

# Good Landlord Scheme Trainee Programme

Summative evaluation

July 2025

# Introduction

This report documents a small-scale qualitative evaluation of the Good Landlord Scheme Trainee Programme, undertaken in June 2025. This evaluation was commissioned by the Housing Strategy and Policy team and conducted independently by the Research team at Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). Those involved in the evaluation include Local Authority (LA) housing enforcement team leads, trainee regulatory compliance officers and GMCA. First, the report discusses the background and context to the Good Landlord Scheme Trainee Programme (hereafter mainly referred to as the trainee programme) and details the methodology adopted for this evaluation. This is followed by a findings section detailing the approach to the trainee programme, the course structure and content, additional training, trainee integration and impact within housing enforcement teams and ideas about the future of housing enforcement funding. The report ends with a discussion of the findings and draws out key considerations to inform future iterations of the trainee programme.

# Background and context

## The Good Landlord Scheme

The Good Landlord Scheme emerged in response to concerns about housing standards, specifically within the Private and Social Rented Sector. Agreed in 2021, the scheme consisted of three key elements:

- Work to make sure that tenants and landlords have access to up-to-date information and advice
- Strengthen and focus enforcement capacity to help redress enforcement<sup>1</sup> resource constraints
- Target capacity building for landlords and agents

The scheme has been underpinned by a £1.5 million investment.

A large proportion of this budget was earmarked for strengthening and focusing enforcement capacity as a result of conversations with local authorities where this was raised as a priority. Following an eight-week consultation process with local authorities in 2021, a skills shortage was cited as one of the main issues affecting local authorities; some LA teams had been finding it difficult to recruit, while others were worried about an aging workforce and the longer-term sustainability of housing enforcement teams.

To tackle this skills shortage, the Good Landlord Scheme included £545k to fund:

- New Regulatory Compliance Officer apprenticeships across Greater Manchester (GM) with additional training to bring them up to a Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH) recognised standard
- On the job training to bring existing local authority staff up to CIEH recognised standard

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<sup>1</sup> The remaining budget is being used to fund the introduction of new enforcement tools and to provide increased support and advice for landlords and tenants, such as through the tenancy relations pilot programme.

## The Good Landlord Scheme Trainee Programme

Previously, a common route into housing enforcement careers was through an Environmental Health Degree. This degree, however, is no longer offered by universities in GM and during the consultation period LA housing enforcement leads reported that the degree was too long and not specific enough to housing. However, there was a clearly identified need to increase the capacity of housing enforcement teams with qualified and skilled workers.

In discussion with local authorities, therefore, it was decided that an trainee scheme would be launched to bridge the skills gap and increase capacity within the housing enforcement workforce across GM. As there is no specific housing enforcement apprenticeship model, the training programme was made up of a number of readily available training courses. The training programme learning programme included:

- A Level 4 Regulatory Compliance Officer Apprenticeship lasting 18 months, run by an externally procured training provider<sup>2</sup>
- A Level 5 Diploma or Advanced Professional Certificate in the Private Rented Sector (PRS) lasting 10 months, run by Middlesex University and developed by the Chartered Institute for Environmental Health (CIEH)
- Additional training throughout (covering for example Housing Health and Safety Rating System, construction, Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984)

As the Regulatory Compliance Officer apprenticeship is a general course, additional training was required to ensure new trainees had all the technical skills and knowledge they need to enforce standards in the PRS. For this reason the Level 5 Diploma was added to give officers working in PRS enforcement a higher level of training. The Diploma, intended to be delivered over a year with an average of two day's study a week, prepares learners to carry out a full range of activities to improve conditions within the PRS. Learners who complete the qualification are recognised

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<sup>2</sup> The provider is not named as not to influence the procurement process

by CIEH and can be registered as 'Private Rented Sector Standards Enforcement Officers'<sup>3</sup>.

