore, it reminds us that identification and understanding of those groups who struggle to sustain housing is important.

Other interventions that sustain tenancies, particularly for those most at risk of homelessness, are also needed. Section 3 looked at evidence which suggests that there has been a lot of activity in the UK to prevent and relieve homelessness, aid tenancy sustainment, and provide interventions to help people through complex and sometimes inadequate housing, health and social systems of provision and support. But the evidence base for outcomes and determining ‘what works’ in tenancy sustainment is still limited.
Despite these challenges, there are multiple opportunities ahead to improve tenancy sustainment in the PRS. Some of the key learning points, based on the evidence set out in this paper, are put forward as a starting point for the development of recommendations in collaboration with CHI:

1. Housing affordability, availability and access are all acting as major barriers for accommodation-based interventions that aim to prevent and relieve homelessness and play a crucial role in the sustainment of existing tenancies. This must be better understood (and acted upon) at all levels: boosting tenants’ capacity to pay for accommodation with the support of housing-related benefits; boosting supply of truly affordable housing in the right places, and considering mechanisms to incentivise landlords to offer and maintain their properties available for people living on low incomes.

2. Changes to the legislation around evictions will remove ‘no fault’ evictions and continue transitioning to a more protective environment for renters in England and Wales, closer in line with Scotland where renters have had open-ended tenancies since 2017. However, both mediation and legal advice for tenants could play a relevant complementary role in securing better outcomes for people who are facing evictions. While some of the evidence is promising and national governments across the UK are piloting some of these services, it is important to ascertain which type of legal advice is more effective. Some of the existing studies point out that ‘facilitative, non-confrontational style’ advice could be leading to less favourable outcomes for tenants.

3. Pre-tenancy training programmes are commonplace in the UK, with many Local Authorities and third sector organisations offering these services. However, there is a dearth of robust evaluations to assessing their efficacy and cost-effectiveness compared to other models of support. While a recent study showed these might not be enough to convince landlord to let their properties to people in receipt of benefits\(^\text{107}\) they may play a role in improving tenancy sustainment.

4. Local policy should support and encourage private landlords willing to rent to tenants with experiences of homelessness. Different strategies to support incentive landlords have been proposed, including cash incentives, guarantees, deposit bonds, tax breaks, among others – but their impact on access and tenancy sustainment are still to be tested. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), working collaboratively with DLUHC and its equivalent bodies outside England, as well as the many Local Authorities operating these models, should consider Demonstration Projects to compare the relative impact of these schemes and whether they deliver good value for money. The role of Social Lettings Agencies, and barriers to their growth, could be explored further.

5. Forms of intensive case management are effective for those who require support for multiple disadvantages, with unconditional housing, such as Housing First, demonstrating strong outcomes. These models have operated both in the private and social rented sectors since their inception and the ongoing National Evaluation of Housing First in England should provide important new evidence to support the further roll-out these approaches.

\(^{107}\) Kolker et al., op cit.