



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government

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Housing safety and quality system mapping

End of project report

March 2025

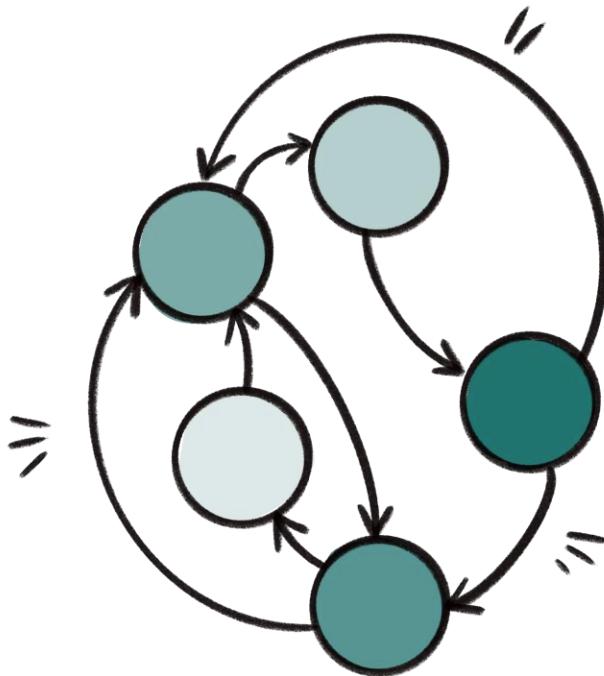
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Introduction

This project was completed by the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) System Design team in March 2025.



The project and its outputs aimed to give a high-level snapshot of the housing quality and safety system to support and inform internal teams. We've published our work because we believe it may be useful to others too.

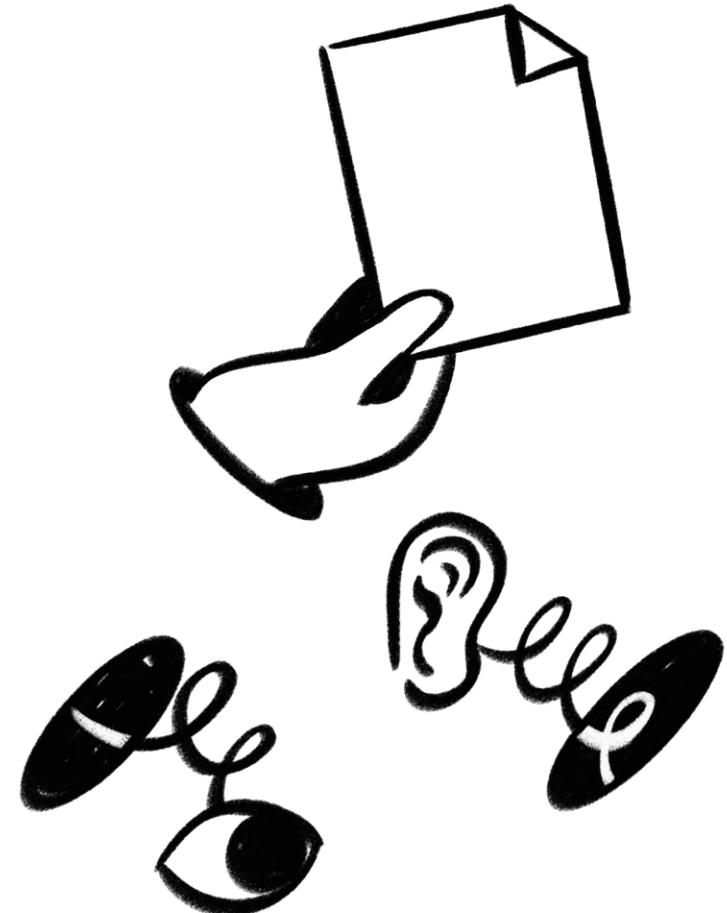
Given the scale of the system and the short timeframe of the project, these outputs cannot offer an in depth or representative view of the whole system. So, the team will be continuing their work through future projects.

This document is marked as Official like the majority of information that is created, processed, sent or received in the public sector and by partner organisations. But the insights it contains reflect what we've heard from people at the heart of the system, rather than MHCLG policy positions.



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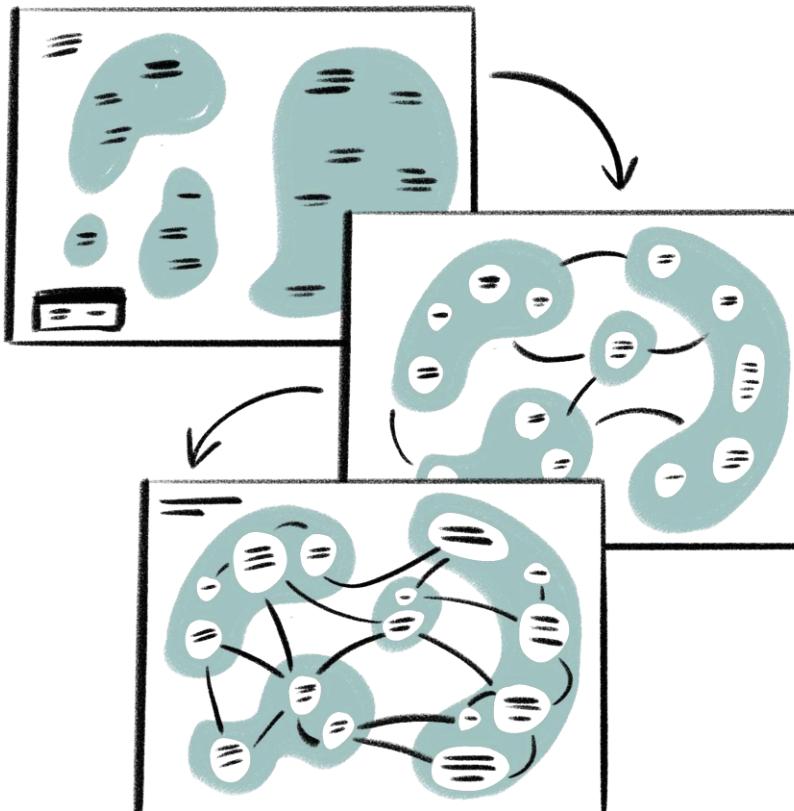


Introduction



The ask

We are mapping the system of people and things that relate to the safety, quality and sustainability of residential buildings



Our key objectives are:

1. Visualise a clear view of the as-is system
2. Deliver insights about the reality of that landscape
3. Assess and stress test assumptions, guiding star proposals and any reform proposals
4. Identify gaps, challenges and opportunities for further change



The system boundary

The system boundary includes the people and things that relate to the safety, quality and sustainability of residential buildings. It includes the design, build, maintenance and use as this relates to existing stock and new build.

The system we explored and mapped considered the housing system as a whole. This means it does not reflect the Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government's (MHCLG) boundaries. In places we have looked beyond those boundaries considering regulation and policy provided by other departments, to ensure we explored the experiences of some of the most vulnerable residents. But our focus has also been narrower than MHCLG's remit, in our choice to not consider commercial buildings. We set this boundary to give our work a clear structure in the time we had for the project.

Residents



- All people living in a building regardless of tenure or temporality
- Considering the whole experience of users – not just fire safety
- Resident engagement in the design, build or maintenance of buildings
- Management of buildings by agents, freeholders and others

Buildings



- New and existing buildings, and the associated regulatory framework
- Buildings where people live or spend a significant period inhabiting
- Residential buildings that contain commercial or social spaces
- Refurbishment, renovation or retrofitting of buildings

Sector



- All roles involved in the design, construction, assessment and management of buildings
- Regulation, competence, skills, availability and capacity
- Contract and commercial aspects
- Construction products, manufacturers and distributors

Other



- All remediation activity
- Retrofitting schemes' impact on the system
- Energy performance of buildings
- England only
- Fire and rescue services and their role

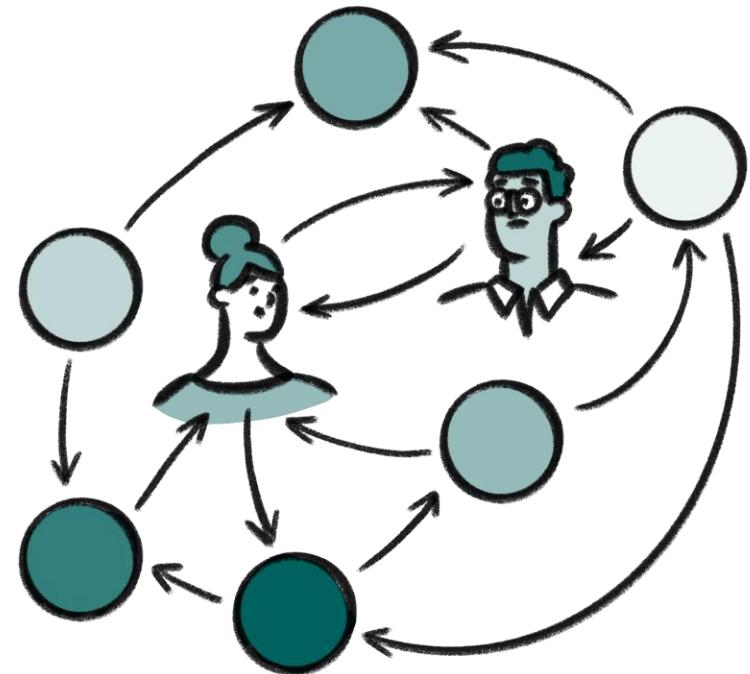


User centred systems thinking

We took a user centred systems thinking approach to this work:

