

## **Invitation for Expressions of Interest Research into the English Private Rented Sector**

<b>Summary:</b>	This document invites expressions of interest to undertake research to drive systemic change in the English private rented sector (PRS). Expressions are sought for one or more of the following research lots:  Lot 1. The role and behaviour of letting agents.  Lot 2. Establishing the scale and impact of the mediated market.  Lot 3. Assessing the local impact of build to rent.
<b>Deadline:</b>	The deadline for proposals is 5pm on Tuesday, 17 December 2024.
<b>Timescales for research:</b>	Research is expected to begin in March 2025. We expect to invite full bids for the research in January 2025.
<b>Budget:</b>	The total budget available for the three Lots is £300,000 (inclusive of VAT).

### **1. About the Nationwide Foundation**

Funded by Nationwide Building Society, the Nationwide Foundation is an independent national charity (registered charity number 1065552) which seeks to make the housing system work for all, ensuring decent and affordable homes are available for those in need. We aim to influence systemic changes to the housing system by supporting, testing and evidencing solutions.

One of the Foundation’s key areas of focus is transforming the private rented sector (PRS) to provide more decent, secure and affordable homes, particularly for renters who are vulnerable to increased risk of harm in the system. Our Transforming the Private Rented Sector (TPRS) Programme has been running since 2016, through which we have funded and supported research and projects which aim to transform the PRS and improve the lives of renters.

For further information about the Nationwide Foundation and our work please visit our website: [www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk](http://www.nationwidefoundation.org.uk).

### **Our vision for the private rented sector**

The Foundation’s TPRS Programme is fundamentally concerned with improving the PRS from a renter’s perspective. In particular, we focus on those renters who are more vulnerable to harm.

To ensure the PRS can deliver the high quality, safe and secure homes that renters need, we believe it needs to be radically different. While we don’t promote a specific version of a future PRS, or one with a particular size or make-up, we know that the current system isn’t working for many renters, and fundamental change is needed. That means we are open to ideas that could significantly alter the private rented sector; be it the size of the sector, the types of landlords which operate within it, the rights of renters and the means by which renters enforce their rights, or interventions that increase affordability.

While renters are our primary focus, we also recognise the need to engage with all elements, and take a holistic view of the system to create change. It is vital to engage with and understand all actors in the system to make change happen. We need to take the system 'as it is' and take actions that lead to genuine positive and lasting change. Therefore, while we may measure the success of a change from a renter's perspective, the change itself could involve an intervention anywhere in the system.

## **Our values**

Our values shape the decisions we make, from big to small. They reflect the way we have conversations, the way we work with others and individually, and the way we see the world. We believe our values are the guiding lights that will allow us to achieve our mission, and they are vital to all our work including funded research. [Full details are available on our website.](#)

## **2. Background**

Changes in regulation of the English PRS, coupled with intense pressures in the housing market, are driving an increased focus on the PRS and its appropriate role within the housing system. There is a clear need for a deeper understanding of how the PRS operates, what effect this is having, and what change we might want to prevent or encourage to ensure it supports renters. While there is much commentary and debate about these questions already, there is not yet any systemic research to answer the above questions.

The Foundation has identified further research into the English PRS as a key priority and intends to fund further research over the next several years across multiple phases. There are many existing and emerging research areas that could benefit from an increased understanding, and we will prioritise funding research into those areas which we believe we need to understand the most urgently to drive long-term positive systemic change to the PRS.

In April 2024, we funded Julie Rugg, from the University of York, to scope what further research would drive positive change in the English PRS. This involved a literature, data and policy review and engagement with stakeholders from across the sector, in particular through a project advisory group which included industry stakeholders, landlords, tenant representatives and The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). A forthcoming report will set out further details of the work and findings of this phase (phase one).

After arriving at an initial total of 37 potential areas of research, working with the project's advisory group we have identified three research areas to explore in this next phase (phase two).

## **3. Research into the English Private Rented Sector: Phase Two**

For phase two of this research programme, we have selected three areas for research which encompass important but under-analysed actors in the sector: letting agents, PRS mediating agencies and build to rent organisations.

**We are seeking expressions of interest from a skilled and experienced applicant or applicants to undertake one or more research Lots.**

The three Lots, alongside potential **research questions** suggested by Julie Rugg, are:

1. **The role and behaviour of letting agents:** Are letting agents contributing to or ameliorating problems associated with private rental, including high tenancy turnover, poor property conditions and increasing rent levels?
  - How has the Tenant Fees Act impacted on the lettings industry?
  - Do letting agents promote tenancy sustainability or tend to provoke higher tenancy turnover?
  - Can letting and managing agents play a more active role in improving property conditions in the sector?
  - What is the impact of letting agent practice on rent levels?
  
2. **Establishing the scale and impact of the mediated market:** In what ways is it possible to manage the mediated market (being those tenancies that are let through an intermediary, such as temporary accommodation, accommodation for people leaving prison or people who are seeking asylum or a place of safety)?
  - What is a robust definition of 'mediated letting' and what can usefully be included under this heading?
  - What is the landscape of the mediated market, in terms of key supply and demand characteristics and what models of operation are in evidence?
  - What regulatory frameworks are currently in place to control rent levels and property standards in the mediated market?
  - What policy interventions can be brought to bear to ensure that property leased from the PRS is of appropriate quality and good value for money?
  
