



**MANCHESTER SOCIAL
HOUSING COMMISSION**

IT'S TIME FOR A SOCIAL RENT REVOLUTION

**FINAL REPORT OF THE MANCHESTER SOCIAL
HOUSING COMMISSION**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MAY 2026



www.socialhomes4mcr.org.uk/commission

OUR COMMISSIONERS



The Right Reverend Dr **David Walker**, Bishop of Manchester (Chair)



Dr **Sophie King**, Director, Community Led Action & Savings Support (Convenor)



Andrea Lowman, Director of Development, Wythenshawe Community Housing Group (WCHG)



Canon **Andrea Titterington**, Former Housing Association CEO and Regeneration Director



Bernard Sudlow, Aquarius TARA, Aquarius Community Savers and Hulme Community Forum



David Rudlin, Urban Design Director, BDP



Eleanor Radcliffe, Project Manager, Carbon Coop



Councillor **Gavin White**, Executive Member for Housing and Development Manchester City Council



Isaac Rose, Organiser, Greater Manchester Tenants Union



John Ryan, Strategic Lead for Greater Manchester, Shelter



Jo Walby, CEO, Mustard Tree



Dr **Naomi Luhde-Thompson**, Senior Lecturer, Oxford Brookes/Director, Rights: Community: Action



James Scott Vandeventer, Senior Lecturer in Sustainability, Manchester Metropolitan University



Dr **Nigel de Noronha**, Research Associate, University of Manchester



Sally Casey (BEM), Aquarius Community Savers and Hulme Tenants Union



Sheila Davies, Chair, Miles Platting Community & Age-friendly network



Sue Anya, Vice-Chair, Miles Platting Community & Age-friendly network



Dr **Stuart Hodgkinson**, Associate Professor, University of Leeds



Thirza Amina Asanga-Rae, Organiser, Greater Manchester Tenants Union



Tom Chance, CEO, Community Land Trust Network



Sue Thomas O'Flaherty, Lifted Carers/Wythenshawe Central Network



Venus Galarza, Former Policy Manager, Shelter (2021-2025)



Vicky Leigh, Assistant Principal, Greater Manchester Academies Trust



Zoe Marlow, Wythenshawe Central Network



Anne Worthington, St Georges Youth and Community Centre

INTRODUCTION

This is the final report of the Manchester Social Housing Commission (July 2024 - December 2025).

The Commission brought together social housing tenants, grassroots community organisations, senior public and voluntary sector leaders, housing and planning professionals, academics, housing campaigners, politicians and officers at Manchester City Council for a shared purpose: **to achieve accelerated delivery of ecologically sustainable housing for social rent in the City of Manchester by 2030.**

The Commission was created by the Social Homes for Manchester coalition (SH4M), a network of community and voluntary sector organisations in the city.

SH4M was formed in 2023 with the aim of building a city-wide movement for housing justice. Local communities in Manchester had seen enough of ‘luxury’ high-rise towers being erected across the city’s skyline whilst records were being broken for levels of homelessness and children living long-term in poor quality temporary accommodation.

For them, the answer was obvious: it was time for a new generation of social rent homes, built in response to evidenced need not profit, with rents set in proportion to local incomes, and tenancies let on a secure, lifetime basis.

SH4M also saw the climate and cost of living crises as critical aspects of the housing emergency and that retrofitting existing stock whilst building homes with better insulation and on-site renewable energy would reduce both carbon emissions and people’s energy bills.

Importantly, the Commission comprised one third Community Commissioners: residents with direct experience of the housing crisis who in most cases have spent decades organising to protect their community’s right to the city.

The Commission’s final report has three key objectives:

1. To set out the substantive case for an acceleration of building sustainable homes for social rent.
2. To present our key recommendations and assess progress achieved to date.
3. To reflect on the process we have followed, in support of more and better public participation in policymaking.



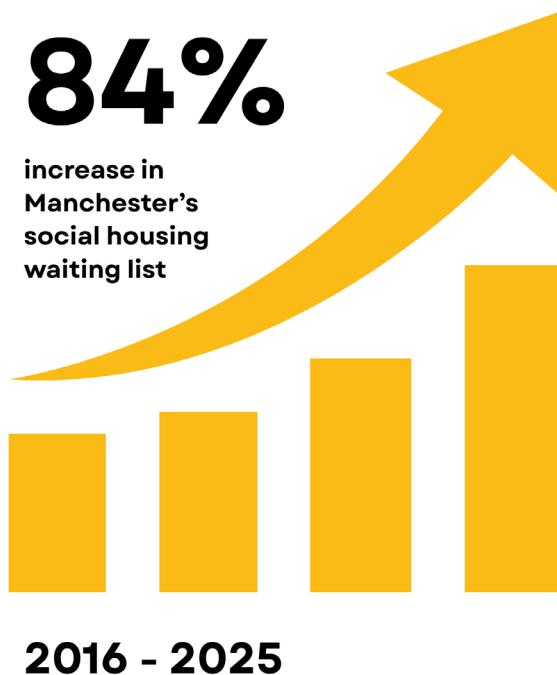
WHY WE NEED A SOCIAL RENT REVOLUTION

Access to adequate housing that is safe, secure, and affordable is a fundamental human right enshrined in international law and in the 20th century was guaranteed through the mass development of social rented housing. However, the erosion of social rent as part of a long-term marketisation agenda means **the right to adequate housing is no longer being met for increasing numbers of people.**

THE HOUSING CRISIS

Communities across England are grappling with an ever-worsening crisis of housing affordability. The rapid growth in people experiencing homelessness has driven a remarkable **84% increase in Manchester's social housing waiting list between 2016 and 2025 to 21,606 households.**¹

Across England, a decent and safe home is also being denied to over 1.4 million households who are living in poor quality rental accommodation. **In Manchester, 1 in 4 households in the PRS do not meet the basic decency standard.**² The most vulnerable people who spend the most time at home are the most vulnerable to the physical and mental harm caused by poorly insulated and damp homes.



