

DETAILING THE DATABASE

HOW THE PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR DATABASE CAN SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT AND DRIVE UP STANDARDS

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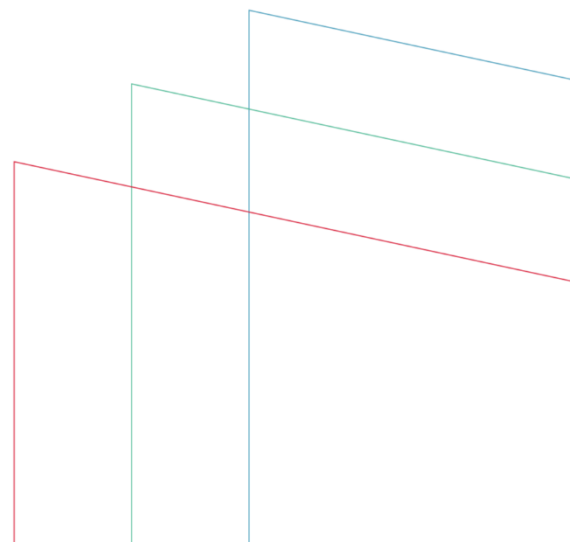
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CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction.....	6
1. Methodology.....	8
1.1 Estimating registration fee revenue	9
1.2 Modelling impact on enforcement capacity.....	10
2. Tenants' case studies of conditions in the PRS	12
3. Current context in the PRS.....	14
3.1 A national enforcement picture	14
3.2 Changes under the Renters' Rights Bill.....	16
3.3 Landlord licensing.....	17
3.4 Property MOT.....	19
3.5 Enforcement challenges.....	21
4. Views from stakeholders	22
4.1 Overall attitudes of the database	22
4.2 Ringfencing revenue to improve accountability	23
4.4 Licensing schemes.....	23
4.5 Compliance concerns.....	24
4.6 Mandatory data capture.....	25
4.7 Access to the database	27
4.8 An educational tool for tenants and landlords	29
5. Opportunities to expand enforcement capacity through the PRS database	30
5.1 The highs and lows of local capacity	30
5.2 Licensing schemes make a mark	32
5.3 Implications for renters and reform.....	33
6. Possibilities for change from the PRS database	34
6.1 Landlord database fees	34
6.2 Potential impact on enforcement capacity.....	36
6.3 Impact on landlords	40

Conclusion.....	42
Endnotes	43

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Renters' Rights Bill presents a once in a generation opportunity to tackle England's long-standing crisis in the private rented sector (PRS). Among its most consequential components is the introduction of a national PRS database. If ambitiously implemented, this new system could transform the enforcement landscape by driving up transparency, enabling accountability, and giving local authorities the tools and funding they need to uphold standards.

This report explores how the PRS database can act as a springboard for systemic improvement. Drawing on mixed-methods research including interviews with stakeholders from local authorities, landlord bodies, tenant groups, and industry actors, we assess how the database could help rebalance power in the PRS and repair England's fragmented enforcement framework. Our analysis is underpinned by economic modelling that demonstrates how even modest fees could significantly boost local authority enforcement capacity.

The PRS accounts for approximately 4.7 million households in England, yet it remains one of the tenure types with the poorest property standards. While existing enforcement duties lie with local authorities, our research reveals a postcode lottery in capacity: in the most stretched areas, a single officer is responsible for up to 25,000 properties; in better-resourced areas, the ratio is closer to 650. Many councils are forced to rely on tenant complaints, but tenants themselves face barriers to enforcement including fear of eviction and a lack of information or legal support.

Against this backdrop, the PRS database represents a rare opportunity to introduce a national, consistent framework to support local enforcement while raising expectations of landlord behaviour. Participants across the housing ecosystem - including tenants, landlords, and councils - recognised this potential and were in broad agreement on key data priorities and system design features.

The effectiveness of the PRS database depends on its ambition. If designed as a simple register, its impact will be marginal. But if implemented boldly, the database can:

- Require landlords to upload essential documents such as compliance certificates, tenancy agreements, rent data, and enforcement histories.
- Enable tenants to make informed decisions and report concerns through a publicly accessible interface.
- Provide local authorities with a robust tool for proactive enforcement, replacing opaque, manual systems.

5 Detailing the database

- Serve as an educational platform with rights-based guidance for tenants and best-practice training for landlords.
- Fund a step-change in enforcement capacity through modest annual fees—estimated at £46.08 per property, which could reduce average workloads from 3,300 properties per officer to fewer than 1,000.

Modelling shows that even assuming 65% compliance, a modest annual per-property fee could lead to a +233% uplift in PRS enforcement-related staffing nationally. This would ensure every council could maintain a meaningful enforcement presence.

Critically, the revenue must be ringfenced for local enforcement functions rather than be diverted to general administration or lost to central budgets.

To realise its full potential, the PRS database must:

1. Mandate essential data: Including property-level compliance, landlord identity, rent levels, enforcement history, and basic accessibility features.
2. Ensure access: Local authorities must have full access; tenants should have visibility of core compliance information; and stakeholders like lenders and ombudsmen should have functional data sharing
3. Ringfence revenue: Fees must directly fund frontline enforcement teams. Local authorities must have financial certainty to plan, recruit, and sustain capacity.
4. Support participation: Landlords should see reputational benefits from compliance. Training, optional reviews, and early-bird incentives should all be built in
5. Complement, not replace, licensing: The database and licensing schemes must work together to cover reactive and proactive enforcement needs.

INTRODUCTION

The Renters' Rights Bill presents an urgent and consequential opportunity to deliver generational improvements to standards within the private rented sector (PRS). While much of the Bill's scope is clear, there are aspects where amendments or secondary legislation and statutory guidance have the potential to significantly strengthen or weaken its impact. One area that offers such opportunities is the PRS database, which could transform transparency and accountability within the sector.

The guidance to the Bill acknowledges the database's potential to assist local authority enforcement, presenting a clear opportunity to improve standards in the PRS. At its most limited, the database would act as little more than an information hub about generic rights and responsibilities. At its most expansive, however, it could drive up standards, transparency, and accountability throughout the PRS, acting as a vital tool to root out malpractice and shifting the onus of responsibility from tenants and local authorities onto landlords.

Landlords will be required to register for the database and pay a fee as part of this process. In its initial phase, the national database will require every private landlord to register themselves and their rental properties.¹ Landlords will be able to register online (with alternative offline routes for those unable to do so digitally).² While a portion of the fee will likely cover the basic operational costs of running the database, there is also scope for it to contribute to improving the enforcement of standards in the PRS via funding to local authorities.

Currently, the PRS houses approximately **19% of households in England**, equating to 4.7 million households.³ While the sector has doubled in size since the early 2000s, the rate has remained between 19% or 20% since 2013–14. It is widely recognised as one of the tenure types with the poorest property standards.⁴ As such, legislative intervention which improves the PRS is much needed and would have a transformative impact not just on private tenants but on society and the economy more widely. Simultaneously, owing to the significant growth in the sector, any fees derived from mandatory licensing could hugely improve local authorities' ability to hold non-compliant landlords to account.

While the government published some information about the prospective scope and operation of the PRS database in 2024, many questions remain unanswered about the scope and reach of the database. This research, therefore, identifies how a bold and ambitious PRS database could shine a light on poor practice and provide one of the principal means by which proper accountability is generated. It does so through a mixed-methods approach using quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis

7 Detailing the database

techniques to understand the current challenges, opportunities, and tensions relating to the prospective PRS database. Participants included representatives from local and combined authorities, those advocating for tenants' rights, those advocating for landlords' rights, and other key stakeholders in the lettings and lending industries.

1. METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a mixed-methods approach consisting of desk-based, qualitative, and quantitative research techniques. First, a literature review of existing research, grey, and academic literature was undertaken to develop an understanding of the current context, including the following:

- Recommendations, limitations, and anticipated functionalities for the initial and future phases of the PRS database.
- Insight from existing UK selective, additional, and mandatory licensing schemes.
- Specific enforcement challenges local authorities are currently facing, and how effectively a centralised PRS database could address or alleviate these challenges.

We conducted eighteen 60 minute in-depth semi-structured interviews to develop an understanding of the current state of play in the PRS, as well as key challenges faced in terms of enforcement and conditions. We sought participants from four groups based on their proximity to the sector:

- Three local authorities
- Four combined authorities
- Six interviews with organisations supporting tenants
- Five interviews with key stakeholders:
 - Nationwide Lettings
 - The Lettings Industry Council
 - Tenant Deposit Scheme
 - GeoPlace
 - National Residential Landlords Association

We conducted two 90 minute online focus groups: one with seven tenants and one with six landlords. A professional recruitment company recruited participants with screening questions supporting sample representation:

- Aged between 18 and 75 years
- Mixed gender
- Three landlords with a portfolio of <5 properties, three with >5 properties
- All tenants currently renting from a private landlord

The qualitative research aimed to develop an understanding of the following:

- Current levels of understanding of the PRS database.

