

Centre for the New Midlands

West Midlands Social Housing Quality Fund

Evaluation Study

Job Description for 2 Research Associates

1. KEY INFORMATION

Start Date: 11 March 2024

End Date: 31 October 2024

Contract Days: 70 days per associate

Day Rate: £150/day

2. JOB DESCRIPTION

The Centre for the New Midlands is looking to recruit 2 research associates for an evaluation study of the West Midlands Social Housing Quality Fund works and impacts.

One research associate will focus on **qualitative** data gathering and analysis and the other associate on **quantitative** data gathering and analysis. Both associates will engage in the collation and analysis of housing stock data and contribute to the report write-up. Detailed methodology and tasks can be found in the project overview below.

The candidates will ideally have post-doctoral or postgraduate research project experience, including in conducting interviews and focus groups and analysis, and in designing and administering online surveys (using programmes like Qualtrics or BOS) and analysing survey data respectively. Strong candidates will be proficient at undertaking research in areas like the built environment, construction and housing,

retrofitting, housing policy, social policy, or the health and wellbeing impacts of housing. It will be beneficial if researchers are already familiar with industry standards such as Building and Safety Standards, Decent Homes, Housing Health and Safety Rating System and the standardised ONS wellbeing measures for surveys.

We would like to work with early career researchers based in the West Midlands but will consider all applications.

This is the first project being undertaken by the Centre for New Midlands with the West Midlands Combined Authority but there are several future projects currently in discussion, so while these posts are fixed term for the duration of this evaluation study, there will be opportunities for future collaboration and to be involved in other research projects around housing quality and placemaking through the Centre.

After reviewing the project overview, methodology and suggested workload allocation below, if you are interested in applying for this role please complete this short [online application form](#) and attach your CV as requested.

If you would like to have a conversation with Dr Halima Sacranie to find out more about this project and these roles please email Halima at halima@thenewmidlands.org.uk to arrange a call. Due to the tight timeframe for this evaluation study, we are looking to interview suitable candidates for the roles in the week commencing the 4th of March with a view to starting on the 11th of March.

Although the suggested workload allocation in the project brief is mapped out according to stages over the project timeline, there is capacity for some flexibility around this workload allocation, where possible. This would allow for contract days to be spread more evenly across the 8-month contract, so approximately 8 days per month. Alternatively, if intermittent blocks of time are more suitable around the project tasks where appropriate that can also be discussed.

3. About the Centre for New Midlands (CNM)

The Centre for the New Midlands (CNM) is the only independent, not-for-profit think tank for the West Midlands region and has a mission to be the place where people come to 'debate, shape and create' a better West Midlands region. Through the Centre's

partnerships across society, industry and academia, it is focussed on discovering new solutions to some of the region's biggest social and economic challenges and help to shape a New Midlands.

CNM operates across four research workstreams: Housing and Communities, Digital, Infrastructure, and People and Skills. Since its first event in September 2021 (following the easing of Covid19 lockdowns), CNM has held 15 events across the region, ranging from roundtables, regional networking discussions to a conference at the University of Warwick. The Centre hosts a regional partnership network of more than 60 businesses across the region and has welcomed national politicians including Eddie Hughes MP, Lisa Nandy MP, Andrew Mitchell MP and Lucy Powell MP, as well as leading industrialists such as Sir John Armitt (Chair of the UK National infrastructure Commission) as speakers at its events, as well as having worked closely with regional leaders such as the Mayor and the Shadow Mayor of the West Midlands.

The Centre aims to be the most influential and impactful think tank outside of London, seeking to undertake research, to develop new ideas and insights, to generate solutions to the challenges, and leverage the opportunities, in the West Midlands' region. CNM has responded to Government inquiries focussed on the issue of Exempt Accommodation and has published its own reports on how we deliver more affordable housing for the region and 'What next for Birmingham' following the Council's submission of its 'bankruptcy' notice. The Centre has a broad and diverse network of volunteers across its workstreams who are tasked with helping to shape the agenda for the region and providing thought leadership and insight across their areas of expertise.