41.2%

increase in the number of households living in England over the past five decades



40%

decrease in the total stock of genuine social rented housing in England over same period

THE RETREAT OF THE STATE

Successive governments since 1979 have overseen decades of public underinvestment in housing provision whilst at the same time encouraging the wider privatisation, deregulation, and financialisation of housing.

This has led to the catastrophic erosion of social rented housing: **the total stock of genuine social rented housing in England has fallen by 40% over the past five decades, whilst the number of households living in England has increased by 41.2% over the same period.**³

The failure of the state to participate in large scale house building or finance the retrofit of existing stock, has also left England with the oldest housing stock in Europe with 1 in 5 homes (5.1 million) built before 1919, most of which lack sufficient insulation, proper foundations and damp-proofing.⁴

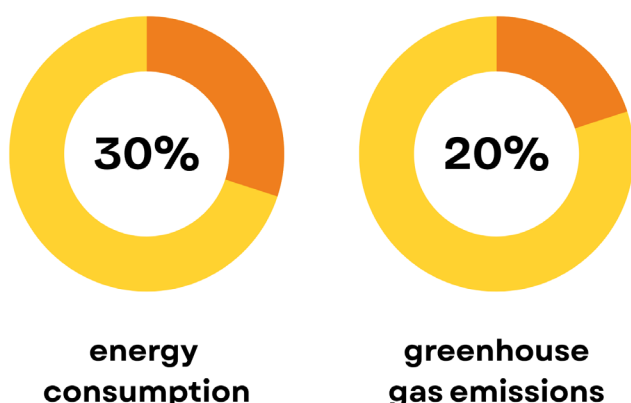
Meanwhile, since deregulation under the Housing Act 1988, private landlords have effectively been empowered to let sub-standard homes at full market value. Combined with over a decade of welfare reform and rising energy prices, this has contributed to 1 in 5 households in Manchester living in fuel poverty, resulting in cold, damp and mouldy homes and the exacerbation of health inequalities.⁵

THE CLIMATE CRISIS

The UK has committed in law to a 100% reduction by 2050 on its 1990 level of carbon emissions, with an interim target of an effective 78% reduction in emissions by 2035. Given that existing residential buildings in the UK account for over 30% of energy consumption and a fifth of greenhouse gas emissions, rapid and radical action to decarbonise our housing stock is essential.

But we are nowhere near achieving this: in 2018, just 1% of homes were registered to Energy Performance Band certificate A.⁶ This is in large part due to a shift in national government policy in England since 2015 under the influence of the private housebuilding industry.

Existing residential buildings in the UK account for over:



THE CASE FOR INVESTMENT

The Commission recognises the need for a diverse range of housing tenures and the value of mixed income neighbourhoods. However, sustainable social rented housing plays a unique and indispensable role in the housing system as the most affordable, secure, and decent tenure.

Affordability: on average, social rents in England are just over a third of private market rents and are set through a formula based on local incomes.

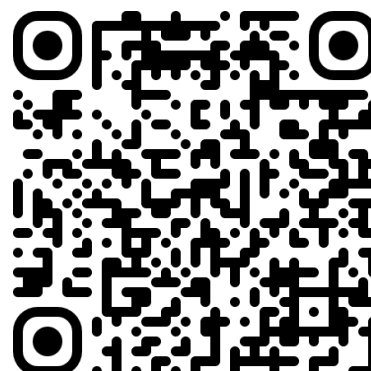
Social and economic value: building 90,000 social rented homes each year over ten years would yield an estimated £3.50 in economic benefits for every £1 spent and would pay back the public cost of building it within 11 years,⁷ in part through savings on welfare support from lower rents and temporary accommodation costs.

Security and decency: social landlords have traditionally evicted as a last resort while social housing is also by far the most decent tenure in relation to housing standards due to stronger regulation and periodic investment.

Sustainability: social landlords are uniquely placed to build and retrofit homes to the highest energy efficiency standards whilst creating economies of scale through the large number of homes they own, the concentration of stock in relatively few bodies, their strong relationship with government, and the potential for sectoral cooperation.

To access the full final report and recommendations please scan this QR code or visit

<https://www.socialhomes4mcr.org.uk/publications:>





KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

To rapidly increase the supply of homes for social rent that are both decent and sustainable, innovative options for overcoming barriers to delivery must be considered. Some of our proposals will require changes at the national scale, whilst others will require commitment and flexibility at the local authority level. The investment needed to implement these measures will pay for itself over the long-term through improved health outcomes, educational attainment, new employment, cuts to welfare spending, and tackling climate change.

1. Boosting delivery of social rent

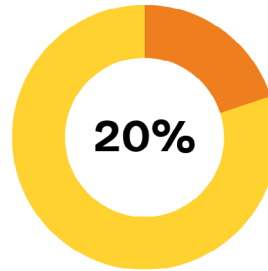
The Government has taken important steps to increase the supply of social rent in a welcome shift from the past 15 years.