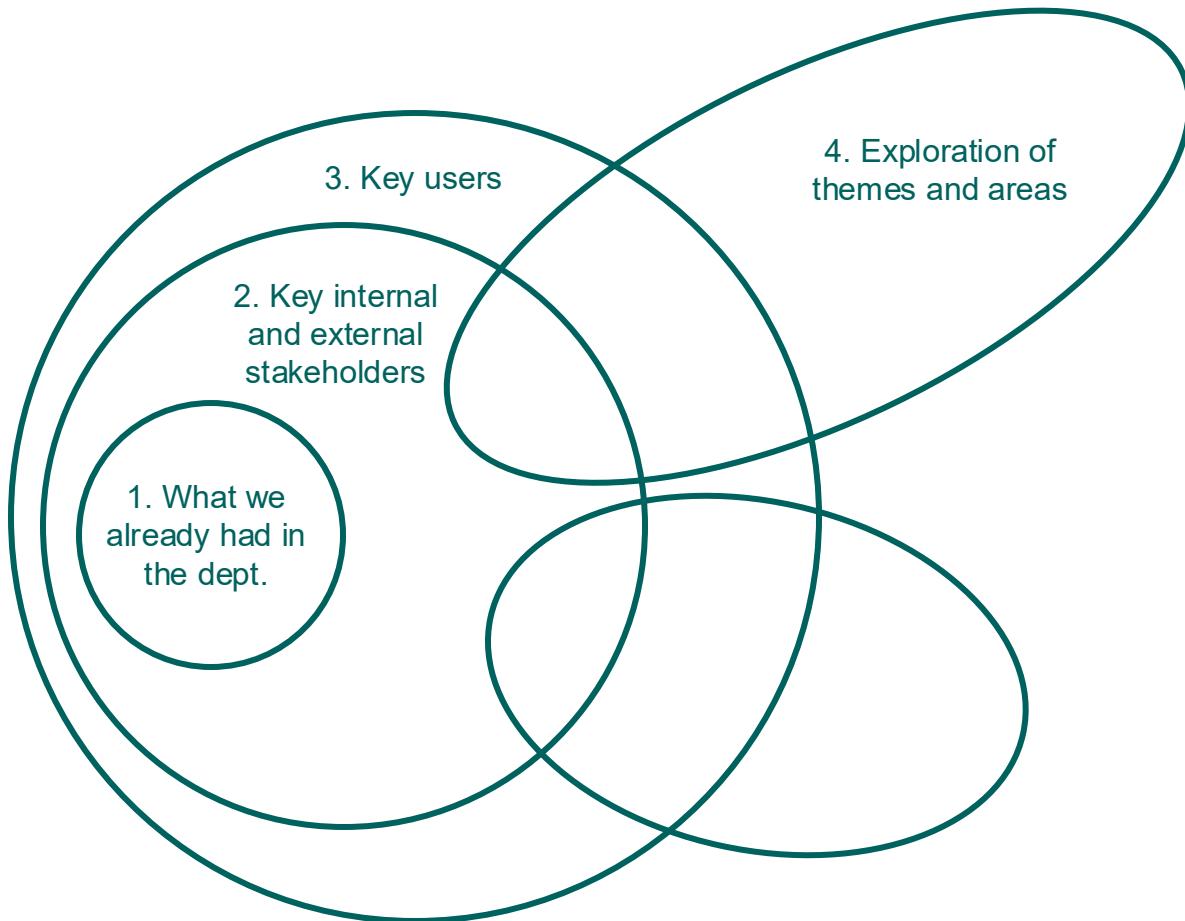
We engaged with the people who were most involved in the system to understand their behaviours, relationships and experiences.

Their insights enabled us to map how different parts of the system interact, better understand our role and identify levers for change.





Approach to research and mapping



To avoid duplication and enable speed, we started with research that already existed.

Then we engaged and collaborated with internal and external stakeholders, key users who featured heavily in the system.

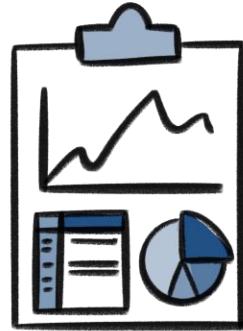
At each level we looked to map across the system, rather than mapping in sections based on users or system areas.



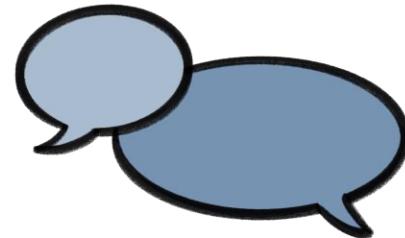
Our research



Desk research
including **91** internal
and external sources



Analysis of data
from **13** sources



Conversations with
17 internal stakeholders



Research with
27 professional actors
and residents in the
system



Key system findings

Overview of the System



Housing is a fundamental human need, but its safety and quality is determined by a vast and complex system

Ambiguity and risk



We heard reports of concern for both professional and personal risk influencing decision making around building safety.

Capability & Capacity



Limited capacity and capability across key roles has created a reactive system, with minimal enforcement, significant delays and pinch points in key processes

Regulation in Practice



Unintended impacts of legislation and the uncertainty of navigating new processes have caused delays, risks for residents, and fear in the system

Impact on Residents

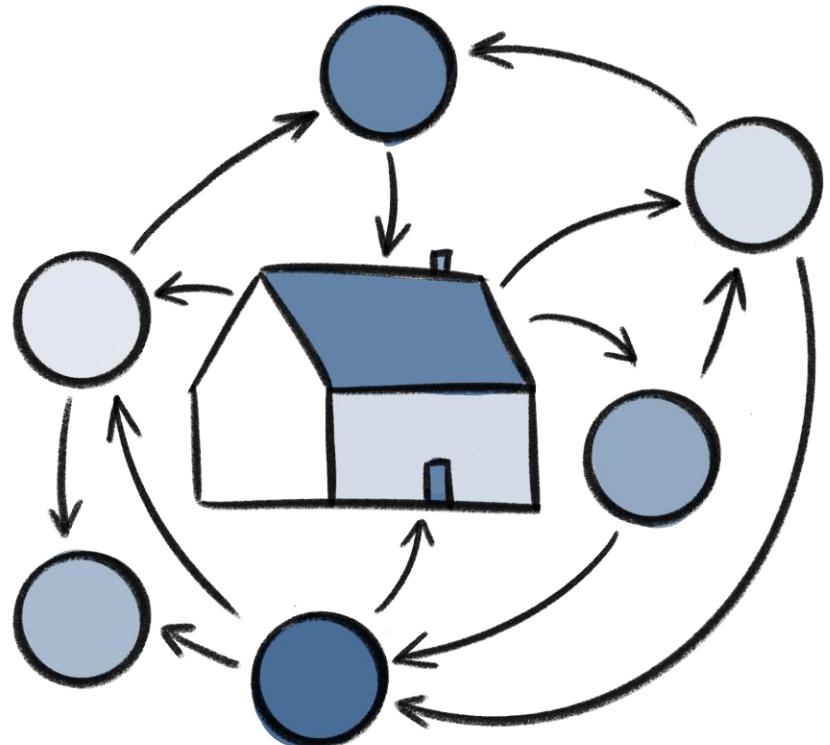


Residents feel the impacts of the quality and safety of housing but currently have the least influence within the system.

An overview of the system



An overview of the system



Housing is a fundamental human need, but its safety and quality is determined by a vast and complex system.



Housing is a fundamental need

Housing is a fundamental human need which impacts every aspect of our lives.

- Housing profoundly impacts residents' health. Poor quality housing can cause chronic conditions and impact mental health. When not addressed this can lead to loss of life.
- Hazards, structural issues and fire risks can pose immediate and direct risks to residents' lives.
- The quality and sustainability of housing can cause and exacerbate financial burdens and impact communities' social outcomes.



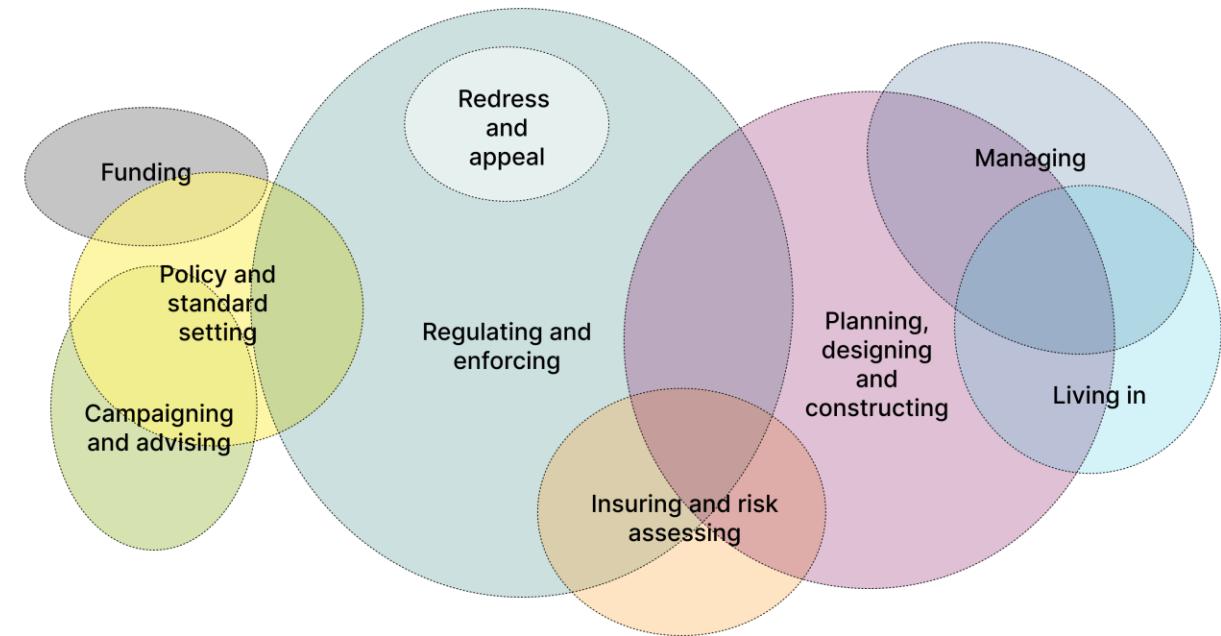
Complexity of the housing system

The housing safety and quality system is complex, non-linear, ever-changing and vast.

We have mapped the system at a high level, showing role types and their interactions.

Many of those involved in the system have multiple interlinking relationships, even when just considering how they are regulated. Their financial and risk-based relationships are even more complex.