- What items landlords should be required to upload onto a property portal, and what (if anything) should be excluded.
- Level of access to data.
- How to strike the right balance between achieving higher transparency and providing the information most useful for local authorities, while not imposing unreasonable burdens on landlords, and providing the information most useful for local authorities.

We analysed and thematically coded data gathered from interviews and focus groups via NVivo software to develop a cross-group analysis which identified similarities and differences in views. We redacted all participant names to ensure anonymity and consistency across groups.

To contextualise the opportunity that the PRS database offers, we gathered three case studies from current PRS tenants with experience of poor conditions.

Additionally, we conducted quantitative economic modelling to illustrate how registration fees collected through a new PRS database could be used to improve enforcement capacity in the PRS. The approach estimates potential revenue under various fee structures and models how this revenue could enhance local authority enforcement activity.

1.1 ESTIMATING REGISTRATION FEE REVENUE

To estimate the total revenue generated by the database, we used the following key inputs:

- **Number of PRS households in England:** We estimated that there are approximately 4.7 million PRS households in England, based on the English Housing Survey 2023–24.⁵ To allocate revenue to local authorities, where fees are redistributed according to the number of properties, we estimated the number of PRS households by local authority. To do this, we generated weights for each local authority using estimates of the dwelling stock by tenure in each local authority, England, 2012 to 2021.
- **Number of landlords:** For fee structures that include a per-landlord charge (in addition to, or instead of, per-property charges), we required an estimate of the number of landlords. We used the figure of 2.3 million landlords included in the government's White Paper, *A Fairer Rented Sector*.⁶ The figure is a 15 July 2021 estimate from HMRC. This estimate excludes furnished holiday lettings and only covers landlords who declared income via their self-assessment tax returns in

2019 to 2020. Not all individuals with property income are required to declare it. For example, those with income below the £1,000 property allowance are not required to tell HMRC. Some individuals with property income between £1,000 and £2,500 will declare this via PAYE rather than Self-Assessment. These individuals were not included in this data.

- **Estimated compliance rate:** To calculate actual revenue collected (as distinct from theoretical revenue if compliance were 100%), we applied an expected compliance rate. This was based on an estimate of 65%, provided by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in correspondence with NEF in April 2025. The 65% is a starting point from which revenues are expected to rise year-on-year.

Using these inputs, we modelled total revenue under a variety of plausible fee structures, including per-property and per-landlord charges, as well as hybrid approaches.

1.2 MODELLING IMPACT ON ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY

To understand how this revenue could translate into increased enforcement capacity at the local level, we introduced additional parameters:

- **Current enforcement capacity:**
We used local authority enforcement data collected by the government. The data, submitted to the central government in 2022–23 following the death of Awaab Ishak, offers a nationwide snapshot of enforcement capacity.⁷ While its accuracy varies, with some councils appearing to include admin staff or round up part-time posts, it remains the most comprehensive source on local enforcement. The figures likely overstate capacity. This provided a baseline against which to model the potential impact of new funding.
- **Employment costs for enforcement staff:**
We estimated the full employment costs of additional enforcement officers using data from the Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings (ASHE) for Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) code 84120: *Regulation of health care, education, cultural and other social services, excluding social security*. This code encompasses statutory regulatory activities undertaken by public authorities, including local authority enforcement relating to housing standards and environmental health. To estimate full employment costs, we did the following:

11 Detailing the database

- Applied wage growth to uprate the older 2024 ASHE data to 2025. We then projected this forward to November 2026, the anticipated go-live date of the PRS database.
- Adjusted the base wage figures to include non-wage labour costs of employer National Insurance contributions and pension contributions (7% assumed).

This gave us an estimated full employment cost of £57,476 per FTE.

Combining these inputs, we modelled a series of scenarios to estimate:

- Total revenue collected under different combinations of fees and compliance rates.
- The number of additional enforcement staff that this revenue could fund.
- The change in enforcement capacity before and after the introduction of the database.

These scenarios are not forecasts, but illustrations of the scale of enforcement enhancement that could be supported by a well-designed and sufficiently resourced registration system.

2. TENANTS' CASE STUDIES OF CONDITIONS IN THE PRS

We used our community networks to speak to tenants about how the PRS impacts them. While only a snapshot, these case studies offered insight into the poor conditions being faced by tenants in the PRS and the urgent need to drive-up standards and increase enforcement capacities across the country.

**Please note all names are pseudonyms*

Monique*, 2 bed-house, South Yorkshire, lives alone

Monique has lived in her house for 18 years. When she moved into the home, black mould occupied the window sills in her bedroom and living room. She complained about these substandard conditions immediately, but it took the landlord four years to begin any improvements on the windows, which resulted in only two windows being replaced. Those that were left have since blown, leaving gaps exposing her rooms to outside elements.

Monique also waited 14 years for her front and back doors to be replaced and had electrical faults which fire services informed her were a hazard. Her wooden doors were insecure with missing panels causing significant draughts in the house. When Monique repeatedly asked her landlord to fix these significant issues over many years, she was informed she would not receive new doors because she had informed her local council of the poor conditions.

After complaining to the council, enforcement officers visited Monique's house and delivered to the landlord a list of improvements to be completed in a set time period. Despite the landlord taking longer than agreed, Monique shared that eventually the issues were fixed.

Monique strongly supports significant amounts of money going to protect private renters from the issues she has had to deal with.

Ciaran*, 1-bed flat, North West, lives alone

Ciaran has rented his flat from his landlord for 13 years. His is one of six flats in the block that the same landlord owns.

Ciaran experienced significant **damp and mould in his bathroom, bedroom, and living room** due to drains on the roof leaking through into his flat. Despite Ciaran and his neighbours contacting the landlord continually to inform them of leaking drains and resulting damp/mould, **the landlord left the tenants in these conditions for over 18 months.**

Ciaran shared that while on some issues his landlord “wasn’t too bad at responding”, including “only taking a few weeks to fix the oven and shower door”, that tenants had to experience consistently poor conditions in communal spaces. **Their intercom was broken for two years, fire alarms were periodically broken, and lighting in all corridors was not working for eight months** – leaving tenants to rely on daylight or torchlight.

Ciaran and his fellow tenants consistently informed the landlord of issues but were unable to get support from their local council in a timely manner. Ciaran strongly supports the database being an education tool and a means with which landlords can be held more accountable through enforcement visits.

Lukas*, 3-bed flat, South Yorkshire, lives with three daughters under 12 years

Lukas and his three daughters have rented from their landlord for five years. Lukas’s family suffered with a leak on their roof for three years which became so bad it leaked into the children’s bedrooms and the living room. This leak caused chronic black mould and severe damp risking the physical health of Lukas’s children and causing significant distress for the family.

Despite informing his landlord of the leak and its consequences, the landlord waited two years to send a contractor to look at the problem. Lukas explained that the first fix was insufficient and leaked again within a few weeks. The second fix is – at this moment – still sufficient. Meanwhile, Lukas kept trying to clean the mould off his daughters’ bedroom walls but he explained it persistently returned.

Lukas did not know he could request support from his local council, but had he known, he would have contacted them. He would benefit from accessing free education tools to support tenants’ rights especially when their landlord is not responsive.

3. CURRENT CONTEXT IN THE PRS

Enforcement within the PRS is a statutory duty of local authorities, typically handled by environmental health and housing enforcement teams. Officers investigate complaints, monitor conditions, and ensure compliance with minimum property standards.

As the housing affordability crisis intensifies, so too does the crisis in conditions. Medical professionals have raised serious concerns about the state of the PRS, with 45% of health workers reporting that they have had to discharge a patient knowing their home environment would likely cause them to become unwell.⁸

While tenants can complain to local authorities if their landlord has failed to make their accommodation liveable, this only becomes an offence if a) deemed severe enough and b) a trained environmental health officer visits the property and deems it to require improvement. Despite being a theoretically straightforward process, the crisis in local government funding, staffing, and services, compounded by tenants' lack of access to information to guide them through this process (and fear of retribution for doing so), has culminated in a system which is currently not fit for purpose.

3.1 A NATIONAL ENFORCEMENT PICTURE

Analysis of 2022–23 data from 302 local authorities in England shows that the capacity to enforce housing standards is far from consistent, with deep and systemic disparities between councils. The data, submitted to the central government in 2022–23 following the death of Awaab Ishak, offers a nationwide snapshot.⁹ While its accuracy varies, with some councils appearing to include admin staff or round up part-time posts, it remains the most comprehensive source on local enforcement. The figures likely overstate capacity yet still show an ad hoc system under strain.

