



# Rent-Move-Repeat

**A Participatory Action Research project on the challenges of renting in London as a young person**

Report authored by young renter peer researchers, and Toynbee Hall's research and policy team; and designed by young renter Megan Evans.

March 2019 – November 2021



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# Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Foreword .....	4
Executive summary.....	6
<b>Part one : Introduction.....</b>	<b>10</b>
1. The objectives.....	12
2. Why this project?.....	12
3. The approach.....	14
<b>Part two : The research.....</b>	<b>15</b>
1.The research process.....	16
1.1 Building a team.....	16
1.2 Deciding the project focus.....	16
1.3 Choosing and shaping the methods, and conducting research.....	16
2. The findings.....	17
2.1 Finding a home.....	19
2.2 Making a home.....	22
2.3 Moving out.....	24
2.4 Relationships.....	25

<b>Part three : Co-designing solutions.....</b>	<b>28</b>
1. The co-designing solution process.....	29
1.1 Choosing a focus.....	29
1.2 Co-design workshops with landlords.....	29
1.3 Feedback from specialists and decision-makers.....	29
1.4 Refining proposals .....	29
1.5 Learning points from landlord-renter discussions.....	31
2. What we want to see happening at a local level?.....	33
3. Our hopes for the future.....	37
<b>Part four : Sharing learning, taking action and policy influencing.....</b>	<b>39</b>
1. How is this research making a difference?.....	40
1.1 Policy influencing timeline.....	41
1.2 What's next?.....	43

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# Foreword *Sian Williams*

A safe and stable home is one of the key criteria for sustained wellbeing and inclusion, yet in this report we hear directly from young people about how poorly these basic needs are being met by London's private rental sector. Young people are forced to cope with unsafe homes and unfair rents, leaving them feeling exploited, and physically, financially and psychologically at risk at every stage of their rental journey. Shockingly, the experiences captured in this report aren't unusual; research published by Shelter in September 2021 found that 45% of England's private renting adults – equivalent to 3.7 million people - have experienced illegal behaviour from a landlord or letting agent<sup>1</sup>.

This report makes for uncomfortable reading. What makes it so powerful is that the researchers are themselves young private renters. At Toynbee Hall we believe that effective social reform requires the direct involvement of those people affected. The recommendations in this report are all the more relevant because they are shaped by the lived reality of renting privately in London, both before and during the pandemic. In the final stages of the research, the peer researchers were

themselves coping with the additional challenges presented by Covid-19 lockdowns. Their achievement in producing such important work under those conditions is all the more impressive, and demonstrates their commitment to ensuring their and their peers' voices are both heard and acted upon.

The report offers practical proposals for transforming the experience of being a young private renter. Importantly, the peer researchers have already tested their ideas with private landlords and incorporated their feedback. We took this co-design approach to challenge the prevailing narrative that landlords and renters are necessarily on opposing sides, and instead test a hypothesis that understanding landlords' perspectives might contribute to designing workable, win-win solutions. We believe the approach has led to a set of robust, highly effective and mutually beneficial proposals for both private renters and good landlords.

The research exposes how vulnerable the private rental market is making young Londoners. It's telling that the peer researchers chose to focus

their next step on the action they felt was most within their power; developing a tool to help increase young renters' understanding of their rights and how to claim them. I very much hope that, in whatever context you read this report, you will also be motivated to use whatever power you have to help make renting safer for young people. We'd be delighted to hear from anyone interested in collaborating with the peer researchers to implement their recommendations and help make London a safer place where young renters can thrive.

***Sian Williams***

Director of Policy and Innovation, Toynbee Hall

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1. Shelter (2021) 45% of private renters have been victims of illegal acts by their landlord or letting agent. Available from [https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_release/45\\_of\\_private\\_renters\\_have\\_been\\_victims\\_of\\_illegal\\_acts\\_by\\_their\\_landlord\\_or\\_letting\\_agent\\_](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/45_of_private_renters_have_been_victims_of_illegal_acts_by_their_landlord_or_letting_agent_). Accessed on 25 November 2021.

# Foreword *Matthew Walsham*

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Young people should be at the heart of decision making, not just being consulted on. They must be involved in the important work of designing research, analysing results, or producing recommendations. Participatory approaches seek to address this issue, with young people as equal partners in the process of policy making, and this work from Toynbee Hall is a great example of that.

Young people with experience of privately renting in East London came together to design this research, and to interview their peers. Participatory research, or peer research, is one way that young people can take ownership over their own research projects. It values their lived experience and provides them skills and training to empower them to take decisions over the research process as equal partners.

The work that the young people have done in this project is remarkable; choosing a clear focus, conducting high quality research, and taking collective action to create change. Key findings such as that young private renters often do not know their legal rights, is important when thinking about the services that we provide young people

as they rent their ever first flat, or house. The key findings from this research are a credit to the team of peer researchers on this project and are an insightful look into the many conversations they had with young people across London.

The challenge faced by young people in the private renter sector is huge, but this work has provided clear solutions. One of the most important parts of this project, was how solutions were co-designed between those young researchers with experience of renting, and local landlords. It provides young people and landlords an opportunity to share their lived experience, to build consensus and a basis on which workable solutions can be co-designed. It is important that we do not conduct research for research's sake and that we support young people to take forward findings and create their own solutions, to make the change that they want to see.

This report from Toynbee Hall is a fantastic example of participatory research and one that I hope other organisations can learn from. Young people need to be involved in how the youth

sector tackle the big structural inequalities that they face as a generation.

***Matthew Walsham***

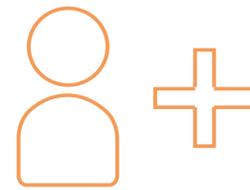
Policy Lead, Partnership for Young London

# Executive Summary

What risks do people aged 18-30 face as private renters? What can be done to help avoid financial hardship, sofa surfing, exploitative informal living arrangements, and ultimately to prevent rough sleeping and homelessness?

Over the course of two years, Toynbee Hall worked with 23 peer researchers to carry out participatory action research to explore the risks young private renters face in East London.

The peer researchers worked together with Toynbee Hall's research and policy team to design the research, conduct and analyse data from surveys and interviews, and host co-design workshops with landlords to develop recommendations to improve the private renting experience for young renters.



23 Peer researchers involved



18 Research training workshops delivered



80 Surveys completed



14 Interviews carried out



5 Landlord-renter workshops held



14 Actions taken



14 Landlords consulted



34 Organisations supporting the project



# Key findings

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The research found that young private renters face challenges across the entire renting experience, from finding a home, to making a home, to moving out.

The research shows that a number of challenges contribute to a riskier experience of renting for young private renters:

- The percentage of income they spend on rent makes it difficult to cope with rent increases or slow deposit return;
- Lack of options for affordable housing can force acceptance of inadequate living situations such as poorly maintained properties, overcrowding or illegal sublets;
- Regular house moves can create extra risk through repeated exposure to periods of financial precarity, and increased chance of encountering poor landlords and letting agents;
- Young private renters often do not know their legal rights, including whether their landlord/agent has met their obligations; and they lack time and confidence to communicate with landlords and letting agents and to exercise their rights, especially when these relationships can be difficult.



## Finding a home

Particularly in the context of London's competitive housing market, the majority of young people surveyed said that they felt under pressure to sign contracts and provide deposits for properties quickly and without time to take advice. Renters most commonly felt under pressure from letting agents, followed by fear of homelessness. Two-fifths of survey respondents found this stage of the renting process very or somewhat stressful. Many experienced a failure by landlords or letting agents to meet their basic rights as renters, including providing required legal documentation and the details of which deposit scheme their deposit is held in (if it is being protected in a scheme at all). Often young people do not even know they are meant to receive these documents, and therefore do not ask for them. Too many young people have not been given the information they need to avoid renting-related scams and get their tenancy off to a good start.



## Making a home

The research found that affordability had a big impact on young people's quality of life, with more than half of those surveyed spending more than half of their income on rent. Some young people described securing good quality but expensive homes that they struggled to afford. However, the shortage of affordable, well-maintained properties meant many young people were forced into properties with inadequate living space, low quality amenities and poor living conditions including mould and pests. A number of young people we spoke to were forced to sublet illegally. Many young people also spoke about compromising on basic living standards and tolerating improper behaviour by landlords and letting agents to avoid revenge rent raises or eviction. In many cases, issues were left unmanaged, with 40% of respondents reporting being somewhat or completely dissatisfied with landlords' and letting agents' responses to issues raised.



## Moving out

While many young people spoke about wanting to build roots in their local area, they were often forced to move out due to sudden rent increases, unfair eviction, or improper behaviour by landlords and letting agents. One in three renters surveyed had trouble getting their deposit back, including deposits being only partially returned without agreement over what tenants were being charged for and why. Young people reported lacking access to advice on what is acceptable practice when leaving a property, whilst others were vulnerable to deposit return scams. Importantly, when young people failed to receive the correct deposit amount and within fair and agreed timeframes, they struggled to afford the deposit for their new property.

# Key co-designed recommendations

## What we want to see happening at a local level

- Investment in ethical property management agencies in the capital which guarantee renters' rights to accessible, affordable and safe housing.
- Development of a website and app, co-designed with renters and hosted by an organisation invested in housing rights, to help renters to get information and support at the correct time, and to successfully manage their tenancy.