The Level 5 Advanced Professional Certificate in the PRS and the additional training were also offered to existing LA staff in order to improve pathways to developing careers in housing enforcement and respond to requests for more on-the-job training. The trainee programme began in the Spring of 2023 and the trainees are currently completing the last stages of the Diploma, with trainee contracts due to come to an end in Spring 2026. Funding has been agreed to re-run the trainee programme.

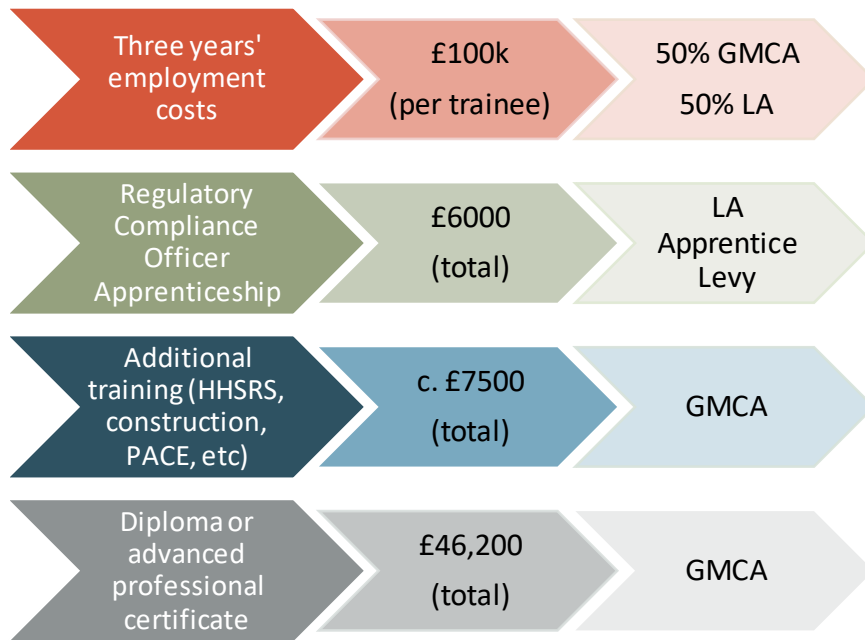
## **Funding**

Greater Manchester local authorities were offered funds from the Good Landlord Scheme to support half the salary and on-costs of a new trainee for three years, during which they would complete the Regulatory Compliance Officer Apprentice Level 4 training course and the Diploma (three years in total). This funding also covered their additional training costs. Funding was provided for one trainee per LA and all 10 GM local authorities accepted a trainee. Some local authorities opted to fund additional trainees and so the total number of trainees on the trainee programme is 13. The total cost of the trainee programme to GMCA is up to £545k.

### **Figure 1. Breakdown of the funding approach to the three year trainee programme**

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<sup>3</sup> There is an application and fee to register.



# Methodology

## Approach and methods

This evaluation was designed to assess the training and skills element of the Good Landlord Scheme with the following aims:

- Does the approach taken successfully tackle the skills shortage?
- Is this approach worth taking again, or should a different approach to improving housing standards enforcement be considered?

To meet these aims, the evaluation has used qualitative methods to explore with LA leads and trainees the extent to which the Good Landlord Scheme Trainee Programme met individual and enforcement team expectations, as well as key successes of the programme and areas for improvement.

Fieldwork for this evaluation involved:

- Six individual interviews with trainee housing enforcement officers
- Three focus groups involving seven LA housing enforcement leads
- One individual context and background interview with John Bibby, Principal Housing Strategy (PRS), GMCA
- A review of relevant documents detailing the context and history of the Good Landlord Scheme

All interviews and focus groups were held online in June 2025. The questions were semi-structured in nature and designed to draw out different experiences across the 10 local authorities and feedback on the content and structure of the trainee programme. For trainees, particular questions were asked about future career plans and prospects. For LA leads, particular questions were asked about the process and design of the trainee programme, as well as the impact of the trainee programme on existing housing enforcement teams. Thematic data analysis has been undertaken to report on the key themes from the data and highlight considerations for future iterations of the trainee programme.

