



**MANCHESTER SOCIAL
HOUSING COMMISSION**

MANCHESTER'S HOUSING CRISIS IN CONTEXT: WHY WE NEED SUSTAINABLE HOMES FOR SOCIAL RENT



About the Manchester Social Housing Commission

The Manchester Social Housing Commission was launched in July 2024 and is convened by the Social Homes for Manchester Coalition, a network of voluntary and community sector organisations. The Commission joins together tenants, grassroots community organisations, campaigners, political leaders and officers at Manchester City Council, senior public and voluntary sector housing and planning professionals, and academics in a shared purpose: to achieve accelerated delivery of housing for social rent that is ecologically sustainable in the City of Manchester by 2030.

We take a co-produced and evidence-based approach to engaging with the intersecting nature of the housing, climate, and cost of living crises. Over the life of the Commission, we will produce a set of practical and financially robust recommendations to help deliver the Manchester Housing Strategy targets as well as meet the housing growth, regeneration and decarbonisation challenges faced within the city.

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For more information, please visit www.socialhomes4mcr.org.uk/commission

About this report

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This report provides a baseline evidence review of the scale and nature of the housing crisis in England and its specific trajectory in the Manchester context. It makes the case for higher levels of sustainable social rented housing delivery, including retrofitting existing homes in the City of Manchester to address the housing, climate, and cost of living crises.

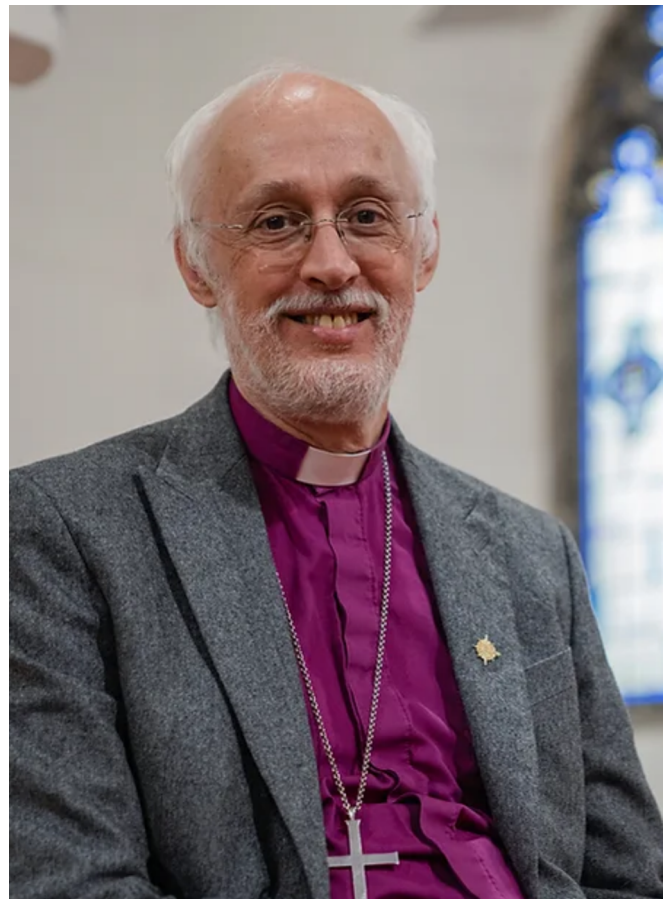
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Foreword from Right Reverend Dr David Walker, Bishop of Manchester

Thirty-five years ago, I wrote to my then bishop, expressing my increasing concerns that the 1990s would usher in a housing crisis at least as significant as the crisis in employment had been for the previous two decades. His response was to set up a Commission and appoint me as its secretary. Three and a half decades later, I find myself once again at the heart of a Commission which brings together academic research, public and charity sector understanding, business acumen and the lived experience of the people of a great city. Now, as then, the Commission's task is to engage with the complexities of housing, in order to advance ambitious but concrete proposals, ones which might enable us to turn the corner on an ever-deepening crisis. However, this time we do so in the context of the cost of living and climate and ecological crises.

This Report is unashamedly Mancunian. Whilst some of our Commissioners come from further afield, we are focussed on the specifics of a particular city. A city which by its very success in recent times has seen a move from having unlettable social homes within recent memory to one of the most severe shortages of affordable homes for rent outside London. That does not mean that our Report is of little relevance to those from other parts of England and the UK. Rather, by taking a deep and close look at the place of social housing and the interlocking crises in this one city, we believe that we are shedding light on the problems experienced in, and possible solutions for, many other urban areas of the country.

We are also aware that we are offering this contribution at a critical moment in the UK political scene. A newly elected government, with a substantial parliamentary majority, is better placed than at most points in the political cycle to think beyond the short term. And housing, especially social rented housing, has long been dogged by short term policies, ones aimed at addressing only the most immediate and acute issues, to the detriment of both the longer term



good of the people of our nation, of planetary well-being, and long-term financial benefit to the Treasury.

Other briefings and reports will follow, as we continue to work with our wide range of partners and reflect on the challenges and opportunities for sustainable social rented housing in our city. I hope you will want to join with us on this journey.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Walker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Abbreviations

ADUG	Abu Dhabi United Group
AST	Assured Shorthold Tenancy
BRMA	Broad Rental Market Area
CPI	Consumer Price Inflation
CSH	Code for Sustainable homes
EPC	Energy Performance Certificate
FHS	Future Homes Standard
FOI	Freedom of Information
GM	Greater Manchester
GMCA	Greater Manchester Combined Authority
GMHP	Greater Manchester Housing Providers
GM SHMA	Greater Manchester Strategic Housing Market Assessment
HA	Housing Association
HB	Housing Benefit
HHSRS	Housing Health and Safety Rating System
HNA	Housing Needs Assessment
HRA	Homelessness Reduction Act
IPPR	Institute for Public Policy Research
JRF	Joseph Rowntree Foundation
LAEP	Local Area Energy Plan
LHA	Local Housing Allowance
MCC	Manchester City Council
MHPP	Manchester Housing Providers Partnership
NHF	National Housing Federation
NPPF	National Planning Policy Framework
PRS	Private rented sector
RTA	Right to Acquire
RTB	Right to Buy
SHLAA	Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment
S106	Section 106

Glossary

Affordable Rent

This is a rental tenure offered by social housing providers set at no more than 80% of local market rents in the private rental sector.

Consumer Price Inflation

The rate at which prices paid by consumers rise or fall over time using a representative basket of goods and services.

Energy Performance Certificate

Records a property's energy use, typical energy costs, energy efficiency, and steps that can be taken to improve a property's energy efficiency and reduce energy costs.

Financialisation of housing

Refers to how housing is being increasingly treated as a financial asset for investors rather than a human right and a social good.

Future Homes Standard

A UK government commitment for all new build homes by 2025 to be future-proofed with low carbon heating and high levels of energy efficiency.

Fuel poverty

A household is considered to be fuel poor if they are living in a poorly-insulated home and the required cost to heat their home leaves them with a residual income below the official poverty line.

Housing Association

Not-for-profit organisations that own, let, and manage social rented housing as well as other housing tenures. Also known as Private Registered Providers.

Housing Health and Safety Rating System

A method for local authorities to assess the health and safety risks in housing introduced under the Housing Act 2004.

Homes England

The government's housing and regeneration agency that allocates funding for housing and construction.

Local Area Energy Plan

A non-statutory, whole system approach to delivering net zero in a particular region that maps energy supply and demand to outline the most cost-effective way for a local area to decarbonise.

Local Housing Allowance

Local Housing Allowance rates are used to calculate Housing Benefit for tenants renting from a private landlord based on the level of private market rents being paid in a given area.

Local Plan

It is a statutory requirement for local planning authorities to create a Local Plan to guide decisions on future development proposals to address local needs and opportunities including where development should take place and where it should be restricted.

Manchester Living Rent

A relatively new rental tenure introduced by Manchester City Council distinct from both Affordable Rent and social rent, 'set at or below the Local Housing Allowance level'.

Manchester Move

A website used to advertise and bid for ready-for-rent social homes let by around 18 not-for-profit landlords in Manchester.

National Housing Federation

An umbrella body representing England's housing associations.

National Planning Policy Framework

The UK government's planning policies for England. It outlines how these policies should be applied to local and neighbourhood plans, and to planning applications.

Private Rented Sector

Rental homes let by a private landlord (a person or company that owns the property you will be living in) on a for-profit basis, and subject to particular legal regulations.

Retrofit

Retrofitting consists of changes to a home that will make it more energy efficient and environmentally friendly.

Right to Acquire

Enables some housing association tenants who have had a public sector landlord for 3 years to buy their housing association home at a discount of between £9,000 and £16,000.

Right to Buy

Enables council tenants who have had a public sector landlord for 3 years to buy their council home at a discount set by how many years a tenant has lived at a property and the region it is located in.

Section 106 / Developer Obligations

Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) allows for agreements focused on site specific mitigation of the impact of development - often referred to as 'developer contributions' – and include contributions to affordable housing.

Shared Ownership

As opposed to buying 100% of a property, Shared Ownership allows you to buy a share of between 25%-75% of your property and pay rent on the remaining share usually charged at 2.75% of the property value. There is an option to buy more shares as and when you can afford them.

Social Rented Housing

Low-cost, secure tenancies rented out by local authorities or housing associations to those deemed to be in priority need. Rent is set through the National Rent Regime in England at around 50% of market rents.

Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment

An annual assessment of land suitable for housing development that the local authority expects to deliver housing over the next 15+ years. Alongside the SHLAA is a Five-Year Supply Statement which assesses how many homes the local authority expects to be built in the next five years, setting this figure against Government housing requirements.

Strategic Housing Market Assessment

An evidence-based picture of current and future housing need over the next 20 years for different groups calculated through a government-guided methodology.

Temporary Accommodation

A broad term that describes temporary housing for people who have been assessed as homeless by a local authority and eligible for assistance, including: B&Bs or hotels; private flats/houses; council or housing association properties.

1. Executive summary

Access to safe, secure, and affordable housing is a fundamental human right enshrined in international law. It provides a foundation for many other basic human rights including the right to health and wellbeing.¹ Yet, the growing scale of homelessness and housing insecurity and the frequent horror stories about tenants living in damp and mouldy homes, are all indicators that across the country, the right to adequate housing is not being met for increasing numbers of people. The city of Manchester is no exception to this. While rightly championed as an urban regeneration success story in which civic leaders turned the city's fortunes around from the 1990s, Manchester's booming urban development sits uncomfortably alongside one of the country's worst housing crises relative to population, which compares unfavourably to similar-sized cities in England.

This report by the Manchester Social Housing Commission evidences Manchester's housing crisis set within a national context in order to make the case for a major increase in the supply of social rented housing that can also address the climate and cost of living crises. It draws on existing academic and practitioner research, central and local government statistics, and data provided by Manchester City Council (MCC) and Manchester Housing Providers Partnership (MHPP). It is timed specifically to inform national government planning reform for England, contribute to policy-making in the run-up to the next Comprehensive Spending Review, and support MCC's drafting of a new Local Plan that will guide future development and planning decisions in the city.

The report has four main sections, each of which is summarised in the remainder of this Section 1, the Executive Summary. Section 2 reviews existing evidence about the growing mismatch between the international human right to adequate housing and housing experiences in England and Manchester; Section 3 provides the Commission's main analysis of the key drivers of Manchester's housing crisis, including both national and local factors with a focus on the long-term destruction of the social rental sector; Section 4 makes a new case for the increased delivery of ecologically sustainable housing for social rent; and Section 5 offers our initial policy recommendations for how to do this, which will be developed further over the Commission's lifespan.

The conflation of terminology relating to social and affordable housing has become a major challenge in cities like Manchester where communities often feel misled that new social rented housing is being delivered when in practice the properties are for more expensive renting or Shared Ownership. In this report, therefore, we avoid using the blanket terms social or affordable housing and refer to specific forms of tenure wherever possible. Please see the glossary for definitions of different housing tenures referred to in this report.

1.1. The right to adequate housing at crisis point in England and Manchester

Homelessness, rough sleeping, and households in temporary accommodation are the most extreme manifestations of the housing crisis. In England, the situation has now reached a critical point with 1.33 million households on social housing waiting lists (2023),² and 123,100 households – including 150,000 children – living in temporary accommodation: the highest figures since records began in 1998.³ The number of households presenting as homeless has also increased by 18.3% over the past five years.⁴

Homelessness is a serious issue in Manchester. Despite its booming economy and skyline over the last 25 years, Manchester has the third highest local rate of homelessness outside London⁵ and the highest local rate of temporary accommodation in England outside London (three times the national average).⁶ Worse, Manchester has the sixth highest number of children living in temporary accommodation in England, including London. This is just the tip of a growing iceberg with 19,157 households officially recorded on the social housing waiting list in February 2025, a 69% increase since 2015/16.⁷ This includes many who have already waited years and some who will never be housed, but excludes many more in housing need deemed ineligible for the register.

Alongside this is a much wider growth in housing insecurity that underpins rising health inequalities, difficulties maintaining stable employment, and community belonging.⁸ While social landlord evictions have been falling since 2003, eviction action by private landlords has increased by 115.4% over the same period.⁹ In Manchester, the private rental sector (PRS) comprises around 80% of evictions since 2022.¹⁰ These divergent trends generally reflect the contrasting tenancy rights in social and PRS sectors. While social landlords offer secure tenancies with strong legal protections, the vast majority of PRS tenancies have a fixed term of between 6 months and 1 year, at the end of which the landlord can evict the tenant without having to give a reason under Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988, a so-called ‘no fault’ eviction. Since the government first promised to abolish no fault evictions back in 2019 (which will finally come into force in 2025 once the Renters’ Rights Bill is passed), 39,216 households in England have been removed from their homes under a Section 21 notice.¹¹

In the PRS, renters spend a greater proportion of their income on rent than any other tenure and involuntary moves are far more prevalent.¹² In England between 2023 and 2024, there were an estimated 830,000 moves in the PRS, with 40% of renters surveyed stating that their last home move was forced rather than by choice due predominantly to the end of fixed term tenancies, increases in rent pricing tenants out of tenancy renewal, legal eviction notices, or being informally asked to leave by the landlord.¹³ These forced PRS moves burden renters with significant unrecoverable costs that can make it more difficult to find alternative accommodation in an increasingly unaffordable private market.

Rising levels of homelessness and housing insecurity are rooted in a national affordability crisis in which the cost of either buying or renting a home has become increasingly detached from household incomes. A widely accepted definition of housing affordability is that rents or purchase costs should not exceed a third of net equivalised household income with costs indexed to average local incomes.¹⁴ In large parts of England and Manchester, this affordability threshold is routinely crossed. House prices increased four-and-a-half times in England and Wales between 1997 and 2023 while average earnings only doubled.¹⁵ The cost of renting is also increasing, especially in the PRS where the average monthly rent for England was £1,276 in February 2024, up 8.8% (£104) from a year earlier, the highest annual rise since the Government’s Price Index series began in 2006. Out of all the local authorities in the UK, Manchester had the second highest (un)affordability ratio after Kensington and Chelsea in 2024.¹⁶

The increasing number of low-income renters paying ever-rising rents in the PRS has led to significant increases in government spending on housing benefit, currently costing over £30bn a year, and predicted to rise to £35bn by 2028. This partly explains why successive governments have made cuts to housing support as part of welfare reform since 2010. These cuts have compounded the affordability crisis for low-income tenants in both social and private rental housing by increasing the proportion of renters whose housing benefit does not cover their full rent¹⁷ and have left some families unable to afford even the cheapest forms of social rented housing.¹⁸ For example, over the six months up to 31 October 2022, only 3% of new private tenancies were affordable to tenants eligible for housing benefit in Manchester.¹⁹ Rising energy bills further exacerbate this affordability gap, with stark choices being made for 1 in 8 households in England between eating or heating. However, this situation is far worse in Manchester, which has the seventh highest local rate of fuel poverty in England, affecting 1 in 5 households.²⁰

Everyone should live in a home that is safe, warm, and free of damp, mould, and disrepair; especially in the world's sixth largest economy. But in Manchester, as across the country, this basic human right amounts to a tenure and postcode lottery. The main official measure of housing standards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland has its own standard) is the Decent Homes Standard. A home will fail the current statutory minimum standard for housing if it contains one more Category 1 hazard identified by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), meaning there is a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety. The PRS has the country's worst housing conditions, with more than 1 in 5 failing the current Decent Homes Standard compared to 1 in 7 privately owned and 1 in 10 socially rented homes. In Manchester, the situation in the PRS is even worse with one in four homes non-decent, equating to 17,565 homes or 43% of the city's non-decent stock.²¹ The social rented housing stock is generally in much better condition due to regulation and ongoing investment since the early 2000s, but the sector cannot currently ensure everyone lives in a decent home due to funding shortfalls at a time of increasing regulatory and other investment requirements.

1.2. Understanding the housing crisis: national and local factors

While Manchester and England's housing crisis is rooted in several interconnecting factors, it has been fundamentally shaped by the state's long-term retreat from housing provision and the stark failures of a predominantly market-based approach to housing development.

In the latter half of the twentieth century, the state addressed previous housing market failures and war-time destruction by regulating private landlordism, and both building and funding millions of social rented homes, alongside similar levels of private housing development. This meant that by 1979, owner occupation and social rented housing had become the main tenures, with the private rental sector in long-term decline. Since then, however, successive governments have overseen decades of public underinvestment in housing provision and the curtailment of local authority house building whilst encouraging the wider privatisation and financialisation of housing development and consumption.²² This has contributed to a major decline in house building of all tenures as private house builders, developers and landowners have sought to maximise profit through constraining supply, raising scarcity and capturing monopoly rents.²³ The treatment of housing as a financial asset has also generated the growing problem of empty homes and second homes sitting alongside rising numbers of people living in over-crowded conditions. There has also been a failure to meet the emerging climate and fuel poverty crises through inadequate standards for sustainable homes.

The problem is not simply one of supply. It is also about the erosion of social rented housing, which historically performed a vital role as a public service good and a foundation of the right to adequate housing. Since 1979, the total stock of social rented housing in England has fallen from 5.5 to around 3.8 million in 2023,²⁴ whilst the number of households has increased by a third. In Manchester, there has been a net loss of over 16,000 social homes over this same period. The city's social rented housing stock is now at its lowest level for 40 years,²⁵ although social rented housing remains a vital tenure, housing 29.5% of the city's population in 2021.²⁶ This has decimated the most affordable, secure, and decent tenure that best meets the needs of those priced out of other tenures, as well as our most vulnerable households.

A major cause has been tenants' statutory Right to Buy (RTB) since 1980. Nationally, over 2 million social homes have been sold to tenants during this period,²⁷ including over 26,000 sales in Manchester.²⁸ At the same time, the new supply of social rented housing has failed to replace that stock, let alone meet newly arising need. To underline the scale of the problem, recent estimates suggest that at least 90,000 net additional social rented homes are needed across England every year to address current unmet demand and projected future need.²⁹ Yet England is currently building less than 10,000 social rented homes per year while losing 26,700 per year from primarily RTB sales - an annual deficit of 16,700 social rented homes. In Manchester, there has been a net loss of more than 16,000 social rented homes over this same period. Worse, research has found that 41% of all homes sold under RTB are now rented out by private landlords.³⁰

This represents a triple loss: of affordable and secure social rented housing; of vital revenue streams for social landlords to repair and invest in new homes; and of precious public subsidies for private landlords that could be spent on social rented housing. Such trends are the result of a deliberate policy approach. Since the early 1980s, local authorities have been prevented from either borrowing or spending RTB receipts to build new or replacement homes, while all social housing providers have experienced a gradual reduction of grant funding from nearly 100% of the capital cost of a new home in 1989, to just 14% between 2011 and 2015.³¹ Moreover, since 2011, government capital funding for new affordable housing has mainly targeted other tenures such as Affordable Rent (set at 80% of local market rents) and Shared Ownership.³²

The growing mismatch between grant levels and the costs of building new social rented homes has been widened by the combination of land and construction cost inflation, and the increased cost implications of building safety and consumer regulation since the Grenfell disaster. Land appears to be a particular problem as social landlords struggle to compete in bidding wars with housebuilders and private developers who can offer more for the land when proposing to build for market sale.³³ Between 2011/12 and 2014/15, the top 10% of local authorities in terms of land values experienced an estimated 70% drop in the numbers of new affordable or social rented homes, compared to a 20% drop across the rest of England.³⁴

While there has been a welcome increase in government funding for new social rented housing since 2018, and a positive shift in prioritising the remaining Affordable Homes Programme funding for social rent by the new Government, this remains insufficient to meet housing need. By way of illustration, an estimated £14.6bn in capital funding is needed each year over a ten-year period just to meet social rented housing need, yet the current Affordable Homes Programme equates to only £2.3bn per year over five years and funds a range of tenures.³⁵

The developer-friendly planning system also contributes to the shortfall of social rented housing. Since the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990, local authorities have been able to plug some of the funding gap from declining grant levels by requiring developer contributions for affordable housing through Section 106 agreements. As of 2022/23, 47% of new affordable homes - including social rent - were being delivered (at least partially) through S106.³⁶ However, the nature of this new affordable housing has shifted from primarily social rent to Shared Ownership and other tenures.