## Our hopes for the future

- Accessible, affordable and safe housing is a human right, and decision-makers with responsibility for housing have the fulfilment of that right as their legal primary consideration.
- Section 21 no fault evictions are scrapped and there is better regulation and enforcement of the sector.
- The social security system is protected and extended to provide a reliable lifeline to protect people.
- A landlord register is created, and this is the first step in decision-makers having access to much more data on the private rented sector with which to identify and solve problems.
- London and other devolved governments are given the power to tackle the affordability crisis using data from sources like the landlord register to take the best regional approach to rent stabilisation and control.
- The building of social housing is a national priority with programmes of co-operative and community-led housing also explored and supported.
- Young people are educated about their rights as renters as part of the national curriculum.
- Co-design principles are used at every step of the process of tackling the housing crisis.



# Part 1: Introduction

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“ I joined the Young Private Renters project after seeing the voluntary position advertised by my university Queen Mary, University of London. At the time, I was trying to secure a tenancy for my final year of studies. My experience of the London market during that time was particularly stressful. I had been frustrated by the poor quality of housing and prospective property management of letting agents and landlords experienced in our viewings, especially considering the extortionate rent we were expected to pay despite seeking some of the cheapest properties in Tower Hamlets.

Initially, my participation in the project was facilitated from a distance via email, voting on research methodology, despite not being present for in-person discussion in London. When I began attending meetings, the first task I contributed to was the analysis of the survey's results. This was great, as I love the illustrative ability of statistics and data in helping you understand a demographic or issue. Additionally, to begin discussing my experience and the experiences of my fellow peer researchers was really enjoyable. The atmosphere of our discussions has always been really supportive throughout.

Planning interview questions together followed on from this analysis as we considered which issues we wanted to probe based on our results. This was the first instance when we considered the scope of the project. Although we recognised that there were massive changes needed in renting on a market level, we acknowledged that it was important to focus our project in a way that it could be the most effective. We subsequently took a focus on young people's access to renting advice and information in the interviews.

We scrupulously discussed the wordings of our questions to ensure they were received and understood properly. To be a private renter deciding on these details, and then to follow on as interviewers, felt appropriate, despite not necessarily having prior research experience. It was therefore great to be supported through this by research manager Philip. To have the interviews, the qualitative data collection, as a conversation between individuals of the shared lived experience was brilliant.

I, along with other renters, held serious scepticism regarding the initial co-design phase of the action stage. We certainly questioned the idea of working

with those who owned the property to skew the focus away from renters and their powerlessness that our research had highlighted. Even despite the move online spurred by Covid-19, the co-design phase with landlords was instead really constructive. Working with them was very eye-opening to me. Particularly in terms of the shared concern for the malpractice of letting agencies, but it was also telling of the importance of the landlord/renter relationship and how it could be the foundation for improving the quality of one's renting experience. I'm not sure these findings would be possible without such a participatory and collaborative approach to action research.

As the co-design stage draws to a close, I continue to maintain my excitement about the outcomes of the project that I've had throughout. Despite having to manage expectations, the feedback from the steering groups and other organisations of the potential for impact has really emboldened my optimism. My main hope is for improving communication between landlords and renters. I believe both parties largely share a common interest in managing their ethical concerns in a market that encourages the opposite. ”

**-Peer researcher**

# The project objectives

1. To identify the risks faced by young people as renters and develop proposals that help them to avoid financial hardship, avoid the need to sofa surf with friends or live in exploitative informal living arrangements, and ultimately to prevent rough sleeping and homelessness.
2. To co-design recommendations with landlords and other stakeholders to tackle the risks and challenges faced by young private renters.

## Why this project?

Young people in London face specific challenges in finding secure, good quality, affordable housing. Between April 2020 and March 2021, London had the highest median monthly rents in England at £1,430<sup>2</sup>. This is nearly double the median monthly rent for England. In London, the majority of low-income adults in their late 20s/early 30s now live in the private rental sector, and a large minority will rent privately through their 30s/early 40s, with home ownership unattainable for many and causing a bottleneck for social housing.<sup>3</sup>

Some evidence suggests that the impact of the affordability crisis is exacerbated by poor regulation and weak enforcement. Polling commissioned by Shelter shows that 45% of England's private renters have experienced illegal acts by their letting agent or landlord, with almost 10% of private tenants having experienced abuse and threats. Safer Renting's report on these issues, "Journeys in the Shadows of the Private Rented Sector", concisely summarises why illegal letting agent and landlord behaviour is so rife in the capital:<sup>4</sup>

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“Rents are high relative to property quality; market pressures create a tolerance for overcrowding amongst tenants; there is a growing population of economic migrants; cutbacks in enforcement; an unwieldy legal framework; poor support for tenants seeking legal recourse; low penalties for convicted offenders; and growing use of the internet where identities are harder to verify.”<sup>4</sup>

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- Journeys in the Shadows of the Private Rented Sector

2. Office for National Statistics (2021) Private rental market summary statistics in England: April 2020 to March 2021. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/housing/bulletins/privaterentalmarketsummarystatisticsinengland/april2020tomarch2021>. Accessed on 27 Oct 2021.

3. Bailey, N. (2020) Poverty and the re-growth of private renting in the UK, 1994-2018, PLoS ONE 15(2): e0228273. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0228273>. Accessed on 16 September 2021.



One of the key reasons for the development of this project in 2018 was that the fastest growing group of people seeking debt advice through Toynbee Hall's pan-London debt advice service was 18-24 year olds and rent arrears was the most frequently occurring debt type among 18-34 year olds. The peer research conducted for this project was completed before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. In the context of Covid, private renters, particularly young private renters, are coping with even more rent debt. Research commissioned by the NRLA in late 2020 found that 14 percent of private renters aged 18 to 24, and 10 per cent of those aged 25 to 34, had built up rent arrears since March, compared to 7 percent on average.<sup>5</sup> Our Pandemic Stories research revealed that many young private renters in their twenties experienced income loss through furlough or loss of freelance work, zero-hours employment or redundancy, with income at times lost across all rent-payers in a household, creating shortfalls for the overall rent.<sup>6</sup>

Systemic failures in the housing sector create insecurity for young private renters, so it is essential they know their rights and how to protect themselves. Yet a variety of small scale studies suggest that awareness of rights amongst private renters is low. One study found that 50% of tenants do not know if their landlord could change their rent without notifying them, while 38% of tenants do not know when the landlord

is permitted to enter the property.<sup>7</sup> Another found that just over a third of the renters surveyed did not realise that they have the right for their deposit to be placed in a Tenancy Deposit Scheme.<sup>8</sup>

In the context of intractable issues around affordability, regulation and enforcement, increasing rent debt and low awareness of rights amongst renters, this project aims to find out what specific challenges are faced by young people in London; what systemic changes could support them; and how innovation could help. Using distinctive methods of innovation like Participatory Action Research and co-design between renters and landlords, we sought new approaches to tackle long-standing issues.

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4. Shelter (2021) 45% of private renters have been victims of illegal acts by their landlord or letting agent. Press Release. Available from: [https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press\\_release/45\\_of\\_private\\_renters\\_have\\_been\\_victims\\_of\\_illegal\\_acts\\_by\\_their\\_landlord\\_or\\_letting\\_agent\\_](https://england.shelter.org.uk/media/press_release/45_of_private_renters_have_been_victims_of_illegal_acts_by_their_landlord_or_letting_agent_). Accessed on 27 Oct 2021.

5. Spencer, R., Reeve-Lewis, B., Rugg, J. and Barata, E. (2020) Journeys in the Shadows of the Private Rented Sector. Cambridge House and University of York report, p. 6. Available from <https://ch1889.org/journeyslaunch>. Accessed on 27 Oct 2021.

6. National Residential Landlords Association (2020) Tenant Survey November 2020. Available from: <https://www.nrla.org.uk/research/deep-insight/tenant-survey-nov2020>. Accessed on 27 Oct 2021.

7. Toynbee Hall (2021) Pandemic Stories. Available from: <https://www.toynbeehall.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Pandemic-Stories-Full-Report-August-2021.pdf>. Accessed on 27 Oct 2021.

8. Landlord Today (2019) Totally Money Study. Available from: <https://www.landlord-today.co.uk/breaking-news/2018/12/most-renters-unaware-of-their-rights-research-shows?source=othernews>. Accessed on 27 Oct 2021.

9. Let Britain (2017). Tenant Sentiment Index. Available from: <https://letbritain.co.uk/blog/the-results-of-our-market-research-are-in-britains-renters-are-outraged/>. Accessed on 27 Oct 2021.

# The approach

Within a traditional research framework, those with lived experience are typically considered as participants only, with the research directed by professional researchers.

As such, research is often conducted on communities, not with them. Participatory action research (PAR) re-envision this process, bringing those with lived experience into the research process as collaborators.<sup>9</sup> Research is conducted with and alongside communities, drawing on the principle used by many marginalised communities: “Nothing about us, without us”.

Research collaborators, known in this research as peer researchers, can engage with the research process and decision-making at a level they choose. This ensures that the research addresses issues which are genuinely significant to the communities studied, and frames research questions in ways which are considered and sensitive to the circumstances with which communities are grappling. PAR has action and impact as central principles, using research not only to understand the world but also to transform it in meaningful ways. Involving the community in developing the terms of action, as well as in undertaking it, promotes a sense of ownership and involvement and results in solutions which

are more likely to succeed.<sup>10</sup> This approach also ensures that the benefits of conducting research and social action – for example, developing new skills and networks – are extended to those with lived experience in more meaningful ways.