Ethical approval was sought through the internal GMCA research team's ethics process and support was received from GMCA's Information and Data Governance team to create a Privacy Notice and consent form. All contributions to this evaluation are reported on anonymously and data has been stored on secure servers in line with GMCA's data protection policies.

## **Limitations**

Over half the number of LA leads involved in the trainee programme participated in this evaluation, representing seven out of the 10 GM local authorities. Six out of 13 trainees participated, representing four GM local authorities.



# Findings

## Approach and set up of the trainee programme

All the LA leads spoke positively about the approach and process for setting up the trainee programme. In particular, they valued the responsiveness of GMCA to their concerns around recruitment and support with the process of launching the trainee programme. Managing to agree a proposal and getting all 10 LAs on board were noted as key successes.

There were some challenges encountered in the set-up process including recruitment freezes, lengthy internal Human Resources (HR) and governance processes, needing sign off from 10 local authorities at every stage and different job application processes in each LA. The biggest challenge noted across all focus groups, in interviews with trainees and from the perspective of GMCA was the issue of pay disparity. Each LA has their own independent job evaluation processes and differing pay scales. As a result, the trainees have received different salaries and different types of job contracts which was a key discussion point across focus groups and interviews. One way of ensuring parity of pay considered in the development of the programme was for the trainees to be directly hired by GMCA and seconded to each LA. However, that approach would have meant LAs not having control over the hiring process which was an important part of the programme and therefore this approach was not taken. Significant work was undertaken with HR departments across the local authorities to bring salaries as in line with each other as possible before the hiring process began, however there is recognition across the board that this is an ongoing consideration for future iterations of the trainee programme.

In addition, a small number of LA leads provided feedback that it would be useful to have the funding for the trainees in one lump sum at the start to cut down on administrative invoicing processes both with the GMCA and internally.

## Recruitment

All LA leads described receiving more applications than usual for the trainee post, highlighting significant interest in the role. The trainees who took part in this evaluation came from varying work backgrounds, including retail, hospitality and

finance. Some had previous council and housing experience, but most were new to housing and enforcement. Reasons for applying for the scheme included a desire to work for a local authority and the perceived benefits this entails such as regular hours, a good pension, job security, good work/life balance and opportunities for career progression. A small number of trainees described being motivated by wanting to help people within their local authority and a specific interest in housing.

## **Aims and expectations**

All LA leads stated that the trainee programme had either met or exceeded their expectations, with many describing their trainees as having made a “fantastic” contribution to the team. In discussing motivations underpinning the trainee programme all LA leads spoke about the need to build capacity within housing enforcement teams and respond to the national shortage of qualified and experienced housing enforcement officers. The aims and expectations of this trainee programme for LA leads therefore centred on wanting “more boots on the ground”, the opportunity to “grow your own” and to increase the number of qualified staff with the knowledge base and experience to undertake roles within housing enforcement.

Some LA leads spoke about the need to increase the workforce across the conurbation and saw the trainee programme as a longer-term investment in the GM region, whereas others spoke emphatically about wanting to keep their trainees in their LA once the three-year trainee programme is finished.

“...even if we don't keep them or there's movement, it's still more bodies within the conurbation so that really helps in terms of we've got a lot of people who are moving in and around GM so therefore it's just more bodies, and that obviously helps everybody out.” *LA lead.*

Whilst in the majority of cases the aims and expectations of LA leads in relation to this programme were fully met, one LA lead was less clear the trainee programme fully prepared the trainees for the role of housing enforcement officer.

“I think every local authority is going to be looking to recruit and therefore there'll be a place for all of them. What the place is is the

challenge for us. I don't think that we have got, in *our* structure, a natural progressive role. They are not going to be our fully fledged enforcement officers, there's still not enough experience of delivering that compared to somebody who may come with a degree, who we then slot into one of those roles. So we're going to be redesigning our service and looking for an entry level enforcement role. Now that might be different for different authorities because their structures are different and they may have that already. So it has met that expectation, but I think we've been on a massive journey because so much has changed in terms of what's coming and what local authorities can be expected to deliver.” *LA lead.*

It is important to note that there was discussion and ambiguity around this point, particularly in relation to the Environmental Health degree which was described in the same focus group as not providing potential housing officers with adequate practical experience. However, the broader point about the need for a variety of available roles open to trainees following completion of the trainee programme is an important one and an area where more cross-authority discussion would be of benefit.