This decline stems from changes introduced by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) since 2012, in particular, the introduction of financial viability assessments that have effectively guaranteed minimum profit margins for developers of 15-20%, empowering them to water down or fully evade contributions to social and affordable housing. The NPPF also removed statutory requirements for affordable housing and minimum affordable housing targets in S106 agreement and loosened the definitions of affordable and social housing to include more sub-market tenures and products that have served to diminish the obligation for social rent.³⁷

While Manchester's social rented housing shortage is mainly a result of these national policy choices and constraints, the current property-led model of urban development has also contributed to the problem. Against the background of long-term public funding cuts, private developers have become a prized source of local investment and urban regeneration, which has helped Manchester to recover from a state of urban decline in the 1980s. However, very little affordable housing of any tenure has been gained from private developers and between 2012 and 2022, just 2% of all new housing built in Manchester was for social rent. Moreover, while some of Manchester's lower income areas have experienced significant levels of redevelopment, this has not addressed the multiple disadvantages experienced by existing residents and has sometimes led to the displacement of existing residents altogether. There are concerns from some local communities that the dynamics of city centre investment have led to an imbalance in the types of housing, developments, and social infrastructures being built, creating unsustainable communities and making it difficult for the longer-term community to have access to the housing and social infrastructure that they need to thrive.

As access to both affordable home ownership and social rented housing has become more difficult, ever increasing numbers of households are living in the PRS.³⁸ While the PRS is an important tenure for millions of households across the UK, and offers flexibility in accommodation, deregulation and the end of rent controls in 1989 created one of the most liberalised and unaccountable private rental sectors in the world. The PRS is now a prime driver of housing insecurity, instability and homelessness.³⁹ Homeless households are now routinely being temporarily re-housed in PRS accommodation where rents outstrip housing benefit rates for temporary accommodation which are still frozen at 2011 levels.⁴⁰ With 87% of households struggling to afford temporary accommodation,⁴¹ local authorities are having to fund some of the shortfall from their general fund or reserves. In Manchester, where 78.6% of temporarily housed homeless households are in the PRS, the gross cost of PRS accommodation increased by 557% between 2017/18 and 2021/22 (from £2.93m to £19.29m).⁴² Shelter reports that 75% of households in temporary accommodation live in poor conditions with more than two-thirds having no access to basic facilities.⁴³

A final element of the housing crisis concerns tenants' ability to take action against landlords. For private tenants in particular, complaints about housing conditions have led to so-called 'revenge evictions'. While social housing tenants with secure tenancies have strong legal protections against eviction, their rights and regulatory protections have also been eroded over time. Bringing legal claims of any sort has been made far more difficult and daunting since April 2013 following cuts to legal aid, which is now available only to tenants who can prove that disrepair poses a serious risk to their health and safety.⁴⁴ The fundamental power inequalities between landlords and tenants was violently exposed by the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire that killed 72 people and the death of 2 year old Awaab Ishak in 2020 from a respiratory condition caused by prolonged exposure to mould in his family's social rented home. These preventable deaths caused in strong part by the unaccountable actions of social landlords have led to new laws, regulatory priorities and future legislation designed to strengthen tenants' rights to both timely repair and safer housing. These include the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 including Awaab's Law, and the Renters' Rights Bill. Time will tell whether these new formal rights will empower tenants in practice.

1.3. The case for increasing the delivery of sustainable homes for social rent

The Manchester Social Housing Commission recognises the need for a diverse range of housing tenures and the value of mixed income neighbourhoods. Given adequate welfare support and regulation, different affordable rental and home ownership products can help households who do not qualify for social rent and cannot afford to buy outright, and therefore cannot get a home through other tenures. However, the Commission's core mission is to **significantly increase the availability of sustainable homes for social rent in Manchester and other parts of England.**

This is because social rented housing plays a unique role in the housing system as the most affordable, secure, and decent tenure, delivered to directly meet social need. Social housing rents are set in accordance with the Government's rent policy by a formula that is linked to local incomes. This makes rents more affordable and rent increases more predictable than in the PRS. On average, social rents are a third (33%) of private market rents – whereas 'affordable rents' are up to 80% of market rents.⁴⁵ For most households, social housing is provided on a secure, lifetime tenancy, compared to the standard six-month tenancy in the PRS. Social landlords usually evict as a last resort, whereas eviction is far more frequent and tenancies far less secure in the PRS.

Increasing the delivery of good quality social rent homes – which includes homes provided by local authorities, housing associations and cooperatives – is not only a rights-based imperative, but it also creates economic and social value. The lack of social rental housing, combined with high rents, inadequate welfare support and low wages, fuels poverty, compounds health inequalities, and drives-up costs in the health and social care sector.⁴⁶

Research commissioned by Shelter and the National Housing Federation earlier this year found that building 90,000 social rented homes a year would pay for itself in three years and add £51.2bn in benefits to the economy over the next 30 years. This is through savings on welfare support from lower rents and temporary accommodation costs; income from construction and employment taxes; and savings to the NHS from healthier residents.⁴⁷ These savings will be even greater once the positive effects of better insulated homes are factored in.

Building new social rented housing at scale will significantly address the housing crisis. But **these new homes must also address the climate and cost of living crises.** The combined housing, cost of living, and climate crises are of particular concern for older people and people with disabilities on low incomes who spend more time in their homes and are thus more vulnerable to extreme cold and extreme heat. The Commission welcomes the Prime Minister's recent announcement on the UK's new target to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% on 1990 levels. Manchester has also made bold moves to declare a Climate Emergency and commit to becoming a zero-carbon city by 2038. However, in practice, progress has been slow as the local authority contends with an inadequate planning system, the legacy of 14 years of austerity-focused policy making, and the local impacts of repeated global upheavals.

Given that existing residential buildings in the UK account for over 30% of energy consumption and a fifth of greenhouse gas emissions,⁴⁸ rapid and radical action to decarbonise our housing stock is essential. The majority of UK homes (85%) are reliant on gas for energy. Therefore, decarbonising housing alongside decarbonising energy supply will be critical to meeting the UK's commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.⁴⁹ It is also necessary to transition our energy system away from fossil fuels. Retrofitting existing housing will help to reduce energy bills and increase resilience for existing communities. All new build must be zero carbon and include on site renewable energy production wherever possible. Together, these measures will create new jobs and livelihoods as part of the green transition.

This means ensuring that any investment in new homes for social rent is predicated on sustainable planning policy and the requirement for environmental building standards, specifically high energy performance. As the energy system becomes electrified, we also need to reduce demand through adopting a fabric first approach. Maximising building materials' performance will both lower bills and reduce the pressure on generation and the grid. Social housing providers have a key role to play in the development of broader supply chains to deliver retrofit across other housing tenures and boost our local economies.⁵⁰

The combined housing, cost of living, and climate crises are of particular concern for older people and people with disabilities on low incomes who are more likely to live in social rented housing, spend more time in their homes, and are thus more vulnerable to extreme cold and extreme heat. Reducing emissions through improving housing standards via better design, insulation, green retrofitting, and on-site renewable energy production, will also help to address socio-economic inequality by reducing energy bills. Decarbonising housing has significant cost implications and therefore requires major additional government investment as well as stronger planning and building regulations.

1.4. Initial policy recommendations

Our evidence-based review of the housing crisis in England through the lens of Manchester has made a clear case for a major and rapid increase in the supply of social rented housing that is also ecologically sustainable. While the Commission is continuing to research potential funding and delivery models to support this aim, we have identified five major and urgent changes in national policy direction that are essential to make this happen.

1. Reinvest in social rent

The government's ambitious target of building 1.5 million homes over the next parliament is simply not achievable within the current market-based supply model. Scaling up housing supply requires scaling up public investment in ecologically sustainable social rented housing.

We urge government to:

- Restore the pre-2010 social housing grant regime and provide a generous long-term funding and rent settlement for social housing providers.
- Allow local authorities, housing associations, and community self-builders greater access to cheaper borrowing through the Public Works Loan Board.
- Enable cities like Manchester to deliver large scale housing growth of all tenures on brownfield locations by supporting land supply, site assembly, and remediation.
- Tie any public investment to delivering zero carbon standards.
- Scrap the benefit cap and bedroom tax and unfreeze and uprate housing benefit rates for temporary accommodation to prevent homelessness and create more stable rental streams to help boost social landlords' investment plans in existing and new stock.

2. Reform planning and land supply to prioritise sustainable social rent in affordable housing delivery

More public investment and longer-term certainty of revenue streams for social housing providers will not lead to a major increase in sustainable social rented housing delivery on its own. The planning system in England must also be reformed to promote and require a higher percentage of social rent in new housing developments and require that new homes are fit for the future and can withstand climate change.

We urge government to:

- Reform viability percentages in planning practice guidance so that developers cannot unfairly opt-out of making contributions for homes for social rent.
- Introduce tougher targets and minimum requirements for social rent in all developments based on local housing needs assessments that factor in homelessness and the need for social rent.
- Allow local plans to go beyond building regulations in requiring better energy standards and ecological design so that ecologically sustainable social homes are affordable for low-income households such as setting targets for energy-based metrics.⁵¹
- Amend the definition of 'Affordable Housing for Rent' in planning policy to clearly distinguish between Social Rent and other forms of affordable rent and define these in relation to incomes.

3. Rethink the Right to Buy

The RTB is the largest contributor to the loss of social housing with over 2 million social homes sold and only 2% replaced. Research has shown that councils are unable to build for fear of new homes being sold.⁵² We welcome the government's plan to reduce RTB discounts back to their pre-2012 levels, and to allow councils to retain and more flexibly use 100% of the capital receipts. However, the long waiting lists and high numbers of households in temporary accommodation mean we cannot afford to lose social rented homes in Manchester at this time.

We urge government to:

- Suspend the RTB/Right to Acquire for existing and new tenants with immediate effect and consider abolishing it outright.
- Look at alternative policy solutions that can support lower income households into home ownership beyond the current Shared Ownership provision and ensure those homes remain affordable in perpetuity.

4. Retrofit empty homes for sustainable social rent

While new supply dominates the policy focus, we must not forget the large number of long-term empty homes that could be brought back into use as social rented housing and retrofitted to high energy standards.

We urge government to:

- Implement Shelter's 10-city plan⁵³ 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, and ring fencing all second home and empty home premiums for acquiring empty homes.
- Abolish VAT on refurbishment to incentivise green retrofitting and refurbishment of existing stock.

5. Embed community voice and ownership into the planning system

Communities and their locally elected representatives should have stronger statutory powers within the planning system to properly shape the investment decisions that are made about their own neighbourhoods, towns and cities to ensure local development is more equitable, democratic, and reflects the needs of present and future generations.

We urge government to:

- Implement New Local's recommendations that models such as neighbourhood planning and community-led development are written into local and national policy and given longer-term funding certainty alongside the Affordable Homes Programme.
- Revise the National Planning Policy Framework to require deeper community involvement across the development process, including a presumption in favour of consent for community-led schemes.
- Use forthcoming English Devolution legislation as an opportunity to improve community rights to more power and participation in planning and regeneration.

2. The right to adequate housing at crisis point in England and Manchester

According to the United Nations (UN), adequate housing means having essential facilities such as safe drinking water, energy, sanitation and washing facilities in homes that are habitable with adequate space, protection from the elements, free of structural hazards, and a decent quality living environment that is also culturally appropriate to enable the expression of cultural identity and diversity. Housing should also be affordable so that housing costs do not compromise someone's ability to meet their basic needs and located near to employment options and essential public services. Finally, housing should be lawfully accessible to all, especially disadvantaged groups, and be legally secure to protect people against forced eviction, harassment and other threats.⁵⁴

Access to adequate housing that is safe, secure, and affordable is a fundamental human right enshrined in international law. It provides a foundation for many other basic human rights such as the right to health and wellbeing, to an adequate standard of living, to education and work, and to equality of opportunity and outcomes.

Across the country, this right to adequate housing is not being met for increasing numbers of people due to a housing crisis that in most measures is worsening over time.

This crisis has its epicentre in London but is also badly affecting cities like Manchester. In this section we set out the broad picture of this crisis, both at the national and Manchester scale, spanning homelessness and temporary accommodation, social rented housing waiting lists, the insecurity of housing, the barriers to accessing affordable housing across all tenures, and the scale of non-decent and unsustainable housing stock.

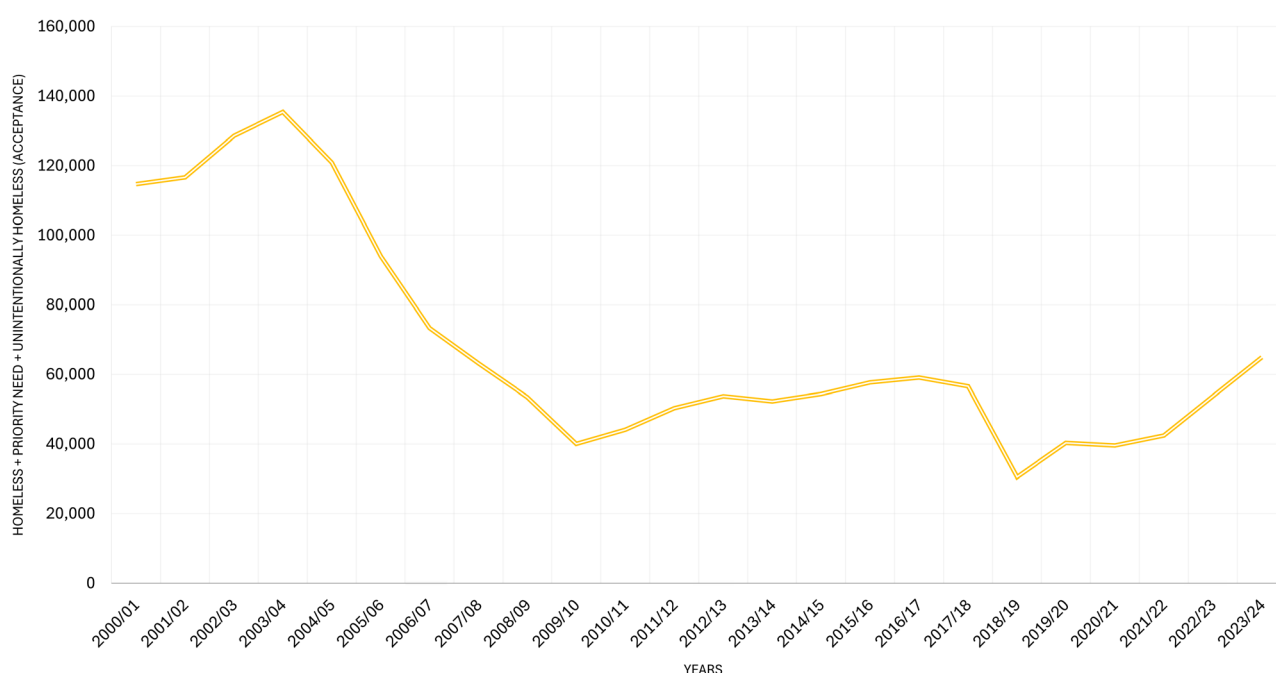
2.1. The homelessness scandal

It is well established that homelessness has “economic, social and personal costs that have tangible, negative consequences for society”.⁵⁵ The stress of losing a settled home can cause or exacerbate social isolation, create barriers to education and employment opportunities, and negatively impact physical and mental well-being. Since the Housing (Homeless Persons) Act 1977, which provided the first statutory definition of homelessness, local authorities have had a legal duty to house homeless people in priority need, as well as to prevent homelessness, with much wider relief and prevention duties imposed through the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017.⁵⁶ Most homeless households eligible for longer-term rehousing will be placed in Temporary Accommodation. It is worth noting that a large amount of homelessness is invisible and goes unrecorded, including people sofa surfing and living in other forms of insecure housing.⁵⁷

We should be deeply concerned, therefore, that after significant reductions from the early 2000s, homelessness and rough sleeping are once again on the rise in England. Figure 2.1 shows that main duty acceptances by local authorities began to increase in 2010/11, briefly dropped after the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, but have been growing again since 2018/19. Homeless charity Shelter estimates that 1 in 160 people – at least 354,000 people, including 161,500 children – were homeless over Christmas in December 2024, an increase of 14%, or 44,500 people (1 in 182) on the previous year.⁵⁸ Rough sleeping has also been on the rise across England (see Figure 2.2), more than doubling between 2010 and 2023.⁵⁹

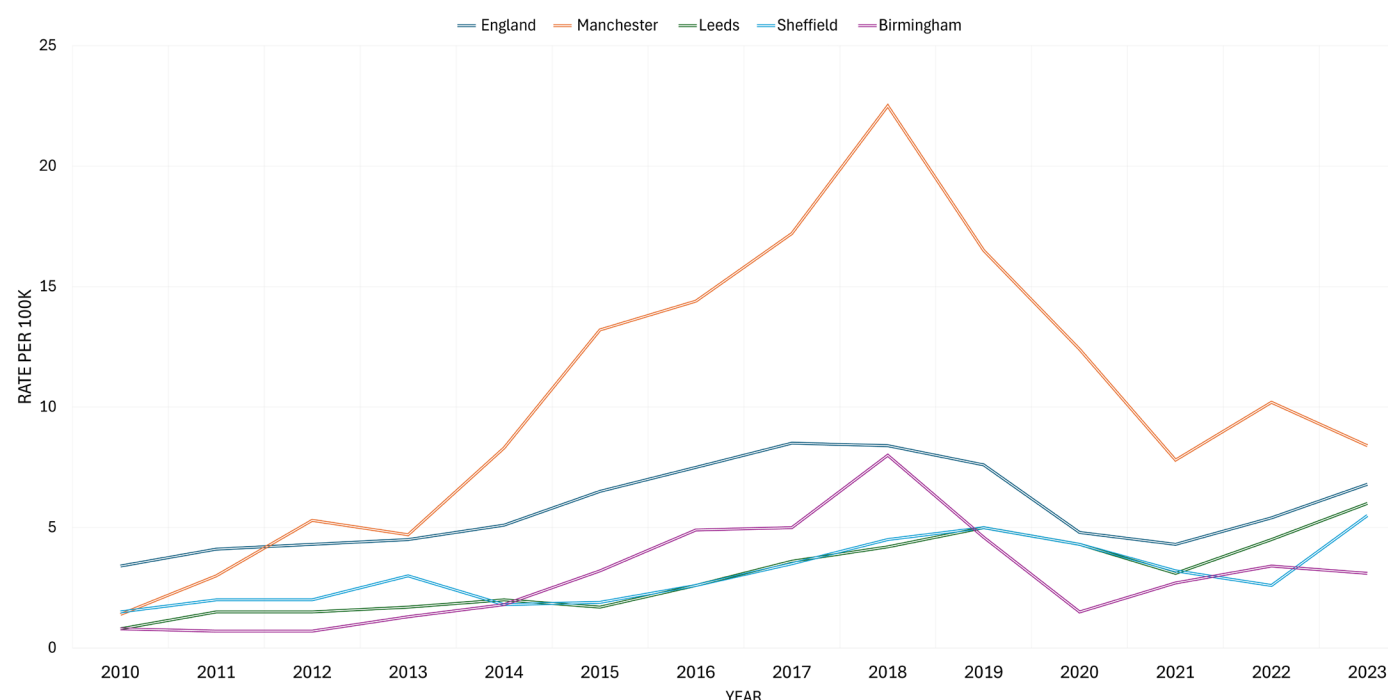
These trends are far more pronounced at the urban scale. Across London, 1 in 51 people are homeless – an annual increase of 11%. Outside of London, Manchester and Birmingham share the second highest local rate (by population) of homelessness in England,⁶⁰ affecting an estimated 1 in 71 people in both cities.⁶¹ Indeed, during the year 2021-22, Manchester opened the highest number of homelessness applications in England (6,660),⁶² and in 2023-24, initial homeless assessments in Manchester jumped by 39% on the previous year, compared to 32.4% in Sheffield, 21.7% in Birmingham and just 0.1% in Leeds.⁶³

Figure 2.1: Homeless main duty acceptances in England 2000/01 to 2023/24



Source: DLUHC, [Statutory homelessness live tables](#); Table MD1.

