

# The Citizens' Summit on the Housing Emergency

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Prepared for: Shelter



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# Executive Summary

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Shelter is a national housing and homelessness charity that aims to defend people's right to a safe home. As well as offering advice and legal support, Shelter carries out research and policy work to understand people's housing problems and possible solutions. The charity also runs campaigns, both nationally and in communities, to make these solutions a reality.

Through its policy work Shelter has identified four key causes for what it terms England's 'housing emergency': the lack of social housing, insecure and unaffordable private rental homes, a lack of effective regulation of social and private landlords and a lack of rights. Shelter sees government action as central to solving the housing emergency. For Shelter, the next general election (which must take place by January 2025) is therefore a key opportunity to make change happen. Shelter wanted to work closely with people with lived experiences of the housing emergency to develop its manifesto for the general election campaign.

To inform the development of its manifesto Shelter commissioned NatCen's Centre for Deliberative Research (CDR) to deliver a citizens' summit on the housing emergency. The summit had two main objectives:

- 1) **To identify an agreed set of principles to guide Shelter's general election campaign.** These principles set out a vision for a future where there is no housing emergency.
- 2) **To understand which policy solutions people with lived experience of the housing emergency want prioritised in Shelter's manifesto.** The proposed solutions were a combination of Shelter's existing solutions and solutions suggested by participants during the summit.

The two objectives work in tandem, with the principles demonstrating the overarching values and vision that participants want to guide housing policy, and the proposed policy solutions offering ways forward for realising that vision.

The solutions that participants were asked to prioritise were a combination of Shelter's existing policy options and further options suggested by participants during the summit. Shelter developed the policy solutions list by combining those presented by Shelter in session two with those suggested by participants in the same session. These were then collated by Shelter under four main solution clusters, which had more specific solutions within them.

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The summit ran for fifteen hours across four sessions, three online and one face-to-face, between the 25<sup>th</sup> May and 17<sup>th</sup> June 2023. 75 people took part overall, but not everyone attended every session<sup>1</sup>; 58 of those attended all four sessions and there were 66 people who participated in the final workshop. The summit was designed around the core principles of deliberation, providing people with the time, information, and conditions to engage with diverse viewpoints and to come to informed opinions about the housing emergency and what can be done to fix it.

All participants lived in either a social or privately rented home or temporary accommodation and had recent lived experience of the housing emergency (defined by Shelter as experience of at least one of the following issues: unaffordability of rent, homelessness, poor conditions, discrimination in housing, and insecure tenancies). The final sample reflected a range of demographics from across England and all participants lived in, or near to, Shelter's community hub areas.<sup>2</sup>

The first three sessions took place online and lasted three hours each. In these sessions, participants had the opportunity to share their own experiences of the housing emergency, as well as hear evidence from Shelter and other expert speakers on the causes, solutions, and barriers to solving it. The final session was a longer hybrid session, lasting five and-a-half hours, with the majority of participants meeting face-to-face in Birmingham, and some participants joining online. In this final session, participants were asked to review and agree a set of principles that would guide Shelter's manifesto. These principles were developed by NatCen based on analysis of participants' responses to a series of visioning exercises in previous sessions. They were also asked to prioritise what specific policy solutions should be included in Shelter's manifesto from a list of options that included both those developed by Shelter, and suggestions from participants in previous sessions.

This report draws upon data captured via transcripts of participant discussions, facilitator notes, participant contributions to a digital whiteboard tool, participant voting forms and a survey carried out by participants online after the first session. Our analysis sought to:

- Describe participants' experiences of the housing emergency and their views on its causes.
- Outline the final agreed principles that would guide Shelter's manifesto and participants' reasons for valuing these.
- Report participants' preferred policy solutions for responding to the housing emergency and the reasons for prioritising these options.

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<sup>1</sup> This is partly due to medical emergencies or appointments that participants had, and partly due to some participants joining the research later in the process (this is detailed further below in the sampling and recruitment section).

<sup>2</sup> These are: Birmingham, Bristol, Devon – Plymouth, Dorset – Bournemouth, Lancashire – Blackburn, London, Greater Manchester, Merseyside – Liverpool, Norfolk – Norwich, North East – Newcastle, Sheffield.

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## Key findings

### Experiences of the housing emergency

The summit began with Shelter presenting evidence on the nature and scale of the housing emergency, before participants moved to breakout discussions to discuss their own views and experiences of housing issues. People's testimonies highlighted the complex ways different housing issues intersect and interact with other parts of their lives. For example, those in poor living conditions often reported problems with landlord behaviour as well as impacts on their mental, physical, and financial well-being. Underpinning many of these experiences was a perceived power imbalance between tenants and landlords, which left participants feeling insecure in their homes and often powerless to improve their circumstances.

After discussing their experiences, participants shared what they viewed as the causes of the housing emergency. At a systemic level, participants identified the lack of access to truly affordable and secure housing, the lack of regulation to address the power dynamic between tenants and landlords, and the lack of political will amongst the government to prioritise housing.

Alongside identifying these causes, participants also explained what they felt was needed to overcome, in particular, the sense of powerlessness the housing emergency creates. They felt that empowering tenants was important, for example through the provision of accessible and effective information, advice, and resources to enable them greater choice and control in improving their circumstances.

### Principles

Following sessions where Shelter and other experts presented material on the causes, barriers, and possible solutions to the housing emergency, participants were asked in session three to describe their vision for a future where there is no longer a housing emergency. Ahead of the final summit session, NatGen had analysed the responses to this exercise and drafted a set of principles that captured participants' views. This resulted in the following:

1. A home is a human right.
2. Home is the foundation of a secure society.
3. Home is fundamental to health and wellbeing.
4. Strengthen regulation, accountability, and enforcement.
5. Listen to communities and act!

In the final session, participants broadly agreed that these principles reflected their views on what values should guide Shelter's manifesto. The first three principles resonated with people's experiences of insecure housing by highlighting the importance of a secure home in underpinning all other aspects of their lives. Principles four and five spoke to the powerlessness that participants felt, and the importance of empowering tenants in turn.

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Participants also discussed the key definitions that underpin these principles, namely, 'basic needs', 'home' and 'secure'. Participants agreed that guaranteeing basic needs should drive housing policy, but there was some discussion between participants around what needs are 'basic' and what are 'non-essential'. 'Home' was consistently understood as not just the place people lived, but its proximity to support networks that enable them to feel secure. A 'secure' home was consistently understood as long-term and the basis of good health and wellbeing, with some participants also linking it to safety in the local area.

## Policy solutions

In the final session of the summit, Shelter presented participants with 24 different possible policy solutions to the housing emergency. From this list, participants were asked to prioritise three as 'must have' and three as 'nice to have' that they wanted included in the Shelter manifesto. All 24 solutions received some votes, which suggests participants believed there was a range of important responses to the complexity of the problems they were aimed at addressing. The solutions with the most 'must have' votes all spoke to the need to guarantee secure, truly affordable housing for all (not surprisingly reflecting the agreed principles) as well as to address the power imbalance expressed by participants at the start of the summit.

Two policy solutions, however, emerged as clear priorities: investing in building new social homes and introducing rent increase caps. Investing in building social homes was seen to address the systemic issue of supply through a sustainable, long-term solution that provides secure homes to people in housing need. Participants also interpreted this option as making truly affordable housing available to a wide range of people. Introducing rent increase caps were seen as an immediate solution to the issue of affordability, while working within the private housing market. Our analysis identified four ideas shaping people's priorities here. These build upon the agreed principles and shared experiences:

- **The right to a permanent, truly affordable home:** Participants prioritised solutions that they felt guaranteed people access to secure and permanent homes (by 'affordable' participants meant accessible to those on low incomes, rather than specifically access to homes provided under the government's 'Affordable Homes Programme').
- **Addressing power dynamics:** Other solutions were selected because they were seen to tackle power dynamics and empower tenants, reflecting the lived experience of many participants.
- **Helping those most in need or most harmed by the housing emergency:** Some participants selected solutions because they were seen to guarantee homes for those worst affected by the housing emergency, specifically those experiencing homelessness or a risk of this, and those facing discrimination, particularly on the basis of race.



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- **Timescales:** Participants wanted a focus on solutions that address systemic issues in the long-term, responding to these issues in ways that offered genuinely sustainable solutions. Shorter-term solutions were a focus for participants when these addressed immediate issues and concerns.

The summit has generated both principles and priorities that speak to people's experiences of the housing emergency, what they want to underpin Shelter's manifesto, and what they believe are the specific solutions to the housing emergency.

*"I think it's good to have the voice of people that have lived through experiences [of the housing emergency] and everyone on this table has different experiences. However, they're all relevant to what may appear in the manifesto. So, the more people and different types of people that can get involved I think the better understanding higher up, because there's no point them creating things without actual real lived experiences."*

*– Birmingham participant*

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# 1. Introduction

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To inform their upcoming general election campaign manifesto, Shelter commissioned NatCen's Centre for Deliberative Research (CDR) to deliver a citizens' summit on the housing emergency. The summit had two main objectives:

- 1) **To identify an agreed set of principles to guide Shelter's general election campaign.** These principles set out a vision for a future where there is no housing emergency.
- 2) **To understand which policy solutions people with lived experience of the housing emergency want prioritised in Shelter's manifesto.** The proposed solutions were a combination of Shelter's existing solutions and solutions suggested by participants during the summit.

The two objectives work in tandem, with the principles demonstrating the overarching values and vision that participants want to guide housing policy, and the proposed policy solutions offering ways forward for realising that vision. The summit ran for fifteen hours across four sessions, three online and one face-to-face, between 25<sup>th</sup> May and 17<sup>th</sup> June 2023. 75 people took part overall but not everyone attended every session; 58 of those attended all four sessions and there were 66 people participating in the final workshop.

The summit took place in the middle of a cost-of-living crisis in the UK, which was referenced by participants throughout the discussions with many in particular struggling to afford increased rents. In the twelve months to July 2023, rents in England rose at highest level since comparable records began in 2006.<sup>3</sup> This came amidst rising heating and food costs, with the cost of goods rising by almost 10% in the year before February 2023 according to the consumer price index.<sup>4</sup>

There were also important developments within housing policy before and during the deliberations. The Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023 was completing its passage through Parliament at the time of the deliberations and received Royal Assent on 20 July 2023. This includes new standards, proactive regulation of registered social landlords and 'Awaab's Law', which will require landlords to respond to damp and mould within clear timeframes. Awaab Ishak was a two-year-old boy from Rochdale who died from a respiratory condition in December 2020, following exposure to mould in his home that was part of the housing society, Rochdale Boroughwide Housing.<sup>5</sup> The Renters (Reform) Bill 2023, was introduced to Parliament on 17 May, but yet to be fully debated and passed into law at the time of writing. This will abolish no-fault eviction, enable better

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<sup>3</sup> [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

<sup>4</sup> [Consumer price inflation, UK - Office for National Statistics](https://www.ons.gov.uk)

<sup>5</sup> McCann, P., Horsburgh, L. 'Awaab Ishak: Mould in Rochdale flat caused boy's death, coroner rules'. BBC. 2022. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-63635721>

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regulation of private landlords, as well as outlaw discrimination in letting. The Government was also continuing to consult on reviewing housing standards during the period of the deliberations and were developing guidance for social and private landlords on damp and mould in relation to Awaab's Law.

## **1.1 Method**

### **1.1.1 Core principles**

Deliberative research methods provide participants with the time, information and discursive conditions needed to engage in depth with a topic and promote the exchange of views and opinions across different groups. This contrasts with methods such as focus groups, which provide insight only into people's momentary, 'top of mind' views. In contrast, deliberation yields insights into people's considered views on complex, and value-driven issues that often require trade-offs for resolution. Deliberative methods also support people to make decisions or identify shared principles – approaches such as Citizen's Juries<sup>6</sup> or Citizen's Assemblies<sup>7</sup> conclude with these outcomes.

Deliberative research typically takes place over extended periods such as full day workshops or multiple workshops. Material on a given topic is provided so that all participants have access to the same information to inform their views. This information is selected to ensure it is accurate and reflects a spectrum of evidence on a given topic. Experts are often employed to deliver the information and they are asked to be transparent about where their information comes from, and what organisation they represent.

Trained facilitators support participants to debate and deliberate this information to form a view or make decisions on what is usually a complicated policy issue.

### **1.1.2 Our approach**

This research drew upon these core principles to deliver a process that supported citizens to consider a range of evidence on the housing emergency across multiple workshop sessions. This concluded with participants identifying shared principles and making decisions on policy solutions that should inform Shelter's manifesto.