As an independent think tank, our research is guided by the following principles:

- We are fully transparent in who funds our organisation and projects
- To ensure integrity to our research, we will always have editorial control on our published content
- We will work with the region's outstanding universities to create new research opportunities for early career researchers
- We will provide tangible recommendations to support and promote positive change

As one of the key work-streams at the CNM, our Housing and Communities research programme seeks

- To address critical issues around Housing and Communities in the Midlands, supporting independent debate on strategy, policy and practice.
- To collaborate with key stakeholders to undertake impactful research, which includes reviewing existing evidence, identifying evidence gaps and addressing these gaps with new rigorous research in the field of Housing and Communities in the Midlands, focusing on common areas of interest, which will benefit our region and its communities.
- To engage with academia, industry, local, regional and national government, highlighting evidence of best practice in the region, working with our partners to both evaluate and positively influence regional and national policy around Housing and Communities.
- To create long-term and sustainable impact as a think-tank by uniquely contributing towards new longitudinal evidence bases and frameworks particularly around core themes including housing quality, health and wellbeing, net zero transitions and tenant engagement, housing need and affordability.

4. West Midlands Social Housing Quality Fund (SHQF) Research Evaluation: Context, Aims and Framework

In January 2023 the West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) secured nearly £15 million of the Social Housing Quality Fund (SHQF) to tackle severe damp and mould in social housing properties across the region. ¹

According to the English Housing Survey², in 2022, 15% of homes in England failed to meet the Decent Homes Standard, while 8% of dwellings had a HHSRS (Housing Health and Safety Rating System) Category 1 hazard, and 4% of dwellings had a problem with damp. Looking more specifically at social housing stock, in 2022, 7% of local authority dwellings and 4% of housing association dwellings had damp, both an increase from the previous year.

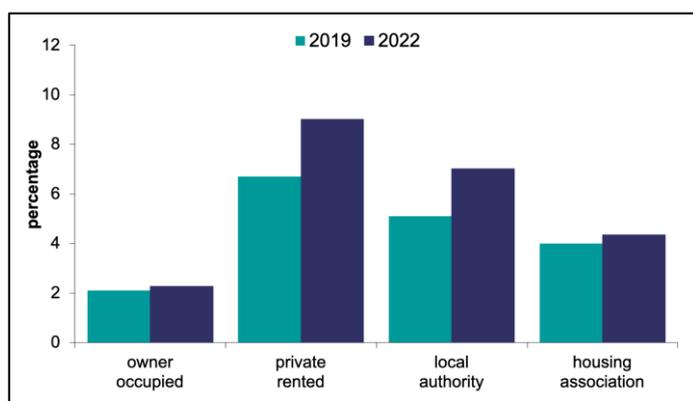
¹ <https://www.wmca.org.uk/news/15m-to-be-spent-tackling-region-s-most-dilapidated-mouldy-and-unhealthy-homes/>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-housing-survey#2022-to-2023>

Common causes of damp and mould are condensation building up from temperature differentials between indoors and outdoors, poor ventilation and poor insulation. This build-up of condensation and damp in homes can lead to the growth of dust-mites, bacteria and mould, the spores of which cause allergic reactions like rhinitis, and cause or worsen asthma and other respiratory infections and illnesses. Children who grow up with mould in their home are up to three times more likely to have coughs and wheezes related to asthma and other respiratory illnesses, (Department for Health and Social Care, 2022)³ while cold and damp homes also increase the risk of cardiac disease and can worsen health conditions like arthritis (WHO, 2009).⁴

The impacts of poor housing quality include detriment to both physical and mental health. Living in a home that has damp and mould increases the prevalence of anxiety, worry and depression.

Bratt⁵ (2002, p.14) draws out key connections between housing quality and family wellbeing reflecting that “The literature pertaining to this issue is vast and draws from a variety of disciplines: economics, planning, social welfare, public health, medicine, sociology, public policy, housing policy, child development and psychology.”