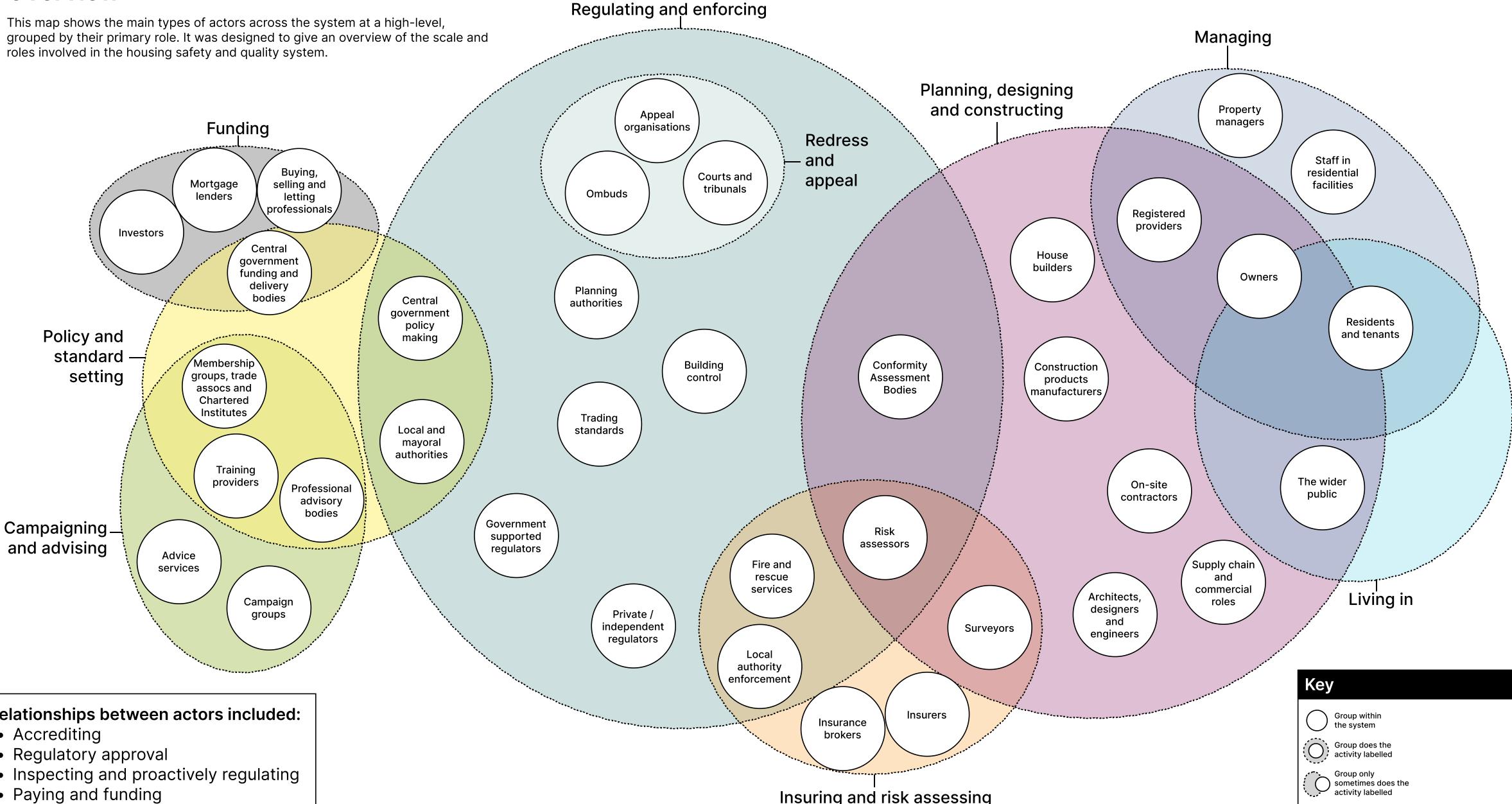
Housing is also part of wider systems such as immigration, health and education.



Full pdfs of these maps are available in our GitHub repository

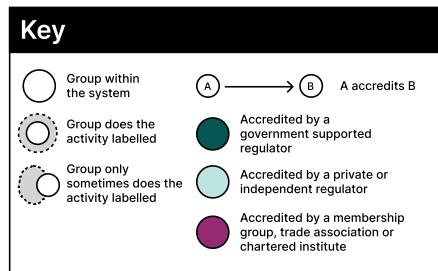
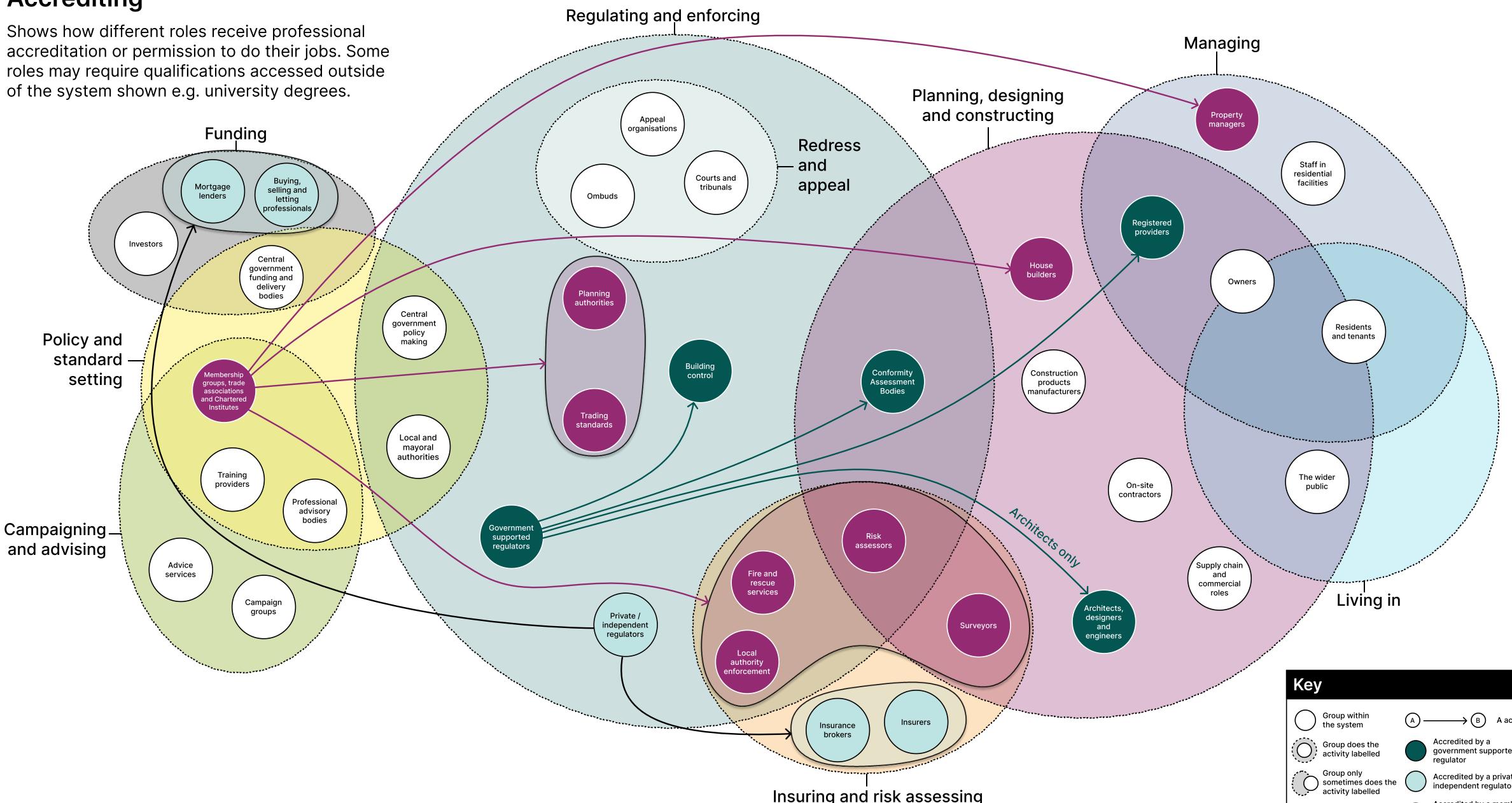
Overview

This map shows the main types of actors across the system at a high-level, grouped by their primary role. It was designed to give an overview of the scale and roles involved in the housing safety and quality system.



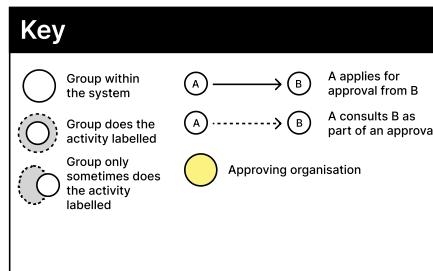
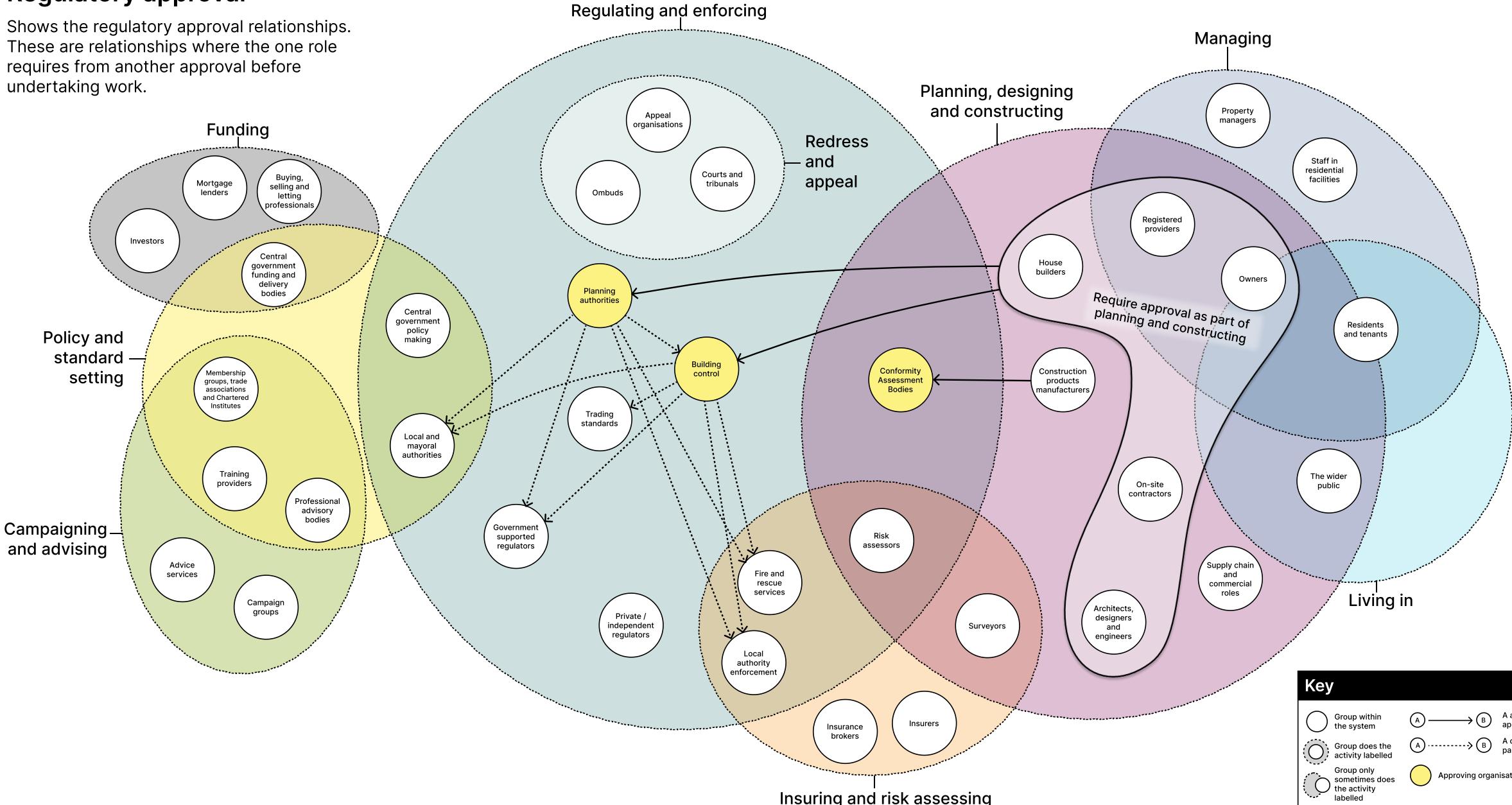
Accrediting

Shows how different roles receive professional accreditation or permission to do their jobs. Some roles may require qualifications accessed outside of the system shown e.g. university degrees.



