



Creating a democratic, member-led force for housing justice

Blueprint

for a National Housing Union for tenants, residents and their representative organisations

FULL VERSION

Final - August 2026



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Index

1. Summary	5
1.1. What is it?	5
1.2. Who is it for?	5
1.3. Why is it necessary?	6
1.4. Don't tenant and resident unions already exist?	6
1.5. What will it offer to individuals?	7
1.6. How will it work with other campaign groups?	7
1.7. How will it be run?	8
1.8. How much will it cost to join?	8
1.9. How will it be funded?	8
1.10. Where has this proposal come from?	8
2. The Housing Emergency	11
2.1. Introduction	11
2.2. Structural Demand	14
2.3. Private Rented Sector Pressures	15
2.4. Problems with Social Housing Rent Levels	16
2.5. Leaseholders, Tenements, and Apartments	17
2.6. Accountability and Redress Across Tenures	18
2.7. Regional Housing Law	19
2.8. Regional Housing Movements	20
2.9. Regional Sensitivity	21
3. Home and Workplace Overlap	22
3.1. Impact on Working Lives	22
3.2. The Landlord and Tenant Power Imbalance	24
3.3. Housing is a Trade Union Issue	24
4. Forms of Governance	26



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

4.1.	Founding Principles	26
4.2.	Previous Tenant Voice Iterations	27
4.3.	An Alternative Vision	27
4.4.	A Unifying Union	29
4.5.	Branch Formation	30
4.6.	Branch, Regional and National Relationships	31
4.7.	Membership and Sectional interests	31
4.8.	Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	34
4.9.	Legal Form	34
4.10.	Alliances and Partnership Working	35
5.	Funding Models	39
5.1.	The Necessity of Trade Union Partnership	39
5.2.	Seed Funding	40
5.3.	Membership Subscriptions	40
5.4.	Trade Union Linked Subscriptions	41
5.5.	Other Sources of Funding	42
5.6.	More Ambitious and Larger Structural Ideas	43
5.7.	Income Structure and Projections	43
6.	The Collective Organising Model	46
6.1.	Introduction	46
6.2.	Defining Organising	47
6.3.	The Trade Union Organising Model and the Assembly Model	49
6.4.	Branch and National Organisational Support	50
6.5.	Branch Expenditure Accountability	51
6.6.	Campaign and Action Planning	51
6.7.	Intersection	52
6.8.	Barriers to the Organising Model	53
7.	Provision of Individual Advocacy and Legal Services	54



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

7.1.	Summary	54
7.2.	Scope and Vision.....	56
7.3.	Considerations.....	56
7.4.	Type of Housing Provider and Complaints	57
7.5.	Barriers to Justice	60
7.6.	Lack Of Legal Aid	61
7.7.	Key Ingredients to Casework Success	61
7.8.	The Housing Union’s Recommended Approach.....	63
7.9.	Triage Framework	63
7.10.	Service Provision.....	65
7.11.	Advocacy as Action	65
7.12.	Advocacy and Legal Services Conclusion	66
8.	Meeting Resistance.....	68
9.	Main Risks	70
10.	Next Steps: The Feasibility Stage.....	72
11.	With Thanks.....	73
12.	Appendix I: The Housing Emergency – Methodology and References	75
12.1.	Methodology	75
12.2.	References and Bibliography.....	75
13.	Appendix II: Comparison Rule Books	79
14.	Appendix III: About SHAC	80



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

“If we don’t create a national tenants and residents union, we’ll be forever firefighting, never putting out the fire.”

Housing activist, October 2025



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents



1. Summary

This document offers a Blueprint for a national **Housing Union** which housing campaign group SHAC aims to establish in partnership with other housing groups, community groups, and individual activists. It sets out the case for its existence, who it is for, how it will run, and how it will be funded. The Blueprint ends with the suggested next steps to turn the vision into reality. More information on the National Housing Union project can be found at shaction.org/a-national-housing-union, which also allows readers to feed in their views.

1.1. What is it?

A new, national democratic, member-led, trade union-style organisation.

1.2. Who is it for?

Membership will be open to tenants (full renters), shared owners, and leaseholders irrespective of whether they live in housing association or council properties, private accommodation, or other dwellings such as caravans and boats – it is a union for all.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

In addition, home owners may have disputes related to their homes and neighbourhoods, or face eviction threats if mortgage costs spike for example, and may therefore also benefit from joining, or people may have other life experiences that have led them to campaign on housing issues.

1.3. Why is it necessary?

There is a well-documented **housing emergency** featuring high costs, disrepairs, insecure housing, unlawful discrimination and anti-social behaviour. This is coupled with **inadequate legislation and regulation** created over a period of decades. The superior lobbying power of landlords and developers has allowed them to shape laws and policies to prioritise their own interests over those of tenants and residents.

On the other side of the equation, **there is an acute lack of support systems** for tenants and residents. Council and charitable tenancy support, advocacy and advice services have been slashed, as have related support systems that help stabilise people, for example by supporting those with drug and alcohol addiction.

Over time, **communities have become increasingly atomised**. Landlords by contrast are powerful, well-connected, and effective at fuelling division. This makes it difficult for people to collectivise housing issues in the absence of external organisational support.

Initiatives launched by government and the housing sector establishment have been aimed at giving tenants a 'voice' (opportunities to log their complaints), but there is a great resistance to **giving tenants and residents real power** to effect genuine, fundamental change.

1.4. Don't tenant and resident unions already exist?

There are many excellent housing and community campaign groups, but even those with national aspirations have been unable to achieve the size and scale needed to match the power of large landlords, whether councils, housing associations, or corporate providers. There is a clear gap in provision that the Housing Union seeks to fill.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

1.5. What will it offer to individuals?

Like a trade union, such a body would perform five key tasks:

1. **Individual casework provision and support** which could include legal advice and advocacy. Some of this will be provided by directly employed staff, but some will be provided by trained peer advocates from within the communities they serve. This in itself will significantly alter the balance of power between landlords and their tenants, since landlords will no longer be able to exploit the freedoms they enjoy because of a pervasive lack of access to justice.

Casework requests will be triaged, with a range of self-help resources on offer, more tailored, expert advice, and full-scale advocacy and representation.

2. **Collective organising** by building community power. The community may be united by living within a specific location or because they share a common interest such as better retrofitting of homes to make them more energy efficient.
3. **Press work** to change the narrative and ensure that tenants and residents are no longer cast within certain negative stereotypes such as powerless victims, and that their emerging issues are publicised.
4. **Political influence** exerted by systematically engaging with politicians at all constitutional levels to advocate for legislative and policy changes that better serve the interests of tenants and residents.
5. **Training, education and resources** for tenants and residents to develop the tools which will empower them to fight for their interests. Resources and training will also be provided to policy makers and those in authority who want to improve their engagement mechanisms.

1.6. How will it work with other campaign groups?

The Housing Union will sit within the current ecosystem of housing related campaign groups and coalitions. It will not seek to replace them.

Affiliated membership will be open to neighbourhood and regional tenant and resident associations, and to campaign groups.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

It will offer them the opportunity to extend their reach when mobilising for action such as protests and occupations, access to legal advice and advocacy, assistance with lobbying government and securing press coverage, and funding for their running costs and resources.

1.7. How will it be run?

Like a trade union, it will have twin, mirrored structures of directly employed staff supporting democratic and self-determining branches and committees. The priority will be to ensure that the Housing Union is member-led and to keep bureaucracy to a minimum.

Branches would be formed offering a mix of localised, landlord-based, and thematic options. Members may wish to join a branch based on their location, a shared characteristic, landlord, the issue they are concerned about, or their tenure. Members will therefore be able to choose where to devote their time and energy.

1.8. How much will it cost to join?

While membership fees will be necessary to create an income stream, the Housing Union will bake into its rule book the aim of keeping membership fees to a minimum, and offer free membership to those in financial difficulty. No-one should be excluded on the basis of cost.

1.9. How will it be funded?

A full feasibility study would need to be carried out to assess the relative merits of different funding models, and it is expected that the funding structures will change over time. Initially, a large investment of seed funding is needed from the trade union movement. Over time, this will be replaced by membership subscriptions, and it may be possible to link these to trade union membership for a symbiotic relationship. Other sources of funding include charitable donations and fundraising.

Most successful tenants' organisations use a mixed funding approach rather than relying on a single source.

1.10. Where has this proposal come from?

The Housing Union is the product of a seven-month long participative process involving hundreds of people. It includes those who discussed the original germ of an idea at SHAC

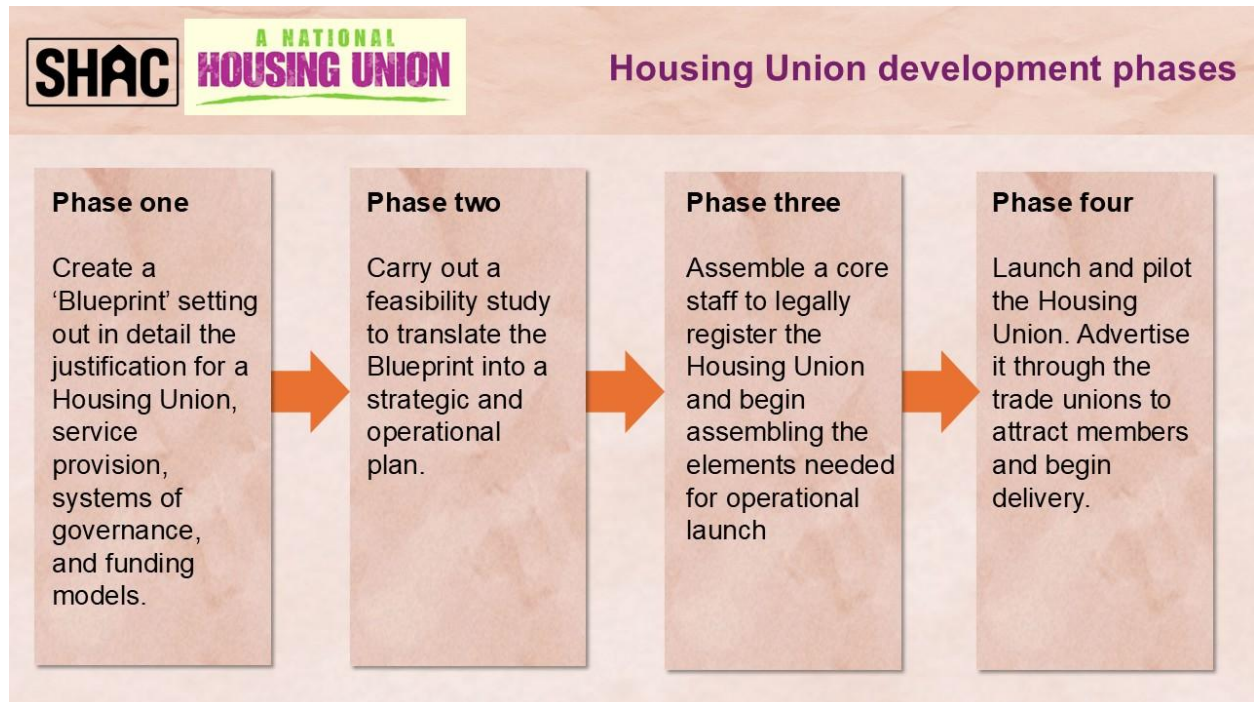


Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

member meetings, campaign groups who signed up as supporters, those who debated it at a specially organised conference in October 2025, and those who took part in both the steering group and taskforce meetings and activities. In the latter case, their labours contributed entire chapters to this document.

The Blueprint contributes to the development of the Housing Union by adding flesh to the original vision paper. Both have relied on an army of remarkable volunteers, while the subsequent phases depend upon the project's ability to secure donations in kind and seed funding from the trade union movement.

Housing Union Development Phases Illustration





Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Housing is a Trade Union Issue

We make a compelling case below as to why the formation of a Housing Union is a trade union issue, including original research carried out by SHAC, and believe strongly that a partnership between industrial unions and a Housing Union will be both welcomed and heavily utilised by working-class people across the UK.

We argue that the involvement of the trade union movement is the only viable pathway to the creation of a Housing Union. The scale of the problem is too large for it to emerge from among existing formations.