Dwellings with damp problems, 2021 and 2022

(Figure 4.6. English Housing Survey)⁶

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officers-annual-report-2022-air-pollution>

⁴ Heseltine, E. and Rosen, J. eds., 2009. WHO guidelines for indoor air quality: dampness and mould.

⁵ Bratt, R. (2002). Housing and family well-being. *Housing Studies*, 17(1), 13-26. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02673030120105857>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/chapters-for-english-housing-survey-2022-to-2023-headline-report/chapter-4-dwelling-condition#damp>

A recent House of Commons Research Briefing entitled Health Inequalities: Cold and damp Homes (February 2023)⁷ considered the social inequalities inherent in poor quality homes with certain household types likely to be disproportionately affected by cold and damp. Damp homes were more common in households with children; over-60s were more likely to live in excessively cold homes, while low-income households, single parent households and ethnic minority households were also more likely to have damp and mould in their homes.

The cost to the NHS of poor-quality housing has been calculated at £1.4bn per year to treat those people (in the first year of their illness) who are affected by their housing condition. However, a more holistic costing considering the broader societal costs of poor housing has been estimated to be around £18.5 billion per year (BRE, 2021).⁸

Additionally, the issue of living in cold and damp homes not only pertains to the quality of insulation and thermal performance of home but increasingly to the cost-of-living pressures where households have to make budgeting decisions around essential costs like heating or food bills, highlighting again the critical social impact of poor-quality housing.

There are clearly far-reaching negative consequences of living in properties with damp and mould, and this evaluation will be cognisant of this wider context, while focusing on evaluating the specific impacts of the SHQF grant programme in the West Midlands.

We are undertaking this research evaluation, in partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority, of the range, scope and scale of organisational and tenant impacts of the SHQF funding allocated and deployed by social housing providers in the West Midlands to address damp and mould in their housing units.

This research will be underpinned by the following question:

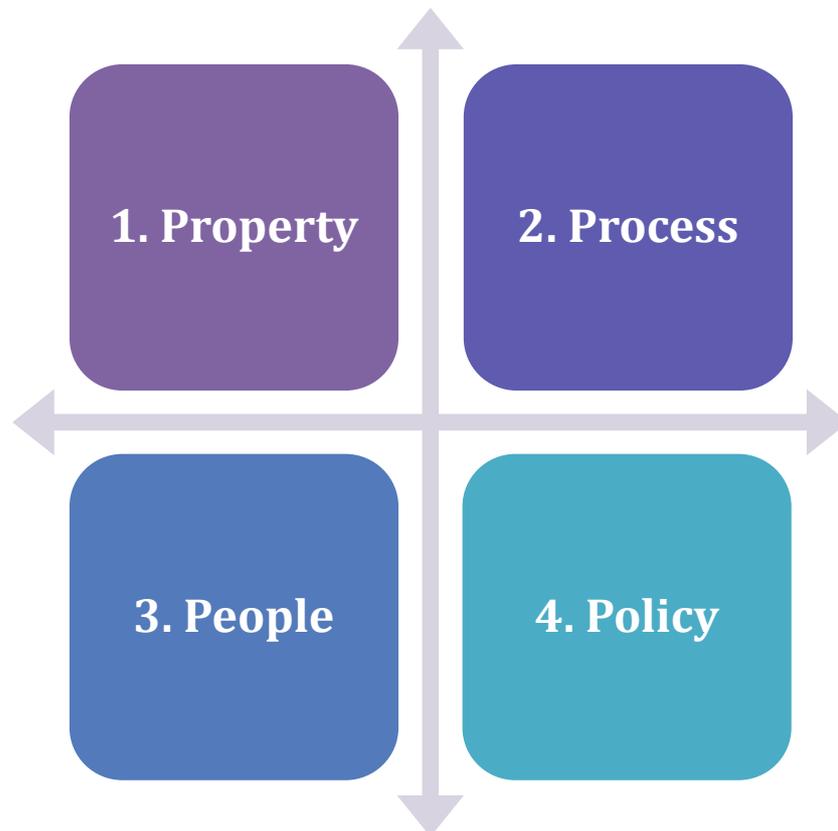
*How do social housing providers of **different organisational structures, size and stock profile** in the West Midlands **deploy additional funding** in relation to existing **business plans, asset management strategies, repairs and maintenance operations, and tenant engagement mechanisms to redress and prevent damp and mould (D&M)** in their*