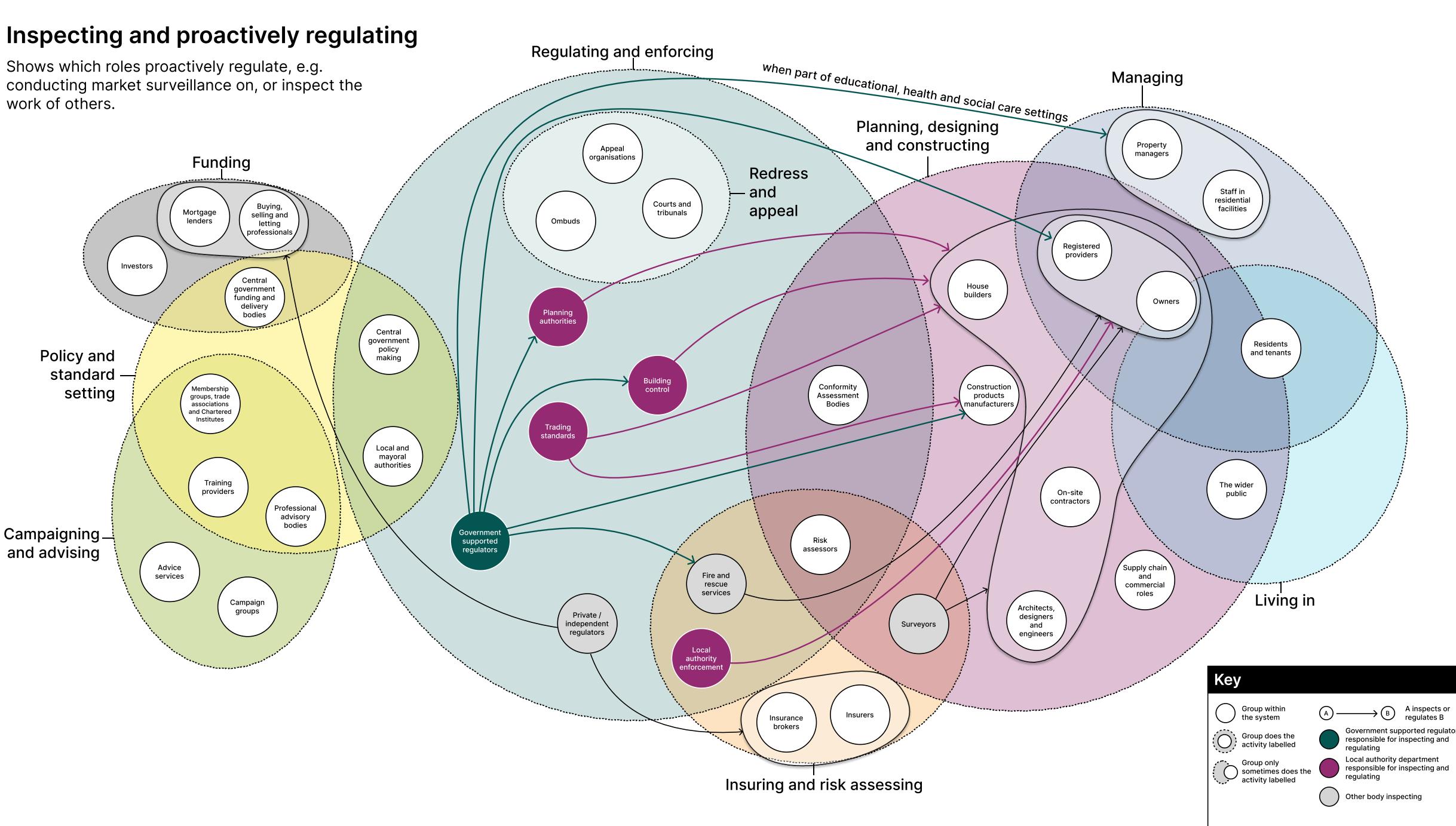
Regulatory approval

Shows the regulatory approval relationships. These are relationships where the one role requires from another approval before undertaking work.



Inspecting and proactively regulating

Shows which roles proactively regulate, e.g. conducting market surveillance on, or inspect the work of others.





Who is involved in regulating?

The regulatory actors across the building safety and quality system, include

26

Government supported regulators

Building Safety Regulator
Fire and Rescue Services
Office for Product Safety and Standards

10

Private sector & independent regulators

Financial Conduct Authority
Registered Building Control Approvers
Competent Persons Scheme

6

Redress and appeal bodies

Housing Ombudsman
MHCLG Appeals and Determinations
HMCTS Tribunals

23

Membership groups & trade associations

Royal Institute of British Architects
National Residential Landlord Association
Chartered Institute of Environmental Health

11

Advisory bodies

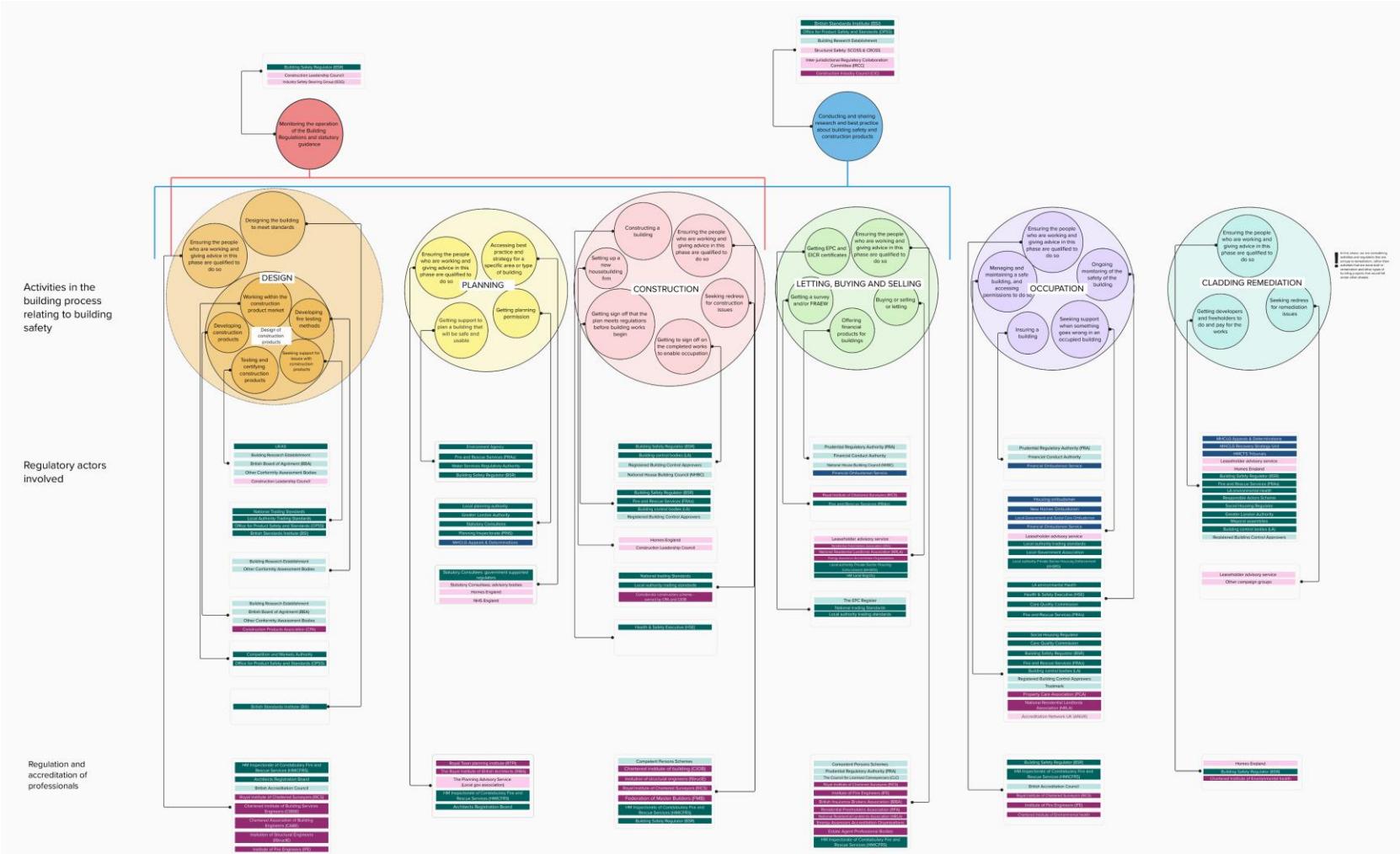
The Planning Advisory Service
Leaseholder Advisory Service
Construction Leadership Council

For example...



Who regulates the system?

The regulatory landscape is complex, with multiple different regulators involved at every stage of the process as shown in this map.