We pay tribute to the many community and campaign groups carrying out excellent work to help tenants and residents self-organise, apply political pressure, and challenge bad practice by landlords and freeholders. But there is currently no national tenant and resident organisation of sufficient scale to effectively combat the power of landlords and the political will to protect them. Thus, grass-roots organisations are kept busy mitigating the worst of the housing emergency's symptoms, without the resources or power needed to address the underlying disease.

Terminology

Throughout this document, we use the phrase 'tenants and residents' to encompass the different categories of tenants and dwelling owners: full renters, shared owners, leaseholders, and those in non-traditional forms of housing such as almshouses, boats and caravans. The Housing Union must in our view support all who identify as experiencing a housing problem.

“SHAC has helped with shared knowledge of the exploitation of tenants. It helped me understand the common practice of profit before people in the housing sector and the means to challenge it. A Housing Union could make affordable housing a reality.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



2. The Housing Emergency

2.1. Introduction

A deep and devastating housing crisis has developed in Britain. Official 2024-25 data confirm that the housing crisis is both structural and intensifying:

England

- **1.34 million households** are on social housing waiting lists (MHCLG, 2025a). This figure marks the **highest level of backlog seen since 2014**, driven by a severe deficit in new builds and the ongoing loss of historical housing stock.
- **131,140 households are in temporary accommodation**, a record high (MHCLG, 2025b).
- **The Housing Ombudsman issued 7,082 determinations in 2024–25**, with 71% upheld and 120 landlords recording maladministration rates of 75% or higher (Housing Ombudsman Service 2025).
- At this current pace of construction, **it would take 119 years to clear the existing waiting list**. This creates an average ratio of 110 households waiting for every single social home delivered (Shelter England 2026).

Northern Ireland



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- **Total Applications:** The number of households on the social housing waiting list passed a historic milestone, reaching **50,381 households** as of mid-2026 (Department for Communities 2026a). This represents a **30% increase in waiting list volume** over the last decade, driven by rising demand outstripping limited social housebuilding starts (BBC News 2026).
- Between October 2025 and March 2026, a total of **7,836 households officially presented as homeless** to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NISRA 2026a). In total, **33,412** are legally recognised as owed a permanent housing duty (Department for Communities 2026a).
- The number of households living in temporary accommodation rose to **5,633 placements** by mid-2026 (Department for Communities 2026b). This represents a **79% surge in temporary accommodation usage** compared to five years prior, when 3,140 households were recorded in early 2021 (Homeless Connect 2026).

Scotland

- There were **180,074 applications** for social housing recorded across local council waiting lists or common housing registers as of 31 March 2025. This represents the **highest volume of applications since March 2013**, growing 1% over the prior year (Scottish Government, 2025).
- Of these applications, **149,439** were households waiting for initial entry into social housing, while **30,635** were registered on transfer lists (ibid).
- As of March 2024, **33,619 households** were officially assessed as homeless by local authorities (ibid).
- The number of households living in temporary accommodation reached a record peak of **17,240** in early 2025, before settling at **15,693** by late September 2025 (Scottish Government 2026).

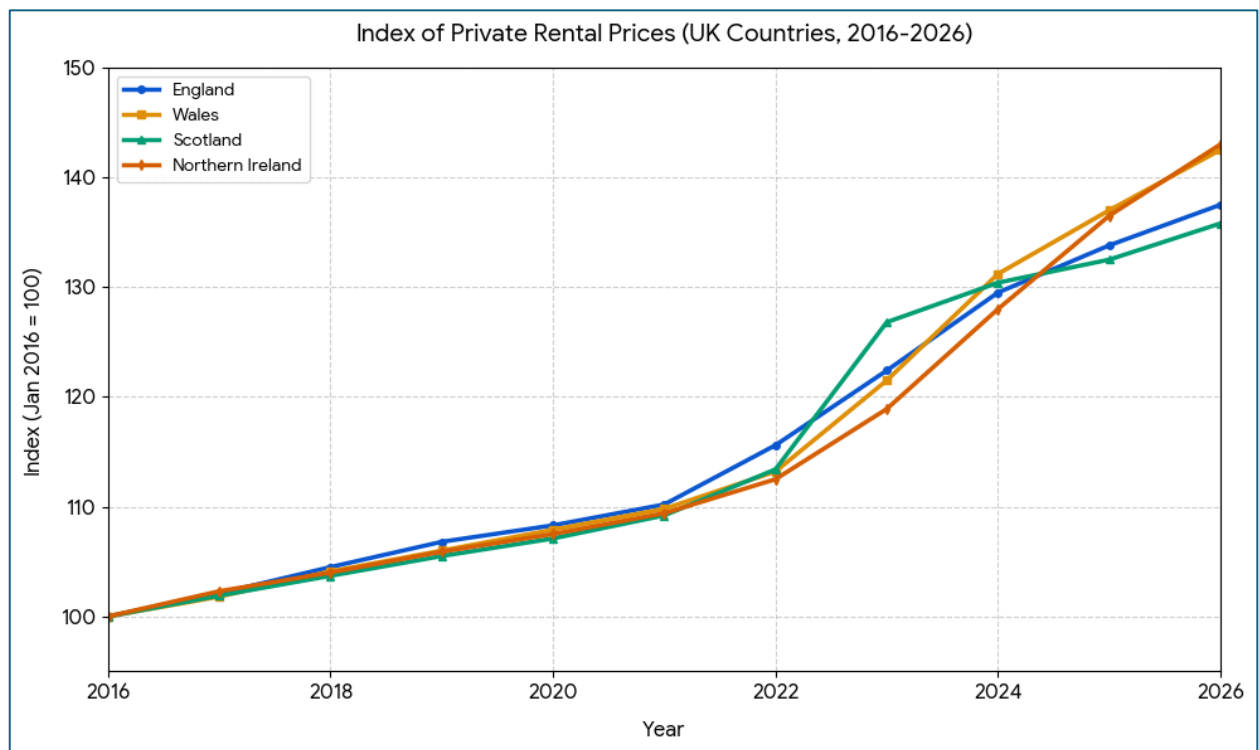
Wales

- There are currently **94,000 households on social housing waiting lists** across Wales, representing 1 in every 14 households in the nation (Chartered Institute of Housing 2026). This total equates to around **177,000 individuals**, including around 55,000 children (Chartered Institute of Housing 2026).

Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- The Welsh Government officially estimates a standalone, pre-existing **unmet housing need of 9,400 affordable units** specifically to resolve pressures from homeless or severely overcrowded families (Welsh Government 2026a).
- On a single-night snapshot at the end of May 2026, there were an estimated **162 individuals sleeping rough** on the streets throughout Wales (Welsh Government 2026b).
- A total of **6,201 households were living in temporary accommodation** as of 31 March 2026, illustrating a plateauing yet historically elevated emergency baseline (Crisis 2026).

Rental Increases 2016-2026 Illustration



Source: [Office for National Statistics](#)



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Private Rentals

Across the nations and regions, relatively minor, predictable annual rent increases between 1% and 3% were visible, resulting in indices hovering around 108–112 by 2021 (Office for National Statistics 2026).

Chronic supply shortages and macroeconomic inflation sparked unprecedented cost surges, causing annual rent inflation to break records across the board, reaching single-year peaks of 11.7% in Scotland in August 2023 and 9.9% in Northern Ireland in April 2024 (Office for National Statistics 2026).

As of mid-2026, rent inflation is beginning to cool off significantly from its record peaks—with UK-wide annual rent growth slowing down to 3.3%—though cumulative index baselines remain historically inflated (Office for National Statistics 2026).

These figures reflect sustained supply-demand imbalance, record overflow into temporary accommodation, and recurring governance failures across parts of the sector. Across social housing, private renting, and leasehold tenure, redress mechanisms remain fragmented, reactive, and individualised.

This section assesses these conditions across tenures and sets out the structural case for collective civic co-ordination through a National Housing Union. It draws exclusively on verified primary sources from 2024–25 and current legislation.

2.2. Structural Demand

Social Housing Backlog

England: On 31 March 2025, a record high of **131,140 households** were living in temporary accommodation in England, marking a 12% year-on-year surge (MHCLG 2025b). Independent analysis by Shelter estimates that at least 354,000 individual people experienced homelessness in England across 2024, including approximately 326,000 trapped in temporary placements (Shelter 2024a).

Scotland: The system overflow has mirrored this crisis, with households in temporary accommodation climbing to a peak of **17,240** in early 2025 before settling at **15,693** by late September 2025 (Scottish Government 2026b). This backlogged infrastructure holds **10,480 children** in legal limbo, with families spending an average of **237 days** waiting inside temporary setups for a permanent housing offer (Scottish Government 2026b).



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Wales: Placements reached an acute baseline of **6,201 households** by early 2026 (Crisis 2026b). By May 2026, the individual person count climbed to **10,282 total people** in temporary housing, which tragically includes more than **3,000 children** (Welsh Government 2026b; Shelter Cymru 2026).

Northern Ireland: The region has logged a staggering **79% five-year explosion** in emergency placements, jumping from 3,140 in early 2021 to **5,633 households** by mid-2026 (Homeless Connect 2026). This structural gridlock keeps **4,837 children** without a permanent home, while over 8% of all homeless applicants have been left stranded in temporary accommodation for **five years or more** (Inside Housing 2026; NISRA 2025).

Across all jurisdictions, temporary accommodation is increasingly long-term rather than transitional. It reflects constrained access to permanent housing rather than a short-term crisis response. Combined with waiting list data, this indicates a four-nation housing system operating as a rationing mechanism under sustained strain.

2.3. Private Rented Sector Pressures

England: The private rented sector (PRS) accommodates approximately **one in five households** (ONS 2024). Legislative reform through the Renters' Rights Act 2025 reflects recognition of instability within this tenure, establishing rules regarding tenancy arrangements and landlord obligations (UK Parliament 2025). However, structural enforcement remains complaint-led.

Scotland: The sector accounts for roughly **14% of households** (Scottish Government 2025). Following the expiration of the emergency cost-of-living rent cap, the Cost of Living (Tenant Protection) (Scotland) Act 2022 was succeeded by transitional adjudication frameworks under the Housing (Scotland) Bill, yet tenants face a highly restricted stock pool and complex structural rent arbitration (Scottish Government 2026a).

Wales: The PRS houses approximately **14% of the population**, encompassing an estimated 184,900 dwellings (Welsh Government 2026b). Landlords must register via Rent Smart Wales under the Housing (Wales) Act 2014, but enforcement remains hampered by local authority capacity deficits, meaning renters struggle with persistent quality control issues (CIH Wales 2026).

Northern Ireland: Private renting has grown to absorb **14% of all households**, doubling in size over the last twenty years (NISRA 2025). The Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 introduced basic safety obligations and notice period changes, yet letting agent activities and



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

arbitrary fee management are not governed by a singular, centralised statutory regulator (CIH Northern Ireland 2024).

Enforcement of standards remains complaint-led. Barriers include:

- Fear of retaliatory eviction.
- Limited legal support.
- Tribunal complexity.
- Information asymmetry.

Private rental insecurity directly interacts with pressure on social housing and temporary accommodation.

2.4. Problems with Social Housing Rent Levels

Contrary to much media portrayal, social housing rental is not necessarily an affordable option when compared to incomes as opposed to other rentals on the market. The problem has been compounded by a recent social rent formula that will allow councils and housing associations to increase rents by CPI inflation plus 1%.

- An annual rent increase of **CPI+1%** forces social housing costs to consistently outpace basic inflation. For the approximately one-third of tenants who pay rent without state housing support or are subject to the welfare benefit cap, this compounds severe living cost pressures (Inside Housing 2025).
- Alongside the CPI+1% baseline, a phased policy allows landlords to increase weekly rents by an **additional £1 to £2** to bring properties up to standard "formula rent" levels (Regulator of Social Housing 2026). This dual mechanism causes compounding real-terms rent hikes for the lowest-income households (Inside Housing 2025).
- For tenants receiving universal credit or housing benefits, CPI+1% rent increases place a heavier burden on the state's welfare budget. Where Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rates or overall benefit caps are frozen, **tenants face structural shortfalls that trigger rent arrears and subsequent eviction risks** (Propertymark 2026).
- Social rent formulas are linked to historic property values and regional incomes rather than **dynamic economic realities** (National Housing Federation 2026). This creates regional disparities where social rents remain high relative to low local wages, while in high-cost areas like London, the stock is so depleted that social housing is no longer a realistic or accessible safety net for the working poor (Loughborough University 2026).