The sessions included a combination of time in plenary where evidence was shared with all participants to ensure they all received the same information, and small breakout rooms of 6-8 people where participants discussed their views in more detail. Breakout rooms were organised so that people from the same 9 locations – reflecting Shelter's Community Hubs - deliberated together, to encourage discussion of local factors relating to the housing emergency, although in some instances participants joined groups for participants from a mixture of locations (see the appendices for a breakdown of the sample across locations). Participants stayed in the same

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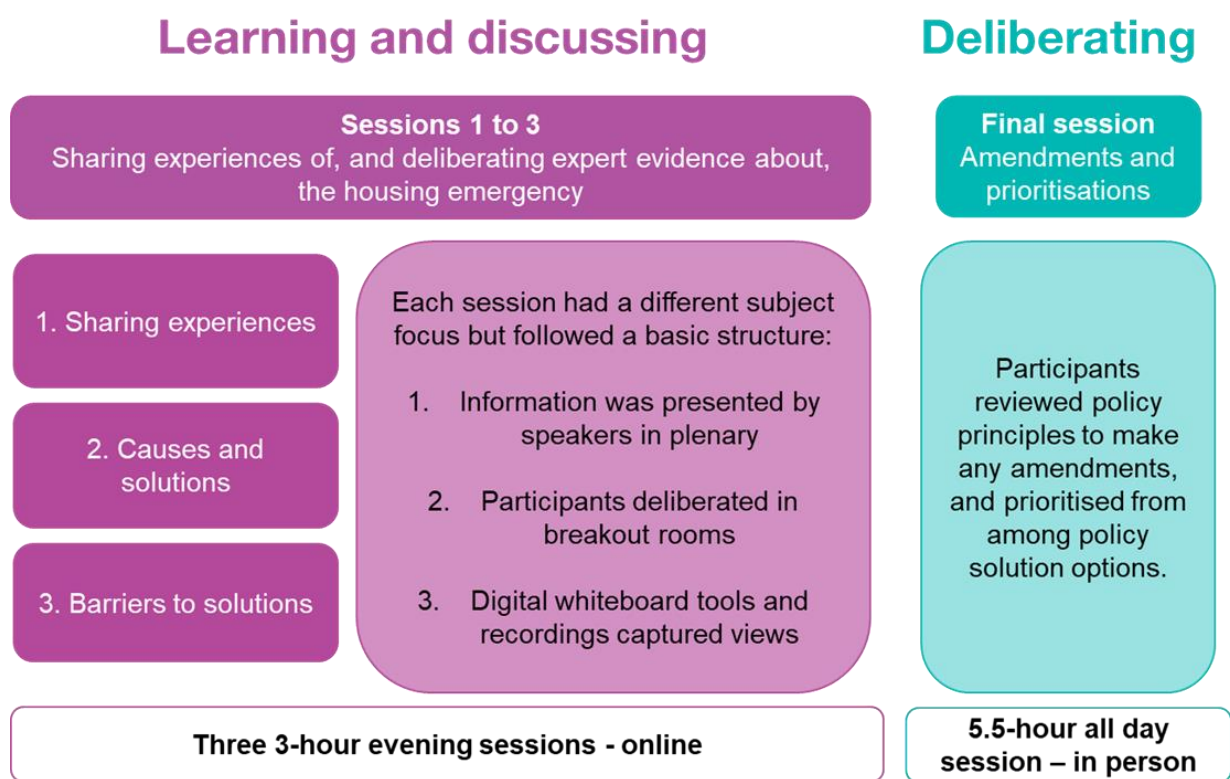
<sup>6</sup> Participedia. 'Citizens' Jury'. Participedia. Available at: [participedia.net/method/155](https://participedia.net/method/155)

<sup>7</sup> Involve. 'Citizens' Assembly'. Involve. Available at: [Citizens' Assembly | involve.org.uk](https://involve.org.uk/citizens-assembly)

groups throughout the summit in order to build rapport and to enable NatCen to analyse any location-based differences if and where these were present.

All sessions were led by NatCen with Shelter providing information and evidence about the housing emergency drawn from their internal research and policy teams, along with external speakers in the third session. Breakout rooms were facilitated by NatCen researchers and Shelter staff. Prior to the first session NatCen had delivered training in deliberative facilitation to these staff to ensure they were supported to run the breakout rooms. In total 11 Shelter staff facilitated across the summit.

As Figure 1. below illustrates, the summit brought together people with lived experience of the housing emergency from across England to engage in a series of three weekday evening workshops. They then came together in a full day of deliberation to agree a set of principles and prioritise the policies which they believe Shelter should include in their national manifesto.



**Figure 1.** The Summit Process

In the first session, NatCen introduced participants to the research and summit process. Shelter then introduced the aims of the process before participants moved through successive plenary and breakout room discussions. These discussions were aimed at first giving participants room to share their experiences of, and then share their perceptions on, the causes of the housing emergency.

In between sessions one and two, NatCen analysed participants' views on causes of the housing emergency and collected clarification questions where participants felt they may benefit from more information from Shelter. The second session started with NatCen presenting back to participants key themes on their views on the most significant causes of housing emergency before Shelter presented evidence on the causes of, and possible

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policy responses to, the housing emergency. These presentations were interspersed with opportunities for participants to discuss what they had heard in their breakout rooms, log clarification questions they had for Shelter regarding the evidence, raise additional policy ideas, and share initial views on what they felt was the top priority policy responses for solving the housing emergency.

The third session saw participants consider what barriers possible policy solutions to the housing emergency face, as well as ways these can be overcome. To support this discussion participants heard evidence from four different experts with knowledge of the barriers:

- Alex Marsh, Professor of Public Policy, University of Bristol, presented the systemic barriers to addressing the housing emergency.
- John Bibby, Principal Housing Strategy Officer, presented the barriers faced by local government in addressing the housing emergency.
- Sally Causer, Executive Director, Southwark Law Centre, presented the barriers faced by people in housing need in influencing local planning decisions on housing, as well as the barriers they face in dealing with their housing problems.
- Shaan Bhangal, Public Affairs Officer, Shelter, presented the political barriers to addressing the housing emergency.

After hearing these perspectives, participants were given the opportunity to ask the panellists questions before discussing their views in breakout rooms. At the end of the session participants were asked to respond to visioning questions on the housing emergency such as *'the change I most want to see is...'* After the session NatCen analysed these responses and used them to create a draft set of principles to present to participants. In the final session participants reviewed these principles to confirm they captured the values they wanted to guide Shelter's national manifesto.

In the second half of the fourth session participants were asked to prioritise policy solutions that deliver these agreed principles. Participants were presented with a list of 24 policy solutions that had been developed by Shelter. 14 of these solutions were pre-existing Shelter policy ideas, while 10 were developed by Shelter during the summit process in response to suggestions from participants in session two. Participants were asked to prioritise three 'must have' and three 'nice to have' solutions from this list for inclusion in Shelter's manifesto. Shelter representatives were on hand during the final session to answer clarifying questions on the policy solutions.

At the end of the summit Shelter presented more information about its general election campaign and what opportunities there would be for getting involved. The summit concluded with a discussion about how people with lived experience of the housing emergency could campaign with Shelter, any barriers to engagement they might face, and space for participants to express an interest in engaging further in Shelter's campaigning.

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To support the inclusion of as many participants as possible, the final summit session was a hybrid online and face-to-face session. In total, 47 attended a face-to-face session in Birmingham and 19 joined online. Both sessions covered the same information and exercises. The online option was introduced to support the inclusion of participants who were unable to make the journey to Birmingham to take part face-to-face.

Alongside the main summit, a small number of participants from the South West attended a condensed version of the summit as they had not been recruited until after the sessions had begun. They attended one online learning session where they were introduced to key facts about the housing emergency and given the opportunity to share their experiences of housing issues before being introduced to Shelter's policy solutions.

## 1.2 Sampling and recruitment

In total, 75 people took part in the summit, 66 attended the final session, and 58 attended all four sessions. A full breakdown of the achieved sample is provided in the appendices.

An initial sample plan was agreed with Shelter that aimed to recruit 80-100 participants across the following criteria:

- Participants from each of Shelter's community hubs should be represented in the sample.
- Participants should have experienced at least one housing problem in the last three years.<sup>8</sup>
- All participants had to be renting a private or social rented home or were experiencing homelessness.
- To align with Shelter's anti-racist values, participants were screened out of the deliberation based on their views towards immigration (further information on this can be found in the report appendices<sup>9</sup>).
- To ensure the final sample reflected the population in England, a mix of demographics were also sought across the sample in terms of gender identity, age, sexuality, disability and long-term illness, residency, ethnicity, social grade, household income, ability to pay rent, household composition, property occupying status, and urban/rural dwelling.

Participants were recruited via an external recruitment agency, Taylor McKenzie.<sup>10</sup> Every participant completed a screening questionnaire to ensure they met the criteria above.

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<sup>8</sup> The list of housing problems in scope was provided by Shelter and specifically covered: not having enough bedrooms/overcrowding; significant mould, condensation, or damp problems; home cannot be warmed in winter; safety hazards e.g., faulty wiring or fire risks; home not structurally sound (i.e., it has significant defects/issues to the walls and/or roof); having to cut back on household essentials, such as food or heating, to pay the rent; worry that they might be evicted; been evicted or sent an eviction notice; experiencing discrimination relating to their housing situation; rough sleeping; living in temporary accommodation.

<sup>9</sup> [https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_and\\_research/policy\\_library/summit\\_on\\_the\\_housing\\_emergency](https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/summit_on_the_housing_emergency)

<sup>10</sup> See: <https://www.taylormckenzie.co.uk/>.

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Shelter supported the recruitment process by promoting the opportunity through its community hubs. This targeted people with lived experience of rough sleeping and living in temporary accommodation in particular. Shelter's community hubs then passed the details of interested participants to Taylor MacKenzie who took them through the screening questionnaire.

In line with Shelter's incentive approach, participants were given £250 in high street shop vouchers for attending all four sessions. NatCen also funded transport to Birmingham for the face-to-face session and provided support to join online sessions through Wi-Fi devices and data costs.

To increase the participation of people from more rural areas and locations a long distance from Birmingham, NatCen provided the option of joining the final session online through a hybrid design. NatCen also offered a condensed online option to three South West participants who joined for the final session a prior introductory session.

Despite these efforts the sample size was smaller than initially sought, but still is in line with guidance on the most frequently employed forms of deliberative processes, which typically range between 16-90 participants depending on more granular design considerations.<sup>11</sup>

Although the summit was not designed to be a representative deliberative process, we believe the sample size guidance remains a useful reference point because it enabled us to ensure a range and diversity of experiences of the housing emergency, in line with good practice for qualitative methods.

### **1.3 Approach to analysis**

Data was captured via transcripts of participant discussions, facilitator notes, participant contributions to a digital whiteboard tool, participant voting forms and a short survey carried out by participants online after the first session.

NatCen used a mix of inductive and deductive coding to analyse the data. Deductive coding is where qualitative data is organised using pre-set categories and researchers look to organise data according to pre-agreed themes such as 'affordability of housing'. Inductive coding is where researchers analyse qualitative data with no pre-set themes but identify themes that emerge from the data. For example, when looking at policy solutions, 'timescale' emerged as a theme because participant discussions included considerations of the need for policy solutions at different durations; more immediate or longer-term solutions.

For each section of this report, analysis occurred as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> OECD. *Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions: Catching the Deliberative Wave*. OECD. 2020. Available at: [Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions : Catching the Deliberative Wave | OECD iLibrary \(oecd-ilibrary.org\)](https://oecd-ilibrary.org/publications/innovative-citizen-participation-and-new-democratic-institutions-catching-the-deliberative-wave)

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- **Experiences:** NatCen inductively coded contributions to a digital whiteboard and transcripts of participants' discussions of their experiences of the housing emergency in the first session using a predefined set of categories of experience. These categories were provided by Shelter and used in the screening questionnaire (see recruitment and sampling section above). Facilitator notes covering participants' perceptions about causes and barriers and a participant survey were deductively coded to draw out understanding of the causes and barriers to the housing emergency.
  - **Principles:** NatCen analysed participants' votes from the final session concerning whether and how to amend the principles that ought to drive Shelter's campaign manifesto, drawing out key themes in how the principles were viewed. These themes informed deductive codes used in the analysis of transcripts of participants' discussions regarding these principles.
  - **Policy solutions:** NatCen analysed participants' votes from the final session concerning which policy solutions they wanted to see Shelter prioritise in their campaign manifesto. The transcripts of participants' discussions of these priorities were then inductively coded to draw out the reasons behind people's votes.

During the analysis process, NatCen reviewed data to see if any attitudes differed between community hub locations. These have been noted in the report where possible, though a finding of the research was that there was consistent convergence across locations when it came to people's experiences and their views towards the principles and policy solutions. This is in part a consequence of research design: participants were primarily asked to consider the housing emergency at the national scale and input to the shaping of a national manifesto. However, it also underlines how much people's experiences of the housing emergency cut across locations.

## 1.4 Interpreting the data

### 1.4.1 Enclave deliberation

This research is an example of 'enclave' deliberation, in which people deliberate with others who share an identity, or who are heterogeneous in many respects but who still share a 'social location' (in this case, experience of the housing emergency), and not with others outside of this group.<sup>12</sup> This contrasts with the 'mini public' approach found in many deliberative processes, in which the participants are intended to represent demographically and potentially attitudinally, a larger cross-section of a population. Recent research points to the value of enclave deliberation for groups marginalised from power and public discourse, which speaks to the

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<sup>12</sup> Karpowitz, C.F., et al. 'Deliberative democracy and inequality: Two cheers for enclave deliberation among the disempowered'. *Politics and Society*. 2009. P. ii. Available at: [Deliberative democracy and inequality: Two cheers for enclave deliberation among the disempowered \(core.ac.uk\)](http://www.core.ac.uk).



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goals of this report's research.<sup>13</sup> However, it is important to note still that the exclusion of wider publics will have shaped the content of the discussions that took place and thus potentially the outcomes of the deliberations (for example, the policy solutions prioritised).

### 1.4.2 Scope of deliberation

The scope of the summit and the information provided is also important to consider when interpreting this report for the way it will have framed participants' deliberations. Shelter communicated to participants that the scope of the deliberations would be the housing emergency, defined in terms of the following categories of housing issues: unaffordability of rent, homelessness, poor conditions, discrimination in housing, and insecure tenancies. Shelter also explained that, while participants' preferred principles and policy solutions would be communicated to its senior leaders, the latter would make the final decision on the content of manifesto. Finally, among the policy solutions considered during the deliberations, Shelter communicated from the outset that investing in building more social housing was a preferred position for the organisation.

### 1.4.3 Inferring reasoning for policy solutions

In chapter four this report details our analysis of participants' reasons for their policy solution priorities; however, it is important to bear in mind certain considerations about these inferences. Given the large number of policy solutions considered by participants, their varying degrees of specificity, and the time available for deliberation, participants did not discuss each policy explicitly. In addition, as explained in chapter four, discussion took place prior to voting so there is limited transcript data on participants' explicit rationale for prioritising specific solutions. Nonetheless, these discussions allowed people to confirm the areas in which they felt policy solutions were needed to address the housing emergency. Therefore, our analysis focusses on identifying over-arching ideas that informed people's views on policy solutions.

