

# Overview and scrutiny



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## Final Report of the Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task & Finish Group



**October 2024**

## Membership of the Task and Finish Group



[Councillor Bill Brown](#)



[Councillor Jack Lavery](#)



[Councillor Aisha Malik-Smith](#)



[Councillor Stephen Penfold](#)



[Councillor Sakina Sheikh](#)

**Note:** Councillor Will Cooper, was a member of this Task and Finish Group (TFG) until he was replaced by Councillor Stephen Penfold on 3 October 2023, after being appointed as a member of the Executive. Councillor Rosie Parry was also a member of, and chaired, this TFG from its establishment until 27 March 2024, when she was appointed as a Cabinet Advisor and replaced by Councillor Aisha Malik-Smith.

Supporting Officer:

Nidhi Patil (Scrutiny Manager)

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## 1. Chair's Introduction

The private rented sector (PRS) plays a crucial role in Lewisham, housing a significant proportion of our residents. As the sector continues to expand, it is becoming increasingly important to address the challenges faced by both tenants and landlords, particularly in light of rising rents, short-term tenancies, inadequate housing conditions, and the uncertainty many face due to the threat of eviction. Landlords, too, face their own difficulties, from navigating complex regulations to dealing with rent arrears and rising operating costs. These challenges call for a more responsive framework from the Council.

PRS issues deeply affect residents' quality of life and addressing them is essential to fostering a stable and resilient community. Many tenants in this sector face housing insecurity due to unaffordable rent increases and the constant risk of eviction, which can lead to homelessness, displacement, and severe emotional and financial stress. For vulnerable residents, the lack of secure, affordable housing can mean the difference between stability and a continuous struggle to find a safe home. This makes it critical for the Council to address these issues and take meaningful action to support those living in the PRS. By fostering clear, accessible lines of communication and supporting both tenants and landlords, the Council can help ensure a safe and sustainable private rented sector for Lewisham residents.

This report highlights the pressing need for Lewisham Council to improve its engagement with residents in the PRS. The Task and Finish Group (TFG) recognises that while some of the wider policy challenges- such as rent regulation or national housing policies- lie beyond our direct remit, there are areas where the Council can have a significant impact. Our focus has been on identifying practical measures that the Council can take, particularly in terms of enhancing how it communicates with and supports PRS tenants and landlords. This report calls on the Council to take proactive steps in these areas, acknowledging that more can be done to ensure residents feel heard, supported, and protected within the sector.

As we conclude the work of this TFG, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to Councillor Will Cooper, whose commitment to addressing housing issues led to the establishment of this Task and Finish Group. I also want to express my gratitude to Councillor Rosie Parry, who chaired this TFG from its establishment until the 27th of March 2024. Her vision and hard work was instrumental in laying down the foundation of this TFG's work. We are confident that Councillor Cooper and Councillor Parry in their roles as Cabinet Member for Better Homes, Neighbourhoods and Homelessness and Cabinet Advisor, respectively, will make efforts needed to progress our recommendations.

I would like to thank all the members of the Task and Finish Group for their hard work and valuable contributions, as well as the housing officers from Lewisham Council and the various stakeholders and organisations who shared their insights. Their input has been essential in enriching this report and ensuring a comprehensive approach to addressing PRS challenges in Lewisham. I would also like to give my special thanks to all Lewisham residents who engaged with us via surveys and focus group sessions. Your first-hand insights were invaluable in helping us better understand how the Council can improve its support for and communication with residents.

This report represents an important step in the broader effort to enhance the lives of those residing in Lewisham's private rented sector. We must continue to

build on this momentum and work collectively to drive forward the changes needed.

**Councillor Bill Brown**

**Chair of the Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group**

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## 2. The role and purpose of the Task and Finish Group

- 2.1. The purpose of the Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group was to explore how the Council could improve its services for, and communication with residents in the private rented sector (PRS). With a clear focus on the PRS in Lewisham, the Task and Finish Group (TFG) sought to gain insight into prevailing challenges and examine the existing support provided to residents in the PRS to identify areas for potential improvements. The TFG also aimed to explore and utilise benchmarking and good practices from other councils, with the purpose of enhancing the services within Lewisham's PRS.
- 2.2. The subject and membership of the group was agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 4 July 2023<sup>1</sup>. However, the group's membership changed a few times throughout its duration. The Task and Finish group was initially proposed by Councillor Will Cooper, who was replaced by Councillor Stephen Penfold on 3 October 2023, after being appointed as a member of the Executive which meant he could no longer serve on a scrutiny TFG. Councillor Rosie Parry served as a member and Chair of the Task and Finish Group from the group's establishment until 27 March 2024, when her appointment as a Cabinet Advisor required her to step down. She was replaced on the TFG by Councillor Aisha Malik-Smith. After 27 March 2024, the Task and Finish group was composed of Councillors Bill Brown, Jack Lavery, Aisha Malik-Smith, Stephen Penfold and Sakina Sheikh, with Councillor Bill Brown serving as Chair.
- 2.3. The Group considered a scoping report at its first meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of September 2023<sup>2</sup> which established the context and background for its work. The following key lines of enquiry were agreed by the Group at its first meeting:

Understanding the current challenges:

- What are the most common challenges faced by private renters in the area and are there specific demographic groups or communities that experience unique difficulties in the Private Rented Sector (PRS)?
- How do these challenges impact the overall well-being and stability of private renters?
- What are the key areas of improvement in Lewisham's PRS according to tenants and landlords?

Evaluating the current support offer for residents in the PRS:

- What is the existing support framework for residents in the PRS, and how effectively does it meet their needs?
- What are the gaps in the existing support framework and what barriers do PRS residents face when trying to access support services?
- How many tenant support and advice organisations exist in Lewisham, and is their utilisation effective in addressing the needs of tenants and landlords in the area?

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<sup>1</sup> [Link to the agenda of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 4 July 2023](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Link to the agenda for the Private Rented Sector in Lewisham Task and Finish Group meeting- 21 September 2023](#)

- How can support services be customised to cater to the diverse needs of different private renters, including families, students, seniors, and individuals with specific requirements?
- How can the Council support the establishment of a network specifically designed for private renters in Lewisham, in line with its Corporate Strategy 2018-22 commitment?

Enhancing communication channels:

- How can we ensure effective communication to inform PRS residents about the Council's responsibilities within the sector?
- How can communication between Lewisham Council and PRS residents be improved to effectively convey information about available support services, and what communication channels prove most effective for this purpose?

Learning from successful case studies:

- How can we utilise benchmarking and good practice from other councils to improve our services for PRS residents in Lewisham?
- Considering the constraints of limited resources, how can the Council draw insights from successful case studies and good practice to develop proactive enforcement initiatives and enhance support services for PRS residents?

2.4. It was also agreed that the Task and Finish group would be carried out utilising 'agile' methodology, further details of which are given in section six of this report (how the task and finish group was run).

### 3. Context

#### Trends and Challenges in the Private Rented Sector: A broad overview

- 3.1. London's Private Rented Sector (PRS) has witnessed a substantial surge since the 1990s, with the number of private renters reaching approximately 2.7 million as of 2021 (Census, 2021). Privately rented properties now account for 30% of homes in London, much higher than the national average of just over 20%<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.2. However, a rise in demand for housing in the PRS hasn't translated to a rise in supply; in fact, it's quite the opposite. Market data reveals that demand for rental properties reached record levels in late 2021 and continued its upward trajectory in 2022, following dramatic declines during pandemic lockdown. But the number of private rental properties available in London has experienced a substantial decrease since the mid-2020s, leaving the supply significantly lower than pre-pandemic levels. Rental listings have fallen across all bedroom types in London, with listings for 1, 2 and 3 bed properties down by around 36% in 2023 compared to the Quarter 1 2017-19 average<sup>3</sup>.
- 3.3. Properties are being rented out at an increasingly rapid pace due to a shrinking supply of rental units and rising demand, leading to intense competition in the rental market.
- 3.4. A key outcome of this reduced housing supply in the PRS has been a sharp rise in rental prices, exacerbating the affordability crisis for private renters and significantly contributing to the broader cost-of-living crisis.



Figure 1- High rent prices in London<sup>4</sup>

- 3.5. The English Housing Survey 2022-23 reported that the average private rent in London was £356 per week, compared to £190 per week outside of London. This survey also assessed housing affordability for households in England using two methods: one based on total household income (including the income of all household members), and another based solely on the income of the household reference person (HRP) and their partner (irrespective of whether there are other adults in the household). Excluding any housing support received, private renters across the country spent 37% of their total household

<sup>3</sup> [Supply of Private Rented Sector Accommodation in London- Savills and LSE consulting](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Reforming Private Renting: The Mayor of London's Blueprint](#)



income on rent and 46% of the HRP and partner-income<sup>5</sup>.

