

# HOW THE RENTERS' RIGHTS ACT WAS WON

## A CASE STUDY

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### 1. Why this campaign succeeded

This case study explores how a broad coalition of organisations, campaigners and renters helped secure the Renters' Rights Act (2025). It draws on findings from an evaluation commissioned by Shelter on the factors that contributed to success and the strategies that proved most effective over time.

While the campaign's success was the result of collective action across many organisations, reflecting the strength and diversity of the Renters Reform Coalition, much of the source material focuses on Shelter's contribution. This case study draws on that evidence while also reflecting the wider dynamics and shared efforts behind the campaign.

The table below summarises the main drivers of change. Together, they show how sustained effort across multiple fronts, combined with strong coordination, credible solutions and strategic judgement, created the conditions for reform.

Factor	What made the difference
Long-term groundwork	Years of research, campaigning and organising built a strong foundation before reform became politically possible.
Clear narrative change	Renting was gradually reframed as a systemic issue, making the need for reform widely understood and harder to ignore.
Strong coalition working	A broad, disciplined alliance aligned on shared goals, increasing credibility and influence.
Credible policy solutions	Campaigners developed workable proposals, based on good quality research and real-world experiences, that could be adopted by politicians and withstand parliamentary scrutiny.
Political engagement	Sustained work with MPs, peers and civil servants helped turn pressure into legislation.
Public support and renter mobilisation	Visible backing from renters and the public reinforced the case for change.
Strategic timing and judgement	Campaigners were ready to act when political opportunities emerged and made key decisions at critical moments, such as withdrawing support from a weakened earlier version of the Bill.
Managing opposition	Direct engagement with critics helped reduce resistance and protect core reforms.

## 2. What changed and why it matters

### 2.1. The scale of the ‘renting crisis’

Since 1988, legislation on the Private Rented Sector has broadly favoured landlords. In particular, Section 21 ‘no-fault’ evictions permitted them to end tenancies without reason (following fixed terms), creating situations in which tenants faced the constant risk of losing their homes, and making it hard to settle, plan or feel part of a community. Because of this, ‘no-fault’ evictions were consistently recorded in government statistics as one of the largest single causes of homelessness in England<sup>1</sup>. Other challenges faced by renters included:

- Large rent hikes within existing tenancies - which often effectively led to evictions.
- Lack of clarity and transparency about terms (rent, length, notice rules, repairs responsibilities, how rent could be increased).
- Poor property conditions and slow responses to hazards.
- Weak routes to redress and enforcement and ineffective monitoring of landlords.
- Discrimination against families and benefit claimants.
- Barriers to keeping pets.

Meanwhile, the number of people living in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in England has broadly doubled since the year 2000 and is now estimated at 4.7 million households (about a fifth of all households<sup>2</sup>). As such, for a growing number of households, private renting is not a temporary stage but a long-term reality. Yet the system had not adapted: while there have been minor changes since 1988, such as deposit protection, a more fundamental set of reforms was called for.

As the Renters’ Reform Coalition put it, private renting had become the least secure, most expensive and lowest quality housing option. A system widely experienced by renters as insecure, unaffordable and unfair, and in urgent need of reform.

### 2.2. What was achieved through the Renter’s Rights Act

The Renters’ Rights Act (2025) represents the most significant reform of private renting in a generation. It received Royal Assent on 27 October 2025 and came into force on 1 May 2026. Its core aim is to improve security and fairness for renters and rebalance the relationship between tenants and landlords. Specifically, the act:

- **Ends Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions entirely.** Landlords must now provide a valid reason to evict tenants. Tenants have also gained stronger protection against retaliatory or arbitrary eviction.
- **Fixed-term shorthold tenancies were abolished,** giving renters greater stability and flexibility to leave unsuitable properties.