## 1.5 Reading the report

The executive summary of this report provides an overview of the key findings of the research, while chapters 2-4 provide further detail on the four areas of data analysed. Chapter two describes participants experiences of the housing emergency, as well as their perceptions of the systemic causes. Chapter three outlines the principles that were agreed in the third session, and why these principles were important to participants. Chapter four reports participants' policy solution priorities and the main themes that explain why they prioritised some solutions over others.

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<sup>13</sup> See: Abudullah, C., et al., 'Affinity Groups, Enclave Deliberation, and Equity'. *Journal of Public Deliberation*. 2016. Available at: [Affinity Groups, Enclave Deliberation, and Equity \(delibdemjournal.org\)](https://delibdemjournal.org/); Kuehl, A.K, et al. 'Using enclave groups to discuss workplaces cultural diversity and community inclusion'. *Human Communication Research*. 2023. Available at: [Using enclave groups to discuss workplace cultural diversity and community inclusion | Human Communication Research | Oxford Academic](https://www.oxfordacademic.com/doi/10.1093/hcr/ckad001)

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# 2. Experiences

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This chapter describes the range of participants' experiences of the housing emergency and how it impacts their lives. It concludes with a summary of participants views of the main systemic causes of the housing emergency.

The chapter draws on transcripts from the first session of the summit where participants were invited to share their individual experiences of the housing emergency in their small groups. This in large part reflected the themes Shelter identifies as forming the housing emergency: unaffordability of rent, homelessness, poor conditions, discrimination in housing, and insecure tenancies. However, our analysis shows an additional theme that came through from participant discussions – poor landlord behaviour. This chapter begins by reporting participants' experiences of each of these different issues with a particular focus on how they impact their lives, and the barriers they face in trying to overcome them.

Towards the end of the first session participants were asked what they thought the main causes of the housing emergency were. These views were captured via facilitator notes, a participant survey, and contributions to an online whiteboard tool. The views recorded here were based on participants own knowledge and lived experience as these discussions were had before Shelter gave evidence on the causes of the housing emergency in session two. The chapter concludes with a summary of three underlying systemic causes that participants identified as both causing the housing emergency and preventing it from being solved.

## 2.1 Key Findings

- Individuals experienced a range of **impacts** from issues related to the housing emergency that were inter-linked. These included negative effects on **mental and physical health, financial wellbeing, and living in a state of constant instability or insecurity exacerbated by the power dynamics they experienced between landlords and tenants.**
- **Barriers to overcoming these issues were related to the limited availability of genuinely affordable rented homes, and a lack of regulation** to ensure properties met required standards of living, and tenants were treated fairly and with respect.
- After identifying barriers, participants discussed what they thought were the **systemic causes of the housing emergency, highlighting challenges of affordability, supply, and regulation.** They also identified a perceived lack of government will to address these causes as a systemic issue.
- Participants wanted to see measures put in place to ensure the **housing system guarantees secure and safe housing for all.** They also emphasised **the need to empower tenants** through the provision of accessible and effective information, advice, and resources.

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## 2.2 Homelessness

Those taking part in the research had lived in a range of emergency and temporary accommodations including hostels, B&Bs, a safe house, and a women's refuge, some of which were supplied through charities.<sup>14</sup> While such accommodation is intended to be a temporary fix, it was often far from 'temporary'. The length of time spent in this accommodation ranged from just over a year to ten years.

Some participants had sofa-surfed or stayed with family or friends and these housing options were mixed in their outcomes for participants. In some cases, people found themselves having to stay for longer than they had expected or even were felt to have become more permanent. In other cases, they had ended for example because the arrangement affected family relationships, or a family member had told them to leave.

*“So, I landed on my mum's doorstep. At first, they said, 'Oh, yes, stay as long as you need.' A few months in, no, you're going to have to start looking for somewhere else. I felt like my whole world had fell through the bottom [...].”*

*– Merseyside participant*

Overall, experiences of living in temporary accommodation were negative. Participants described the challenges of accommodation in unsuitable locations, for example being far from family members or their children's school. In addition, participants described a range of other challenging issues including insufficient space and the property being in a state of disrepair. The challenges and insecurity of living in shared accommodation were also described. Such experiences centred around feeling uncomfortable about the other residents, it being a noisy environment, and illegal or nuisance behaviour or activities that made them feel unsafe, such as drug use, and sex work.

Participants discussed how they felt they had little chance of securing housing because their circumstances were not deemed to meet the threshold required. Specifically, they referred to what they perceived as the ineffective 'points' or 'banding' in local authority social housing schemes, and the criteria for support from certain charities which was seen as hard to meet.

A limited pool of available and appropriate housing was another barrier. High competition for vacant properties between prospective tenants was also raised, and in a rural area in the East of England, one participant explained how this was felt to be exacerbated by properties being used for holiday lets, such as AirBnB.

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<sup>14</sup> A squat was also cited, which is not classed as temporary accommodation but was nevertheless raised in the context of discussing this category of accommodation.

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The uncertainty of where to access support and help also acted as a barrier. One participant described how a homelessness officer had blamed her for the situation she was in and had revealed her whereabouts to a private landlord who had been harassing her.

### 2.3 Poor living conditions

Participants described the impact that poor living conditions had on their physical and mental health. Mould and damp were reported to have caused structural damage, posed a safety hazard, and had a negative impact on mental and physical health and wellbeing. This included colds, flu, and chest infections. Many testimonies included those in more vulnerable circumstances such as families with babies and young children.

*“Me and my partner have two children with disabilities, learning disabilities, and we were living in a house which had black walls, frankly, with damp and mould. Everybody, all of us, all four of us had almost permanent chest infections, coughing. Clothes have had to be disposed of. Furniture had mould on it.”*

*– North East participant*

One participant described how their friend with asthma died because of the mould where she was living. This was one among a range of poor living conditions that participants had experienced of properties being uninhabitable or unsafe. These included homes that were difficult to keep warm, were not structurally sound, were overcrowded and cramped, had electrical issues or broken appliances, or problems with rats and mice.

*“Where the property was, it was near water, and we had a lot of rats in the garden, so we could never go out in the garden. We had rats running around in, like, the loft hatch bit. It was awful, and the landlord was just really, really unhelpful. So, then we had literally two months to get out, with nowhere to go, so, yes, it was really tough. So, you had to deal with a sick baby, four other children, low income, and trying to find somewhere that would accept us.”*

*– South West participant*

Participants highlighted a perceived lack of accountability on landlords (private and social) as a barrier to improving conditions. There was also a perceived lack of adequate maintenance services from private landlords or councils to ensure that properties met necessary space and safety standards. Participants also felt that what did exist did not address poor housing conditions in a timely and effective way.

*“I think the biggest problem with renters right now is we're not dealing with competent people when we give them a call. [Name of provider] is really incompetent, so I think that's the biggest issue. It kind of just adds to the bad experience, because that customer service is such a minute thing, but it plays a*

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*huge part when you have a problem in the house. I think that makes things even worse. It really does add to the experience.”*

*– Manchester participant*

Participants highlighted how private tenants could fear or face eviction if they tried to get a landlord to carry out housing repairs. More generally people reported how some may be in situations where they were expected to, or had tried to, mitigate issues themselves, which could be unsafe or costly.

*“[My concern is] paying for repairs myself as I’m scared she will sell the property if I keep asking her for repairs. I paid for the roof myself [which] cost me 300 pound as I’m happy here.”*

*– Manchester participant*

## **2.4 Affording rent**

Participants’ accounts highlighted the struggles involved in affording rent. Housing costs were described as ‘expensive’, ‘extortionate’ and taking a large proportion of individuals’ income; particularly for those not in full-time employment because of caring responsibilities or health conditions. Struggling to afford rent led to some participants staying in unsuitable, but more affordable accommodation. For example, where it did not meet their needs, or where they were unsafe because of an abusive relationship.

*“I was in quite an abusive marriage, but I was unable to afford to move out of the [council home], which was in his name, and unable to, with two children ... afford any accommodation that could house us in our locality. So, I was actually trapped in what was the marital home...”*

*– Lancashire participant*

Participants saw the current housing market and local authority policies as barriers to making housing more affordable. For example, one participant described how they thought people receiving benefits were locked out of housing in London, as a lot of its councils had sold properties to private developers. This left those on lower incomes faced with increasing private rents and a limited availability of truly affordable privately rented homes.

*“Private renting is absolutely extortionate. A lot of the markets [i.e., private landlords and estate agents] now are saying I've got to be in full-time work. I've got to have someone to go down for me [i.e., a guarantor] to put down [a deposit]. It's scary because there's just nothing out there. I started renting this house 12 years ago and it was only £500 back then. The houses now around here are £1,700. That's what they're going for at the moment and I don't know how anyone can afford it unless you've got a really high paying job and stuff like that. It's really, really scary.”*

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– *Mixed locations group participant*

Other challenges discussed included people's housing benefit not covering their rent, or people struggling to access this in the first place. One participant reported how they found it harder to access the discretionary housing payment system now it had moved from being a face-to-face service to telephone and online contact.

## 2.5 Discrimination

Across the group discussions participants reported the unfair or unequal treatment of people during housing journeys, including being discriminated against in finding a home and during their time in a property. Disability was discussed, and participants' accounts reflected how their housing journeys had been disproportionately affected because of this, either in accessing housing or when they experienced property disrepair. For example, one participant reported how they were refused a property because they had an assistance dog, and a participant with mobility issues was left housebound when the lift stopped working where she was living.

Other types of discrimination experienced by participants included age, relationship status, household composition, sexuality, race, family composition and gender. For example, one participant from London explained how they felt different groups in society were prioritised over others when people were seeking a home, with working-class, black British people losing out most. When it came to family composition, while participants felt it was right to prioritise families and women with children, some felt that this meant that men were deprioritised within the housing system, including single fathers. There were also instances where people felt there was a lack of care for people's gender identity when it came to allocation of suitable housing.

*"...my eldest child's non-binary, but because they were [assigned female at birth], they're expected to share a bedroom with their younger sister, but they don't feel comfortable doing that at all...No matter how uncomfortable they feel, they'd be expected to share a room just because they were both [assigned] the same gender [at birth]."*

– *Sheffield participant*

The barriers participants faced to overcome discrimination issues included a lack of timely action and a sense that accessing support was a constant battle.

*"Nobody wants to listen to you unless you're really, really at them. Whether it be a medical condition, you want to move on medical grounds. My father had a stroke a few years back. It really took a lot for them to move him. He couldn't get through the doors with his frame. The doors weren't wide enough. It was so hard, it was depressing. By then, he was already depressed, and he was already in that rut. We finally got him moved, and like I said, it takes years, and a lot, a lot of stress to get to where you need to be, and people helping you, emails, phone calls, when you*

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*should be able to just prove your medical condition, or whatever you're going through, and you should be listened to.”*

*– Sheffield participant*

## **2.6 Insecure tenancies**

Landlord power was felt to create uncertainty through, for example, property owners wanting to sell a property to capitalise on the rise in house prices. There was also a perception among participants that landlords issued eviction notices to tenants who raised repair and maintenance issues, or where there was a disagreement for example over an unpaid bill.

*“As I said, I had to move in total four times before I got a housing association flat, which I'm in now, which is, on the whole, very nice. Those experiences have now made me frightened to complain about any issues I have here because I'm worried about getting another eviction notice and then ending up in the same situation. So, I think once you've been through it, the fear factor does play quite a big role in what you decide to do.”*

*– East of England participant*

*“Yes, it's frightening, isn't it, because you think that's your home, and if you do anything to annoy that landlord, then he can just go, 'By the way, I've decided I want to sell it,' or 'You're out,' or...”*

*– Sheffield participant*

Participants thought access to information and advice is key to being able to address the issue of insecure tenancies. One participant described their positive experience of the support received from Shelter during this time, including advice around their rights and how to liaise with their housing officer.

*“I did go to my local Shelter, and they were great at giving me advice and what to say back to my housing officer at the time [laughing] because he shouldn't have been saying what he was...they were very good. I have to say they were really informative of what to say, what I was entitled to and that, because they were telling me that I wasn't allowed stuff when I was. So, they were like, 'No, you need to fight for this. You should be entitled to this.’”*

*– South West Participant*

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## 2.7 Poor landlord behaviour

Poor landlord behaviour emerged as an additional theme during analysis and was defined as behaviour which falls below an expected standard (for example, failing to respond to tenants' communications). When discussing experiences of landlords, participants primarily referred to private landlords, but discussions also included the council and housing associations. Participants highlighted poor customer service and a lack of communication with some landlords. They also reported how some private and social landlords did not deal with property disrepair and hazards in a timely and effective way. For example, one participant described how she was taking the council to court over the damp in her property.

*"We've actually got a claim in with a solicitor because of the damp. The council hasn't actually addressed the repairs. I have tried to clean as best I can, but it's causing, like, nasal congestion. Yes, so it's with the solicitor at the moment, but the council wants to go to court, which is crazy because they haven't done the repairs. Yes, that's where I am."*

*– London participant*

Participants also spoke about intimidating and unlawful private landlord behaviour, including verbal abuse, harassment, and a lack of respect for tenants' rights. Tenants had also faced some illegal behaviour among landlords such as not getting deposit money back, accessing their property without giving prior notice and fiddling the electric meter.

*"Rogue landlords - disrepair/mould/being blamed and fined for repairs not my fault. Only had one landlord who wasn't dodgy. Came out of a bad relationship and ended up taking a tenancy with someone who took the biscuit - infestation, unsafe electric (landlord had fiddled meter and said not to let anyone official in or I would get blame - did get caught for this and had to take blame) and unable to access better private or social housing."*

*– Merseyside participant*

The impacts of unlawful and unprofessional landlord behaviour included participants making the very difficult decision to leave their property and become homeless, being evicted including at short notice, and having to spend money on property repairs themselves.