The majority of trainees felt like the trainee programme had met or exceeded their expectations and spoke very positively about their experience of undertaking the programme so far. One trainee, however, felt they had not been offered enough experience or responsibility throughout the trainee programme to be fully qualified for the role of regulatory compliance officer and was worried about what this would mean for their job prospects following the end of the trainee programme. For the trainees, key aims and expectations of the trainee programme included the ability to work alongside studying and gaining a qualification and knowledge.

“It's exceeded my expectations...I never thought after two years I'd be doing my own cases...leading on empty properties...having that trust from your colleagues which is quite nice to actually do the job

which has been really good...you feel like you're not just an apprentice now because you've got the knowledge from this course and the physical action of doing the inspections." *Trainee.*

## Course structure and content

### Level 4 apprenticeship

Feedback about the Level 4 apprenticeship was overwhelmingly positive in both the focus groups and interviews. Both LA leads and trainees praised the course citing in particular the quality of the tutors; the clear structure; regular opportunities to meet with the tutors, managers and trainees; the general nature of the content with a housing focus meaning trainees gained a broad knowledge base in regulatory compliance; and the course provider's responsiveness and openness to feedback.

The majority of trainees specifically mentioned valuing the fact they were a closed cohort as this fostered a stronger sense of connection and community. Trainees also valued the in-person sessions as a chance to meet others as well as learn about housing within different areas across GM. Trainees valued the ability to learn on the job alongside studying and felt that this worked particularly well when managers lined up tasks and shadowing opportunities that were directly relevant to what they were studying at the time. All the trainees passed the course with a merit or a distinction.

"My journey with [course provider] was a fantastic step back into education and provided a solid foundation for the next level of learning. The tutors were outstanding, always supportive, approachable and easy to contact. I genuinely couldn't fault the quality of teaching and guidance I received." *Trainee.*

The one area of improvement suggested by LA leads and trainees was related to the self-assessment activities; these were felt to be subjective and hard to answer with limited perceived benefit to their learning and development.

## **Level 5 Diploma**

Feedback about the Level 5 Diploma run by Middlesex University was more varied. The course was noted by many as more challenging, with one trainee describing it as a “night and day difference” between the Level 4 and the Level 5. LA leads discussed the Diploma being more trainee-led with minimal updates from the course leaders which they noted could be an issue if trainees did not feel confident to ask for help. Despite being a step up, some trainees felt adequately prepared having completed the Level 4 course and reported valuing the more in-depth knowledge gained during the Diploma.

The issue of time available to complete the work required for the Diploma was discussed in most focus groups and interviews. A number of trainees described needing to work evenings and weekends to keep on top of the coursework required. Whilst some felt this was to be expected and found it manageable, others described finding the workload stressful and that this expectation was not something that was fully outlined when they started the apprenticeship. Trainees reported being allocated different amounts of time to work on the Diploma and suggested that standardising this across the LAs is a key area for improvement; some LAs allowed two full study days while others allowed only the time to attend lectures. In addition, it was noted that a full day of online lectures is very tiring and not an engaging way of learning and that more in-person learning opportunities would be welcome.

The focus of this evaluation was the trainee programme, however some comments relating to the experiences of those existing staff members undertaking the Diploma are worth highlighting. First, although most LA leads were aware that existing staff could take up the offer of undertaking the Diploma, at least one LA did not know this was an option. Secondly, it was noted in one interview and focus group that tensions were surfacing between the trainee and the existing staff undertaking the Diploma as the trainee was allocated more time to study.