These include:

- the new 10-year £39 billion Social and Affordable Housing Programme (2026-2036) managed by Homes England, with at least 60% allocated for social rent.
- the new definition of 'Affordable Housing for Rent' in planning policy that clearly distinguishes between Social Rent and other forms of affordable rent.
- £2.5 billion of low-interest loans over four years (2026-2030) to Private Registered Providers of social housing.
- extending the 'preferential' borrowing rate for council housebuilding from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) until the end of March 2027.
- increasing the threshold for when a council must open a Housing Revenue Account (HRA) from 200 to 1000 homes to make this more cost-effective.
- launching the Council Housebuilding Support Service and Council Housebuilding Skills & Capacity Programme (CHSCP).
- reforms to the Right to Buy (RTB) that will dramatically reduce the loss of existing and future social homes and incentivise providers to build new social rent homes.

- the 10-year social rent settlement which will enable social landlords to make better long-term plans to build and refurbish.

However, these combined measures will not deliver anywhere near the number of social homes we urgently need.



The Government's 10-year funding programme will only deliver 20% of the 90,000 net additional social homes per year we need.

The Government's 10-year funding programme aims to build 18,000 new social rent homes per year - just 20% of the 90,000 net additional social homes per year required. Worse, this does not factor in the impact of future RTB sales and demolitions, which on past and current trends would remove around 13,000 social homes per year. Should this happen, the Government's programme would only generate around 5000 net additional social rent homes per year, **just 5.5% of what we need.**

Achieving 90,000 net additional social rent homes per year will need in excess of £100 billion additional capital funding, around two and a half times the current funding programme.⁸ Without this funding, social landlords will not have the financial capacity to both deliver the new social rent homes we need whilst simultaneously meeting the growing investment needs of their existing stock. At the same time, the Government must address the potential adverse consequences of above inflation rent increases on low-income households, which could include a growth in evictions and homelessness.

Current legislation constrains the ability of local authorities to use public land to subsidise social housing delivery, and to compulsory purchase private land for the development of social housing. Local authorities can sell land at below

best consideration without ministerial consent if they consider this strategic to ‘economic, social or environmental well-being’, but only if the undervalue of this land does not exceed £2 million, which is a major impediment to unlocking public land. The Levelling-up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA) gave local authorities the power to remove hope value when compulsory purchasing land for a development in the public interest, including building affordable housing. Hope value inflates the cost of land by 275 times on average, higher than is viable for most local authorities seeking to build housing for social rent.⁹ However, the current requirement to obtain Ministerial approval on a case-by-case basis creates uncertainty on what exactly the ‘public interest’ constitutes and is deterring local authorities for fear of expensive legal battles.¹⁰

90,000 net additional social rent homes per year will need at least

£100 billion

additional capital funding

Empty homes and vacant commercial property can be repurposed for social rent, but the Government has not done enough to support local authorities to re-use existing buildings.

In Manchester, where there are 1,500 long-term empty homes¹¹, the Council has brought 500 such homes back into use over the past two years as part of its 10-year council leasing programme where current or new owners renovate and lease their homes to the council for temporary accommodation.¹² The Greater Manchester Combined Authority has also launched a new Empty Homes programme to refurbish or lease 400 empty homes for temporary accommodation.¹³ However, leasing empty homes as temporary accommodation is a missed opportunity to acquire, retrofit and convert them

into social rent to help homeless families gain long term, affordable, sustainable and energy efficient homes. Greater funding and powers for local government would transform this agenda.

■ Recommendation 1:

The Government must significantly increase its target for building new homes for social rent from 18,000 new homes per year to 90,000 net additional homes per year whilst protecting tenants from onerous rent increases.

We call on Government to:

- 1.1. Commit an additional £100 billion to the 10-year Social and Affordable Housing Programme exclusively for new social rent.
- 1.2. Cancel the unsustainable £17 billion HRA debt preventing councils from building new homes and retrofitting their existing stock; and to conduct a wholesale review of the 2012 HRA self-financing system to put it on a sustainable footing.
- 1.3. Allow social landlords longer-term access to the preferential rate borrowing via the Public Works Loan Board to finance new build and retrofitting.
- 1.4. Work with social landlords and SMEs to develop an alternative social housing supply chain in which they can procure together to generate economies of scale.
- 1.5. Accompany the new long-term social rent settlement with financial protections to avoid pushing households into rent arrears and homelessness.
- 1.6. Set up a taskforce with social landlords, tenant organisations and other stakeholders to develop a new rent-setting model that is both fair to tenants and social landlords whilst retaining social rent as the most affordable and secure tenure.

■ Recommendation 2:

The Government should introduce further legislative changes to embed the 90,000 net additional social rent target in national and local planning frameworks.

We call on Government to:

2.1. Further amend the definition of Social and Affordable Housing in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to define these different tenures in relation to local household incomes.

2.2. Introduce tougher targets and minimum requirements for social rent in all developments based on local housing needs assessments that explicitly calculate the amount of social housing needed to eliminate temporary accommodation and homelessness.

2.3. Ensure private developers make their contribution to social rent delivery by reforming the viability percentages in planning practice guidance and introducing a national requirement for developer contributions to set a non-negotiable minimum target.

■ Recommendation 3:

The Government should take bold action to unlock cheaper land for social housing delivery.

We call on Government to:

3.1. Modernise legislation on land disposal to give local authorities and other public bodies explicit consent to use public land to subsidise social housing delivery.

3.2. Amend LURA 2023 to further specify the conditions under which local authorities and other public bodies can undertake compulsory purchase of both land and existing structures without paying hope value, such as by revising the definition of 'public interest' to include land and buildings for social housing construction and retrofit.

3.3. Require combined authorities to establish city regional 'land commissions' as the Greater

Manchester Mayor has done to facilitate cooperation between all public landowners, including utilities, churches, public transport providers and Network Rail for the purpose of social housing delivery.