Figure 2.2: Comparing snapshot rates of rough sleeping per 100K people, 2010-2013



Source: DLUHC, [Rough sleeping snapshot in England: autumn 2023](#)

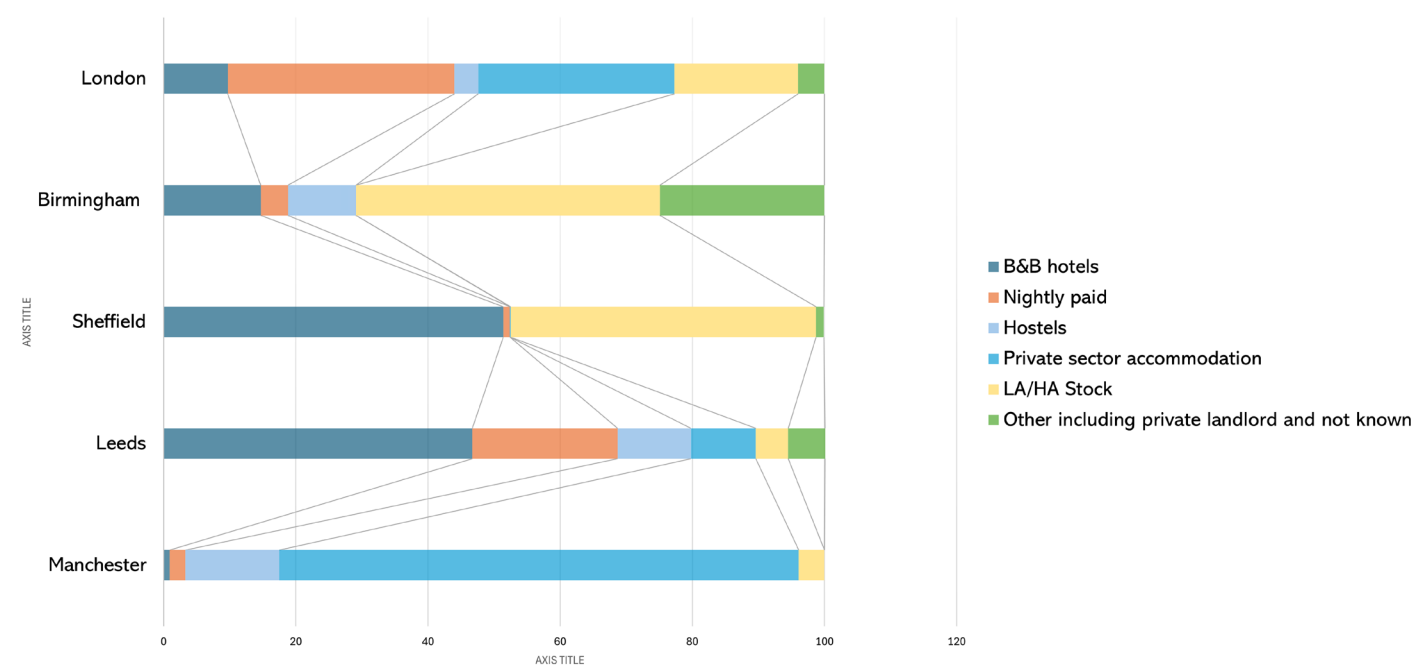
2.1.1. The explosion of (private) temporary accommodation

As part of this homeless population, 123,100 households were in temporary accommodation in 2024 (Q2, 2024-25), an increase of 16.3% from the previous year. Households with children increased by 15.1% to 78,420, and single households increased by 18.5% to 44,680. These are the highest figures since records began in 1998, and an increase of around 90% since April 2014.⁶⁴ Manchester has the highest local rate of temporary accommodation in England outside London (three times the national average) and has the sixth highest number of children living in temporary accommodation in England, including London.⁶⁵ Nearly three-quarters of Manchester's temporary accommodation cases are households with dependent children. The number of households in temporary accommodation in Manchester grew by 23% between March 2000 and 2024.⁶⁶

The living conditions in temporary accommodation add another layer to the hardship that vulnerable homeless households face.⁶⁷ Shelter reports that 75% of households in temporary accommodation live in poor conditions with more than two-thirds having no access to basic facilities for cooking and laundry.⁶⁸ There is clear evidence of the detrimental effect of these poor living conditions on children's lives.⁶⁹ Such abject conditions have to be endured for longer periods due to the shortage of permanent re-housing options. In 2023-24 across England, 22.8% of households with children stayed in temporary accommodation for between 2 and 5 years, and a further 22.5% stayed for more than 5 years.⁷⁰ In Manchester, the average stay for all households increased from around 39 weeks in 2018-19 to 46 weeks by 2021-22⁷¹, but decreased to 22 weeks in 2022/2023.⁷²

While both social and private landlords have long been an established part of the temporary accommodation sector, the huge increase in demand since 2012 has been absorbed through the growth in the expensive private nightly accommodation market of bed and breakfast and self-contained units. In 2024, nearly 1 in 4 households (36,790 of 123,100) were living temporarily in this sector, compared to 1 in 10 (5370 out of 51,630) in 2012, an astonishing 585% increase.⁷³ While the use of nightly-paid private accommodation in Manchester remains very low (3.1%), the city is almost completely dependent on private landlords to temporarily house its homeless households (81.9%) with just 3.9% in social rented stock (see Figure 2.3).⁷⁴ Indeed, Manchester has a high proportion of households in private sector temporary accommodation compared to other local authorities, including London, and the lowest proportion of households in social rented stock.⁷⁵

Figure 2.3: Comparing the percentage of households in each type of temporary accommodation across select local authority areas, Q1 2024



Source: [Detailed local authority level tables: January to March 2024](#)

The increased use of PRS homes for temporary accommodation is adding to the wider housing crisis by diverting homes out of longer-term residential use into short-stay lettings.⁷⁶ It is also placing a huge and growing financial burden on central and local government in terms of housing benefit and other support costs (see section 4).

2.2. The long and increasingly interminable wait for social housing

The growing scale of homelessness and temporary accommodation is just the tip of a much larger iceberg of unmet housing need. This has been traditionally captured through the local authority housing register, also known as the social housing waiting list. Households wishing to obtain a social rented home must first successfully apply to join their local register to bid on properties,⁷⁷ providing an indicator of the scale of local need. Local authority waiting lists usually prioritise the most vulnerable categories of need who receive ‘reasonable preference’ in law,⁷⁸ such as the homeless and statutorily homeless, those in insanitary or overcrowded housing, people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds, and people who need to move to avoid hardship.⁷⁹

Nationally, there were 1.33 million households on social housing waiting lists in 2023/24, the highest number since 2014/15.⁸⁰ In Manchester, 17,836 households were officially recorded on the city’s housing waiting list in October 2024,⁸¹ also the highest number since 2014/15.⁸² This figure jumped to 19,157 households by end of February 2025, a 7.4% increase in just five months.⁸³ Manchester has the highest proportion of households on the waiting list outside of London (Table 2.1), a clear indicator of the city’s social housing deficit.

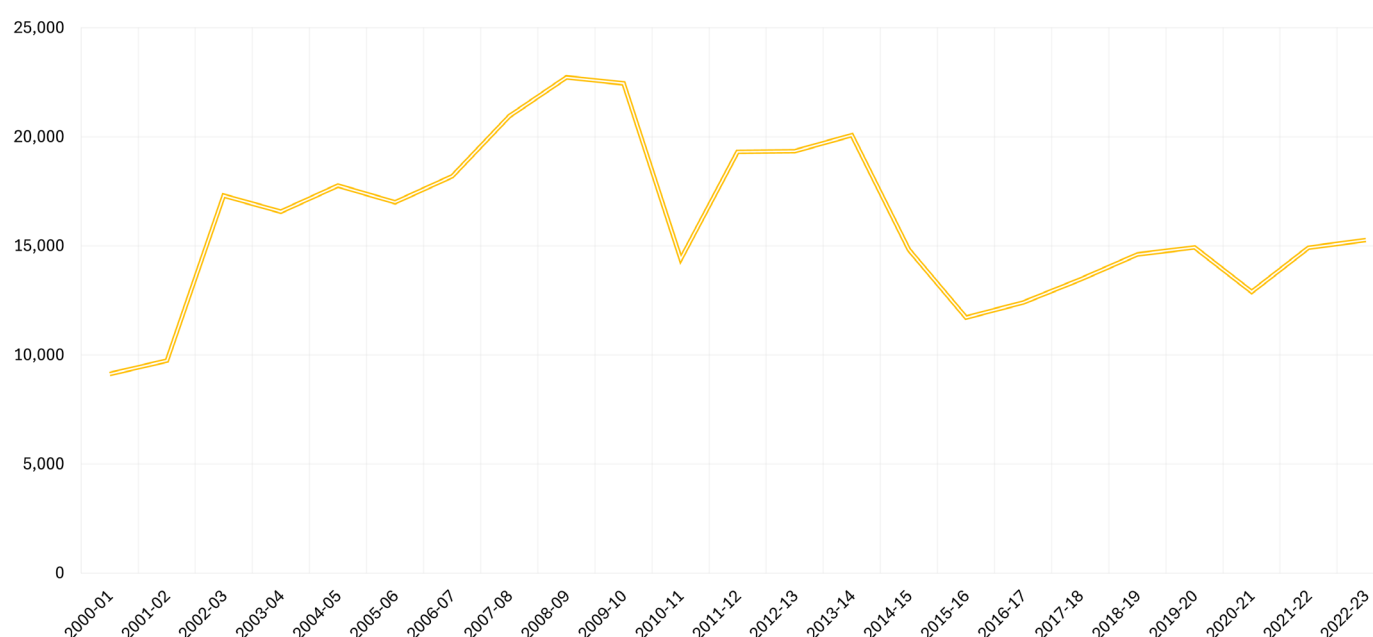
Table 2.1 Comparison of local authority housing waiting lists

	Estimated number of households recorded Census 2021	Households on local authority waiting list 2022-23	
		Number	% of total households
Manchester	214,732	17,079	8.0
Leeds	341,466	21,202	6.2
Sheffield	231,950	17,685	7.6
Birmingham	423,456	23,969	5.7
London	3,423,890	336,366	9.8
England	56,536,000	1,330,611	2.4

Source: [Census 2021](#); [Live Table 600: Local Authority Waiting Lists](#)

The true number of people in need of social rented housing is likely to be much higher. The Localism Act 2011 gave local authorities more freedom to decide who would be entitled to social rented housing at a time of falling stock and rising need.⁸⁴ This has resulted in stricter local eligibility criteria and these criteria being applied more rigorously, leading to sudden, large drops in waiting lists across the country on or after 2011. For example, Manchester’s current banding system introduced after 2012 for allocating housing disqualified certain categories of need including applicants without at least two years’ continuous residency in Manchester, or where their behaviour makes them unsuitable to be a tenant, including owing rent and being assessed as intentionally homeless.⁸⁵ This largely explains two large drops in the number of households on the social housing waiting list between 2010-2011, and 2014-2016 (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2.4: Number of households on local authority housing waiting lists, Manchester, 2000/01 to 2022/23



Source: [Table 600: numbers of households on local authorities’ housing waiting lists, by district, England, from 1987](#)

Manchester City Council’s banding system for allocating social housing is summarised in Table 2.2.⁸⁶ Bands 1 to 3 represent households given reasonable preference with additional preference given to those households who have urgent housing needs due to a life-threatening illness or sudden disability, severe overcrowding that poses a serious health hazard, or being homeless as a result of violence or threats of violence.⁸⁷ In reality, only households in Bands 1 and 2 stand any chance of being allocated social housing. These are people in urgent need of being rehoused and most (70%) require 1-bedroom or 2-bedroom properties.⁸⁸

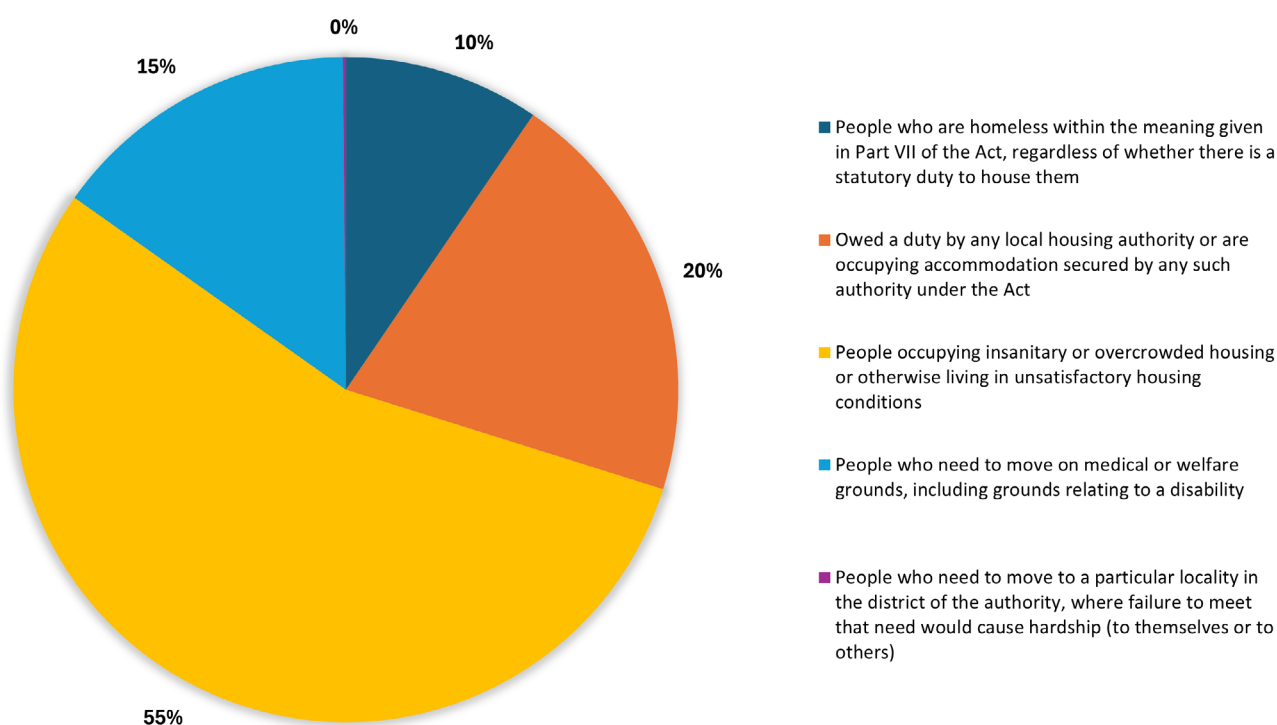
Table 2.2 Manchester City Council's housing allocation banding system

Band	Definition
1	The highest priority band for people who need to move urgently for reasons that the law or the local authority prescribe
2	People who need to move for urgent reasons
3	People who need to move
4	People who want to move but don't have a level of need that would get them into a higher band
5	A 'reduced priority' band – may include those who cannot live independently or whose behaviour means they would not make a good tenant

Source: Manchester City Council (n.d.) [Getting your own home.](#)

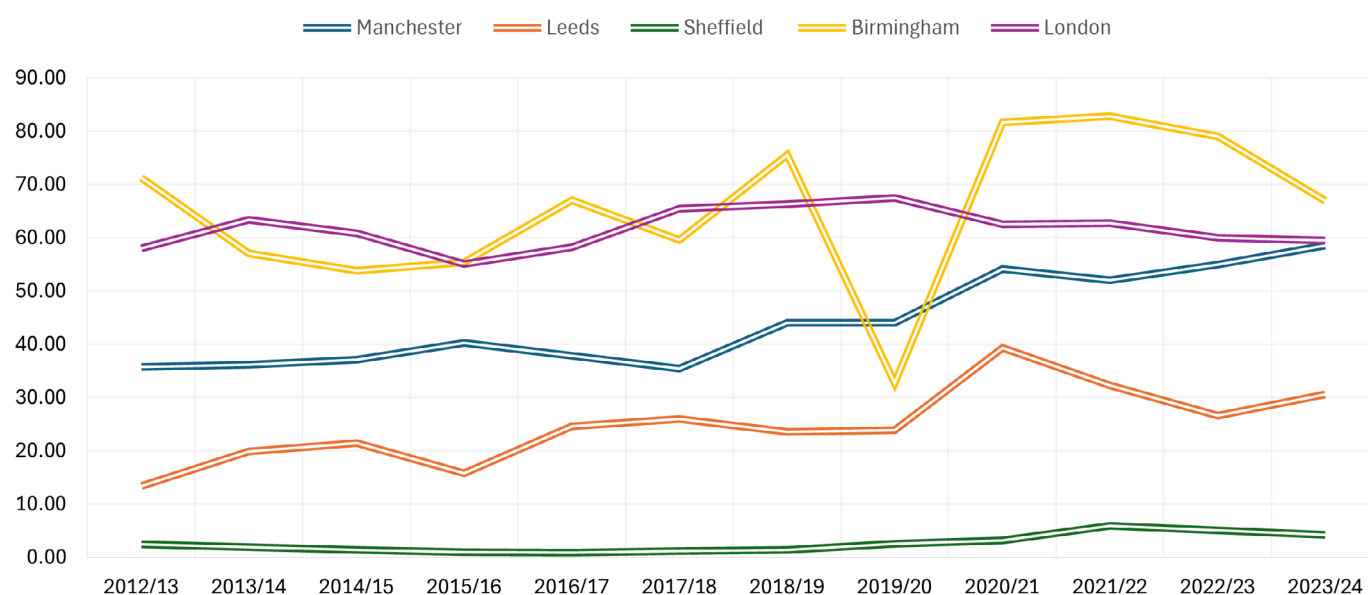
In 2022/23, 8,394 households were on the waiting list in Bands 1-3, an increase of 13% on the previous year.⁸⁹ As Figure 2.5 shows, 58% of these households were occupying insanitary, overcrowded, or unsatisfactory housing, with most of the remaining households homeless. When compared to other core cities (Figure 2.6), Manchester is close to London levels with only Birmingham having a higher proportion of households waiting in a reasonable preference category.