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<sup>1</sup> See [Households threatened with homelessness over 80,000 times due to Section 21 evictions since Government promised to scrap them | Homeless Link](#)

<sup>2</sup> See [Chapter 1: Profile of households and dwellings - GOV.UK](#)

- **New rent rules**, with landlords only able to increase rents once per year and required to stick to advertised rents to prevent bidding wars.
- **Addresses discrimination** and other unfair barriers to accessing a home. There is now a ban on discrimination against renters with children or those receiving benefits.
- Introduces new **landlord accountability & enforcement** tools, expected in late 2026. Including a database that tenants can use to search their landlord's track record, check compliance and get key information about rental properties.
- **Raises standards in rented homes.** Future secondary legislation will apply a 'decent homes standard' to the private rented sector and 'Awaab's law' will require timely action on hazards such as damp and mould.

### 2.3. Why this campaign is instructive for others

The campaign shows how sustained, strategic campaigning can deliver major legislative change over time.

Campaigners reshaped how renting was understood—combining lived experience with research, organising and media work to show that the private rented sector was structurally unfair. This made the issue more visible and harder to ignore.

At the same time, the campaign worked across multiple fronts. Public pressure, coalition coordination, political engagement and policy development progressed in parallel and reinforced each other at key moments.

Progress depended not on a single organisation, but on coordinated action across renters, grassroots groups, charities, policy experts and political allies, each playing complementary roles over time.

This case study draws on research by the Sheila McKechnie Foundation, commissioned by Shelter. While we have mostly focused on Shelter's contribution, the findings also reflect the wider campaign.

Our research methods included a document review covering both published sources and Shelter's internal documents, workshops with Shelter staff, interviews / surveys with 15 external stakeholders, a survey of Shelter supporters. Because the research was fairly small-scale and we have aimed to be cautious in our conclusions and clear about limitations. This case study is a summary of a longer evaluation written for Shelter's internal use.

## 3. What happened: A short campaign journey

### 3.1. Who was involved

The campaign built on more than a decade of activity before a single, coordinated effort emerged. Over this time, a growing network of organisations, including Shelter, Generation Rent and others, helped define the problem, build public awareness and push for reform.

In 2018, an early coalition between [Generation Rent](#), [ACORN](#), the [New Economics Foundation](#) and the [London Renters Union](#) campaigned to end unfair evictions. While more limited than the later Renters Reform Coalition, it marked the first coordinated push to abolish Section 21 and helped shift the debate.

Across the campaign, organisations played complementary roles, including research, legal expertise, community organising, policy development, political influencing and media work.

The Renters Reform Coalition (RRC), formed in 2020 and hosted by Generation Rent, brought together 18 organisations spanning housing charities, tenant unions, advice services and think tanks. It provided a more formal structure for coordination, strengthening the campaign's credibility and influence. A full list of organisations is included in the below footnote<sup>3</sup>.

### **3.2. Campaign timeline**

The timeline below highlights key moments where campaign activity and political opportunity aligned.

#### **Early groundwork (2012 – 2017)**

- Shelter publishes reports on tenancy insecurity and poor practice
- Generation Rent founded (2014), calling for an end to Section 21
- ACORN founded (2014), building renter power locally
- Revenge eviction narrative & reports from Shelter highlight renter insecurity & power imbalance.

#### **Issue becomes politically unavoidable (2018 – 2019)**

- 2018: 'End Unfair Evictions' campaign launched
- 2019: Prime Minister Theresa May commits to abolishing Section 21

#### **From commitment to coordinated campaign (2020 – 2022)**

- 2020: Renters Reform Coalition (RRC) formed
- COVID-19 and the housing crisis increase focus on insecurity
- 2022: Government White Paper sets direction for reform

#### **Shaping legislation and building pressure (2023 – 2024)**

- 2023 (May): Renters Reform Bill introduced by Conservative Government
- 2023: Campaigners intensify political engagement and mobilisation
- 2024 (March): Coalition withdraws support from a weakened Bill
- 2024 (July): Labour wins General Election

#### **Final push & legislative success (2024 – 2025)**

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<sup>3</sup> Members of the Renters Reform Coalition: Acorn, Camden Federation of Private Tenants, Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, Citizens Advice, Crisis, Generation Rent, Greater Manchester Tenants Union, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Law Centres Network, Lloyds Bank Foundation, London Renters Union, Nationwide Foundation, New Economics Foundation, National Union of Students, Safer Renting, Shelter, Toynbee Hall, Z2K. A full list of partners can be found on the Renters Reform Coalition website.