- 3.6. Alongside the surge in rent prices, the quality of housing in the PRS has become a growing concern. According to the English Housing Survey 2022-23, 21% of homes in the private rented sector were classified as non-decent, the highest proportion amongst all housing tenures. Of the 2.1 million dwellings in England with a Category 1 hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), the PRS accounted for the largest share, at 12%<sup>5</sup>.

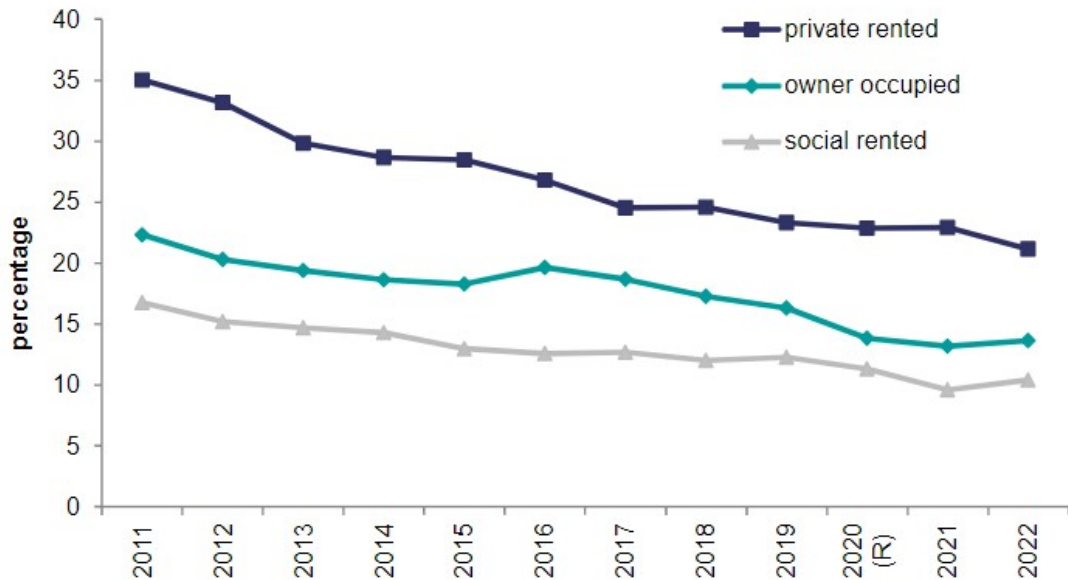


Figure 2- Non-decent homes, by tenure, 2011 to 2022

- 3.7. In addition to the escalating rent prices and concerning housing quality within the PRS, another pressing issue that tenants face is tenancy insecurity and a lack of long-term stability. Many renters in the PRS are subjected to short-term leases, resulting in uncertainty over renewals, heightened stress, and a weakened sense of home and belonging. The instability also makes individuals and families vulnerable to sudden rent increases and potential evictions.
- 3.8. In 2022-23, approximately 1.9 million households across England moved home in the previous 12 months, with the majority of these moves occurring within, into or out of private rented properties. A total of 676,000 households moved within the sector (from one privately rented home to another), while 192,000 new households entered the private rented sector. In contrast, there was significantly less movement in the social rented and owner-occupied sectors<sup>5</sup>.
- 3.9. The composition of household types in the PRS has also diversified in recent decades. What was once a residual tenure, primarily occupied by students, young people, and economic migrants in the late 1990s, now accommodates millions of Londoners from a broad range of backgrounds<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.10. A growing number of older people are now renting in the PRS. The number of individuals aged 40 or older renting privately in London has nearly doubled from around 290,000 in 2009 to around 570,000 in 2019<sup>6</sup>. Within this total, those aged 65+ increased from around 50,000 to 80,000. Simultaneously, the number of older owner-occupiers has declined. Age UK reports that high rents leave

<sup>5</sup> [English Housing Survey 2022-23](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Understanding recent rental trends in London's private rented market](#)

one in three older tenants in the UK in poverty after their rent is paid, with many relying on fixed incomes or pensions to cover housing costs<sup>7</sup>.

- 3.11. Around one-third of private renting households in London now include children, up from approximately one in six in the mid-1990s<sup>4</sup>. The demographic shift within the PRS, particularly the rise in households with children, underscores the complexity of needs within the sector. As this landscape evolves, the role of local authorities in regulating the sector and supporting its residents, becomes increasingly important.



Figure 3- Growing number of children living in the PRS

- 3.12. Most London local authorities are grappling with similar issues across the PRS. However, the lack of a cohesive London-wide policy on the PRS has resulted in significant differences in the approach and effectiveness of PRS policies across boroughs, complicating efforts to address the sector's issues uniformly. This Task and Finish Group's work focuses on the PRS issues in Lewisham but throughout its research and evidence gathering, the TFG remained mindful of these wider challenges affecting the PRS across London and more broadly England.

#### **Private Rented Sector in Lewisham**

- 3.13. The growth in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Lewisham over the past two decades has mirrored the broader trend observed across London. Based on Lewisham Council's Housing Strategy 2020-26, the number of households relying on the PRS has nearly doubled in the past two decades and the rents in the sector have surged by 50% in the last 10 years, significantly impacting affordability.
- 3.14. The rising rents in the PRS and the lack of affordable options has forced individuals and families to compromise on living conditions, exposing them to potential health and safety risks. The PRS in Lewisham has 22.7% of properties with at least one Category 1 hazard, much higher than the national average.

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<sup>7</sup> [Why older private renters need more security: Age UK](#)

- 3.15. Despite paying exorbitant rents and enduring substandard living conditions, renters continue to face significant tenancy insecurity. Many tenants accept high costs and inadequate housing out of fear that raising complaints might lead to rent hikes or eviction notices.
- 3.16. Eviction from an Assured Shorthold Tenancy is the leading cause of homelessness in Lewisham. Eviction resulting from a Section 21 notice is a subset of this. The possibility of being evicted without reason at 2 months' notice (no-fault Section 21 eviction) puts tenants in a position where they find it uncomfortable to raise their voice against poor living conditions. In 2018, Citizens Advice found that if a tenant complained to their local council, they were 5 times more likely to be evicted using Section 21 than those who stayed silent<sup>8</sup>.

Tenants who receive a section 21 notice are:



Figure 4- Information gathered by a survey conducted by ComRes on behalf of Citizens Advice, 2018

- 3.17. Local authorities have a statutory responsibility to investigate residents' reports of harassment, illegal eviction and disrepair in their properties, and to take action where they find evidence of these issues. But there is reluctance amidst private renters to report any issues due to fear of eviction or rent rises. Additionally, a lack of awareness about available support often prevents tenants from seeking help from their local council.
- 3.18. A London-wide shortage of socially rented homes has also meant that London boroughs, including Lewisham, have become more reliant on the private rented sector as a means for prevention and relief of homelessness. Since 2011, there has been a 45% reduction in the number of social housing lets for households on the housing register in Lewisham<sup>9</sup> which has led the Council to explore alternative solutions for housing homeless people which includes the PRS. This has further exacerbated the existing pressures and challenges within the sector.
- 3.19. When discussing challenges in the PRS, it is essential to recognise that most landlords are responsible and compliant, striving to operate fairly. Understanding the difficulties they encounter is crucial for maintaining a secure PRS. This Task and Finish Group (TFG) has focused its efforts on understanding the challenges faced by both renters and landlords in the PRS. Additionally, it has attempted to assess the existing support available to them and explore how the Council can improve communication and engagement with

<sup>8</sup> [Touch and go- How to prevent private renters from retaliatory eviction in England: Citizens Advice](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Lewisham's Housing Strategy 2020-26](#)

PRS residents.

### Lewisham Council's Existing Policies in the Private Rented Sector

- 3.20. With regards to the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in Lewisham, current policies encompass a range of initiatives, including licensing schemes and the Council's Private Sector Housing and Enforcement Policy, aimed at ensuring better living standards and stronger tenant protections.
- 3.21. Licensing schemes play a crucial role in regulating the PRS. Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO) licensing focuses on properties with multiple tenants sharing facilities, ensuring landlords meet specific safety and management standards. On the other hand, selective licensing covers single-occupancy properties and aims to improve property management, tenant safety and the overall condition of rented homes in specific designated areas.
- 3.22. When this Task and Finish Group was established, Lewisham had 2 licensing schemes for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)- the National Mandatory Scheme<sup>10</sup> and a Lewisham Additional Scheme<sup>10</sup>. In December 2023, Lewisham Council's proposals for a Selective Licensing scheme to cover nearly all privately rented properties in the borough received approval from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This new scheme came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2024.
- 3.23. The new Selective Licensing scheme brings an additional 20,000 properties in the borough into scope and nearly all privately rented properties in Lewisham not currently covered by the existing licensing schemes for HMOs will need a licence under the new scheme<sup>11</sup>.