*"Nothing's been done, so I had to make that decision. Even though it was hard, I'd rather sofa-surf than be in a house like that, which also makes me think, surely it's illegal for landlords to be giving such - just renting places like that where it's just not acceptable to be living in."*

*– Birmingham participant*



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The barriers highlighted by participants in being able to address unprofessional landlord behaviour included a perceived lack of regulation, rules, checks, or fines in place to prevent landlords from renting out properties in substandard conditions.

*“[...] anyone with a bit of money can become a landlord. Any idiot with some money in their pocket. It's worrying. There's no license, you know what I mean? There's no test, no qualifications. You have to train to be a doctor, you can't just go on an operating table and cut people apart. A landlord, oh, you've just got a bit of money you've set aside.”*

*– Mixed locations group participant*

Throughout these discussions, participants emphasised a power imbalance between tenants and private rental landlords. In particular, people felt powerless against landlords raising their rent because tenants had limited options to find housing elsewhere and so would be forced to pay the higher rent. Tenants also felt that landlords lacked awareness or care over their legal obligations to tenants, or simply acted without sufficient humanity. If tenants did try and address their landlords' neglect of their obligations, for example by making a disrepair claim, there was felt to be little formal support to draw on.

## **2.8 Systemic causes of the housing emergency**

After participants had shared their personal experiences of the housing emergency, they were asked about what they saw as the causes of the emergency. An analysis of online whiteboard, facilitator notes, and responses to a participant survey reveal three overarching systemic causes: affordability and supply, regulation and government will.

### **2.8.1 Affordability and supply**

Participants commonly described how both private and social housing rents were unaffordable. This was partly attributed to the cost-of-living crisis – rapidly rising mortgage rates, high inflation, and low wages. However, the privatised housing market and the consequent depletion of social housing stock was seen as a key cause of high rents. Without sufficient social housing, the private market was seen as unconstrained, with nothing to mitigate the costs charged by private landlords.

*“Right to Buy has decimated social housing stock over the decades, not enough being built to replace it.”*

*– Mixed locations group participant*

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The challenges of supply were seen to be exacerbated by an ever-increasing demand on a finite housing stock. Participants thought that the UK's housing infrastructure was unable to supply the demand of growing local populations and that this contributed to soaring market rates. Participants attributed the shortage of housing, and in particular social housing stock, to a lack of investment by national (and subsequently local) governments. A further issue in some areas that impacted supply was second homes – participants felt that the market system and lack of government intervention has led to homes lying empty all over the country while their owners occupy other properties elsewhere.

*“Nationally, again a very mismanaged housing stock. Insufficient council housing being built. Too many private ownership housing, too much housing is being sold to people who don't live in them, e.g., people from abroad, people who want second homes.”*

*– East of England participant*

### **2.8.2 Regulation**

Participants described how private landlords have the right to increase rents and serve possession notices (which can lead to a court issuing an eviction warrant) without reason and how this approach has 'priced-out' many from being able to afford a home. Behaviour such as this was largely attributed to the fact that there is not sufficient regulation in place to determine who is fit and suitable to become a landlord in the first place. This was seen as creating a landscape where simply having a home or not is dictated by the whim of unscrupulous and irresponsible individuals whose only qualification for becoming a landlord is wealth.

*“Anyone can become a landlord, whether they should or not...”*

*– Mixed locations group participant*

This sense of fragility was also underlined by the belief that there is a lack of enforcement on private landlords to meet their obligations to ensure decent living conditions within their properties. Failing to respond to tenants' concerns about disrepair emerged again and again as participants described how the behaviour of landlords is left largely unchecked. As such, regulation and its enforcement were viewed as slow, inconsistent, and largely toothless, creating an environment where landlords flagrantly violate regulations to the misery of their tenants.

*“Lots of landlords [are] getting away with stuff because no one is checking”*

*– Merseyside participant*

### **2.8.3 Lack of government will**

Finally, participants perceived the UK government as favouring a deregulated, private housing market. It was perceived that the government therefore have little interest in, or political incentive to, tackle affordability and the

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supply of homes, or increase the regulation of landlords. Primarily, participants believed that this was due to a lack of public support, or active opposition in some cases, for new housing developments, which included elements of NIMBYISM (a 'not in my backyard' attitude) amongst voters who are opposed to new housing developments near their properties. This was seen as the reason why the government has been slow in either permitting, or themselves investing, in new housing developments.

*“the influence of 'vote winner' policies on influencing manifestos and housing being lower down the priority list ... it's not a popular option for policy.”*

*– North East participant*

Participants also felt that successive governments had not met house building targets because they had not prioritised investment in more social housing.

*“Ideological barriers with the current government - can't invest in things that would matter.”*

*– East of England participant*

Many thought the government wanted this private market to be unregulated and so there was little political incentive to increase landlord regulation. Therefore, the solution of building more housing and, in particular more social housing, was seen as being unattractive to politicians, and thus a primary driver of the housing shortage and the wider housing emergency.

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# 3. Principles

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This chapter outlines the five principles that participants wanted to see guide Shelter's campaign manifesto. These principles set out a vision for a future where there is no housing emergency. The principles work in tandem with the solutions that participants prioritised and are reported in chapter 4, with the solutions offering ways forward for realising this vision.

The findings in this chapter are based on analysis of verbatim transcripts from the final session that highlights why these principles were important to participants.

The final agreed principles were generated following a visioning exercise in session three where participants were asked to complete the following statements:

- "If the housing emergency was solved I would..."
- "Everyone deserves housing that is..."
- "To solve the housing emergency, I want the government to..."
- "The change I most want to happen is..."

In between session three and the final session, NatCen inductively analysed their responses and drew out five recurring themes. These became the five principles reported below. NatCen also drafted a series of statements within each principle to further describe the principle.

In the final workshop, participants discussed these principles and associated statements in detail within their groups. For each principle they were asked what they thought about it, what if anything they thought needed changing (outside of specific words or phrases), and why a principle might be important to them. They were then given time to write their thoughts and their reasons on post-it-notes. We also captured any additional principles participants thought were missing.

The discussion on the principles was concluded by a voting exercise where participants were asked to identify any statements they wanted removed or amended. The votes were tallied by the table facilitator and the results of the voting exercise were fed back to the whole room in plenary.

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### 3.1 Key findings

Participants agreed that the following five principles and associated statements captured views on what overarching values should guide policy responses to the housing emergency.

#### A home is a human right

- Housing needs to be inclusive, accessible, and affordable for everyone.
- Everyone should be able to live in a home that meets their needs.
- A home is not just accommodation; home means identifying with a local area, creating a community, and benefiting from modern amenities.

#### Home is the foundation of a secure society

- Homes should be safe and secure: people should not feel vulnerable to eviction or intimidation.
- Everyone needs a secure home to feel optimistic and invested in the future.
- Secure homes support better financial security and allow people to plan.
- Secure homes allow people to be part of their communities and contribute to society.

#### Home is fundamental to health and wellbeing

- Better homes will improve wellbeing for everyone.
- Decent homes prevent people being exposed to the dangers from homelessness and disrepair.
- Everyone should be able to live in clean, spacious, and healthy homes.
- A home is so central to life that housing issues take an all-pervasive toll on mental health.

#### Strengthen regulation, accountability, and enforcement

- Landlords must let decent homes and face a tough enforcement if they don't.
- Enforcement must be strengthened so landlords face severe penalties for poor standards and service.
- Tenants must have stronger rights to equalise the power imbalance between landlords and tenants.
- Housing regulation needs to be more responsive to the lived experiences of tenants.

#### Listen to communities and act!

- Housing policy should not be driven by profit, ideology, or party politics.
- Housing policy should be driven by principles of equality, fairness, and inclusivity.
- Housing policy and funding allocation should be transparent and understandable.
- Housing policy should prioritise community needs by listening and responding to people affected by the housing emergency.
- Central and local government should make decisions based on an understanding of how people are affected by the housing emergency.

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As with experiences of the housing emergency reported in chapter two, people's attitudes towards these principles were often interlinked – for example the idea of a secure home was also seen as a basic or human right to many participants.

The first three (home is a human right, home is the foundation of a secure society, and home is fundamental to health and wellbeing) resonated with people's experiences of the importance of a secure home in underpinning all other aspects of their lives. Across these, participants also emphasised the importance of guaranteeing basic housing needs, although debate emerged when statements were seen by some participants to move beyond 'basic needs'. If these needs are guaranteed a positive impact will be felt in all areas of people's lives, such as career, relationships, and mental and physical health.

Principles four (strengthen regulation, accountability, and enforcement) and five (listen to communities and act!) spoke to the role that participants felt unregulated landlords play in the housing emergency and the need to empower tenants. If these principles are achieved, then participants felt the power dynamic highlighted in chapter one may be reduced.

## 3.2 Principles in focus

### 3.2.1 A home is a human right

- Housing needs to be inclusive, accessible, and affordable for everyone.
- Everyone should be able to live in a home that meets their needs.
- A home is not just accommodation; home means identifying with a local area, creating a community, and benefiting from modern amenities.

Participants strongly identified with the idea of a home being a human right. They perceived a home as vital for life as "water, air, food, shelter, sleep and reproduction are our psychological basic needs."

*"It's natural, it's like have accommodation, like breathing, it's natural, it's a human right. A human being has to have a place to stay, even if they don't have to pay for that person to stay, you have to have a roof over your head. I think it's immoral to allow anyone to sleep on the street."*

*– Merseyside participant*

'Home' was understood as something long-term and when discussing this principle participants highlighted that a temporary home was as disruptive to a family or a person as having no home at all, emphasising the disruption to a child's education and a person's social wellbeing. Making homes accessible and affordable for everyone would impact participants' sense of security. This was particularly true for young people, where affording a home was seen as increasingly impossible.

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*“I would say, for me, when I was being rehomed with my children, they said, 'Because you're homeless, you can travel anywhere. We can put you anywhere across the country.' Even though our family was based in a certain area, our doctor, the children's school, everything...I mean, it's affected me for a while, but while the children were doing GCSEs, then you don't move. So that would be important...”*

*– London participant*

Participants understood human rights to be about guaranteeing housing 'basic' needs. Therefore, this principle impacts people's lives by ensuring a minimum standard of accommodation for all. However, there was some debate over what was in the scope of the statement: 'Everyone should be able to live in a home that meets their needs'. For most participants, this statement aligned with their ideas of human rights and they agreed on 'needs' including meeting a family's size and composition (e.g., being a family with children), and addressing specialised needs (e.g., being a disabled tenant). There was more debate around whether factors such as location, proximity to family, and the size of a home (particularly when downsizing) are needs or simply nice to have. These participants warned that “people are always going to argue that a property doesn't meet their needs” and were concerned that this statement is unrealistic and idealistic.

*“...people with disabilities are sometimes stuck in houses or flats where they're up two, three floors, and they can't actually access their own homes easily. So, I think that is important to include the fact that it needs to be accessible as well because there are people - my dad, for example. He has COPD and he really struggles with stairs, and his flat is on the second floor. So, yes, he has a home, but is it a home that is actually suitable to him and his needs...there's probably a lot of people stuck in homes that aren't really suitable homes for them. “*

*– East of England participant*

Lastly, participants felt the principle would build community and mean people can be close to support networks (for older people, families or disabled), which was seen as important for many. Alongside community acting as a source of socialising and being a safe place (specified in the next principle), participants thought of homes and communities as needing suitable amenities (like schools) and basic facilities (like lifts for people with mobility issues) that are vital for day-to-day life.

*“...from the perspective as a carer, as well as a mum, and physical disabilities with my children, it's equally as important that when you're in a local area not only does your house need to meet your needs, but the local area needs to be accessible as well. Creating a community is vital for families like mine because we don't have extended family, it's just the three of us. So, we do need to make those connections and rely on our neighbours and help them out where we can too.”*

*– Birmingham participant*

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### 3.2.2 Home is the foundation of a secure society

- Homes should be safe and secure: people should not feel vulnerable to eviction or intimidation.
- Everyone needs a secure home to feel optimistic and invested in the future.
- Secure homes support better financial security and allow people to plan.
- Secure homes allow people to be part of their communities and contribute to society.

Participants highlighted the importance of a secure home for mental health, financial stability and feeling safe in their local neighbourhood.

*“I would say that I think we've got more opportunities when you've got a secure home, rather than when you're homeless, to be able to contribute to society.”*

*– South West participant*

This principle addresses the powerlessness that tenants expressed throughout the summit. For participants, a secure home meant landlords providing tenants with truly affordable and long-term homes. They felt that an effective housing system would allow tenants to have certainty over their rent, now and in the future, which would help them feel financially secure. They would also feel free from the threat of eviction. This security would provide tenants with the mental and physical capacity to make plans for the future and stop them feeling trapped in homes that do not meet their needs because they fear eviction or homelessness.

*“...I can't get a job; I can't move forward until I know where I'm living. I don't know where I'm going to be living. I don't know how much rent I'm going to be paying. So, for me, that is a massive thing. Until I've got - it's the basis for everything, a secure home, isn't it? Financially and bettering yourself and moving forward, it is a big part.”*

*– North East participant*

Some interpreted financial security as applying to landlords as well as tenants because the financially secure landlords would in turn support security for tenants. These participants acknowledged the relationship between landlord mortgage rates and tenant rent increases and discussed financial security as part of a bigger picture in the cost of housing.

*“I think it's a long chain of mortgage rates are going up, so landlords are raising rents, which is then affecting people lower down, on lower incomes, because they're struggling to afford to live on minimum wage with the other costs of living. I think it's just a long chain from the top...”*

*– East of England participant*

Security was seen to extend outside the home. Some understood community in relation to a secure society as important in ensuring they are safe from local crime. For example, a secure community being one where children



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can walk to school. Not everyone felt that contributing to society was important enough to be a part of the principle, but it was not disagreed with strongly enough to change the principle.