- 2024 (Sept): Labour introduces an updated Renters Rights Bill for its first reading. It builds on earlier bill but strengthening key positions.
- 2024 (Sept) - 2025 (Oct): Passage through Parliament. Sustained influencing at each stage ensuring key asks, such as capping rent in advance, appeared in the final Act.
- 2025 (July – Oct): Campaigners protect key provisions maintaining pressure whilst Bill ‘ping-pongs’ between Commons & Lords.
- 27 Oct 2025 – The Renters Rights Act receives Royal Assent
- 1 May 2026 – The Act comes into force

## 4. What worked: key influencing approaches

The following sections draw on evaluation findings to explore what contributed most to the campaign’s success.

### 4.1. Understanding what drove change: evidence from the evaluation

To analyse our information, we have drawn on Contribution Analysis<sup>4</sup> and Process Tracing<sup>5</sup>, which are theory-based approaches suited to complex situations where outcomes cannot be attributed to a single organisation or factor. These approaches help us to assess whether the available evidence supports a credible contribution claim, while considering alternative explanations.

We developed 10 hypotheses about how campaigning influenced the Act and assessed how strong the evidence was for each one. These hypotheses focus primarily on Shelter’s contribution, reflecting the purpose of the evaluation. However, many of the dynamics being tested, such as coalition working, narrative change and political influencing, were shared across the wider campaign. The findings therefore offer insight into how the broader movement contributed to securing reform.

Given the complexity of the campaign, some hypotheses are easier to evidence than others. Rather than providing definitive proof, this approach identifies where contribution is most strongly supported and where conclusions are more tentative.

Table 1 explains the levels of evidence used, building on the Process Tracing approach, and Table 2 summarises each hypothesis alongside our level of confidence.

**Table 1**

Level	Definition	Question to consider
<b>Level 1: ‘Straw in the wind’</b>	Suggestive but weak evidence	‘Does this evidence only suggest we might have influenced something?’
<b>Level 2: ‘Hoop test’</b>	Evidence that must be true for the hypothesis to hold	‘What evidence would almost certainly be needed if our causal hypothesis were true?’

<sup>4</sup> [Contribution analysis | Better Evaluation](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Process-tracing.pdf](#)

<b>Level 3: ‘Smoking gun’</b>	Strong evidence that supports the hypothesis	‘Do we have evidence that strongly supports this hypothesis?’
<b>Level 4: ‘Doubly Decisive’</b>	Confirms one hypothesis and rules out alternatives	‘Does this evidence rule out alternative explanations?’

**Table 2**

<b>Ref</b>	<b>Hypothesis</b>	<b>Summary of our confidence in this hypothesis</b>
<b>H1</b>	Shelter helped raise awareness of renters’ rights and change the narrative over the long-term (2012–2024).	Level 2: ‘Hoop test’
<b>H2</b>	Shelter provided policy and legal expertise that directly shaped the content of the Act.	Level 4: ‘Doubly Decisive’
<b>H3</b>	Shelter working in coalition was a success factor.  A) The Renters Reform Coalition played a key role in securing the Renters Rights Act by amplifying the sector’s leadership capacity and influence.  B) Shelter was central to the Coalition: legitimising, providing resources and helped maintain unity at critical moments.	Level 3: ‘Smoking gun’
<b>H4</b>	Having clear, tangible, achievable goals was a factor in the campaign’s success.	Level 1: ‘Straw in the wind’
<b>H5</b>	Shelter directly influenced the wider political landscape to support reform.	Level 2: ‘Hoop test’
<b>H6</b>	Withdrawal of support for the Conservative bill  A) Strategic withdrawal for the 2024 bill created the conditions for a more robust Act under Labour in 2025  b) Shelter played a key role in this decision	Level 3: ‘Smoking gun’
<b>H7</b>	Shelter shaped Labour’s thinking during opposition and into Government.	Level 2. ‘Hoop test’
<b>H8</b>	Creativity, variety and emphasising the ‘human side’ helped the campaign to ‘cut-through’ and increased engagement amongst renters and wider supporter audiences.	Level 2. ‘Hoop test’
<b>H9</b>	Research projects, casework insight and strategic litigation brought credibility to Shelter’s arguments.	Level 3: ‘Smoking gun’