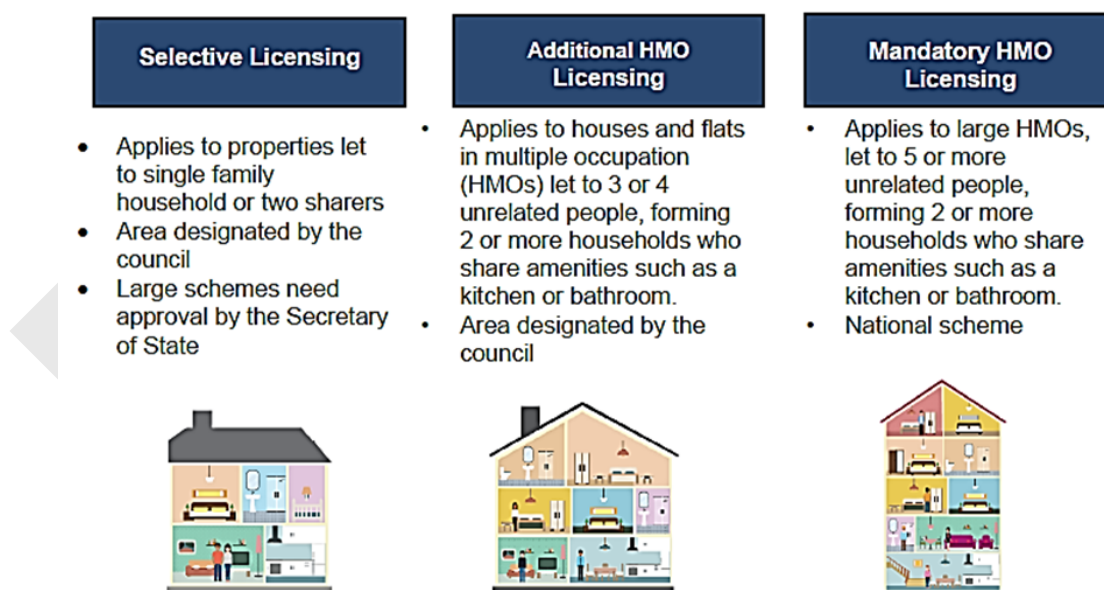


Figure 5- Different property licensing schemes

- 3.24. The Council's Private Sector Housing and Enforcement Policy supports the key objectives of the Housing Strategy 2020-26 and sets out its enforcement objectives. The Council operates a four-level enforcement policy -
- Level 1- Emergency Enforcement (this includes Emergency Prohibition

<sup>10</sup> [HMO licensing schemes: Lewisham Council](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Selective Licensing in Lewisham](#)

#### Orders and Emergency works in default)

- Level 2- Formal Enforcement (this includes serving statutory notices, revoking or varying licenses, issuing civil penalties, referring cases to Council's legal department, etc.)
- Level 3- Informal Enforcement (this includes providing schedules of work, writing letters and commencing a dialogue with tenants, landlords and agents)
- Level 4- Information, advice, support and signposting (this includes posting information about the rights and duties of tenants and landlords on the Council's website, providing advice on compliance, assisting those seeking information, etc.)

3.25. When this TFG was established, the Renters Reform Bill was at the Second Reading stage in Parliament. In August 2023, the TFG received both a written and a virtual verbal briefing on this Bill from Lewisham Council officers. The TFG intended to monitor the Bill's progress closely and try to evaluate its potential impact on the PRS in Lewisham. However, the Bill was abandoned before Parliament prorogued on the 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2024, ahead of the General Election on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 2024. The King's speech on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 2024 has now promised a Renters' Rights Bill which will be introduced to give greater rights and protections to people renting their homes, including ending no fault evictions and reforming grounds for possession. During its research phase, the TFG remained updated on these developments.

#### Lewisham's Corporate Strategy

- 3.26. The work of this Task and Finish Group has been consistent with the Council's policy framework. It supports the achievement of the Corporate Strategy objective of providing 'Quality Housing'.
- 3.27. In its Corporate Strategy 2022-26, the Council commits to providing more support to renters in the borough through further landlord licensing, enforcement of poorly managed homes, holding landlords to account and giving a voice to renters in the borough.
- 3.28. The efforts of this Task and Finish Group have been directed toward advancing this corporate strategy objective.

#### Lewisham's Housing Strategy 2020-26

- 3.29. Lewisham's Housing Strategy 2020-26 sets out its priorities and actions for delivering quality housing in the borough. This strategy acknowledges the vital role of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in fighting homelessness and overcrowding in the borough, promising to make the best use of the PRS to solve housing need. It also acknowledges the current state of the sector with high rents and sub-par living standards and states that ensuring the quality and standard of the PRS is a priority for the Council.
- 3.30. The efforts of this Task and Finish Group were guided by the Council's Housing Strategy 2020-26, aligning closely with its objectives.

#### Lewisham's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-26

- 3.31. Increasingly unaffordable PRS and not enough social homes have contributed massively to the increase in homelessness in the last decade. The Council's strategic approach to preventing homelessness and meeting housing needs is outlined in the Council's Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-26.

- 3.32. The strategy acknowledges that due to the scarcity of social and council housing and the lengthy waitlists for accommodation, the Council is increasingly relying on preventing homelessness by supporting people to remain in their PRS properties or supporting them to find alternative PRS accommodation. However, the decrease in supply of PRS properties is hampering the Council's ability to secure alternative housing, giving rise to numerous challenges in the process.
- 3.33. The work of this TFG was informed by this strategy and ensured that the Group had a comprehensive understanding of the pivotal role played by the PRS in homelessness prevention.

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## 4. Key findings

### Understanding Current challenges in the PRS

#### Demographic Shifts and Affordability Challenges

- 4.1. The socio-demographic profile of residents in the private rented sector is evolving. Traditionally, the PRS was associated with young professionals, students and economic migrants. However, due to rising costs and the increasing difficulty of homeownership, more people from diverse backgrounds are staying in the PRS. This sector now serves a broader demographic, including increasing number of families with children and older adults. This shift was evident in the TFG's engagement with key stakeholders, including direct feedback from tenants through surveys and a focus group session.
- 4.2. Along with the demographic profile, the length of time people spend in the PRS is also changing. The PRS was once considered a temporary housing option for those transitioning due to work, study, or other short-term reasons. Now, many tenants are staying in rented accommodation for much longer as leaving the sector has become more challenging. During the TFG's focus group discussions, some renters reported having lived in their rented homes for over 20 years, highlighting that the PRS is no longer just a stop-gap but a long-term housing solution for many.
- 4.3. The TFG's survey for private renters in Lewisham received 118 responses. This survey found that renters in Lewisham were spending on average 11.83 years in the PRS. Responses varied widely, from someone who had recently moved in at 1.5 months to a tenant who had been renting for 43 years. Notably, 31.3% of respondents had lived in Lewisham's PRS for over 15 years, 19.13% for over 20 years and 4.35% for more than 30 years.
- 4.4. The changing socio-demographic profile of tenants in the sector underscores the increasing number of vulnerable residents in the PRS, which heightens the importance of addressing issues within the sector to ensure it remains safe and secure. The growing permanence of tenants in the PRS further highlights the need for stronger regulation and oversight to guarantee that homes are safe, affordable and conducive to health living.
- 4.5. The demographic shifts also significantly impact the type of support services required by residents in the PRS. For example, older tenants may have difficulty accessing online or IT-based resources, making in-person or telephone support crucial. In contrast, parents could benefit from improved digital services that provide accessible advice or information online at their convenience.
- 4.6. Another pressing challenge affecting private renters is affordability. It is widely known that London has become an increasingly expensive place to live. Lewisham, being an inner London borough, has not been immune to these steep rent hikes. In the TFG survey, 64.96% of renters identified high rent costs as their biggest challenge, followed by rising utility bills. When asked if they had to make any significant sacrifices or cutbacks in their lifestyle due to rent costs, 52.9% of respondents answered yes.
- 4.7. As tenants grapple with rising costs, landlords are also facing financial pressures of their own. The TFG engaged with landlords in the private rented sector through a survey and a focus group session. Landlords highlighted that broader economic pressures, such as rising mortgage costs, were impacting their financial sustainability and contributing to rents increases. In the TFG's

survey, 65.1% of landlords reported that their rental pricing decisions were primarily influenced by operating costs (such as maintenance, taxes and insurance). Other significant factors included wider economic conditions, such as inflation and mortgage rate increases, as well as local market demand.

- 4.8. Through its engagement with both tenants and landlords, the TFG gained a comprehensive understanding of the demographic shifts and affordability challenges shaping the private rented sector in Lewisham. These changes are making it increasingly difficult for many residents, particularly vulnerable groups, to secure and maintain affordable housing. By understanding these challenges, the TFG sought to gain deeper insight into the support services required by both tenants and landlords.