*"I'll cope with lower living conditions...to live in a wider pond of safety without intimidation...'Your house is a safe and secure place, and your locality is a safe and secure place,' because there's not much point building one without building the other."*

*– Lancashire participant*

### **3.2.3 Home is fundamental to health and wellbeing**

- Better homes will improve wellbeing for everyone.
- Decent homes prevent people being exposed to the dangers from homelessness and disrepair.
- Everyone should be able to live in clean, spacious, and healthy homes.
- A home is so central to life that housing issues take an all-pervasive toll on mental health

This principle spoke to the idea participants discussed throughout the summit of decent and truly affordable homes positively impacting mental and physical health.

Participants highlighted the relationship between a secure home and their relationships, work, education, and mental health. Additionally, some felt this principle spoke to their concerns around the impact on physical health from unsuitable and poor standard homes which they saw as unacceptable and 'shameful'. They referenced Awaab Ishak's death alongside their own experiences to highlight why they felt this principle would ensure a decent home is provided, in turn improving all forms of health.

*"...her eldest was hospitalised because of the asthma, and she's got all these medical letters saying, the doctor's saying the housing is doing it. The council know about it and they're just, they're stuck there. Then you're hearing a lot of the time it's mums in desperate situations, fighting and fighting just to make sure their children are safe. No mum should have to do that in a country this wealthy. It's shameful, absolutely shameful. I'm doing it again, ranting!"*

*– Birmingham participant*

Participants felt the principle would positively impact the safety of accommodation through ensuring a 'better' and 'decent' home for all and felt it should apply to both temporary and permanent homes. It could ensure all tenants could be confident that repairs that pose safety risks or affect everyday life would be addressed.

*"The decent homes bit, I think that needs to be not just people with permanent homes, but when you're forced into temporary housing, like I was. I was in there for two years, three months, not that I kept count, but the condition of the place... the*

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*showers were left really disgusting. The kitchen, I wouldn't want to prepare a dog's food in it, and yet I was expected to prepare my food in it, which is why I was glad that I took the microwave when I left the marital home. I lived mostly on microwave meals or stuff that my mum pre-cooked for me, and I could just warm it up. That in itself didn't help with my weight."*

*– East of England participant*

Participants saw a link between affordability and wellbeing. Many highlighted the challenges that unaffordable homes have on health and wellbeing – for example high rents meant that some people compromised spending on heating or healthy food. Others also highlighted the stress caused by struggling to afford housing.

*"Say you're getting £500 income and you have £1,000 rent, and that's not accessible to you to afford. Now the government is giving you a house that might be £300 worth of rent, and you're getting £500 income, so that potentially could be accessible to you...Within your means, basically."*

*– London participant*

Participants linked individual health and wellbeing to wider social benefits. By tackling issues around homelessness or having unsuitable and substandard housing there would be an overall decrease in those suffering from mental and physical health issues, in turn, reducing the impact on aspects of society, such as the NHS.

*"It's the impact it has on other areas as well. Say, for example...but if you think about it all having a negative effect on children's engagement in education, on the effect on the NHS and the local community, how many issues could be resolved or reduced simply by much more focus and empathy from providing decent housing and social support? It isn't just a small thing. It can impact such a wider area."*

*– Lancashire participant*

### **3.2.4 Strengthen regulation, accountability, and enforcement**

- Landlords must let decent homes and face a tough enforcement if they don't.
- Enforcement must be strengthened so landlords face severe penalties for poor standards and service.
- Tenants must have stronger rights to equalise the power imbalance between landlords and tenants.
- Housing regulation needs to be more responsive to the lived experiences of tenants.

This principle spoke to participants' shared experience of powerlessness, and their hope that through strengthening regulation, accountability and enforcement, tenants would feel more empowered and able to secure better quality homes.

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Participants thought stronger regulation, accountability and enforcement would mean a better standard of service for tenants. Dangerous issues in their homes would be addressed well and immediately, rather than ignored or fixed poorly. This would give participants confidence that their home is safe and secure, and in turn support their mental and physical wellbeing.

*“Yes, accountability is really important. Just because someone's got wealth, and someone doesn't have it, doesn't mean they don't have their basic needs and rights.”*

*– London participant*

Participants agreed that the principle would protect tenants and their rights by reducing the power imbalance between landlords and tenants. This was seen to be especially important where tenants may not have knowledge of their rights, or where they may lack the financial security which would allow them to feel able to challenge their landlord when they were doing something they perceived as unlawful.

*“People should be helped to understand what their actual rights are when they move in somewhere. All I got when I moved into my property was a tenancy contract, and I saw that four-and-a-half years ago. If there was something wrong, I wouldn't know what my rights were, so I think it's helping people to understand and making that system a lot easier, isn't it?”*

*– Lancashire participant*

The idea that housing regulation should be more responsive tenants' lived experience resonated with participants. They believed these regulations should not be built on the assumptions of those who have not experienced the housing emergency first-hand.

*“[The council needs to] be more responsive because someone is coming from some different kind of lived experience, or [...] background, [the council] need to be more responsive to look at that, because [right now] there is a very set rule.”*

*– Merseyside participant*

### **3.2.5 Listen to communities and act!**

- Housing policy should not be driven by profit, ideology, or party politics.
- Housing policy should be driven by principles of equality, fairness, and inclusivity.
- Housing policy and funding allocation should be transparent and understandable.
- Housing policy should prioritise community needs by listening and responding to people affected by the housing emergency.

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- Central and local government should make decisions based on an understanding of how people are affected by the housing emergency.

This principle was important to participants as they thought policymakers should be listening to communities and acting on what they are saying. They thought this was central to achieving equality and fairness of housing regulations and standards for all. The principle also directly states and reinforces their belief that housing policy should be driven by equality and fairness rather than profit or politics.

*“I feel like maybe a lot of us are just bashing our heads against a brick wall and we're not getting listened to, so maybe some of us need to feel a bit more empowered and optimistic that we're really, really going to drive change this time, and it isn't just words.”*

*– Mixed locations group participant*

It was important to participants that all types of people impacted by the housing emergency and their range of experiences of this was included in the development of housing policy. They emphasised the importance of listening, understanding, and responding to all people affected by the housing emergency and not only those who are more vocal or confident. The types of experiences that need to be heard included ethnic minorities, different family sizes and those with long-term health or accessibility needs. They felt listening to all would also start to close the imbalance between those in social and private homes; with private home tenants believed by participants to have less of a voice.

*“Equality doesn't always come down to race and things. I'm one of ten. My mum had ten children, and growing up, we had to private rent because there weren't any council homes available that were big enough for our family, and the amount of times my mum would get turned down for a six-bedroom house because of the amount of children she had...”*

*– East of England participant*

This principle was seen as fundamental for identifying the needs of tenants and actions needed to improve housing policy. Participants felt that ongoing communication would allow active improvement and adaptations of policies with changes in society and changes in the challenges that most tenants face. Some changed their mind about the importance of listening to communities as they began to see this as key to identifying and tackling the issues highlighted by the other principles.

*“We first thought that it's not high priority about listening to communities and acting. It didn't seem like there was an urgency to it. It seemed something immediate, but then reflecting, we felt as well, having an ongoing panel, listening to people, exactly like what's going on right now, is actually the root of the solutions that we have in the future with social housing problems.”*

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*– London participant*

Housing policy being driven by fairness rather than profit resonated with many. They saw profit-driven policies as the fundamental reason for disrepair, immoral actions (like eviction, poor housing standards and services) and unavailability and unaffordability of homes. They understood equality and fairness as the ideas that *should* drive housing policy as these are more likely to ensure secure and affordable homes for all.

*“All this stuff is what I would expect for them to have anyway, principles of equality. Everyone should have fairness. Everyone should have that. The policy shouldn't be driven by profit. It should be driven by fairness.”*

*– London participant*

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# 4. Policy Solutions

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This chapter outlines the policy solutions that participants wanted to see prioritised in Shelter's manifesto, building on the two previous chapters. Participants felt the prioritised solutions offered ways for realising the principles they wanted to see guide housing policy, and in so doing this would tackle the housing issues they had experienced.

The chapter draws on verbatim transcripts, facilitator notes and voting data from the final summit session where Shelter presented participants with 24 different policy solutions. Shelter developed the policy solutions list by combining those presented by Shelter in session two with those suggested by participants in the same session. These were then collated by Shelter under four main solution clusters, which had more specific solutions within them. Fourteen of the proposed solutions were Shelter's solutions and 10 were suggested by participants.<sup>15</sup>

Shelter representatives were on hand to answer clarifying questions to ensure participants understood the different solutions. The 24 solutions that Shelter presented to participants are set out below in four policy areas:

## More social rented homes

- Invest in a new generation of social homes (at least 90k a year).
- Improve the funding model, e.g., prioritise funding of social rent homes over affordable rent/shared ownership.
- Make it easier to get land to build social housing, e.g., by removing 'hope value' or buying back land.
- Improve planning system to get more social rented housing delivered, e.g., definition of 'affordable housing'.
- Abolish or reform Right to Buy to stop the loss of social rented homes.
- Make sure we build the right quality and mix of social rent homes, e.g., family homes, in the places they're most needed.

## Make rented housing more affordable

- Unfreeze local housing allowance and base on actual rents.
- Abolish the household benefit cap (which deducts housing benefit when people not in work/earning less than £722pcm).
- Introduce a rent increase cap, so landlords can't be too greedy and keep rising the rent.
- Stop sharp increases in social rents.

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<sup>15</sup> All participants' suggestions were included in the list apart from solutions that were very broad or lacked clarity. Participants were given the opportunity to say if they felt a solution was missing from the list of 24 solutions but did not identify any missing solutions.

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### Better management of rented homes

- Invest in existing social homes to improve standards.
- Create a National Tenant Union to give a strong national, regional, and local voice to social tenants.
- Invest in, and give stronger powers to, local authority housing enforcement teams (who enforce standards in private rented housing).
- Reinstate rights to Legal Aid for tenants can get a solicitor to enforce their rights to decent conditions
- Make it easier to move ('transfer') between social homes.
- Improve the management of temporary accommodation for homeless people by requiring temporary accommodation providers to be registered with the Regulator of Social Housing.
- Stronger government guidance to councils on allocation of social housing, to make it more standardised, transparent, and fair.
- Encourage more training and accreditation of private landlords.

### Better housing rights and help to enforce them or deal with problems

- Invest in accessible, reachable, and relatable housing support services to prevent people from eviction and homelessness or help people who are struggling with housing problems.
- Right to suitable emergency accommodation for everyone at risk of the street.
- Right to suitable accommodation for homeless families who go to social services for help.
- Abolish 'No Recourse to Public Funds' and 'Right to Rent' policy.
- Empower and educate people to know their housing rights and responsibilities (as tenants).
- Invest in free legal advice and advocacy services for people with housing problems, e.g., via the Legal Aid system.

Participants discussed all 24 policy solutions in small groups of up to eight people, before voting on what they thought Shelter should prioritise in the manifesto. They voted individually by each identifying three 'must have' and three 'nice to have' options. They were asked to look across all 24 solutions when voting rather than choose within clusters. For those attending the final session in-person, voting took place publicly at tables as participants placed sticky dots against their preferred solutions.<sup>16</sup> Participants were not asked to achieve consensus – therefore voting trends reflect their own personal views.

The policy solutions presented ranged significantly in terms of scale and specificity in how they would achieve the policy cluster objective. Therefore, participants were not asked to choose between solutions within a cluster – for example they were not specifically asked to decide whether improving the planning system or improving the funding model is the best way to create more social homes, as these policies are designed to tackle different aspects of the system. Participants were not presented with pro and con arguments for each solution, so their

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<sup>16</sup> Participants attending online voted via a polling tool that showed overall responses.

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discussions and choices were based on the evidence presented in sessions 1-3 as well as their own and others' lived experiences.

The themes reported in this chapter draw upon analysis of discussions *before* participants voted. Therefore, the themes identified reflect the overarching ideas that helped participants navigate the different solutions and discuss their relative merits, rather than detailed reasoning of each choice made. This chapter also reports these overarching ideas as they related to each cluster of policies. Participants generally voiced few drawbacks and concerns about negative outcomes of implementing the policies prioritised, but we have included details where these views were expressed.

#### 4.1 Key Findings

From the analysis of transcript discussions prior to voting, NatCen identified four overarching ideas that shaped how and why participants prioritised policy solutions. These ideas in many ways converge with the experiences they shared and principles they agreed.

- **The right to a permanent truly affordable home:** Participants prioritised solutions that they felt guaranteed people access to secure and permanent homes (by 'affordable' participants meant accessible to those on low incomes, rather than specifically access to homes provided under the government's 'Affordable Homes Programme').
- **Addressing power dynamics:** Other solutions were selected because they were seen to tackle power dynamics and empower tenants, reflecting the lived experience of many participants.
- **Helping those most in need or most harmed by the housing emergency:** Some participants selected solutions because they were seen to guarantee homes for those worst affected by the housing emergency, specifically those experiencing homelessness or a risk of this, and those facing discrimination, particularly on the basis of race.
- **Timescales:** Participants wanted a focus on solutions that address systemic issues in the long-term, responding to these issues in ways that offered genuinely sustainable solutions. Shorter-term solutions were a focus for participants when these addressed immediate issues and concerns.