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

2.5. Leaseholders, Tenements, and Apartments

Property ownership frameworks vary dramatically by nation, exposing owners to unique structural, financial, and management risks:

England & Wales (Leasehold Model): Approximately **4.9 million dwellings in England** (DLUHC 2023) and **215,000 dwellings in Wales** (Welsh Government 2025) are held under leasehold tenures. Leasehold is the default for privately owned flats, covering 91% of owner-occupied flats in England (House of Commons Library 2025). Under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985, leaseholders frequently face steep **service charges** which averaged over **£2,300 annually per flat** by 2025 (The Guardian 2025). While the Building Safety Act 2022 provides legal cost protections for qualifying leaseholders against high-rise cladding remediation, multi-year disputes persist regarding non-cladding safety items, interim waking watch fees and surging insurance premiums (UK Parliament 2022).

Scotland (Tenement Common Property Model): Scotland abolished traditional residential leaseholds via the Abolition of Feudal Tenure etc. (Scotland) Act 2000. Instead, multi-occupancy blocks are governed by the Tenements (Scotland) Act 2004, covering roughly **895,000 tenements** (Built Environment Forum Scotland 2024). Co-owners share joint legal liability for common repairs (e.g. roofs and foundations). However, without the enforcement of a central freeholder, flat owners face chronic block degradation; independent surveys show a critical maintenance deficit due to missing **Building Reserve Funds (BRF)** and a lack of consensus among mixed-tenure residents (Scottish Government 2023).

Northern Ireland (Statutory Multi-Unit Model): Multi-story blocks and modern apartment complexes are managed via unique long-lease models or commonhold-style pathways overseen by private **Management Companies**. Because Northern Ireland lacks an equivalent to England's Leasehold Reform, Housing and Urban Development Act, apartment owners lack clear, streamlined statutory protections against unregulated estate management charges, arbitrary sinking fund allocations or building structural safety cost allocations (Northern Ireland Audit Office 2024).

To resolve structural asset disputes, property owners must navigate legally technical, slow and resource-intensive mechanisms. In England and Wales, individual challenges are pursued via the First-tier Tribunal (Property Chamber), Section 20 consultation disputes, Right to Manage (RTM) processes, or collective enfranchisement.

In Scotland, the dispute mechanism is via Tenement Management Scheme (TMS) voting protocols or individual debt recovery applications through the regular Sheriff Court system.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

In Northern Ireland, complainants must navigate high-cost civil litigation routes or fragmented private alternative dispute resolution bodies.

2.6. Accountability and Redress Across Tenures

There are various mechanisms offered by national and regional governments to provide redress when things go wrong. The patchwork systems do not provide coherence, with a postcode lottery determining what type of issues can be challenged. Nor is there an equivalence of protections depending on tenure, complicating the picture even further. Finally, there are plentiful gaps, with tenants and residents having no redress for certain issues. This results in an accountability network that is fragmented, reactive and reliant on individual complaints to identify deep systemic errors.

Structural Barriers Across Tenures

Despite regional and tenure differences, common patterns emerge:

- Individualised enforcement.
- Legal and procedural complexities.
- Cost and evidential burdens.
- Information asymmetry.
- Retrospective remedies.
- For social tenants: allocation constraints and repair disputes.
- For private renters: tenure insecurity and enforcement barriers.
- For leaseholders: service charge exposure and building safety disputes.
- Systemic issues are addressed primarily through individual action.

What the numbers revealed

Official 2024-25 data confirm that housing pressure in the UK is sustained, multi-tenure and systemic. Backlog is at decade highs. Temporary accommodation is at record levels. Complaint determinations reveal recurring maladministration patterns. Leaseholders continue to navigate complex redress frameworks. Across the housing system, enforcement remains individualised and reactive.

The interaction between social housing waiting lists, the growing number of households in temporary accommodation and the high proportion of Ombudsman determinations that are upheld reveals a housing system under sustained structural strain.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

The volume of unresolved demand dwarfs the scale of formal redress, and accountability mechanisms operate at a fraction of the scale at which pressure is accumulating.

The data does not describe isolated failures but rather systemic imbalance across tenures. The proposal for a National Housing Union arises within this empirical context as a structural response to structural conditions, a collective civic mechanism capable of:

- Aggregating systemic evidence.
- Supporting tenants and leaseholders.
- Coordinating escalation across fragmented oversight systems.
- Strengthening transparency and accountability.

2.7. Regional Housing Law

There are considerable regional variations in housing law, systems of redress and the shape and depth of housing movements across the UK. This will inevitably impact on the type of support offered to members in different regions.

The section below offers a very high level overview of the landscape, but the Housing Union will develop its regionalised approach in a far more nuanced way than we are able to cover here. Please see [Appendix \(I\)](#) for methodology, bibliography and references.

England: Housing law in England is underpinned by the historical Assured Shorthold Tenancy (AST) framework, allowing landlords to use Section 21 "no-fault" notices to evict tenants with two months' warning, though the sweeping Renters' Rights Act 2025 is actively phasing this out to transition all private rentals to rolling periodic terms.

The statutory homelessness safety net utilises the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 to enforce early prevention duties, yet it maintains strict "priority need" and "intentionality" eligibility criteria that often exclude single, healthy adults from securing temporary or permanent social rehousing.

Furthermore, flat ownership remains structurally tied to a complex, multi-layered leasehold system where buyers do not own the physical building or land and are legally liable for variable, escalating annual service charges.

Scotland: Scotland features the most progressive and rights-oriented housing legislation across the UK nations, having completely abolished both residential leaseholds and the statutory homelessness "priority need" test.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Under the Private Residential Tenancy (PRT) framework, all private tenancies are open-ended, with no fixed terms, making no-fault evictions entirely illegal and requiring landlords to prove one of 18 specific statutory grounds before a specialised national tribunal to regain possession of the property.

Property standards are strictly monitored through a uniform National Landlord Register and the Repairing Standard, while flatted blocks are governed collectively under the unique Tenement system where flat owners own their units outright but hold shared financial liability for structural maintenance (Scottish Government 2025).

Wales: Wales fundamentally restructured its housing ecosystem through the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016 (fully implemented in 2022), which replaced traditional tenancies with "occupation contracts" and reclassified tenants as "contract-holders". Landlords in Wales must provide a minimum of six months' notice for a no-fault eviction, and this cannot be issued within the first six months of occupancy, guaranteeing contract-holders an absolute 12-month minimum baseline of security.

Additionally, the region mandates centralised licensing via Rent Smart Wales, requiring all self-managing landlords to complete legal training, and dictates that property safety be judged under strict Fitness for Human Habitation (FFHH) regulations (CIH Wales 2026).

Northern Ireland: Northern Ireland maintains a more traditional and centralised approach to housing law, where statutory homelessness and public housing supply are managed by a single nation-wide body, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), rather than localised regional councils.

Private tenancies are governed under the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022, which keeps no-fault evictions legal but scales tenant notice periods up to 12 weeks based heavily on their continuous length of tenure. Property regulation is highly fragmented between the NIHE and council environmental health teams, and multi-unit apartment complexes are overseen by private Management Companies without the specialised statutory property tribunal protections available to residents elsewhere in the UK.

2.8. Regional Housing Movements

Inevitably, differences in the legal and regulatory frameworks, together with historical factors, have been mirrored in the forms of housing advocacy, resistance and rights movements within each region. Once again, a high level summary is provided here, but recognition of this variation is a crucial starting point for engagement with local activist structures.

The housing movement in **England** is defined by a decentralised network of grass-roots tenant unions, community organisations, and national charities collaborating to balance the severe



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

legal power gap in the private sector. Major national advocacy charities such as Shelter England leverage deep research and legal expertise to lobby Westminster.

Northern Ireland's housing movement is uniquely shaped by a combination of cross-border solidarity networks and the region's centralised public housing framework. Grass-roots direct action is heavily spearheaded by Community Action Tenants' Union Ireland, an all-island activist body that mobilises community resistance against evictions, poor conditions and corporate landlordism north and south of the border.

Because public housing is managed by a single centralised entity, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), rather than individual councils, activist pressure is targeted directly at the NIHE and the Department for Communities. Activists have run cross-tenure campaigns aimed at tackling soaring waiting lists, securing greater social sector funding and regulating the rapidly expanding private rental sector.

Scotland boasts a highly co-ordinated, radical and politically influential tenant movement that have successfully driven legislative reform deep into Holyrood's agenda. The foundational force is Living Rent, Scotland's national tenants' union, which grew from a 2014 campaign into an influential mass-membership infrastructure. Their strategic organising is widely recognised as the primary political catalyst behind Scotland's landmark housing legislation, including the historic abolition of "no-fault" evictions and implementation of statutory rent controls via the recent Housing Bill.

Wales the housing movement in Wales functions as a tight, collaborative ecosystem where local activist groups work in tandem with long-standing housing charities and the devolved Welsh Government. Rather than relying solely on aggressive external protest, the movement leans on a co-productive model. The close alignment between grass-roots advocacy and political institutions allowed Welsh housing movements to directly co-author the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2016, which reshaped Welsh contract law to prioritise long-term residential security and statutory fitness requirements over landlord commercial interests.

2.9. Regional Sensitivity

While all regions have activists, campaign groups and third sector bodies that have positively improved protections for tenants and residents, the power imbalance between landlords and those they home remains overwhelming. The political, statutory and regulatory establishment has a dominance that needs to be challenged.

The Housing Union does not seek to replace or displace any existing organisation, but is strongly committed to ensuring that it works with those who are fighting for better housing justice. The detail of how, will be a matter for the Union's lay democracy.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents



3. Home and Workplace Overlap

3.1. Impact on Working Lives

The housing emergency directly impacts our workplaces. Pay rises won by trade union activists are largely siphoned off to landlords. Worker absences are frequently due to unhealthy homes, the psychological strain of persistent antisocial behaviour and the cumulative stress of fighting their landlord's war of attrition.

At the start of 2025, SHAC conducted a Housing Crisis in the Workplace Impact Survey. Initial results showed that housing problems are having a significant impact within workplaces, but with the issues often masked. For example, people may report an absence as due to asthma, but this does not record the root cause as damp and mould in the home.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Housing Crisis in the Workplace Impact Survey Headline Findings





Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

3.2. The Landlord and Tenant Power Imbalance

Tenants and residents are outflanked when trying to challenge large, powerful corporate landlords who have seemingly endless resources and superior access to decision makers in local and national government and in the press.

Alongside this power imbalance, the regulatory system is soft and malleable, based on the premise that landlords are generally compliant even when the evidence suggests otherwise. There is little meaningful sanction when landlords transgress.

This has created an environment in which the landlord narrative is dominant and alternative perspectives are efficiently, sometimes brutally, silenced. And while some legislation exists - designed to protect tenants and residents - the disparity in access to resources and the barriers faced by tenants and residents make the reality of regulatory enforcement a pipe dream for most ordinary people.

It is within this context that we see:

- Estates left with life-threatening disrepairs.
- Rising rents, service charge abuse.
- Race and disability discrimination and a failure to provide accessible housing.
- Antisocial behaviour.
- A loss of low-cost rental housing.
- The cladding scandal and the cost of remediation passed to residents.
- The stigmatisation of renters and the concept of social housing.
- The failure to change leasehold into commonhold.
- Lack of access to legal remedy for housing issues.
- Revenge evictions and landlord harassment.

3.3. Housing is a Trade Union Issue

Trade unions have regularly acknowledged the impact of the housing crisis on workers, but have not treated it as a primary workplace issue. The SHAC survey results underscore the point made by many housing campaigners that housing is a mainstream trade union issue.

Maintaining stable employment is almost impossible when workers' housing problems cause sickness absence, the need to relocate regularly or even end up homeless due to unjustified evictions and the lack of genuinely affordable housing. By extension, a stable economy is impossible in the context of a housing crisis.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

The extreme housing affordability crisis means that many workers, especially young workers and those in the private rented sector are paying the majority of their wages to their landlords.