### Tenancy insecurity and its impact

- 4.9. Another significant challenge faced by tenants in the private rented sector (PRS) is tenancy insecurity, which has a profound impact on their well-being. This instability particularly affects older tenants relying on pensions and families with children. Frequent relocations that are a part of living in the PRS hinder the development of community ties and create a persistent sense of instability.
- 4.10. During an evidence session with Generation Rent, Crisis and Renters Rights London, the Task and Finish Group (TFG) learned that many tenants, especially those on lower incomes, were being offered 6-month Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) contracts. This short-term arrangement heightened the insecurity for tenants, making them more vulnerable to frequent rent increases and exacerbating the instability within the sector.
- 4.11. The fear of Section 21 notices, commonly known as ‘no-fault’ evictions, further intensifies this insecurity. Tenants in the PRS live under the constant anxiety that they could be asked to vacate their homes at any time, which discourages them from reporting issues with their landlords or properties, including sub-standard living conditions. In the TFG’s evidence sessions, tenant advocacy groups such as Shelter, Generation Rent, Crisis, Renters’ Right London and even other London local authorities have highlighted how the fear of Section 21 notices silences tenants and prevents them from raising legitimate concerns.

#### **Court proceedings for no-fault evictions in England are at a seven-year high**

Section 21 court claims brought by private landlords, quarterly

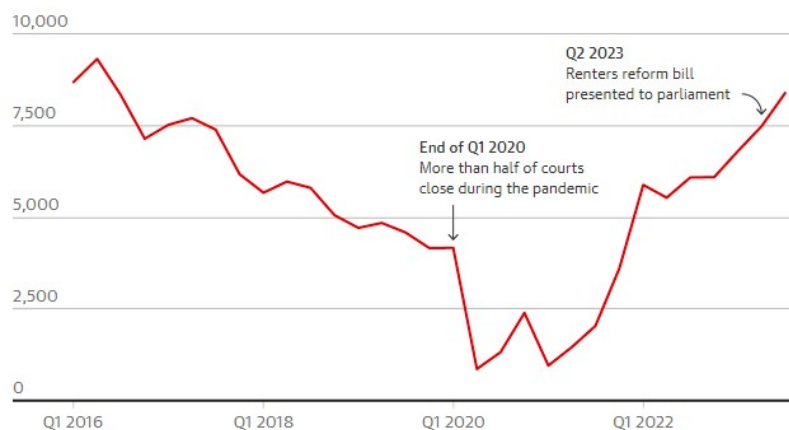


Figure 6- Rise in Section 21 court claims

- 4.12. Citizen Advice Lewisham reported a significant rise in Section 21 evictions within the borough, noting that it was one of the primary issues for which they



provided tenant support in the last year (2023). This increase is reflective of a national trend, which has contributed substantially to the culture of insecurity in the private rented sector.

- 4.13. Eviction from an Assured Shorthold Tenancy is the leading cause of homelessness in Lewisham and eviction by a Section 21 notice is a subset of this. It is important to understand that the increase in these evictions has not only left tenants living in fear but has also discouraged them from asserting their rights, reinforcing a broader culture of insecurity within the PRS.
- 4.14. Several studies have identified tenancy insecurity as a major factor negatively affecting the mental health and wellbeing of individuals in the PRS. This is often linked to short-term tenancy agreements and the looming threat of “no fault” evictions<sup>12</sup>. The TFG’s evidence sessions confirmed these findings, as it heard several case studies illustrating how frequent relocations and uncertainty in the sector are particularly damaging to families with children, disrupting their lives and preventing the establishment of stable community connections.
- 4.15. Young adults are also experiencing the detrimental effects of tenancy insecurity on mental health. In an evidence session with Generation Rent, the TFG discussed research by the Institute for Social and Economic Research, which found that the ‘boomerang’ generation- adults aged 21-35 moving back in with their parents- experienced improved mental health after escaping the stress of poor living conditions and instability within the rental housing sector.
- 4.16. The TFG’s understanding of tenancy insecurity and its impact has enhanced its insight into the necessary support required by PRS residents.

### Rise of short-term rentals

- 4.17. The Task and Finish Group (TFG) heard from tenant advocacy organisations as well as other local authorities regarding the adverse effects of the growth in short-term rentals. Research has shown that short-term rentals on platforms such as Airbnb, HomeAway, Booking.com etc are increasingly being utilised by professional operators as a cost-effective means of renting out properties<sup>13</sup>.
- 4.18. In London, homeowners wishing to rent out residential properties for short-term accommodation exceeding 90 nights in a calendar year must obtain planning permission from their local authority. However, there are concerns that some homeowners are turning residential properties into letting businesses without the required planning permissions, often exceeding the 90-night limit<sup>13</sup>. Homeowners are not required to notify the local authority that they are using their property for short-term lettings which makes enforcement action by the authority difficult.

However, following the government’s consultation in 2023 on a registration scheme for short-term lets in England, it has been agreed that a mandatory, national registration scheme will be implemented that would provide valuable data to local authorities. This will help local authorities identify short-term lets in their area and mitigate their impact on communities and housing<sup>14</sup>.

- 4.19. The TFG’s evidence sessions highlighted concerns from local authorities and tenant advocacy groups regarding the impact of rising short-term lettings. They

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<sup>12</sup> [Health and wellbeing in the private rented sector](#)

<sup>13</sup> [The growth in short-term lettings in England- House of Commons Library](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Delivering a registration scheme for short-term lets](#)

noted that this trend was reducing the availability of longer-term rental accommodations, thereby exacerbating housing shortages in certain areas and driving up rents. Research commissioned by ARLA PropertyMark (a representative body for letting agents) in 2019, found that 10% of surveyed landlords were ‘very likely’ or ‘fairly likely’ to transition to short-term rentals from properties currently used for long-term tenancies<sup>13</sup>.

- 4.20. The TFG acknowledged that the rise of short-term rentals was having a negative impact on the PRS. Due to time constraints, the TFG was unable to collect comprehensive data on the number of short-term rentals in Lewisham or to identify trends. However, it was recognised that Lewisham, as an inner-London borough, was vulnerable to the surge in short-term lettings because of its proximity to central London and tourist attractions, which must be considered in discussions regarding private rented sector issues.

## **Assessing support services for PRS residents**

### Awareness and Accessibility of Council Support Services

- 4.21. All the evidence gathered from the TFG’s tenant survey, discussions with tenant advocacy organisations, and focus group sessions, indicates a significant lack of awareness among private renters in Lewisham regarding the support services available through the Council.
- 4.22. The Council’s Housing Needs team offers guidance to residents on securing their own private rental accommodations. It facilitates referrals for discretionary housing payments to assist with rent deposits and advance rent payments for qualifying individuals. The team also utilises homelessness prevention funds to help people threatened with homelessness to secure alternative accommodation in the PRS. It provides tenancy sustainment services, including a floating support service for renters seeking assistance from the Council and also makes referrals to the credit union for interest free loans.
- 4.23. The Council’s Private Sector Licensing and Home Improvements team offers advice and support to private tenants on tenancy rights and also investigates any reports of disrepair from private renters. In terms of proactive work, officers from this team proactively inspect HMO properties prior to licensing them. This team also offers advice to landlords on their regulatory responsibilities and pursues enforcement actions when voluntary compliance fails. Property licensing schemes are a way of improving proactive contact with landlords and with the introduction of selective licensing, the team expects to enhance its outreach to landlords as well as improve its support for tenants in the PRS.
- 4.24. Despite the existence of these initiatives, awareness of these services among private renters remains low.
- 4.25. In the TFG survey, an overwhelming 87.18% of respondents reported being unaware of the support services provide by Lewisham Council for private renters.

**Question 34: Are you aware of the services provided by Lewisham Council specifically for private renters?**

*Awareness of council services*

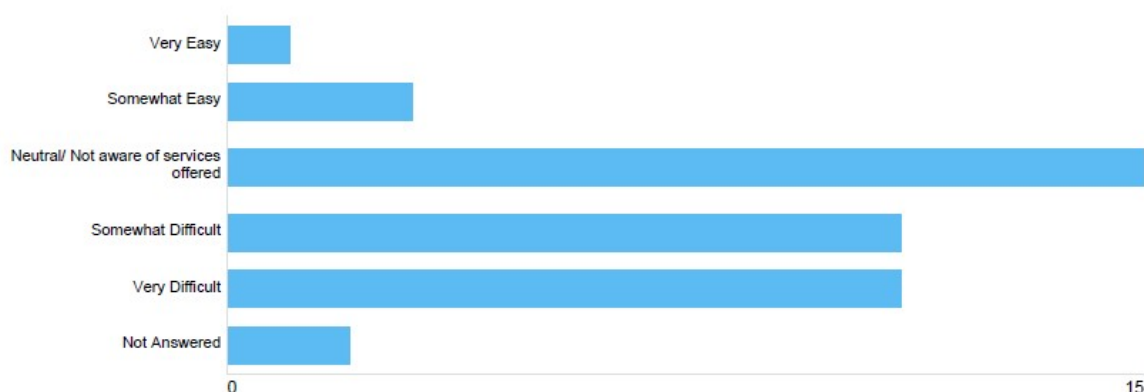


Option	Total	Percent
Yes	13	11.11%
No	102	87.18%
Not Answered	2	1.71%

- 4.26. During the focus group session with Lewisham renters, one renter expressed their surprise at the prospect of contacting the Council for help, stating, “*I just assumed I was on my own if I was in the private sector*”.
- 4.27. Awareness of services offered by the Council, is also lacking amongst landlords in the private rented sector. In the TFG survey for landlords, 34.88% landlords reported being unaware of these services. Even among those who were aware, accessibility remained a challenge, with 25.58% stating they found it difficult to contact the Council and an additional 25.58% describing it as very difficult.

