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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  
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# Fair Housing Futures Learning and Evaluation Report

JANUARY 2025



# Introduction

Fair Housing Futures was a Nationwide Foundation funded, collaborative, place-based programme in Greater Manchester.

The programme ran from 2017- 2023 and was supported by £1.34m of funding, with the overall aim being that the private rented sector in Greater Manchester provides more decent, genuinely affordable homes for people in need.

Work to achieve this goal included:

- ↳ Establishing a partnership board with stakeholders from across the Greater Manchester Private Rented Sector (PRS), including renters, landlords, powerholders, researchers and charities.
- ↳ 'Mapping the Patch', a two-stage research programme, which built an evidence-based understanding of the PRS in Greater Manchester.
- ↳ A £600,000 Test and Learn Grant Fund, trialling innovative local solutions to problems in the PRS in Greater Manchester, and reaching landlords, tenants and powerholders.
- ↳ A tenant voice programme, working to make the voices of private tenants heard.
- ↳ The development of the 'Plan for Better Renting', a manifesto of policy and practice recommendations drawn from the work across the project and aimed at local, regional and national governments.

## ★ KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

The development of a highly committed board that brought perspectives and experience from across the private rented sector resulted in a deeper understanding of the challenges within it. This insight facilitated the design of a Test and Learn Grant Fund programme that increased tenant empowerment and support available for landlords.

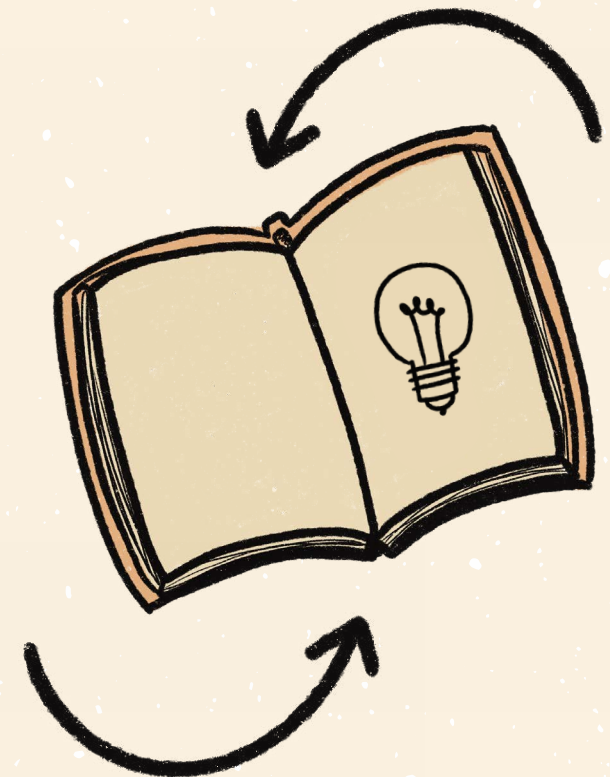
Learning from across the Fair Housing Futures programme and strong networks in turn, developed policymakers' understanding of the siloed nature of the housing system and drivers of landlord behaviour, resulting in moves to strengthen enforcement and a deeper focus on the PRS.



# Key findings

The key insights drawn from the evaluation are:

- 🕒 **A place-based approach builds the change into the local ecosystem.** For FHF, the approach meant learning, relationships and influence are more likely to stay in the local ecosystem and be sustained for the long term.
- 🕒 **Successful collaboration between stakeholders across the private rented sector is possible even amongst those with strongly opposing views.** This is deliverable by:
  - **A locally-led partnership approach** to the project. FHF had a diverse Board of organisations, with each member holding relative seniority, which allowed for a deeper understanding of the problems in the private rented sector.
  - **Having an experienced chair** of the partnership board, who is able to manage differences and ensure all voices were heard.
  - **Valuing the differing points of view**, which ultimately created more empathy and understanding of the challenges different groups faced.
- 🕒 **Local government buy-in builds the influencing power of the project.** For FHF, this was increased by having a Combined Authority in Greater Manchester that was in alignment with the aims of the programme, which helped build relationships with and secured commitment from powerholders from the start of the programme.
- 🕒 **Taking the time to understand the context is worth it to facilitate evidence-based and collaborative decision making.** By completing research at the beginning of the project, as well as time spent developing relationships amongst the members of the project's partnership board, future decisions around the Test and Learn Grant Fund were evidence-based and made collaboratively.
- 🕒 **Localised approaches to grant making which allow for failure and changes in approach can deliver new ideas and have long-lasting effects on grassroots organisations.** The Test and Learn Grant Fund empowered grassroots organisations and had a long-term ripple effect that has continued after the programme ended.
- 🕒 **Place-based and locally led projects can be effectively supported by a collaborative and involved funder.** The Nationwide Foundation trusted project delivery partners to achieve the goals, while also maintaining a participatory role, learning 'with' rather than just 'from'.
- 🕒 **Shifts in system conditions are more likely to be sustained when working at all levels and across all conditions that hold a problem in place.** Through the programme, FHF affected both the explicit conditions of policy, practices and resource flows, while also working to the more implicit conditions of power dynamics, relationships, and mental models.



# Recommendations

The Nationwide Foundation believes in the role of locally-led and ambitious projects to deliver systemic change in the housing system, and this evaluation has evidenced the power of place-based approaches to tackling deeply-seated problems by using collaboration and innovation.

These recommendations have been written for the Nationwide Foundation and other funders or organisations. When looking to design and deliver collaborative, place-based programmes that create effective change, we recommend that projects should:

## Be genuinely locally and collaboratively led.

This is achieved by:

- ↳ **Including representation and engagement from all voices within the local system.** This should include key power holders, such as local authorities or landlords, and those with lived experience such as tenants, grassroots and service delivery organisations. This will encourage deeper learning and solutions, and the ability to enact change.
- ↳ **Appointing an experienced project leader,** with a good understanding of the area you are seeking to change and the ability to manage difference within the partnership.
- ↳ **Reimbursing project participants,** particularly those from local organisations which are giving up time to engage with the project, to encourage inclusiveness and longevity.
- ↳ **Ensuring the funder plays a participatory role.** Learning with other participants as the programme progresses helps balance potentially skewed power dynamics.

## Use flexible and long-term funding approaches that prioritise learning and collaboration.

Funders should:

- ↳ **Be flexible and prepared to modify original aims and objectives** to allow room for experimentation and innovation in a failure-tolerant environment.
- ↳ **Recognise the time it takes to change a system, and consider providing funding with a long-term view.** Effective interventions that change systems need secure funding to allow for experimentation and innovation. Systemic issues need new non-obvious solutions, the effectiveness of which only becomes visible over the long term.
- ↳ **Establish an ongoing learning-focused relationship and process** where new insights have space to emerge in conversational settings with stakeholders across all levels of the system.

## Use research, existing knowledge and systems change methodologies to target efforts and understand the change that is happening.

This is achieved by:

- ↳ **Recognising and embracing the project's place in the overall ecosystem** you are trying to change. It takes the commitment and action of many different stakeholders to make change happen, and a single programme is only one part of this change.
- ↳ **Understand the problem and build shared ownership of it.** Provide resources of time and funds at the start of a programme to both research the problem and its relation to the place, and build relationships across the partnership. Exploring drivers behind the behaviour in both the partnership and wider sector will build empathy and understanding resulting in collective and informed decision making.

## Choose a tool that helps you interrogate the system you are trying to change.

- ↳ The 6 Conditions of Systems Change is a good example of a tool that enables a broader understanding of impact and identifies unexpected challenges and benefits. While outcomes and aims do have a place in the process, the less tangible changes and the need to adapt approaches as circumstances alter need to be recognised as an essential part of systems change.