Across the dataset, the average number of PRS properties per enforcement officer is 3,319. While this figure alone suggests enforcement services are under pressure, the national average masks stark inequalities across different parts of the country.

Birmingham has the largest PRS in the dataset, with more than 84,000 private rented properties. Despite this, it employs just 22.4 enforcement officers, meaning each officer is responsible for nearly 3,750 homes. Manchester, also with a large PRS of over 70,000 homes, has 32.8 officers, one for every 2,142 properties. Wandsworth stands out with a particularly high burden: only seven officers are responsible for over 47,900 homes,

equating to nearly 6,846 properties per officer – one of the most stretched ratios in the country at the time of data collection.^a

In contrast, some councils have invested more substantially in enforcement capacity. Newham, for instance, employs 68 officers to manage around 43,000 PRS homes – just 637 properties per officer, ten times fewer than that of Wandsworth. Leeds also demonstrates a more intensive approach, with 68.25 officers overseeing roughly 72,585 properties – around 1,063 per officer. Bristol, Liverpool, and Camden all report comparatively strong enforcement ratios, each maintaining fewer than 1,100 homes per officer.

Meanwhile, some councils with smaller PRS appear under-resourced in proportion to need. Wiltshire has over 40,000 PRS homes but just 4.3 officers, resulting in an exceptionally high ratio of 9,460 properties per officer. Cornwall, with nearly 55,000 properties, employs only 17 officers, ie over 3,200 properties for each officer.

Table 1: A snapshot of PRS enforcement capacity across England

Local authority	PRS properties	Enforcement officers (FTE)	Properties per officer
Newham	43,291	68.0	637
Leeds	72,585	68.3	1,064
Liverpool	58,841	56.0	1,051
Bristol	51,658	48.0	1,076
Camden	32,862	24.0	1,369
Tower Hamlets	44,957	29.0	1,550
Bradford	44,457	25.5	1,743
Manchester	70,254	32.8	2,142
Westminster	49,974	19.0	2,630
Birmingham	84,044	22.4	3,747
Cornwall	54,695	17.0	3,217
Wandsworth	47,921	7.0	6,846
Wiltshire	40,678	4.3	9,460

Source: NEF analysis of enforcement data returns and the English Housing Survey – full details in methodology note.

^a Wandsworth is in the process of putting in place licensing schemes, which will change this.

3.2 CHANGES UNDER THE RENTERS' RIGHTS BILL

According to the government's *Guide to the Renters' Rights Bill*, the PRS database is intended to be a cornerstone of the rest of the legislation and "fairer private rented sector" reform.¹⁰ Its functionality is framed as going beyond a "simple register".

First, it should serve as a "single source of information" for landlords about their legal responsibilities, effectively a one-stop database consolidating guidance (reducing confusion from myriad regulations). Second, it should provide a platform for landlords to "showcase their compliance" – for instance, by uploading safety certificates and evidencing that their properties meet required standards. The exact dataset that will be publicly viewable is still to be determined in secondary legislation, but the guide makes a strong point for the need to balance tenants' right to make informed decisions with landlords' privacy, suggesting not all data will be open access, but tenants will "be able to access necessary information" about their landlord and property.

For example, current plans would display if a landlord has committed certain offences or breached regulations (essentially incorporating a "rogue landlord" alert function from the existing database), but likely without exposing personal data irrelevant to tenancy decisions. Under current plans, a landlord who lets or even advertises a property without registering it in the database can face enforcement by the local council, including civil penalties up to £7,000 for a first breach. Repeated or serious non-compliance (eg providing fraudulent information to the database) may attract penalties up to £40,000 or even criminal prosecution. Non-registered landlords would be restricted from regaining possession of a property via the courts – landlords in breach cannot serve a valid eviction notice except on grounds of serious tenant fault, such as anti-social behaviour.

Many operational details of the database will be fleshed out via secondary legislation. The initial rollout will focus on establishing the core registration functionality – getting all landlords onto the system and populated with essential information. The database is currently in development; the department has indicated it will move into a "Beta" phase of testing with key users following Royal Assent (which Shelter have already seen demonstrated). The full public launch is expected as soon as possible after the passage of both primary and secondary legislation (with late 2025 being an indicative timeframe).

In this iterative approach, future phases of the PRS database are intended to expand its capabilities. Ministers have suggested that information related to property condition and standards will be included in the database's scope, which opens the door for future integration with a property inspection or certification regime (Section 1.3). Another

expected evolution is interoperability with the new PRS Ombudsman being introduced in parallel. Landlords will be required to join the PRS Ombudsman; the database fees and design are being coordinated so that the system can, for example, flag whether a landlord has PRS Ombudsman membership and possibly funnel complaints data (though the PRS Ombudsman is separate, the landlord's database registration fee will also fund the service).¹¹

3.3 LANDLORD LICENSING

It's worth noting that the government does not intend the national database to supersede all existing local licensing schemes. In recent statements, MHCLG has affirmed that selective licensing will remain a "valuable tool... when used appropriately" for targeting local issues.¹² However, by creating a comprehensive national register, the database aims to remove one of the biggest barriers to enforcement that councils face – identifying which properties are rented and who owns/manages them. In the long term, having this centralised information may enable some streamlining or "alignment" of local schemes.

Currently, there are a variety of existing licensing schemes in the UK, including selective licensing of all rentals in designated areas, additional licensing for smaller houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), and the mandatory HMO licensing regime, which provides insight into fee levels and funding enforcement in a way that balances compliance costs with regulatory outcomes.

Under the Housing Act 2004, local authorities can charge landlords licensing fees meant to cover the administration of these schemes. In practice, fees vary widely. Councils initially often set lower fees to encourage uptake or to gain political acceptance for a new scheme, then raise fees upon renewal once actual costs become clear.¹³ For example, the London Borough of Newham charged an early-bird fee of £150 per property when launching its borough-wide licensing in 2013, but increased this to £400 (for a five-year licence) at renewal, after finding the initial fee insufficient to sustain the programme.¹⁴ Other councils have offered incentives such as discounts for accredited landlords or those meeting higher standards. Blackpool, for instance, give a fee discount if a landlord's property met standards above the legal minimum, and some schemes allow half-fees for members of approved landlord associations.¹⁵

For local authorities, optimal fee levels are those that are proportionate to landlords' business costs yet sufficient to resource enforcement. For instance, Haringey's current selective licence fee is £600 for five years (£500 with early discount) – roughly £10 per month per property – which the council found is a tiny fraction of typical rental income

and thus “unlikely to lead to landlords exiting the market” or significantly raising rents by itself (especially in comparison to larger cost drivers like interest rates or tax changes).¹⁶

There is often resistance initially from landlords worried about cost, but as the MHCLG selective licensing review in 2019 found, 97.7% of officials surveyed agreed that well-implemented licensing improves property management and ensures minimum standards are met – outcomes that ultimately benefit responsible landlords too, by enhancing the sector’s reputation.¹⁷ It’s a key source of local authority revenue – Southwark, for example, generated £23m across different licensing schemes last year.¹⁸

Despite fees, many councils have struggled to fully cover enforcement costs; one-third of councils reported their licensing scheme revenue was not sufficient to cover the work required.¹⁹ Crucially, by law, licence fees can usually only fund the administration of the licensing scheme itself (processing applications, inspections related to licensing conditions, etc.), not broader housing enforcement beyond the scheme’s scope. As a result, when proactive licensing uncovers extensive hazards, councils must often dip into general funds to pursue further enforcement or remedial action.

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health noted that several authorities saw an uptick in identified hazards through licensing – a success in terms of uncovering problems, but this generated “higher enforcement costs” which licensing fees alone couldn’t pay for.²⁰ Authorities can and do use civil penalty fines (up to £30,000 under the Housing Act 2004 as amended), but reliance on fines is unpredictable and may vary year to year. Furthermore, limitations on fee usage (historically guided by the European Services Directive and case law) mean councils tread carefully to ensure fees only cover licensing-related enforcement and not unrelated activity.