3.4. Permit local authorities to levy council tax on unbuilt sites after a certain time period in proportion to the number of homes for which permission has been granted to incentivise timely development.

■ Recommendation 4:

The Government should make better use of existing residential and commercial buildings to deliver social rent homes at pace.

We call on Government to:

4.1. Implement Shelter's 2024 "Home Again: A 10-City Plan"¹⁴ to rapidly convert empty homes into social rent homes, which includes a mix of targeted grant funding, stronger Compulsory Purchase powers, tougher and mandatory council tax premiums on empty homes and short-term lets, and ring fencing all second home and empty home premiums for acquiring empty homes.

4.2. Set up a Property Conversion Commission, supported by a National Housing Conversion Fund (as proposed by the Affordable Housing Commission), to identify and enable the acquisition, adaptation or conversion of commercial properties into social rented homes that meet building safety and decent homes standards.



2. Embedding sustainability in new and existing rental housing

The Government has made some important progress towards increasing the sustainability of both new and existing rental housing.

This includes:

- new building regulations from March 2027 that require higher standards of energy efficiency and on-site renewable energy production for new build homes.
- the £15 billion 'Warm Homes Plan' to upgrade 5 million privately owned (including rented) homes across England with insulation and renewable energy related technology with the aim of taking 1 million households out of fuel poverty.¹⁵
- a new £1.29 billion round of investment in retrofitting social housing through the Warm Homes: Social Housing Fund Wave 3 2025-28.
- new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) that require rental homes to achieve new energy efficiency standards by 2030, benefitting up to 1.5 million households, and meet additional energy power standards by 2039.
- new EPC metrics that will provide better information to consumers on fabric performance, heating system, smart readiness and energy costs.
- proposed changes to permitted development rights, on top of existing rights around insulation and renewable energy generation, to allow batteries and EV chargers.

Along with the wider Greater Manchester region, Manchester has also made bold moves on climate action. These include:

- declaring a Climate Emergency and committing to becoming a zero-carbon city by 2038.
- developing a Local Area Energy Plan (LEAP) with support of Greater Manchester Combined Authority, which aims to define the extent of the transformation needed¹⁶ and sets out a number of focus areas, one of which is Fabric Retrofit that improves buildings' insulation and heating efficiency to ensure they will lose less energy and reduce energy demand.¹⁷

It is clear, however, that these combined measures are a long way short of addressing the scale of the challenge of virtually eliminating greenhouse gas emissions from England's rental housing stock by 2050.

While the majority of new build domestic properties are now being registered as EPC Band B, there is a major gap to achieving 'ultra high' energy efficiency rates of Band A. The Committee on Climate Change's latest progress report states that the installation of heat pumps currently stands at only 1% of homes.¹⁸ New building regulations from March 2027 will only apply to homes consented after this date, and are worded in ways that will potentially enable developers to evade the highest standards by only requiring "reasonable" standards of energy efficiency and on-site renewable energy production "wherever possible".¹⁹ There have also been no moves to increase fabric efficiency, largely due to a Government policy choice to favour 'better performance to technology such as heat pumps'.²⁰

More generally, we are deeply concerned about the deregulatory drive in the land use planning system. While the Trade and Cooperation Agreement with the European Union has committed the UK to remain on a level playing field with long held environmental protection aims - including healthy environments and the prevention of pollution - various Planning Acts in England have diverged from the more sustainable directions taken in Scotland and Wales. The proposed changes to the NPPF (PM13) will discourage local planning authorities from setting standards above building regulations.²¹

The Government's reforms to Energy Performance Certificates are a missed opportunity to adopt the LETI approach.²²

Developed by a leading group of local authorities, developers and architects, LETI uses the Energy Unit Intensity (EUI) metric to measure the energy performance of the actual build. This is much more realistic than using the Target Emissions Rate (TER) approach of the previous Future Homes Standard (which is based on a model to predict performance). Measuring the 'real world use' of a home is essential for capturing the effectiveness of energy performance as it is experienced by occupants. Wales has introduced energy use

intensity metrics as part of its uplift to Building Regulations.²³ Scotland has also committed to introducing a Passivhaus standard to building, which is expected in 2028 following a private members bill and extensive consultation.²⁴

Efforts to adapt England's housing stock are not progressing fast enough nor being targeted in the right way. Existing rental properties are only required to achieve EPC Band C by 2030 under the new MEES regulations. The Warm Homes plan to retrofit 5 million homes in the private sector does not specifically target the homes and households in most need of support - it only focuses on 1 million households in fuel poverty and is open to middle income households to carry out their own retrofit if they live in deprived postcode areas.²⁵ Meanwhile, the comprehensive decarbonisation of the social rented sector is being held back by the staggering of short funding rounds as shown by the Social Housing Fund Wave 3 being oversubscribed by £1 billion.²⁶

Once the electricity grid itself is decarbonised from using 100% renewables, there is currently no guarantee that electricity bills will be affordable to low income households in a privatised electricity market. That is why it is vital that the Government's Warm Homes Plan commits to prioritising the maximisation of building insulation in the lowest income and most fuel poor homes - to both lower bills and reduce the pressure on energy generation and the grid.

The current emphasis of the Social and Affordable Housing Programme on new build and net additional supply is highly restrictive and ignores the urgent need to upgrade existing homes that do not meet environmental and building quality and safety standards. Longer term, flexible repayment offers should be created, and the funding should be made available to other prospective housing providers, including housing associations, Community Land Trusts and self-builders who are working in partnership with local authorities to build to the highest sustainability standards.

■ Recommendation 5:

The Government must urgently set higher minimum standards of energy efficiency and on-site renewable energy to more rapidly decarbonise both new build and the existing housing stock.