This underscores the importance of engagement between the Housing Union and the trade union movement, not just to generate policy statements on housing, but to combine their forces in order to influence economic policy.

“The SHAC community has been a great help as I've tried to resolve several years' worth of service charge issues.

People shared tips on what to do, what to look for, what to ask for. Also shared examples of success that could be used as a precedent when dealing with our landlord. But a Housing Union would have offered stronger official advice and guidance.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



4. Forms of Governance

4.1. Founding Principles

The founding principles agreed early in the development of the Housing Union's conception are that it should:

- Be member-led and democratically controlled.
- Adopt an organising model of membership empowerment reflected in the rule books of the most effective and militant trade unions.
- Work in partnership with the multitude of different housing and intersectional campaign groups and service providers, not seek to replace them.

The development of the Housing Union's rule book is rightly a function of the next phase rather than the Blueprint. However, the rule book's contents can helpfully be guided by taking the best of a range of trade union rules. Please see [Appendix \(II\)](#) for comparison sources.

It also means that the membership structure will need to accommodate both individual membership and group affiliation.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

4.2. Previous Tenant Voice Iterations

The establishment of a tenants' voice has been attempted several times, but all have failed, primarily because they were top-down approaches, funded and controlled by government or charities.

Crucially, such organisations aimed to offer a means of consulting tenants and residents, rather than enabling tenant and resident self-organisation which forms the core vision for SHAC, London Renters Union, Greater Manchester Tenants Union and many similar grass-roots organisations.

Recent calls by the Housing Ombudsman and Baroness Taylor are once again policy focused. Baroness Taylor said in the House of Lords in July 2025:

“The new [tenant] body should work with ministers to drive national policy, and this was particularly important, given the government’s recent commitment to spend £39bn on social and affordable housing.”

These organisations aim to give the appearance of listening to tenants and residents without fundamentally altering the UK housing landscape. They also seek to act as a pressure valve, diffusing the anger which gives rise to radical protest movements including occupations, rent and service charge strikes.

4.3. An Alternative Vision

This does not mean, however, that a national tenants and residents union will inevitably end in failure. Instead, the initiative needs to emerge from the labour movement and be grounded in the principles of self-organisation, democracy and developing a layer of activists able to empower member self-advocacy.

The primary aim and most productive efforts of the Housing Union would be to mobilise, support and empower tenants and residents to influence housing policy at national, regional and local levels. This would include supporting the use of radical tactics such as rent and service charge strikes, eviction resistance and the occupation of empty homes.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

If the Housing Union is to change the housing landscape, it would need to challenge the UK's dominant economic model and the way that it has played out through housing. It would therefore work with trade unions and other voluntary sector bodies challenging wider austerity, cuts to local authority funding and the removal of the checks and balances that should protect tenants and residents.

In summary, like a trade union, such a body would perform five key tasks:

Key Tasks Illustrations





Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

4.4. A Unifying Union

The Housing Union will also be open to all, irrespective of the landlord type, whether council, housing association, or private developments, and even those in less traditional forms of housing such as almshouses, mobile homes, caravans, and boat dwellers and would seek to address problems with managing agents.

The all-encompassing membership would allow the Housing Union to bring its members together wherever there is common cause, leveraging the power of the strongest to help the weakest, so that government is forced to hear all, not just those with the loudest voices. Smaller groupings within the union would nonetheless be able to focus their action according to specific locations or themes.

“At times, I tell our landlord that I've been talking with 'fellow resident associations' who experience similar issues, and it clearly has a positive effect as they can see an issue could grow if they don't deal with it quickly. I imagine that the effect of a Housing Union behind future complaints would be far, far stronger.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026

Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

The scope of the Housing Union would overcome establishment endeavours to divide different categories of tenants and residents, applying legal protections to some but not others based on tenancy or landlord type. Divide and rule has allowed the housing crisis to flourish.

4.5. Branch Formation

Housing Union branches would be largely self-determining when it comes to campaigning. Branch formation would be a mix of localised, landlord-based and thematic options. Members may wish to join a branch based on their location, a shared characteristic, their landlord, the issue they are concerned about or their tenure. Members must be able to choose where to devote their time and energy.

Branch Options Illustration



The Housing Union has to allow individual membership. Some people are not on estates where other tenants and residents are known to them, or they may not have a good relationship with their Tenants and Residents Association (TRA). Such individuals would be able to choose the branch that they feel works best for them, whether geographically or thematically.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Some people are already in an organised grouping such as a well-functioning TRA. Such organisations may wish to turn their organisation into a branch of the Housing Union. Others however may wish to retain their independence and identity, in which case they can opt to affiliate. There will also be an affiliation option for housing campaign groups.

4.6. Branch, Regional and National Relationships

While branches will be the primary unit of delivery, there must be scope within the Housing Union to coordinate across regions and between different themed groups. This necessitates democratic structures to accommodate co-ordination. Some would be organic developments as the most logical organisational structures are identified. We advocate for the flattest possible structures to avoid unnecessary bureaucracy, combined with a branch-based democratic structure to protect the member-led ethos of the Housing Union. The details would be laid out in a democratically agreed rule book.

4.7. Membership and Sectional interests

The structure of the union needs to accommodate the various interests of different tenure and landlord types. The recommendation is to offer three levels of membership:

Level 1 - Full members

These members would enjoy the full rights of membership to create democratic control of the Housing Union:

- **Tenants (full renters)** All categories of tenant, including shared owners as they rent a proportion of their property
- **Leaseholders** whether council, housing association or private, and as above, shared owners because they are leaseholders on the non-rented proportion of their property
- **Unusual or insecure accommodation arrangements**, for example almshouse residents, caravan and boat dwellers, street sleepers and sofa surfers, but the list is not exhaustive.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

It is clear that navigating these will occasionally generate conflicts of interest. These will need to be resolved by the Housing Union's membership through the democratic processes laid out in its rule book.

“SHAC has been a valuable networking platform where I could connect with others facing similar issues. The community has advised and helped me understand my rights and options.

However, many members, including myself, often need practical support, not just advice. A Housing Union would provide access to a qualified legal adviser with specialist knowledge of housing law and tenants' rights. This would have been extremely beneficial.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Organisations

The Companies Act 2006 makes excellent provision for the representation, at general meetings of a company, of incorporated organisations that are members. But companies must make their own provisions for the representation of unincorporated organisations that are members.

The two remaining membership categories would therefore be open to organisations. The highest level of membership would be via affiliation. Consideration would need to be given as to what benefits, participation and voting rights would be available to the organisations in this category, in other words, what level of influence they would have over the policy and direction of the Housing Union.

The Housing Union would be able to support the work of local TRAs or campaign groups like a local tenants' union. Such groups would be able to affiliate to the Housing Union and then benefit from its resources. This might include for example:

- Extending their reach to mobilise for action such as protests and occupations.
- Providing legal advice.
- Lobbying government with key messages.
- Press releases to publicise campaigns.
- Funding leaflets, banners, flags and other resources for groups without sufficient funds.

Affiliated Members - the groups in this category would typically be member-led, democratic, and represent tenants and residents, including:

- Tenants and/or residents associations (TRAs).
- Housing or related campaign groups.
- Right to Manage companies.
- Right to Manage organisations for councils.

Supporter Affiliation – this would allow other organisations that are not necessarily member-led, democratic and representing tenants and residents to nonetheless form a relationship with the Housing Union. Their membership would be more confined than that of affiliated members. For example, they might receive a newsletter and invitations to events, but not enjoy any voting rights. Typically, such organisations might include:

- Trade union branches.
- Trades Union Councils.
- Independent housing policy think-tanks.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- Charities concerned with housing and related themes.
- Political parties.

4.8. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

There is plentiful evidence of the disproportionately negative impact of the housing crisis on particular working-class communities. These include:

- Older people
- Young people
- Disabled people
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities
- Women
- Single parents
- Migrants

The list is not exhaustive. The Housing Union recognises the structural and social conditions that drive a greater level of homelessness and housing insecurity for these communities. The equality, diversity and inclusion agenda must therefore be embedded within the Housing Union's structures and services, and be actively planned at every stage of its development and operation.

4.9. Legal Form

The Co-operative movement offers a helpful way of approaching this subject, making a distinction between how the law regards the organisation and how the organisation regards itself. The main legal forms discussed were:

- a non-profit company, where the members of the union are members of the company. This was the legal form preferred by the governance taskforce
- some kind of society registered with the Financial Conduct Authority
- an unincorporated association
- hybrid of company and unincorporated association, where the broad membership of the association are not members of the company. It was questioned whether people from the trade union movement would take readily to such an arrangement



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Attempting to register with the quasi-corporate status of a trade union was a possibility, but not considered a viable option for the Housing Union.

4.10. Alliances and Partnership Working

Building strong alliances or a federation of existing collaborative tenant and resident associations, tenant unions and housing campaign groups has many advantages, not least that it could help form a “backbone” for the NHU.

It is important to emphasise some of the things that the Housing Union will and won't do. It will be part of the housing campaign ecosphere, but it won't carry out a corporate takeover of tenant and resident unions or housing campaign groups. Nor will it scoop up all the resources available from the trade unions, leaving nothing for those currently supported or needing support in the future, nor will it allow itself to become a means through which the trade unions outsource their own campaigning work on housing issues raised by their members.

There is both sufficient need and sufficient resource to allow multiple organisations to co-exist, and for the unions to build on their own housing campaigning, as well as provide crucial support to community campaigns and the Housing Union.

Alliances and Partnerships graphic



There are five main mutual benefits of the collaborative approach:

1. **Referring members**, for example, where either a local group or the Housing Union wants to refer a member because the other organisation is better suited to address the issue, helping to increase membership and participation.
2. **Collectivising cases**, for example, a campaign targeting a particular housing association might be developed by the Housing Union which would then approach local TRAs for that landlord. Alternatively, a TRA might initiate a campaign and ask the Housing Union to share details with others from the same landlord because the issue affects the wider group of tenants and residents.
3. **Providing resources and expertise**, for example, to a small, local group that might need funds for a banner and leaflets but does not have the capacity to go through the onerous process of formalising structures and registering as a charity. Alternatively, the Housing Union might need expert advice from another group.
4. **Raising awareness and amplifying campaigns**, for example, a campaign on energy costs might want people to sign its petition, or the Housing Union develops a petition and asks campaign partners to share it.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

5. **Mobilising for protests and demos**, there are many examples of coalitions that were built to organise demonstrations and protests where the groups involved all mobilise amongst their own memberships.

One suggestion is to investigate some form of 'passporting' so that those who join a partner organisation who need support from the Housing Union could be referred and their details would be passed on without having to re-register, and vice versa.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Proposed Broad Structure Illustration





5. Funding Models

There are various possible funding models for a new Housing Union. While a full feasibility study would need to be carried out to assess the relative merits of each, this section lays out some of the options. Most successful tenants' organisations use a mixed funding approach rather than relying on a single source and this is likely to hold true for the Housing Union.

5.1. The Necessity of Trade Union Partnership

Individual campaign groups and previous iterations of tenant voice organisations have been unable to achieve sufficiently large memberships to create a power base capable of changing the landscape and genuinely empowering tenants and residents.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

This is because they are variously restricted by:

- Reliance on unpaid volunteers to run their organisation and activities.
- Donations to fund resources such as daily operating costs, travel and leaflets.
- A lack of resources sufficient to make themselves visible to all potential members.
- The prohibitive cost of providing individual casework and legal advocacy.
- Charitable registration inhibiting willingness to engage in political, and especially party political, activities.
- Reliance on government grants to fund the organisation, inhibiting their willingness to fundamentally challenge the imbalance in power between landlords and tenants.

The close partnership between the Housing Union and trade unions proposed here overcomes all such obstacles.

5.2. Seed Funding

In order to allow the Housing Union to form, and to employ a small national staff, casework team, legal support and organising resources, seed funding would be needed from the trade union movement. This however will gradually be replaced by other forms of income.

That said, there are many benefits that might be explored for a close working relationship between the Housing Union and the trade union movement, not least that it can aid recruitment to the trade unions who often struggle to reach some of the most vulnerable and isolated communities. The relationship would therefore be symbiotic and not exclusively advantageous to the Housing Union.