⁷ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9696/>

⁸ https://files.bregroup.com/research/BRE_Report_the_cost_of_poor_housing_2021.pdf

properties and **guarantee their tenants healthy homes**, and what has been the **overall impact** of the additional funding?

Adapting a previously developed and tested framework (Mullins and Sacranie, 2017⁹; Archer et al. 2019¹⁰) the evaluation will consist of 4 areas:



Addressing each of these 4 areas, the evaluation will investigate, assess and provide evidence around the thematic aims expanded below:

⁹ Mullins, D., Sacranie, H. and Pattison, B. (2017). *Social Lettings Agencies in the West Midlands*. Project Report. Birmingham, University of Birmingham.
<https://shura.shu.ac.uk/15740/>

¹⁰ Archer, T., Crisp, R., Ferrari, E., Green, S., McCarthy, L., Moore, T., Mullins, D., Pattison, B. and Sacranie, H., 2019. *Scaling up social lettings? Scope, impact and barriers*.
<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/scaling-social-lettings-scope-impact-and-barriers-0>

A. PROPERTY

- Review repairs programme data to explain which, and how, properties are selected for the additional grant funded repairs programme.
- Review stock condition data for properties being improved by the grant funding and compare to general stock condition profile of the housing provider.
- Map property types, age, materials and construction method for the homes that are selected for additional grant D&M repairs.
- Map number and type of D&M repairs and renovations planned and undertaken through the additional grant funding.
- Assess if the SHQF funded work has helped better target the highest priority homes.

B. PROCESS

- Assess if the additional grant funding extends or widens the current repairs and maintenance schedule for housing providers i.e. more repairs possible for the same standard of Category 1 hazard properties or allowing for further repairs of less hazardous but still poor quality homes.
- Assess if the additional grant funding repairs sit within a planned repairs programme or additionally includes responsive repairs over the period of the funding programme.
- Assess which types of interventions are most effective, and how, for different types of social housing.
- Assess to what extent the additional grant funding addresses wider investment and organizational constraints in addressing D&M in social housing properties.
- Consider how the SHQF funding can provide best value and impact within existing maintenance and repair business plans.

C. PEOPLE

- Investigate the impact of D&M repairs on the health and wellbeing of tenants living in the homes improved by the SHQF fund, and how these impacts are typically captured by the housing providers.
- Assess if and to what extent social impact and value measures are incorporated by social housing providers for the additional grant funded D&M repairs.
- Explore the relationship between landlords and tenants around D&M repairs for the additional funded repairs projects and consider if this complements, extends or differentiates from existing tenant engagement structures and mechanisms.

D. POLICY

- Explore the policy barriers and enablers to addressing housing quality issues and in particular D&M in social housing in the West Midlands, as experienced by social housing provider recipients of the SHQF grant.
- Outline learning from this grant funded programme including to what extent the SHQF funding has been an effective targeted policy intervention for the West Midlands.
- Consider how further policy initiatives can expand this critical agenda and sustain a successful programme of ongoing housing quality improvement for different types of social housing providers and different types of social housing in the West Midlands.

5. Evaluation Methodology

The research will be undertaken over a 9-month period from February to October 2024, which would allow for the SHQF grant to have been allocated and deployed, and enough time for a meaningful assessment of impacts thereafter.

Working with the WMCA, we will identify and invite 5 social housing providers who have been recipients of SHQF funds, who represent a sample of different organisational sizes, structures, geographies (working across the 7 local authority areas) and housing

stock types. The evaluation will be structured around 4 stages linked to the 4 themes adopting a mixed-method qualitative and quantitative methodology.