<b>H10</b>	Involvement of renters with direct experience of bad private renting strengthened legitimacy, authenticity, and improved supporters' experience	Level 2. 'Hoop test'
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**4.2. Coalition working**

The Renters Reform Coalition demonstrates the value of strong coalition working. A stable membership, shared purpose and clear policy positions were central to the campaign's success.

Building this alignment required significant effort. Unity was not automatic, it depended on sustained relationship-building, compromise and careful management of power dynamics between larger organisations and grassroots groups. This often involved difficult trade-offs and ongoing negotiation to maintain a shared position.

Speaking with one voice significantly increased the campaign's influence. Policymakers recognised a clear, unified position, making it harder to ignore or divide. As one partner noted, the coalition *'prevented the government from picking and choosing which organisations to listen to.'*

A key enabler of this was funded coordination. Dedicated roles were critical in managing relationships, facilitating agreement, aligning strategy and supporting joint action. These roles also enabled the coalition to operate externally, representing a shared voice in the media and in Parliament, rather than relying on individual organisations alone.

The coalition's diversity strengthened both its credibility and the quality of its policy positions. It brought together national charities, tenant unions and grassroots groups, ensuring proposals reflected real-world experience as well as technical expertise. Grassroots organisations also played an important role in pushing for more ambitious positions within the coalition. As one MP noted, Shelter's more formal evidence and legal insight complemented Generation Rent, ACORN and tenants' unions work to amplify renters' voices, with the Coalition ensuring these activities were coordinated.

Organisations were aligned on core goals, but able to act in different ways. This balance allowed the coalition to combine coordinated action with the distinct strengths of its members; whether evidence, organising, media or policy work.

Working together also increased reach, participation and resource efficiency, helping the coalition focus effort where it would have most impact.

<b>Key learning points</b>	
Agree clear, shared policy positions early	A clear set of policy asks helps coalitions stay aligned and avoid fragmentation.
Balance message discipline with tactical flexibility	Coordinated core messaging can sit alongside diverse campaigning approaches by members.



Use complementary strengths strategically	Different organisations can play distinct roles (evidence, lived experience, media engagement, mobilisation) to strengthen overall impact.
Invest in coordination	Dedicated, funded coordination roles help to maintain alignment, manage relationships and enable joint action.
Act together at key moments	Coordinated interventions (e.g. lobbying, media, briefings) maximise influence and visibility.
Build and maintain trust across members	Stable relationships and a shared sense of purpose underpin effective collaboration.
Address power imbalances intentionally	Larger organisations should actively create space for smaller and grassroots voices, which in turn can act as critical friends.
Broaden participation and representation	Diverse membership strengthens legitimacy, reflects lived experience, and improves policy quality.
Reduce duplication and share resources	Collective planning allows coalitions to use time, funding and capacity more efficiently.
Unity makes campaigns harder to ignore	Clear alignment limits opportunities for decision-makers to divide or sideline voices.

### 4.3. Shifting public narrative

The campaign helped shift how renting and renters were understood in public debate, positioning renters as a visible group and renting as a mainstream political issue. This was the result of years of sustained work by charities, campaigners and the media, which steadily increased pressure for reform and made renters' rights harder for governments to ignore. Early commitments from the Conservative government indicate how politically salient the issue had become, and how addressing renters' concerns had become part of a broader electoral strategy.

A central shift was reframing renting from an individual problem to a systemic one. Campaign messages showed that insecurity, poor conditions and unaffordability were widespread and rooted in the housing system, rather than isolated cases.

Evidence from lived experience was critical in this process. By giving renters opportunities to platform their stories, the campaign was able to build empathy while demonstrating the scale of the problem. Combined with more robust research evidence, this strengthened the case for reform.