5.3. Membership Subscriptions

This is the most democratic and independent model. Members would pay a modest monthly or annual fee which might typically range between £1 and £5 per month for individuals.

Subscription rates can be scaled by income or household and could be waived on a needs-assessed basis. In addition, higher 'solidarity' subscriptions could be offered to those who are willing and able to subsidise lower-income members, for example at a monthly rate between



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

£10 and £20. Thus, a combination of seed funding and membership subscriptions could be supplemented with one-off joining donations or solidarity payments from better-off members.

5.4. Trade Union Linked Subscriptions

The trade unions affiliated with the Labour Party currently offer Labour Party membership via the trade union. On joining, members can opt-in and receive Labour Party membership, with the trade union passing on the bulk affiliation fees on a quarterly basis to Labour.

A similar scheme could operate for the Housing Union. Their trade union membership fee would be slightly higher and accommodate membership of both organisations, with the trade union passing on the subscription and new member details to the Housing Union. Trade unions could offer their members the opportunity to pay two kinds of Housing Union subscription via the trade union:

- **A Full-cost Membership** - their trade union membership fee would be slightly higher, for example an additional £1-£2 on top of the trade union membership fee.
- **Subsidised Membership** – similar to above but with a subsidy from the trade union so their trade union membership fee would be increased by a smaller amount, for example an additional £0.50 on top of the trade union membership fee.

“For a Housing Union to be truly effective, it would need to build a strong collective voice and employ experienced housing professionals who can advocate on behalf of tenants and leaseholders and hold landlords accountable.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

5.5. Other Sources of Funding

a) Charitable Trusts & Progressive Foundations

Grants from organisations that fund housing justice, community organising, and tenant power-building. Potential funders include:

- Nationwide Foundation
- Oak Foundation
- Lipman-Miliband Foundation
- Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust
- Reform Foundation
- People's Health Trust/Health Lottery
- Fair Housing Futures

These are especially useful for start-up phase, hiring initial organisers, developing training or running national campaigns.

b) One-off or Short-term Project Grants

The Housing Union would be eligible to bid for specific pots tied to housing policy, tenant voice or post-Grenfell tenant involvement. Possible sources include:

- Homes England (tenant engagement streams)
- Ministry of Housing innovation funds
- Lottery and community funds when they open housing and tenant participation strands
- Research funding in collaboration with sympathetic academics

c) Crowdfunding and Large Donor Campaigns

Periodic public crowdfunding drives are possible, especially around high-profile campaigns like rent controls, no-fault eviction abolition or cladding/safety crises.

The Housing Union could also fundraise from sympathetic wealthy individuals or ethical investment funds focused on housing justice.

Corporate funding is not considered viable for the Housing Union as it risks mission drift as well as reputational damage by association. It is rarely used by similar existing groups.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

5.6. More Ambitious and Larger Structural Ideas

d) Statutory and Government Core Funding

Income from this source is not ruled out completely, but could be contentious. A careful risk assessment would need to be made in order to protect the integrity of the Housing Union. However, some national tenants' organisations in the past received limited exchequer funding for representative functions (for example, the Tenant Participation and Advisory Service).

The Labour Party previously pledged £20m to expand renters' unions. A revived or expanded version could provide seed/core funding for a national body.

It is also possible that a future government could introduce a small levy on private landlords or social landlords which would fund tenant and resident representation, similar to the levy on betting companies to fund gambling addiction initiatives.

e) Earned Income Streams

Once established, the Housing Union might offer services for which it would charge a fee, for example:

- Training & consultancy to housing associations, councils or other tenant groups for resident involvement, conflict resolution or organising expertise.
- Legal support packages.
- Merchandise, publications or events.

5.7. Income Structure and Projections

The membership of the Housing Union is most likely to be drawn from the following pools:

- 5.5 million **private renters** across the UK
- 6 million **housing association** tenants and residents in England (including leaseholders)
- 1.6 million **council housing** tenants and residents in England (including leaseholders)

As a guide, the potential annual income generation on the basis of membership numbers and subscription rate variables is as follows:



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Income Projections Illustration



A NATIONAL HOUSING UNION

Income Projections

		Annual Income				
Subs Rate		Membership Numbers				
Monthly	Annually	50,000	100,000	150,000	200,000	250,000
£1	£12	£600,000	£1,200,000	£1,800,000	£2,400,000	£3,000,000
£2	£24	£1,200,000	£2,400,000	£3,600,000	£4,800,000	£6,000,000
£3	£36	£1,800,000	£3,600,000	£5,400,000	£7,200,000	£9,000,000
£4	£48	£2,400,000	£4,800,000	£7,200,000	£9,600,000	£12,000,000
£5	£60	£3,000,000	£6,000,000	£9,000,000	£12,000,000	£15,000,000



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

The recommended and realistic mix for the Housing Union is as follows:

- **Years 1 and 2:** 60–80% trade union seed funding, plus charitable and project grants, crowd-funding and early membership recruitment.
- **Years 3 to 5:** 60–80% membership dues, supplemented by trade union funds, solidarity contributions and recurring foundation grants.
- **Year 5 onwards:** 70–85% membership-funded, supplemented by grants and union support for specific campaigns or capacity building.

The recommended funding structure balances independence - critical for a union challenging landlords and government - with the reality that building a national organisation takes significant upfront resources. The most stable and politically legitimate path is growing a large, fee-paying membership base while using grants to reach that scale.

“I was isolated and not knowing where and how to start, do or crack on. People shared their challenges, what they tried to do, detailed methodical research and solutions. Always strong solutions to deal with issues.

A Housing Union would offer local cross coordination across estates and tenures to create powerful resident groups, with clear data and trained advice, support and politically targeted campaigns to create accountability and reduce landlord influence in Parliament.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



6. The Collective Organising Model

6.1. Introduction

The organising model set out below has been drawn from materials produced for the trade union movement¹. It enables collective challenge to housing problems through:

- Individual and collective support.
- Guidance on housing and other legal rights.
- Opportunities for learning and skills development.

The organising approach is key to ensuring that the sources of housing problems are challenged strategically and collectively, rather than individualising complaints. This means that solutions apply to all affected, not just those who had the resources and wherewithal to pursue a complaint through to a successful conclusion.

In developing the thinking on organising, we are deeply indebted to the activists and academics from various tenant and resident unions who held multiple and very rich discussions on different organising models. Their honesty about what has worked and what has failed from their own

¹ For a good reference point, see 'Organising at Work - A TUC guide for trade union activists on how to build and maintain strong workplace unions
<https://www.tuc.org.uk/sites/default/files/OrganisingatWork2018.pdf>



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

experiences and where the challenges are most likely to lie has fundamentally shifted our thinking in relation to the Blueprint.

“It's a tough discipline and it's a very important methodology to be able to blend the use of activists and activism with structure-based organising.”

Tenant Union Activist - May 2026

6.2. Defining Organising

In broad terms, the trade union organising model is a process through which people collectively:

- Define an issue;
- Design their desired outcome; and
- Become actively involved in implementing a plan to achieve it.

The people involved could be a community defined by location or by a shared interest, or a mixture of both. The individuals would be brought together within a branch (see below for further details on branch formation).

The Housing Union can empower the community by creating a hub within which relevant knowledge and resources are collected and exploited, and people are brought together to take advantage of each other's skills and abilities.

This approach means that:

- The branches reflect the profile of the population within that community and the group is less likely to exclude those who are traditionally isolated and marginalised.
 - The Housing Union becomes visible to others who share the same features as that community.
 - It becomes a space through which national strategic campaigns and calls to action can be rolled out.
 - Ownership of successes by those within that community increases the likelihood of future engagement and sustained organisation by those involved.
-



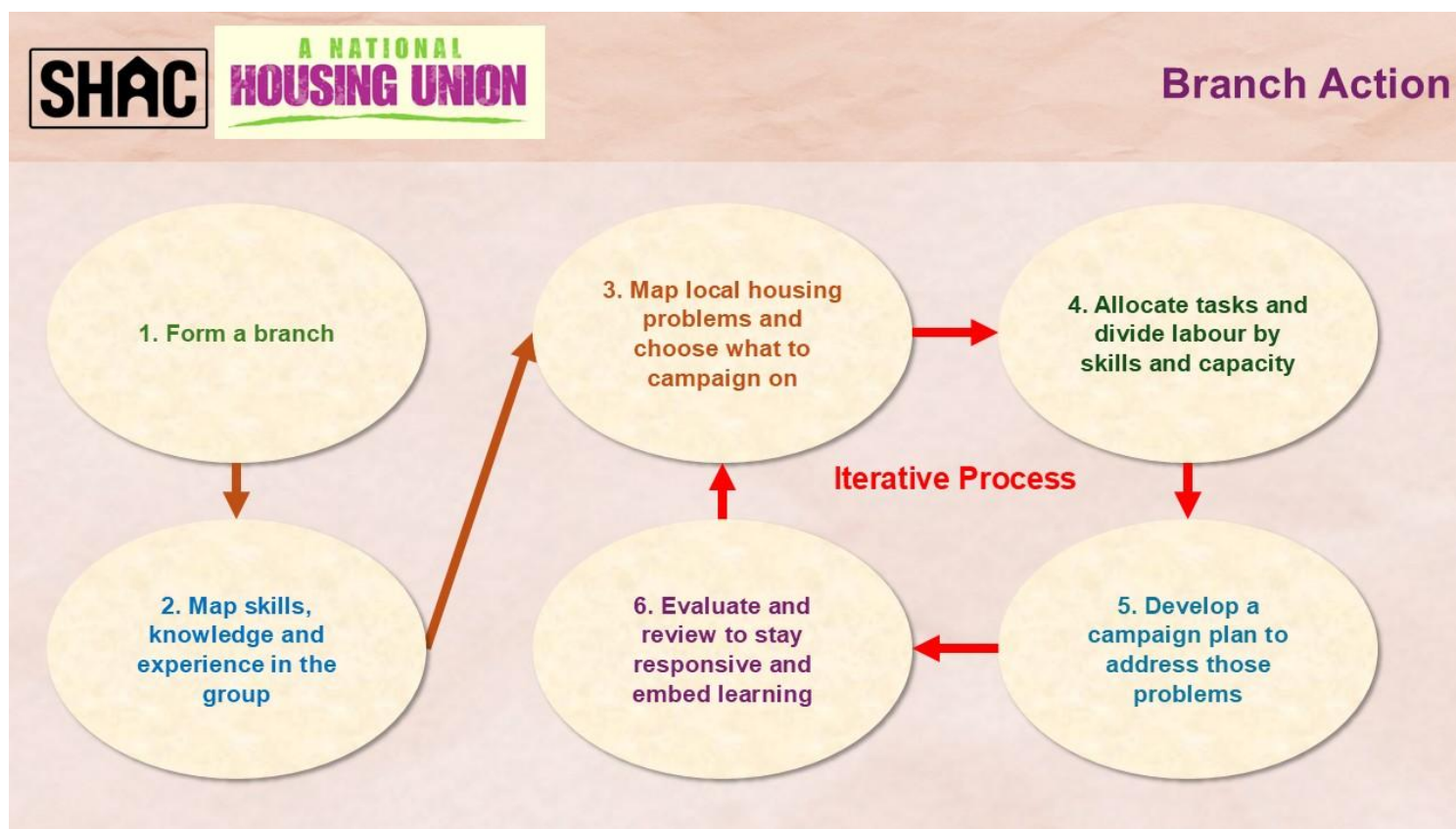
Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

There are many different models of collective organising, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. This Blueprint offers two; one that mirrors industrial unions' organising model and one which is more akin to the Spanish 'assemblies' model. It does not specify which should be used but defers this question to the feasibility stage.

6.3. The Trade Union Organising Model and the Assembly Model

The two models are similar in principle. Their key features include:

Branch Action Illustration





Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

The **Assembly Model** has a similar process to the organising cycle outlined above, but support is not a one-way street. It starts with new joiners having to attend a minimum number of meetings before they can raise their issue. Other people in the community will be invited to say if they have a similar issue, and then a collective organising project can begin. It means that issues are more likely to be collectivised and reduces the amount of individual casework. The Housing Union can set the rules on how people receive assistance, ranging from a hardline approach to one which is softer.