#### 4.2 Policy solution priorities

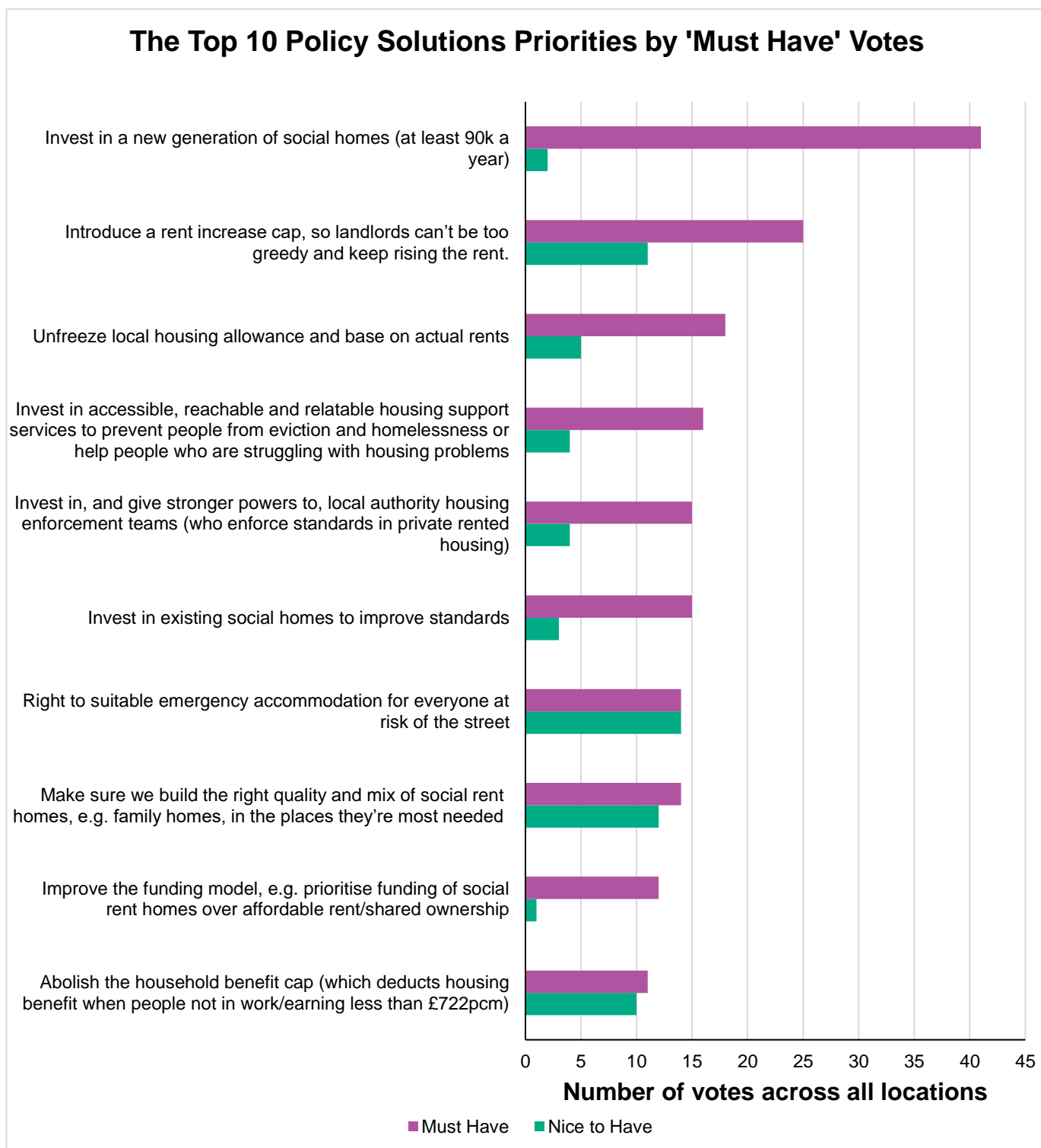
The top ten solutions prioritised by 'must have' votes are displayed in Figure 2. below.<sup>17</sup> The 'nice to have' votes for these solutions have also been included in Figure 2. All 24 solutions received some votes, which suggests

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<sup>17</sup> See the appendix for the full voting trends on all twenty-four solutions.  
[https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional\\_resources/policy\\_and\\_research/policy\\_library/summit\\_on\\_the\\_housing\\_emergency](https://england.shelter.org.uk/professional_resources/policy_and_research/policy_library/summit_on_the_housing_emergency)



participants believed there are a range of important responses to the complexity of the problems they are aimed at addressing. It also reflects the design of the deliberation where participants were not asked to achieve consensus by agreeing on priorities. Instead, they were given the opportunity to express their personal view after discussing with others and reviewing information.



**Figure 2.** Top 10 Policy Solution Priorities by 'Must Have' Preference

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As Figure 2. shows, **investing in building new social homes was a clear ‘must have’ solution for participants**. This is because it was perceived to be a sustainable solution to an immediate, pressing problem. It was understood as allowing more people access to housing over time, while also speaking to current concerns around affordability. The challenges it responded to were also seen as mitigating the root causes of the housing emergency, and interest in it reflected some of the principles participants had agreed upon - particularly that housing is a human right and the foundation of a secure society.

**The next highest in priority was a rent increase cap** because it addressed the immediate problem of affordability in the private rented sector and was seen to tackle a core power imbalance between landlords and private renters, an issue highlighted in participants’ experiences in chapter 1. Interest in tackling this problem is underlined by the third highest priority: to unfreeze local housing allowance and base this on actual rents.

The remaining sections of this chapter explore the solutions that participants prioritised within each cluster and highlight the ideas that drive why participants made these choices.

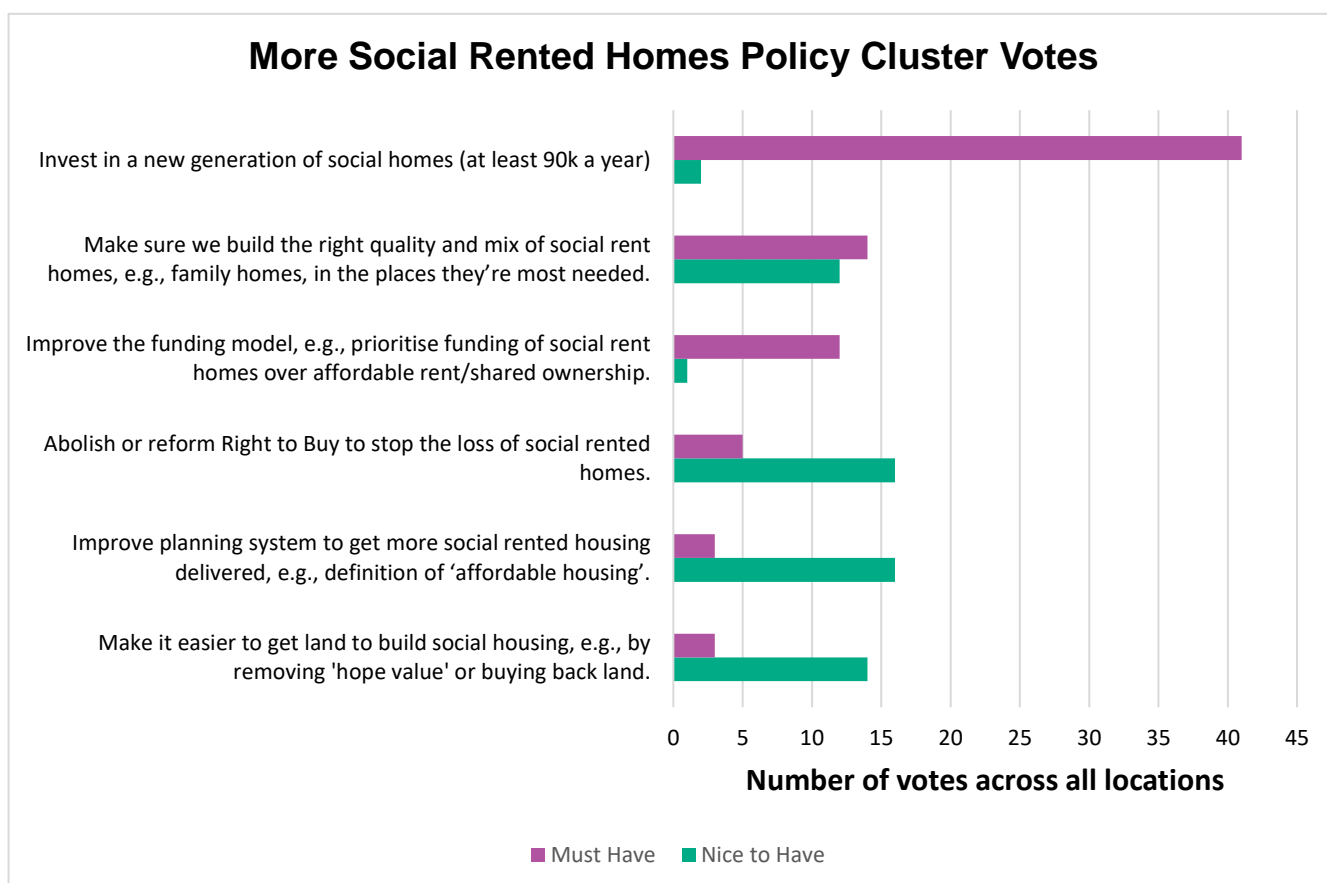
### 4.3 More social rented homes

Participants considered the following solutions for achieving more social rented homes:

1. Invest in a new generation of social homes (at least 90k a year).
2. Improve the funding model, e.g., prioritise funding of social rent homes over affordable rent/shared ownership.
3. Make it easier to get land to build social housing, e.g., by removing ‘hope value’ or buying back land.
4. Improve planning system to get more social rented housing delivered, e.g., definition of ‘affordable housing’.
5. Abolish or reform Right to Buy to stop the loss of social rented homes.
6. Make sure we build the right quality and mix of social rent homes, e.g., family homes, in the places they’re most needed.

Of these, solutions 1, 2, and 6 were in the top 10 ‘must have’ priorities, while 3, 4, 5, and 6 were in the top 10 ‘nice to have’ priorities. Participants prioritised more solutions from this cluster than from any other, underlying the importance they placed on achieving more social rented homes. Figure 3. below shows that solutions related to planning received more ‘nice to have’ votes whilst solutions relating to investment and funding received more ‘must have’ votes.

## More Social Rented Homes Policy Cluster Votes



**Figure 3.** More Social Rented Homes Policy Cluster Votes

### 4.3.1 Social rent homes promote access to truly affordable housing and help those in need

Policy solutions aimed at supplying more social rent homes were prioritised because participants felt these would support rights to a truly affordable, permanent home by providing an alternative to the market. These policies were also seen to help those most in need through providing more equal access to truly affordable housing.

### 4.3.2 Investment prioritised over specific policies

The more general solution of investment in a new generation of social homes was prioritised ahead of more specific policies related to land use planning, building and the right to buy. Our analysis did not find many people explicitly connecting different policy solutions within this cluster (for example, making it easier to get land to build social housing before investing in it). Nonetheless, people supported a breadth of solutions to achieving the overarching aim of having more social rented homes, which may have come from the belief that, by its nature, this aim requires a number of different solutions to be achievable.

Some participants did, on the other hand, highlight specific solutions as important to achieving more social rented homes. For example, Lancashire participants suggested that existing social homes should be “regenerated” in a manner akin to the policy of investing in existing social homes, which is discussed in the third policy cluster on the better management of homes below.

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*“I also really agree with your [other participant] point about regeneration because we can’t just leave some people in really, really poor conditions while we’re building new ones. I think it has to be on a parallel leap forward across that.”*

*– Lancashire participant*

#### **4.3.3 Securing access to truly affordable permanent housing**

Investing in a new generation of social homes was supported by participants partly because it was seen as a way to secure access to truly affordable, permanent housing for more people. This is because it is a form of housing that exists outside the housing market, a market which was seen as providing too few homes. When it did provide homes, participants felt they were often unaffordable or were at risk of *becoming* unaffordable due to increasing rents. This view was informed by people’s own experiences of the housing market and of social housing, but also their experience, or understanding of, the loss of social homes following the introduction of the Right to Buy. Many referenced this loss and wanted to increase the availability of affordable social housing through investment and preventing its privatisation happening again.

The policy solution of abolishing or reforming the Right to Buy was the joint-first ‘nice to have’ option, and the discussions suggest this reflects the disagreement and uncertainty it unearthed in people’s beliefs about the policy. Right to Buy was briefly introduced in an earlier session, but participants were not given extensive information on this so discussions will have been based primarily on people’s own experiences and knowledge. Most agreed that Right to Buy should be reformed so that it does not cause an excessive loss of social homes, but few felt it should be abolished outright as they wanted people to be able to retain the choice of buying their social home.

*“Initially, I’ve been saying [Right to Buy] should be abolished [...] but then I thought to myself [...] say the social housing tenants that want that security of owning their own home [...] I wouldn’t want that to be taken away from anybody. So, I thought to myself, in the broader scope, what I would want is to stop these houses falling into the hands of buy-to-letters.”*

*– Mixed locations group participant*

#### **4.3.4 Equal access to truly affordable social rented homes**

People also valued an increase in access to social homes because they wanted there to be greater equality in the opportunities people had to access housing. Many felt that, at present, renters are discriminated against in their access to housing and have few options because of how high private rents and house prices are. When it came to having greater equality in opportunities to live in a social rented home, however, this did not mean that people wanted everyone to be treated the same. The policy of making sure we build the right quality and mix of

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such homes was important therefore, because it was seen to address specific needs such as different family sizes or differences among regions. At the same time, there was a desire to maximise access to social housing for households who were currently judged to be deprioritised in its allocation, such as young, single people without children (including those having to live with their parents due to it being unaffordable for them to move out).

*“You need to invest for the future, not just for what’s happening now, but yes, also the right type of housing in the right places. It’s all right making all these big development in places, but that is maybe not what area it’s needed in.”*

*– South West participant*

#### **4.3.5 Drawbacks and concerns on more social homes as a solution**

The barriers participants identified were the privatisation of the housing system and a lack of political will to support social homes (coming from central government, not local authorities who many thought needed more support). They also felt the preference towards home ownership among the population was a barrier to prioritising social homes. Despite overarching support, these considerations meant there was a mixture of expectations among participants about how feasible an increase in social rented homes actually was.