Figure 2.5: Breakdown of households on waiting list in Bands 1 to 3 by main reason in Manchester



Source: [DLUHC, Local Authority Housing Statistics data returns for 2022 to 2023](#)

Figure 2.6: Comparing percentage of households on a local authority housing waiting list in a reasonable preferences category, 2012/13 to 2022/23



Source: [DLUHC, Local Authority Housing Statistics data returns for 2022 to 2023](#); DLUHC, [Table 600: numbers of households on local authorities' housing waiting lists, by district, England, from 1987](#)

The waiting time to be rehoused is long – even for these urgent situations. A recent analysis of housing waiting list figures shows that the average wait for a social housing property in England is five and a half years.⁹⁰ Unpacking this average, government data shows that in 2022-23, 54% of households with a new General Needs letting were on the waiting list for less than one year, 37% for one to five years, and 10% for five years or more.⁹¹

In Manchester in the first quarter of 2024 (Table 2.3), the average waiting time for those in the highest priority Band 1 was 6 months for a 1-bedroom home, 9-10 months for a 2-bedroom home; 13-17 months for a 3-bedroom home; and over 2 years for a 4-bedroom home. Those with the second highest priority Band 2 (still deemed urgent) wait far longer: over 2 years for a 1-bedroom home; over 3 years for a 2-bedroom family home; and around 4 years for a 4-bedroom home. The 1000+ families in Bands 1 and 2 who need homes with more than 3 bedrooms, and those in Bands 3-5, currently face an indefinite wait due to the lack of suitable properties.⁹²

Table 2.3: Average waiting times from recent lettings results 2023-2024

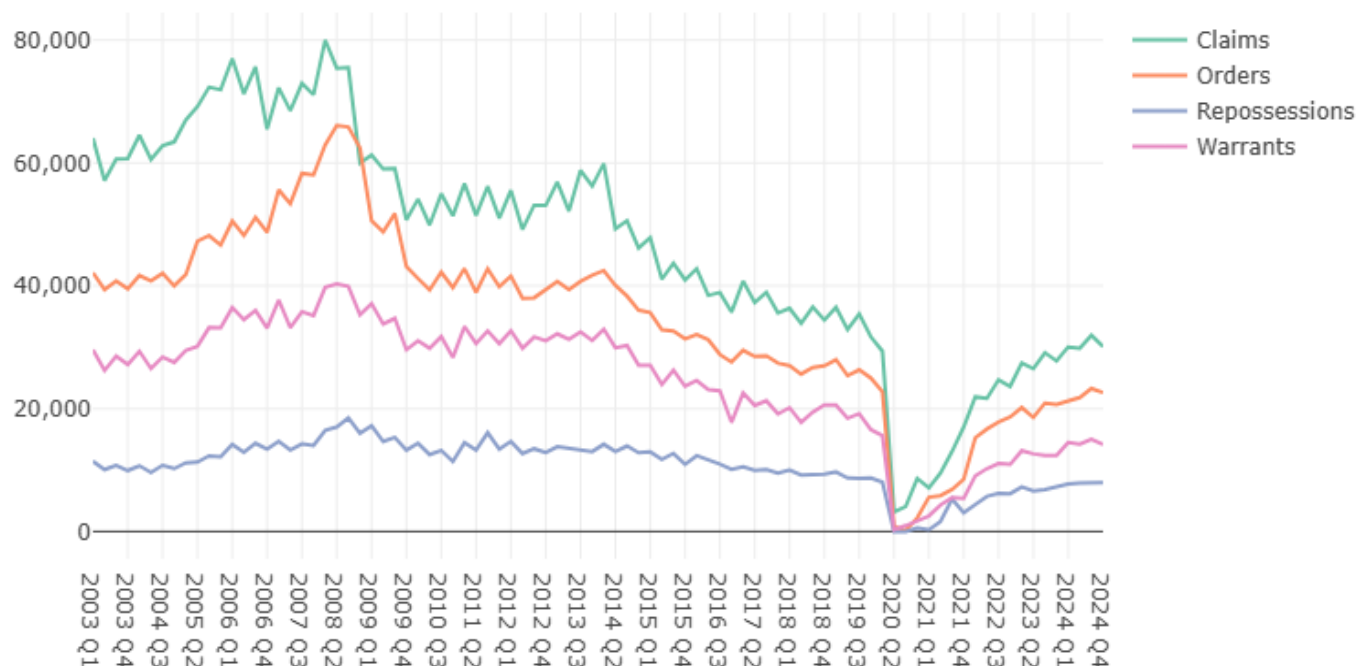
Property type	Band 1	Number Let	Band 2	Number let
1 Bed	6 months	350	2 years and 2 months	230
1 Bed 55+	6 months	74	9 months	87
2 bed non-family	9 months	65	1 year and 9 months	79
2 bed family	10 months	237	3 years and 3 months	235
3 bed family	13 months	221	3 years and 7 months	151
3 bed/2 living rooms	1 year and 5 months	32	No average: not enough lettings	6
4 bed family	2 years and 2 months	21	4 years	15
4 bed/2 living rooms	No average: not enough lettings	8	No average: not enough lettings	1
5 bed family	No average: not enough lettings	0	No average: not enough lettings	0
5 bed family/2 living rooms	No average: not enough lettings	1	No average: not enough lettings	0
6 bed family	No average: not enough lettings	0	No average: not enough lettings	0

Source: Data based on letting times between 01.04.2023 and 31.03.2024 on Manchester Move

2.3. Evictions, insecurity, and involuntary moves

Another major source of homelessness and housing instability is the threat or experience of eviction. This is experienced amidst the much wider growth in housing insecurity that underpins the exacerbation of health inequalities, difficulties maintaining stable employment, and barriers to people settling in a community.⁹³ Since 2003, the overall rate of landlord repossession has remained fairly constant at around 8000 bailiff evictions per year, with the obvious exception of the Covid pandemic-related exceptional protections between March 2020 and May 2021, including a ban on possession proceedings and evictions.⁹⁴ As Figure 2.7 shows, evictions are back on an upward trend since the Covid restrictions were lifted.

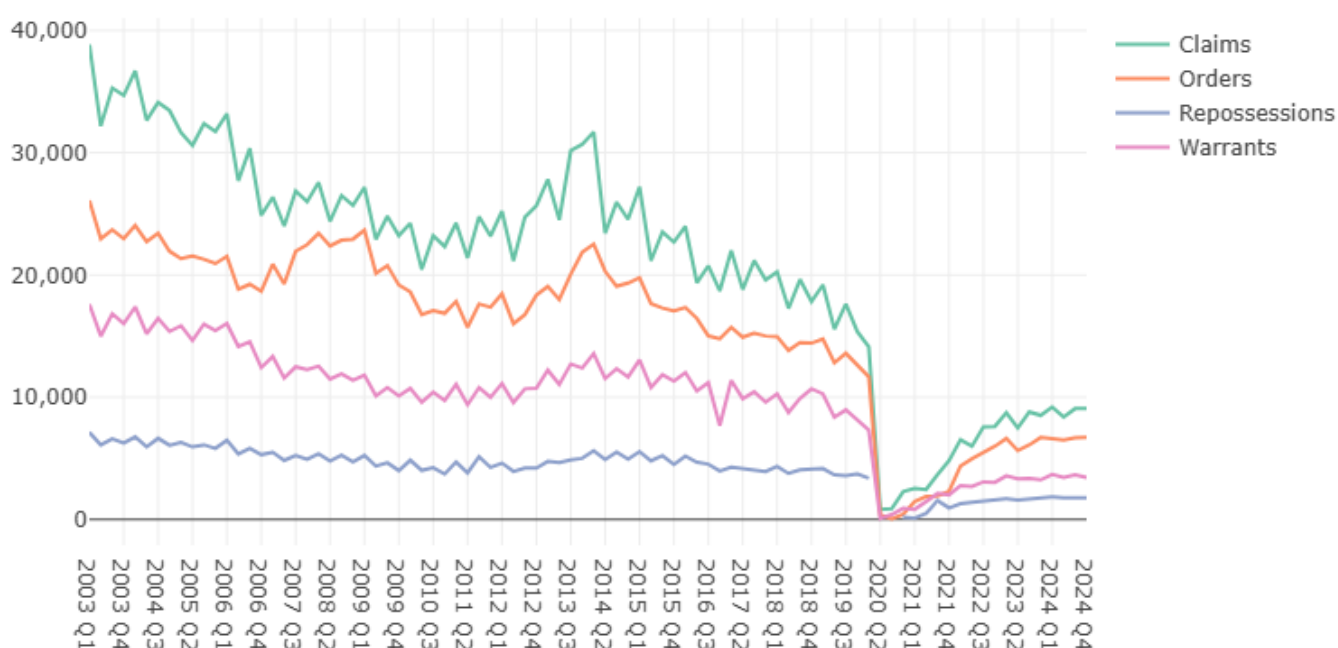
Figure 2.7 Headline possession actions for all landlord possession claims, England (2003 Q1 - 2024 Q3)



Source: Mortgage and Landlord Possession Statistics: data visualisation tool, <https://mlp-app.apps.live.cloud-platform.service.justice.gov.uk/>

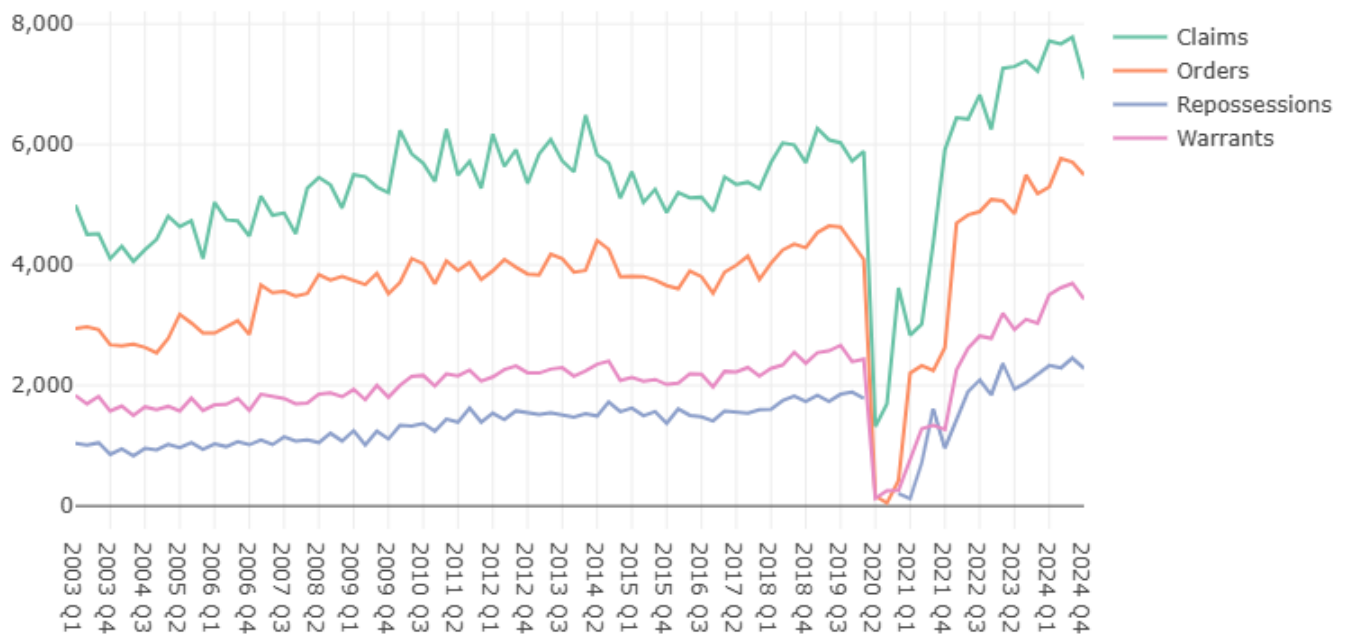
When private and social landlord sectors are disaggregated, we see a very different set of trends. Social landlord evictions are on a long-term downward trend (Figure 2.8), falling by 74.4% between 2003 and 2023.⁹⁵ Eviction action by PRS landlords is on a long-term upward trend increasing by 115.4% over the same period (Figure 2.9). In Manchester, eviction trends largely mirror the national picture (Figure 2.10) with the PRS comprising around 80% of evictions since 2022.⁹⁶

Figure 2.8. Headline possession actions for social landlord possession claims, England (2003 Q1 - 2024 Q3)



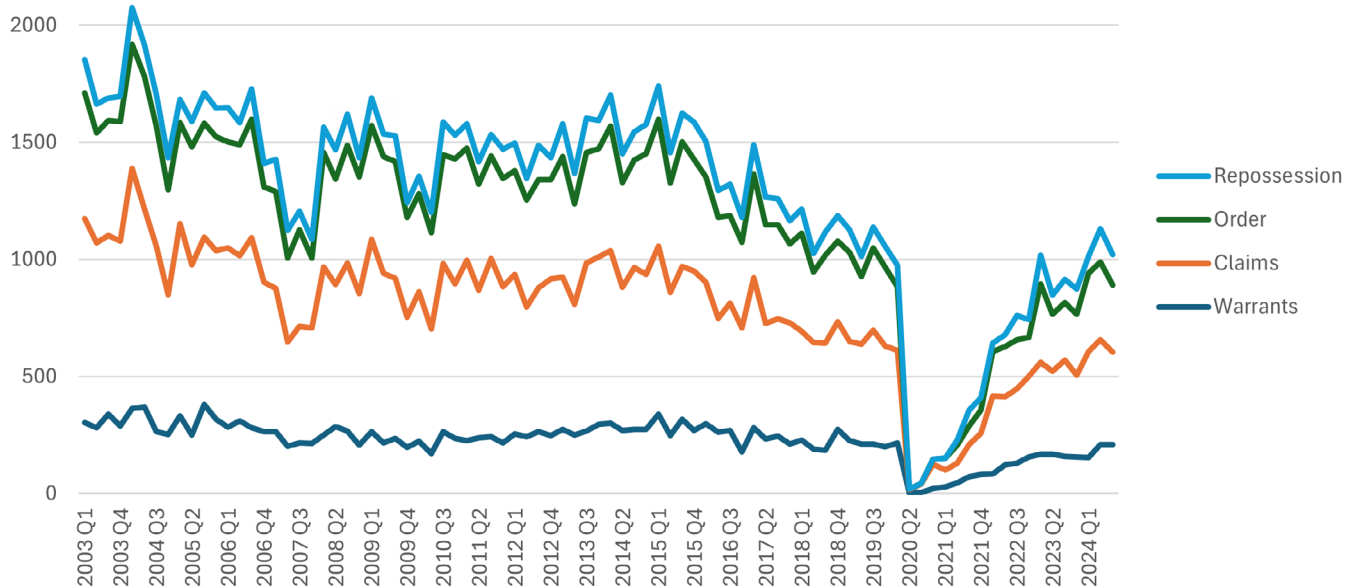
Source: Mortgage and Landlord Possession Statistics: data visualisation tool, <https://mlp-app.apps.live.cloud-platform.service.justice.gov.uk/>

Figure 2.9 Headline possession actions for private landlord possession claims, England (2003 Q1 - 2024 Q3).



Source: Mortgage and Landlord Possession Statistics: data visualisation tool, <https://mlp-app.apps.live.cloud-platform.service.justice.gov.uk/>

Figure 2.10. Landlord possession statistics for Manchester, (2003 Q1- 2024 Q3)



Source: Ministry of Justice, Mortgage and Landlord Possession Statistics: data visualisation tool

There are other factors at play here beyond the long-term decline in social rent housing and the growth of the PRS. While social landlords offer lifetime, secure tenancies with strong legal protections, and are under growing financial and policy pressure to maintain tenancies and evict as a last resort, private landlords face no such constraints. The vast majority of PRS tenancies are assured shorthold with a fixed term between 6 months and 1 year; at the end of this term, the landlord can use Section 21 of the Housing Act 1988 to evict the tenant without having to give a reason, a so-called 'no fault' eviction. Since the government first promised to abolish no fault evictions back in 2019 (which will finally come into force in 2025 once the Renters' Rights Bill is passed), 39,216 households in England have been removed from their homes under a Section 21 notice as part of a rising trend.⁹⁷ Due to the limited time that tenants have to find alternative accommodation, no-fault evictions are a major contributor to rising homelessness.

Officially-recorded evictions are just one part of the wider housing instability experienced in the PRS where renters spend a greater proportion of their income on rent than any other tenure, and where involuntary moves are far more prevalent.⁹⁸ On average, private renters live in their property for half the amount of time as social renters or owner occupiers, with the most common PRS tenancy lasting less than 1 year.⁹⁹ There were an estimated 830,000 moves in the PRS in England between 2023-2024, with 40% of renters surveyed stating that their last move was forced not by choice, mainly due to the end of fixed term tenancies, increases in rent pricing tenants out of tenancy renewal, legal eviction notices, or being informally asked to leave by the landlord.¹⁰⁰ Forced PRS moves burden renters with significant unrecoverable costs that can make it more difficult to find alternative accommodation in an increasingly unaffordable private market.

2.4. The barriers to affordable housing of all tenures

The rising levels homelessness, temporary accommodation, social housing waiting lists, eviction, and involuntary house moves, are all rooted in a wider affordability crisis in which the cost of either buying or renting a home has become increasingly detached from household incomes. **A widely accepted definition of housing affordability recently proposed by the independent Affordable Housing Commission (2020) is that rents or purchase costs should not exceed a third of net equivalised household income with costs indexed to average local incomes.**¹⁰¹ In large parts of England and Manchester, this affordability threshold is routinely crossed, with the gap between incomes and housing costs widening over time. We will discuss the reasons for this in section 3.

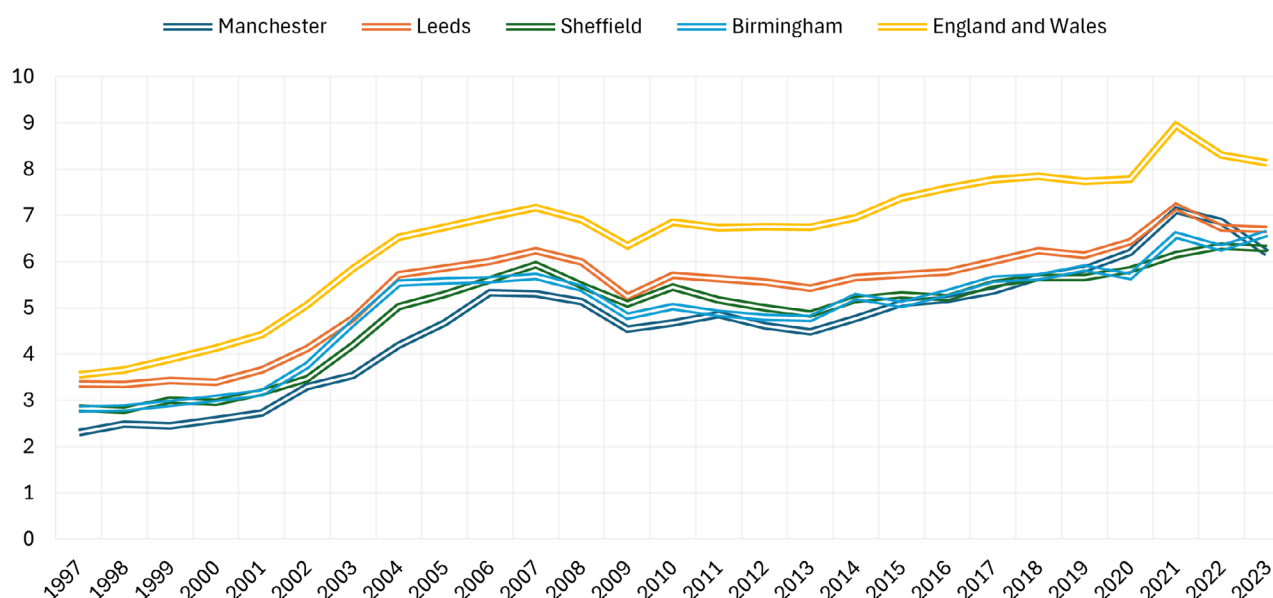
2.4.1. Home ownership

Purchasing a home has become more unaffordable over time with rising house price to income ratios¹⁰² and restrictive mortgage lending excluding lower income owners from home ownership.¹⁰³ High house prices relative to earnings also make raising a deposit a serious challenge for first-time buyers, many of whom are increasingly reliant on parental support to get on the housing ladder. High mortgage rates since 2022 create an additional barrier to home ownership and increase housing costs for those on a variable mortgage rate or coming to the end of a fixed rate period.

House prices increased four-and-a-half times in England and Wales between 1997 and 2023 while average earnings only doubled.¹⁰⁴ In 2023, the average house price in England was £350,000 and full-time employees could expect to spend around 8.3 times their annual earnings buying a home, compared to 3.6

times in 1997.¹⁰⁵ The provisional average house price in Manchester in September 2024 was £251,000, compared to £226,000 across the North West and £294,000 across Great Britain.¹⁰⁶ Manchester's affordability ratio has risen in line with the national average over time and is currently 6.2 (Figure 2.11). Mortgage costs are around 37.3% of average disposable income in Manchester, which is higher than the average for England and Wales.¹⁰⁷

Figure 2.11: Comparing housing affordability ratios across select local authorities between 1997 and 2023



Source: ONS (2024) *Housing affordability in England and Wales: 2023*.

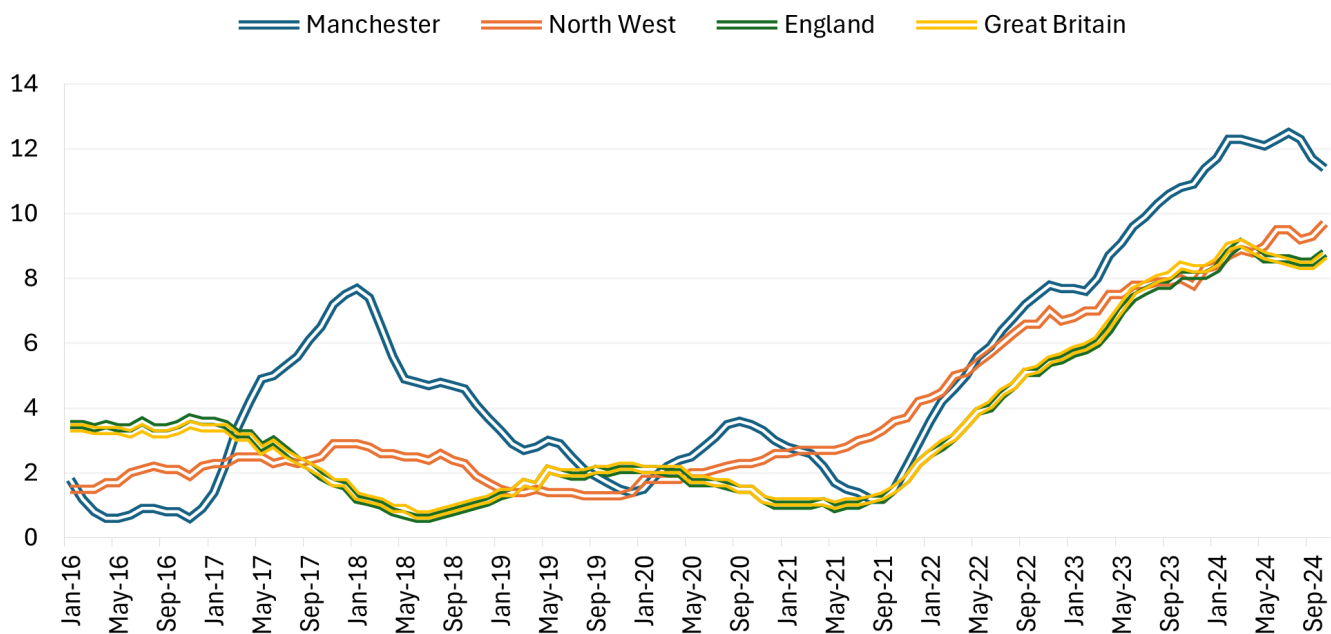
2.4.2. Renting and welfare reform

The cost of renting is also increasing, with a marked difference between social and other government-regulated rental levels and rents in the PRS. In 2023/24, the median monthly rent in England was £424.67 for new social housing lettings and £580.67 for homes let at Affordable Rent (limited to 80% of local market rent).¹⁰⁸ This represents a 5.4% and 4.5% increase respectively from 2022/23. In Manchester, in 2022/3, average social and affordable monthly rents were £345.76, an increase of 4.1% on the previous year.¹⁰⁹ These rent increases were below the rate of inflation (CPI) due to government rent regulations to support the cost of living crisis. In comparison, the average private monthly rent for England was £1,276 in February 2024, up 8.8% (£104) from a year earlier. This is the highest annual rise since the government's Price Index series began in 2006, and reflects a dramatic increase in private rental inflation since November 2021 to February 2024 from an average of 2.1% between January 2006 and October 2021 to an average of 5.6%.