The narrative also broadened who is seen as a renter. Highlighting families, older people and key workers challenged stereotypes and increased political relevance.

External events reinforced this shift. The Grenfell Tower fire and the COVID-19 pandemic exposed the consequences of unsafe and insecure housing, sharpening public focus on renters' rights.

Over time, this led to a clear shift in public and political discourse, helping make stronger protections both more visible and more politically feasible.

<b>Key learning points</b>	
Centre lived experience through strong storytelling	Sharing clear, credible stories of ordinary renters built empathy and made the issue visible and relatable.
Challenge stereotypes by broadening and humanising who is affected	Highlighting diverse groups of renters increased relevance and political salience.
Frame the issue as systemic	Consistently presenting problems as structural, not individual, strengthened the case for reform.
Combine storytelling with robust evidence	Stories showed the human impact, while research demonstrated scale and urgency.
Sustain a consistent narrative over time	Long-term, coordinated efforts across organisations helped shift public and political debate.

#### **4.4. Turning policy into law**

Our evaluation finds that the campaign’s contribution to the policy and legislative process was critical. In particular, there is strong evidence that policy and legal expertise directly shaped the content of the final Act.

In the early stages, this involved building relationships with policymakers, making the case for reform, presenting evidence and engaging in consultations. As the Bill progressed through Parliament, campaigners provided detailed input, helping shape both the direction and content of the legislation. This included drafting proposals, developing amendments and working closely with MPs, peers and civil servants to ensure reforms were practical, robust and deliverable.

This work drew on contributions from across the coalition. Shelter provided legal and technical expertise grounded in research and casework and worked closely with officials to translate campaign demands into workable policy. Alongside this, Generation Rent and coalition staff produced briefings, built relationships with decision-makers and sustained media and political attention, helping maintain momentum.

Tenant unions strengthened the ambition of the campaign by introducing new policy ideas and pushing for bolder positions. They also mobilised renters to engage directly with Parliament. Advice and service organisations contributed detailed frontline insight into how the system operates in practice, helping identify gaps in protection and shape workable solutions.

Together, this created a broad and credible policy platform, grounded in legal expertise, lived experience and on-the-ground knowledge. Campaigners were therefore not only able to call for change, but to engage directly in the detail of legislation and influence its final form.

Overall, the campaign shows that policy expertise is a decisive form of power. The ability to develop credible, workable solutions, and to engage constructively with the legislative process, was critical to both securing reform and shaping the final Act.

<b>Key learning points</b>	
Policy expertise enables influence	Campaigns that can propose clear, workable solutions are more likely to shape legislation.
Insider & outsider strategies are both needed	Public campaigning creates pressure, but engagement with civil servants, MPs and peers is essential to turn that pressure into policy change.
Coalition discipline increases credibility	Agreeing shared priorities and maintaining discipline helps present a unified, credible offer to government and avoids mixed messages.
Legislative engagement is ongoing, not one-off	Influencing does not stop at commitments, ongoing engagement through briefings, amendments and committees is critical to shaping final legislation.
Ambition can be driven from within coalitions	More radical grassroots perspectives can push for stronger positions, helping shift the overall ambition of the sector.
Use formal legislative moments effectively	Opportunities such as Bill Committees, evidence sessions and amendment stages can be highly influential if campaigners are prepared and coordinated.

#### **4.5. Political influencing**

Alongside the formal legislative process, campaigners invested in sustained political influencing to build support and manage opposition.

This work began well before Theresa Mays initial commitment to abolish Section 21. Campaigners helped raise the political salience of renting by demonstrating its electoral importance. Shelter conducted analysis to highlight the constituencies within which the renter vote might swing results, they worked locally, through supporters, to engage MPs in their constituencies, and organised petitions and briefings that emphasised the injustices and human stories behind the campaign.

Within Parliament, organisations worked collectively to influence both MPs and peers. This included written briefings, meetings and supporting parliamentary champions, some of whom tabled amendments and pushed proposals during debates. More targeted engagement focused on ministers and key decision-makers, combining insider influencing with public pressure.