There is precedent from within the UK for a mandatory landlord database. In Wales, the Rent Smart Wales scheme charges landlords a registration fee (currently £45 for online registration, valid for five years) and an additional licence fee (if they self-manage) for those managing property. The Welsh approach centralises the administration (via a single national body) and uses economies of scale; one team processes all applications and coordinates enforcement with local councils. Even so, enforcement still relies on councils to prosecute or issue penalties for non-compliance. It’s an offence to let property without registration or a licence, and by 2023, hundreds of landlords had been fined for failing to register.²¹

Scotland has had its own landlord registration since 2004. Landlords pay roughly £68 plus £16 per property for a three-year registration. Compliance is enforced by criminal offence for failure to register (with fines up to £50,000). While most active landlords are

registered, Scottish authorities also face the need to continuously chase non-registrants and update entries. One issue has been ensuring that every change (eg a landlord selling a property or a new landlord entering the market) gets captured, which requires ongoing effort and sometimes data sharing with tax or tenancy deposit schemes to catch those who miss registration. The Scottish government strengthened the registration regime in 2019 by requiring landlords to report more safety information at registration, moving towards a certification approach.²²

One frequent claim is that landlords will pass on costs to tenants via rent increases. Landlord associations like the National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) have argued that cumulative regulatory costs (licence fees, mandatory improvements, loss of tax relief) put upward pressure on rents or else make the business less viable.²³ However, studies so far have found “no evidence ... that introducing licensing schemes increases rents”.²⁴

Indeed, in areas with long-standing licensing, such as Newham or Waltham Forest, the PRS has continued to grow, and rents have followed regional trends rather than spiking uniquely due to licensing (Newham’s PRS grew from 39% to 54% of housing stock during the years of licensing).²⁵ This indicates that most landlords absorbed the costs or made efficiency improvements rather than simply hiking rents, which they likely had already set at the market rate anyway.

3.4 PROPERTY MOT

The concept of a property MOT – an annual safety and standards inspection for rental homes, akin to a car’s MOT – has gained traction in recent years. This generally involves an independent inspector checking a rented property against a set of essential criteria (health, safety, and habitability) regularly (often proposed as annually) and issuing a certificate or ‘pass’ if the property meets the required standards. This certificate could then be required for a landlord to legally let the property.

A property MOT system promises a more proactive approach to standards compliance, shifting away from licensing’s current reliance on tenant complaints or infrequent council inspections.²⁶ By requiring landlords to prove that their property is fit for habitation each year, sub-standard conditions could be identified and remedied before they seriously harm tenants. In theory, it would bundle together existing certificates – gas safety (annual), electrical safety (five-yearly), Energy Performance (10-yearly) – and include checks for hazards like mould and fire safety devices into one inspection.²⁷ If applied correctly, an MOT tool could enforce the expansion of the Decent Homes Standard and Awaab’s Law in the PRS.

Real-world case studies of property MOT-style approaches are still limited, as the concept has not yet been written into national law. Some intensive licensing schemes effectively operate like a de facto MOT. For example, Bristol’s additional licensing scheme requires an inspection of each licensed HMO. In 2022–23, that scheme found 94% of properties inspected initially failed to meet the conditions of the licences.²⁸

Further, in 2021, Leeds City Council launched a voluntary Property MOT Month, encouraging landlords to perform a seven-point check on their properties (floors, damp, alarms, locks, heating, electrics, plumbing) ahead of winter.²⁹ While this was a light-touch, voluntary exercise, it revealed a couple of things. First, many landlords assumed no news was good news – if the tenant wasn’t actively complaining, the landlord believed the property was fine. Second, it highlighted that simple, clear guidance could spur landlords to identify and fix minor issues (like replacing smoke alarm batteries or addressing early signs of damp) before they escalated.³⁰

This method could be particularly valuable in overcoming the knowledge gap between tenants and landlords regarding their rights and responsibilities. Currently, more than half of tenants report issues with the condition of their accommodation, and around half do not know where to turn when their landlord or letting agent fails to resolve the problem.³¹ This knowledge gap leaves many renters unable to pursue redress or enforcement, reinforcing cycles of inaction even in the face of serious housing disrepair. Gaps in understanding are mirrored on the landlord side. While 64% of landlords reported being fully aware of the legal requirement for a minimum energy efficiency standard (EPC rating E), a further 22% were aware of the regulation but did not understand its details. Notably, 15% of landlords were entirely unaware of the requirement, suggesting that even well-established legal duties are not universally understood.³²

The UK has other regulatory databases that grapple with self-reported data. The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) database relies on owners to update details (people forget to file Statutory Off Road Notifications (SORNs) or update addresses, leading to inaccuracies). To combat that, DVLA links with insurance and MOT databases. If a vehicle lacks an MOT, automated enforcement letters go out. The PRS database could analogously link with gas/electric safety databases to auto-nudge non-compliant landlords. Companies House moved to verify director identities after concerns about false filings; similarly, the PRS database might implement identity verification for landlords (perhaps cross-checking against Government Gateway or photo ID) to prevent fake names. Rent Smart Wales’s experience is instructive: RSW can “access various data sources” like the electoral roll or benefits data, to find unregistered

landlords, and they emphasise proportionate enforcement (they don't prosecute if someone is actively trying to comply).

3.5 ENFORCEMENT CHALLENGES

Local authorities are at the frontline of enforcing housing standards in the PRS, and in recent years, they have faced significant challenges in carrying out this role effectively. The most cited problem is that Environmental Health and private-sector housing teams in councils are under-resourced. Some are now turning to combined authority capacity to support their day-to-day activities. Many councils have only a handful of officers (or sometimes just one dedicated officer) dealing with thousands of private rentals, along with outdated training and resources due to budget cuts. Recent freedom of information (FOI)-based analysis found that councils' responses to complaints about poor conditions remain inconsistent and poorly correlated with formal enforcement. For example, some local authorities inspected fewer than 5% of the private rented complaints they received, while others conducted more inspections than they had complaints. Half of all formal Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) inspections across England were carried out by just 20 councils.³³ The remainder were dealt with informally (letters, advice) or not at all.

Recruiting and retaining qualified environmental health officers (EHOs) has been difficult, especially in high-cost areas like London. The workload and relatively lower pay in the public sector make it hard to compete with private sector opportunities, and schemes requiring lots of inspections can hit a wall if "recruiting the right people quickly is an issue".³⁴ An optimised database could streamline some tasks (like background research on property ownership) to free up officer time for actual enforcement.

A huge practical challenge has been simply finding the bad actors. Rogue landlords often operate under the radar, not giving tenants written contracts, avoiding registering properties for licensing or with deposit schemes, and sometimes concealing their ownership through complex company structures. Tracing can be very time-consuming, involving Land Registry checks, tracing agents, etc. One of the "most time-consuming barriers" in enforcement is exactly this task of identifying the owner of a problem property.³⁵

When reported, further challenges come with levels of enforcement. Some councils have been accused of taking a "light-touch" approach – sending warning letters repeatedly instead of escalating to enforcement notices – possibly to avoid legal battles due to limited capacity. Indeed, in that 2016 survey, housing officers were four times more likely to use informal action than to issue a legal notice.³⁶

4. VIEWS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

This section of the report contains a thematic analysis of findings from interviews and focus groups. Throughout each sub-section, where relevant, key findings relating to distinct participant groups are discussed. However, in the main, the sections contain cross-group analysis to identify points of connection and possible tensions between stakeholders. Doing so is crucial to develop robust analysis and recommendations grounded in the evidence available.

4.1 OVERALL ATTITUDES OF THE DATABASE

“[The database] is the biggest opportunity we will ever have to improve standards within the sector and for local authorities as well.”

All participants engaged in this research saw the database as a potentially valuable tool, one which could be transformational for improving standards in the sector. There was agreement among local and combined authorities that, given how little some regions know about the PRS and their landlords, any increase in data access would be a significant step forward.

All tenants and organisations representing tenants strongly emphasised the opportunity the database offers, and the need for central government to have the confidence to use this moment as a key mechanism with which to improve PRS conditions and fundraise much-needed revenue for local authority housing teams. Furthermore, as one combined authority put it, the database offers a “a really fantastic opportunity for landlords to show compliance”.

Other key arguments for introducing a digital database centred on existing levels of data. Currently, the PRS is far behind other sectors in terms of modernisation. Participants explained that local authorities’ ability to enforce regulations is severely hindered by the lack of low-level data geographically. Indeed, much of the PRS is still reliant on manual data collection, meaning local authority staff have to physically visit properties, which, as discussed thus far, is increasingly difficult in a crowded sector with few resources. The database offers the opportunity to upgrade the existing system and digitise existing data to ensure it is usable across local authorities and regions.

4.2 RINGFENCING REVENUE TO IMPROVE ACCOUNTABILITY

There was broad agreement across all groups that the database's value is contingent on key factors being executed well. One of these factors is that the revenue from fees must be used to directly fund local authority enforcement and hold non-compliant landlords to account. All of these issues were emphasised by local and combined authorities, as well as landlords and tenants, who argued that without revenue from fees going directly to reprimanding non-compliant landlords, the database represents an unfair penalty on compliant landlords.

While the precise level of fees considered appropriate varied between stakeholders (and as such, we have modelled potential scenarios in Section 4), there were general concerns shared by local and combined authorities that the fees collected would not be sufficient to make the necessary changes to the PRS. These concerns are compounded by the significant strains faced by local authority housing teams.