The PAR process is not without its challenges. The circumstances of our peer researchers sometimes contributed to issues with engagement; we needed to balance between meeting project deadlines and facilitating in-depth discussion and decision making; and agreements about what can or should be achieved within the scope of the project require compromise. However, the diverse backgrounds, skills, and insights of our team were benefits which enabled us to work towards a common goal; strengthening both the project, and our collective investment in working to make renting better for young people.

You can find out more about our approach including methodology in our publication [Rent-Move-Repeat: Participatory Action Research Approach](#).

10. See: Freire, P. (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, and Kington, S., Pain, R. and Kesby, M. (2010) *Participatory Action Research Approaches and Methods: Connecting People, Participation and Place*. London: Routledge.

11. Johnson, V. and Nurick, R. (2006) *Regeneration through Community Assessment and Action: Overview of Methodology*. Available from: [http://developmentfocus.org.uk/Development\\_Focus/Training\\_files/Community%20Assessment%20and%20Action%20%28CAA%29%20methodology.pdf](http://developmentfocus.org.uk/Development_Focus/Training_files/Community%20Assessment%20and%20Action%20%28CAA%29%20methodology.pdf). Accessed on 16 September 2021.

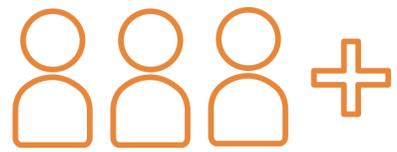
# What we would like to find out

Future plans → aspirations - (areas housing)  
→ Feasible to raise a family in  
The ideal London?  
→ prevented from staying in London  
How much left per → Feeling brapped  
rent → London

## Part 2: The research

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# The research process



## Building a team

Over the course of 2.5 years, 23 peer researchers have taken part in the research, and a core group of 7 participated in the co-design of recommendations. Peer researchers were all aged between 18-30, and either currently rent from a private landlord in East London, or have done so within the last five years.



## Deciding the project focus

The peer research team felt that, while tackling affordability would make the largest impact in preventing homelessness amongst young people, this was not achievable within the scope of the project. Instead, it was decided that understanding how young people might be better supported to access and understand their housing rights would be the most effective focus for the project.



## Choosing and shaping the methods, and conducting research

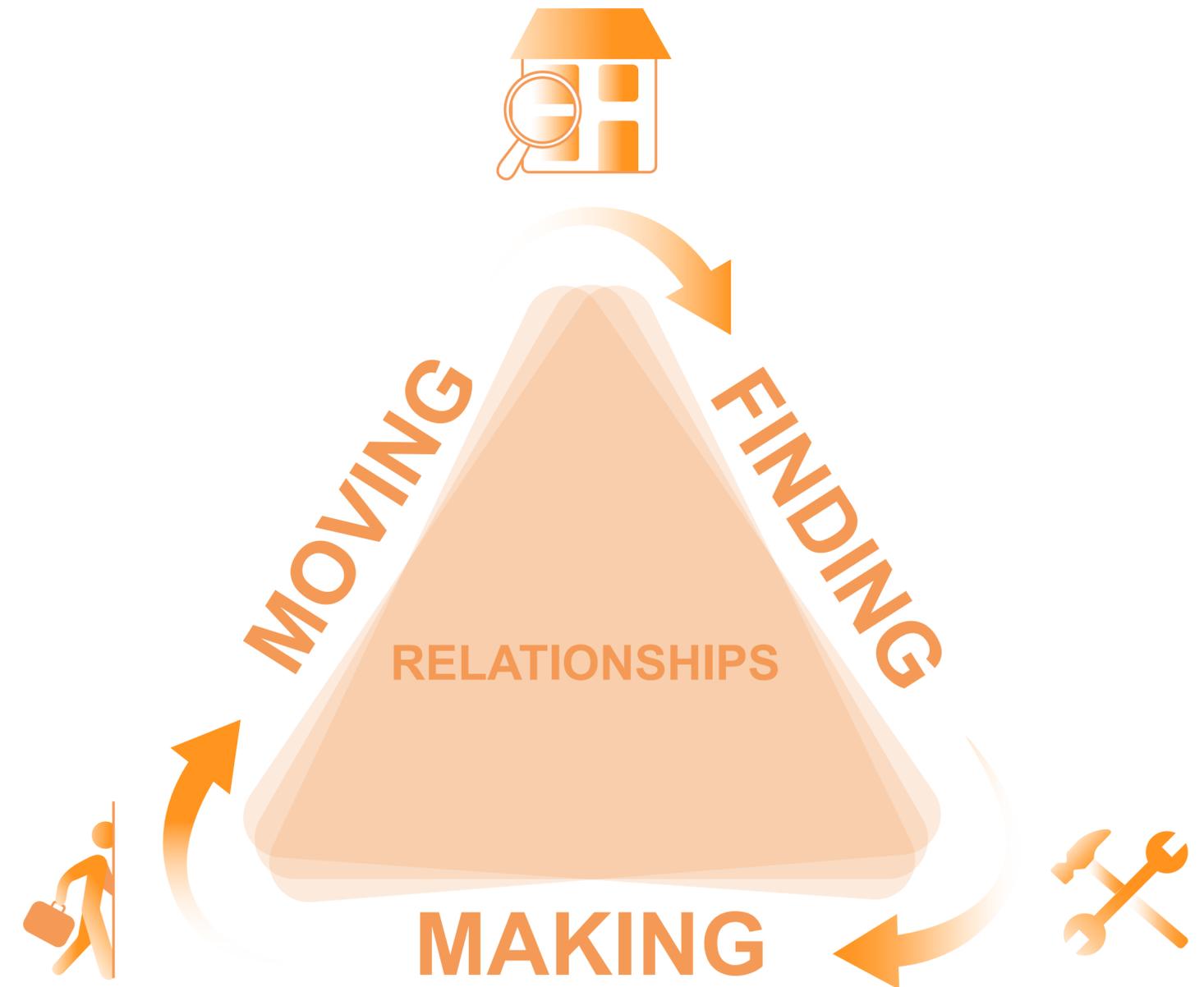
The peer research team decided surveys and interviews were the best methods to use and worked with the research manager to decide on questions and wording. 80 young private renters filled out our survey and 14 took part in in-depth interviews. The peer research team and the research manager came together to analyse the findings.

# The findings

The research found that young private renters face challenges across the entire renting experience, from finding a home, to making a home, to moving out.

Throughout, difficult relationships with landlords, letting agencies and even other housemates negatively impact on the renting experience. The research showed that a number of challenges contribute to a riskier experience of renting, faced by young private renters:

- The percentage of income they spend on rent makes it **difficult to cope with rent increases or slow deposit return:**
- Lack of options for affordable housing can force **acceptance of inadequate living situations** such as poorly maintained properties, overcrowding or illegal sublets
- Regular house moves can create extra risk through **repeated exposure to periods of financial precarity**, and increased chance of encountering poor landlords and letting agents
- Young private renters often **do not know their legal rights**, including whether their landlord/agent has met their obligations
- **They lack time and confidence to communicate with landlords and letting agents** and to exercise their rights, especially when relationships can be difficult



“ It is really a very intense environment as a young person, just trying to find somewhere to really settle down. [...] I was sofa surfing for two and a half years, and that was just so hard. **I wasn't choosing any of my life choices at that point**, it was just whatever was in the vicinity of whatever was going on, that was what you interacted with, that was where you stayed... **you could never really build a life from that**, that means it's harder to go get work, to do anything.

And it's not too dissimilar even when you get into the renting sector and you know you are only going to be there for a year. If you have to put anything into storage in that period of time [when moving between properties] there is nothing to really help on most people my age's income actually afford that, whilst also paying for a deposit and the first months of rent moving into anywhere new. **Makes it very difficult and something that never really leaves the back of your head, you will just never genuinely escape it...**

You know it's not forever, and you know you can never really make roots. I feel like the rest of society viewing young people, they don't feel like you deserve to make roots, that's how the attitude feels because **everything is so unstable and so short-term, how could you ever really hope to build anything?**

– Interviewee

”



# Finding a home

Finding a place to live is one of the first big decisions that young people make. But the research found that young people lack information about how to rent, which makes them vulnerable to rogue landlords and letting agents. This section looks at the issues that young people encounter when finding a home in East London.

Anyone who has rented property in London will tell you that affordable, good quality properties are usually snapped up in no time. This is a particular challenge for young people on low incomes, and a significant social problem in London, where the majority of poor adults in their late 20s and early 30s now live in the private rental sector.<sup>12</sup> It is common for landlords and particularly letting agents to use this intense competition to rush prospective tenants to sign a contract or put down a deposit. Over half (57%) of young people we surveyed said they felt under pressure to sign their contract or pay the deposit (see chart) – often a requirement to secure a property.