In Manchester, rental inflation is much higher (Figure 2.12), with the average PRS monthly rent £1184 in February 2024, a 12.3% rise on the previous year¹¹⁰, and significantly higher than the corresponding rise across the North West in general (9.5%).¹¹¹ Manchester tenants living in the PRS spend a larger proportion of their incomes on rent than any other housing tenure¹¹² and lower-income households tend to spend a larger proportion on housing costs.¹¹³ This is because Manchester has some of the least "affordable" median rents, alongside other local authorities with urban centres such as London, Brighton and Hove,

Bristol and Bath.¹¹⁴ Out of all the local authorities in the UK, Manchester had the second highest (un)affordability ratio after Kensington and Chelsea, with the average PRS rent reaching 45.6% of a median-private renting household's monthly income, significantly higher than the 34.2% ratio for England and the affordability threshold outlined earlier.¹¹⁵

Figure 2.12: Private rental price annual inflation, Manchester, January 2016 to October 2024

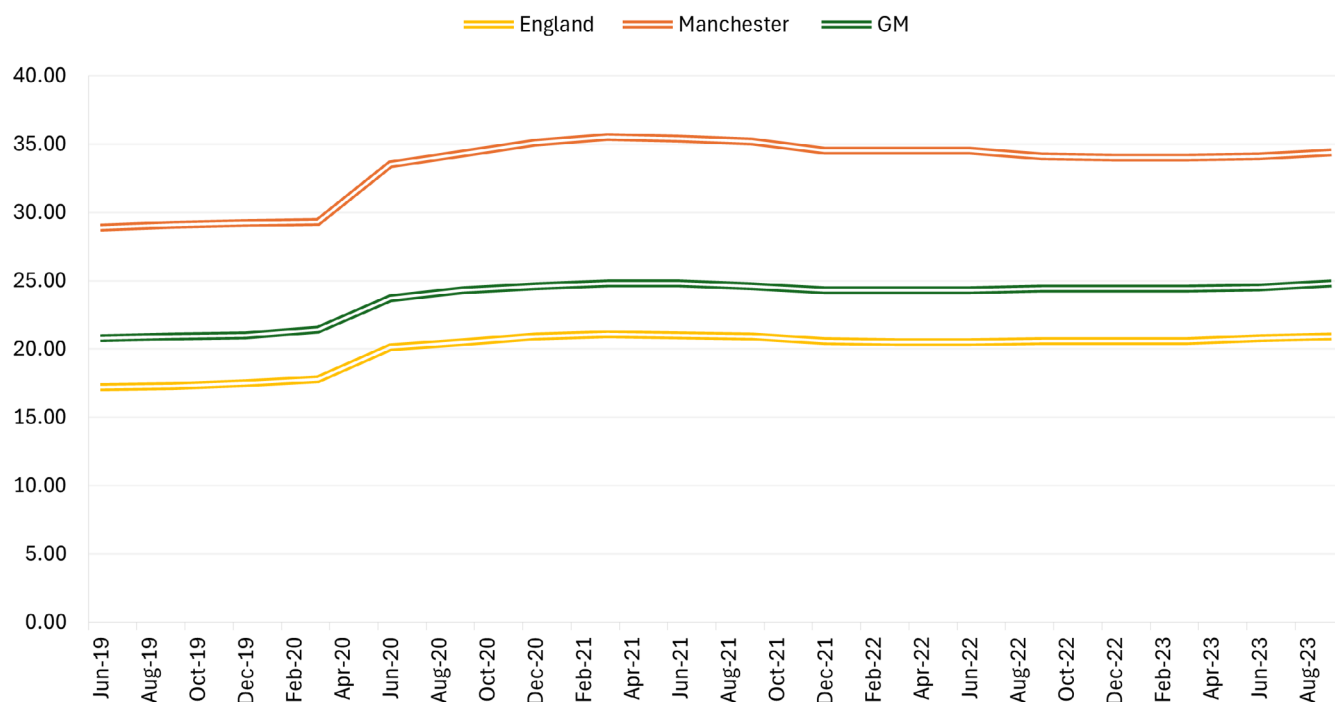


Source: ONS, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/visualisations/housingpriceslocal/E08000003/>

The increasing number of low-income renters combined with rising rents - especially in the PRS - have led to significant increases in government spending on housing benefit, currently costing over £30bn a year, and predicted to rise to £35bn by 2028. This partly explains why successive governments since 2010 have made cuts to housing support as part of welfare reform. These policies include the Benefit Cap, which places an upper limit on the total amount of benefits that can be claimed, and the Under-occupancy Charge - better known as the 'bedroom tax' - which restricts housing benefit for social housing tenants who occupy properties assessed as being too large for their needs without in most cases providing them with an alternative. Local Housing Allowance (LHA), which determines the amount of support renters are entitled to when living in the private rented sector, was cut from covering the 50th to the 30th percentile of local market rents from 2011 and then frozen between 2016 and 2020, restored to the 30th percentile in 2020 and then frozen again.

Citizens Advice reports that the average LHA maximum available (for all property types) was 9% lower than the average cost of renting at the 30th percentile in April 2023, which equates to a shortfall of £745.60 each year (£62.13 per month) for renters.¹¹⁶ However, these average shortfall figures obscure a great deal of geographical variation. A comparison of LHA rates and data on new private tenancies over the six months up to 31st October 2022 showed that only 3% of new tenancies¹¹⁷ were affordable on LHA in Manchester. Manchester has a significantly higher percentage of households receiving Housing Support than both Greater Manchester and England (Figure 2.13).

Figure 2.13: Comparing percentage of households receiving housing support for England, Greater Manchester and Manchester



Source: [Greater Manchester Cost of Living Dashboard](#)

These cuts have compounded the affordability crisis for low-income tenants in both social and private rental housing by increasing the proportion of renters whose housing benefit does not cover their full rent¹¹⁸ and have left some families unable to afford even the cheapest forms of social rented housing.¹¹⁹ Rising energy bills further exacerbate this affordability gap, with stark choices being made for 1 in 8 households in England between eating or heating. However, this situation is far worse in Manchester, which has the seventh highest local rate of fuel poverty in England, affecting 1 in 5 households.¹²⁰

The end of the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) freeze in April 2024 is a welcome relief for private renters and should start bringing numbers of households in temporary accommodation down.¹²¹ However, the household benefit cap and planned freeze to Housing Benefit from 2025 could undermine these gains.

2.5. Indecent, unsafe and unsustainable homes

Everyone should live in a home that is safe and warm, free of damp, mould, and disrepair, especially in the world's sixth largest economy. But in Manchester, as across the country, this basic human right amounts to a tenure and postcode lottery. The main official measure of housing standards in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (Scotland has its own standard) is the Decent Homes Standard. First introduced as a required standard for the social housing sector in 2000, a decent home must currently meet four overarching criteria:

- a) The current statutory minimum standard for housing
- b) Be in a reasonable state of repair (no major repairs or replacement building components are required).
- c) Have reasonably modern facilities and services.
- d) Provide a reasonable degree of thermal comfort (including efficient heating and effective insulation – which therefore links in with questions of sustainability)

A home will fail the current statutory minimum standard for housing if it contains one more Category 1 hazards identified by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), meaning there is a serious and immediate risk to a person's health and safety. Nationally the PRS has the highest proportion of poor quality housing with more than 1 in 5 failing the decent homes standard compared to 1 in 7 privately owned and 1 in 10 socially rented homes. Figure 2.13 shows that the North West is the region with the highest percentage of non-decent dwellings in England, with a relatively high percentage of non-decent dwellings in all tenures and the highest proportion of non-decent homes in the PRS at around 1 in 3. A GMCA study published in 2024 suggests that around 23% of homes in GM (over 280,000) are likely to contain a Category 1 health and safety hazard, compared to 15% nationally.¹²² This is reflected in Manchester where 1 in 4 PRS homes are non-decent, equating to 17,565 homes or 43% of the city's non-decent stock.¹²³

Table 2.4: Percentage of non-decent dwellings per tenure

	All tenures	Owner occupied	Private rented	Social rented
All dwellings	17.3	13.7	21.2	10.4
North West	19.2	18.3	32.1	10.4
North East	12.4	12.7	16.1	8.4
Yorkshire and the Humber	17.4	16.9	25	10.7
East Midlands	18.8	16.8	28.9	16.3
West Midlands	15.9	14.8	24.7	10.8
East of England	12.4	11.8	18.9	7.7
London	9.9	7.9	12.2	11.3
South East	10.8	9.7	18.1	6.3
South West	17.3	15.9	24.9	13.9

Source: [DA3202: Decent Homes- areas \(2022\)](#)

It has proved challenging to access clear, comparable and consistent data on the number and proportion of social rented homes within the City of Manchester that meet the Decent Homes Standard.¹²⁴ Experimental data from the government's annual English Housing Survey reports that for 2020 – the most recent year for which there is evidence – an estimates that 12.2% (7,802 homes) of the social rented sector is non-decent, contributing 19% of the city's total.¹²⁵ Data provided to the Commission by MHPP paints a completely different picture, showing that 99% of housing association stock in Manchester is decent, and local authority housing statistics for 2022/23 indicate that 1.7% of local authority stock in Manchester is non-decent.

It is worth stating that Decent Homes is a basic, minimum floor below which housing conditions should not fall and has been criticised for setting too low a bar and not being ambitious enough with respect to the wider UN adequate housing definition and at the time of writing not applying to the PRS.¹²⁶ We note that a new Decency Standard is being prepared and will apply to the PRS, once the Renters Reform Bill is passed, which is welcome.

3. Understanding Manchester's housing crisis: national and local factors

The crisis of housing outlined above is the result of both national and local factors that have been decades in the making and are the focus of this section. We begin with an overview of national-scale government policies that have undermined housing supply and efficient use of the existing stock, and eroded social rented housing over time, primarily council housing, as part of a wider financialisation agenda. But we also argue that the local policy context has played a role in the housing crisis through a particular model of urban development.

3.1. The failure to build?

One of the main explanations put forward for the crisis of housing affordability is the long-term under-supply of new homes. In this perspective, new housing supply neither matches population growth, new household formation nor existing backlog need. For example, research by the Centre for Cities finds that if the UK had built at the same rate as the average Western European country between 1955 and 2015, there would have been an additional 4.3 million homes over that period.¹²⁷

Similarly, a report commissioned by Crisis and the National Housing Federation in 2018, estimated a total housing backlog of 4 million homes in England (4.7m across Great Britain) to meet current housing need.¹²⁸ To clear that backlog whilst also meeting newly arising need over a 15-year timeframe, the report stated that around 340,000 new homes per year for England were needed.¹²⁹ This would translate to more than doubling the annual average of 151,580 completions per year between 2000-01 and 2023-24, with the highest number of completions recorded in this period being 175,330 in 2019-20.¹³⁰ Manchester itself is held to be undersupplied by an estimated minimum of 500 new homes a year.¹³¹ The supply and demand mismatch is regarded as a major driver behind house prices and rents (particularly in the private market) rising much faster than wages and benefit levels, disproportionately impacting those on the lowest incomes.¹³²

3.1.1. Planning 'red tape'

Within this 'failure to build' perspective are very different understandings of the root problem. The Centre for Cities analysis, which currently has strong political traction, lays the blame on the planning system introduced in England by the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act. It argues that, in contrast to most other national land-use regimes that are rules-based 'zoning' systems, England's permission-and-appeal

regime induces case-by-case decision-making, despite being nominally 'plan-led'. In short, this means developers can adhere to the local plan and still have their application rejected: "The effect is that instead of all land being available for development unless it is prohibited, development is prohibited on all land unless a site is granted a permit (planning permission)."¹³³ In this view, the planning system restricts the availability of land for development, which both increases the price of land with planning permission, and slows down the rate of house building.

3.1.2. Land speculation

While there are clearly costs and delays being generated by the present planning system that inhibit new housing development, blaming the planning system for the housing crisis has been criticised from different quarters for failing to address the multi-faceted and systemic factors at play. Not least, issues related to the land market and patterns of land ownership and use.¹³⁴ A 2024 review by the Competition and Markets Authority concluded that the UK's under-supply is caused by an over-reliance on the speculative development model of private developers buying land and seeking to sell parcels of that land at a profit.¹³⁵ For the developer to realise this profit, the housing must be sold at a premium to cover the build and land purchase costs and required contributions under S106 and Community Infrastructure Levy. This incentivises developers to "slow building and drip feed homes onto the market to maintain high house prices and protect their profit margin", known as the market absorption rate.¹³⁶ Supporting this argument, a 2024 study found that more than a million homes handed approval since 2015 remained unbuilt, equating to roughly one in three over the period.¹³⁷

The government's independent review of build-out rates in 2018 led by Sir Oliver Letwin found that a major driver of high house prices and thus slow building rates is how land values are calculated as part of planning applications. The standard RICS valuation method for new housing "bakes in the assumption" that new homes will be sold at "the current prices of second-hand homes in the local market".¹³⁸ This assumption underpins the price of land for development using the 'residual value' calculation, which is based on an estimate of the gross open market value of the new homes expected to be built, minus the expected construction, financing and regulatory costs and return on equity. Once a land price is paid by a developer, it will not build any more homes than can be expected to sell at that profit-maximising value in any given year.

3.1.3. The withdrawal of the state

An alternative perspective on the housing crisis is offered by Crisis/NHF and fellow travellers like Shelter.¹³⁹ While they accept there has been a general failure to build enough homes, and see land market speculation as a major driver of unaffordability, their emphasis is on the specific shortage of social rented housing resulting from the state's long-term retreat from housing provision. In the latter half of the twentieth century, the state addressed previous housing market failures and war-time destruction by regulating private landlordism, and both building and funding millions of social rented homes, alongside similar levels of private housing development. This meant that by 1979, owner occupation and social rented housing had become the main tenures, with the PRS in long-term decline.

Since then, however, successive governments have overseen decades of public underinvestment in housing provision, the curtailment of local authority house building, and the failure to meet the emerging

climate and fuel poverty crises through inadequate standards for sustainable homes; whilst encouraging the wider privatisation and financialisation of housing development and consumption. The house-building sector has become ever more concentrated into fewer, larger national firms operating a business model that focuses on controlling and trading land in high-demand areas and restricting housing supply so as to increase the price.¹⁴⁰ The Letwin Review found that developers are able to control the absorption rate due to the “limited opportunities for rivals to enter large sites and compete for customers by offering different types of homes at different price-points and with different tenures”.¹⁴¹ Consequently, unless the building industry oligopoly is broken up and land markets are regulated, increasing the supply of new homes is not possible without a major increase in new social housing, and boosting affordability will not happen by building more homes for market sale or rent but by building the only tenure that is designed to be affordable and secure i.e. social rent.

3.1.4. The demand-side and existing stock

In contrast to the approaches above, some analysts deny there is an overall shortfall of supply. For instance, former Treasury official, Ian Mulheirn, argues that since house prices fell to their lowest level in 1996, the English housing stock has grown by an average of 168,000 units per year compared to the average growth in households of 147,000 per year.¹⁴² This left a surplus of over 1.1 million dwellings to households by 2018. He suggests that these figures are often obscured due to wrongly comparing new build completions over time rather than ‘net additions’ to the housing stock, which tend to be about 30% higher each year. In addition, he argues that household projections have for many years significantly overestimated the rate of household formation due to questionable assumptions in the official methodology now being addressed by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

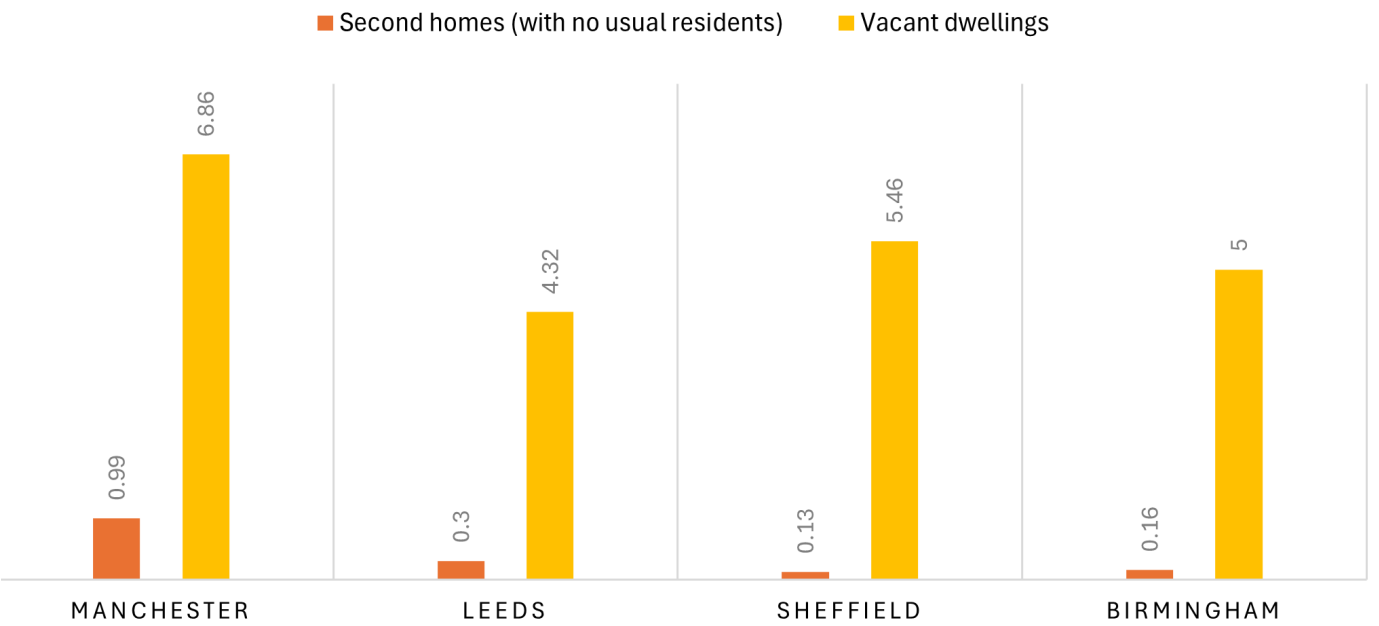
While Mulheirn acknowledges that house prices have risen faster than median incomes, he argues that the cost of housing services (i.e. the market rent on a rented house or the equivalent ‘imputed rent’ on an owner-occupied house), has not outpaced median household incomes since 1996 and in most regions outside London has actually fallen. Moreover, housing asset price inflation diverges at the regional level, growing particularly fast in London and the South, and remaining stagnant elsewhere. This suggests that the variegated picture of house price inflation is being driven by other factors, such as the growing global demand for London’s (and potentially other major UK cities’) housing assets, but not growing demand from people to live there. He cites numerous studies of house price sensitivity to additional stock to conclude that a dramatic increase in supply will do little to reduce house prices. An additional 1% more housing stock would be expected to lower house prices (and by implication rents) by around 1.5% to 2%, all else equal. Therefore, if households in England were to form at a rate of 200,000 per year, net additions of 300,000 per year would cut real terms house prices by 0.8% per year, all else equal, equating to between 7% and 13% over 20 years, compared to the 160% real terms growth in house prices over the 22 years between 1996 and 2018. Mulheirn concludes that declining housing affordability is primarily caused by “the stagnation of young people’s incomes, the erosion of the social housing stock and, more recently, policies to cut housing benefit, especially for young single adults”, which will not be addressed by increasing general housing supply.¹⁴³

This analysis suggests that addressing the under-utilisation of existing stock is one solution. Namely, bringing empty homes back into use; discouraging second home ownership; and tackling under-occupation (where a household has more bedrooms than its members need to sleep in). A review of the most recent data shows that as of October 2024, there were 719,470 empty homes across England or 2.8% of the total housing stock, the highest number since 2010, of which 265,061 (36.8%) were classed as long-term empty (the highest number since 2011), meaning they had been unoccupied and substantially

unfurnished for over six months.¹⁴⁴ Over 90% of empty homes are privately owned. In Manchester, there were 4,995 empty homes in October 2024 (2% of the total dwellings), of which 1,700 were classed as long-term empty.