You can find a full pdf of this map in our GitHub repository



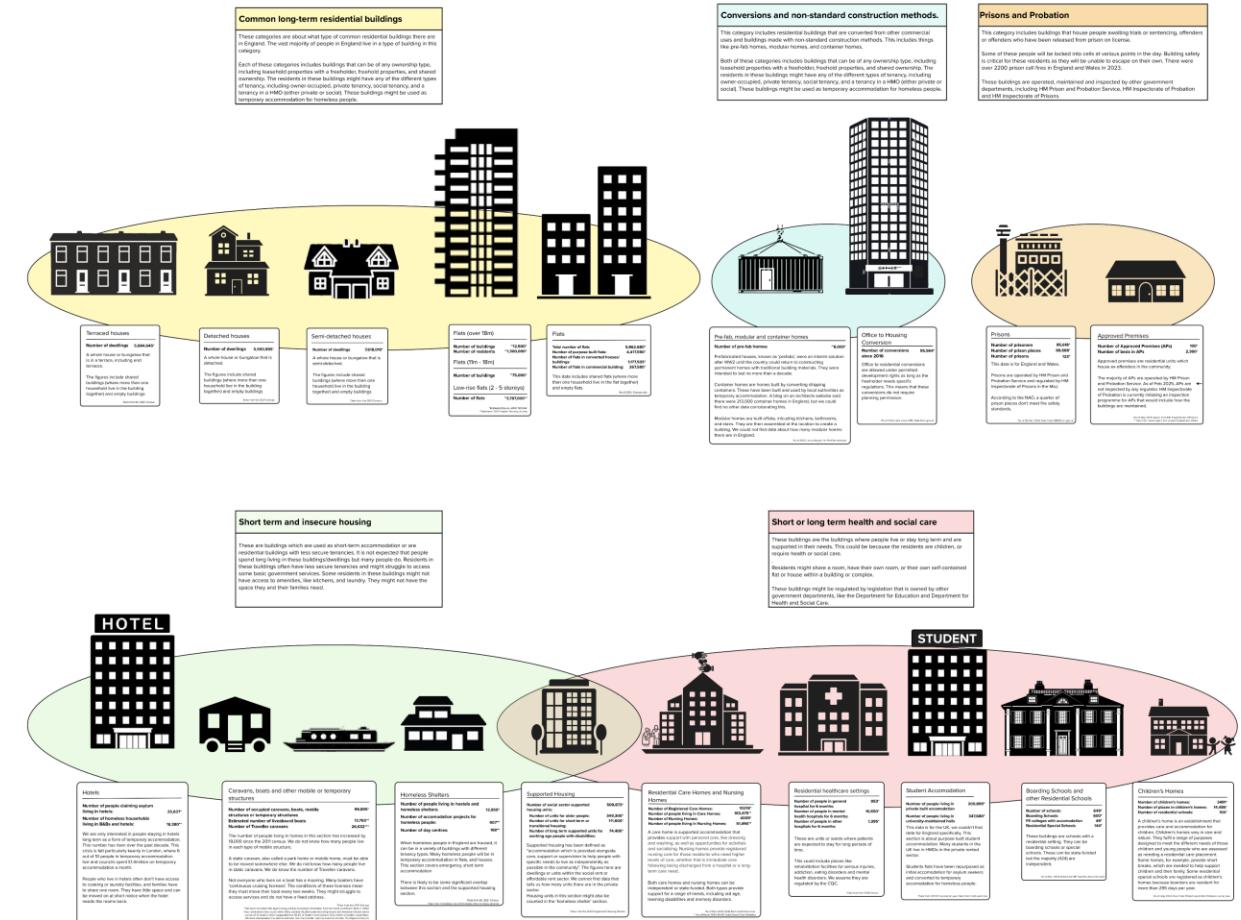
Where are people living?

The majority of people live in what we might typically think of as residential buildings like houses and flats. However, when considering people's experience of housing, we should also consider:

- Buildings that might be designed to provide temporary or short-term accommodation
 - Buildings that are constructed using non-standard methods
 - Buildings where residents are provided with support or healthcare.

These experiences impact expectations and behaviour, and the vast range of places people live only add to the complexity of the system.

You can find a full pdf of this map in our GitHub repository





Considerations to take away

Any changes or reforms we make in the system will need to work within this complexity, impacting how changes land in practice and the impact they have.

Every new home developed must navigate the complex system of regulators and regulation across the system.

Understanding the health of and stewarding the system requires a broad view across roles, regulations and experiences.

The complexity of relationships and the difficulty in pinpointing responsibility impacts not only the construction but the management and maintenance of all homes.

Ambiguity and risk



Ambiguity and risk



We heard reports of concern around both professional and personal risk when it comes to building safety. This is particularly true for those in regulatory roles where ambiguity in the system makes their job more uncertain, and for residents living in unsafe or poor-quality homes.



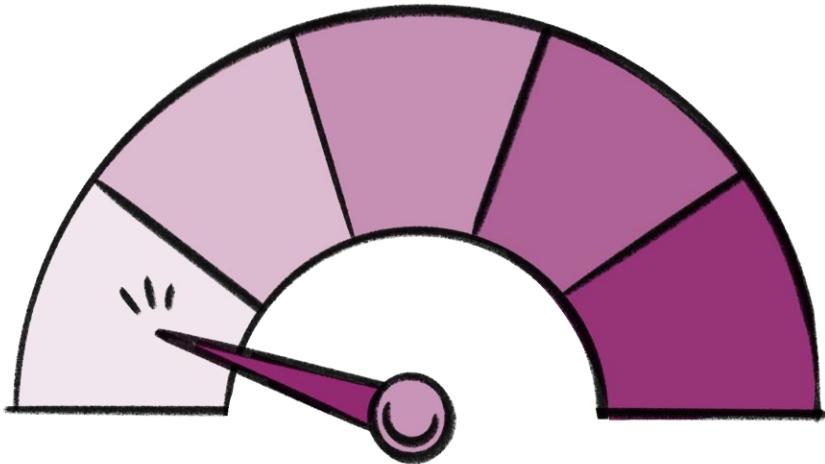
Personal and professional risk

Concern around personal and professional risk is prevalent throughout the system particularly for regulatory professionals and residents

- This concern appears to be a consequence of a race to the bottom. The culture of doing the bare minimum in the broader housing system exacerbates the fear that professions such as Building Control and Environmental Health feel when making decisions about the safety of housing
- Building Control inspectors feel they are seen to be responsible for housing safety, which is a difficult position to be in when others in the system are doing the bare minimum
- When combined with lack of capacity to manage the workload, this responsibility has left regulators feeling fearful of making decisions and being responsible for risks to residents that they may have little control over
- Building Control inspectors reported concerns about providing support for compliance without offering what would be considered design advice under the Building Regulations 2010 and Building Safety Act 2022, as the distinction between these kinds of advice didn't feel clear in all cases.
- Residents living in poor-quality housing are the most powerless in the system and often fear eviction or rent increases if they raise issues with their landlord. The housing crisis means there is no security for residents, and they are fearful of ending up in a worse living situation



Ambiguity and risk



The same ambiguity that creates fear for those in regulatory roles, enables bad actors to ‘play’ the system. This has led to ‘a race to the bottom’ culture where meeting the minimum safety requirements and maximising profits is the goal.



Industry culture and behaviour

In our research we heard a ‘race to the bottom’ culture to increase profit still very much exists

- Professionals from across the sector emphasised that the race to the bottom is still a problem impacting the safety and quality of housing
- Compliance and ensuring safety of homes can be seen by some actors as a burden rather than a responsibility
- We heard that some private sector developers, and other professions involved in house building, are still doing the bare minimum to meet standards to keep costs low and profit margins high
- But professionals across the sector have explained that only meeting the minimum legal requirements is not enough to create good quality homes, there needs to be best practice
- Professionals in local authorities have highlighted how difficult it can be to hold developers to account after completion of buildings which is when most issues are identified



Considerations to take away

Concern around risk and ambiguity impacts how receptive actors are to changes, particularly where regulations and responsibilities are changing.

The current system is far from a place of trust between actors (professionals, residents, regulators) in the built environment.

Residents in unsafe or poor-quality housing are fearful of repercussions or not being heard when raising issues, even when feeling impacts on their lives.

Unintentional ambiguity can create uncertainty and risk of unwanted behaviour in the system.

Capacity and capability



Capacity and capability

Issues recruiting, training and retaining skilled staff have been reported across key roles in the system.





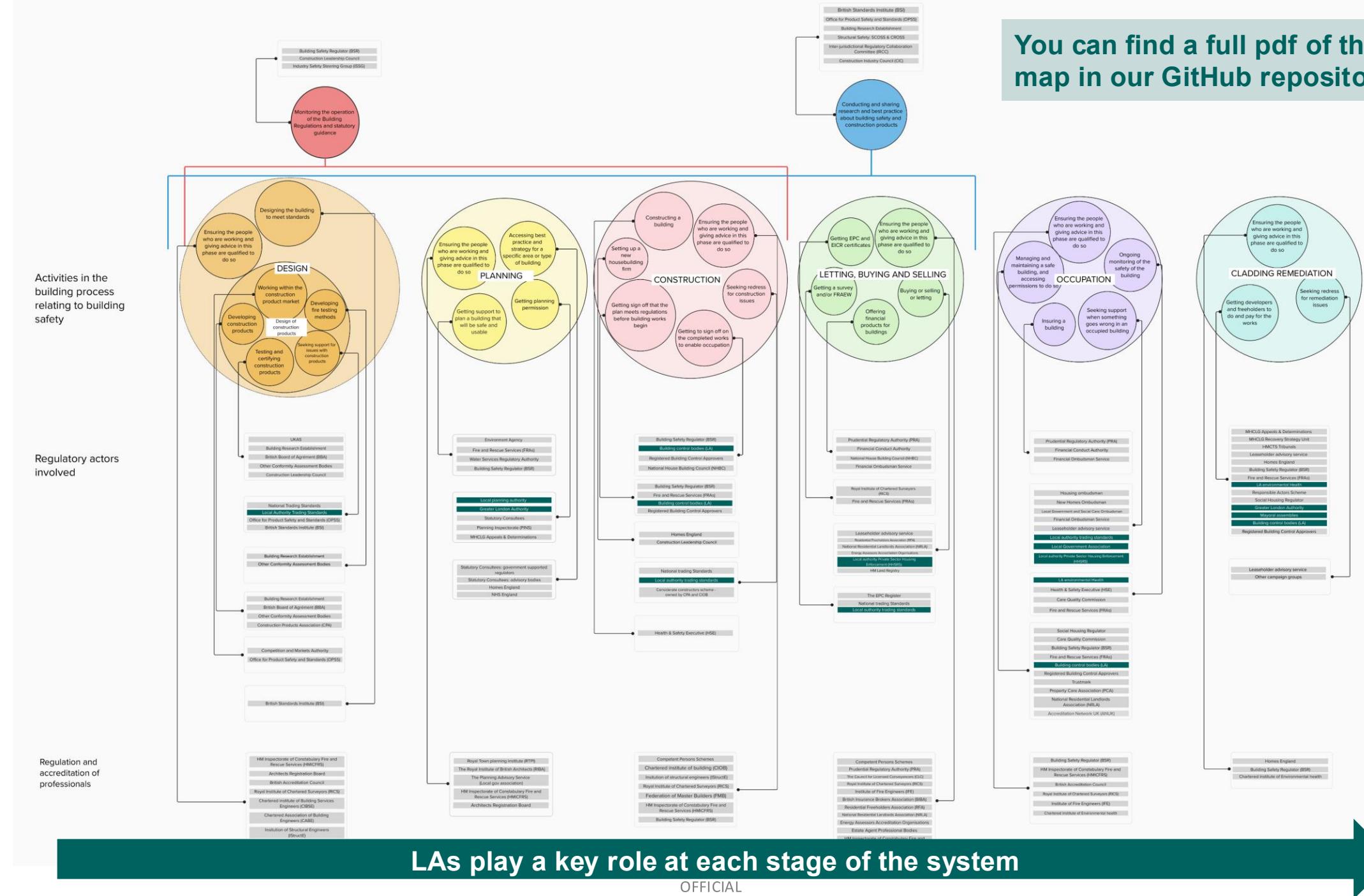
Capacity and capability

Local Authorities and the Building Safety Regulator are facing issues with capacity and capability, as they respond to multiple competing priorities.