**Question 25: How easy has it been for you to get in touch with Lewisham Council regarding services for landlords in the private rented sector?**

Ease of access



Option	Total	Percent
Very Easy	1	2.33%
Somewhat Easy	3	6.98%
Neutral/ Not aware of services offered	15	34.88%
Somewhat Difficult	11	25.58%
Very Difficult	11	25.58%
Not Answered	2	4.65%

- 4.28. There is an urgent need to increase awareness amongst residents in the PRS about their rights and the support services available to them via the Council.
- 4.29. The Council’s website plays a crucial role in disseminating information to both renters and landlords about their rights and available services along with general signposting.
- 4.30. Over half (57.26%) of renters responding to the TFG survey indicated a preference for accessing support or assistance from the Council via an online portal or website. This was closely followed by a preference for a phone hotline. Among landlords, 39.53% preferred to access assistance from the Council via an online portal or website, with many favouring a phone hotline as well.
- 4.31. The TFG’s evidence sessions highlighted the importance of a well-organised, information-rich website in supporting residents in the PRS.
- 4.32. Currently, the information on the Council’s website is poorly structured, making it difficult to find necessary information. The website also contains broken links and lacks essential contact information, which highlights an urgent need for a redesign of the website that includes better signposting information for residents in the private rented sector.

**Good practice case study- [Camden Private Renters website](#)**



Camden Council launched this dedicated website for private renters that provides information to private renters living in Camden on understanding their rights and what action they can take, who to contact in the Council for help and also what support the Council's

external partners can provide. The information on the website is split into three easy sections of- 'Before tenancy', 'During tenancy' and 'End of tenancy'. These sections are further split into subsections. Council officers can see how many 'hits' the website gets to understand how many people are using it and which areas they are seeking information for. Currently this website is getting 300 to 600 hits every month.

- 4.33. In addition to the website, residents have expressed a strong need for a phone hotline to access support. The complexities of housing issues can be overwhelming and tenants in the PRS often struggle to navigate their options for redress. There are several places a PRS tenant may go to resolve a housing issue, including but not limited to: local councils, various licensing schemes, county courts, tribunals, deposit adjudication services and trading standards. The TFG heard that a Council phone hotline would provide crucial, easily accessible information and guidance, particularly for residents who are less tech-savvy or find online resources challenging to navigate.

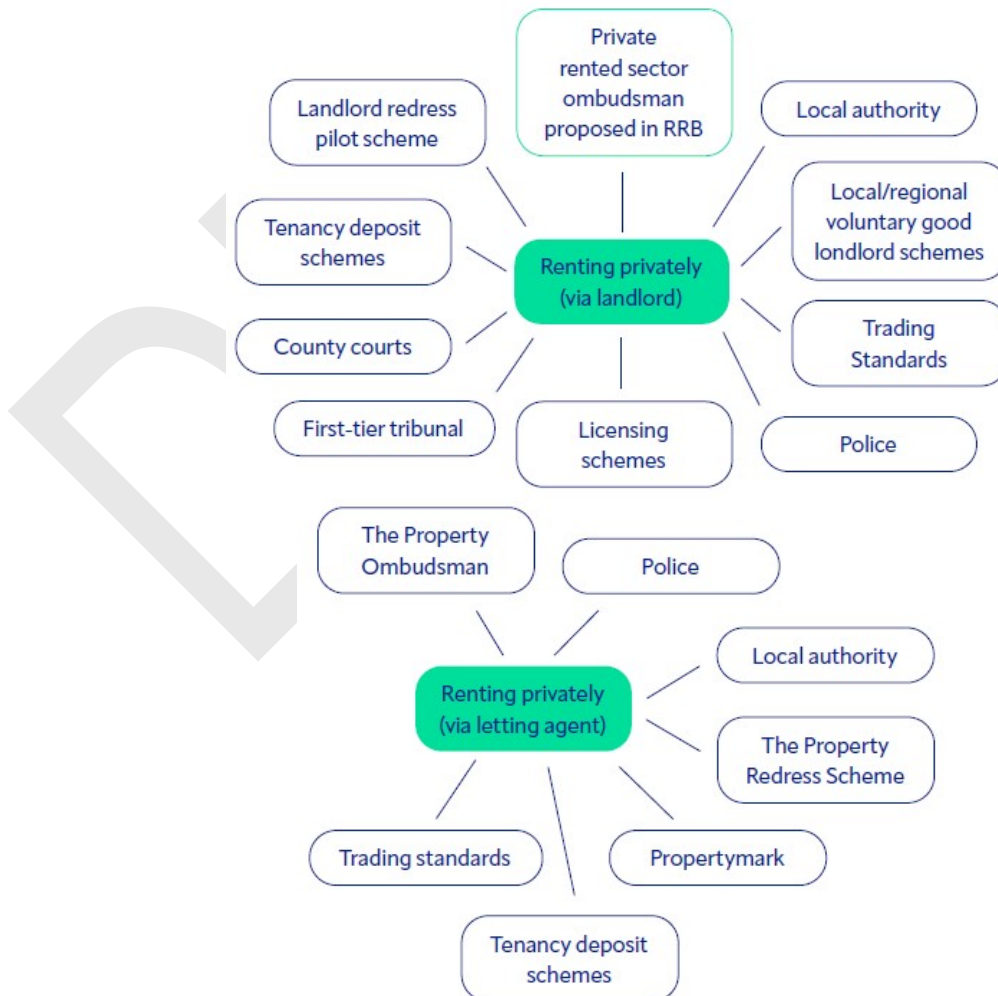


Figure 7- Complex redress options for PRS tenants

- 4.34. In such a complicated PRS landscape, the lack of awareness around Council support services exacerbates challenges for PRS residents, who often do not view the Council as a viable source of help. Enhancing the Council's website and establishing a dedicated phone hotline will be important steps toward improving awareness and accessibility of Council support services. However, the TFG believes that an extensive communications campaign is essential to inform residents in the borough about the available support services and how they can access them.
- 4.35. Beyond issues of awareness and accessibility of Council support services, tenants face additional challenges in receiving effective support from the Council. In its evidence session with tenant advocacy organisations, the TFG learnt that when tenants are aware of the support services available through their local council and seek assistance, councils often opt for informal actions, such as sending letters to landlords, due to insufficient funding for PRS enforcement work. Most enforcement efforts usually require property inspections, but councils lack the capacity to conduct these due to the growing demands of the PRS and strained resources. As a result, these informal actions from the Council tend to discourage tenants, as often they fail to ensure landlord compliance and may inadvertently alert landlords to tenants' complaints, leading to potential negative repercussions.

However, with the recent introduction of selective licensing in Lewisham, there is hope for an increase in resources to bolster PRS enforcement efforts.

#### Support services provided by tenant and landlord advocacy organisations

- 4.36. In addition to Council services, various tenant advocacy organisations and landlord associations provide vital support and advice to residents in the private rented sector. The Task and Finish Group (TFG) also looked at their support offer in Lewisham.
- 4.37. Through evidence sessions with organisations such as Generation Rent, Crisis, Shelter, Renters Rights London and Citizen Advice, the TFG sought to understand the support these organisations offered to tenants in Lewisham and the challenges they were facing. The TFG also met with NRLA (National Residential Landlords Association), which is UK's largest landlord association, to understand the support available to PRS landlords in Lewisham.
- 4.38. In the TFG survey for renters, when asked about their awareness of organisations such as Advice Lewisham, Citizen Advice Lewisham, Crisis, Generation Rent, London Renters' Union, Shelter, etc that offer housing-related support- 77.78% of respondents said they were aware of their support services. When this is compared with the 87.18% of respondents who said they were *not* aware of the support services offered by the Council, it highlights tenants' heavy reliance on these advocacy organisations for advice and information.
- 4.39. This reliance has led to an overstretching of resources among these organisations. In the TFG survey, when renters were asked where they would seek support if they believed their rights were being violated, the majority of respondents answered Citizen Advice. During a TFG evidence session, Citizen Advice reported operating at full capacity but struggling to meet unprecedented demand for assistance with homelessness, rent arrears and debt advice. This was reflected in the TFG survey where renters complained that they found it increasingly difficult to access support from Citizen Advice as their phone lines

were often busy.