We call on Government to:

- 5.1. Seek higher minimum standards of energy efficiency for new buildings in England in line with the approaches being taken by Scotland (Passivhaus) and Wales (EUI).
- 5.2. Reform the NPPF to empower local planning authorities in England to require higher standards based on energy use in buildings until building regulations are fully comprehensive.
- 5.3. Strengthen the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards for rental housing from EPC C to EPC B by 2030 in line with commercial buildings.
- 5.4. Amend the new Decent Homes Standard to place stronger emphasis on climate resilience and thermal comfort by requiring that all homes can be maintained at 18°C to 21°C year-round at a reasonable cost to tenants.

■ Recommendation 6:

The Government must tie all public investment in housing to achieving zero carbon and ending fuel poverty as soon as possible.

We call on Government to:

- 6.1. Target publicly funded retrofitting schemes such as the Warm Homes Plan on the most energy inefficient homes (those in EPC E, F and G bands) and fuel poor households.
- 6.2. Abolish all VAT on retrofitting that delivers zero carbon standards.
- 6.3. Provide public funding to private landlords to meet EPC B on the condition that they charge social rents for at least 15 years.

6.4. Remove Homes England rules for regeneration funding that requires net-additionality and instead move regeneration funding to a joint programme between Homes England and the Department of Energy, Security and Net Zero that prioritises the most environmentally friendly forms of social housing regeneration.

6.5. Reinstating the Feed-in-Tariff (FIT) specifically for social and affordable housing providers that install renewable energy systems and ensure tenants benefit from lower energy bills.

6.6. End state subsidies for fossil fuels and switch them to funding a universal basic provision of energy for all that ends prepayment meters and ensures wealthier households pay progressively more for using excess energy beyond their needs.

3. Supporting community-led housing, development and participation

We welcome the Government's recognition of the importance of community-led housing, whether as communities directly building or managing their own homes collectively, or having a strong voice in planning, design and development of homes in their communities. Specifically, the Government has:

- made community-led housing a national priority in the Social and Affordable Homes Programme (SAHP) 2026 to 2036, offering flexible grant rates for community-led projects in recognition of their higher upfront costs.
- through its New Towns Taskforce has suggested that community-led housing should be developed in every New Town.
- improved policies in the NPPF including the definition of community-led development and the exception site policy.
- pre-approved Pride in Place funding for community-led housing through Community Land Trusts.
- injected £20 million into Resonance's Community Developers Fund providing finance to support more than 2,500 new homes over

ten years as part of housebuilding projects led by community groups.

- commissioned a major policy options study on improving long-term access to finance for community-led housing.
- introduced the Community Right to Buy in the current Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill.

However, this important progress has been undermined by inaction in other areas as well as government policies pushing in the opposite direction. There are major rollbacks in the Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025, the new NPPF under consultation, and apart from 'support' for assets of community value in the Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, nothing to support community-led development or require community participation in local plan-making, planning decisions, and wider local development. In fact, the Government has proposed a new national scheme of delegation for planning decisions that will automatically delegate planning application decisions to officers with only a few exceptions.²⁷ The new forms of environmental assessment will weaken existing consultation and consideration requirements, replacing clear processes with indeterminate and permissive regimes, subject to the whim of the decision-maker. The Government has offered nothing substantive to: improve access to pre-development finance for community-led projects; provide support and funding for the sector's growth lab to build delivery capacity; improve access to public land; or require combined and local authorities to engage with community development and empowerment in planning, housing, regeneration or New Towns. The funded support for neighbourhood planning has also been axed.

Communities, social housing tenants, and those in need of social housing, currently have very little power over housing, planning and developments. In most discussions the focus remains on ensuring that local authorities and housing associations can deliver the social rent homes we need. While we agree that their role is critical, the Commission has also heard from those who believe that **community-led models might provide a way to develop additional social housing** as well as give working class communities

a much more meaningful voice and role within housing development and management, driving alternative forms of regeneration and governance that go beyond bricks and mortar to build community power, improve social cohesion and address health inequalities. These models will allow communities to hold land, assets and facilities in trust for future generations. **A further key benefit of housing cooperatives and community land trusts is that they are wholly exempt from policies like the statutory Right to Buy, the Right to Acquire and the Right to Shared Ownership, which can lead to the loss of council and housing association social rent homes to the open market.**

Beyond this, a more participatory approach to planning new social rented homes is needed, one that responds to local geographies of need.

Whilst demand for social homes exists across Manchester, it is particularly acute in areas where rents have risen most sharply, including neighbourhoods within and around the city centre and parts of South Manchester. Need is also concentrated in communities with higher numbers of households with caring responsibilities, people with disabilities or long-term conditions and children with special educational needs.

This underlines the importance of local citizens having access to user-friendly, locally specific data to inform local participation, decision-making and community plan-making. It is wrong to assume that areas with relatively higher existing levels of social rented housing do not need more of this tenure. In many communities facing multiple forms of disadvantage, residents rely heavily on intergenerational and extended family networks to meet caring needs. These support systems depend on proximity and are reinforced by social ties.²⁸ At the same time, such households are often least able to absorb the higher transport costs associated with displacement to more distant areas, particularly where employment is concentrated in lower-paid sectors such as retail, transport and hospitality. **Addressing entrenched socio-economic, health and spatial inequalities across the city requires a more granular understanding of local need, and a commitment to delivering social rented homes in the places where they are most needed.**

All of this requires political will to create reforms at multiple levels of decision-making as well as a change in the culture towards a “people-powered” model where communities initiate, own and manage housing and assets that meet local needs.