Given their role in building control and enforcement, this has led to delays in remediation and housebuilding, increasing risk in the system.



You can find a full pdf of this map in our GitHub repository





Capacity and capability

In our research participants highlighted that capacity issues in local regulators are at a pinch point:

- Crucial roles in public services such as Fire Services and Environmental Health are unable to recruit and retain staff due to high pressure and better incentives in private sector roles
- Most participants across Building Control, Fire Services and Environmental Health emphasised the impacts on staff wellbeing of increasing workload and responsibility for safety which is made harder by other actors in the system not prioritising safety when building and maintaining of housing
- Pressures are compounded, particularly for Building Control and Fire Services, as the BSR is drawing on the same local authority resource to fill multi-disciplinary teams for the new regulatory system for high rise buildings (known as the building gateways). These pressures are having consequences for house building. Delays with the Stage 2 Gateway for high rise buildings is adding months into projects and leading some investors to pull out of high-rise projects, creating the unintended consequence of slowing down house building
- The new accreditation for Building Control Inspectors has led many skilled professionals to take early retirement rather than go through additional exams. There is a greater risk of not receiving accreditation and no financial incentive to be accredited at Class 3 which is needed for high rise buildings.



Considerations to take away

Capacity and capability are key not only to designing and constructing homes, but also the regulation and enforcement that maintain their safety and quality.

Lack of capacity across the system makes it hard for different parts of the system to work together to uphold quality.

Not having the right skills across the system diminishes trust in people doing what they should be doing.

Competing priorities, new requests and responding to emerging issues put further pressure on regulator capacity.

Regulation in practice

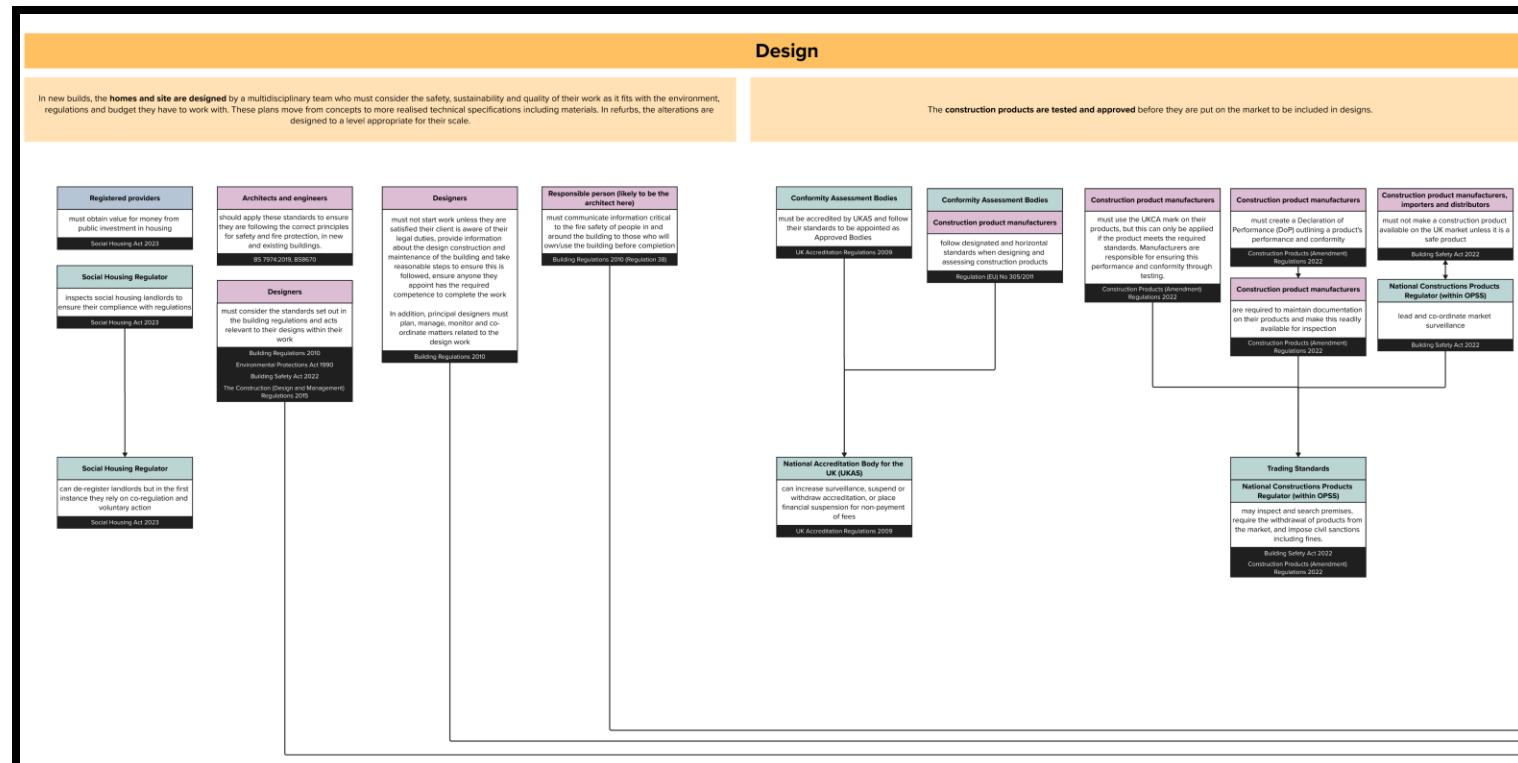


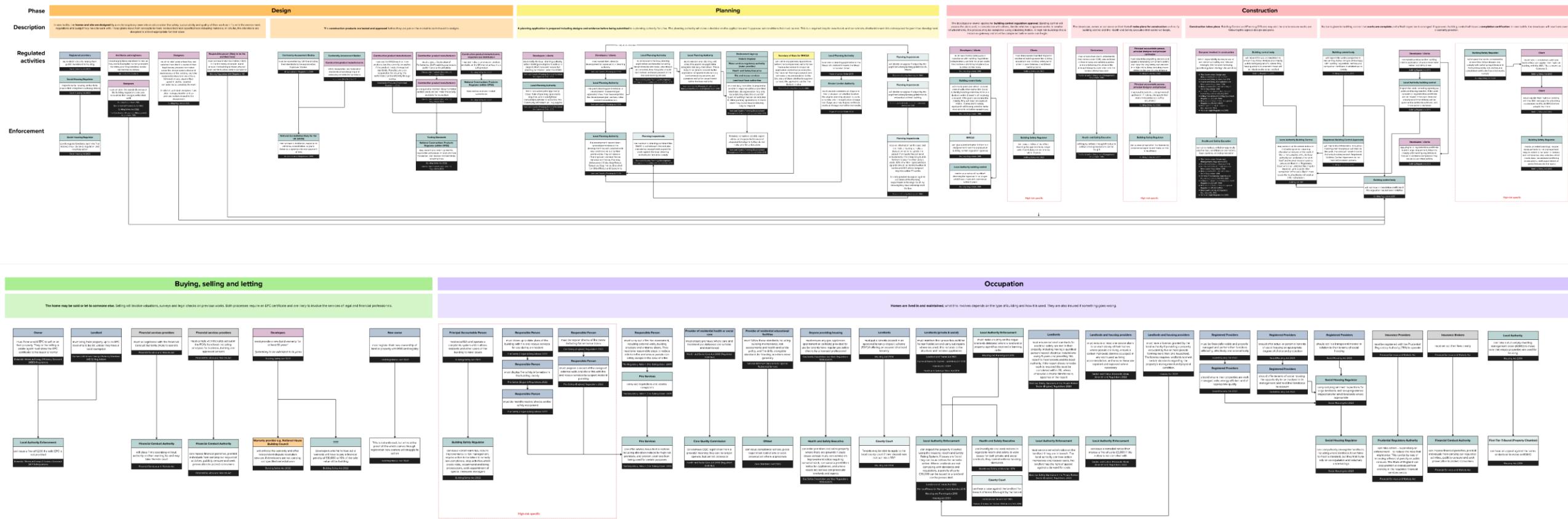
Regulations in the system

Regulations in the system are complex and numerous. Looking at the stages from design to occupation, not including remediation, we've captured:

- Over 76 bodies who regulate or are involved in regulating the system
- Over 70 acts
- Over 83 regulations

We have looked to bring together this information alongside the stages in the system in the map pictured here.