## **On-the-job training**

LA leads and trainees noted the on-the-job training offered by GMCA as being very welcome. The training was described as good quality and relevant for those at different levels within housing enforcement teams; a good “refresher” for existing

staff as one LA lead described it. Some LA leads mentioned it being particularly helpful that the funding for the additional training came from a central pot which helps to mitigate training inequities across smaller teams as everyone had access to this. One area of feedback concerned timing, with a request made for the training to be more spread out across the year, rather than concentrated between January and April.

## **Trainee integration and impact within LA housing enforcement teams**

LA leads described the trainee programme as providing important additional capacity within their teams and creating a new wave of employees bringing a good level of training and fresh perspectives. Trainees described developing a range of experiences across the following areas: admin, empty properties, inspections, joint visits, developing their own caseloads and shadowing colleagues. As time went by trainees described being given their own caseloads, issuing warrants and triaging disrepair cases. Job roles differed slightly across the LAs, but most LA leads discussed their trainees playing meaningful and valued roles within the team and significantly helping with the skills shortage by being in post.

Whilst LA leads welcomed the increased capacity, challenges were discussed by some in relation to the balancing of workforce priorities and being able to rely on trainees consistently for tasks, and the need for trainees to focus on developing knowledge and skills. This was managed by some by giving trainees lower risk tasks, however discrepancies over the amount of responsibility trainees have been given across the LAs has been noted by trainees as something that requires further thought for future iterations of the trainee programme. It also highlights the utility of sharing learning across LAs as to how LA leads have managed this balance between trainees meeting the skills shortage within teams whilst being given adequate time to learn.

Whilst the trainees are currently contributing to meeting the need for additional capacity within housing enforcement teams, funding for contract extensions has only been secured in a minority of LAs and this was noted as a challenge. It is important to note, however, that it was the hope from the outset of the programme that

alongside the potential of contract extensions trainees would also be able to move into available vacancies either within or outside of the LA in which they completed the trainee programme. Therefore, further consideration could be given to the additional support trainees may need in relation to job applications and interview preparation, as well as to whether there is a need to support LAs with business cases and/or funding applications.

“It will be a travesty if we ended up getting someone to the level he’s at now, and he’s really helping and supporting the team on a range of issues, that if we then couldn’t fund to keep him. Especially with the new legislation coming in, because I think it’s estimated there’ll be a shortfall of around 40,000 officers.” *LA lead.*

## **Future housing enforcement funding**

### **Priorities for housing enforcement teams**

In the context of the Renters’ Rights Bill coming into force soon and the need for increased capacity within housing enforcement teams, all LA leads spoke about future priorities focusing on training, recruitment and retention. All LA leads were supportive of another trainee programme and discussed the need for a new stream of people coming in to contribute to the sustainability of the sector. LA leads mentioned limited capacity for recruitment and the need to improve the visibility of the sector given the closure of all but two university degrees in Environmental Health. The support from GMCA with recruitment, therefore, was seen as very beneficial.

As detailed above, some LA leads saw the trainee programme as building up regional and national capacity and accepted that their trainee may choose to move elsewhere; others felt more strongly that they did not want to train a new member of staff only to lose them to another local authority. One focus group suggested that a solution to this problem could be introducing a clause into trainee contracts to ensure they were required to stay in post for a minimum amount of time after the end of the training. However, without follow-on funding there was acknowledgment that this would be hard to implement.

Most LA leads discussed wanting to put in business cases to be able to fund a post for the trainee to occupy once they complete the trainee programme; in two LAs this has been successful and three trainees will be made permanent in Spring 2026 following successful completion of the Diploma. As previously mentioned, one LA spoke of the need for more entry level roles across the conurbation that those undertaking the trainee programme could apply for following completion of the course. Other challenges related to funding were highlighted, including the difficulty of being able to fund a new trainee this year if the previous trainee is still in post and the unreliability of funding streams contributing to difficulties with future planning.