■ Recommendation 7:

The Government must provide greater legal and financial support for community-led housing development to enable housing cooperatives, community land trusts, tenant management organisations and cohousing projects to flourish.

We call on Government to:

7.1. Mandate Homes England to consider how a greater volume of social housing and other forms of affordable housing can be delivered through community-led models.

7.2. Revise the NPPF to mandate deeper community involvement across the development process, specifically setting out ways in which local plan-making and decision-taking on major schemes should involve local communities of place.

7.3. Revise the NPPF to establish a requirement to deliver consent for community-led schemes.

7.4. Revise the NPPF to enable Local Plans to require a defined proportion of community-led housing on large development sites. In parallel, the Community-Led Exception Site policy should be extended to apply within as well as adjacent to settlements, in order to de-risk and accelerate the delivery of small-scale community-led schemes.

7.5. Fund the Community Led Housing Growth Lab to develop more delivery capacity within the sector.

7.6. Restore funding for Tenant Empowerment Grants, abolished in 2015, that provide the support and training that council tenants need to exercise their Right to Manage.

■ Recommendation 8:

The Government should strengthen community participation rights in both the planning system and regeneration.

We call on Government to:

8.1. Amend the current Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill to improve community rights to more power and participation in planning and regeneration. These should focus the duty on regional mayors and create an obligation for the Government to assess and report on the right to participate in decisions, the right to a healthy environment, and the right to a healthy home.

8.2. Safeguard public participation in Local Plans and in decision-making on local development proposals by enshrining in law public speaking rights at planning committee meetings.

■ Recommendation 9:

The Greater Manchester Combined Authority should pioneer community-led development and participation in the Greater Manchester region.

We call on the GMCA to:

9.1. Continue to fund Greater Manchester Community Led Homes (GMCLH) as the key enabling body for community-led developments in Greater Manchester.

9.2. Explore how housing and land funds could be better used to scale up different models of community-led housing proposed by the Commission.

9.3. Work with SH4M, Manchester City Council, and GM Community Led Homes to support the development and implementation of a city-wide strategy that could become a learning base for other GM boroughs to explore similar approaches.

9.4. Work with SH4M and Manchester City Council to develop a Greater Manchester Transparency and Accountability web portal through which communities can access key local area data for

analysis/advocacy.

9.5. Use the Greater Manchester Land Commission to identify potential small sites and empty buildings for community-led housing projects.

■ Recommendation 10:

Manchester City Council should use its planning powers and other legal instruments to give impetus to community-led development.

We call on Manchester City Council to:

10.1. Introduce a policy for community-led development into the new Local Plan that: gives weight to developments that result in community ownership and management of buildings and land; and incorporates quantified requirements for community-led homes in sites over a threshold (e.g. 250).

10.2. Consider the use of Local and Neighbourhood Development Orders to de-risk and accelerate community-led development on small sites.

10.3. Incorporate community-led development into MCC's thirteen regeneration projects, providing opportunities for communities to influence, co-design, co-produce, own, manage, and steward assets being developed there.

10.4. Support those communities in receipt of Pride in Place funding to explore establishing a Community Land Trust to develop and take ownership of assets, including social housing.

10.5. Give community-led organisations a right of first refusal on public land or properties prior to disposal on the open market, and that any land or properties offered at a value that reflects best consideration should explicitly take into account the Council's strategic objectives, including the delivery of social housing.

10.6. Review and revise the eligibility criteria for community-led housing groups to allow early-stage groups to explore and develop proposals without being unduly restricted by procedural requirements.

10.7. Work with the community led housing sector to agree Local Lettings Policies for sites that are brought forward as community led.

■ Recommendation 11:

The Manchester Housing Providers Partnership should support the development of community-led housing in Manchester through:

11.1. Working with GMCLH to develop delivery frameworks for community-led housing, including on sites and developments currently being progressed by members of the Manchester Housing Providers' Partnership.

11.2. Incorporate models such as Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs) into both new and existing social housing, strengthening tenant empowerment and participation in housing management.

4. Empowering tenants to live in decent homes

Building on previous governments' renewed focus on housing safety following the Grenfell Tower disaster in 2017 and the death of two-year-old Awaab Ishak in 2020, the Government has brought forward a raft of important reforms to tackle existing housing conditions for renters and force landlords to take issues of repair, health and safety more seriously. These include:

- the introduction of Awaab's Law since 27 October 2025 that requires social landlords - and soon private landlords - to take urgent action on all emergency hazards within 24 hours and address significant hazards and serious damp and mould and emergency disrepair to strict timeframes.
- the modernised Decent Homes Standard (DHS) that will apply to all rental housing, including Temporary Accommodation and Supported Housing by 2035.
- the Renter's Rights Act 2025 which will extend the DHS to the PRS, bring greater security of tenure through the abolition of assured

shorthold tenancies and Section 21 evictions, provide greater accountability through a new Ombudsman service for private renters and a national landlord register, and strengthen powers for local authorities to enforce on unsafe housing conditions.

- increased funding for legal aid solicitors that will help to make legal aid representation for serious housing cases more viable.

However, the new emerging landscape of housing regulations and tenant rights falls well short of what is needed.

The new DHS will only become mandatory by 2035, far too late for those homes in the worst conditions and delaying decency for millions of renters. The new standard also contains significant inconsistencies and anomalies (see our Briefing No.3). For example, a home can be classed as 'decent' whilst lacking essential facilities, because only items that already exist must be in good repair. Vital accessibility components, such as handrails, will not be required nor classed as 'key', meaning there are fewer incentives to provide them or keep them in good repair and landlords will be excused from meeting external public realm requirements. Without new protections and flexibility, the new DHS has the potential to increase the risk of homelessness, instability or unaffordability for renters as private landlords push for higher rents, or as new standards reduce the supply of temporary accommodation.²⁹

A key barrier to change is the funding crisis affecting parts of the social housing sector, local authority housing enforcement, and legal aid.