The approach will be collaborative and participative with the opportunity for stakeholder experts to contribute to the design and pilot of research survey tools and protocols, and for participating social housing providers to co-facilitate tenant participation where appropriate.

The methodology for surveys, interviews and focus group protocols will draw on original recent research¹¹ undertaken by the project lead investigator on housing projects encompassing similar themes to this evaluation. Industry standard measures and variables will be included such as Decent Homes, Housing Health and Safety Rating System and the standardised ONS wellbeing measures for survey questions.

The evaluation output will take the form of a condensed evaluation report capturing research findings which address the overarching research question, structured around the 4 given themes. The report will aim to provide a robust evaluation of SHQF programme to the West Midlands and present the impacts and value achieved by the funding allocation to a range of social housing providers in the West Midlands. This would provide the evidence base to support further grant funding to address damp and mould in social housing, and how this funding might be best leveraged and utilised to maximise a range of impacts.

There will be an opportunity to share early headline findings and a summary report in July 2024, allowing housing provider CEOs and senior leaders as well as WMCA to review for feedback and further policy insights, which will feed into the final report to present to the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. If appropriate it will also be possible to disseminate the final report findings through CNM platforms or at a jointly hosted event with the WMCA.

¹¹ Sacranie, H., Tian, L. and Lymer, A., 2022. VIVID Wellbeing Study: The Impact of Housing Quality and Neighbourhoods on Customer Wellbeing.
<https://www.vividhomes.co.uk/media/3271/housing-quality-research-vivid-aston-university-2022.pdf>

1. PROJECT METHODS AND STAGES		
	THEME	METHODS
Stage 1 February – April 2024	Properties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A systematic review and analysis of existing sources of data on stock condition for the properties selected for repairs, a general stock condition profile for the housing provider and asset management and repairs programme data of the 5 participating social housing providers. • Details of types of works undertaken will also be captured through the WMCA Monitoring template which will be shared with the CNM evaluation team.
Stage 2 April-May 2024	Processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi-structured in-depth interviews with senior leadership of Asset Management and senior management of Repairs and Maintenance divisions for evidence on how the additional funding fits into and is leveraged by existing strategic and operational processes. (2 interviews per housing provider)
Stage 3 May – July 2024	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review customer satisfaction data, and current tenants' complaints procedures for reported D&M. • A short online tenant survey to capture impacts of SHQF grant D&M repairs/ refurbishments on tenant health and wellbeing. • Tenant interviews co-facilitated by participating social housing providers with tenants having D&M repair works undertaken through the grant funding. (2 per social housing provider) • Focus groups/ interviews with tenant engagement managers or frontline officers (1 per social housing provider)
Stage 4	Policy/ Report Write Up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic analysis of findings from stage 1-3, a summary of key emerging themes shared with CEOs/ senior leaders of the participating

July- October 2024		5 social housing providers and WMCA (July 2024) for further insights to feed into final policy learnings and recommendations. These insights will be gathered in writing and/or at a roundtable meeting (September 2024)
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2. WORKLOAD ALLOCATION					
	TASKS	PI No. of days	RA 1 No. of days	RA 2 No. of days	SP No. of days
Stage 1	Secondary Data Analysis of Stock Condition, Repairs Programme and WMCA Monitoring template to map profile of selected properties for SHQF D&M repair works	10	15	15	
Stage 2	Draft participant information paperwork and consent forms	2			
	Design semi-structured management interview protocols	2	2		
	Arrange and conduct 10 semi-structured interviews	5	2		
	Draft thematic interview summary notes from recordings/ transcriptions		8		
	Qualitative analysis of interview data	6	6		
Stage 3	Review customer satisfaction data, and current tenants' complaints procedures for reported D&M.			6	