- 4.40. Citizen Advice Lewisham receives funding from the Council for their telephone inquiry line and for some face-to-face outreach posts across the borough. However, the demand for services continues to strain resources. Other comparable organisations have also reported similar pressures.
- 4.41. Many organisations such as Shelter reported a reduction of their in-person services in the borough. Support services were increasingly being offered online and over telephone. This shift towards online and telephone services, coupled with a reduction in face-to-face support has created barriers for individuals who find it challenging to access assistance remotely. The TFG's evidence session revealed a widespread perception that a lot of in-person/face-to-face services closed during the Covid-19 pandemic and have not fully reopened since.
- 4.42. All organisations that the TFG consulted, that provided support to tenants and landlords, expressed difficulty in communicating with the Council. This lack of established communication channels is concerning and underscores the need for better collaboration. Many organisations noted they would benefit from a more productive relationship with the Council to effectively address and escalate residents' issues. The absence of regular in-person interactions with the Council was particularly highlighted.
- 4.43. After engaging with various support and advice organisations, the TFG believes that it is crucial for the Council to actively engage with tenant and landlord advocacy organisations to foster a collaborative environment. Establishing a PRS Stakeholder Forum, involving all key organisations is a partnership initiative that would be beneficial. This forum would provide a platform for all stakeholders to discuss and address issues affecting private rented sector residents in Lewisham.
- 4.44. Establishing regular communication, enhancing outreach efforts and ensuring the availability of diverse support options, will be crucial in addressing the support needs of residents in the PRS.

## **Council's communication and engagement with PRS residents**

### **Communication and Engagement with Private Renters**

- 4.45. As previously discussed, there is a significant lack of awareness among residents in the private rented sector (PRS) regarding the support services offered by the Council. This points to the limited engagement the Council has had with PRS tenants. Many PRS tenants do not view the local council as a resource for assistance, underscoring the need for the Council to improve its outreach efforts and engagement with renters.
- 4.46. The TFG heard from other local authorities that engaging tenants is a challenging endeavour. There are limited incentives the Council can offer to encourage tenants to interact with or seek support from the Council. As noted earlier in this report, maintaining a well-organised, up-to-date website could be instrumental in promoting the Council's services and increasing tenant engagement. However, additional efforts are necessary to more effectively reach PRS residents.
- 4.47. Engaging tenants through formal mechanisms such as tenant forums is considered a difficult task. The TFG heard from Camden Council, who established a Private Renters Forum in July 2023, that despite consistent

efforts to increase participation, they faced significant challenges in attracting tenants to forum meetings. Similar difficulties have been reported by other local authorities attempting to foster tenant engagement through such platforms.

- 4.48. These challenges emphasise the need for more informal methods of tenant engagement. The evidence gathered by the TFG suggests that information and advice for tenants is more effectively disseminated through existing community networks, including faith groups, voluntary and community sector (VCS) organisations, and community events.
- 4.49. Leveraging existing community events frequented by PRS tenants provides an opportunity to distribute information about Council services more effectively. Staff, volunteers, and members of various community and faith groups could be equipped with PRS-specific signposting materials so they can direct tenants to relevant resources when the opportunity arises. Additionally, dispersing information through social media platforms offers an effective means of reaching a wider audience of tenants.
- 4.50. The TFG held an evidence session to gather insights into effective tenant engagement practices from the Safe Suffolk Renters initiative. A key takeaway from this session was the importance of employing multiple informal methods to engage tenants, as this approach proved essential in reaching a broader and more diverse audience.

#### **Good practice case study- [Safe Suffolk Renters](#)**



Safe Suffolk Renters is an initiative to support private sector tenants, landlords and other stakeholders and involves five Suffolk-wide local authorities: East Suffolk Council, Babergh District Council, Mid Suffolk District Council, West Suffolk Council and Ipswich Borough Council.

This project is funded by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) Pathfinder Programme and aims to foster and nurture relationships between tenants, landlords, property managers, and local councils. The first 2 phases of this project are- 'Empower' and 'Encourage', and their aim is to ensure that tenants are empowered to know what their rights are and that landlords are encouraged to do the right thing. As part of their 'Empower' phase, they are using various methods to engage with tenants. This includes in-person and online events as well as newsletters, TV adverts, radio adverts and Facebook ads. This multifaceted communication campaign is helping them reach more tenants in the county.

- 4.51. The TFG's findings underscore the need for the Council to improve its communication and engagement with private renters, recognising that formal channels alone are inadequate and that informal, community-based approaches are essential.

#### **Communication and Engagement with Landlords in the PRS**

- 4.52. Regular and effective communication between the Council and private sector landlords is essential for maintaining a safe and secure rental market. However, as highlighted earlier in the report, many landlords are unaware of the Council's services, and most find it difficult to establish contact with the Council. The TFG heard from NRLA and other councils about the need for the Council to be more

accessible to landlords and have regular communication with them.

- 4.53. Both the TFG's landlord survey and focus group discussion underscored the Council's lack of engagement with local landlords. Many landlords expressed frustration over the difficulty in getting responses from the Council, the absence of a dedicated phonenumber for help or advice, and the perception that the Council only reached out when compliance was required. The NRLA echoed this sentiment, noting that many landlords felt they were only contacted when action was needed from them, with no other updates or information provided.
- 4.54. Landlords also voiced dissatisfaction with the Council's communication during the property licensing process. One landlord in the focus group shared that after applying for a property licence in March 2024, they had still not heard back by July 2024, despite numerous attempts to contact the Council. They highlighted difficulties with the online application system and the challenge of reaching out for support. When the same landlord applied for an HMO licence five years earlier, it had taken them six months to receive the certificate from Lewisham Council. The TFG recognises that Lewisham has now introduced a new licensing software, which should address some of these issues. However, improved communication and engagement with landlords remains crucial.
- 4.55. For a healthy PRS, it was important for the Council to build trust with landlords. The Council should view PRS landlords as key partners and provide opportunities for them to express their concerns. Establishing a regular landlord forum, similar to those held by other Councils like Camden and Newham, would offer a valuable platform for communication and collaboration.
- 4.56. Newham Council also issued quarterly e-bulletins to landlords via email, which serve as an effective tool for sharing updates. These e-bulletins cover a range of topics, from energy efficiency grants to changes in legislation, as well as details about enforcement actions against landlords. As of March 2024, Newham Council sent out around 18,000 e-bulletins every quarter, with about 12,000 of those being opened/ accessed by the recipients. Lewisham Council could adopt a similar approach to improve communication with its landlords.
- 4.57. Strengthening the Council's relationship with the NRLA could also enhance engagement with landlords. As the largest landlord association in the UK, the NRLA has approximately 323 members in Lewisham. A closer partnership with the NRLA would create an additional channel for sharing information and updates with landlords. Moreover, if the NRLA identifies trends or concerns affecting Lewisham landlords, they could effectively relay this feedback to the Council.
- 4.58. The evidence collected by TFG has highlighted the importance of establishing open lines of communication with landlords. This can be done through regular forums, e-bulletins, or partnerships with organisations like NRLA. Ensuring landlords feel informed and supported is essential for achieving long-term improvements in the sector.

### **Maximising the benefits of Property Licensing as a regulatory tool**

- 4.59. Property licensing is an important tool that allows local authorities to regulate properties in its private rented sector. Currently, Lewisham operates three licensing schemes: Mandatory HMO licensing, Additional HMO licensing and Selective licensing.
- 4.60. Lewisham's first ever selective licensing scheme came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of



July 2024. This scheme is expected to treble the estimated number of licensable properties in the borough, to between 26,000 - 29,000 properties. Implementing and managing such a large-scale initiative is a complex task, and Lewisham's private sector licensing team is currently expanding to ensure its successful delivery.