*“[We need to give] the council a chance to build their portfolio back up, because otherwise we’re just going to have this conversation in five- or ten-years’ time. The council will have no properties. It’ll just be big, large landlords”*

*– Merseyside participant*

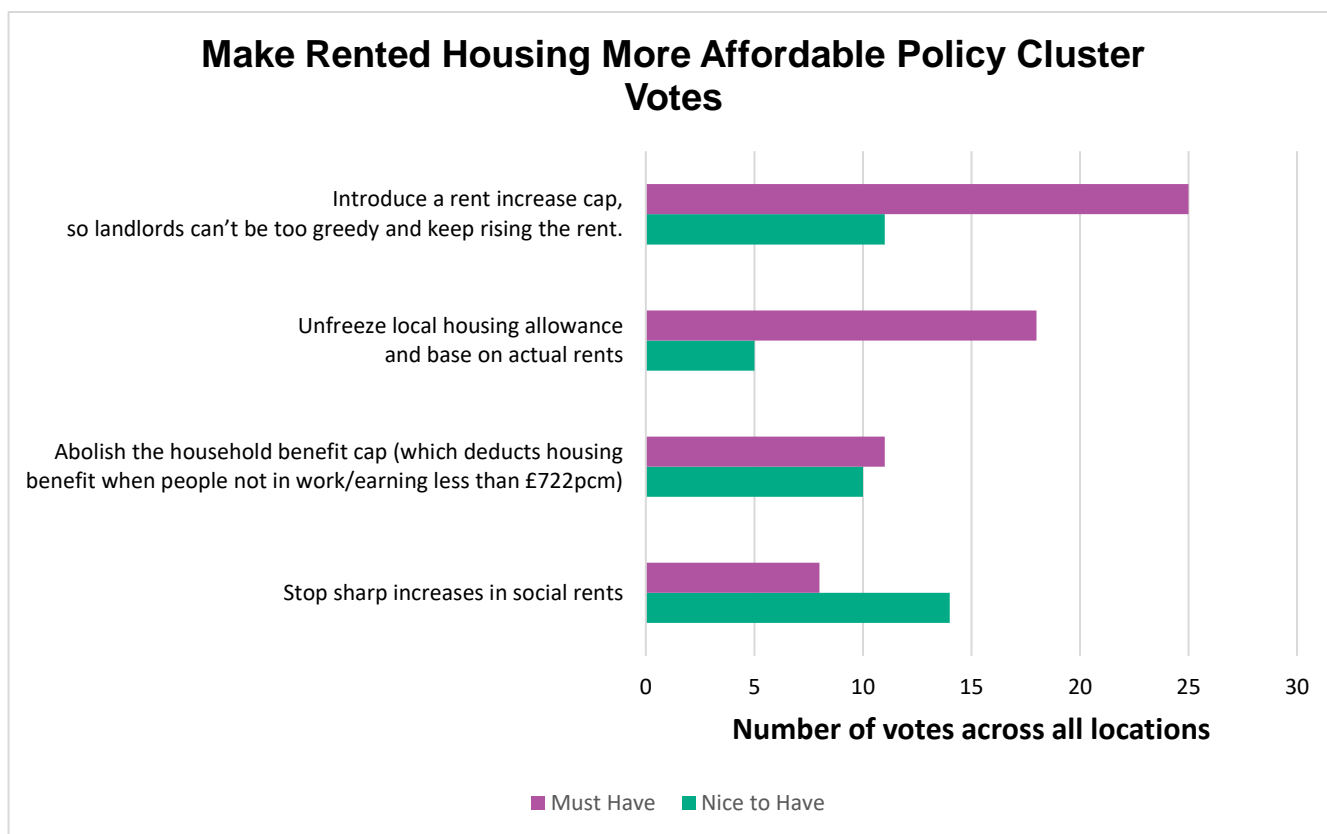
#### **4.4 Make rented housing more affordable**

Participants considered the following solutions for making rented housing more affordable:

1. Unfreeze local housing allowance and based on actual rents.
2. Abolish the household benefit cap (which deducts housing benefit when people not in work/earning less than £722pcm).
3. Introduce a rent increase cap, so landlords can’t be too greedy and keep rising the rent.
4. Stop sharp increases in social rents.

Of these, solutions 1, 2, and 3 were in the top 10 ‘must have’ priorities and solutions 2, 3, and 4 were in the top 10 ‘nice to have’ priorities. This reflects the importance participants placed on tackling the unaffordability of private rented homes. Figure 4. shows the number of votes each solution received and shows that introducing a

rent cap was the highest scoring 'must have' policy, but also that all solutions received a reasonable number of 'must have' votes.



**Figure 4.** Make Rented Housing More Affordable Policy Cluster Votes

#### 4.4.1 More affordable rent addresses urgent harms to tenants and removes power imbalances

Policy solutions to make rented housing more affordable were supported because the harms of high rent on people's security and wellbeing were considered urgent, and because the housing system was seen to create a power imbalance geared against tenants.

#### 4.4.2 Addressing the urgent harms caused by high rents

Participants prioritised these policies because they felt they would reduce the risk of losing a home and therefore allow tenants more autonomy over personal decisions (from financial decisions to lifestyle decisions, where you can live, and who with).

Harms to people's autonomy resurfaced regularly in discussion of the different policies within this cluster, a theme that ties into participants' experiences of powerlessness and insecurity about their housing situations detailed in chapter 1. For example, when discussing abolition of the household benefit cap, some people said they felt this leaves people trapped in homelessness, which - in turn - makes it hard to work longer hours.

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Similarly, participants discussed how unaffordable rents could constrain people's options so severely that they were faced with the options of living with immediate dangers inside the home or exposing themselves to the harms of homelessness.

*“Someone that I know, because of her housing situation she was forced to stay in a relationship with an abuser, just so she could have shelter, she could have a roof over her head. I was saying to her, ‘You need to leave,’ but she was like, ‘I can’t leave, I’d be homeless’. She was stuck with an abuser who was very physically abusive and nearly killed her, you know what I mean?”*

*– Birmingham participant*

#### **4.4.3 Removing power imbalances through making rent more affordable**

Participants emphasised throughout the discussion that private renters were at the mercy of landlords with little protection against the harms caused by rising rent (outlined above). As such, fundamental changes, such as a rent increase cap, were seen as essential to redressing this imbalance of power.

At the same time, some argued that the uneven relationship between tenants and landlords was not inherent and should be addressed by the government encouraging greater cooperation between the two parties.

*“It goes back to what you were saying [...] about things having to benefit both [tenants and landlords] and [renting] not being this conflict. It’s like it was almost set up for conflict.”*

*– London participant*

#### **4.4.4 Drawbacks to and concerns about achieving more affordable rented housing**

All of the policy solutions from this cluster – unfreezing local housing allowance, abolition of household benefit caps, introduction of a rent increase cap and stopping sharp increases to social rent – were judged as necessary to address the harms and power imbalances identified. However, some argued there were potential drawbacks to introducing a rent increase cap in the private sector rent as it may be counterproductive through reducing the availability of homes. Others argued this would go against some people's desires to rent out homes. Concerns lay primarily with whether these policies would adequately address the relative nature of 'affordability' for different tenants' circumstances.

Participants felt there should be equality between private and social renters when it came to the protections that prevent unaffordable rent increases and that equality in affordability should also be attentive to different needs. These include geographic considerations, such as average salaries and the relative cost of living, and household

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circumstances. Without this, there was a concern that these policies would not address the ways in which affordability is relative to circumstance. When it came to social rents, participants felt this included supporting those with fewer sources of income, including people living by themselves.

#### 4.5 Better management of rented homes

Participants considered the following solutions for achieving better management of rented homes:

1. Invest in existing social homes to improve standards.
2. Create a National Tenant Union to give a strong national, regional, and local voice to social tenants.
3. Invest in, and give stronger powers to, local authority housing enforcement teams (who enforce standards in private rented housing).
4. Reinstating rights to Legal Aid for tenants can get a solicitor to enforce their rights to decent conditions.
5. Make it easier to move ('transfer') between social homes.
6. Improve the management of temporary accommodation for homeless people by requiring temporary accommodation providers to be registered with the Regulator of Social Housing.
7. Stronger government guidance to councils on allocation of social housing, to make it more standardised, transparent, and fair.
8. Encourage more training and accreditation of private landlords.

Of these, 1 and 3 were in the top 10 'must have' priorities. Likewise, solutions 5 and 6 were in the top 10 'nice to have'. Figure 5. below shows the number of votes that each solution received. All received some 'must have votes' with those focused on investment and enforcement receiving the most 'must have'. One of the two solutions with the joint most 'must have' votes – investing in existing social homes to improve standards – nonetheless received less attention from participants in their discussions prior to voting, so this is not explored below.



## Better Management of Rented Homes Policy Cluster Votes

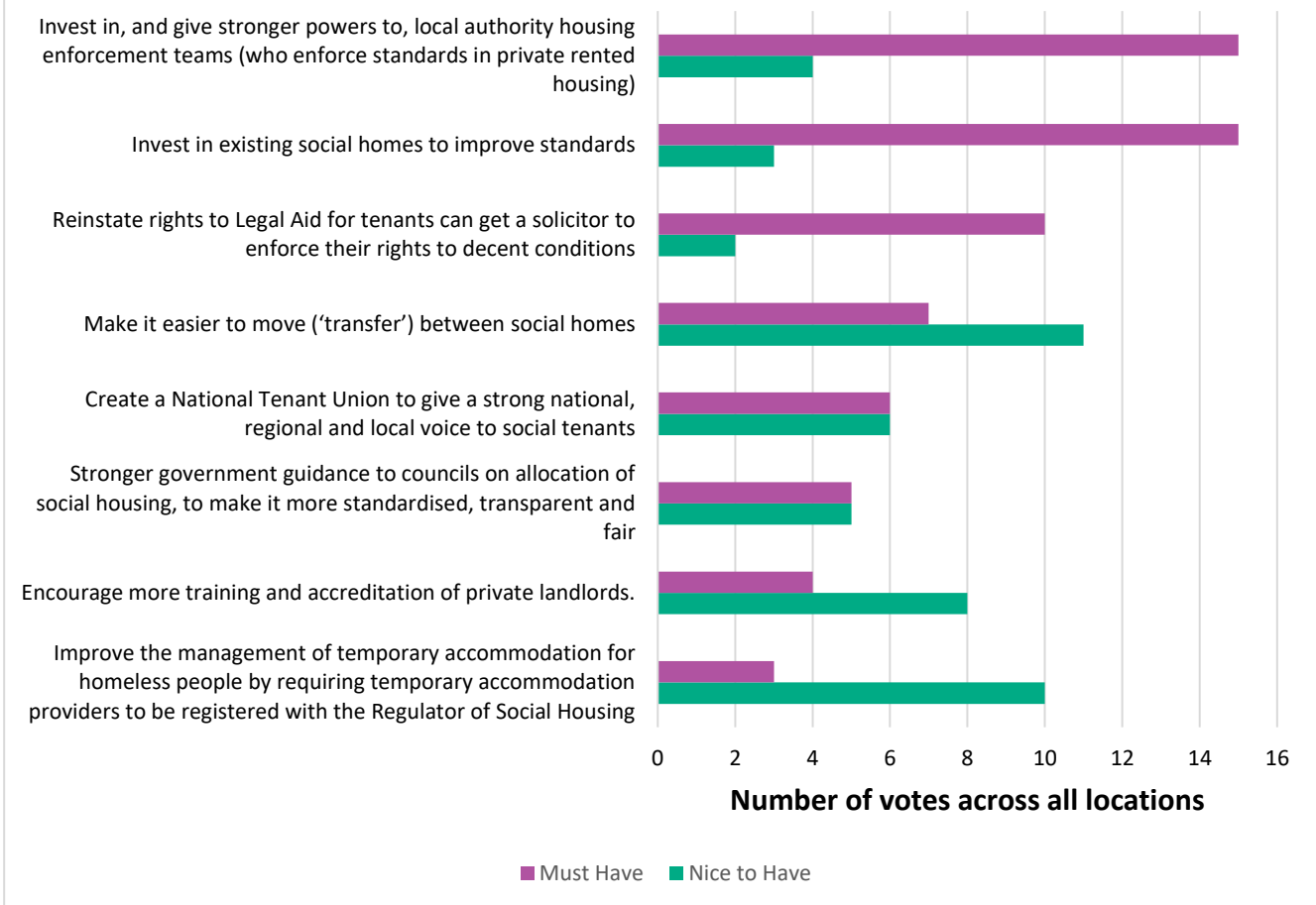


Figure 5. Better Management of Rented Homes Policy Cluster Votes

### 4.5.1 Better management would give tenants more power to hold landlords to account

Policy solutions aimed at bringing about better management of rented homes were supported because participants thought they would address the power imbalance between tenants and landlords.

### 4.5.2 Addressing the power dynamics of the tenant-landlord relationship

In emphasising the need for solutions that deterred landlords' poor management, participants expressed that this was particularly important for the private rental sector where people felt tenants have few powers at present to hold landlords to account. This was reflected in the high number of 'must have' votes for stronger powers for local authority enforcement teams (who enforce standards in private rented housing).

Beyond addressing the powers available, some argued that the power imbalance experienced by tenants was exacerbated by their frequent lack of knowledge about the legal powers they do have. For this reason, policies aimed at signposting and educating people on their rights and capabilities to challenge landlords' management failures were supported. Participants referenced policies from the fourth cluster (better rights and enforcement) in this respect, however they also in some cases saw this as a role that a tenant's union could play.

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*“[A union] cannot only provide legal advice to people but they can also educate people on their [...] tenancy rights. I think that would be a very helpful organisation to help set up.”*

*– East of England participant*

#### **4.5.3 Drawback and concerns about better management of rented homes**

Participants did not raise significant drawbacks to these solutions, though they felt that improvements to management of temporary accommodation should not be seen as a sufficient means of support for those experiencing homelessness.

Small caveats were raised for two specific policies. The solution of improving the management of temporary accommodation (TA) for those experiencing homelessness by requiring TA providers to be registered with the Regulator of Social Housing was well supported, though people wanted reassurance that efforts to move people on from TA would be implemented. Otherwise, it was felt there would simply be better management of a system which ultimately kept people within TA and not in more suitable homes.