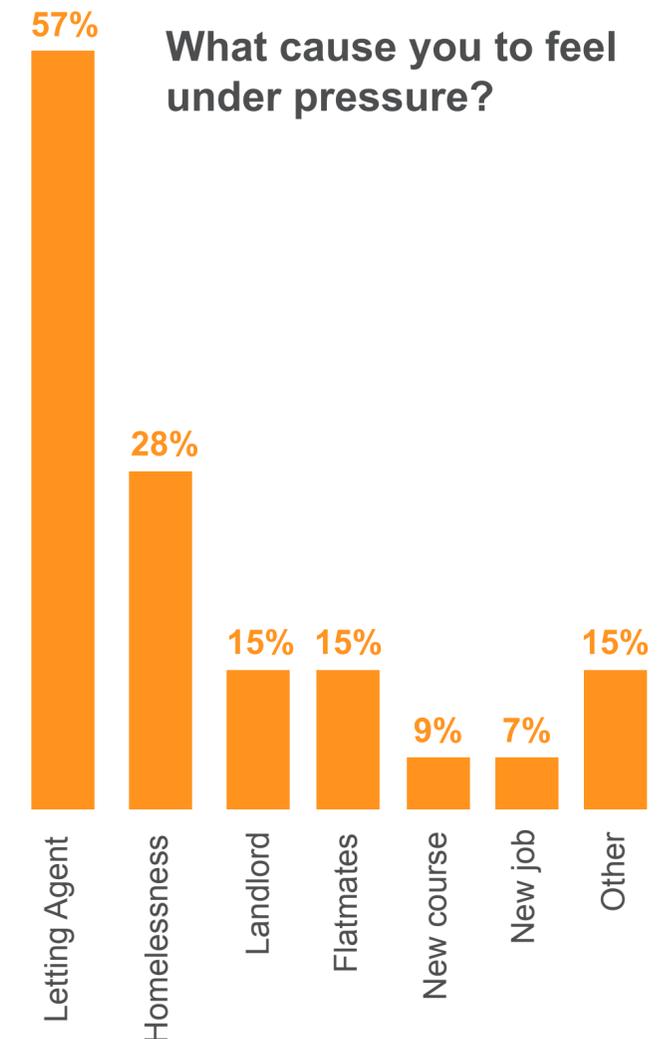
A rushed decision is more likely to be a bad one, and some tenants commit to a property they might not have chosen in other circumstances, for fear of ending up without a place to live. Sometimes the lack of opportunity to access advice or information leads to serious risks. For example, committing to a property managed by landlords or agencies who

operate illegally, or agreeing to sublet a property without a contract.

**“I lived in London for years subletting because it was so hard to get accommodation without 6 months payslips or a guarantor.”**

**“Landlord created a flat within part of our flat but never registered it, so we were legally responsible for their utility bills.”**

12. Bailey, N. (2020) Poverty and the re-growth of private renting in the UK, 1994-2018, PLoS ONE 15(2): e0228273. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0228273>. Accessed on 16 September 2021.



Entering a rental contract is also complicated and contracts are often not standardised. Few renters have their contract checked by a trusted person and may be scammed or their contract may contain unfair terms that hurt them further down the line.

Once their contract is signed, many renters find that landlords and letting agents don't respect the "ground rules" of renting. Two in five (41%) survey participants were not given an inventory of the state of the property and its furnishings. Only half of the renters we spoke to had been told which tenancy deposit scheme their deposit was held in, in spite of this being a legal requirement of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy.

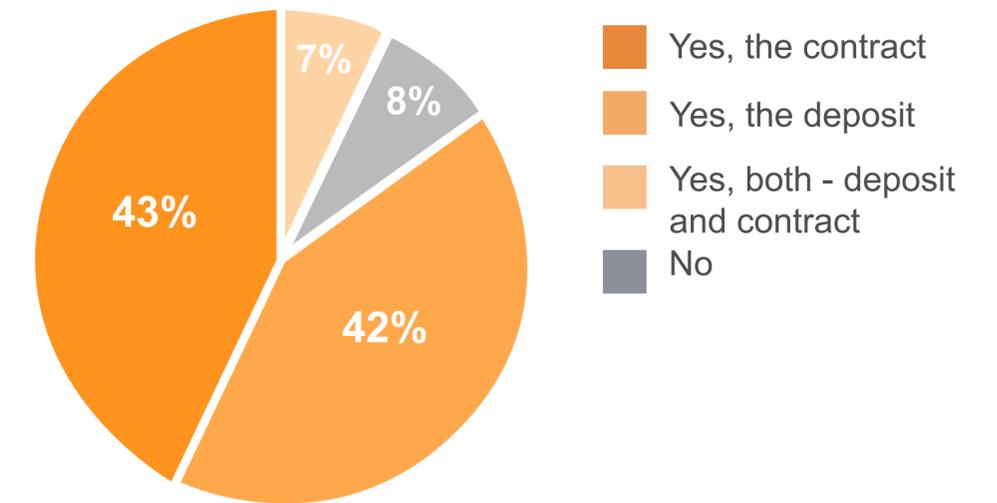
Often young people don't know they are meant to receive certain documents and certification, and so don't ask for them. To address this lack of information, in 2015 the UK Government introduced the requirement for new tenants to receive its How to Rent Guide. However, very few (20%) of the tenants surveyed had received it.

Private renting involves rights and responsibilities, but our survey shows that too many young people have not received the information or advice they need to avoid scams, protect themselves from illegal eviction and deposit-loss, and lay the foundations for a successful tenancy.

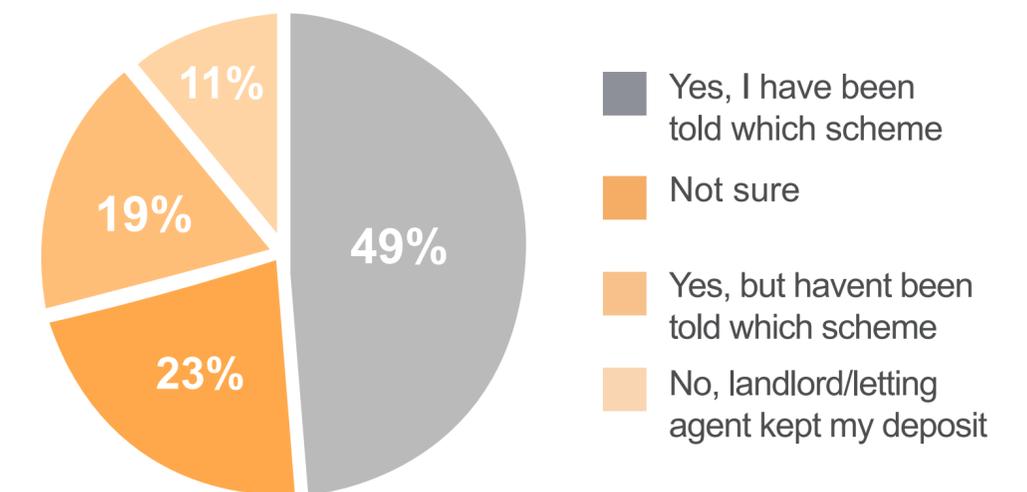
Private renting involves rights and responsibilities, but our survey shows that too many young people have not received the information or advice they need to avoid scams, protect themselves from illegal eviction and deposit-loss, and lay the foundations for a successful tenancy.

So how do we give private renters the right information, at the right time? When asked what could have improved their experience of finding a property, renters said they would benefit from information and advice being presented in a clearer way, and having an opportunity to discuss their doubts and queries with an advisor face to face (see chart). More than half (59%) of respondents only asked families and friends, who may not have the necessary legal knowledge, to check their contract; and one in four respondents would have liked having a professional check to help them understand their rental agreement (see chart). This suggests that advice agencies, who have provided pre-tenancy support to 4% of young people we spoke to about their contract, should find ways to more proactively engage young people about their services.

### Did you feel under pressure to sign a contract or pay a deposit?



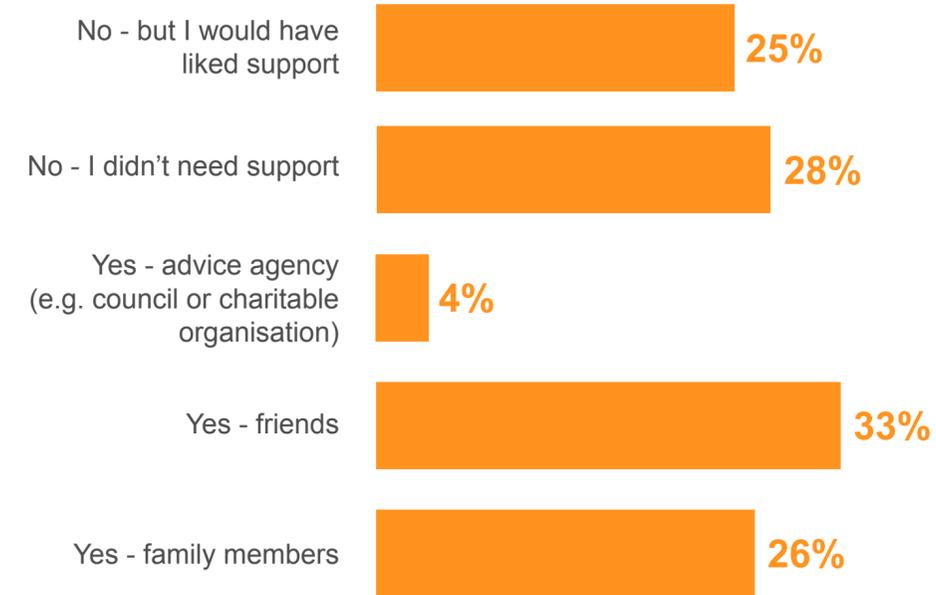
### Is your deposit protected?



### How could information about your rights and raising issues with your landlord/letting agent be made more accessible to you?



### Did anyone help you read or check your contract?



# Making a home

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Even after the process of finding and securing accommodation is over, young people experience stress in new areas of their housing journey. Struggles relating to affordability whilst looking for housing continue to impact young renters' quality of life.