A notable strength was engagement across political parties. While working with the Conservative Government to progress the Bill, campaigners also built relationships with Labour politicians in opposition. When the Conservative Bill was judged to be too weak, the coalition made the strategic decision to withdraw support, while continuing to shape Labour's approach. When Labour entered government in 2024, many of the relationships and arguments were already in place, helping enable a stronger Bill.

There was opposition in Parliament, particularly in the House of Lords. This represented a constant risk of slowing progress and weakening protections. One mitigation strategy was to highlight how a significant proportion of peers challenging reforms had landlord interests themselves. Shelter also worked with centre-right think tanks to emphasise the cross-party nature of renter issues and engaged directly with critics, meeting sceptical parliamentarians, rebutting counter-arguments, addressing concerns and reframing proposals to emphasise fairness and balance.

Overall, the campaign shows that political influencing requires long-term relationship building, careful targeting and strategic use of both public pressure and insider engagement. Success depended not just on building support, but on actively managing opposition and shaping political conditions over time.

Key learning points	
Build sustained relationships with politicians	Regular engagement with MPs and peers, through briefings, meetings and evidence, helps turn campaign asks into parliamentary action.
Combine local and national pressure	Constituency-level organising, alongside national advocacy, makes issues politically relevant to MPs and harder to ignore.
Treat opposition as strategic, not incidental	Identify where resistance is strongest and engage directly to understand and influence their position.
Use transparency to challenge power dynamics	Highlighting vested interests (e.g. landlord influence in Parliament) can strengthen the case for reform and build external pressure.
Engage to mitigate, not just persuade	You don't need to win over all opponents, reducing resistance and limiting damaging amendments can be enough to protect key reforms.
Influence before power shifts	Engaging shadow ministers early helps embed arguments and relationships that carry through into government.

#### 4.6. Campaign creativity & supporter mobilisation

Campaigners used a wide mix of tactics, including media, digital campaigning, public actions and grassroots organising, to build support and sustain pressure for reform. Coordinated moments, such as national days of action, media coverage of renters' experiences and campaigns encouraging people to contact MPs, helped maintain visibility throughout a long legislative process.

Creativity played a key role in cutting through. Shelter, in particular, adopted a distinctive tone and encouraged teams to experiment with new approaches. Campaigns such as 'Only Choice Lettings' used humour to communicate the realities of renting and engage new audiences, helping extend reach while maintaining momentum over time.

Another central feature was the voice of renters. Renters' stories of eviction, poor conditions and insecurity were told across media and campaigning, helping to humanise the issue and strengthen the case for change. Mobilising supporters to share their experiences, contact MPs and contribute evidence made backing for change visible and reinforced political pressure.

Different organisations played complementary roles. Larger organisations often led national media and campaigning, while tenant unions and grassroots groups focused on organising and mobilisation at a local level, connecting renters directly to political processes.

In a crowded political environment, the combination of creativity, lived experience and sustained mobilisation helped the campaign remain visible, build support and reinforce other forms of influence.

Key learning points	
Use a mix of tactics	Combine media, digital and organising approaches to reach different audiences.
Centre lived experience	Real stories make issues tangible and strengthen influence across media and politics.
Use creative moments to cut through	Timely, varied actions help maintain attention over long campaigns. Also, using humour can increase engagement and get your messages heard.
Sustain engagement over time	Continued mobilisation is needed to maintain pressure through slow legislative processes.

## 5. What explains success overall?

The campaign succeeded because multiple forms of influence aligned at the right moment. Over more than a decade, campaigners worked to reshape how renting was understood, built a broad and disciplined coalition, and developed policies that addressed the key issues and could withstand parliamentary scrutiny. Together, this created the conditions for reform well before legislation was introduced.

When political opportunities emerged, the campaign was ready. Policy expertise sustained political engagement and visible public support combined to move reform forward, while strategic decisions helped protect ambition and manage opposition.

Overall, change came not from a single tactic or organisation, but from coordinated action across the system, sustained over time and applied at key moments of opportunity.