The advantage of this approach is that it reinforces the collective, not necessarily with the same people all the time but with a continuity of people who develop a level of experience, knowledge, and skills. SHAC has experience of a similar approach in the WhatsApp groups which are both landlord focused and themed. People gain a great deal of peer support and advice, but there is also a (limited) amount of collective organising.

One of the major problems in trying to get people to adopt a collective, organising and campaigning approach is that when people have an acute issue, they are too distracted by the problem and don't have the bandwidth to start a more strategic, organising campaign. The challenge is to work with them to resolve the most immediate, presenting issue while moving towards more organising and mobilising.

There is also a challenge in organising tenants and residents that trade union organising doesn't suffer from. A trade union will be organising within a single employer, whereas tenants and residents within a physical space could be from multiple different landlords, landlord types and tenures, with little common ground. For this reason, branch formation must be left fluid and accommodate communities united by an issue rather than a geographically bound space.

In both models, it very often takes time from inception of the core group to the point of planning a campaign and even longer to achieve success. Jane F. McAlevey's book *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*², the author argues that meaningful social and political change can only be achieved through deep, mass-based labour organising rather than top-down advocacy or shallow mobilising. Trust takes time to build.

6.4. Branch and National Organisational Support

While some of the delivery will rely on volunteers and this presents its own challenges, there are many ways that the Housing Union will support its activists, for example:

² McAlevey, J. F. (2016) *No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- Provision of telephones, laptops and internet access to key activists.
- Payment for basic expenses such as travel and accommodation.
- Provision of campaign resources such as venue bookings, banners, leaflets, badges and flags.
- The provision of accessibility support such as translation services.
- The provision of training, coaching and mentoring by Housing Union officers where needed.

6.5. Branch Expenditure Accountability

Branches would elect treasurers and expenditure would be accounted for through branch level scrutiny with submission of accounts to the Housing Union's central finance department to ensure transparency and probity.

6.6. Campaign and Action Planning

Branches should be able to choose their campaign targets. This might be hyper-localised, but could be at local or regional authority, recognising different scales of powers and spheres of influence over landlords. The Housing Union will need to consider carefully what level of authority is enabled, balancing the need to maintain standards against the risk of stifling action through excessive bureaucracy.

A template for campaign and action planning is necessary to ensure a high and consistent standard for campaigning. The following is a proposal based on learning from trade union and community campaign literature.

- **Aims:** Establish the aims and objectives.
- **Targets:** Identify the decision-makers who can resolve the issues. Where possible, the campaigners will need to open a channel of communication with the targets and a team of negotiators who engage with them directly.
- **Context:** Analyse the context to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The biggest failure factor in many campaigns is that they have either skipped this stage entirely or failed to carry it out effectively.
- **Plan Action:** Develop an escalating plan of actions. Generally the most effective plan is one which builds from low impact/easy delivery tactics, to more complex and impactful



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

actions. McAlevey is typical in arguing for low-stakes tasks like signing a petition to begin with, working up to higher stakes actions³. In this case, rent strikes would represent ‘the nuclear option’, which would demand supermajority participation of around 70%-80%.

- **Plan Communication.** Develop communication plans to run alongside actions. This will need to consider internal communication methods between activists to help co-ordinate delivery in a multi-layered format to account for different scales of engagement. It will also need to be external facing in order to keep the public informed and communicate with the campaign targets.
- **Alliances.** Build alliances and partnerships to harness the power of other groups to achieve the campaign aims.
- **Recruitment.** Include recruitment activities alongside actions. Issue-based recruitment is one of the most effective means of union building.
- **Resourcing.** Ensure that the resources needed are available at the point of delivery.
- **Review and learn.** Embed periodic review points that allow activists the opportunity to change direction and improve delivery.

While many local tenant and resident groups already adopt some of the organising approach, none have the backing of a sufficiently well-resourced and powerful national organisation to help increase their chances of success, especially given the inherent power of the landlord class and their allies.

6.7. Intersection

The collective organising approach intersects with other parts of the Housing Union’s activities. For example:

- Individual casework will often lead to the identification of a wider issue impacting other tenants and residents.
- A collective campaign may need to involve strategic legal challenge and therefore the involvement of legal practitioners.

³ McAlevey, J. F. (2016) No Shortcuts: Organizing for Power in the New Gilded Age. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- The issue may need a change in the law or action at local government level. The involvement of the Housing Union's political department may therefore be needed.
- Campaigns at a local level may need to call on the resources of the Housing Union's press department to amplify and intensify public pressure on decision makers.

The structure of the Housing Union must therefore accommodate effective joint working between its different departments.

6.8. Barriers to the Organising Model

While the organising model is a powerful tool, it is important to be explicit and honest about the challenges it creates. These include:

- **Burnout amongst activists:** those who are actively involved on an individual basis will be fitting it in amongst other demands on their time and energies. Key leaders can become burnt out with the stress of campaigning.
- **Burnout amongst Housing Union officers:** coaching and mentoring to upskill volunteer activists is very often more demanding than undertaking tasks. This can lead to greater stress on Housing Union officers. There will be an ever-present temptation to rely more heavily on paid staff than to organise within the affected community.
- **Churn:** delivery is more challenging when it relies on a volunteer group whose life circumstances and therefore available time will change over the period of the campaign.

Despite these barriers, we are of the firm belief that this model is the best and most empowering, and supremely preferable to the servicing or 'tenant voice' consultative models of delivery.



7. Provision of Individual Advocacy and Legal Services

7.1. Summary

This section summarises a fuller report produced by a SHAC working group tasked with mapping options for the legal and casework arm of a Housing Union.

Decades of complex legislative and social changes have reversed the post-war political commitment to ensure that working-class people have access to good housing. Gradually power has seeped away from tenants and residents to large developers and housing providers.

Neither SHAC nor any of the grass-roots campaign groups are currently able to offer any legal advice and representation service as the costs are prohibitive. Trade unions solve the legal costs problem by retaining a law firm that does not represent employers. A proportion of the membership fee is used to fund the retainer, but only a tiny fraction of members ever need legal advice or representation from their union and it is therefore a viable funding model. The legal firms benefit by receiving a steady stream of cases through this arrangement.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Over time, it is desirable for the Housing Union to have scope to bring legal cases, whether strategic (for example launching Judicial Review claims), or in relation to individuals. However, this may not be possible right from the start due to the costs involved.

“Landlord tried to silence me when I spoke against inflated cost of contractors backed by Engagement Team of the landlord. SHAC put me in touch with others who wrote in media about it. It was then the repair work started again. Extra resources with a Housing Union would have allowed them to work with me on Equality Act 2010 and harassment issues. They would have exposed the landlord silencing residents.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026

One of the primary tasks of the Housing Union will be lobbying to restore and improve properly funded, publicly-owned services that help people maintain stable lives, stay in their homes and develop thriving communities. Nonetheless, it must provide its own casework service to both fill a gap in service provision and reverse the decades-long seep of power away from tenants and residents, levelling the playing field.

We strongly recommend that the Housing Union launches swiftly with an effective Minimum Viable Product (MVP) of essential legal support and advice, with the aspiration to grow into a long-term strategy for providing in-depth casework.

A key component of this approach is a triage system designed to manage high demand and member expectations by offering tiered support, ranging from a ‘Light Tier’ low-resource self-service (e.g. website resources and fact sheets), up to ‘A Deep Tier’ for advanced, bespoke casework for complex cases.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

7.2. Scope and Vision

The vision for the UK's first National Housing Union's casework service is to provide appropriate legal advice and help to all members and to equalise the power imbalance between landlords and their tenants and residents.

The current redress routes are primarily administrative and do not always directly enforce statutory repair obligations in the way a court would.

There are many challenges that individuals with housing problems face to get their voices heard and effect positive change.

Ordinary citizens rarely possess the energy, time or resilience to launch legal housing cases. If some residents do persevere and take their case to a body like the Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS), they can find the outcome doesn't have the 'teeth' they expect it to have.

Section 11 of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 creates clear legal obligations on landlords, but current redress mechanisms are largely administrative and assess service failure through maladministration standards rather than direct statutory enforcement.

The Housing Union framework therefore retains explicit alignment with housing law to ensure residents understand when administrative resolution is insufficient and formal legal enforcement may be required.

One of our aims is that the Housing Union harnesses the power of collective knowledge and action to create a framework and process to share ways that other people have successfully solved their housing issues with light to deep levels of legal support and advocacy. We know the current political and community climate is right to launch a Housing Union.

At present, even landmark legal wins by tenants or residents fail to change the behaviour of landlords, who are complacent in the knowledge that the majority of tenants and residents will not have the wherewithal to bring a legal case, whether to the First-tier Property Tribunal or county court.

7.3. Considerations

Not all legal support would be 100% legal advocacy and advice in the true sense of taking a landlord to court. In addition, casework would combine with organising to resolve issues. This would include examples like:

- Pressuring local councillors to exert support on housing issues.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- Engaging with MPs to pressure and influence solutions to housing problems.
- Engaging with the media, campaign groups and other influencers.

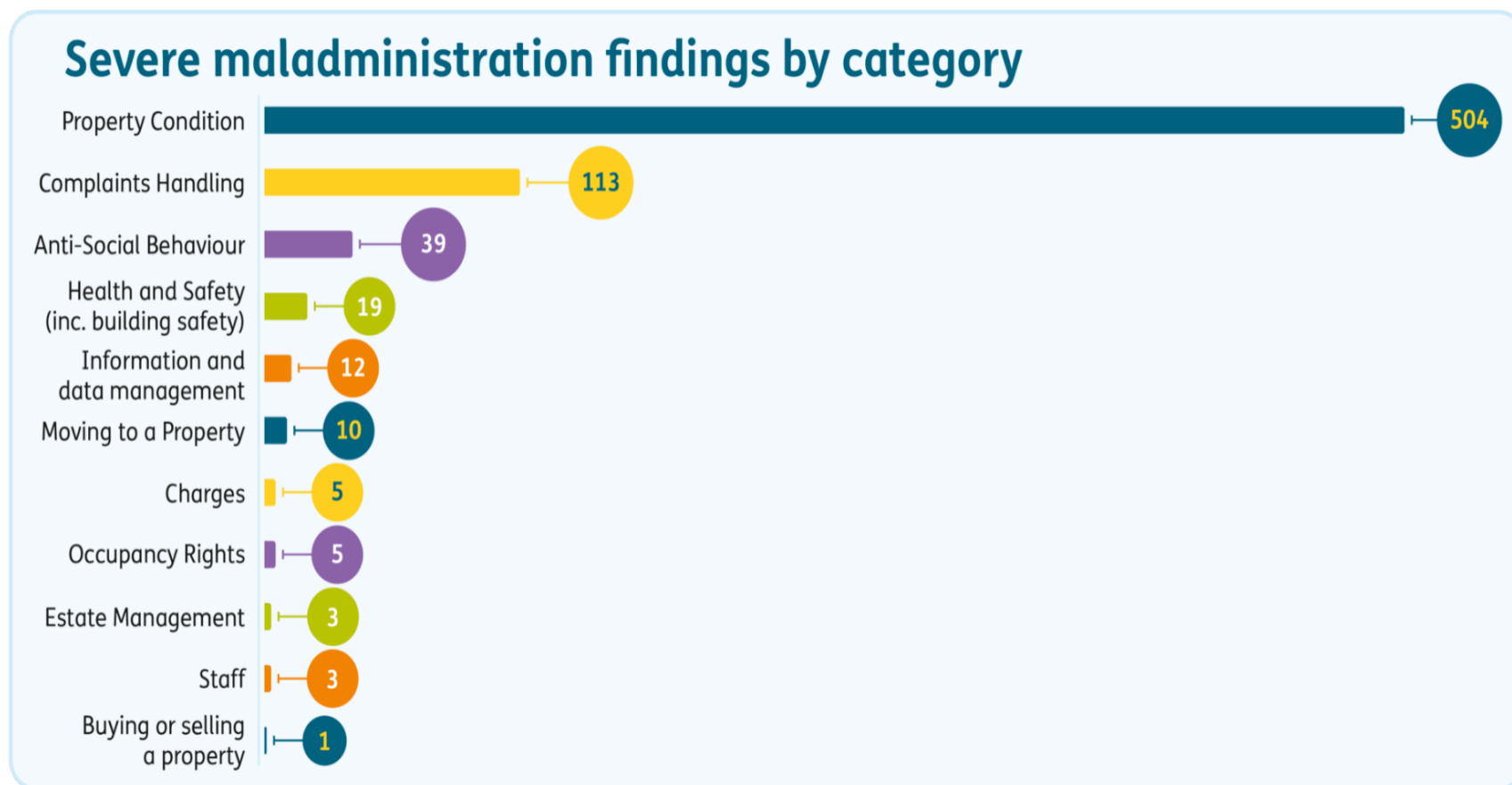
It is important to also include self-help resources within the Housing Union's offer. Some individuals may need a light amount of support and signposting, where they would self-serve fact sheets and resources that they need, versus others which would need a very deep level of bespoke casework support in preparation to take a housing provider to court.