Over half (57%) of young people we spoke to spent more than half of their income on rent alone, and nearly one in ten (7%) spent 70% or more. When such a large proportion of young renters' income is spent solely on rent, this leaves them little ability to accommodate for emergency costs, saving for their future, and even sometimes essential purchases – let alone to enjoy day-to-day life.

Despite the fact that 49% of our survey respondents reported being "happy" or "very happy" with their current accommodation, many spoke about having to compromise or lower their standards. Some respondents noted that they tolerated poor behaviour from their agent as the house was nice, or had accepted a poorly maintained property which was more affordable.

**“London is an amazing city to live and work, but housing, for me, is the main – if not the only – major issue. The state in which most houses are in and the prices really make it difficult for me to find a place to call home. I have to compromise a lot to find affordable accommodation. I’ve been in London for 2 years and still, I haven’t found a place to call home.” – Survey respondent**

Housing being “cramped” or “overcrowded” was another problem reported by respondents, with 39% having lived in housing with inadequate living space. Tenants described having to “[fight] for amenities such as hot water and the stove”. Living rooms turned into bedrooms also left tenants without the comfort of a common space to feel at home or connect with housemates. Instead, some spent a lot of time in their bedrooms, which they often felt were too small for socialising or relaxing.

**“I would like to specify that the flat has NO living space. Just our bedrooms, the bathroom and a kitchen that can only comfortably hold one person at a time.” – Survey respondent**

Many young people we spoke to felt their accommodation was of poor quality. Of our survey respondents, 31% said they'd experienced housing of insufficient quality, and 28% had experienced problems in getting repairs made to their housing. Young people reported dealing with mice and other pests, mould, damp, leaks and broken fixtures or appliances. 89% of our respondents had raised issues with their accommodation, and 89% of those respondents had raised issues about repairs.

**“All the chairs broke one by one, the washing machine has black mould all over the seal but the landlord hasn’t replaced it, there’s mould in the bathroom and the bath leaks and the fan didn’t work until we fixed it ourselves. The hot water sometimes just stops working for weeks at a time. There are mice everywhere. Until a year or so ago there was no fire alarm and the windows had holes in them.” – Interviewee**

These issues were often left unmanaged by landlords or agents; where repairs were made, these tended to take a long time or be short-lived. Some young people felt they were not taken seriously in their requests due to their age or student status, and others felt promises made were not kept.

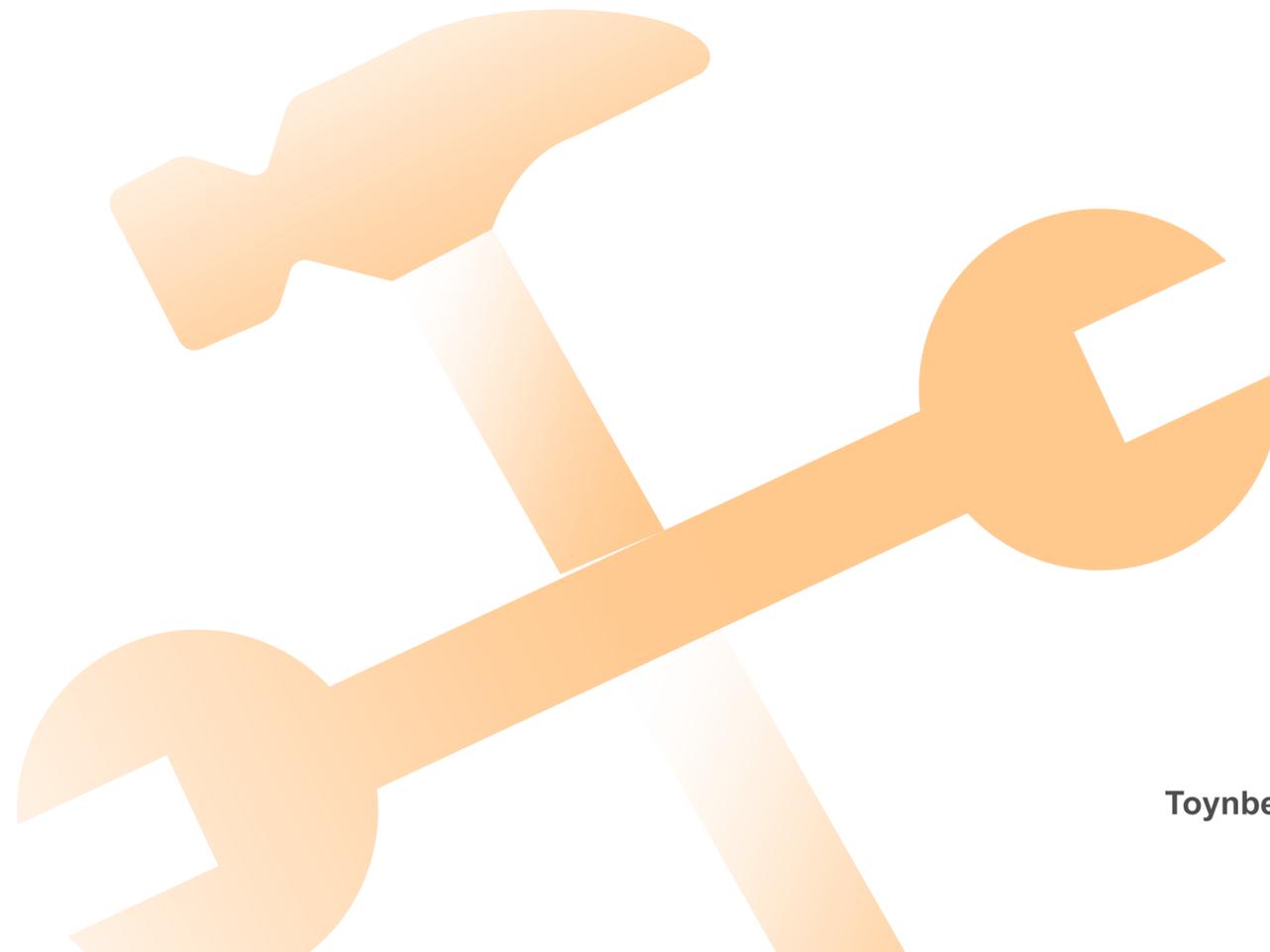
**“The landlord promised to do something about how cold it gets (single glazed windows) last winter but she didn’t do anything.” - Survey respondent**

40% of those who raised issues with their accommodation reported being somewhat or completely dissatisfied with the response from their landlord or letting agent when they raised issues; only 29% did feel satisfied.

Illegal subletting was the only option available to a surprising number of young people we spoke

to because the rent charged was considerably cheaper than market rates. These young people are particularly at risk of homelessness, with few rights to remain in their housing if they are required to move by the person they are subletting from.

Finally, the young renters who described their homes as being of good quality often described themselves as being unhappy at the very high cost of their rent. This suggests a “catch-22” for young people, where they are faced with choosing low-quality housing within their budget or better quality housing out of their budget.



# Moving out

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Many tenants face further problems when moving out. One in three renters surveyed had trouble getting their deposit back. It is common for deposits to be withheld by landlords for a while after a renter has left a property, or only partially returned without agreement over what tenants are being charged for and why.

Some tenants complained of being overcharged or wrongly charged for damage that they hadn't done or was due to normal wear and tear. Tenants have mentioned giving up on attempts to recover deposits that they say were legally theirs, because the process was too long or too complicated.

**“It'd be good to have the deposit quicker as usually people moving rental houses count on that to pay the next deposit. Last time I waited almost 2 months, it's ridiculous.”**

Without advice on what is acceptable practice when leaving a property, tenants are vulnerable to the return of their deposits being delayed, refused, or unfairly deducted from. Importantly, without their deposit back, some tenants struggle to afford the deposit for a new property, increasing the risk of homelessness.

Many of the young people we spoke to wanted to build roots in their local area, but this was made challenging or impossible by their circumstances as renters. Respondents reported frequent moves: the majority had moved at least twice in the last five years; 16 respondents, or 20%, had moved five times or more. Too often young renters were forced out by sudden rent increases or unfair evictions, or chose to move on because of problems with the landlord, letting agent or property.

Answers to the question “What would your ideal tenancy length be?” were initially surprising: whilst 42% wanted contracts of at least a year, 27% said they would prefer a contract of six months to one year. Interviews made the reasoning clearer—it was not that young renters wanted to move regularly, but that they were often anxious about entering into long contracts and becoming “stuck” in bad situations. Flexibility was also required by

some tenants as a “future-proofing” solution to other circumstances young people in particular are vulnerable to, such as work insecurity. As experienced by our own group of peer researchers, maintaining an income sometimes necessitated moving out of the city, or even the country.



# Relationships

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The relationships between young people and others involved in their housing journeys were a frequent point of discussion by participants in our research. An element of renting which had a surprisingly prominent place in respondents' comments were the other people they lived with.

90% of our respondents lived in a shared house with friends or strangers, and 5% shared a room with a friend or partner. Only 5% of respondents lived alone.