	Draft participant information paperwork and consent forms	1			
	Design online tenant survey	4		9	2
	Pilot and administer survey	2		8	2
	Survey data analysis	3		10	
	Design tenant interview and frontline officer focus group protocols	3			
	Conduct 10 tenant interviews		5		5
	Conduct 5 Focus groups with tenant engagement managers or frontline officers	3	1		
	Drafting thematic interview summary notes/ transcriptions from 15 interviews and focus groups		6		
	Qualitative data analysis	4	6		
Stage 4	Systematic analysis to draft headline evaluation findings including policy reflections (short summary report)	8	5	8	
	Roundtable discussion meeting with CEOs/ senior leaders to review and summary report and review written feedback from housing providers and WMCA	5	2	2	
	Draft Final Evaluation Report	12	12	12	

PI – Principal Investigator

RA 1 – Research Associate 1

RA 2 – Research Associate 2

SP – Secondary Partner

6. Project Team

Principal Investigator (PI):

Dr Halima Sacranie BAS (Hons) PhD FHEA - Director of Housing Research, Centre for New Midlands

The lead researcher or Principal Investigator for this evaluation project will be Dr Halima Sacranie (BAS Hons PhD FHEA) who is the Director of Housing Research at the Centre for New Midlands, and also Chair of its Housing and Communities Leadership Board.

Halima completed her PhD at the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at the University of Birmingham in 2011, which was the regional centre of excellence for housing policy research. Following a college restructure and several senior academic retirements, CURS staff were absorbed into different departments at the University of Birmingham. Halima worked with leading housing academic Prof David Mullins to establish the Housing and Communities Research Group based in the Department of Social Policy, taking on leadership of this group from 2018 when David retired.

In her capacity as Housing Research Lead, Halima has worked on a range of research projects from the stage of project bids to designing methodologies, undertaking empirical research, producing final reports, and disseminating findings through publications and conferences. Halima's most recent research has been as UK academic partner on CHARM (Circular Housing Asset Renovation & Management) which is a 4-year project EU funded project aiming to develop an asset management approach that prevents downcycling of materials in the renovation and construction of social rented dwellings. Her work on the project has focused on the impact on, and role of tenants, across the partner organisations adopting Circular Economic principles in social housing case studies. Other projects Halima has undertaken recently include a 3-year study on Housing Quality, Neighbourhoods and Resident Wellbeing with VIVID Homes, and a 2-year study with the Gambling Commission and Birmingham City Council on harmful gambling and tenancy insecurity. Previous public grant project evaluation work has included the national and regional evaluation of the Empty Homes Community Grants Programme, and Halima has worked with funders like the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Nationwide Foundation and the ESCR.

Through her research experience, Halima has developed a strong understanding of the housing policy and built environment context in the West Midlands, as well as a familiarity with key stakeholders in the range of sectors encompassed by the housing and communities' agenda.

In her role as Director of Housing Research, Halima is building a programme of research with the ambition to establish the thinktank as the new centre for excellence for regional housing policy research. She remains a Research Fellow at both the University of Birmingham and Aston University and so is still embedded in an academic community and able to draw on university resources and networks in her work.

Research Associates (RAs):

Further researcher capacity for this evaluation project will be provided through two research associates with experience in qualitative and quantitative research, secondary data analysis, and utilising online survey tools like Qualtrics or Bristol Online Survey. The research associates will be proficient at undertaking research in areas like the built environment, construction and housing, retrofitting, housing policy, social policy, or the health and wellbeing impacts of housing.

Secondary partners (SPs)

Leveraging the CNM's network of public, private and not-for-profit organisations, secondary partners can be involved where appropriate for the purpose of co-designing relevant sections of the research to draw on specific expertise, for example, tenant organisations on tenant survey and qualitative fieldwork protocols, and local health and housing partnerships on health and housing quality links in the West Midlands.

Advisory Committee

The Housing and Communities Leadership Board at CNM is an expert group of academics, professionals and organisational leaders from across the housing and supporting sectors including charities, housing associations, law firms and developers. This board will serve as the advisory committee for this evaluation project.