3. **Assessing the local impact of build to rent: What is the impact of build to rent (BTR) developments on local rental markets?**
  - What is BTR currently supplying to the UK rental market, and what models are in operation?
  - Does BTR supply meet local housing need?
  - In what ways do BTR developments impact on local rent levels?
  - Does BTR operate as an effective mechanism for delivering affordable housing?

The overall intended **outcomes** of the research are:

- The research **supports effective reform** by providing an increased understanding of how the private rented sector currently functions, what the effects of this are, and what the effects of changes might be, particularly on renters vulnerable to harm.
- The research **supports reform to happen** by making the case for change being necessary to one or more of the systemic conditions that hold the current private rented sector in place, and providing clarity on how change can happen.
- The research is **used to promote change** by the Nationwide Foundation and stakeholders across the sector, acting as a mechanism to hold the government to account and call for evidence-backed change.

## 4. Expressions of interest

While we are confident in our areas of research focus and have assigned an overall budget to deliver all three Lots, we are keen to shape the research programme with input from expert researchers. This expression of interest process is ahead of a full tender process,

which will only be open to those who express interest. This will allow us to both hone the research appropriately, and identify prospective delivery partners.

We anticipate that research on the different areas will run concurrently, but each research piece will be a distinct piece of work with its own outputs and dissemination activity. We also anticipate our delivery partners will be closely involved in dissemination and promotion of the research outputs.

**Expressions of interest should include the following information:**

### General information

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Commentary</b>	<b>Indicative word count</b>
1.1	What is the basic information about you and your organisation?	Please include details of the lead organisation, lead individual, and collaborators if submitting as a partnership.	100
1.2	Which Lot or Lots are you interested in completing?	We are open to expressions of interest in one, two or all three Lots.	100
1.3	How does your organisation's vision for the PRS and values align with those of the Nationwide Foundation?	We would like to understand the alignment of our organisations, though also appreciate strong challenge and questioning from our delivery partners.	300
1.4	What relevant research expertise would you bring to your chosen Lot(s)?	Set out at a high level your research expertise.	300

### Information for individual Lots

For each Lot you are expressing an interest in, please answer the following:

	<b>Question</b>	<b>Commentary</b>	<b>Indicative word count</b>
2.1	What, if any, changes would you suggest to potential research questions, and why?	We are open to alternative suggested research questions.	300
2.2	At a high level, what sort of research methodologies would be appropriate, and what do you believe would be an appropriate amount of time to deliver the Lot?	Please keep this indicative and high level; we are very much open to suggestions.	300
2.3	What budget do you consider would be necessary to deliver the selected Lot, in isolation from others?	You are welcome to provide a minimum and maximum potential budget. We are interested here to understand how to effectively split the total budget between the three areas.	200

2.4	If you were to deliver this Lot only, what action would you, and the Foundation, take to ensure optimal value across the three Lots?	We anticipate different organisations may complete research into different areas.	200
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### Information for multiple Lots

All those expressing interest should answer all questions above. For organisations expressing an interest in **more than one** Lot, please also answer the following:

3.1	What value do you think this approach will bring, and why?	There may be value in the delivery of research across multiple Lots, for example in topics of conversation with stakeholders, and in the impact of the research.	300
3.2	What budget do you consider would be necessary to deliver the selected Lots, and how would this be split?	You are welcome to provide a minimum and maximum potential budget. We are interested here to understand how to effectively split the total budget between the three areas.	200

## 5. Budget

We have allocated a maximum budget of £300,000 (inclusive of VAT) to complete all three research Lots. Our final budget allocation to each Lot will be informed by expressions of interest.

The budget must cover all costs associated with the research project, including dissemination activity and monitoring meetings with the Nationwide Foundation. We support full-cost recovery; this means that we will fund the direct and indirect costs (overheads) of running the project.

## 6. Timeline

Key dates for the proposal process are

17 December 2024	Deadline for expressions of interest
Mid-January 2025	Invitation to tender launched
Mid-February 2025	Invitation to tender closes
Mid-March 2025	Successful applicants appointed

## 7. Submission information

Please provide your expression of interest as a single document. The Nationwide Foundation may ask for further information following your submission.

Please submit your proposal documents by 5pm on 17 December 2024 by email to the Transforming the Private Rented Sector Programme Manager, Joshua Davies, at: [Joshua.davies@nationwidefoundation.org.uk](mailto:Joshua.davies@nationwidefoundation.org.uk)

Please also get in touch with Joshua if you have any questions about the proposal.

## **8. EDI and Access requirements**

We aim for this expression of interest process to reflect our commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion. We particularly welcome expressions of interest from people who are less well represented in the field of evaluation and learning, who bring diverse perspectives, skills and experience. In particular, we hope to ensure that our final research delivery partner(s) includes people that will bring their lived/living experience.

We will seek to provide appropriate adjustments and access support where tenderers require adjustments to enable them to participate in the work. If there are likely to be additional budget implications from these adjustments, please identify them in your proposal.