Positive relationships with housemates were a frequent source of contentment for respondents; but these relationships also complicated their experiences of renting. For example, 11% of survey respondents said that their primary contact about matters relating to their accommodation were their housemates, who may have been strangers to the tenant beforehand. In some cases, housemates' prior experiences influenced how the whole household approached raising problems:

**“The people already living in the flat had an attitude that the landlord wouldn't do anything so there was no point trying. This was based partly on their own experience but also I think on listening to the flatmates before them as well.” – Survey respondent**

43% of respondents had their landlord as a primary contact for matters regarding their housing, and 46% spoke to their agents. These relationships were instrumental for young people in dealing with the issues discussed above. Some described having good relationships with their landlords, describing them as “responsive”, “helpful” or “polite”, and happy to do repairs as required. However, there were also many with less positive experiences. Many young people reported poor or even non-existent relationships with their landlords or agents. Communication was often lacking, with agents in particular described as being unprofessional, uncommunicative, and unresponsive by several respondents. Landlords could be “hard to reach”, or even impossible to contact and in several cases, tenants had never met or talked to their landlord.

**“In my situation, I only ever dealt with the departing tenant. I would have liked to have had a meeting with the landlord (something I still haven't had 18 months on).” – Survey respondent**

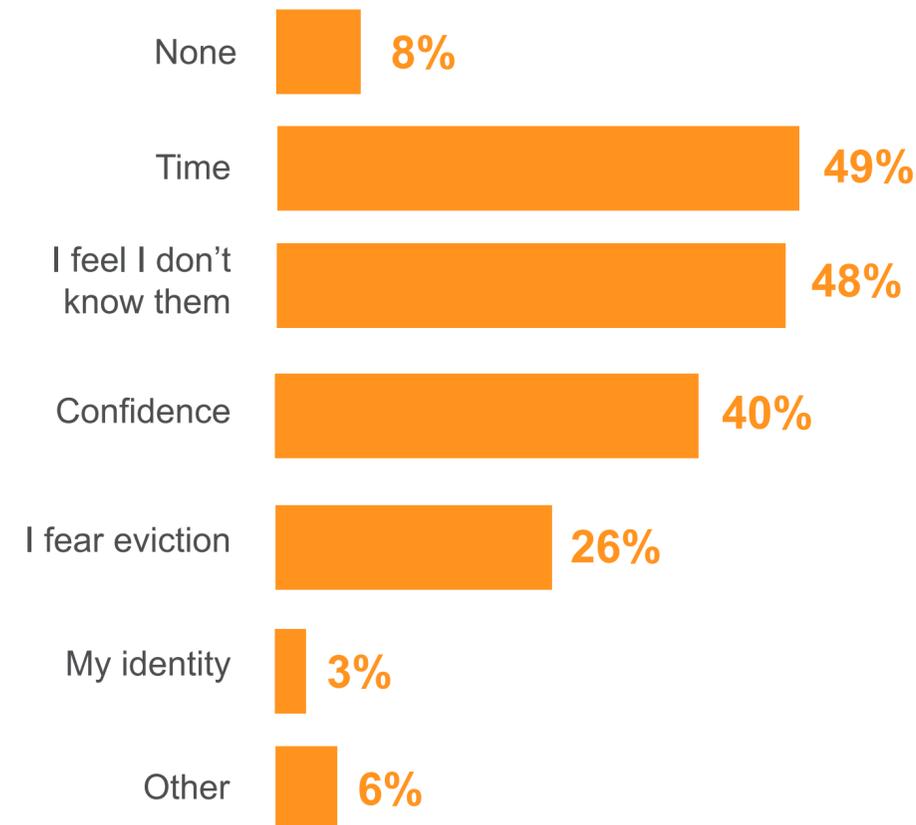
This lack of communication in some cases had led to confusion about which party held responsibility for various issues – this was especially the case where property management agents were used by landlords.

**“Our landlord lives abroad in Austria, so we deal with her via the estate agent who acts as an intermediary. In addition, the building that our flat is located within is actually owned by Islington council (the landlord just has a freehold on the flat that we’re renting) - so depending on the issue, sometimes we need to clarify with the council and/or the estate agents who we need to follow up with in order to resolve an issue if/when they come up.” – Survey respondent**

The relationship between agents, landlords, and tenants is an important factor in tenants feeling able to raise problems with their property, and therefore in making their accommodation a comfortable home. A lack of confidence in the relationship with their landlord, as well as a lack of trust, led to some tenants avoiding raising problems with their accommodation altogether for fear of retaliatory action such as rent increases or eviction.

**“There are a lot of “sticking” issues with the flat. Things that aren’t great but could be better. But you don’t want to make a fuss about things you can live with, but keep quiet. You don’t want to be the annoying tenant that always complains but there isn’t a way to tell them to a private landlord without coming across as ungrateful or similar. Or without concern that they’ll raise the rent at the end of the contract to cover costs.” – Survey respondent**

**Do any of the following stop you from exercising your rights as a private renter?**



The inequality in the relationship between tenants, landlords and agents could also be a source of frustration. Some young people commented that there was significant pressure placed on tenants to sign contracts and pay rent and deposits quickly, and very little communication once the contract was signed.

**“[The] Letting agent is slow to make repairs, often does poor job. Have been left waiting weeks for a response, pay a relatively large amount to a landlord who makes significant money from us and whom we have never met or spoken to, and who avoids spending money to maintain the property whenever possible.” – Survey respondent**

Whilst tenants felt pressure to behave responsibly, their landlords or letting agents sometimes did not. Behaviours reported ranged from unhelpful to downright discriminatory or illegal. One young person spoke of feeling “hated” by their landlord; another said “my landlady is really racist.” Nearly one in five respondents (16%) reported that they had experienced agents or landlords entering the property illegally.

The landlord-tenant relationship is especially complex – and prone to abuse – in housing situations where tenants have fewer rights, such as where tenants sublet accommodation or are lodgers living with their landlord. One respondent described a situation where their live-in landlord had tried to create a “family environment” which had resulted in a very controlling atmosphere. Other respondents, and even some of our own peer researchers, reported not understanding that these situations afforded tenants fewer rights; often, this wasn’t understood until a negative situation arose.

**“My first landlord was a family friend and I moved into a flat he was renting; he was not allowed to sublet it but he did it with me and charged me for it and wasn’t paying my share of the council tax. It almost got me into trouble and he gave me one day to move out after an argument we had. Because I trusted him and didn’t have a contract, I had no choice.”**

**- Interviewee**





# Part 3: Co-designing solutions

# The co-designing solutions process

For the second phase of the project, the peer research team came together with 14 landlords with property in East London to understand where there were shared challenges and to shape recommendations together.

## Choosing a focus

The peer researchers reviewed key findings from their research and generated initial proposals based on recommendations from participants and learning from their own experiences. A SWOT analysis helped to decide the strongest ideas. The private renting policy officer from London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Housing Team helped the group to assess the strongest proposals to take into the co-design process. The recommendations are deliberately framed to show what it will take to achieve a fairer future for young private renters.

## Co-design workshops with landlords

The peer researchers ran a sharing workshop with landlords to get their input into which proposals should be developed through the co-design process. Based on their feedback, the renters ran three further proposal development workshops with landlords.

## Feedback from specialists and decision-makers

Feedback from specialists and decision-makers The team took the proposals they developed with input from landlords to the projects' steering group for feedback on feasibility. The steering group consisted of representatives from the Greater London Authority, local authorities, housing charities, renters rights organisations and a university housing team.

## Refining proposals

The peer researchers discussed and refined their proposals based on the steering groups' recommendations and shared the refined recommendations with the landlords for them to have their final input into the co-design process.

“

Some very interesting/ curious discussion points raised in the last meeting. I have to be honest, I was surprised by the knowledge displayed by some of the landlords and who are not new to letting. Still, by being involved in this project the good intentions must be there and a learning experience for all concerned.

”

-Landlord



# Why work with landlords?

1. *“Learn about landlords’ perspectives”*
2. *“Our chance to tell a different narrative”*
3. *“To educate landlords about tenants’ experience”*
4. *“Can they influence other landlords for good?”*
5. *“Come to a shared understanding of responsibilities and rights”*

- Peer researchers

# Learning points from landlord-renter discussions

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## Where was there common ground?

- **Agreement with broader systemic problems in the sector:** Landlords had witnessed poor practice by landlords and letting/property management agencies. They mostly accepted the researchers' findings, though there was surprise at the number of renters not receiving legally required documentation. Some landlords agreed with the renters that landlord registration could help professionalise the sector. That said, some landlords suggested that renters' poor record keeping and disengagement with the renting process could be at the root of the issues raised in the research.
- **The importance of communication strategies about advice and information:** Both parties accepted that there was a great deal of information and advice available, but that the communication about those sources needed to be improved. They also agreed that renters knowing their rights and responsibilities in advance of starting their first tenancy is crucial.
- **The need for better communication between landlords, letting agents and renters:** It was agreed that poor communication between landlords, letting agents and renters can create confusion and a lack of accountability over requests for action like repairs and deposit return. Some landlords and renters felt this could be achieved through strengthening the trust and communication in renter-landlord individual relationships. Others felt creating mechanisms to professionalise communication would be effective as well, for example, the automatic recording of correspondence using online platforms.
- **Letting and property management agencies as a necessary but sometimes unhelpful middleman:** Landlords and renters experience similar problems with agents around pressure to sign contracts and a lack of responsiveness to requests for action.
- **Recognition that young people can be intimidated to speak to landlords/letting agents:** Some of the landlords were parents who were supporting their children to rent properties. There was recognition that the attitude of agents can exacerbate the lack of confidence young people feel to communicate about their property.

