people's health trust



Realising the potential of the Renters' Rights Act

Parliamentary roundtable
25 November 2026

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Background note for the parliamentary roundtable

25 November 2026

Prepared by People's Health Trust

Purpose of the roundtable: To bring housing, health, business, local government, community organisations, researchers and funders together to understand the housing–health relationship, explore the first six months of the Renters' Rights Act and how best to realise its potential.

1. Key messages

- Poor housing is a health equity issue, not simply a repairs issue. Strong evidence connects damp, mould, cold, overcrowding and disrepair with respiratory illness, stress, anxiety and wider effects on family life and children's wellbeing.

- Legal rights for tenants are necessary but insufficient. There is a gap between rights on paper and renters' ability to use them, shaped by language barriers, digital exclusion, fear of retaliation and limited housing alternatives.

- There are major policy opportunities/challenges in the short and medium term following the initial implementation of the Renters' Rights Act in May 2026:
    - The government's consultation on extending Awaab's Law to private rented tenancies and certain accommodation occupied under licence opened on 9 October 2026 and closes on 18 December 2026. It is an immediate opportunity to bring renters' experience into implementation design.
    - The new Decent Homes Standard will apply to both social and private rented housing in England from 2035. This is not permission to leave dangerous conditions unresolved: existing duties continue, and government explicitly says landlords should not delay all action until the deadline. But could the implementation be significantly accelerated and, if so, what are the mechanisms for doing so?

- The new Better Homes Better Health programme combines trusted neighbourhood support, sustained tenant leadership, organisational capacity building and regional influence, rather than relying on information provision or individual casework alone.

2. Why homes matter for health

Regionally and nationally, there is a combination of affordability pressures, insecure housing, variable property conditions and constrained supply. Where affordable alternatives are scarce, moving away from an unhealthy home may not be a realistic option.

Through our housing and health programme work across Great Britain, tenants told us of recurring problems: damp and mould, cold homes, poor ventilation, disrepair, overcrowding, insecure tenancies, arrears, high energy costs and delayed repairs. Their accounts link these conditions with respiratory problems, poorer mental health, stress, reduced confidence and financial pressure.

There are wider consequences for long-term conditions, cardiovascular and respiratory health, musculoskeletal disorders, premature death, mental wellbeing, family life, educational attainment and social connections. There are disproportionate effects on disabled tenants and people experiencing mental health problems.

The gap between rights and practical remedy

Tenants told us about barriers to understanding tenancy agreements, tribunals and routes to remedy, including technical language, inaccessible information and digital exclusion. Trust, power and confidence matter as much as communication: knowing a right exists does not necessarily enable a tenant to challenge a landlord when they fear retaliation or have nowhere else to live.

Tenants favour trusted routes through which they can be heard and secure timely action. This should complement, not replace, access to independent legal advice and formal redress where needed. There should be differentiated understanding of the local market, including private and social renting, houses in multiple occupation and exempt accommodation, recognising good landlord practice alongside poor practice.

3. What Better Homes Better Health will do

Better Homes Better Health is in the first instance a £1.5 million programme, co-funded by People's Health Trust and Oak Foundation. The model invests in grassroots organisations trusted by marginalised private and social sector tenants initially in Birmingham and the Black Country, with intention to expand across the region. Grants are £120,000–£150,000 over three years.

Projects are small and neighbourhood-based, normally covering no more than 10,000 residents, although communities of interest may work across a wider area where sustained connections can be demonstrated. Funding principally supports staff time, alongside participation, tenant support, organisational strengthening and other delivery costs. The delivery start window is October 2026 – January 2027.

Four intended changes:

1. Tenants have greater confidence, knowledge and support to challenge poor housing and secure action.
2. Housing conditions improve, contributing to better physical and mental health and wellbeing.
3. Funded organisations deliver stronger tenant-led, equitable and effective support.
4. A regional collaboration builds collective influence over housing and health systems.

There will be meaningful health and wellbeing measurement.

The approach:

- Practical tenant support: identify hazards, understand rights and routes to redress, document evidence and pursue action.
- Tenant leadership and collective action: sustained, co-designed activity that builds confidence, peer support and tenant voice, rather than one-off advice sessions.
- Capacity building and peer learning: strengthen organisations' advocacy, inclusion and organising skills; share methods, solve problems together and improve referrals.
- Regional collaboration: use shared learning and renter-led priorities to influence housing and health systems.

We are currently exploring with other Trusts and Foundations, and wider partners, the potential for replicating Better Homes Better Health in other regions of the country as well as extending the work already established in the West Midlands.

The programme draws on learning from Homes for Health, the Trust's earlier pilot in ten areas of Great Britain, which the independent evaluation showed generated stronger tenant voice, housing improvements and improved wellbeing where community-led approaches were supported.

4. Policy context

Reform	Timetable and status
Renters' Rights Act 2025: core tenancy reforms	Periodic tenancy reforms and abolition of section 21 "no-fault" evictions took effect on 1 May 2026. Other measures are being phased.
Awaab's Law: social housing, phase 1	In force since 27 October 2025 for emergency hazards and damp and mould hazards presenting a significant risk of harm.
Awaab's Law: social housing, further phases	Government guidance sets out expansion from 30 November 2026 to significant hazards involving cold, heat, falls, structural collapse, fire and explosions, electrical safety and domestic hygiene. Further expansion is planned for 2027 to remaining qualifying hazards, excluding overcrowding.
Awaab's Law: private rented tenancies and licences	Consultation opened 9 October 2026 until 18 December 2026. It covers implementation for private tenancies and possible application to specified licensed accommodation.
New Decent Homes Standard	Government confirmed on 28 January 2026 that the new standard will apply from 2035 to both social and private rented housing, when regulation and enforcement against the new standard will begin. Energy-efficiency requirements have separate implementation dates.

Awaab's Law: the immediate consultation opportunity

The consultation concerns how Awaab's Law should apply to private rented tenancies, including the requirements to be set through regulations. It also asks about extending protection to accommodation occupied under licence, including supported housing, temporary accommodation for homeless households and care leaver accommodation. The consultation does not itself activate the new private-sector requirements: implementing regulations are needed.

Decent Homes Standard: a long implementation horizon

The new standard covers serious hazards, reasonable repair, core facilities, thermal comfort and freedom from damp and mould. Its 2035 implementation date is a substantial gap between reform design and enforcement of the new framework. Government nonetheless makes clear that landlords should not delay all action until the end of the implementation period.

The central distinction: 2035 is the date for the *new* Decent Homes Standard, not the first date on which tenants can expect safe housing. Existing repairing, fitness and hazard-related duties continue, and social landlords must continue to meet their existing regulatory obligations. The phased introduction of Awaab's Law does not permit dangerous conditions to be ignored in the meantime.

Implication for the roundtable: regulation creates an important framework, but health protection cannot depend on waiting for the final deadline. Tenant support, earlier repairs, enforcement, prevention and investment should be considered together.

5. Questions arising:

Key questions that attendees may wish to consider in advance:

1. Protect health now: where do reporting, referral and repair pathways break down, and what can community organisations, landlords, councils and health partners across the country change without waiting for 2035?
2. Put renters in the lead: how can tenants define priorities, scrutinise progress and shape a collective ask, including those facing language, disability, digital or caring barriers – and who should their ask be put to?
3. Connect housing and health: what shared referral arrangements would help health services recognise housing-related harm and link households with trusted support?
4. Shape the Awaab's Law response: what practical evidence can partners and renters contribute to the consultation?
5. Build constructive accountability: how can good landlords and letting agents help spread effective practice while partners challenge poor conditions and delayed action?