There was agreement among participants, including landlords, that revenue from the database should be ringfenced to support a broad enforcement ecosystem-including rent repayment orders (RROs), tribunal representation, data migration, and proactive targeting of non-compliant properties. Multiple local and combined authorities, as well as tenants' representatives, emphasised that the full cost of enforcement must be reflected: inspections, legal preparation, follow-ups, and tenant support. Local authority officers were clear that revenue should not only fund backend database operations but also directly enhance local enforcement capacity. If not implemented in this way, all local and combined authorities interviewed flagged the risk that the database could create more work without adequate staffing or communications strategies, which could overwhelm already stretched services.

It was apparent through focus group with landlords that ensuring any new revenue is channelled directly into improving the PRS is a crucial step towards building trust between landlords and the government, with landlords reporting a feeling of unfairness amid what they explained felt like a hostile environment of changing regulation and increasing costs.

4.4 LICENSING SCHEMES

When asked whether the existence of a PRS database may render current licensing schemes obsolete over time, tenants' representatives, and local and combined

authorities were strongly opposed to the idea that the database could be introduced as a replacement for existing licensing schemes. A combined authority representative shared:

“They [database and licensing schemes] complement each other and do not replace each other. The database is information gathering and sharing; licensing schemes are investigating and enforcing.”

As one representative of a charity supporting tenants explained:

“There is a continued and strengthened need for selective licensing”, which has been a key revenue source for enforcement in many areas.

An organiser for a tenants’ union added:

- “Landlords are concerned about paying the fees for licensing and database, but that’s the cost of running a business.”

Findings showed the importance of reiterating the separate but foundational nature of both these policy levers in improving the PRS.

4.5 COMPLIANCE CONCERNS

Consistent across all participant groups was the concern that landlords owning properties in the worst conditions would not volunteer for the database and that striking a balance between deterrence-focused approaches and light-touch approaches is very resource-intensive and costly. These concerns were intensified by MHCLG’s proposed approach of a minimalist intervention in the database’s initial lifespan, leaving all interested parties concerned about a lack of fairness and the potential consequences for tenants living in uninhabitable properties.

Local authorities offered practical suggestions for how to bring landlords on board, for example, through a “verified landlord” badge, with lighter re-registration burdens for good performers or by introducing a star rating system later, once critical mass is achieved, to avoid deterring early sign-ups. Another highlighted the value of early-bird schemes and streamlining document uploads across systems. Overall, the clear message was that landlords are more likely to engage with the database if they see a reputational or practical upside. Transparency must come with recognition and simplicity. For this reason, all local authorities interviewed supported efforts to reduce duplication (eg uploading certificates once for multiple uses) and were open to incentive-based compliance models.

While there was agreement with all but one landlord that the database should be mandatory, there was significant scepticism among all landlords that the government would be able to fully communicate the new legislation fully and effectively. This view

was derived from landlords sharing that they already felt confused by the Renters' Rights Bill and other legislation introduced in recent years. As such, clear, pre-planned communication is vital to the success of the database. Tenants also shared this view, with one explaining:

- “Anything that aids clarity in the PRS – be it the landlord or renter – has to be a good thing. You need to set down the foundations if you want to roll schemes out across the country, otherwise it’s just constant confusion.”

Local authority representatives also supported using cross-referenced datasets, machine learning, and even business rate analysis to detect unlicensed activity. Local authority officers viewed the database as one more tool in this arsenal-but stressed that without backend integration, a standalone database “doesn’t change much”.

4.6 MANDATORY DATA CAPTURE

This research found agreement that, as it stands, the database does not represent an onerous ask of landlords, considering much of the documentation is currently required anyway (eg energy performance certificates (EPCs), gas and electrical safety certificates, deposit documents, tenancy agreements). Furthermore, a representative of Nationwide Lettings stated that if the database were credible, then mandatory registration being a term of mortgage loans would be explored to ensure that the opportunity to drive up standards across the sector is not lost.

Legal ambiguities around the database’s enforcement mechanisms were a recurring theme. Local authorities queried how long landlords would be given to update their records after changes, and when failure to do so would become an enforceable breach. It is recommended from this research that records are updated either annually or between tenancies, whichever comes first. Local authorities welcomed the opportunity to use the database as a triage tool, allowing them to route complaints appropriately, flag repeat offenders, and build longitudinal intelligence on landlords’ behaviour. Combined authorities and those representing tenants also supported this, and landlords were in favour of the database being used to identify and sanction poor-quality landlords.

Those advocating for the rights of tenants and increased capacity in local authorities were in favour of a greater amount of data being captured than landlords and the NRLA, for example, public access to advertised and actual rent data, as well as landlord contact details. The hesitation of landlord representatives is in part due to concerns around landlords’ privacy, discussed in Section 3.5, but also due to the view of landlords that they are required to engage in too much paperwork as a result of changing legislation, and their businesses are already subject to too much scrutiny. Despite this view being

shared by most in the focus group, when landlords were asked to provide tangible examples of policies which have negatively impacted them, none could articulate a specific policy.

Tenants and organisations representing tenants were also clear that if mandatory entries on basic accessibility information were fulfilled, this would drastically improve many experiences in the PRS. Deaf and disabled people's organisations have spent years highlighting how inaccessible the housing system is, with only 3% of homes in London classed as 'visitable' – which is the lowest form of accessibility.³⁷ For example, one tenant explained:

“Think about it, for us disabled people arriving at places to view that we're trying to rent, paying to travel across the city, only to find that we can't get through the front door as it's not wide enough or there's no ramp.”

Following the analysis of findings, this research recommends the following information to be mandatorily captured in the database at a minimum:

Property-level compliance documents:

- Gas safety certificate (annual)
- Electrical safety certificate (typically 5-yearly)
- Energy performance certificate (EPC), with current rating
- Proof of working smoke and carbon monoxide alarms (if not already covered by other certifications)
- Tenancy agreements
- Rent data (advertised and agreed)

Licensing status and history:

- Whether the property requires a licence (selective/additional house in multiple occupation (HMO)/mandatory HMO)
- Whether a valid licence is in place
- Expiry date of current licence and date of last inspection

Enforcement and regulatory history:

- Any previous enforcement notices (served by Environmental Health or other PRS teams)
- Record of civil penalties or prosecution outcomes
- Tribunal decisions or RRO awards involving the landlord/property
- Notes on unresolved complaints or landlord watchlists (only visible internally to local authority staff for GDPR reasons)

Ownership and control details:

- Name and contact details of the property owner
- Name of the letting/managing agent (if different)
- Who receives rent payments (for tracing beneficial ownership)
- Link to registered company or director details, where applicable

Letting history and tenancy data (where proportionate and privacy-compliant):

- Start and end dates of the current and previous tenancies
- Monthly rent charged
- Tenancy type (eg assured shorthold tenancy (AST), regulated tenancy)
- Deposit scheme registration reference

4.7 ACCESS TO THE DATABASE

The question of who should be able to access data on a private landlord database is one of balancing transparency, privacy, and public interest. It was the aspect of this research that attracted the most controversy. Ideally, maximised forms of access should be granted to a range of stakeholders, including tenants and the wider public, local authorities, law enforcement, and lenders, while ensuring landlords' privacy is protected against misuse. Furthermore, there were warnings from local and combined authorities that privacy regulations could stymie the public-facing elements of the database. Meanwhile, officers across the board flagged the need for clear national guidance to delineate what should go to the PRS Ombudsman versus the council. This is essential not just for efficiency, but to protect tenants from being bounced between agencies.

Considering the current state of play in the PRS, as outlined in this research and much of which has been developed before, tenants and local authorities should be the primary beneficiaries of access to landlord database information. Renting a home involves trust and financial commitment, and tenants have a right to know whether a landlord has a history of legal disputes, unsafe housing conditions, or code violations. A functional public-facing version of the database would allow tenants to verify that a landlord is registered, legally compliant, and has no major infractions, without revealing sensitive personal data such as a landlord's home address.

All interviewees agreed that local authorities must have full access to the database. They are responsible for enforcing housing standards and licensing regulations. By accessing the database, they can identify unregistered or non-compliant landlords, monitor patterns of repeat violations, and allocate resources to high-risk areas. This access allows for proactive enforcement rather than relying on tenant complaints, which can be

inconsistent or underreported. There was also a broad appetite for local authorities to be able to record internal notes on landlord behaviour, whether about enforcement history or collaborative working. Officers described this not just as helpful for enforcement per se, but as essential for housing teams when making decisions about, for example, placing vulnerable tenants.

Lenders, letting agents, tenant deposit schemes, the PRS Ombudsman, and other key stakeholders should also have access to information on the PRS which they require to carry out their role in the sector. Furthermore, restricted public access to the database should be available to support in assessing housing trends, affordability, and the impact of policy interventions. The data could inform evidence-based policymaking, urban planning, and public debates around rental housing without compromising individual privacy.