7.4. Type of Housing Provider and Complaints

The Housing Ombudsman Service (HOS) report from 2024-25 showed that:

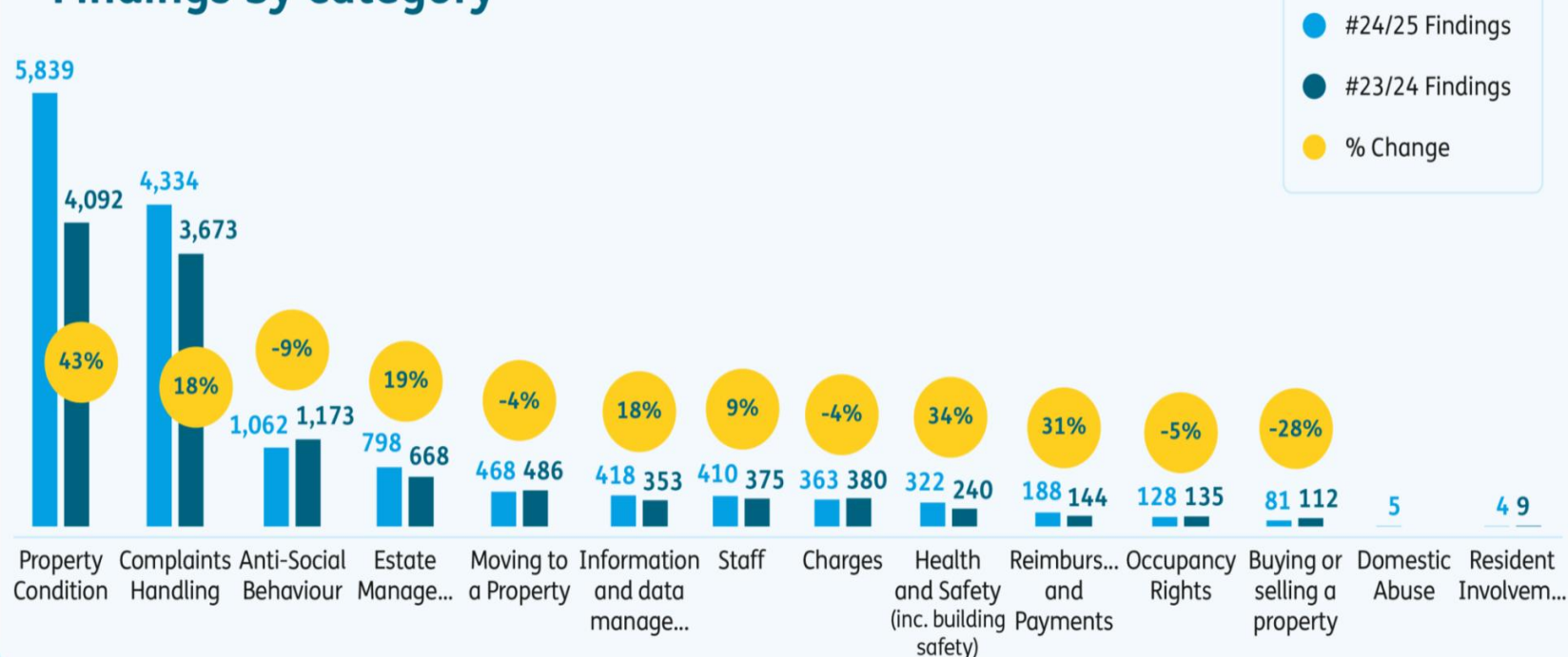
- 30% of HOS complaints 2024-25 were about local authority landlords.
- The HOS upheld the highest proportion of complaints about councils vs housing associations or other types of landlords.
- Housing associations perform better on complaint handling when compared to councils and other types of landlords.
- Nonetheless, 20 housing associations hold a complaint handling rate at, or above, the average for councils.
- The HOS cited a 474% increase in disrepair complaints

Severe Maladministration Findings by Category Illustration



Annual Change in Findings by Category Illustration

Findings by category





Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

The top issues by category to the HOS were property condition, followed by complaints handling, then anti-social behaviour. When the HOS determines a complaint, they make a finding and record the category of each finding.

In addition, we know that bodies such as the HOS, Regulator of Social Housing, Charity Commission and other agencies, and officers such as councillors and Members of Parliament have few actual powers to force landlords to uphold the law or change detrimental housing practices.

Often, various tenants and leaseholders find themselves in situations where a complaint to the HOS or similar agency has not led to tangible positive housing changes. This is because decades of deregulation in favour of landlords have removed meaningful enforcement even where laws exist to protect tenants and residents.

7.5. Barriers to Justice

Our findings from research and the group's lived experiences show there are a variety of macro and micro-challenges to legal redress in the UK currently:

- **Financial:** A personal lack of funds to take issues forward to a formal legal capacity.
- **Limited time:** For those with jobs, families and carer responsibilities.
- **Lack of knowledge:** The great complexity across housing issues, the legal knowledge that is required to fight experts acting on behalf of landlords and to self-advocate is a huge barrier even to get a legal case off the ground.
- **Fear of negative consequences:** Including financial and housing security.
- **Complex housing ecosystem:** The confusing array of different support organisations, a lack of expertise limiting an individual's ability to evaluate and differentiate the relative merits and reliability of advisory organisations.
- **No win, no fee solicitors:** These law firms are almost exclusively money maximising, profit-motivated and tend to exploit vulnerable individuals.
- **Legal maze:** With so many different solicitors and barristers to choose from, it can be confusing and time-consuming knowing where to start and how to vet different law firms.
- **Mental health:** Burnout is real and recurrent when tackling housing issues. The Housing Union must launch with the wellbeing of its members and staff at its heart.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- **Accessibility:** For those that are disabled (from hidden to visible), access literally and metaphorically to resources to enable them to advocate for themselves and create positive change is also very lacking.
- **Language barriers:** For people for whom English isn't their first language.
- **Cultural barriers:** These could be wide ranging and nuanced.
- **Power imbalance:** Between individuals and those they face, including landlords, law firms, the courts and government departments.

7.6. Lack Of Legal Aid

Alongside this Legal Aid was cut (again) on 1 April 2013 through the [Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders \(LASPO\) Act 2012](#), removing huge areas of social welfare law, including family, housing and debt, from the scope of public funding. This has had a detrimental impact on access to legal recourse for tenants and residents in the UK.

7.7. Key Ingredients to Casework Success

The casework working group used a variety of desk-based research online plus case studies to analyse what makes the key ingredient of a successful light-touch to deep legal case. The results offer key ingredients to resolve 'legal' housing issues:

Key Casework Ingredients Illustration





Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

7.8. The Housing Union's Recommended Approach

The proposal is to create triaged tiers and phases of Housing Union development that align with the needs of residents and type of resource needed to provide them.

Organisations that fail to focus on the core audience and service user often fail. The Blueprint is therefore focused on understanding the needs and differences of home dwellers to identify where the commonality lies on housing legal help so that the Housing Union can focus on these for the 'minimum viable product' model. This mitigates the risk of the Housing Union launching and only serving one type of audience or seeming ineffective in the early stages of launch.

The Housing Union would need to launch with some capacity to support core housing issues across all types of housing service user.

7.9. Triage Framework

A process has been devised to help manage the flow of help requests to the Housing Union. The triage framework would work from light to medium to deep levels of support. Not all involve the intervention of a legally qualified practitioner.

This helps to ensure that legal escalation becomes the final level of a wider system which starts with prevention. This is also much more reflective of real life where service users may wish to avoid expensive and time-consuming legal action and apply other tactics first to try and solve their housing issues.

The benefits of this approach are that it:

- Fairly determines proportional allocation of Housing Union support.
- Mitigates the Housing Union being overwhelmed.
- Enables service users to have agency and control over some housing issues.
- Integrates service users' needs to help ensure the Housing Union is fit for purpose.

Triage Levels

- **Light** – focused on prevention and facilitating self-help, this stage would give service users access to frequently asked questions, template letters, signposting to specialist help and other self-service resources.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- **Medium** – this is aimed at some level of supported intervention and could include advice and support from a trained advocate or peer support using help from trained volunteers for example.
- **Deep** – this is the highest level of support and would include legally qualified advocates for providing support with legal action, preparation of cases and representation at Tribunal or other courts.

All services and resources will be maximised for accessibility to accommodate disability and other characteristics. Often, such considerations are secondary, added on at the end of project design. We advocate an approach in which accessibility is part of the core design.

The **Light** level resources are likely to be made available free of charge, providing tenants and residents with access to a safe, accessible, and reliable source of assistance. For **Medium** and **Deep** levels of support, the services are likely to be available to members only, but with a waiver option for those who cannot afford to pay.

The process must also involve feedback loops to build knowledge and expertise and a means of feeding into the Housing Union's policy and organising strategy to help target campaigning.

“SHAC enabled me to see that I am not alone in my fight with Hyde Housing. Complete disregard for tenants and failure to admit mistakes is systemic and not isolated cases. Without SHAC I would have been fighting alone.

Being able to access direct professional support from a Housing Union could alleviate the significant negative effect this had on my mental health.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

7.10. Service Provision

Enquirers accessing the Housing Union services would follow the pathway below to identify their needs and the best option for support:

- **Stage One – enquiry intake**
 - Online form, email or phone options, accessibility maximised
 - Tenure identified
 - Immediate risk indicators logged
 - Specific needs related to disabilities logged

- **Stage Two – structured assessment**
 - Nature of issue clarified
 - Complaint stage identified
 - Safeguarding and urgency assessed
 - Risks recorded

- **Stage Three – triage decision**
 - Referral to Light, Medium or Deep support

7.11. Advocacy as Action

The use of Grassroot Advocates is highly recommended and would add considerable value to the Housing Union.

The advocates would need training, supervision and support, but could be either paid or voluntary positions. From a tenant or resident's point of view, support is gravely lacking at local level and we believe that there is strength in communities advocating and supporting for each other with deeper help from the Housing Union when and where they need it. People are more likely to trust people they know, and by upskilling local people we can ensure that communities get urgent help where they need it most.

The process helps empower all those involved, including those who are providing the peer support: a 'win-win' outcome.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Localised Advocacy

The Housing Union should capitalise on local knowledge sharing and increasing tenant and resident self-agency. This has been a tried and tested technique with mutual aid groups in lockdown, vaccine engagement groups and other housing groups. In essence this operationalises the medium layer and ensures it's aligned to the Housing Union enquiry and triage lifecycle.

Creating a Network of Advocates

The advocates could be identified, recruited and engaged at local levels via:-

- Tenants' and residents' associations.
- Housing action groups.
- Community gardening groups.
- Community hubs and youth centres.
- Faith centres.
- Mutual Aid groups.
- Men's and women's wellbeing groups.
- Other communities marginalised on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability and other characteristics.

7.12. Advocacy and Legal Services Conclusion

The need for individual advocacy and legal support that is free at the point of use is overwhelming. It should be one of the core services offered by the Housing Union. The triage model will allow the Housing Union to provide clear, reliable and appropriate support, some of which will be made available to non-members.