The Government is creating new responsibilities on landlords and local authorities, and new legal rights for tenants, but these are not matched by sufficient resources to achieve them. Beyond the rent settlement, the Government has not announced any additional support for social landlords to meet the new DHS by 2035, which its own modelling suggests will have a mean cost of £5,937 per home, a total of £11.3 billion.³⁰ However, some social landlords and particularly local authorities are struggling to fund the costs of attaining the current decency standard due to the perilous financial position of their Housing Revenue Accounts (HRAs). As a result, many social housing providers are scaling back the output of

new homes, whilst others are bringing forward demolition plans for their more challenging stock, which will worsen the existing housing crisis as well as having a significant impact on the environment.³¹

The Renters' Rights Act is not abolishing no-fault evictions in the PRS. By allowing evictions under a reformed Section 8 of the Housing Act 1988, landlords will still be permitted to evict tenants for "mandatory reasons". PRS landlords will be able to evict private tenants if the landlord wants to sell or move in, if they wish to move in members of their family, or where the landlord wishes to complete significant repairs required by the local authority. In addition, the number of defences that tenants can use will reduce, meaning it may be easier for some landlords to evict a tenant for no fault of their own.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the enforcement mechanisms introduced or strengthened in the Act will rely heavily on local authorities and the tribunal system, both of which face capacity and funding challenges. Whilst the Renters' Rights Act does broaden the scope of disrepair protections, the practical success of the Act will depend on how "serious hazards" are interpreted and if enforcement mechanisms are robust enough to address issues that fall below the threshold of "immediate risk to health" but still render a property unsuitable to live in.³²

The Government is also not dealing with an overly complex and inconsistent regulatory system that still lacks tenants' voice. While individual tenants are represented in various advisory groups, including the Government's own Social Housing Resident Panel, the Government has done nothing to address the crisis of tenant and residents' associations, TMOs and national tenants' representation.

■ Recommendation 12:

The Government must address the current weaknesses in tenant rights.

We call on Government to:

12.1. Work with tenants' organisations to co-create a National Tenants Charter that sets out tenants' fundamental rights to decency, dignity, health and safety in their homes, their landlords' obligations around property conditions, and the systems of scrutiny and redress.

12.2. Support the rejuvenation of the tenants' movement by creating a National Tenant Empowerment Fund (part funded by landlord licensing) to support new tenants' organisations, tenant management organisations and an independent, national organisation elected and run by tenants to represent their interests in policy and regulatory conversations.

12.3. Fundamentally reform Legal Aid, along with funding for local Law Centres, to ensure that all tenants have access to affordable legal representation.

■ Recommendation 13:

The Government should simplify and strengthen housing standards across the rental sector.

We call on Government to:

13.1. Consolidate all existing and future housing standards and legal safety requirements, including fire, gas and electrical safety, in the new DHS and extend it to all forms of rental and temporary accommodation, including accommodation for asylum seekers.

13.2. Revise the new DHS before it is introduced to remove inconsistencies, contradictions, and loopholes, ensuring it provides a clear and enforceable baseline for all rented homes.

13.3. Commit to the elimination of all Category 1 and Category 2 hazards in rented accommodation by 2030 to address persistent inequalities in housing conditions.

■ Recommendation 14:

The Government should provide sufficient funding to support landlords to upgrade their homes and tenants to afford to furnish them.

We call on Government to:

14.1. Help social and private landlords to meet the new DHS with private landlords able to access higher grants from letting their homes at social rents for 15 years.

14.2. Introduce a well-funded programme of area-based housing renewal, targeting concentrations of non-decent pre-1919 terraced homes.

14.3. Increase the maximum amount available for each home under the Disabled Facilities Grant, as proposed by the Fabian Society³³, to cover more complex adaptations, simplify the system of support and allow people with disabilities to stay in their homes.

14.4. Provide funding for all local authorities to set up a Local Welfare Assistance Scheme that provides low-income households with access to essential items of furniture, fittings and fixtures.

■ Recommendation 15:

The Government should revolutionise regulatory enforcement.

We call on Government to:

15.1. Establish a national Housing Standards Agency (HSA) to take over responsibility for housing standards enforcement from local authorities as well as the Housing Ombudsman and operate through locally based teams working in partnership with, or embedded within, Combined and Strategic Authorities.

15.2. Equip this new HSA with comprehensive enforcement powers, including the ability to carry out routine and unannounced inspections, undertake emergency repairs, issue fines, and make repair and compensation orders.

15.3. Introduce a mandatory national registration

and licensing scheme for all landlords and housing providers to be administered by the new HSA with non-compliant landlords ultimately facing the revocation of their licence.

15.4. Make the HSA a one-stop-shop for tenants, and their representatives or advocates, to bring evidence of persistent non-compliance with the new DHS, as well as serious or urgent health and safety issues that have been ignored by landlords, to ensure tenant voices are heard and immediate action taken where necessary.

NEXT STEPS

The final report draws on the full Commission process, incorporating key findings from all our publications as well as wider experiences and ideas shared by visiting speakers, through testimonies submitted as evidence to the Commission, and from local area teams and our Community Commissioners. We have also drawn from our responses to a wide range of local and national government consultations.

The SH4M Coalition is the legacy structure which will take forward these findings and recommendations and seek to maximise implementation, working always in partnership with community leaders across Manchester, Greater Manchester and England. The Coalition will publish an annual progress tracker against these recommendations each year at least until the next General Election.