**Image included as an illustration to show the scale of the regulatory landscape.
You can find a full pdf of this map in our GitHub repository**



Regulation in practice

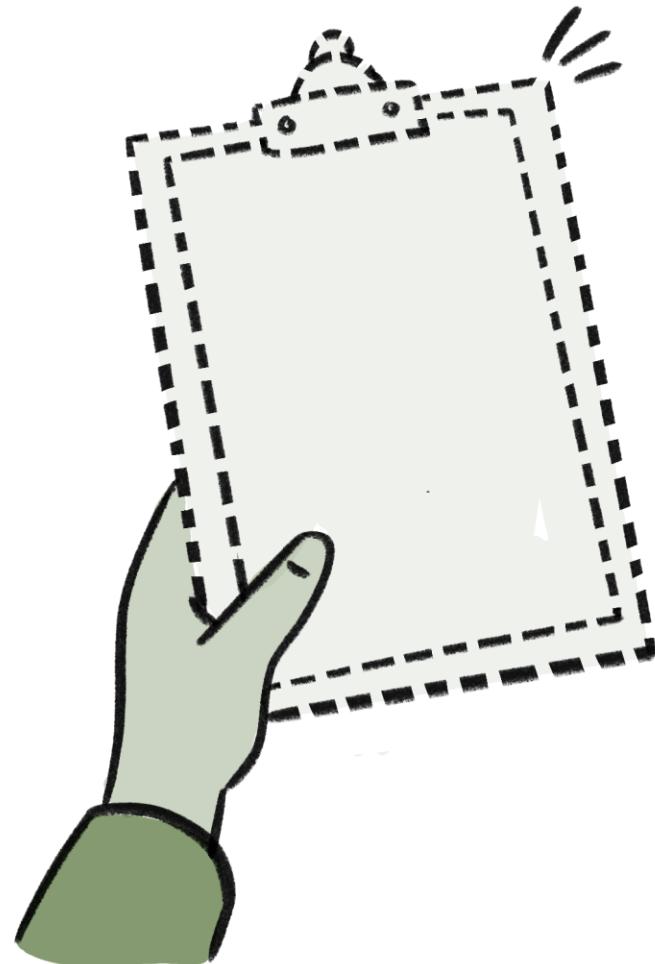


Professionals and residents in the system currently feel they must navigate regulation changes on their own, leading to uncertainty, delays and limited progress.



Regulation in practice

Where regulations meet the breadth of the system, it amplifies the complexity making it harder to enforce, particularly where there are gaps or overlaps.





Regulation in practice



Data limitations make creating proportional and considered regulation harder.

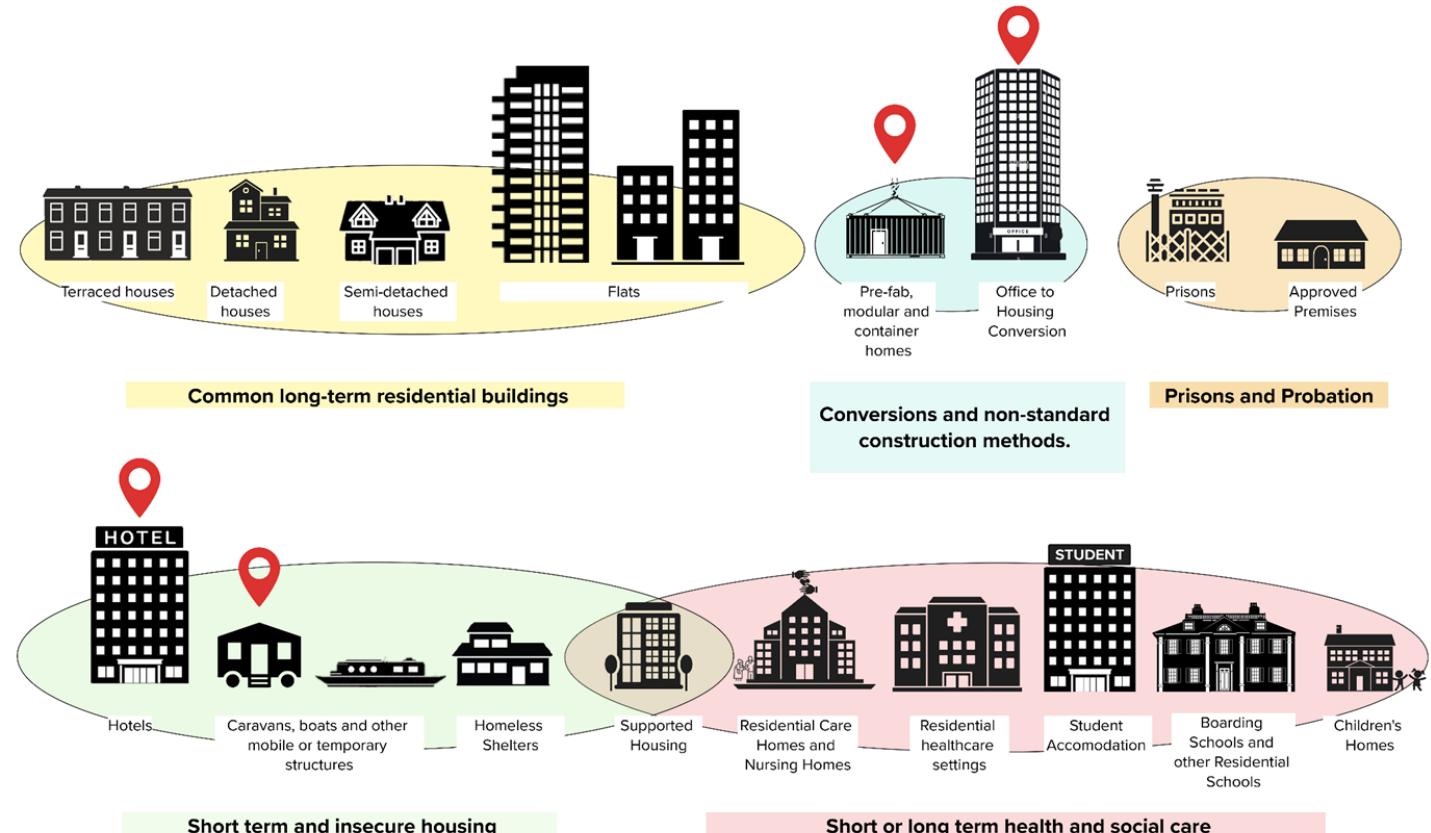
Frequent and perceived ad-hoc changes to data requirements lead to incorrect returns from time and capacity-poor stakeholders, the need for excessive housekeeping to rectify issues, and difficulties making informed decisions.



Housing landscape

We do not have a full picture of the housing landscape. We were unable to find complete and reliable data for several building types outside of common long-term residential buildings.

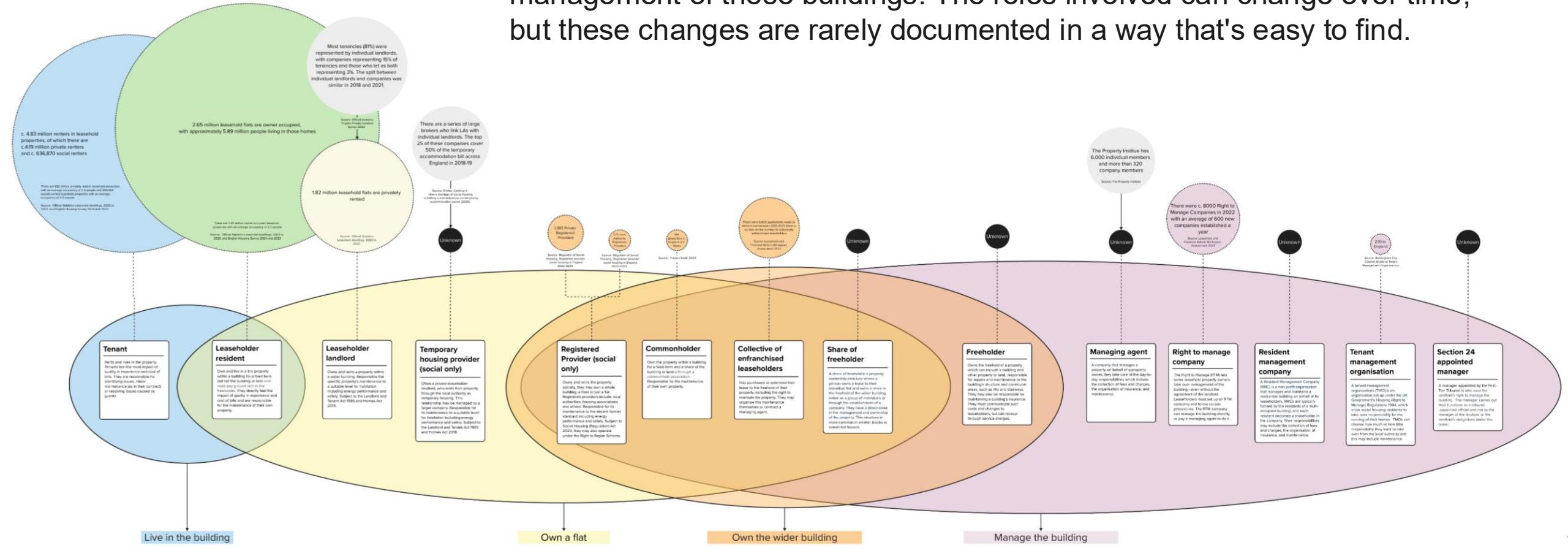
This includes caravans, which we heard from Environmental Health professionals are often in poor condition and can be difficult to regulate and enforce safety in. There is limited data about how many people live in caravans long term or how many may be rented as homes .





Roles in multi-occupancy buildings

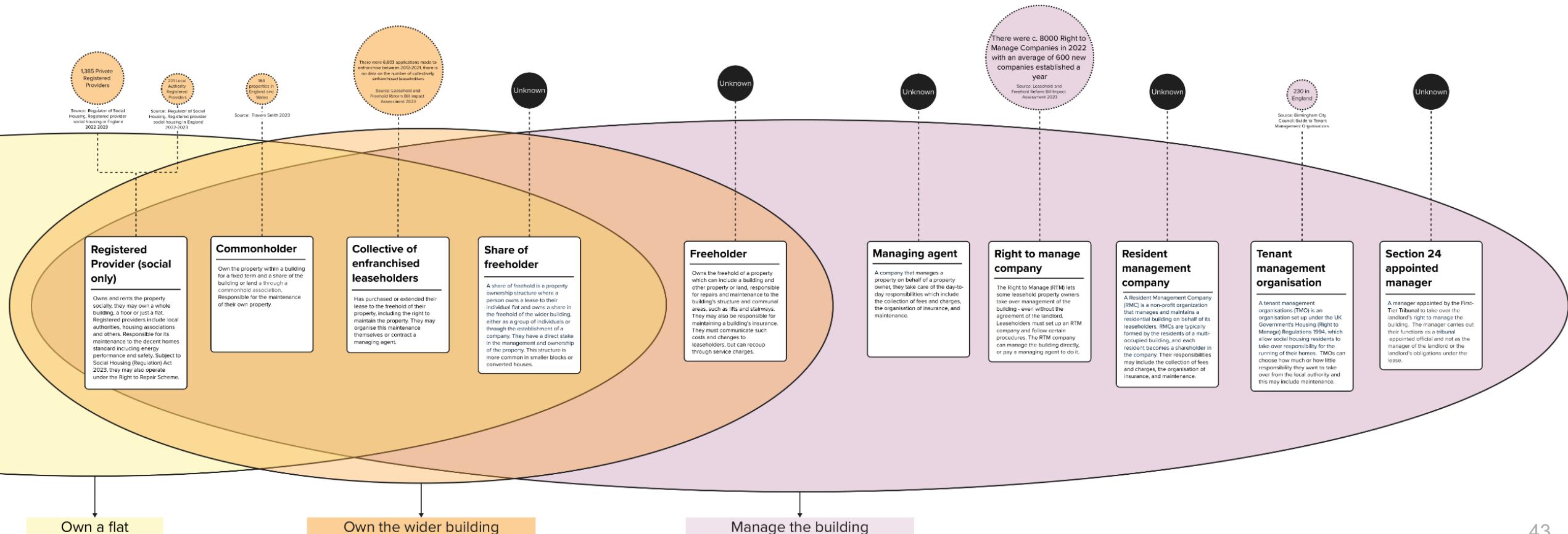
You can find a full pdf of this map in our GitHub repository





Roles in multi-occupancy buildings

In many cases, those involved in managing high-risk buildings are not professionals and may have no training. This should be considered when developing guidance for them to follow, but limited data has meant it can be hard to get the balance of this focus right.