However, broad public access to detailed landlord information must be approached with caution. Publishing full names, contact details, or financial information can have consequences for individuals. A tiered access system—where different levels of detail are available based on the requester's role and justification—would strike a fair balance between transparency and privacy.

Nonetheless, multiple key stakeholders raised the point during interviews that it is not difficult to find out who owns a property (especially as many buy-to-let landlords now operate as private limited companies and therefore their information is available on websites like Companies House). Related to this, interviewees also raised the point that if landlords are keeping well-maintained properties, they should not have concerns about their information being available, and that transparency could support a more efficient buying and selling process. As one tenant asked:

“Why do landlords who aren't a company have better privacy than those who are?”

A practical solution offered by a combined authority representative was to have a named person who is responsible for the property to improve accountability. They also reiterated that the proposed data to be collected is information that is already a legal obligation to pass to tenants when renting out a property – the only difference being that it will be stored online on a central database. As such, while privacy concerns must be considered and legal obligations surrounding the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) adhered to, this research found that these concerns are not reason enough to diminish information available in the database.

4.8 AN EDUCATIONAL TOOL FOR TENANTS AND LANDLORDS

All participants welcomed the prospect of the database being a tool for tenants and landlords to improve knowledge of rights and responsibilities. While much information already exists in the public domain, including the *How to Rent* guide and the TDS Charitable Foundation's *My Housing Issue Gateway*, tenants and organisations supporting them reported struggling to know how to access this information on their rights. For example, six out of the seven participating tenants reported that they had “not had a satisfactory repair”, yet did not know what their legal rights were to take further action. These findings are commensurate with the case studies in Section 6. Key to driving up standards, particularly at a time when local authority capacity is low, empowers tenants and landlords to take ownership of their rights – the database offers the opportunity to boost this access to education significantly.

Having resources collated in one place will streamline the process for tenants and hopefully ensure that tenants can access appropriate support immediately, as opposed to being signposted to the wrong services (as is common now). For example, one local authority stressed that without clear signposting, councils would be inundated with complaints better suited for the Ombudsman. The concern is not hypothetical: all three authorities anticipate a spike in misdirected queries if database awareness increases without public clarity on roles and responsibilities, and clear communication with tenants and landlords far in advance.

5. OPPORTUNITIES TO EXPAND ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY THROUGH THE PRS DATABASE

From our engagement with the sector, we understand that in the face of constrained resources, local authorities tend to adopt one of two broad approaches to enforcement:³⁸

- **Informal approach:** In this model, officers investigate each complaint they receive but tend to follow up with informal advice or warnings, rarely progressing to formal action and as a last resort, and with limited capacity for the pursuit of more resource-intensive formal action.
- **Formal approach:** In contrast, some authorities adopt a more selective and structured approach. It is harder for tenants or others to lodge a complaint, but once a case is opened, the authority is more likely to commit to pursuing formal enforcement action, including statutory notices and potential prosecutions.

Regardless of whether the formal or informal approach is used, enforcement is usually reactive and case-by-case. The limited capacity for proactive inspections or more systematic approaches to enforcement is compounded by tenants' lack of awareness of their rights or ability to challenge poor practice.

Ideally, councils would be resourced to provide both informal and formal enforcement functions, as well as offering tenants a responsive service and proactively investigating standards..

5.1 THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF LOCAL CAPACITY

The five councils with the highest enforcement burdens highlighted the severe capacity constraints facing some local authorities. In each case, a single full-time equivalent (FTE) officer is responsible for between **10,000 and 25,000** private rented properties, making meaningful enforcement unfeasible. These extreme ratios suggest a system where enforcement is largely symbolic, with officers unable to proactively inspect properties, follow up on complaints, or pursue formal action against rogue landlords. None of these councils had additional or selective licensing schemes at the time of data collection, and each is significantly or largely rural.

Table 2: The five most stretched areas for PRS enforcement

Local authority	PRS properties	Enforcement officers (FTE)	Properties per officer
Huntingdonshire	12,416	0.5	24,831
Brentwood	4,487	0.2	22,434
Calderdale	18,101	1.5	12,067
Harborough	5,696	0.5	11,391
Richmondshire	5,435	0.5	10,870

Source: NEF analysis of enforcement data returns and the English Housing Survey – full details in methodology note.

Among the most well-resourced enforcement teams, each officer is responsible for fewer than 650 properties. These councils are also more likely to operate selective and additional licensing schemes, illustrating the impact that landlord-funded enforcement models can have on enforcement capacity.

Table 3: The five best-resourced areas for PRS enforcement

Local authority	PRS properties	Enforcement officers (FTE)	Properties per officer
Nottingham	35,695	133.5	267
Waltham Forest	28,180	60.0	470
Oxford	16,852	32.1	525
Burnley	8,646	15.0	576
North East Derbyshire	4,448	7.0	635

Source: NEF analysis of enforcement data returns and the English Housing Survey – full details in methodology note.

National and local studies repeatedly show that when councils can afford larger, dedicated PRS enforcement teams, tenant outcomes improve. A Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) survey of 140 English authorities found that team capacity was one of the three strongest predictors of proactive enforcement; officers in the smallest teams described “fire-fighting”, while councils with larger teams carried out many more inspections and formal actions, reporting visible gains in property conditions.³⁹ Where licensing has been used most widely, the effects are even starker. Newham’s borough-wide licensing scheme delivered 70% of all Housing Act prosecutions in London in a single year, dwarfing activity in boroughs with smaller teams, and saw over four in five residents agreeing that licensing has been effective in improving the condition and management of PRS properties.⁴⁰

Independent evaluations also link licence-funded staffing to hazard removal. Barnet’s first additional house in multiple occupation (HMO) scheme removed category-1 hazards from 680 letting units, an achievement attributed by officers to the extra inspectors paid for by fees.⁴¹ The strongest quasi-causal evidence comes from a *BMJ Open* natural-experiment study of 921 London neighbourhoods: five years after selective-licensing areas were designated, antisocial-behaviour calls had fallen by 15% and a composite mental-health burden index by 7.5%, relative to matched controls—consistent with safer, better-maintained homes.⁴² Taken together, these findings suggest a robust capacity-enforcement-standards pathway, but most data remain observational, concentrated in urban settings and rarely cost-effectiveness tested.

The extreme variation in reported enforcement capacity – a nearly **100-fold difference** – reveals a postcode lottery in the protection available to private renters.

5.2 LICENSING SCHEMES MAKE A MARK

A key variable in understanding enforcement capacity is the presence of selective and additional licensing schemes. These schemes, which allow councils to require landlords to register and comply with additional conditions, generate both revenue and intelligence that can be used to strengthen enforcement.

Table 4: Licensing schemes support greater enforcement capacity

Licensing status	Number of councils	Average properties per officer
No licensing schemes	233	3,746
Additional licensing only	19	2,385
Selective licensing only	27	1,631
Both selective and additional	23	1,420

Source: NEF analysis of enforcement data returns and the English Housing Survey – full details in methodology note.

Councils with both selective and additional licensing have, on average, less than half the enforcement burden compared to those with no licensing schemes. The contrast is even more striking when comparing the best-resourced licensing authorities to those with no schemes and minimal staffing – a divergence that reinforces existing inequalities within the PRS.

Some local authorities can operate effectively using funding from their existing licensing schemes. Licensing is not just a source of funding, however. Licensing schemes offer powers that better enable effective enforcement. These include clearer routes for lawful entry into properties, which is crucial for inspecting suspected breaches, as well as

increased conditionality – licenses specify conditions, and the failure to meet these can trigger formal enforcement mechanisms.

Therefore, while additional funding for enforcement could reduce reliance on licensing income and potentially allow for more cost-effective schemes, it should not be viewed as a replacement for licensing. Instead, the database could complement and enhance licensing schemes, particularly by supporting reactive enforcement and data collection functions.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR RENTERS AND REFORM

The data illustrates a fragmented and unequal system in which local enforcement capacity is shaped less by tenant need and more by historic funding decisions and institutional arrangements. Many councils are expected to manage growing and increasingly complex rental markets without the resources to ensure minimum standards are upheld.

This enforcement inequality has material consequences. In under-resourced areas, renters face a greater risk of substandard conditions, illegal eviction, and health hazards with limited routes to redress.⁴³ Meanwhile, well-resourced councils with comprehensive licensing frameworks are better equipped to uphold housing law, tackle rogue landlords, and ensure accountability.⁴⁴

These findings reinforce the need for systemic reform. At present, the ability of a tenant to live in a safe and decent home is being shaped not just by law, but by geography. Councils with limited staffing and no licensing infrastructure cannot be expected to deliver effective regulation, leaving large numbers of renters exposed. Without action, the postcode lottery in PRS enforcement will continue, exacerbating housing inequalities and undermining trust in the regulatory system among both tenants and landlords. The landlord database allows for a correction to this.