## Where was there conflict?

- **The role of the landlord and the tenant:** Some landlords felt they had a duty as housing providers to support their tenants to understand their rights and responsibilities. They recognised that private renting was the only housing option available to many young people and wanted to help them to maintain their tenancies securely. Others considered themselves to be in purely business relationships with their tenants where both parties had a responsibility to educate themselves.
- **The role of advice for landlords:** Most landlords felt they did not need more sources of advice to meet their responsibilities. A few reflected that when they were new to landlording they relied on letting agents to help them meet their legal responsibilities. In spite of this, our housing expert identified several inaccurate statements about housing law made by landlords during the workshops.
- **Conflicting expectations around timelines and standard of repairs:** Some landlords said that young renters can be unprepared to rent. They do not necessarily know how they should react to problems arising during a tenancy.

They can be unreasonable in their expectations about how those issues are resolved, and the quality of repairs. Renters agreed that there appeared to be a lack of consensus over reasonable timeframes and quality of repairs and suggested co-produced best practice guidelines could be helpful.

- **Renter resentment over profit margins:** The profit margins involved in landlording is a source of resentment from renters, particularly around delays or extended negotiations over repairs. Landlords were divided over whether tenants had a right to a view on their business models.

# What we want to see happening at a local level

**Investment in a co-designed website and app:** Hosted by an organisation invested in housing rights, **this website and app will help renters to get information and support at the correct time, and to successfully manage their tenancy.**<sup>13</sup>

## The issues to be addressed:

- Renters need the right information at the right time.
- They need easy access to personalised advice.
- They need support to navigate multiple sources of information and advice.
- They find it difficult to understand the legal processes and documentation they should expect as renters.
- They lack time and confidence to understand and exert their rights as renters.

## How would the website/app help?

- **Clarity over legally required documents:** The website/app would be used by renters, but also landlords and letting and management agents to upload and save key documents relating to the tenancy including the contract, energy and gas certificates, and How to Rent guide.
- **Record keeping support:** The website would help renters keep an inventory, store photographs of damage and identify where they had not been provided with up-to-date documents.
- **Provide in-website/app guidance and practical tools:** This would include push notifications and checklists to guide renters before, during and after their tenancy.
- **Signpost to useful resources and specific services:** The website/app would link to national and local services that provide specific information or tailored advice.
- **Provide an option for landlords, letting and property management agents and tenants to use the website as the primary tool to manage the tenancy:** The website/app could offer a communications platform between the three parties. It could also transparently log issues or disputes raised by tenants, with indication of progress, and notifications for when tasks are due, updated, or completed.
- **Create formal reports using data stored in app:** For example, an end of tenancy report which could be sent to DPS adjudication service.

- **Single referral point in communications:** Communication strategies about advice and information are not working for young renters. A website that acts as a single referral point for communication strategies would help, especially for letting websites like OpenRent, who could integrate a link to advice and information on their property search page.

## What do we recommend?

We propose that the website and app be developed in collaboration with young renters, and then piloted to evaluate whether it could support young renters to overcome the risks they face. If the evaluation proves the web/app is workable and useful in supporting young people, we would like to see it adopted, funded and maintained. This might be by a large advice provider such as Shelter, a public body like the Greater London Authority or an independent organisation. We would like there to be a mechanism for renters to oversee the design and decision-making about the app long term.

## What do landlords say?

Landlords are in favour of providing tools to help renters to manage their tenancies, particularly around record keeping. They are not in favour of this functioning as a communication tool between renters and landlords as they think there is too much variability in renters' communication preferences.

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13. Tech innovation has been used to improve renters management of tenancies. For example, SmartRenter was set up in Northern Ireland in 2018 by Housing Rights helpline. So far we cannot find a similar product in London. Many letting agencies provide renters with access to software to hold contracts and keep track of repairs, but the functionality of this software is not extensive enough or designed to be useable for renters, and signposting to advice and information is not included.

# Investment in ethical property management agencies<sup>14</sup>

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Landlords who live far away from their properties or were new to the business felt property management agencies were a necessary intermediary to find tenants and provide support to resolve issues throughout the tenancy. But according to landlords and our research findings, it is clear that such agencies can create risks for both parties.

## The issues to be addressed:

- The presence of management agents can muddy accountability when issues were raised by landlords or tenants about who should be actioning what and by when.
- Management agents pressure both landlords and renters to sign contracts without giving them time to get advice.
- Management agencies are not always providing the required legal documents.
- There are conflicts of expectation around quality and expense of repairs between the three parties.
- Renters and landlords need support to maintain a tenancy well if they are new to renting.

## How would an ethical management agency help?

- **They would have an organisational commitment to support tenants and landlords to know their rights and would treat them fairly:** The management agency will have a not-for-profit social purpose. Their support offer would include providing guidance, support and signposting to external sources of advice and information. It would also mean use of simple, easy to understand, legal and fair contracts; ensuring provision of all legal documentation; commitment to a fair eviction process; and prioritisation of deposit dispute resolution.

- **A great service for landlords and renters:** They would provide quality advice to both landlords and renters to understand contracts and their legal obligations. They would also easily attract and keep landlords and tenants through their good reputation, good advertising and good service.
- **A better approach to repairs:** The management agency would adhere to a co-designed policy on reasonable timeframes for repairs, and use trusted, reasonably priced, in-house repair people to undertake work.

## What do we recommend?

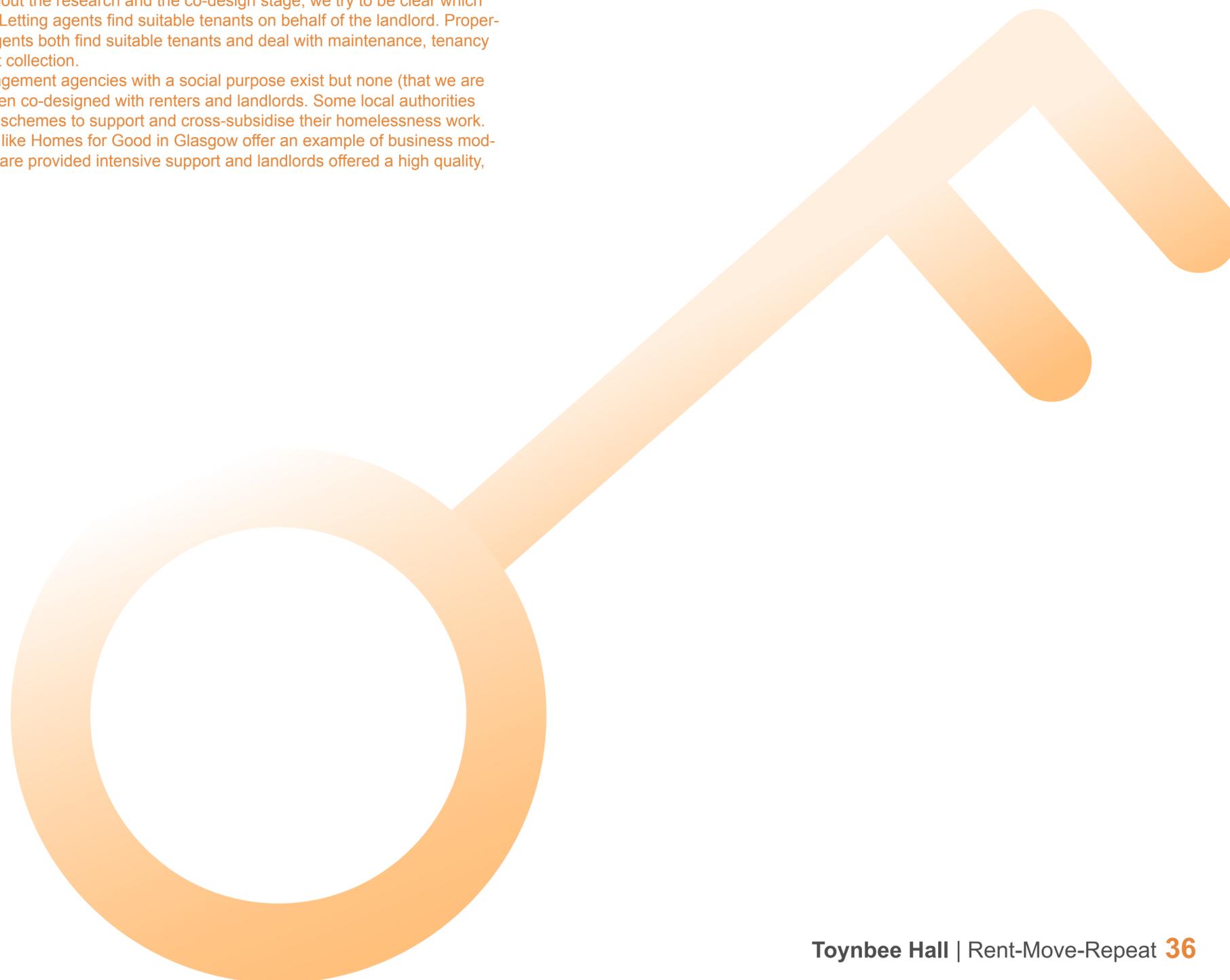
Right now, property management agencies will inevitably be used by many landlords, and while the housing market forces young people to rent, we think property management companies can be a force for good in the sector. We would like to see investment in start-up property management agencies that operate as social enterprises or co-operatives, disrupting the market and raising the game of management agencies with poor practice. Their aim should be to facilitate homes where renters can feel safe, and not to exist for profit. We would like to see this beginning in East London and expanding across the capital. To start this process, we recommend a feasibility assessment of different business models that would meet the aims of the co-designed ethical management agency described above.<sup>15</sup>

## What do landlords say?

Landlords we spoke to would prefer to use an ethical management agency. There is deep mistrust of property management agencies by landlords about the willingness of agencies to treat tenants fairly, to communicate transparently and charge fairly. Even though they are concerned it may not be sustainable in London's property market, they are in favour of exploring this more.