In addition to these empty homes, the most recent data release in 2024 showed that across England there were 280,000 dwellings recorded as private second homes for the purposes of council tax: a 6.3% increase on the previous year.¹⁴⁵ Manchester recorded 7,487 second homes – the fifth highest by local authority across England, a 20.5% annual increase.¹⁴⁶ Figure 3.1 below shows that Manchester has a higher proportion of empty and second homes compared to other core cities.

Figure 3.1. Comparing second homes and vacant dwellings in select local authorities as of March 2021



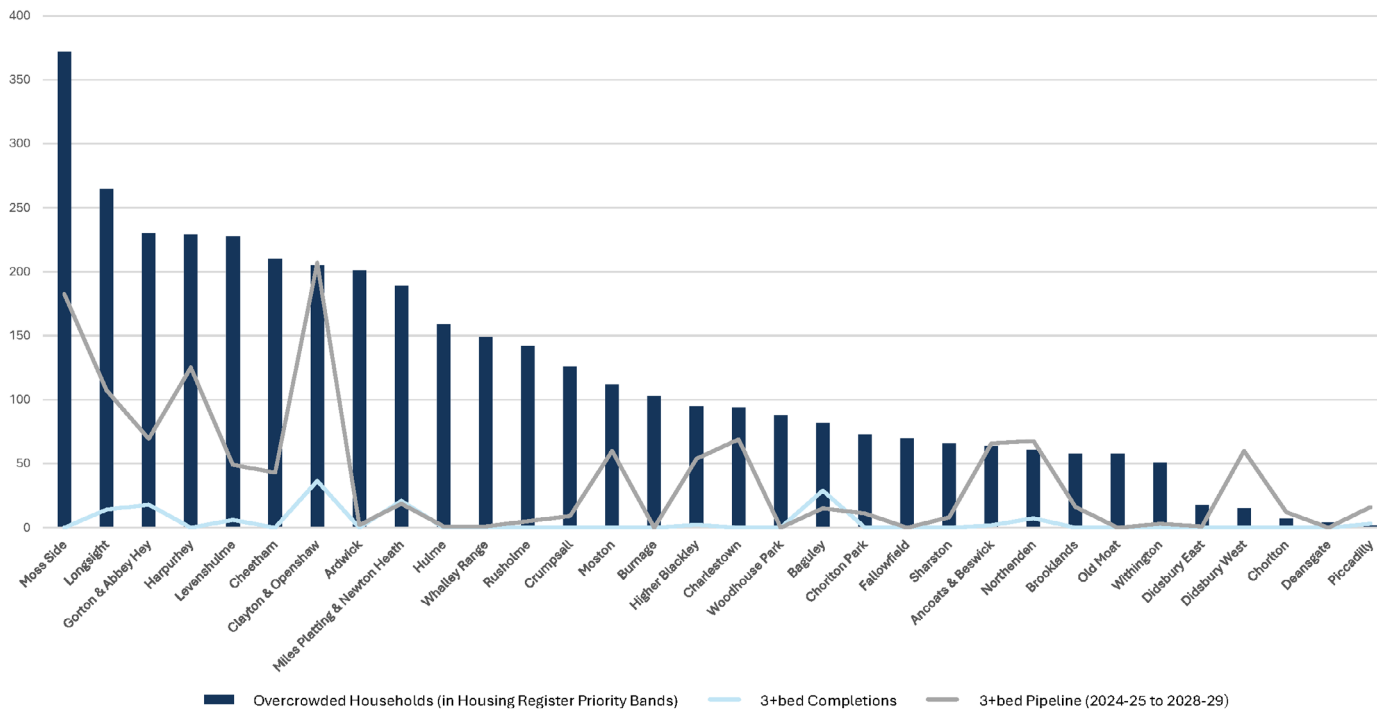
Source: Census 2021 from ONS

The English Housing Survey records that 9.4 million households (38.8%) were under-occupying over a three-year average 2020/21 to 2022/23. Of these, 90% were homeowners, 7% private renters, and 4% social renters. This suggests that 97% of under-occupation takes place in the private sector. Conversely, 328,000 social renting households (8.2%) were overcrowded, compared to 232,000 private renters (5.1), and 148,000 homeowners (0.9%).¹⁴⁷ Under-occupation in Manchester is much greater than the national average, affecting 116,823 households (54.4%), but with very different tenure breakdowns: 76.1% of homeowners are under-occupying (62,106), compared to 41.2% (26,040) of social renters and 41.1% (28,677) of private renters. In contrast, 7.9% (16,954) of all households were over-crowded, the vast majority living in rented accommodation with similar numbers across the social (10.4%, 6,561) and PRS sectors (9.2%, 6,459).¹⁴⁸

Manchester City Council has been working in partnership with other social housing providers to address under-occupation in the social rental sector by encouraging rightsizing. For example, in Silk Street, Newton Heath, 69 high quality, low carbon, social rent homes were built on a brownfield site with one block of 16 flats for over 55s specifically intended to encourage right-sizing and free-up larger properties for families to access. This development helped rehouse 37 households, which represented 28% of all rightsized households in 2023-24). Rightsizing was facilitated through the offer of a financial incentive

(£2,500) and a free packing and removal service.¹⁴⁹ However, as Figure 3.2 shows below, there is a clear mismatch between the scale of overcrowding versus the amount of new family-sized homes recently completed and in the pipeline.

Figure 3.2: Overcrowded households compared to residential pipeline in Manchester, January 2022



Source: MCC Residential Pipeline / Housing Register

These statistics reveal four important aspects of the under-utilisation problem. First, when comparing the numbers of households on the social housing waiting list with the more efficient utilisation of the existing stock, there is huge potential to address overcrowding and homelessness and grow the social rented housing stock. Second, the vast majority of under-utilised homes are in the private sector over which government has less control than the social sector and is politically less inclined to tackle. Local authorities do have powers to bring empty homes and second homes back into use. However, local authorities are under no statutory obligation to take action, their powers remain inadequate to address the scale of the problem at speed, and they lack both resources and incentives to seize the initiative.¹⁵⁰ Third, the policy focus of under-occupation has been almost exclusively targeted at the social sector with almost no attention paid to the 8.36 million under-occupied homes in the home ownership sector.¹⁵¹ Finally, while focusing on addressing under-utilisation makes obvious sense at a national scale, the actual distribution of empties, second homes, and under- and over-occupied homes at the local scale is what matters for policy making.

3.2 The financialisation of housing

The role of land speculation¹⁵², the oligopolistic nature of housing development¹⁵³, and the retreat of the state discussed above, have been understood as part of the global ‘financialisation’ of land and housing under neoliberal policies.¹⁵⁴ Neoliberalism refers to the broad market liberalisation turn since the late 1970s, inspired by free market thinkers such as Hayek and Friedman, and embodied in the privatisation and deregulation policies initiated under Thatcherism. Financialisation is defined by the UN Special Rapporteur on Housing as:

“...structural changes in housing and financial markets and global investment whereby housing is treated as a commodity, a means of accumulating wealth, and often as security for financial instruments that are traded and sold on global markets. It refers to the way capital investment in housing increasingly disconnects housing from its social function of providing a place to live in security and dignity and hence undermines the realization of housing as a human right. It refers to the way housing and financial markets are oblivious to people and communities, and the role housing plays in their well-being.”¹⁵⁵

3.2.1. The privatisation and under-funding of social rented housing

Housing financialisation in England has both driven and benefited from the stunning reversal in the fortunes of social rented housing over the past four decades as part of wider welfare state retrenchment under neoliberalism. While the supply of other housing tenures has at least continued to grow, between 1979 and 2023, the total stock of social rented housing in England fell by 25.5%, from 5.5 to 4.1 million homes.¹⁵⁶ This decline is mirrored at the Manchester scale as shown in Table 3.1. By 1981, after decades of council house building, Manchester had 83,732 social rented homes making up 51% of the city’s housing stock, compared to 23.8% owner occupation and 25.2% private rented. As of 2024, the social housing stock had fallen by 22% to 67,130, a net loss of more than 16,000 homes.¹⁵⁷

Over this same period, the PRS has expanded more than threefold with the highest concentration of growth taking place in the last twenty years. The PRS has overtaken social rented housing as the city’s second tenure and by current trends, is likely to overtake owner-occupation within the next fifteen years. This reflects similar trends at the national scale that we discuss in section 3.2.3.

Table 3.1 Manchester's housing stock compared 1981-2021 - Census¹⁵⁸

Tenure	1981	1991	2001	2011	2021
Owned outright		25,024	28,079	31,145	35,460
Owned with mortgage or loan		44,660	40,717	46,250	44,543
Shared Ownership			1,167	1,481	1,680
<i>Social</i>	<i>83,732</i>	<i>77,242</i>	<i>66,042</i>	<i>64,682</i>	<i>63,286</i>
Council	77,296	64,963	47,917	27,585	24,412
Housing Association	6,436	12,279	18,125	37,097	38,874
<i>Private rented</i>	<i>21,265</i>	<i>22,023</i>	<i>25,176</i>	<i>55,043</i>	<i>65,003</i>
Other categories used					
Rent free				3,127	4,381
Temporary	55	78			
Other			6,264		
Households	163,565	167,994	167,453	204,969	214,700

Source: Various Census publications ^{159 160 161 162}

This erosion of the most secure and affordable tenure is the direct outcome of central government privatisation policies since 1979 that have underpinned housing financialisation.¹⁶³ Nationally, over two million social homes have been sold to tenants under the Right to Buy policy at significant discounts.¹⁶⁴ In Manchester, the RTB has accounted for the loss of approximately 26,000 council homes – around 30% of the city's historic council stock.¹⁶⁵ While the RTB has enabled many council tenants to access low-cost home ownership, the majority of these sold homes have never been replaced. In the period 1991/92 to 2022/23, Manchester experienced a net loss of 3,690 social homes with 14,166 council homes sold and only 10,476 new social homes completed.¹⁶⁶

The failure to replace the privatised stock results from the financial straitjacket imposed on social housing providers by central government. Historically, local authorities were able to access sufficient subsidies from central government to cover the full capital cost of new homes by borrowing over 60 years at low interest rates via the Public Works Loan Board, which they could repay from the rental income. However, after 1979, central government gradually reduced subsidy for new social housing while constraining local authority borrowing and powers to spend RTB receipts¹⁶⁷ on building new council homes at scale. Instead, the Housing Association (HA) sector became the government's preferred provider of social rented housing¹⁶⁸, both through the stock transfer programme that moved more than one million council homes into the HA sector, and government capital grants to build new social homes.¹⁶⁹ Yet HAs have built only modest amounts of social rented housing compared to local authorities in their post-war heyday due to the gradual reduction in government grant rates from nearly 100% of the capital cost of a new home in 1989, to just 14% between 2011 and 2015.¹⁷⁰ Moreover, from 2011, government capital funding for new affordable housing was targeted at other tenures such as Affordable Rent (set at 80% of local market rents) and Shared Ownership.¹⁷¹

While there has been a welcome increase in government funding for new social rented housing since 2018, and a positive shift in prioritising the remaining AHP fund for social rent by the new government, this remains insufficient to meet housing need.

By way of illustration, **an estimated £14.6bn in capital funding is needed each year over a ten year period just to meet social rented housing need**,¹⁷² yet the current Affordable Homes Programme equates to only £2.3bn per year over five years and funds a range of tenures.¹⁷³ As the Chartered Institute for Housing has pointed out, only 12% of government spending on housing in 2022 went towards new buildings, compared to 95% in 1976.¹⁷⁴ Instead, the vast majority is spent on housing benefit, approximately £10 billion a year of which subsidises private landlords' profits, around four times more than the government spends to build new homes through the Affordable Homes Programme.¹⁷⁵

With declining grant levels, local authorities and HAs that want to develop must use more of their rental income and reserves to fund new homes. This is creating pressure to diversify the tenures of new developments away from social rent towards those that offer more income such as Affordable Rent, shared-ownership, outright market sale and private rent.¹⁷⁶ While these new homes are helping to meet demand, most will be out of reach of households on the housing waiting list. Social landlord development plans have also been significantly hampered by central government welfare reform policies since 2010 and various caps on rental levels since 2015. HAs have had to negotiate reduced expected revenue streams and new uncertainties about future income, whilst facing new cost pressures from building safety and consumer regulation after the Grenfell disaster, and higher environmental standards for new builds.¹⁷⁷

3.2.2. The developer-friendly model of urban planning and development

Another set of issues behind the low proportion of social homes being built relate to national planning policy reforms over time which have increasingly constrained social rent delivery and developer-friendly approaches to local urban development.

Before the introduction of the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990, developer contributions for affordable housing were negotiated on a local ad hoc basis. Section 106 of the TCPA became the formal mechanism for such agreements, and planning policy introduced affordable housing as a material consideration.¹⁷⁸ The policy was effectively a means of capturing land value uplift from landowners (resulting from being granted the right to develop) to contribute to public costs including health, education, transport, energy, water and waste.¹⁷⁹ On the surface, the proportion of new affordable housing in England delivered via S106 – including social rent and other tenures – has increased from zero in 1999/2000 to 47% in 2022/23.¹⁸⁰ However, developer contributions have merely offset to some degree government funding cuts for social and affordable housing. Moreover, the nature of new affordable housing via S106 has completely shifted from primarily social rent (82% in 1999/2000) to primarily Shared Ownership, Affordable Rent and other sub-market tenures (85.1% in 2022/2023).¹⁸¹

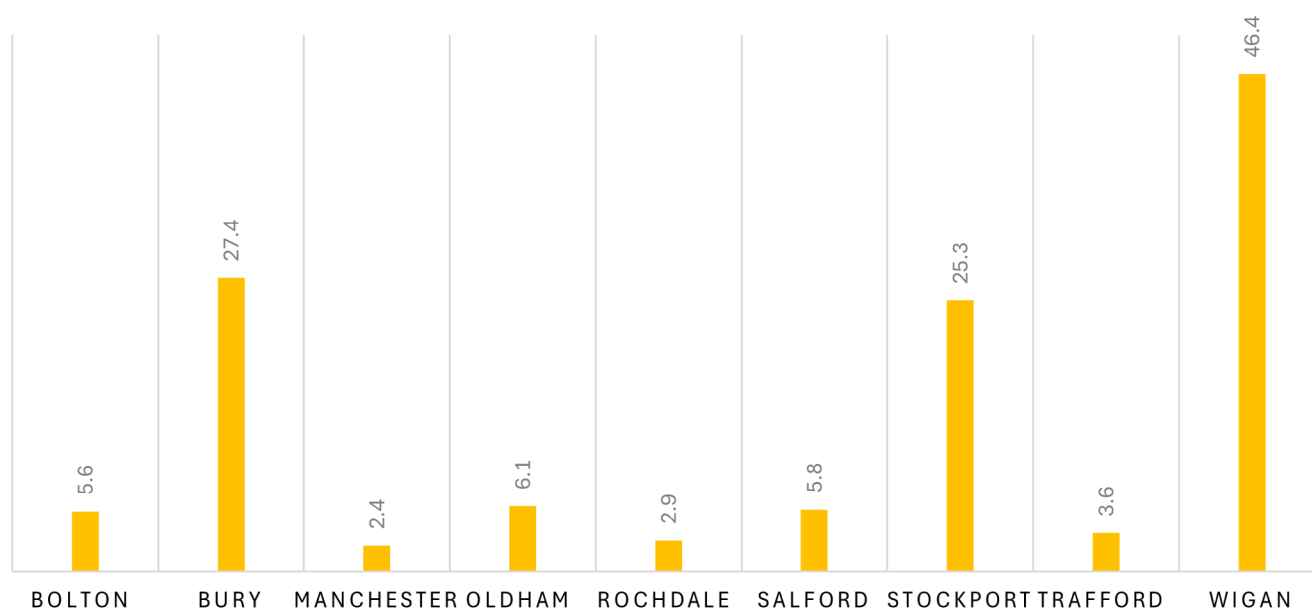
This transformation in affordable housing supply can largely be explained by the Coalition Government's introduction in 2012 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), which replaced the previous planning framework. The NPPF scrapped the national statutory requirement on developers to provide a portion of social rented homes as part of new developments under S106 agreements, leaving this up to local authorities to decide as part of Local Plans. Many local authorities do not have up to date Local Plans that are reflective of the need for social rented homes in their area. The NPPF also broadened the definition of both affordable and social housing for the purposes of planning consent to include more sub-market tenures and products that have served to diminish the obligation for social rent.¹⁸² Finally, the NPPF introduced financial viability assessments that have effectively guaranteed minimum profit margins for developers of 20%. This has enabled developers to reduce, renegotiate, or even evade S106 obligations to provide social and affordable housing where they threaten those profit margins.

The growing mismatch between existing grant levels and building costs has been further widened by construction cost inflation, particularly since the Russia-Ukraine War (2022-present), and competition for land. Local authorities and HAs struggle to compete with developers in the resulting bidding wars for expensive land and are consequently paying increasing amounts of money to build fewer and fewer social rented homes. Between 2011/12 and 2014/15, the top 10% of local authorities in terms of land values experienced an estimated 70% drop in the numbers of new affordable/social rented homes, compared to a 20% drop across the rest of England.¹⁸³ In Greater Manchester, housing associations frequently lose out to housebuilders and private developers who can offer more for the land when proposing to build for market sale.¹⁸⁴ Private developers are often reluctant to include social and affordable homes in developments having paid such an inflated price for the land, incentivising the practice of cross-subsiding new social rented housing from building homes for market sale, but leading social housing providers to dedicate less of their increasingly scarce land for building social rented housing.¹⁸⁵

The current model of urban development has also contributed to this problem. In response to reduced government funding, local authorities have increasingly turned to private developers as a new source of both local investment and income, and become enthusiastic facilitators of private development¹⁸⁶. Although a property-led urban regeneration model has helped cities like Manchester recover from a state of urban decline in the 1980s, poverty and inequality have been perpetuated. In central Manchester, global real estate finance began to invest heavily in city-centre flat construction from 2013¹⁸⁷, dramatically changing the overall housing stock.¹⁸⁸ On the surface, this has driven a housing supply boom, with year-on-year stock increases since the financial crisis, temporarily halted by the Covid pandemic in 2020/21, before continuing to rise from 2021/22.¹⁸⁹

However, studies have found that Manchester City Council has not recouped appropriate resources for the delivery of homes for social rent.¹⁹⁰ The 2007 Manchester Housing Needs Assessment recommended the introduction of a 30% affordable housing target across the city, split between 15% social rented housing and 15% intermediate housing – a net annual delivery of 716 social rented homes.¹⁹¹ However, Manchester City Council's existing Local Plan, published in 2012, envisages that only 5% of new housing provision will be for either social or affordable rents out of a 20% affordable housing target for developments.¹⁹² In practice, only 2% of new build housing in the city between 2012 and 2022 was housing for social rent.¹⁹³ There have been tiny levels of S106 affordable home completions in Manchester. Out of the 3,793 additional dwellings in Manchester in 2019/20,¹⁹⁴ S106 contributions provided only 9 affordable homes,¹⁹⁵ none of which were for social rent.¹⁹⁶ In fact, since the year 2000/01, S106 contributions have funded only 17 social rented units in Manchester, all completed in 2000/01.¹⁹⁷ Figure 3.3 compares Manchester to other Greater Manchester districts between 2014/15 and 2019/20 on all affordable housing completions. It shows that Manchester has delivered the lowest proportion of S106 affordable homes as a percentage of total affordable homes completions in Greater Manchester.