A further caveat was asserted in discussions about the policy to make it easier to transfer between social homes. This brought out a similar dynamic seen in the discussion over the Right to Buy in the first policy cluster. Some argued that an individual's right to keep or own their social home should be a priority, whereas others believed people should be offered suitable alternatives and help to move when their needs change, for example when parents have an empty nest.

*“I would feel bad to be in a big seven-bed house when somebody else needs it, if I could move somewhere else.”*

*– Birmingham participant*

Participants were enthusiastic about the possibility of having better management of rented homes through, in particular, creating a National Tenant Union, encouraging more training and accreditation of private landlords, and investing in, and giving stronger powers to, local authority housing enforcement teams. However, their concerns centred on whether these options would have teeth when implemented, a factor clearest in the case of the union policy.

While creating a National Tenant Union received considerable attention in discussions, it was not a priority 'must have' solution for participants when voting. Motivating this was potentially a repeated concern in discussions that the demands of this union would in practice go unheeded by the government and so it would ultimately not bring about change for tenants. In contrast to this, the policy solution that more often offered participants a sense of assured support was the reinstatement of rights to legal aid. This was seen as a reliable route to empowering

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tenants against poorly managed homes because it had existed before and could provide support to other means in turn (in some cases, participants cited their experience of accessing legal aid as a basis for supporting the policy).

*“Yes, the legal aid one is, otherwise you can have your rights, but you can't really fight them without legal aid.”*

*– Merseyside participant*

The fact that the right to legal aid has existed may be a similar rationale to the one at play in people's prioritisation of strengthening local authority housing enforcement. Participants did not express many views on the latter, but as it would mean investing in an existing service based on existing legal duties councils have to enforce standards, it may have been an attractive option. Given that it also supports private renters, who were the focus of people's interests in this cluster, this may have further added to the policy's appeal.

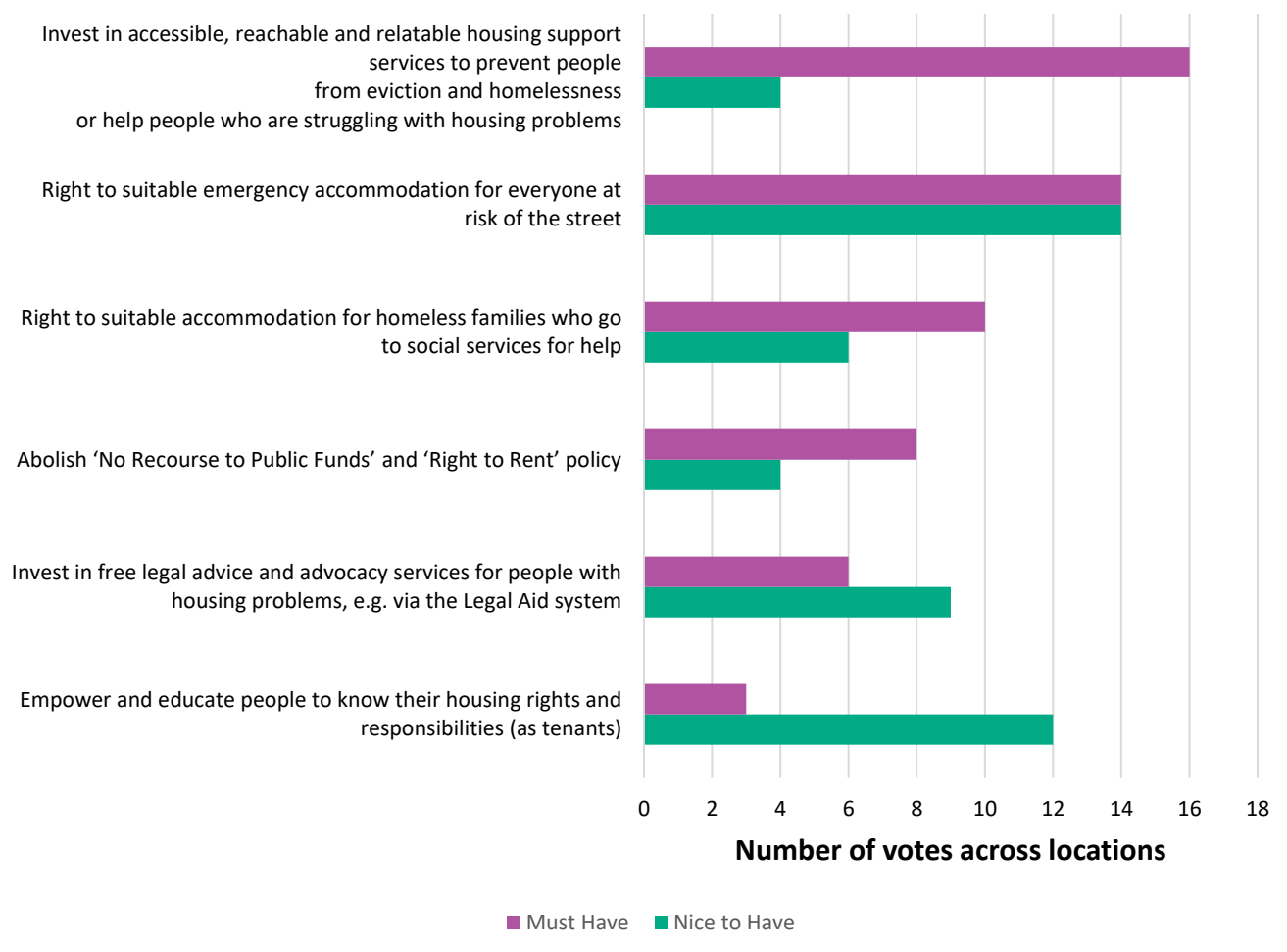
#### **4.6 Better housing rights and help to enforce them or deal with problems**

Participants considered the following solutions aimed at achieving better housing rights for tenants, helping to enforce these or deal with problems.

1. Invest in accessible, reachable, and relatable housing support services to prevent people from eviction and homelessness or help people who are struggling with housing problems.
2. Right to suitable emergency accommodation for everyone at risk of the street.
3. Right to suitable accommodation for homeless families who go to social services for help.
4. Abolish 'No Recourse to Public Funds' and 'Right to Rent' policy.
5. Empower and educate people to know their housing rights and responsibilities (as tenants).
6. Invest in free legal advice and advocacy services for people with housing problems, e.g., via the Legal Aid system.

Of these, 1 and 2 were in the top 10 'must have' priorities among participants, while 2 and 5 were in the top 10 'nice to have' priorities. Figure 6. shows the votes each solution received and highlights that solutions related to investing in support and guaranteeing rights received the most 'must have' votes.

## Better Housing Rights and Help to Enforce Them or Deal With Problems Policy Cluster Votes



**Figure 6.** Better Housing Rights and Help to Enforce Them or Deal with Problems Policy Cluster Votes

### 4.6.1 Better housing rights support those most in need and empower tenants

Policy solutions aimed at achieving better housing rights and their enforcement were prioritised because participants saw these as integral to empowering those most harmed by the housing emergency or in need of housing support. Furthermore, knowledge of rights was seen as shaping people’s expectations about their housing issues.

### 4.6.2 Better housing rights supporting those most in need or most harmed by the housing emergency

Those experiencing, and at risk, of homelessness were viewed as being on the frontline of the harms caused by housing emergency. Therefore, although other clusters encouraged a focus on prioritising, for example, the needs of private renters, participants focused on the needs of those experiencing homelessness when discussing this cluster. For some, this was strengthened by their interpretation of the government’s ‘Everyone In’ pandemic response, which convinced them that it is possible to do much more to support those experiencing

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homelessness than is currently the case, as well as the understanding they gained during the deliberations of how little rights those experiencing homelessness in fact have.<sup>18</sup>

*“I think honestly when I heard that [those experiencing homelessness have few housing rights], I was just baffled. I was baffled because they’re human rights - do we all not deserve the same right[s] whether you’ve got a house or not? Where’s the equality there?”*

*– Birmingham participant*

Participants supported the abolition of No Recourse to Public Funds and the Right to Rent on the basis that these subjected people to racist discrimination; a harm seen as compounded by these same people experiencing racism elsewhere in their lives (with participants citing refugees, for example). In a minority of cases, participants expressed disagreement with the argument that these two existing policies were racist because they did not think that they withheld rights or discriminated on an unfair basis. Others said that they were unclear on how eligibility for public funds is determined, and therefore questioned whether these were being withheld unfairly. Participants had been provided with information about No Recourse to Public Funds in session 2 of the research, so disagreement on how these funds are allocated reflects their own understanding of this.

#### **4.6.3 Better housing rights provide empowerment through knowledge and increased expectations**

Participants supported the solutions that empowered and educated people to know their housing rights and responsibilities as tenants, provided support to those with housing problems in the form of free legal advice and advocacy services, and invested in accessible, reachable, and relatable housing support services to protect people from eviction and homelessness or who are struggling with housing problems. Participants felt the existing system of housing advice was difficult to navigate. Therefore, better provision of this sort was supported because access to knowledge about housing rights was seen as integral to empowering tenants to feel they can hold landlords to account for harms they cause them. Related to this was a broader argument that knowledge of these rights, and the support available, could raise people’s expectations that their housing issues were surmountable.

*“I think for me, I do think that empowerment of people and giving them their rights, that one’s important. It’s like I say, if I had known what my rights were when I went [to court with my landlord], I would have absolutely floored them.”*

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<sup>18</sup> This was the government’s decision on 26 March 2020 to ask English local authorities to find accommodation for people “who are, or are at risk of, sleeping rough, and those who are in accommodation where it is difficult to self-isolate, such as shelters and assessment centres”. See: MHCLG. ‘Letter from Minister Hall to local authorities on plans to protect rough sleepers’. HM Government. 2020. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/928780/Letter\\_from\\_Minister\\_Hall\\_to\\_Local\\_Authorities.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/928780/Letter_from_Minister_Hall_to_Local_Authorities.pdf)

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*– Birmingham participant*

#### **4.6.4 Drawbacks and concerns about achieving better housing rights**

Concerns centred on the way in which participants felt the existing housing system, and wider societal prejudices, discouraged support for these same groups and so would be a challenge to these policies. This was clearest in discussion of homelessness, where people felt that, at present, responsibility was placed too much on those experiencing homelessness or at risk of it. Instead, people argued that landlords should be more accountable for preventing homelessness, and councils less inclined to judge people as making themselves intentionally homeless. The onus was judged to be on these actors to provide more early intervention and support for people at risk of homelessness, who should be seen in need of active help rather than left to their own devices at a time of acute personal stress.

*“Support [for those at risk of homelessness] needs to be actively getting out there and helping people that are in need”*

*– London participant*

Participants felt that, in providing information about housing rights, there was a need for these to be more tailored to supporting people in different circumstances; for example, lone mothers or those experiencing homelessness. Participants argued that, at present, the array of information available can be hard to navigate without this personalisation. Furthermore, people felt that provision of this information should start from a younger age in educational settings. The absence of a greater understanding of housing was seen as a barrier which landlords at present take advantage of.

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# 5. Conclusion

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To inform the development of Shelter's manifesto and general election campaign, NatCen brought together 75 members of the public from across England to deliberate on the housing emergency and input into the development of the manifesto. Across four sessions, participants shared their lived experiences of the emergency and deliberated upon further evidence they were given about it, including a series of policy solutions that could address the housing emergency. Participants then agreed upon a set of principles that they felt should guide Shelter's general election campaign and came to a set of priority policy solutions for tackling the housing emergency to be included in Shelter's manifesto.

Participants' testimonies highlighted the ways housing issues intersect and interact with other parts of their lives. Underpinning many of their stories was the feeling of a power imbalance between themselves and their landlords that left people feeling insecure in their homes and powerless to improve their circumstances. In the penultimate session of the summit process, participants described their visions of a future where there is no longer a housing emergency, and these responded to common feelings of powerlessness and uncertainty. Out of this came the agreed principles which foregrounded the importance of a secure home and the need to empower tenants:

1. A home is a human right.
2. Home is the foundation of a secure society.
3. Home is fundamental to health and wellbeing.
4. Strengthen regulation, accountability, and enforcement.
5. Listen to communities and act!

In the final session of the summit, Shelter presented participants with 24 different policy solutions to the housing emergency, which were developed through the collation of existing Shelter solutions and other ideas suggested by participants. From this list, participants were asked to prioritise three as 'must have' and three as 'nice to have' to include in the Shelter manifesto. NatCen identified four ideas that shaped why participants prioritised the solutions. These build upon the agreed principles and shared experiences identified:

- **The right to a permanent affordable home:** Participants prioritised solutions that they felt guaranteed people access to secure and long-term homes (by 'affordable' participants meant accessible to those on low incomes, rather than specifically access to homes provided under the government's 'Affordable Homes Programme').
- **Addressing power dynamics:** Other solutions were selected because they were seen to tackle power dynamics and empower tenants, reflecting the lived experience of many participants.

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- **Helping those most in need or most harmed by the housing emergency:** Some participants selected solutions because they guaranteed homes for those worst affected by the housing emergency, specifically those experiencing homelessness or at a risk of this, and those facing racial discrimination in housing.
  - **Timescales:** Participants wanted a focus on solutions that address systemic issues in the long-term, responding to these issues in ways that offered genuinely sustainable solutions. Shorter-term solutions were a focus for participants when these addressed immediate issues and concerns.

Since NatCen completed this research, Shelter has developed and finalised its campaign manifesto to launch in autumn 2023. Shelter invited participants to attend a webinar to see the final manifesto ahead of its public launch. This gave participants the first opportunity to see the manifesto they helped to create and for Shelter to explain the policy solutions included in its public manifesto. This step was built into the process to ensure accountability between Shelter staff and the participants in the summit.

Shelter also invited participants to stay involved in the development of its election campaign through a lived experience steering group. This group will co-design specific parts of the campaign, such as tactics for how the organisation gets supporters on board with the campaign. In this way, Shelter aims to continue the approach taken in this research throughout the campaign.