## 6. Key learning points

This campaign offers some practical learning points for delivering complex policy change.

- **Strong coalitions are powerful.** The campaign shows the value of coalition working. By aligning around shared goals and speaking with one voice, civil society organisations increased their influence and were able to counter well-organised opposition.
- **But coalitions need work.** Unity wasn't automatic. It required organisations willing to do the unglamorous work of coordination, smoothing tensions, compromise and keeping people aligned when things got difficult. Without that, the coalition would have struggled to stay coherent.
- **Work across multiple fronts.** Acting on several fronts (organising, media, research, political work, raising renters' voices) at the same time strengthened the campaign. As the Social Change Grid (p.14) shows, the range of tactics and the difference strengths of organisations, built the influence that helped deliver the final Act.
- **Empower campaigners to act.** Giving teams the freedom to act quickly and try new approaches, strengthened impact and enabled innovation. While this can risk fragmentation, strong coordination, monitoring and reflection helped focus effort and maintain coherence.

- **Play the long game.** Even in a situation where the case for reform is compelling and well supported, obstacles and delays slowed progress. Part of the success here was the sustained commitment of campaigners and organisations to pursue change.
- **Narrative work mattered.** The shift in how renting was talked about didn't happen quickly, but it created the conditions for reform. It's a reminder that campaigns need to invest in shaping the story long before legislation appears.
- **Policy expertise matters.** When legislation was on the table, deep understanding of policy and the legislative process was critical. It was immensely important to have people who understood the policy process and have the credibility, aptitude and judgement to engage in it. The wider lesson is to a) anticipate when you will need policy expertise and invest accordingly; b) be judicious with your support / opposition at key moments; c) invest in research so that you have the evidence base to support your cause.
- **Relationships across the system are essential.** Progress depended on having connections not just with ministers, but with civil servants, backbenchers, advisers and peers. It shows the value of building a broad political network rather than investing too much in particular routes – particularly given the level of political churn that is now the norm.
- **Lived experience strengthens the message.** Renters' experiences added authenticity and clarity. However, meaningful involvement required planning, resourcing and support to ensure it was representative and positive for those involved. Renters' need clarity about what they are being asked to do, alongside active support and follow-up.
- **Internal alignment strengthens external impact.** For larger organisations like Shelter Internal alignment is a critical part of the campaign, not a separate task. In this case Policy, legal, comms, campaigns and services all reinforced each other because they were working to the same plan. But this doesn't happen by accident, it needs time, structure and shared intent.
- **Expect volatility and plan around it.** The campaign worked because teams assumed things would change (ministers, priorities, timelines) and built flexibility into their approach.
- **Evidence needs to be ready before the window opens.** Research, casework insight and legal expertise were most useful because they already existed when needed.
- **Managing opposition is part of the job.** The campaign didn't just build support; it worked to limit the influence of groups trying to weaken the bill. This is often overlooked but can be decisive.

Ultimately, the success vindicates a substantial investment across the coalition into this campaign. Over the years, many staff and campaigners across lots of organisations were involved and lots of time, energy and money were spent on a goal, which may, at times, have felt remote. This case study gives us an example of this paying off. Policy windows do eventually open up, and you need to have everything in place when they do.

## 7. Conclusion

This campaign shows that meaningful change is the result of sustained, coordinated effort over time. Through many actors, strong coalition working and a mix of tactics (combining public support, credible policy solutions, political engagement and strategic judgement) campaigners were able to shift both the debate and the balance of power.

While the path was complex and uncertain, it demonstrates that well aligned action at the right moments can turn long-standing demands into lasting reform.

## 8. Social Change Grid

To understand how these elements came together, we mapped the campaign using SMK's Social Change Grid (a practical tool for understanding and planning campaigning strategy). The grid shows how change happens across four areas:

- Personal (casework, lived experience)
- Community (organising and grassroots action)
- Public (media, narrative and campaigning)
- Institutional (policy, politics and legislation)

The Renters' Rights campaign shows that lasting policy change rarely happens in just one place. The final Act was delivered in Parliament, but it was built on years of activity across each of the quadrants.