Figure 3.3: S106 affordable home completions as a % of total affordable home completions, Greater Manchester, 2014/15 to 2019/20



Source: GM Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) Update 2021; DLUHC, [Tables 1006 to 1008: additional affordable homes completions by tenure and local authority, England](#)

Research has also highlighted that public land in central Manchester has been allocated to private developers who are not contributing to affordable housing delivery.¹⁹⁸ Gillespie and Silver (2021) have found that public land is often leased out to developers to build luxury apartments that are unaffordable to most of Manchester's residents, but MCC does not appear to be capturing the rising value of that land that could be used towards affordable housing delivery, in some cases leasing out prime plots of land to developers for as little as £1 or even for free.¹⁹⁹ Such studies suggest that there is a lack of transparency around the benefits of handing over land to private developers, making it difficult to assess the extent to which profits are shared with local authorities.²⁰⁰

Partly as a result, the city is now decades behind in building the social homes needed. Figure 3.4 shows a comparison of the proportion of social rented homes completed in Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds, between 2000/01 and 2022/23. A total of 3,599 social rent homes were completed in Manchester in this period, compared to a total of 7,858 in Birmingham and 4,256 in Leeds.

Figure 3.4: Comparing social housing completions as a percentage of total permanent dwellings completed across select local authorities, 2011/12 to 2022/23

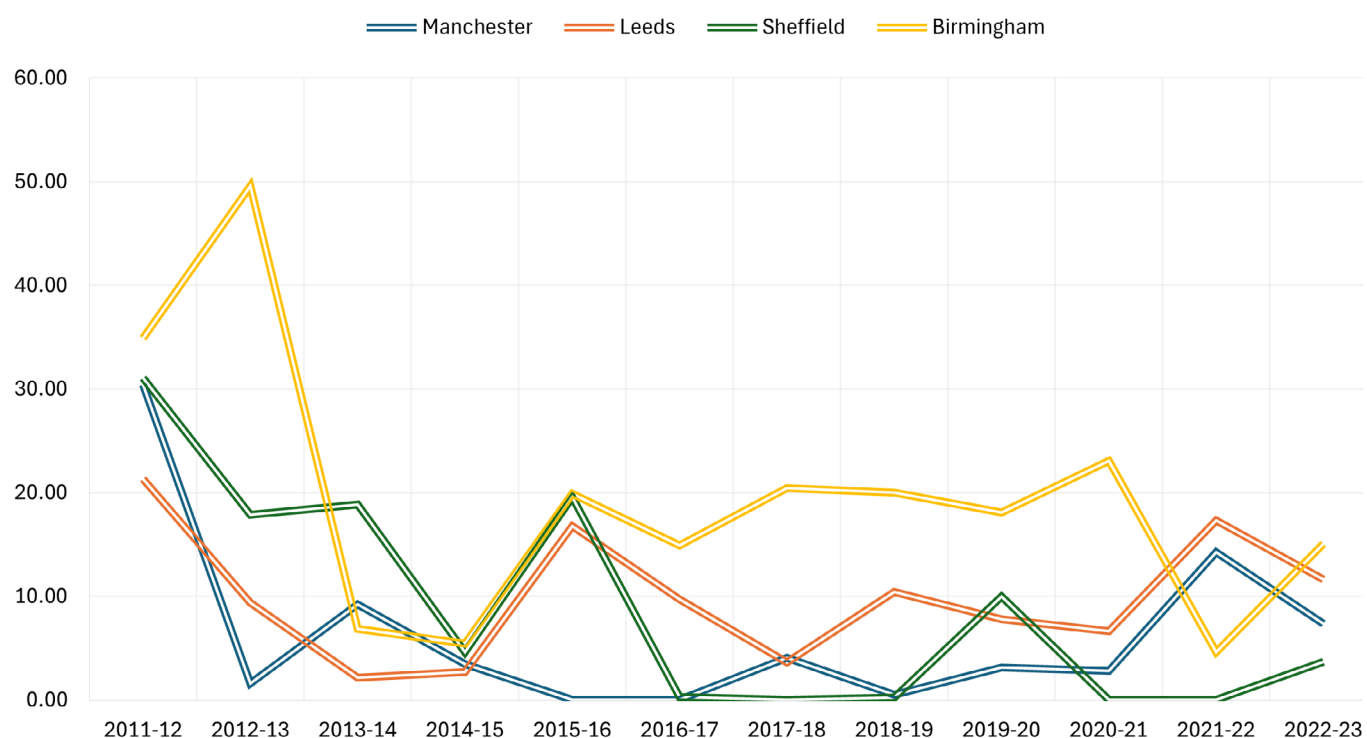


Figure 3.4: Source: DULHC, Table 1006C: Additional social rent dwellings provided by local authority area- Completions; ONS, House building, UK: permanent dwellings started and completed by local authority.

As a result, both the amount of new social rented housing and its share of new affordable housing supply has dropped dramatically since 2012. Nationally, between 1990/91 and 2011/12, an average of 34,449 new social rented homes were built each year, 70% of all new affordable housing completions. Yet between 2012/13 and 2022/23, this annual average dropped to just 8,535 new homes for social rent, representing a mere 17.4% of all new affordable homes.²⁰¹ The most common affordable housing tenure for new supply is now Affordable Rent.²⁰² This pattern is repeated in Manchester. Over the same time periods, Manchester's new social rented housing supply dropped from 71.1% of all new affordable homes to 15.2%, although it has increased markedly in the last few years.²⁰³ MCC announced in July 2024 that 1,018 affordable homes had been completed since 2022 as part of the Manchester Housing Strategy to deliver 10,000 affordable homes by 2032.²⁰⁴ This included 259 social rent homes, or 23% of additional affordable homes.²⁰⁵ However, this increased scale of delivery and planned delivery for larger social rented homes remains far below the level required to reduce the housing waiting list as outlined in Table 3.2.

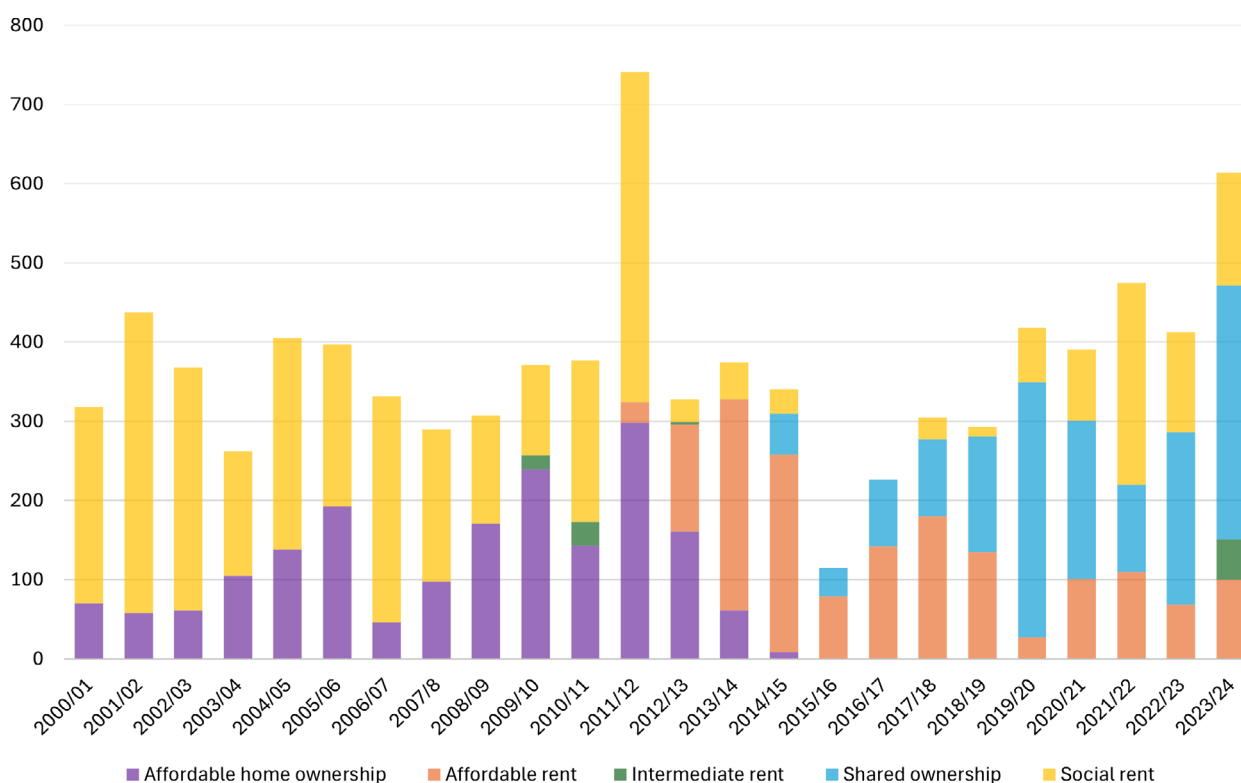
Table 3.2. Social rent pipeline, and waiting list numbers by household size, July 2024

	Social rent homes in the pipeline (2024 to 2027)		Households on the waiting list by size (July 2024)
	%	Number	Number
1-bed	37%	448	7,381
2-bed	45%	548	5,125
3-bed	15%	188	3,555
4+ bed	3%	38	1,471
Total	100%	1,222	17,532

Source: Arc4, 2023; MCC internal data

In Manchester, the majority of new affordable homes delivered are now Affordable Rent or Shared Ownership (see Figure 3.5).²⁰⁶ While Affordable Rent is more affordable than PRS housing, and in some parts of the city is close to or equivalent to social rents due to the complex way in which government rent-setting regulations work, overall, the average Affordable Rent is £130.25 per week compared to the average social rent of £91.63 per week. Currently, Affordable Rent in Manchester is nominally affordable for tenants who are eligible for full housing benefit. However, for tenants receiving partial housing benefit or not eligible for any housing support, it is becoming a struggle.

Figure 3.5. Affordable housing completions, Manchester, 2000/01 to 2022/23



Source: The Housing Market Monitor (GMCA, 2024b)

There are positive signs that Manchester is increasing delivery of social rented housing again. MCC is working in partnership with Manchester Housing Associations on several projects to increase the supply of family homes.²⁰⁷ MCC's Housing Strategy (2022-2032) sets a target of delivering 3,000 affordable family homes by 2032.²⁰⁸ It is essential that an appropriate proportion of these homes are for social rent. With over 17,000 households on the waiting list for social rent housing,²⁰⁹ social rented homes must make up a larger proportion of affordable housing delivery than 23% over time.

3.2.3. The resurgence of private renting

The re-expansion and deregulation of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) is another major factor in the growth of unaffordable, insecure, and indecent housing. After significant decline over the 20th century due to a combination of statutory rent control enacted in 1915, protected tenancies that inhibited eviction, and state support for owner occupation and social housing, the PRS has increased from housing 9% of households in 1991²¹⁰ to 19% of households in England in 2022/23.²¹¹ In Manchester, this shift is even more dramatic with 32% of households living in the PRS, an increase from 28% in 2011²¹², making it the city's dominant tenure.²¹³ Over 50% of households in the central wards of Deansgate, Piccadilly, and Ancoats and Beswick are in the PRS.²¹⁴

This transformation reflects the concerted political drive since the 1980s to re-boot the PRS at the expense of social renting.²¹⁵ This was embodied in the systematic rolling back of rent and tenancy protections for private tenants under the 1988 Housing Act (England and Wales) alongside financial incentives to attract new investment into the PRS. The Housing Act 1988 introduced Assured Shorthold Tenancies (ASTs), which had minimum fixed terms of between six months, after which the landlord could regain possession of the property without having to give a reason.²¹⁶ This set in motion the deregulation of the PRS by enabling landlords to let properties at market rents and weakening tenants' security of tenure.²¹⁷ Following these changes, the tenancy composition of the PRS radically altered from one mostly made up of regulated lettings to one dominated by deregulated tenancies.²¹⁸ Business-oriented landlordism was encouraged by tax breaks for investors in private rent housing and the creation of buy-to-let mortgage products at much lower rates of interest than previously available for private landlords who agreed to have their properties managed by approved lettings agents. Billions of pounds worth of residential housing-to-let has been acquired by investors since the 1990s.²¹⁹

The large-scale loss of social rented homes through RTB combined with this transformation from housing as a public good to housing as a financial asset, have together led to the extensive expansion of the PRS in the UK and rents rising well beyond incomes. A significant proportion of ex-RTB homes have been sold and converted for private renting – estimated at almost 50% - meaning the government is faced with the increasing housing benefit costs associated with tenants paying market rents in the private sector due to a lack of social rented housing.²²⁰ The lack of social rented housing and the inaccessibility of home ownership for lower-income residents in Manchester leaves them trapped in the insecure and unaffordable PRS where it is difficult to save for their own home.²²¹ There is now an increased risk of homelessness for lower-income households in the PRS, as the end of private rented tenancy is projected to become the top recorded reason for the loss of a settled home in Manchester.²²²

There has also been a high level of growth in the short-term rental market in Manchester, taking homes out of the mainstream market and particularly affecting the city centre and adjacent wards.²²³ Although the pandemic disrupted the short-term rental market in Manchester, it has since surpassed pre-pandemic numbers with around 3,600 Airbnb listings in Manchester in mid-2024.²²⁴ There has been a shift from

residents renting out spare rooms towards a model increasingly dominated by professional landlords renting out entire properties and advertising multiple listings.²²⁵ The financial incentives for short-term rentals are significant as the average rental income from an Airbnb is considerably higher than Manchester's mainstream lettings market and at this time there are also limited regulatory or tax burdens associated with short-term lets.²²⁶

This new wave of housing financialisation creates new pressures on affordability for those wishing to purchase or rent housing in the city-regional centre²²⁷ while generating sizeable capital gains for landlords and homeowners.²²⁸ This further results in social renters, key workers, and those entering professional services being displaced or unable to access housing in central Manchester,²²⁹ which is rapidly gentrifying and increasingly only accessible to those with higher incomes.²³⁰

3.2.4. Renters' rights and accountability

A final element of the housing crisis concerns tenants' ability to take action against landlords. For private tenants in particular, complaints about housing conditions have led to so-called 'revenge evictions' whereby landlords exploit the no-fault repossession route provided by section 21 of the 1988 Housing Act to evict their residents after a six-month tenancy has expired without giving a reason. Homeless charity Shelter estimated that in 2013/14 alone, some 213,000 private tenants were evicted by landlords after asking for repairs to be carried out or after complaining to the local authority about their housing conditions, and over 850,000 private tenants had not asked for repairs or complained for fear of eviction.²³¹ New laws introduced in 2015 to prevent revenge evictions have largely failed as they rely on cash-strapped local authorities to inspect and prosecute private landlords, meaning the vast majority of tenants at risk of revenge eviction do not receive protection.²³²

While social housing tenants with secure tenancies have strong legal protections against eviction, their rights and regulatory protections have also been eroded over time. In 2012, the Coalition government abolished the Tenant Services Authority (TSA), which was set up in 2008 to regulate 'consumer' standards in social housing. Council tenants in particular find it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to take action against disrepair and unsafe housing. This is because local authorities cannot prosecute themselves, which means that the only way in which council tenants can seek to have basic fitness standards enforced, including fire safety, is by bringing their own private prosecution. But this is possible only if the hazards are caused by disrepair or relate to a relevant tenancy condition.²³³ Furthermore, bringing legal claims of any sort has been made far more difficult and daunting for all since April 2013 following cuts to legal aid, which is now available only to tenants who can prove that disrepair poses a serious risk to their health and safety.²³⁴

The fundamental power inequalities between landlords and tenants was violently exposed by the 2017 Grenfell Tower fire that killed 72 people and the death of 2 year old Awaab Ishak in 2020 from a respiratory condition caused by prolonged exposure to mould in his family's social rented home. These preventable deaths caused in strong part by the unaccountable actions of social landlords have led to new laws, regulatory priorities and future legislation designed to strengthen tenants' rights to both timely repair and safer housing. These include the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act 2018, the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 including Awaab's Law, and the Renters Rights Bill. However, time will tell whether these new formal rights will really empower tenants in practice.

4. The case for increasing the delivery of sustainable homes for social rent

This report has provided extensive evidence of both the nature of the housing crisis and its major causes. To address the housing crisis, we need a diverse range of housing tenures that help to foster and sustain mixed income neighbourhoods. However, the reduction in England's social rented housing stock, alongside the financialisation of housing through both the deregulation of the PRS and developer-led reforms to the planning system, is driving up homelessness, waiting lists, and households languishing in temporary accommodation, while PRS landlords and investors reap the profits. In this section, we make the case for a new era of social rented housing in England and Manchester that simultaneously addresses the cost of living and climate crises.

4.1. The need for new social rented housing at scale

Social rented housing has historically played a unique role in the UK housing system as a public service, offering a genuinely affordable, secure, and decent tenure to directly meet social need. Social housing rents have always been below private market levels and are currently set in accordance with the Government's rent policy formula that is linked to local incomes. This makes rents more affordable and rent increases more predictable than in the PRS. On average, social rents are a third (33%) of private market rents – whereas 'affordable rents' are up to 80% of market rents.²³⁵ For most households, social housing is provided on a secure, lifetime tenancy, compared to the standard six-month tenancy in the PRS. Social landlords usually evict as a last resort, whereas eviction is far more frequent and tenancies far less secure in the PRS. Social housing is also by far the most decent tenure in relation to housing fitness standards and health and safety due to stronger regulation and ongoing investment since the early 2000s under the Decent Homes programme.

The lack of social rental housing, combined with inaccessible home ownership, high and rising PRS rents, inadequate welfare support and low wages, fuels poverty, compounds health inequalities, and drives-up costs in the health and social care sector. Housing is now established as an important social determinant of health and well-being.²³⁶ **The 2021 Census provided clear evidence that single parents, racialised minorities and disabled households continue to be disproportionately impacted by the increasing unaffordability, insecurity and lack of decent housing.** The Covid-19 pandemic underscored the issue of poor quality and unaffordable housing across Greater Manchester as those living in overcrowded housing experienced higher rates of infection and mortality.²³⁷ **Those who spend the most time at home, such as people with disabilities, older people, children and caregivers (who are predominantly women) are the most vulnerable to the physical and mental harm caused by poorly insulated and damp homes.**²³⁸ Women have lower wages on average than men and are disadvantaged in a system where access to housing is primarily determined through the market.²³⁹ Women carers, single mums, and single women in general are overrepresented in poor housing circumstances.²⁴⁰ **Children are also disproportionately affected by the shortage of social rent homes, with 1 in 5 living in overcrowded, unaffordable or unsuitable homes,** making up almost a third of people in need of social rented housing in England.²⁴¹

A greater proportion of more vulnerable groups live in the social rented sector compared to other tenures in England, which reflects needs-based allocation policy: people aged 65 or over; lone parent households

with dependent children; households with at least one member with a long-term illness or disability; and those within the lowest income quintile make up a high proportion of those in social rented housing.²⁴² The shortage of social rented housing also has a significant impact on those from minoritised ethnic communities, who are the most likely of all ethnic groups to live in social rent housing.²⁴³ Social rented housing is also a critical source of support for people fleeing domestic abuse, rough sleepers, those with drug and alcohol dependencies, vulnerable ex-service personnel and ex-offenders.²⁴⁴

Moreover, those who experience multiple exclusions are often unable to engage with the social rented housing system such as refugees, Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, those with learning disabilities, and entrenched rough sleepers to name but a few. Refugees, particularly those arriving through an asylum-pathway, are increasingly finding themselves homeless and precariously housed.²⁴⁵ Research has demonstrated that this has worsened over the last 20 years as the supply of social rented housing has diminished in dispersal areas and access to social rented housing has become more restrictive.²⁴⁶ This means refugees are often inappropriately housed, live in poor-quality PRS, reside in Temporary Accommodation for lengthy periods and move between friends, precarious housing and street homelessness. The recent upturn in the speed of asylum decisions have meant that many refugees are exiting the asylum process at a higher rate but with a lack of viable accommodation options in which to reside.^{247 248}

Social rented homes are needed across Manchester but are particularly critical in areas where rents have significantly increased, such as areas within and immediately bordering the City Centre, and South Manchester. They are also **particularly needed in communities with high numbers of households with caring responsibilities, people with disabilities, long-term conditions and children with special educational needs**. This is why access to transparent local area data on need is so important. It is not enough to look at an area and decide that because it already has high levels of housing for social rent compared to other areas, it does not need any more. In areas experiencing multiple disadvantage, people depend on intergenerational and wider family support networks for a range of caring responsibilities and rely on families and communities being able to maintain close social and solidarity networks for these purposes.²⁴⁹ Such families are also less able to shoulder high transport costs of travelling into the city centre from more remote areas for work in retail, transport, and hospitality. To address entrenched socio-economic, health, and spatial inequalities in the city, it is critical to analyse particular needs within particular areas and assess needs for social rent delivery in response.