14. **A note on the term letting agents vs property management agents:** Young people use the term letting agent interchangeably with property management agency. Throughout the research, it is not always clear which service young people are referring to. Throughout the research and the co-design stage, we try to be clear which service we mean: Letting agents find suitable tenants on behalf of the landlord. Property management agents both find suitable tenants and deal with maintenance, tenancy renewals, and rent collection.

15. Property management agencies with a social purpose exist but none (that we are aware of) have been co-designed with renters and landlords. Some local authorities run letting agency schemes to support and cross-subsidise their homelessness work. Social enterprises like Homes for Good in Glasgow offer an example of business models where tenants are provided intensive support and landlords offered a high quality, affordable service.



# Our hopes for the future

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We believe in a London that is an affordable, safe and welcoming place for everyone to live. Speaking on behalf of London's young people, we demand change and demand it *now*.

Access to affordable, safe and accessible housing needs to be a right, not a privilege afforded by wealth. The government has failed to act to tackle the housing crisis and instead has let bad actors within the private rented sector trample on the rights of those who call London home. Analysis from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>16</sup> shows rents are only affordable for fewer than one in five low-income private renting households in London. Almost half are spending more than 40% of their incomes on rents<sup>17</sup>. Something is seriously wrong.

It is obvious to us that there needs to be a system of social security that provides a reliable lifeline to protect people. More than just giving them stability, this system needs to be part of a joined-up approach that brings down the cost of housing for all. No vision for the future can ignore the affordability crisis. These steps would ensure that unacceptably high and unfair housing costs can no longer keep people in poverty and prevent them from living the lives that they deserve.

Effective change cannot happen without the input of young private renters. We must have a voice in the decisions made about the private rented sector. Local and national governments need to adopt the principles of co-design in their policymaking. We can't tackle this crisis without those most affected being given a direct role in changing things.

The private rental sector in England is crying out for better and wide-reaching regulation. From the ending of Section 21 to a national landlord register, we believe that now is the time to make the sector more transparent and open. In particular, finally allowing the collation of accurate data about the private rental sector will enable decision-makers to take the steps needed to make the sector fairer. We want to see an independent body be created to oversee the sector at large. Our vision is of a future where accurate data empowers officials to use rent stabilisation and control measures to tackle the acute and intractable housing crises that London faces.

Beyond regulation, the government needs to prioritise building more social housing to tackle the stark inequality apparent across the UK. It needs to be a viable option across the country and not an afterthought. For too long, there have been no affordable alternatives to the private rental sector. Exciting options such as housing co-operatives need to be explored and invested in.

Now we need a housing system centred on the basic needs of residents rather than just profit. Housing is a right and must be treated accordingly.

Our vision is about more than bringing down rents and giving people access to the homes they deserve. Whilst young renters have little options available to them other than the private rented sector we want to see the basic principles of how to rent become part of the national curriculum. We must empower young people to know and claim their rights, tilting the power balance away from those who wish to exploit them. Education has the power to ensure that no young private renter

gets sucked into the vicious cycle of exploitation and fear that is ever-present in our current model. We speak from first-hand experience of that exploitation, and want to protect both ourselves and those who follow in our footsteps from having to experience future exploitation.

Our vision is about more than bringing down rents and giving people access to the homes they deserve. Whilst young renters have little options available to them other than the private renter sector we want to see the basic principles of how to rent become part of the national curriculum. We must empower young people and tilt the power balance away from those who wish to exploit them. Education has the power to ensure that no young private renter gets sucked into the vicious cycle of exploitation and fear that is ever-present in our current model.

Our work has taught us so much and given us as young renters a voice - we want to see that everyone gets this chance.

**Ultimately we want housing justice for all - to build *more* than homes and create communities where everyone can feel safe, loved and flourish.**

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16. Property management agencies with a social purpose exist but none (that we are aware of) have been co-designed with renters and landlords. Some local authorities run letting agency schemes to support and cross-subsidise their homelessness work. Social enterprises like Homes for Good in Glasgow offer an example of business models where tenants are provided intensive support and landlords offered a high quality, affordable service.

17. Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2021, Renters on low incomes face a policy black hole: homes for social rent are the answer. Available from: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/renters-low-incomes-face-policy-black-hole-homes-social-rent-are-answer>. Accessed on 25 November 2021.



# Choices or constraints?

## The reality of renting and how to make it fairer for young people in a post-pandemic world

Laura Blair and Samantha Themnimulle - Peer Researchers  
with Sian Williams - Director of Policy and Innovation



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# Part 4: Sharing learning, taking action and policy influencing

# How is this research making a difference?

Participatory Action Research requires action to follow on from peer research to push for positive social change. The peer researchers developed the following vision statement, objectives and strategies.

**Vision:** An East London where young private renters can easily access information and advice to overcome the challenge of renting as a young person; for young renters to have a strong voice in shaping solutions that fix the systemic insufficiencies of the rental market.

**Objective:** To empower young renters by

1. Giving them the information and tools to improve their private renting experience.
2. Supporting them to manage their relationship with their landlords.
3. Making it standard practice that renters should have a voice in decisions made about them.

**Strategy:**

1. Single point of access advice, information and record-keeping hub, co-designed by young people and accompanying app to support them and therefore relationship with landlords.
2. Promoting need for co-designed content and communication strategies at local authority/regional/national level.
3. Promoting importance of renter involvement in policy-making.

You can see some of the tactics we used to achieve these objectives in the policy influencing timeline.

Policy Influencing Timeline	
Feb 2019	<b>Tower Hamlets Private Renters Forum:</b> Presented projects to members
August 2019	<b>Pizza and policy meeting on deposit reform:</b> An evening with renters and housing experts to put together a joint response to MHCLG's call for evidence on deposit reform
March 2020	<b>Research findings launch:</b> Peer researchers present to stakeholders from Greater London Authority, advice services, renters rights forum and young people's advocacy groups and lead discussions on initial proposals to improve the sector
June 2020	<p><b>COVID-19 renter-landlord workshops:</b> Peer researchers organise workshops with landlords and renters to understand whether steps to mitigate harm to both landlords and renters during the pandemic are proving effective. An article is published in the East London Guardian, and can be found here, as well as a blog post on the findings</p> <p><b>Peer researchers co-created a communication strategy aimed at young private renters and other groups with barriers to accessing advice:</b> Toynbee Hall and peer researchers work with Tower Hamlets Council and the Tower Hamlets Private Renters Charter Forum to contribute to a short-term communication strategy to make sure all young private renters in Tower Hamlets know where to go to get free housing advice</p>
October 2020	<b>Renters Reform Coalition:</b> Toynbee Hall were invited to join the Renters Reform Coalition. Peer researchers contributed to development of key principles for the coalition and shaped Toynbee Hall's response to decisions within the coalition's work
February 2021	<b>Partnership for Young London's Peer Research Network:</b> Peer researchers shared findings and methodology with third sector stakeholders
April 2021	<b>Website-app development meeting:</b> Peer researchers pitched website/app idea to 9 tech-for-good orgs and funders. They partner with two tech for good innovators to explore next steps in scoping the website-app proposal

<p><b>May 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Housing Quality Network (HQN) conference</b> Peer researchers present as keynote speakers at HQN conference looking at how the sector can better support young people using participatory approaches</p> <p><b>Festival of Learning Panel:</b> Peer researcher speaks on panel as part of London Funders’ Festival of Learning about civil society’s response to supporting young people at risk of homelessness during the pandemic</p> <p><b>Rent-Move-Repeat art piece:</b> Peer researchers are invited to share findings and personal experiences of renting as a form of temporary accommodation to shape the priorities of two prominent charitable funders. The consultant recommends exploring the issues through a creative response. Rent Move Repeat website is designed as a tool to help decision makers understand the impact of temporary nature of private renting on young people</p>
<p><b>June 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Meeting with Shelter teams:</b> Peer researchers shared learning about barriers to advice and information and discuss potential of co-designed information and communication strategies</p>
<p><b>September 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Event on affordability:</b> Peer researchers designed and organised an event with panellists from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, IPPR and Renters Rights’ London about what needs to happen to tackle the affordability crisis. This informed the peer researchers’ national policy recommendations</p> <p><b>London Housing Panel:</b> Toynbee Hall’s Young Private Renters group were invited to join London Housing Panel. Representatives from the peer research group were interviewed and selected to sit on the London Housing Panel, informing the work of Mayor’s team on improving housing in the capital</p>
<p><b>November 2021</b></p>	<p><b>Final event to launch report and proposals:</b> To close this participatory action research, the peer researchers shared the story of their project, and were joined by Polly Neate (Chief Executive of Shelter) and Manny Hothi (Chief Executive of Trust for London) in a panel discussion about the role of young people in tackling the housing crisis</p>

# What's next?

The peer research group care passionately about improving housing for everyone, and especially young people. We want to continue to work together on the issues uncovered through this Participatory Action Research and to explore whether we continue as an independent campaign group, a social enterprise or renters collective to help us achieve our shared goals. If you are interested in supporting our proposals on ethical property management or website-app development, or our hopes for the future, please get in touch: [research@toynbeehall.org.uk](mailto:research@toynbeehall.org.uk).