6. POSSIBILITIES FOR CHANGE FROM THE PRS DATABASE

6.1 LANDLORD DATABASE FEES

If designed appropriately, the additional revenues from the PRS database could help support a more consistent and effective system of enforcement. This section outlines some of the context, drawing on examples from Scotland and Wales, and sets out how fee revenues could be used to strengthen regulation in England.

In Scotland, landlords must pay registration fees every three years, which include both a per-landlord fee and a per-property fee. These fees are paid directly to each local authority where the landlord owns property. The per-landlord fee is £82 if the landlord owns property in only one local authority area. If the landlord owns properties in two or more local authority areas, the fee is £41 per local authority. These fees are doubled if the application is submitted late. In addition to the per-landlord fee, there is a per-property fee of £19 for each property owned. Landlords of HMOs and landlords who are registered charities are exempt from all registration fees.

In Wales, fees are paid centrally every five years. Fees are only charged per-landlord, and discounts are offered for renewals vs new registrations, as well as for online registrations. New registrations cost £102 as standard and £60 online. Renewals are £87 for standard registrations and £48 online.

The government's impact assessment states that "Specific details of the policy will be set out in secondary legislation, but for this Impact Assessment, we have assumed the registration will be valid for a three-year period at which point the landlord will be required to repay the fee costs."⁴⁵ Similarly, they assume a per-property registration fee of £28.58 but "will consider various fee structures to ensure fees are fair and proportionate while ensuring the database is self-funding". They do not mention per-landlord database registration fees.

The government's impact assessment for the Renters' Rights Bill states that a government grant will be used to fund the initial set-up of the PRS database.⁴⁶ However, it does not provide a specific cost estimate for the amount of this central government grant, ongoing administrative or technical costs to the government after handover, and the expected cost of support, staffing, system maintenance, or upgrades.

Table 5: Contextual information on database fees

	Scotland	Wales	Impact assessment placeholder (England)
Frequency of payment	Every three years	Every five years	Every three years
Per-landlord fee	£82 - if owns property in one local authority area £41 per local authority - if the landlord owns properties in two or more local authority areas	£102 - standard, new £60 - online, new £87 - standard, renewal £48 - online, renewal	None
Per-property fee	£19	None	£28.58

These schemes charge multiyear licensing fees, tied to the duration of a landlord's licence. While administratively convenient in some respects, this approach poses major challenges:

- Local authority budgets are typically set annually, meaning that receiving a large upfront payment creates pressure to spend within the same financial year, even when this is neither operationally effective nor aligned with enforcement timelines.
- Finance teams often expect consistent annual income streams, making multiyear funding difficult to manage or forecast. As local authorities must typically comply with legal requirements not to generate surplus revenue beyond the cost of scheme administration and enforcement, accurate forecasting becomes essential.
- Multiyear licensing models do not accommodate the staggered nature of landlord sign-up, limiting flexibility and undermining the sustainability of enforcement teams.

An annual fee model would provide more predictable and manageable funding, better aligning with local authority financial planning. Similarly, annual registration mirrors the annual basis of other administrative tasks undertaken by landlords, such as tax returns. Our modelling uses annualised fees for this reason, so for context, we present the fees discussed in annualised terms.

Table 6: Annualised landlord registration fees

	Scotland	Wales	Impact assessment placeholder (England)
Per-landlord fee	£27.33 - if owns property in one local authority area £13.67 per local authority - if the landlord owns properties in two or more local authority areas	£20.40 - standard, new £12 - online, new £17.40 - standard, renewal £9.60 - online, renewal	None
Per-property fee	£6.3	None	£9.53

6.2 POTENTIAL IMPACT ON ENFORCEMENT CAPACITY

The introduction of the PRS database, if paired with an annual fee model, could substantially increase the financial and operational capacity of local authorities to enforce standards in the PRS.

It could enable more consistent enforcement staffing across local authorities; enhanced ability to follow up on tenant complaints in a timely and proportionate manner; greater capacity for proactive inspections, targeting areas or landlords of concern; and improved data to support strategic planning and intervention.

The PRS database should be seen as a mechanism to augment, not replace, existing licensing powers. With the right design and funding structure, it has the potential to deliver significant improvements in property standards and tenant protections across the PRS.

Tables 7 and 8 model the potential impact of PRS database fees on enforcement capacity in the PRS. These scenarios estimate how different combinations of annual fees – charged either per property, per landlord, or both – could be used to expand staffing for local enforcement. The scenarios vary both in fee structure and in assumed compliance rates. Here, compliance refers specifically to landlords fulfilling the legal requirement to register on the PRS database and pay the associated fees. Since the database is a new intervention, compliance is not assumed to be universal in the short term, and a 65% compliance rate is used in several scenarios, reflecting initial estimates from MHCLG.

Table 7 compares the status quo with two illustrative fee models. The first is based on the government's placeholder fee in the policy impact assessment, which includes a

£9.53 annualised per-property fee but no per-landlord charge. The second is labelled the ‘Scottish’ scenario and is designed to mimic the structure and magnitude of Scotland’s current fees, as set out in Table 5, but uprated for inflation and expressed in annual terms. This Scottish scenario includes a £27.88 annual per-landlord fee² and a lower per-property fee of £6.43. Both models are tested under full and partial compliance scenarios. Both scenarios assume that fees are distributed to local authorities in a way that is proportionate to the number of PRS properties in the local authority. Moreover, all of the scenarios assume that 100% of the fee revenue is used to support enforcement, with funding for the ongoing running costs of the database not accounted for. Higher fees would increase the impact on landlords, which we explore in more detail in the next section.

At present, local authorities are expected to enforce standards with an average of one officer per 3,319 PRS properties – a level of coverage that leaves many areas with severely constrained enforcement capacity. In the worst 20% of council areas, there is an average of 6,873 properties per officer. Under the **impact assessment scenario**, this ratio will fall to 1,954 properties per officer if all landlords register, representing a 55% improvement in staffing capacity on average. With 65% landlord compliance, the improvement is still meaningful, reducing the ratio to 2,254 (a 35% increase in enforcement capacity).

The Scottish scenario is more transformative. With full compliance, it delivers a 114% increase in staffing, bringing the ratio to just 1,405 properties per officer. Even with 65% compliance, the improvement remains substantial at 74%.

Disaggregated analysis shows that these gains are especially pronounced in councils currently facing the greatest enforcement challenges. In the most stretched local authorities, the Scottish scenario with full compliance would more than triple enforcement capacity. Councils without any licensing schemes, which often lack a broader enforcement infrastructure, stand to benefit most; enforcement ratios could fall from 3,774 to 1,514 under this scenario, a 130% improvement.

Table 8 approaches the question from a different angle. Rather than starting with specific fees, it models the funding and staffing levels required to ensure maximum property-to-officer ratios of 1,000, 750, or 500 – benchmarks chosen to reflect increasingly ambitious standards for equitable enforcement. Achieving a national average of 1,000 PRS properties per enforcement officer would require a 233% increase

² This would be lower than the rate paid by Scottish landlords with properties in three or more local authority areas.

in staffing. Achieving 750:1 and 500:1 ratios would require 343% and 563% increases, respectively. In the most under-resourced councils, these improvements are even more substantial: reaching a 500:1 ratio in the top quintile of stretched councils would require an almost 13-fold increase in enforcement capacity.

Table 8 then calculates the fees required to achieve these staffing levels, under both full and partial landlord compliance. For example, a 1,000:1 property-to-officer ratio could be reached under 100% compliance with either a £29.95 annual per-property fee or a hybrid model of £27.88 per landlord³ and £16.18 per property. At 65% compliance, the same outcome would require either a £46.08 per-property fee or a hybrid of £27.88 per landlord and £32.31 per property. Even the most ambitious target – 500 properties per officer – could be funded through fees under £90 annually.

Table 7: Potential impacts on PRS enforcement of scenarios

Current scenario			Impact assessment placeholder		Scottish fees scenario	
			Annual landlord fee*: 0 Annual per property fee: £9.53		Annual landlord fee*: £27.88 Annual per property fee: £6.43	
			100% landlord compliance	65% landlord compliance	100% landlord compliance	65% landlord compliance
Property-to-FTE ratio for all local authorities		3,319	1,954 (+55% FTE)	2,254 (+35% FTE)	1,405 (+114% FTE)	1,729 (+74% FTE)
Property-to-FTE ratio by local authority quintile	Q1	1,161	961 (+19% FTE)	1,022 (+12% FTE)	813 (+40% FTE)	907 (+26% FTE)
	Q2	2,054	1,529 (+34% FTE)	1,679 (+22% FTE)	1,199 (+70% FTE)	1,403 (+46% FTE)
	Q3	2,791	1,904 (+46% FTE)	2,142 (+30% FTE)	1,418 (+96% FTE)	1,713 (+62% FTE)
	Q4	3,760	2,311 (+62% FTE)	2,671 (+40% FTE)	1,632 (+129% FTE)	2,035 (+84% FTE)
	Q5	6,873	3,081 (+113% FTE)	3,780 (+74% FTE)	1,973 (+237% FTE)	2,602 (+154% FTE)
Property-to-FTE ratio by local authority licensing	Additional and selective	1,431	1,105 (+23%)	1,197 (+15% FTE)	899 (+49%)	1,027 (+32% FTE)
	Selective only	1,643	1,240 (+27%)	1,353 (+17% FTE)	992 (+56%)	1,145 (+36% FTE)

³ The per landlord fee mirrors that used in the Scottish scenario.