4.2. The economic benefits of building new social housing

Increasing the delivery of good quality social rent homes – which includes homes provided by local authorities, associations, cooperatives, and community land trusts – while ending the ongoing privatisation of the existing social rented stock is not only a rights-based imperative, but also creates economic value.

Analysis by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR), commissioned by Shelter and the National Housing Federation (NHF), shows that investment in social housing is an economic multiplier, with significant long-term benefits. CEBR estimates that building 90,000 social rented homes each year over ten years would yield £3.50 in economic benefits for every £1 spent, a net economic benefit of £51.2 billion, and within 11 years would have paid back in full the cost to government of building it.²⁵⁰ This includes: £48.2 billion in direct and indirect economic activity through construction and housing management and the support of 350,000 jobs in construction and supply chains; £7 billion over 30 years

in tax revenue and fiscal savings from reduced welfare dependency and improved workforce participation; and £5.2 billion in NHS savings by reducing housing-related illnesses and improving mental health outcomes. Investing in social housing also acts as an economic stabiliser, ensuring the construction sector remains resilient during downturns.²⁵¹ These benefits will be even greater if the value of better insulated homes and the retrofit of existing stock, including bringing empty homes back into use, is factored in. Stable housing also increases productivity by allowing workers to stay close to employment hubs, reducing commuting costs and boosting economic activity.

In contrast, **failure to invest in social housing places further strain on the public purse.** In this regard, the Right to Buy has become an expensive and restrictive policy choice. Over 2 million people have purchased their home under RTB, but as discounts on properties are only available once, homeownership has been expanded but not sustained.²⁵² Although more than £58 billion in capital receipts have been generated for the government²⁵³, **the government currently spends four times more on housing benefit for private tenants than on subsidies to build new homes through the Affordable Homes Programme.**²⁵⁴ The UK currently spends £2.3 billion annually on temporary accommodation²⁵⁵, with local authority spending on homelessness services more than doubling since 2010/11.²⁵⁶ Local authority budgets, which have been eroded over a decade of austerity, are increasingly having to cover some of the shortfall between housing benefit and private rents in temporary accommodation from their general fund or reserves, especially in areas reliant on expensive nightly rate accommodation.²⁵⁷ **In Manchester, where at least 81.9% of temporarily housed homeless households are in the PRS, the gross cost of PRS accommodation increased by 557% between 2017/18 and 2021-22 (from £2.93m to £19.29m).**²⁵⁸ Without intervention, these costs will continue to rise.

Manchester City Council acknowledges that increased delivery of affordable housing is the most effective way to meet the growing demand for temporary accommodation.²⁵⁹ Social rented accommodation offers a more cost-effective and higher quality form of temporary provision for those experiencing homelessness, reducing the suffering of those having to live in TA for extended periods of time, while also achieving significant cost savings for local authorities and central government.²⁶⁰ Given adequate welfare support and regulation, different affordable rental and home ownership products can help households who do not qualify for social rent and cannot afford to buy outright, and therefore cannot get a home through other tenures.

4.3. Decent and sustainable homes

Building new social rented housing at scale will significantly address the housing crisis. **But these new homes must also address the climate and cost of living crises.** Given that existing residential buildings in the UK account for over 30% of energy consumption and a fifth of greenhouse gas emissions²⁶¹, rapid and radical action to decarbonise our housing stock is essential. The majority of UK homes (85%) are reliant on gas for energy. Therefore, decarbonising housing alongside decarbonising energy supply will be critical to meeting the UK's commitment to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050.²⁶² It is also necessary to transition our energy system away from fossil fuels as confirmed by the latest pathway published by the Committee on Climate Change as part of the 7th carbon budget report.²⁶³ The UK government's new target to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions by at least 81% on 1990 levels is, therefore, an important and welcome policy shift. The government has also recognised that the near elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from UK buildings is imperative for meeting these targets.²⁶⁴

Retrofitting existing social housing will help to reduce energy bills and increase resilience for existing

communities, and this has been part of the Government's Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund objective, which estimates that over £5 million is being saved in energy bills post building improvements.²⁶⁵ It has committed to upgrading as many social rent homes as possible to meet an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C by 2035, with retrofit for energy efficiency a core component.²⁶⁶ However, recent research suggests that efforts to adapt the UK's existing housing stock are not progressing fast enough.²⁶⁷

The NPPF introduced a presumption in favour of sustainable development which means that development which is "sustainable" should be approved without delay, however **the current framework does not secure sufficient requirements on local authorities to promote increased levels of ecologically sustainable homes for social rent.** The Written Ministerial Statement on Local Energy Efficiency Standards Update published in December 2023, and unchanged since then, makes it difficult for local planning authorities to promote energy use intensity policy approaches.²⁶⁸ Instead, it advises that Planning Inspectors should reject policies proposed by local planning authorities at the examination of local plans that 'go beyond current building regulations' unless they are 'well-reasoned' and 'robustly costed' and do not affect viability, housing supply, and that the requirement is expressed as an uplift on building regulations. However, building regulations and the Future Homes Standard are fundamentally flawed.²⁶⁹

The Future Homes Standard (FHS)²⁷⁰ previously manifested as the Code for Sustainable Homes (CSH). The original vision was to have a ten-year period from 2006 to 2016 to incrementally increase standards with the final code level 6 being the highest standard. However, this programme was cancelled by the Conservative government, and subsequent consultations on the Future Homes Standard to implement higher standards continue to be delayed, with no prospect of this being implemented before late 2025. The issues with the approach suggested in the written ministerial statement, relying on the dwelling's 'Target Emissions Rate' (TER) and the calculation method, the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP), is that both the metric and the method of calculation contain serious flaws. The first is that TER does not count the unregulated energy i.e. the energy used by all the appliances in the building; the second is that Part L of building regulations underestimates actual energy use in significant ways; and thirdly, the 'uplift' in building regulations mooted for 2025 is actually no change on the 2021 standards for insulation, and relies on grid decarbonisation and not use efficiency or on-site technology to be 'zero carbon ready'.²⁷¹

A leading group of local authorities, developers and architects have worked together to develop the alternative 'LETI' approach.²⁷² Instead of using the Target Emissions Rate (TER) approach of the FHS (using a model to predict performance) this uses the Energy Unit Intensity (EUI) approach which measures the performance of the actual build, and the energy uses within the building. This is a 'fabric first' approach which demands that the building achieves a very high performance in terms of efficiency (i.e. using insulation, glazing and air tightness to minimise space heating demand to a specific maximum level) and overall, an energy use intensity of 35 kWh. There is also the Passivhaus standard and measuring tools that are designed to transform construction standards.²⁷³ In addition, the LETI approach requires the installation of (ideally) on-site renewables to take care of the un-regulated electricity uses e.g. the appliances inside the building, so that the building functions operationally as 'net zero' emissions when it is occupied. This investment upfront in the functionality of the building enables future residents to be assured of a warm home with much lower bills.

If the Government puts in place an energy use intensity performance metric for assessing the sustainability of homes through building regulation and supportive planning policy, social homes will be fit for purpose. Social housing providers have a key role to play in the development of sustainable construction supply chains to deliver these sustainable new homes as well as in retrofit across other housing tenures and boost our local economies.²⁷⁴ These measures will also create new jobs and livelihoods as part of the green transition – for example the low carbon and renewable energy turnover was calculated as £27.8 billion in 2022 for the UK, with over 180,000 jobs.²⁷⁵

Manchester has made bold moves to declare a Climate Emergency and commit to becoming a zero

carbon city by 2038 along with the wider Greater Manchester region. Each district has been supported in the development of a Local Area Energy Plan (LEAP) which aims to define the extent of the transformation needed in that area.²⁷⁶ The 'Pathways to Healthy Net Zero Housing for Greater Manchester' report states that a combination of heat pumps and cost-effective fabric measures can be used to remove 95% of today's CO2 emissions from existing Greater Manchester housing, requiring an average investment of £10,100 per home at 2019 prices.²⁷⁷ Manchester's LEAP sets out a number of focus areas, one of which is Fabric Retrofit, or improving buildings' insulation and heating efficiency to ensure they will lose less energy and reduce energy demand.²⁷⁸

Manchester's Housing Strategy (2022-32) sets a target to increase the proportion of low and zero-carbon homes in the affordable pipeline from 20%-50% by 2025.²⁷⁹ They estimate the cost of retrofitting to be £18,000-£25,000 per property. The strategy sets out a target for zero carbon retrofit of at least a third of the 68,000 homes managed by Housing Association partners by 2032, and the council have begun to undertake retrofit on their own domestic building stock as funding becomes available. Between 2014/15 and 2022/23, a net total of 3,925 social rent homes have EPCs that have moved from D or below to C or above.²⁸⁰ In August 2023, MCC announced a new investment of £50 million over two years to uplift 2,000 homes of its own homes to Decent Homes Standards. MHPP members also are undertaking programmes of works to ensure that all properties reach EPC C or above by 2030. Stock decency levels are around 1% non-decent and these will be prioritised in any programmes of works.

5. How to increase the supply of sustainable social rented housing: initial policy recommendations

Our evidence-based review of the housing crisis in England through the lens of Manchester has made a clear case for a major and rapid increase in the supply of social rented housing that is also ecologically sustainable. We conclude with a discussion of five urgent changes in national policy direction emerging from the Manchester Social Housing Commission that are essential to make this happen. These will be further developed and refined in the coming months with a particular focus on developing robust proposals for implementation. It is clear that extensive reforms are required to increase regulation and tenant rights within the private rented sector. However, the Commission's remit is to accelerate the delivery of safe, decent, and sustainable homes for social rent, and this is the focus of our recommendations.

5.1. Reinvest in social rent

The government's ambitious target of building 1.5 million homes over the next parliament is not achievable within the current market-based supply model. England has only ever managed to build at such levels when local authorities were also building hundreds of thousands of homes per year during the 1960s. Scaling up housing supply requires scaling up public investment in ecologically sustainable social rented housing. Local authorities and housing associations cannot scale up development based on rental income alone due to the growing mismatch between social rent levels and the high and rising costs of building and buying land. The prioritisation of social rent delivery for the remainder of the existing Affordable Homes Programme and the Budget's £500 million top-up is a welcome first step, but a drop

in the ocean compared to the estimated £11.8bn investment required to support the delivery of 90,000 social rented homes a year.²⁸¹

What is needed is a long-term public funding settlement on grants and rent-setting to permit cost-effective borrowing by councils and housing associations for large-scale delivery, and reforms to how public borrowing for investment is accounted to enable greater local authority borrowing and cheaper local authority borrowing. As well as more capital investment from government, social rented housing providers need greater certainty about future rent levels, and the social rent-setting formula needs to be reformed to reflect current local housing market conditions and local incomes. Increasing rents without proportionate increases in welfare entitlements and reductions in the cost of living would drive thousands of households into poverty and homelessness – just as it is currently doing in the PRS. Finally, increased investment in the housing association sector must also come with increased scrutiny and accountability for how funds are invested, and increased rights and enforcement capability for tenants and regulators to ensure tenants are housed in safe, secure, and healthy homes. We will be developing further recommendations in this area in future publications.

We urge government to:

- Restore the pre-2010 social housing grant regime and provide a generous long-term funding and rent settlement for social housing providers.
- Allow local authorities, housing associations and community self-builders greater access to cheaper borrowing through the Public Works Loan Board.
- Enable cities like Manchester to deliver large scale housing growth of all tenures on brownfield locations by supporting land supply, site assembly and remediation.
- Tie any public investment to delivering zero carbon standards.
- Scrap the benefit cap and bedroom tax and unfreeze and uprate housing benefit rates for temporary accommodation to prevent homelessness
- Create more stable rental streams to help boost social landlords' investment plans in existing and new stock.

5.2. Reform planning and land supply to prioritise sustainable social rent in affordable housing delivery

The planning system works as a system of consenting development – most planning applications gain consent.²⁸² The issue of housing delivery is generally incorrectly identified as an issue of consent, when it is an issue of market supply (which relies on commercial demand and profitability, as well as supply of materials) and lack of public funding for building new social homes. The problems of relying on the housing market to deliver social rented housing or even affordable housing have been researched and set out by the New Economics Foundation in their 2022 report.²⁸³ However, some structural parts of the existing consenting policy framework, such as the failure to require zero carbon building detailed above, or the failure to require a proportion of locally appropriate social rent from market developments, have contributed to the shortfall in delivery of sustainable social rent homes over the last decade. The planning system has not incentivised the delivery of good quality and genuinely affordable homes²⁸⁴ and developers know that even if they do not meet affordable and social rent housing requirements, local authorities such as MCC who are dependent on them to get things built are not in a position to refuse.²⁸⁵ Efforts to ensure that all new homes are zero carbon face considerable policy barriers with the mandatory Future Homes Standard which has been repeatedly delayed and criticised for not going far enough.²⁸⁶

Meanwhile, attempts by local authorities to use their own planning powers to require better energy performance standards are being discouraged by existing policy as aforementioned.

The only way to promote high percentage social rent in housing development in Manchester is to massively increase public investment and set a national target and minimum requirement for social rent, not just an overall housing target of 1.5 million. **Tougher targets and minimum requirements for social rent in all developments based on local housing needs assessment must be introduced into the National Planning Policy Framework.** Every local authority should be required to set a local target for the number of social rent homes needed in the area, and these should be specified in an updated local plan. The target should be calculated based on the number of people at risk of homelessness, who are already homeless, and the number of households on local social rented housing waitlists (or an estimate of need where there is no waiting list). The government should also amend the definition of 'Affordable housing for rent' to clearly distinguish between Social Rent and other forms of affordable rent; to define these in terms of relationships with incomes, as proposed in the Affordable Housing Commission; and require that provisions are made to ensure the homes remain affordable for future eligible households. Setting a minimum requirement also helps to address viability loopholes and creates a level playing field so that places are not 'traded off' against each other.

The "developer opt-out" on the basis of financial viability should be entirely removed from the NPPF. It has no benefit to the community, merely protecting and bolstering developers' profits, and moreover was introduced by the last Government. In the event that some form of 'viability' policy remains, loopholes should be closed by including a "duty to require" onsite social rent where planning permission is granted. This way, the costs of social rent and other public benefits, specifically health and educational facilities, are embedded in the initial costs and assessments that are turned in when seeking planning permission on sites of 11 homes or more.

A large proportion of the social rented housing that is needed must be built by local authorities themselves and increased scrutiny has been placed on the potential for publicly owned land to improve housing delivery.²⁸⁷ Successive governments have focused on public land disposal since 2011 for building new homes.²⁸⁸ However, data from an Ordnance Survey commissioned to monitor the progress of homes built on the land released through government programmes between 2011 and 2020 shows that of the land sold to developers with scope for 131,000 homes, only 2.6% will be for social rent.²⁸⁹ A key driver of this problem stems from the Land Compensation Act 1961, which ruled that for local authorities to use their compulsory purchase powers - allowing them to pay a fair price for land purchased for the construction of social rent housing in the post-war period - they now had to pay not just for the land's existing value but its potential value if used for something much more profitable than social rent housing.²⁹⁰

This issue of public land disposal feeding into rather than addressing the housing crisis has proven to be acute in central Manchester, a city with historically high levels of public land ownership.²⁹¹ Given the issues surrounding land costs discussed above, public land could provide a significant contribution to increasing social rent housing delivery.²⁹² GMHP has therefore called for local authorities and public sector agencies across GM to allocate land to Registered providers for affordable housing development.²⁹³

We urge government to:

- Reform the viability percentages in the planning practice guidance so that developers cannot unfairly opt-out of making contributions for homes for social rent.
- Introduce tougher targets and minimum requirements for social rent in all developments based on local housing needs assessments that factor in homelessness and actual levels of need for social rent.
- Allow local plans to go beyond building regulations in requiring better energy standards and

ecological design so that ecologically sustainable social homes are affordable for low-income households such as setting targets for energy-based metrics.

- Amend the definition of 'Affordable Housing for Rent' in planning policy to clearly distinguish between Social Rent and other forms of affordable rent and define these in relation to incomes.

5.3. Rethink the Right to Buy

The RTB is the largest contributor to the loss of social housing with over 2 million social homes sold and only 2% replaced, and research has shown that councils are unable to build for fear of new homes being sold.²⁹⁴ Too many social homes have been lost in Manchester through the RTB that have not been replaced and have ended up in the PRS. This represents a triple loss: of affordable and secure social rented housing; of vital revenue streams for social landlords to repair and invest in new homes; and by increasing public subsidies for private landlords that could be spent on social rented housing. RTB was abolished in Scotland in 2016 and in Wales in 2019, but in England, the policy has been periodically revived and relaunched.²⁹⁵ RTB thus continues to undermine social rented housing provision by local authorities, and by Housing Associations that own former council homes where tenants have the right to acquire them.²⁹⁶

We therefore welcome the government's reduction of RTB discounts back to their pre-2012 levels, and to allow councils to retain and more flexibly use 100% of the capital receipts. However, the time limit on spending RTB receipts has not been lifted. Reinvesting receipts within five years is increasingly challenging, while allowing local authorities to retain these receipts indefinitely would contribute to assuring future development and reduce the risks of both the finances of future schemes and the non-delivery of homes.²⁹⁷ We note research commissioned by Shelter earlier in 2024, which showed that completely **suspending RTB for all new and existing social homes would save an estimated 10,000 council-owned homes per year, while continuing RTB but allowing councils to use 100% of the sales receipts to replace the social homes would only save 1,000 social homes a year.**²⁹⁸ While smaller discounts will change this analysis, the long waiting lists and high numbers of households in temporary accommodation mean we cannot afford to lose further social rented homes in Manchester at this time.

We urge government to:

- Suspend the RTB/Right to Acquire for existing and new tenants in England with immediate effect and legislate to permanently abolish it.
- Look at alternative policy solutions that can support lower income households into home ownership beyond the current Shared Ownership provision and ensure those homes remain affordable in perpetuity.

5.4. Retrofit empty homes for sustainable social rent

While new supply dominates the policy focus, we must not forget the large number of long-term empty homes that could be brought back into use as social rented housing and retrofitted to high energy standards. Across England there are 261,474 homes that have been empty for six months or longer (Oct 2023), of which 1,875 are in Manchester.²⁹⁹ Retrofitting these homes back into use as social rent

will both help to tackle the human and financial costs of lengthening waiting lists and the temporary accommodation crisis and directly address the cost of living crisis through lowering household bills.³⁰⁰ However, there are currently major legal and financial barriers in the way.

We urge government to:

- Implement Shelter's 10-city plan³⁰¹ 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, and ring fencing all second home and empty home premiums for acquiring empty homes.
- Abolish VAT on refurbishment to incentivise green retrofitting and refurbishment of existing stock.

5.5. Embed community voice and ownership into the planning system

Communities and their locally elected representatives should have stronger statutory powers within the planning system to properly shape the investment decisions that are made about their own neighbourhoods, towns, and cities to ensure local development is more equitable, democratic, and reflects the needs of present and future generations. There is a wealth of literature on the importance of public participation in delivering better outcomes for people and places, and this was reflected in the last Labour Government's guidance 'Community Involvement in Planning: The Government's Objectives'.³⁰² Primary legislation brought forward in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 enshrined the public right to be heard in plan examinations on local plans. In sharp contrast, the recently published Planning and Infrastructure Bill states the opposite – that there is no right to be heard in strategic development strategies (SDS). This may change with the passage of the Bill, but it cannot be clearer that the protection of the right to be heard is being uprooted rather than embedded.

The UK is a signatory to the Aarhus Convention which states under Article 7 that each party "Each Party shall make appropriate practical and/or other provisions for the public to participate during the preparation of plans and programmes relating to the environment, within a transparent and fair framework, having provided the necessary information to the public".³⁰³ European law that codifies public participation in environmental decision-making, such as Environmental Impact Assessment and Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes have been adopted into UK law. Our spatial planning system rests on these principles of public participation and access to information, and constant reform since 2011 in England has resulted in much less clarity and legal basis than before.³⁰⁴

We urge government to:

- Implement New Local's recommendations that models such as neighbourhood planning and community-led development are written into local and national policy and given longer-term funding certainty alongside the Affordable Homes Programme.
- Revise the National Planning Policy Framework to require deeper community involvement across the development process, including a presumption in favour of consent for community-led schemes.
- Use forthcoming English Devolution legislation and the Planning and Infrastructure Bill as an opportunity to improve community rights to more power and participation in planning and regeneration.

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The Manchester Social Housing Commission is convened by a coalition of voluntary and community sector organisations called Social Homes for Manchester. Coalition steering group members provide the Secretariat for the Commission and provide support to ensure meaningful and substantive community participation in the process.

Enquiries about 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

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