- 4.61. Several studies have highlighted the benefits of selective licensing schemes in regulating the PRS. For example, Generation Rent found that in 2019-2020, councils with selective licensing identified and resolved more housing issues than those without such schemes<sup>15</sup>. Similarly, a 2019 study by the Chartered Institute of Housing and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health revealed significant improvements in property standards across the 20 councils that were investigated after the first year of their licensing scheme implementation<sup>16</sup>.
- 4.62. Throughout its evidence sessions, the TFG found that residents generally supported the concept of property licensing, recognising it as a positive step toward a more regulated rental sector. However, feedback from tenant advocacy organisations, landlords and landlord advocacy groups consistently emphasises that the success of such a scheme depends on the quality of the property inspection regime. There was widespread agreement that property licensing would only be effective if the Council thoroughly inspected all licensable properties.
- 4.63. In a session with tenant advocacy groups, the TFG learned about cases where landlords had followed the correct licensing procedures on paper but flouted these standards in practice. Such instances underscore the need for a rigorous inspection system, without which good landlords may feel frustrated by investing in compliance while others exploit loopholes.
- 4.64. Lewisham Council inspects all HMO properties before issuing licences. For the selective licensing scheme, the Council aims to inspect 60% of licensable properties over the scheme's five-year duration. The TFG understands the rationale for this initial target, as the scheme needs time to establish itself. However, the TFG also believes that, ultimately, a higher inspection rate is required to build trust with compliant landlords. It believes that the Council should develop a long-term strategy to inspect 100% of licensable properties. While this may be challenging during the scheme's first iteration, the Council should plan and allocate resources to achieve this goal over time.
- 4.65. Along with hearing about the importance of a robust inspection regime, the TFG also heard from landlords and other London councils about the need to publicise enforcement actions against rogue or criminal landlords. This transparency ensures compliant landlords that their licensing fees are used effectively to target substandard properties and bad landlords. A Lewisham landlord in the focus group emphasised that without visible enforcement, it could seem that the scheme only burdened good landlords while rogue landlords remained unaffected.
- 4.66. Enforcement actions could be communicated or publicised to the landlords in various ways such as the Council's website, newsletters, e-bulletins that could be introduced for landlords or through existing platforms such as the GLA's

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<sup>15</sup> [Licensing landlords drives up standards in England- Generation Rent](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Chartered Institute of Environmental Health & Chartered Institute of Housing \(2019\). A licence to rent.](#)

Rogue Landlord Checker.

- 4.67. Landlords in Lewisham expressed an interest in seeing how licensing fees are used to administer the scheme. Greater transparency in this area would help build trust with landlords and demonstrate the real-time benefits of the scheme, as well as explain the rationale behind the fees. The NRLA also supports this approach, stressing that transparency and regular communication are key to improving the Council's relationship with compliant landlords. Many landlords aim to operate responsibly, and it is vital to work collaboratively with them, rather than alienate them, while tackling rogue landlords. TFG surveys and focus groups revealed that many good landlords felt penalised for the actions of a small minority of non-complaint landlords who often evade engagement with the Council.
- 4.68. Recognising that this is Lewisham's first selective licensing scheme, the TFG sought insights from another local authority who has been running this scheme successfully to learn from their good practice. Newham Council was the first local authority in London to introduce borough-wide selective licensing in 2013. The TFG held an evidence session with Newham Council to hear more about how they run their property licensing scheme.

#### Good practice case-study- Property licensing schemes in Newham Council



Newham Council have been the 'early innovators' in the field of property licensing in London, having implemented their first selective licensing scheme in 2013. They are currently on their third iteration of this scheme.

Newham's property inspection rate across all their licensing schemes was increasing with each new licensing scheme/ renewal. The latest iteration of additional HMO licensing and selective licensing came into effect on 1 January 2023 and 1 June 2023 respectively. In Year 1 of these schemes, overall 10,470 PRS properties had been inspected. These inspections led to 426 enforcement notices and resulted in 109 financial penalty notices, which were served on non-compliant landlords or managing agents and 14 prosecutions were instigated. Newham's aim was to inspect every single property in these five-year schemes.

They were also doing excellent work in communicating with landlords. They held regular landlord forum meetings, sent out regular e-bulletins, and published their licensing performance data on their website regularly. Newham also made innovative use of its licensing data to help different service areas across the Council, emphasising effective cross-departmental working.

- 4.69. It was recognised that property licensing is a valuable tool for regulating the private rented sector and that there are opportunities to optimise its use. The TFG's evidence sessions highlighted that data gathered on properties through an effective licensing scheme could also support other Council services and improve partnership working within the Council.
- 4.70. As Lewisham embarks on its first selective licensing scheme, it is clear that the success of property licensing relies on more than just the issuance of licences. A strong inspection regime, transparent enforcement action, and open communication with landlords are critical to ensuring that the scheme achieves its goals of raising property standards and holding non-compliant landlords accountable.

## 5. Recommendations

As the Council's Private Sector Licensing team undergoes recruitment and expansion to support the implementation of the selective licensing scheme, the Task and Finish Group (TFG) recognises that the team is heavily occupied by the implementation of this scheme. Given that this is the first year of the selective licensing scheme, many processes are still being established. Additionally, with the wider housing crisis affecting the country, the Council's Housing directorate is also operating under significant strain.

The TFG acknowledges the resource challenges associated with some of the recommendations. Nevertheless, the purpose of this Group's findings is to enhance the Council's support offer for residents in the private rented sector (PRS) and it is essential to take steps toward achieving that improvement. Bearing in mind the current pressures, the TFG has categorised its recommendations into short-term and medium-term actions.

### Short-term actions:

- 5.1. **Recommendation 1- Enhancing the Council's PRS webpage**  
The Council should redesign sections of its website that provide information to renters and landlords to ensure the information is clearer, better-organised and easily accessible for both groups. Non-functional links should be fixed, and missing contact details added. A dedicated FAQ page should be created, guiding residents on where to seek help when faced with different housing issues. All content should be accessible, and the Council should explore translation services to ensure information is available in multiple languages.
- 5.2. **Recommendation 2- Training Councillors to support PRS residents**  
With the selective licensing scheme increasing the Council's interaction with PRS residents, Lewisham Councillors should receive training to understand when and how they can assist residents. This training can be delivered through collaboration between Council officers and an external housing advice organisation such as Shelter.
- 5.3. **Recommendation 3- Enhanced communication with landlords**  
Regular and effective communication with landlords in the PRS is essential for maintaining a safe and secure PRS. To improve its communication with landlords, the Council should-
  - a) Establish a Landlord Forum that meets regularly.
  - b) Request that landlords sign-up for e-bulletins when they apply for property licences and develop a comprehensive database of landlords. The e-bulletins should be used to share information, such as updates on legislative changes or regulatory requirements.
- 5.4. **Recommendation 4- Publicising enforcement actions**  
To publicise enforcement actions taken against rogue landlords, the Council should
  - a) publicise any enforcement action against rogue landlords on its website, social media channels, and via landlord e-bulletins; and
  - b) regularly update the GLA's Rogue Landlord Checker with information about any identified rogue landlords.
- 5.5. **Recommendation 5- Collaboration with the NRLA**  
The Council should foster a closer working relationship with the NRLA and

leverage their influence in disseminating important information to landlords. Additionally, the NRLA can assist in organising the Council's Landlord Forum meetings. In partnership with the NRLA, the Council should also host training and information events tailored for landlords.

5.6. **Recommendation 6- Improving communication with tenant support organisations**

The Council should designate a dedicated officer or establish a monitored email inbox for key tenant advocacy organisations. This would facilitate the timely escalation of urgent cases and strengthen the Council's collaborative efforts with these essential organisations.

5.7. **Recommendation 7- Defining the role of the Cabinet Advisor for the PRS**

The Task and Finish Group supports the appointment of the Cabinet Advisor for the Private Rented Sector, which reflects the Executive's commitment to addressing issues in Lewisham's PRS. The TFG recommends that a detailed role profile with specific focus areas should be developed for this position. The Cabinet Advisor should play a key role in raising the profile of PRS issues within the Council and the wider Lewisham community. Additionally, the TFG recommends that the Cabinet Advisor be actively involved in monitoring the implementation of the recommendations outlined in this report.

5.8. **Recommendation 8- Ongoing monitoring and reporting**

The Housing Select Committee should monitor the implementation of this report's recommendations. Along with monitoring progress against these recommendations, the Committee should include a dedicated PRS performance report in its work programme. This report should track some key performance indicators related to the PRS, such as the number of enforcement fines issued, the volume of service requests received, etc.

**Medium-term actions:**

5.9. **Recommendation 9- Establish a Lewisham PRS Stakeholder Forum**

The Council should establish a 'Lewisham PRS Stakeholder Forum'. This should involve all key stakeholders such as Council officers and relevant Cabinet Members; key tenant advocacy organisations such as Shelter, Generation Rent, Renters Rights London, Citizen Advice etc.; key landlord advocacy organisations such as NRLA; and wider stakeholders such as the MET Police, housing services from Goldsmiths, etc. This forum should hold regular in-person meetings to share intelligence, discuss local PRS issues and improve partnership working.

5.10. **Recommendation 10- Tenant Rights: Awareness Campaign**

The Council should develop and launch a comprehensive communications campaign to educate private renters about their rights and responsibilities, as well as about the services available to them from the Council. This campaign should include strategies to reach all communities and ensure the information is accessible to everyone.

5.11. **Recommendation 11- Engaging private renters**

The Council should intensify its efforts to connect with private renters by adopting more informal, community-based approaches to tenant engagement. Leveraging existing community events frequented by PRS tenants provides an opportunity to distribute information about Council services more effectively. The Council should collaborate with faith groups and charities in Lewisham, as well as with Lewisham Health and Wellbeing Community Champions, and disseminate information through these trusted channels.