However, we argue powerfully in this Blueprint that the way it is offered also presents an opportunity to empower local advocates and activists, bringing a whole new layer of benefits to all concerned.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

“I have an ongoing dispute with my landlord and with the help of SHAC I have gained a lot of courage to challenge my landlord. With a Housing Union, I would have even more tools and to help me fight for my rights.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents



8. Meeting Resistance

The housing establishment – landlords, developers, service providers and their allies among the media and political classes – will inevitably see tenants and residents getting organised as a threat.

The sectors most directly challenged will be the finance sector which has considerable investments in real estate and the landlords who profit from the basic human need to be housed. These individuals and corporate bodies have deep pockets and powerful friends. We can therefore expect:

- Intensive lobbying of government to resist any legislative and regulatory changes which have the potential to hold them to account or otherwise restrict their freedoms.
- Pro-landlord, anti-tenant and resident press and social media, including the use of significant misinformation.
- Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs). These are abusive, baseless legal actions filed by powerful individuals or organisations aimed at intimidating and silencing critics. Rather than winning in court, they will exploit the fact that most tenants and residents could not afford the high cost of a legal defence and will therefore feel too intimidated to challenge their landlords.
- Divide and conquer strategies, for example where a group of tenants and residents have a common problem, they will concede to leaseholders but not tenants.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

- Presenting voluntary, superficial change as significant concessions. Examples can be found in the 'tenant empowerment and engagement' and 'tenant voice' initiatives launched by the government and many landlords.

“SHAC brings people together and works hard to gather and present evidence in clear, professional reports, which helps highlight that these problems are widespread rather than isolated cases. SHAC has helped by giving residents a stronger, collective voice to challenge this.

A Housing Union for all tenants and residents would have helped by giving these issues far greater visibility and influence. With stronger resources, it could promote concerns more effectively in the media and public arena, helping to bring wider attention to problems. This increased visibility would pressure decision-makers, encouraging government and politicians to take more meaningful and timely action to address the issues affecting tenants and leaseholders.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents



9. Main Risks

Sustaining branches can be difficult. People are being asked to do organising in their free time. It's therefore very important to keep branches running and accept that involvement levels will fluctuate.

There will be territorial and political differences, and we have to think about how we deal with conflict and disagreement, keep people together and focus on the aims of the project. Many community activist groups, including tenants and residents associations, can end up in turf wars waged by a different people or groups.

Addressing these problems will require funding a sufficient staff base and effective management, training and structures within the Housing Union.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

“I had multiple structural problems related to long term neglect by Peabody. Advice from the SHAC community helped me understand the processes I needed to go through to get redress. I also felt less alone because others shared their stories.

I believe even copying SHAC onto emails to Peabody and the Housing Ombudsman Service helped move my issues along by showing them I was serious, informed and had community action support.

I would have sought legal advice and support if it had been available through a Housing Union.”

Testimonial – SHAC member - May 2026



10. Next Steps: The Feasibility Stage

1. Decide on the preferred organising model.
2. Review the more comprehensive paper on the provision of individual advocacy and legal services, as set out in Chapter 7, to decide on the most appropriate way to provide services.
3. Define how contingent an individual's casework support is on their collective involvement in organising and campaigning.
4. Decide who will be excluded from membership. The term 'landlords' could include leaseholders or freeholders unable to sell and who have sub-let their properties but are still disadvantaged by, for example, service charge abuse.
5. There is also a question about Right to Manage management companies where sometimes an individual leaseholder will be in conflict with the company which is jointly owned by all residents in a block. This could become increasingly prevalent with commonhold. Within this, the relationship with the housing co-operative movement also needs to be explored. It is possible that a tenant in a housing co-op could have a problem with the collective body that runs the co-op for example.



11. With Thanks

This document was created through the efforts of hundreds of tenants and residents who contributed ideas and, in some cases, entire chapters to the Blueprint. We pay special tribute to workstream leaders who worked so hard to bring different sections to life, co-ordinating their groups despite the challenges of their own housing struggles. These were:

- **Fiona Cameron** (legal and casework).
- **Muhammad Khan** (the housing crisis).
- **Martin Keegan** (governance).
- **Joe Jenkins** (funding models).

For assistance on defining the organising model, we offer sincere thanks to the following:

- The London Renters Union
- The Greater Manchester Tenants Union
- Stuart Hodgkinson (Manchester Social Housing Commission)

Special thanks must also be given to Lindsay Bush, SHAC Administrator and Researcher, for work on the Blueprint.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

While we cannot name each contributor, we nonetheless thank everyone for inspiring contributions and awesome dedication to the concept of a National Housing Union. Your collective efforts and participation in the many events and activities organised by SHAC have undoubtedly created a powerful and robust Blueprint.

SHAC

Final Version

15 August 2026

E: shac.action@gmail.com

W: www.shaction.org

FB: www.facebook.com/groups/www.shaction.org

T(X): [@SHAC_Action](https://twitter.com/SHAC_Action)

Insta: [@SHAC_Action](https://www.instagram.com/SHAC_Action)

Bluesky: [@SHACAction](https://bsky.app/profile/SHACAction)



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

12. Appendix I: The Housing Emergency – Methodology and References

12.1. Methodology

This report draws exclusively on primary administrative data, statutory oversight publications and enacted legislation. Sources were selected according to four criteria:

1. Authoritative origin - only official government departments (e.g. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, Ministry of Justice), statutory bodies (e.g. Housing Ombudsman Service), Parliament, and nationally recognised organisations (e.g. Shelter 2024b, Office for National Statistics) were used for factual assertions.
2. Recency - where multiple editions existed, the most recent full reporting period (2024-25 or latest quarterly release) was used. All statistical references correspond to explicitly dated publications.
3. Structural relevance - indicators were selected to reflect systemic housing pressure rather than isolated cases. Data were included where they demonstrated scale, trend, institutional strain or recurring governance patterns.

All numerical claims are traceable to the reference list below.

12.2. References and Bibliography

BBC News (2026) Department for Communities: Housing waiting list in NI passes 50,000. Belfast: BBC.

Built Environment Forum Scotland (2024) Tenement Working Group Policy Briefing. Edinburgh: BEFS.

Chartered Institute of Housing (2026) The state of homelessness in Wales. Cardiff: CIH Cymru.

Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Ireland (2024) Regulation of letting agents and letting agent fees in Northern Ireland. Belfast: CIH.

Crisis (2026) Crisis responds as new figures show homelessness levels in Wales remain high. London: Crisis UK.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Crisis (2026b) Crisis responds to new data on the scale of homelessness in Wales. London: Crisis UK.

Department for Communities (2026a) Social Housing Waiting List Statistics: May 2026 Update. Belfast: DfC.

Department for Communities (2026b) Northern Ireland Homelessness Bulletin: October 2025 - March 2026. Belfast: DfC / NISRA.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023a) Leasehold dwellings in England. London: DLUHC.

Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2023b) Leasehold dwellings quarterly statistics: 2021 to 2022. London: DLUHC.

Homeless Connect (2026) Latest temporary housing figures released. Belfast: Homeless Connect.

House of Commons Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee, 2026. Housing Conditions in the Social Rented Sector. London: UK Parliament. Available at: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5901/cmselect/cmcomloc/1154/report.html>.

House of Commons Library (2025) Leasehold housing in England: Statistics. London: House of Commons.

Housing Ombudsman Service (2025) Annual Complaints Review 2024-25. London: Housing Ombudsman Service.

Inside Housing, 2025. Social rents have fallen in real terms over past 10 years, report finds. Available at: <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/news/social-rents-have-fallen-in-real-terms-over-past-10-years-report-finds-93025>.

Inside Housing (2026) Households in temporary accommodation in Northern Ireland up 79% in five years. London: Ocean Media Group.

London Councils (2025) London's social housing waiting lists reach 10-year high. London: London Councils.

Loughborough University, 2026. Londoners say social housing is no longer realistic for anyone. Leicestershire: Loughborough University. Available at: <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/media-centre/press-releases/2026/march/social-housing-not-realistic-in-london/>.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025a) Social housing lettings in England: April 2024 to March 2025. London: MHCLG.

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025b) Statutory homelessness in England: January to March 2025. London: MHCLG.

Ministry of Justice (2024) Tribunal statistics quarterly: Property Chamber. London: Ministry of Justice.

Ministry of Justice (2024) Tribunals statistics quarterly: April to June 2024. London: MoJ.

NISRA (2025) More than 8,000 households presented as homeless. Belfast: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

Northern Ireland Audit Office (2024) Homelessness in Northern Ireland. Belfast: NIAO.

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2025) Northern Ireland Housing Statistics 2024-25. Belfast: NISRA.

Office for National Statistics (2024a) Housing, England and Wales: Census 2021. Newport: ONS.

Office for National Statistics (2024b) Private rented sector summary statistics. London: ONS.

Propertymark, 2026. Crisis funding cannot close the Local Housing Allowance gap. Available at: <https://www.propertymark.co.uk/resource/crisis-funding-cannot-close-the-local-housing-allowance-gap.html>.

Regulator of Social Housing, 2026. Regulator of Social Housing publishes the Rent Standard 2026. London: GOV.UK. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/regulator-of-social-housing-publishes-the-rent-standard-2026>.

Scottish Government (2023) Tenement dwellings - provision of Building Reserve Funds. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Government (2025a) Homelessness in Scotland: 2024-25. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Government (2025b) Scottish Household Survey 2023: Key Findings. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Scottish Government (2026c) Housing Statistics 2025: Key Trends Summary. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

Scottish Government (2026b) Homelessness in Scotland: update to 30 September 2025. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Shelter (2024a) Homelessness in England 2024: Research briefing. London: Shelter.

Shelter (2024b) Homelessness in England: Annual estimates. London: Shelter.

Shelter England, 2026. Building social homes at current speed will take 119 years to clear housing waiting lists. London: [Shelter England](#)

Shelter Cymru (2026) Nowhere to call home: Understanding our housing crisis - Living in temporary accommodation. Swansea: Shelter Cymru.

The Guardian (2025) Average service charge for leasehold flat in England hits £2,300. London: Guardian Media Group.

UK Parliament (2022) Building Safety Act 2022. London: Parliamentary Digital Services.

UK Parliament (2023) Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. London: Parliamentary Digital Services.

UK Parliament (2025) Renters' Rights Act 2025. London: Parliamentary Digital Services.

Welsh Government (2025) Dwelling stock estimates: as at 31 March 2025. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Welsh Government (2026a) Estimates of additional housing need: 2025-based. Cardiff: Welsh Government.

Welsh Government (2026b) Homelessness accommodation provision and rough sleeping: May 2026. Cardiff: Welsh Government.



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

13. Appendix II: Comparison Rule Books

Type	Name	Rules	Notes
Trade Union	RMT	Rules	
Trade Union	Unite the Union	Rules	
Trade Union	BMA	Articles	
Trade Union	BALPA	Rules	
Tenant association	Tenantiaid Cymru	Articles	Wales (defunct)
Tenant association	Woonbond	Statutes	Netherlands
Tenant association	International Union of Tenants	Statutes	founded 1926
Tenant association	CATU		Ireland
Tenant association	Manawatū Tenants Union	Rules	part of New Zealand
Tenant association	Sunia	Statutes	Italy



Blueprint for a National Housing Union for All Tenants and Residents

14. Appendix III: About SHAC

SHAC is a national campaigning organisation that was launched by Unite the Union's Housing Workers Branch.

It links tenants, renters, shared owners and leaseholders living in homes owned by housing associations, councils and private landlords.

We maintain strong ties with trade unions, aiming to bring together tenants, residents and workers on issues of common cause.

Together we campaign to improve people's housing conditions and to reduce the commercialisation of public housing, working with the trade unions representing staff in housing and other services where we can.

Our demands include genuine tenant and resident democracy, improved repairs and maintenance services, reduced rents and service charges, better health and safety provisions for all and an end to the exploitation of housing workers.

E: shac.action@gmail.com

W: www.shaction.org

FB: www.facebook.com/groups/www.shaction.org

T(X): [@SHAC_Action](https://twitter.com/SHAC_Action)

Insta: [@SHAC_Action](https://www.instagram.com/SHAC_Action)

Bluesky: [@SHACAction](https://bsky.app/profile/SHACAction)