Additional only	2,389	1,669 (+39%)	1,862 (+25% FTE)	1,270 (+82%)	1,512 (+53% FTE)
Neither:	3,774	2,143 (+62%)	2,494 (+40% FTE)	1,514 (+130%)	1,883 (+84% FTE)

Table 8: Potential impacts on PRS enforcement of scenarios

		Current scenario	Scenario that ensures a maximum property-to-officer ratio of:		
			1000	750	500
Property-to-FTE ratio for all local authorities		3,319	983 (+233% FTE)	744 (+343% FTE)	499 (+563% FTE)
Property-to-FTE ratio by local authority quintile	Q1	1,161	920 (+24% FTE)	724 (+58% FTE)	495 (+133% FTE)
	Q2	2,054	1,000 (+105% FTE)	750 (+173% FTE)	500 (+310% FTE)
	Q3	2,791	1,000 (+179% FTE)	750 (+272% FTE)	500 (+458% FTE)
	Q4	3,760	1,000 (+276% FTE)	750 (+401% FTE)	500 (+652% FTE)
	Q5	6,873	1,000 (+587% FTE)	750 (+816% FTE)	500 (+1274% FTE)
Property-to-FTE ratio by local authority licensing	Additional and selective	1,431	886 (+54% FTE)	699 (+97% FTE)	488 (+188% FTE)
	Selective only	1,643	951 (+69% FTE)	740 (+120% FTE)	500 (+228% FTE)
	Additional only	2,389	995 (+139% FTE)	750 (+218% FTE)	500 (+377% FTE)
	Neither	3,774	996 (+277% FTE)	749 (+403% FTE)	500 (+654% FTE)
	Assuming 100% compliance, this is achievable with fees of:				
	Annual landlord fee		£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	Annual per-property fee		£29.95	£47.72	£84.55
			OR	OR	OR
	Annual landlord fee		£27.88	£27.88	£27.88
	Annual per-property fee		£16.18	£33.95	£70.78
	Assuming 65% compliance, this is achievable with fees of:				
	Annual landlord fee		£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
	Annual per-property fee		£46.08	£73.42	£130.07
			OR	OR	OR

	Annual landlord fee	£27.88	£27.88	£27.88
	Annual per-property fee	£32.31	£59.65	£116.30

6.3 IMPACT ON LANDLORDS

To assess whether these fees are economically sustainable for landlords, our analysis also models their impact on rental yields in each region. This shows that even the most expansive enforcement scenarios have only a marginal effect on gross yield. For example, under the 500:1 scenario with 65% compliance – the highest-cost option tested – average gross yield in the North East would decline by just 0.077 percentage points (to 5.116%). In London, the drop is even smaller, at just 0.024 percentage points (to 4.858%).

These changes are not only minimal in percentage terms but also fall well within typical fluctuations in rental yield due to market conditions. It is important to note that this is a rough estimate of the impact on landlords, as the fees would need to be higher than this to cover the running costs of the database. Still, even if the fees presented were doubled, the impact on yield would remain marginal. In all but one scenario, the impact is less than a tenth of a per cent, and in the less ambitious scenarios, it is much lower still. This estimate assumes no pass-through of costs to tenants.

This minimal impact underscores a crucial finding: dramatic improvements in enforcement capacity can be delivered through modest, proportionate fees that do not materially affect landlord profitability. The marginal reduction in yield is unlikely to distort landlord behaviour or investment decisions, particularly given that the fees would fund a more functional and fair rental system that benefits compliant landlords as well as tenants.

Our modelling has assumed a flat fee nationally; however, there is good reason for fees to be regionally varied, with lower fees in lower-rent regions. This could ensure that the policy is not regionally regressive by burdening landlords/tenants with higher income-adjusted costs. We expect that regionally varying fees will have minimal impact on the enforcement capacity uplift, as lower rent regions typically have lower employment costs for enforcement teams. This should be explored further.

Taken together, the scenarios modelled show that a well-designed fee structure, anchored in annual payments and paired with strong compliance efforts, could dramatically reduce disparities in enforcement capacity. The PRS database offers a unique opportunity to systematise and stabilise enforcement funding – an essential step towards ending the postcode lottery in PRS regulation.

Table 9: Potential impacts on PRS enforcement of scenarios – 100% compliance

				Yield reduction - assuming landlords take costs (percentage points)				
Region	Average rent (pcm)	Average house price	Gross yield	Impact assessment	Scottish (real terms)	1,000 properties /FTE	750 properties /FTE	500 properties /FTE
London	£2,246	£552,000	4.8820%	-0.0017	-0.0062	-0.0058	-0.0092	-0.0162
North East	£728	£168,200	5.1930%	-0.0057	-0.0204	-0.0189	-0.0302	-0.0532
North West	£899	£217,000	4.9700%	-0.0044	-0.0158	-0.0146	-0.0234	-0.0412
Yorkshire and The Humber	£816	£211,200	4.6374%	-0.0045	-0.0162	-0.015	-0.0240	-0.0424
South East	£1,373	£386,300	4.2649%	-0.0025	-0.0089	-0.0082	-0.0131	-0.0232
South West	£1,171	£310,800	4.5207%	-0.0031	-0.0110	-0.0102	-0.0163	-0.0288
West Midlands Region	£923	£250,000	4.4301%	-0.0038	-0.0137	-0.0127	-0.0203	-0.0358
East Midlands	£877	£220,000	4.7836%	-0.0043	-0.0156	-0.0144	-0.0231	-0.0407

Table 10: Potential impacts on PRS enforcement of scenarios – 65% compliance

				Yield reduction - assuming landlords take costs, (percentage points)				
Region	Average rent (pcm)	Average house price	Gross yield	Impact assessment	Scottish (real terms)	1000 properties /FTE	750 properties /FTE	500 properties /FTE
London	£2,246	£552,000	4.8820%	-0.0017	-0.0062	-0.0083	-0.0133	-0.0236
North East	£728	£168,200	5.1930%	-0.0057	-0.0204	-0.0274	-0.0436	-0.0773
North West	£899	£217,000	4.9700%	-0.0044	-0.0158	-0.0212	-0.0338	-0.0599
Yorkshire and The Humber	£816	£211,200	4.6374%	-0.0045	-0.0162	-0.0218	-0.0348	-0.0616
South East	£1,373	£386,300	4.2649%	-0.0025	-0.0089	-0.0119	-0.019	-0.0337
South West	£1,171	£310,800	4.5207%	-0.0031	-0.0110	-0.0140	-0.0236	-0.0418
West Midlands Region	£923	£250,000	4.4301%	-0.0038	-0.0137	-0.0184	-0.0294	-0.052
East Midlands	£877	£220,000	4.7836%	-0.0043	-0.0156	-0.0209	-0.0334	-0.0591

CONCLUSION

The findings provide strong evidence that a well-designed, transparent, and accessible PRS database could play a pivotal role in driving up standards in the PRS. If fully implemented with sufficient ambition and resourcing, the database could significantly shift the burden of responsibility for enforcement away from tenants and over-stretched local authorities, and onto landlords and agents, where it rightly belongs.

Consensus exists among stakeholders (landlords, tenants, local authorities, and sector experts) who overwhelmingly support greater transparency, more robust regulation, and stronger enforcement in the PRS. Crucially, all parties agree that the database must go beyond a static information repository and instead serve as an active tool for raising standards, identifying bad practice, and improving tenant outcomes. This includes public access to key data, integration with existing licensing systems, and using registration fees to meaningfully boost local enforcement capacity.

The modelling demonstrates that even modest annual fees - particularly if compliance exceeds 65% - could more than double the enforcement workforce, dramatically reducing the property-to-officer ratio and tackling the postcode lottery that currently exists. The costs to landlords are minimal, but the benefits to tenants, local authorities, and the wider housing system are significant.

To realise this potential, political will, legislative clarity, and sustained investment are essential. If implemented ambitiously and with input from all stakeholders, the PRS database could mark a generational step forward in housing regulation. It presents a rare opportunity to embed transparency and accountability at the heart of the PRS and must not be allowed to fall short of its promise. A stronger, fairer, and safer rental system is both possible and urgently needed.

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