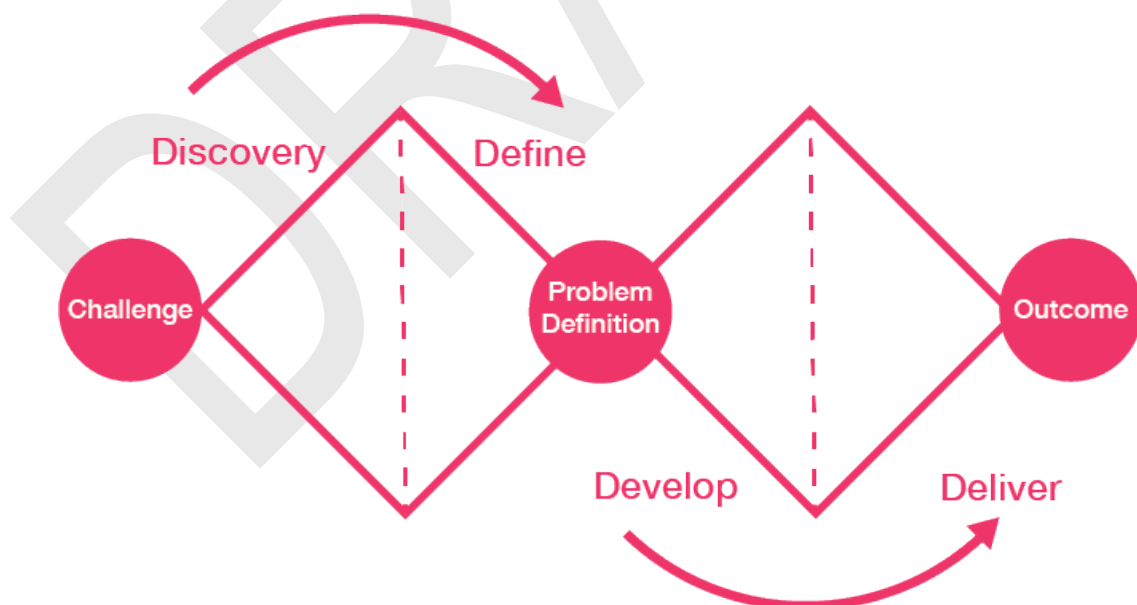
- 5.12. **Recommendation 12- Resources for community leaders and other organisations providing advice**  
The Council should equip staff, volunteers, and members of various community and faith groups as well as non-housing charities in Lewisham, with PRS-specific signposting materials so they can direct tenants to relevant resources when the opportunity arises.
- 5.13. **Recommendation 13- Establishing a PRS telephone helpline**  
The Council should develop plans for a telephone helpline dedicated to residents in the private rented sector, providing easy access to advice.
- 5.14. **Recommendation 14- Introducing some face-to-face services**  
The Council should offer some element of face-to-face service for PRS residents who are seeking to make homelessness applications or are facing Section 21 evictions. This would provide a more accessible support option, particularly for vulnerable residents who may struggle with digital or telephone-based services.
- 5.15. **Recommendation 15- Enhancing property inspections**  
The Council should explore a long-term strategy for achieving 100% inspection of licensable properties in Lewisham within the lifespan of the property licence. The TFG acknowledges that this presents significant resourcing challenges, and achieving this may not be possible in the first iteration of the selective licensing scheme. However, it is important for the Council to have a clear plan in place to work towards a 100% inspection rate in the future.
- 5.16. **Recommendation 16- Promoting cross-departmental collaboration**  
Private rented sector housing issues are interconnected with many other areas such as healthcare, education, planning etc. To ensure a holistic approach to PRS challenges, more cross-departmental collaboration within the Council was necessary. The Council should develop a plan to enhance cross-departmental co-ordination, ensuring that PRS issues are considered across all relevant areas of Council work.
- 5.17. **Recommendation 17- Developing a standalone PRS strategy**  
The Council should develop a standalone PRS strategy. The strategy should provide a focused framework for addressing the unique challenges and opportunities within the PRS, ensuring that the sector is managed effectively and that tenants and landlords receive the support they need. It should help align Council resources and initiatives specifically to improve conditions in the PRS, leading to better outcomes for residents.
- 5.18. **Recommendation 18- Informed advocacy**  
The Council should consider and utilise the key findings from this report to guide its future responses to any consultations on national or local legislative changes relating to the private rented sector.

## 6. How the Task and Finish Group was run

6.1. The Task and Finish Group was run as a project, utilising an Agile methodology, with the intention of being:

- Collaborative – scrutiny officers, directorate officers and councillors working together to address a topical issue of concern
- Time limited – to suggest solutions in a timely manner, with allocated tasks, progress checks and deadlines
- Flexible – with a mixture of formal and informal meetings, visits, research, user engagement etc.
- Focussed on residents – service user experience is key, with issues clearly defined, and solutions suggested, on the basis of understanding residents' experience
- Focussed on solutions – taking evidence from a wide range of sources and good practice to develop affordable, practical solutions that are evidence based and implementable and that will have a positive impact on the lives of residents.

6.2. A 'double diamond' approach was taken which split the project into two parts (diamonds). The first part was the 'discovery' stage. The issue (the topic of the task and finish group) was the starting point and then research and evidence collection was carried out to really understand the issue and define it more clearly. Once the issue was well understood and well defined, the second stage began. Further research and evidence collection was carried out, seeking inspiration from elsewhere and working with a range of different stakeholders and experts to investigate potential solutions. This led to the Group's clear set of carefully considered recommendations.



## Report author and contact

If you have any questions about this report please contact the report author-  
Nidhi Patil, Scrutiny Manager, Lewisham Council ([nidhi.patil@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:nidhi.patil@lewisham.gov.uk))

## Appendix 1- List of engagement and evidence gathering

<b>Title</b>	<b>Date</b>
Meeting with key housing officers from Lewisham Council	24 July 2023
Written briefing on the Renters Reform Bill	1 August 2023
Virtual briefing on Renters Reform Bill	7 August 2023
Formal meeting of the TFG to agree the scope of the review	21 September 2023
Informal meeting of the TFG to discuss next steps	29 September 2023
Informal meeting of the TFG to discuss the Private Renters Survey	16 October 2023
Published a survey for Private Renters in Lewisham	31 October 2023
Evidence Session with Internal Stakeholders- Cabinet Member for Housing Management and Homelessness and Cabinet member for Housing Development and Planning	14 November 2023
Evidence Session- Renters' Right London, Generation Rent and Crisis	30 November 2023
Desktop research for good practice in other LAs	December 2023
Published a survey for PRS Landlords in Lewisham	4 January 2024
Evidence session with Safe Suffolk Renters	29 February 2024
Internal evidence session with key Council officers	14 March 2024
Evidence Session with Shelter	20 March 2024
Evidence Session with Camden Council	16 April 2024
Written report on PRS supply from London Councils	16 April 2024

Evidence Session with Newham Council	25 April 2024
Analysis of TFG survey results	27 April 2024
Evidence Session with Citizen Advice	15 July 2024
Update on Selective Licensing in Lewisham	16 July 2024
Focus group for Private Rented Sector Landlords in Lewisham	22 July 2024
Focus group for Private Renters in Lewisham	24 July 2024
Written evidence regarding the general advice outreach model funded by the Council	6 August 2024
Evidence Session with NRLA (National Residential Landlords Association)	8 August 2024
Written evidence from Landlords and Renters in Lewisham	8 August 2024

## Appendix 2- Additional sources and background reading

Centre for London, 'Homes fit for Londoners: Solving London's Housing Crisis' (2023) <https://centreforlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Homes-Fit-For-Londoners-Solving-Londons-Housing-Crisis.pdf>

Centre for London, 'Licence to Let: How property licensing could better protect private renters' (2023) <https://centreforlondon.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Centre-for-London-Licence-to-Let.pdf>

Crisis, 'Home: No less will do' (2016) [https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20493/home\\_no\\_less\\_will\\_do2016.pdf](https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/20493/home_no_less_will_do2016.pdf)

Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, 'Policy paper: A fairer private rented sector' (2022) [A fairer private rented sector - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/103114/a-fairer-private-rented-sector.pdf)

Greater London Authority, 'The London Model: Reforming Private Rented Sector Tenancies' (2019) [Access here](#)

PropertyMark, 'Housing Insight Report' (2024) [Access here](#)

TDS Charitable Foundation, 'Living in the Private Rented Sector in 2023: The voice of the tenant survey' (2023) [https://www.tdsgroup.uk/files/ugd/48110f\\_cbea64fc047d4cc5ab792e19c7839035.pdf](https://www.tdsgroup.uk/files/ugd/48110f_cbea64fc047d4cc5ab792e19c7839035.pdf)

UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence, 'The private rented sector in the UK' (2019) [https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/TDS-Overview-paper\\_final.pdf](https://housingevidence.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/TDS-Overview-paper_final.pdf)