You can find further details on the context and evidence for the recommendations in our previous reports here:

<https://www.socialhomes4mcr.org.uk/publications>.



ENDNOTES

- 1 Manchester Move. [Demand and Prospects information: Housing Register](#), accessed Dec 2025.
- 2 MHCLG. (2025). [Annex tables for English Housing Survey 2023 to 2024 headline findings on housing quality and energy efficiency](#), 30 January
- 3 See note 21 in the main report.
- 4 MHCLG. (2024). 2023-24 [English Housing Survey Headline Report. Chapter 1: Annex Tables](#)
- 5 Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy. (2022). [Subregional fuel poverty data 2020](#)
- 6 MHCLG. (2018). [Live tables on Energy Performance of Buildings Certificates](#). Data to the end of September 2018 for England and Wales.
- 7 CEBR. (2024). [The economic impact of building social housing](#). Shelter/NHF.
- 8 National Housing Federation. (2019). [Capital grant required to meet social housing need in England 2021 – 2031](#).
- 9 Aubrey, T. (2018) [Gathering the windfall](#). Centre for Progressive Policy.
- 10 Lange, M. (2024). [What do new Compulsory Purchase reforms mean for the housing crisis?](#) 19 January. Centre for Cities.
- 11 Manchester City Council. (2026) [‘Help Shape Manchester’s Empty Homes Strategy’](#). Consultation.
- 12 Manchester City Council. (2026), [‘500 empty Manchester homes brought back into use in under two years’](#), 23 March
- 13 Greater Manchester Combined Authority. (2025). [‘Greater Manchester reveals £11.7m plan to tackle empty homes and temporary accommodation pressures’](#), 22 November
- 14 Bloomer, S; Matthews, W., Galarza, V. Trew, C. (2024). [Home Again: A 10 City Plan to Rapidly Convert Empty Homes into Social Rent Homes](#). Shelter.
- 15 Department for Energy Security and Net Zero. (2026). [Call for Evidence: Warm Homes Plan](#)
- 16 Bowick, L., & Coulsting, T. (2021). [Manchester Local Area Energy Plan](#). Manchester: GMCA.
- 17 Manchester City Council. (2023). [Local Area Energy Plan – Progress Update](#). 20 July
- 18 Committee on Climate Change. (2025). [Progress in reducing emissions – 2025 report to Parliament. The Building Regulations etc. \(Amendment\) \(England\) Regulations 2026](#)
- 19 MHCLG. (2026). [Consultation outcome: The Future Homes and Buildings Standards: 2023 consultation](#), 24 March
- 21 MHCLG. (2025). [National Planning Policy Framework: proposed reforms and other changes to the planning system](#). 16 December
- 22 LETI <https://www.leti.uk/>
- 23 Welsh Government. (2026). [Building regulations circular](#). WGC 003/2026. 6 March 2026. The Building etc. (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2026
- 24 Scottish Government. (2026). [Future Changes to the Domestic and Non-Domestic Technical Hand books](#), 14 January
- 25 GOV.UK. [Apply for the Warm Homes: Local Grant to improve a home](#), accessed April 2026
- 26 National Housing Federation (nd). [Warm Homes Social Housing Fund](#), accessed April 2026
- 27 MHCLG. (2026). [Planning Committees and the National Scheme of Delegation of Planning Functions: Draft guidance for Local Planning Authorities in England](#). Published 26 March 2026
- 28 Hill, S. (2022). [How private developers get out of building affordable housing](#). New Economics Foundation; Zhang, M. L., & Pryce, G. (2020). The dynamics of poverty, employment and access to amenities in polycentric cities: Measuring the decentralisation of poverty and its impacts in England and Wales. *Urban Studies*, 57(10), pp. 2015-2030.
- 29 Shelter. (2025). [Shelter response to the consultation on a reformed Decent Homes Standard for social and privately rented homes](#), 11 September
- 30 MHCLG. (2026) [EHS Briefing: Modelling a new Decent Homes Standard](#), 28 January
- 31 Wilmore, J. (2024) Landlords’ average spend on social homes jumps 14% as inflation bites, 15 February, Inside Housing; Regulator of Social Housing. (2025). Social housing providers’ finances impacted by rising repairs and remediation spend, 9 January
- 32 GMCL. (2026). [What is the Renters Rights Act and when will it come into force?](#) 15 January
- 33 Cooper, B. (2025). [Forward Planning: A Vision of Ageing at Home](#). Fabian Society.



The Commissioners would like to thank the following organisations for their support without which the Manchester Social Housing Commission would not be possible:



The Manchester Social Housing Commission was convened by a coalition of community campaigns and voluntary, faith, and community sector organisations called Social Homes for Manchester (SH4M). The Coalition steering group acted as the secretariat for the Commission to provide support and ensure meaningful and substantive community participation in the process.

Enquiries about the work of the Commission can be directed to sophie.king@class-uk.com

Please also see the below webpage for further information: www.socialhomes4mcr.org.uk/commission

Brief design by Skyla Bailly

This document is an output of the Manchester Social Housing Commission which has been funded by a variety of organisations including through Impact Acceleration Awards at the Universities of Leeds, Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University and by the Lloyds Local Collaborations programme. The views expressed are not necessarily endorsed by these institutions and these institutions can accept no responsibility for views or information published by the Commission. The Commission is a partnership between public, voluntary, and community sector organisations, and individual professionals. Publications reflect the views and position of the Commission as a collective. Individual Commissioners and partner organisations may publish or advocate for proposals that diverge from the Commission’s collectively agreed position or policy recommendations.