### **Career prospects for trainee housing enforcement officers**

All trainees described wanting to stay in housing enforcement, mostly within their LA, however those without confirmation of a job following the trainee programme would look at other regulatory compliance roles in different teams, or roles within different LAs. Two trainees mentioned wanting to undertake an Environmental Health degree and are exploring the potential for funding for this. In one interview a trainee discussed securing funding through their LA to undertake the Housing Practitioner exam, however mentioned that it has not been made clear whether this funding is available across the conurbation and there was a suggestion this should be a universal offer to all trainees.

For trainees, the potential of securing a permanent job following the trainee programme featured strongly across all interviews. At the time of writing, at least three trainees had secured a permanent position within their LA. Others spoke about starting to look for and apply for roles and/or are waiting to hear back from their LA lead about the possibility of a contract extension. Trainees conveyed a sense of disappointment that new trainees may start when they are still in post and felt that available funding should first be used to retain the current trainees, before starting a new round of recruitment.

“It would be disappointing for councils to continue accepting funding for new apprentices while simultaneously losing those who are already trained and embedded in the system. This wastes investment and could drive skilled individuals to look outside the borough. A brief



Google search shows that areas like Crewe are offering permanent positions with higher pay – their minimum wage is equivalent to the maximum I can earn once I move to a technical officer role. These roles also provide peace of mind that comes with the job security of a permanent position.” *Trainee*.

# Discussion and future considerations

Overall, the response to the trainee programme has been very positive, with both LA leads and trainees particularly praising the Level 4 course and the additional training. Trainees reported high levels of satisfaction with the applied nature of the trainee programme allowing them to gain qualifications and on-the-job experience, and LA leads welcomed the extra capacity, new energy and fresh ideas within their teams. In the majority of cases, trainees reported feeling well equipped for the role of housing enforcement officer and expressed a desire to stay working within their local authority; this was echoed by LA leads, the majority of whom were very keen to retain their trainee as a housing enforcement officer. This evaluation has found clear appetite from the LA leads to run the trainee programme again and clear indication from the trainees that the programme is a good model of gaining valuable on the ground experience, alongside the opportunity to gain important skills and qualifications.

The first aim of the Good Landlord Scheme Trainee Programme was to address the skills shortage within housing enforcement teams. This evaluation has found that in the majority of cases trainees have contributed significantly to capacity whilst in post, developed important skills needed for the role of housing enforcement officer, and LA leads are very keen to retain their trainees. Furthermore, the additional training and offer of the Level 5 course for existing staff has contributed to increasing skills and qualifications across housing enforcement teams. However, as this evaluation has detailed, concerns were raised about securing follow on funding for housing enforcement officer roles and a longer-term plan for the sustainability of the sector to ensure this increase in skills has a longer-term impact.

The second aim was to evaluate whether this trainee programme model is worth refunding, or whether a different approach to improving housing standards enforcement should be considered. There was a split in opinion between LA leads and trainees on this point; LA leads expressed a clear preference for running the trainee programme another time, whereas more trainees raised concerns that funding should first be spent on retention before recruiting another round of trainees.

The issue of job security is an important one as the widespread focus on retention demonstrates. Permanently funding posts, however, is outside of the remit of GMCA. This finding therefore speaks to the need for job prospects to be clearly outlined from the start to manage expectations, and for further consideration to be given to additional support local authorities may need with funding applications or business cases.

In light of the decision to rerun the trainee programme, key considerations for future iterations of the programme are as follows:

- Ensure clarification and standardisation of the structure of the trainee programme including:
  - Clarity and agreement on the number of hours trainees get for studying each week throughout the three years
  - Standardised provision of clearly defined tasks that are appropriate to the level of trainee, allowing them to develop experience and knowledge needed to become regulatory compliance officers alongside their studies
- More opportunities built into the Level 5 Diploma for in-person, cross-cohort activities and/or opportunities to meet
- Continue to explore and advocate for parity of pay and contract type across local authorities
- Work to remove barriers to longer term sustainable funding:
  - Capacity building within LAs to support building business cases to retain newly trained regulatory compliance officers
- A follow up with current trainees in a year to gather information on job roles and future plans
- An impact evaluation of the next trainee programme