Considerations to take away

Regulatory change should be designed in the context of the existing regulatory landscape from a system perspective.

Professionals want a role in shaping, and support to understand regulations, particularly where they intersect with or layer on top of existing complexity.

Having high quality data is key to understanding the system, but the approach to gathering that data must be consistent and proportionate to capacity.

Even with the volume of regulation it is not always clear who is responsible for what things, leaving housing quality issues difficult to resolve for residents.

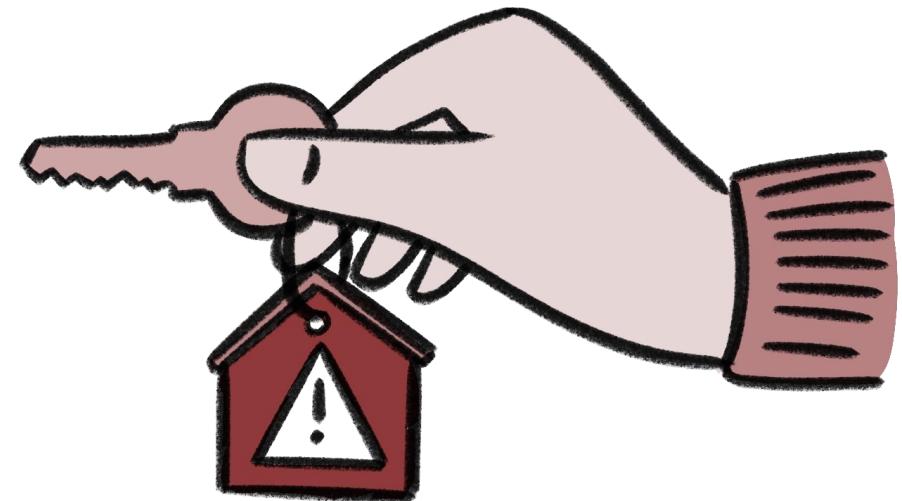
Impact on residents



Impact on residents

Residents feel the impacts of the quality and safety of housing, but they have the least influence within the system.

The most vulnerable residents can experience additional barriers to accessing support, so by the time issues are identified, they can be more dangerous and costly.





Resident findings so far

We were only able to conduct a small sample of resident research in this project so that we could cover a wider range of roles in the system. We will be conducting further research with residents with a range of backgrounds and housing situations in future projects.

In this initial round of research, we heard:

- Users living in communal buildings value the sense of community and often pull together on housing quality issues
- Users voice is effective when leveraged in specific roles within housing association resident-led committees and groups
- Users in the poorest quality housing had experienced a series of bad living accommodations and were most vulnerable, including experiencing homelessness
- Mould and damp issues were a common theme and were causing serious health implications for users



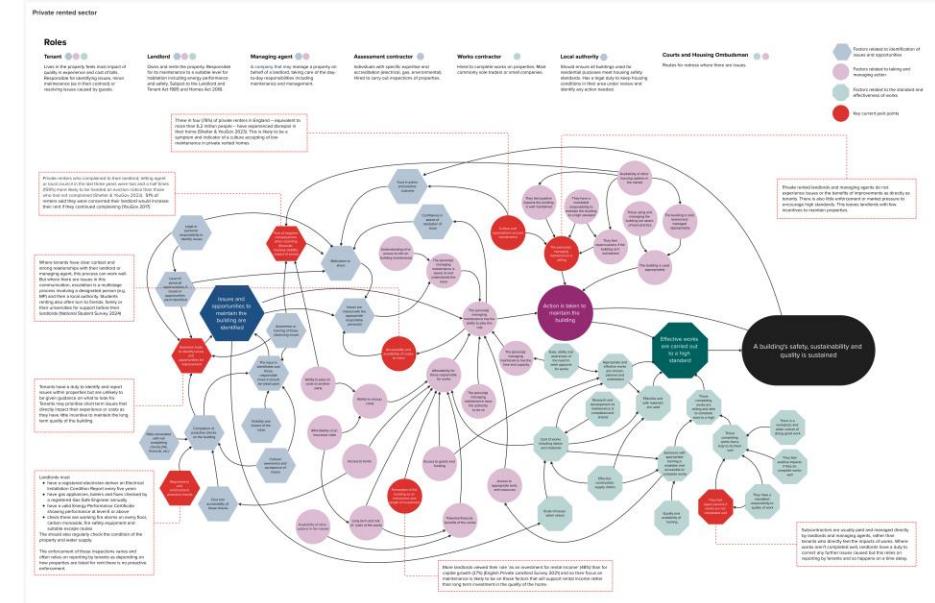
Maintaining housing

The complexity of the system, lack of accountability, and limited capacity, can be seen in the issues faced by residents who want their housing to be maintained well.

We've seen that:

- The more layers between residents and decision makers, the more opportunity there is for communication to fail
 - Ambiguity in responsibility and enforcement, disincentivises proactive maintenance
 - Limited resources and reactive decision making, means issues aren't addressed until they're serious hazards to health

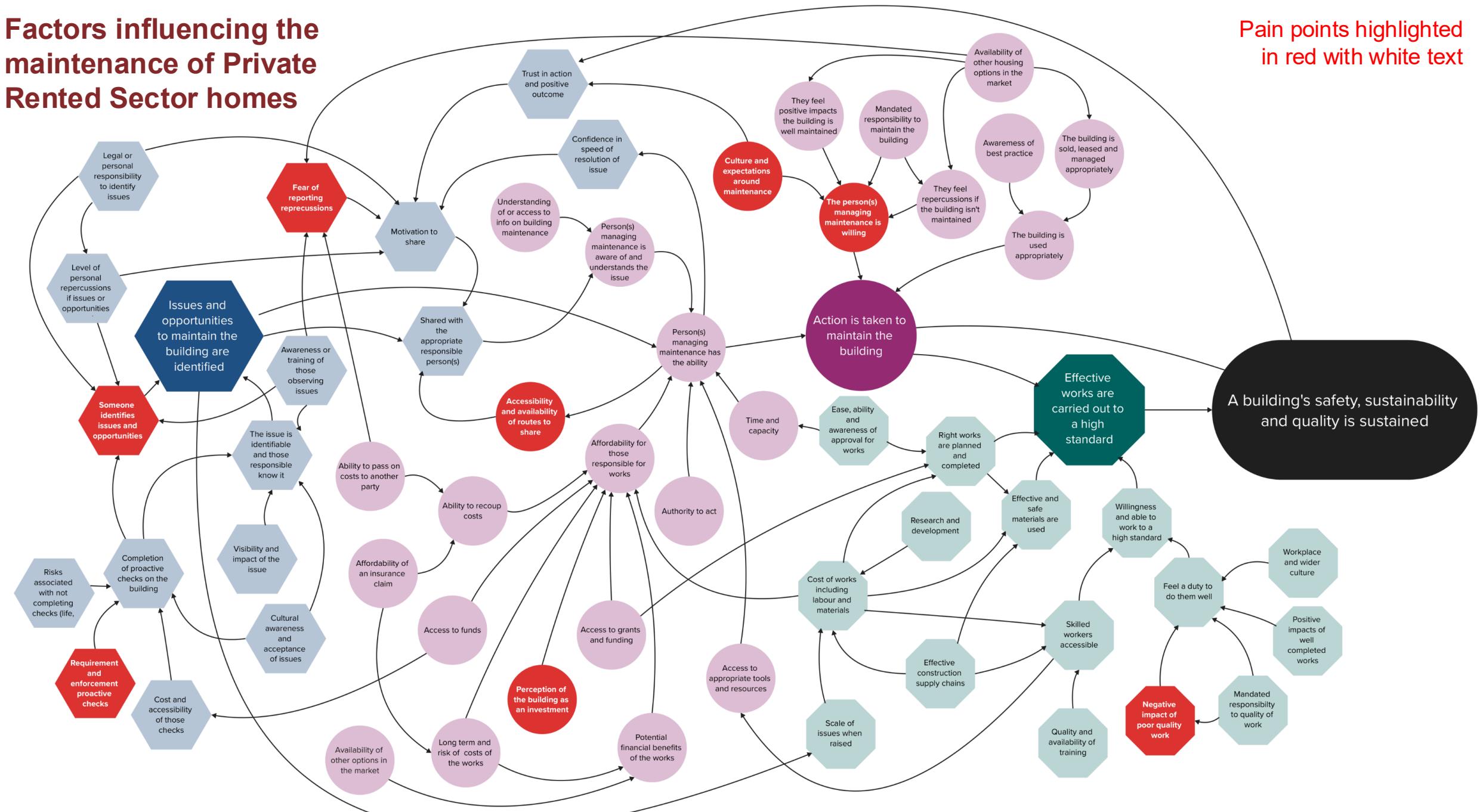
The following map highlights the pain points faced by those in the private rented sector and is a part of a series showing the factors that influence the maintenance of housing.



You can find a full pdf of this map in our GitHub repository

Factors influencing the maintenance of Private Rented Sector homes

Pain points highlighted in red with white text





Considerations to take away

Residents are most impacted by this system but have the least power. All changes and reforms should be assessing the true impact on residents by engaging them meaningfully.

Residents most impacted by poor-quality housing are often vulnerable and are regularly underserved. We need to work hard to build trust.

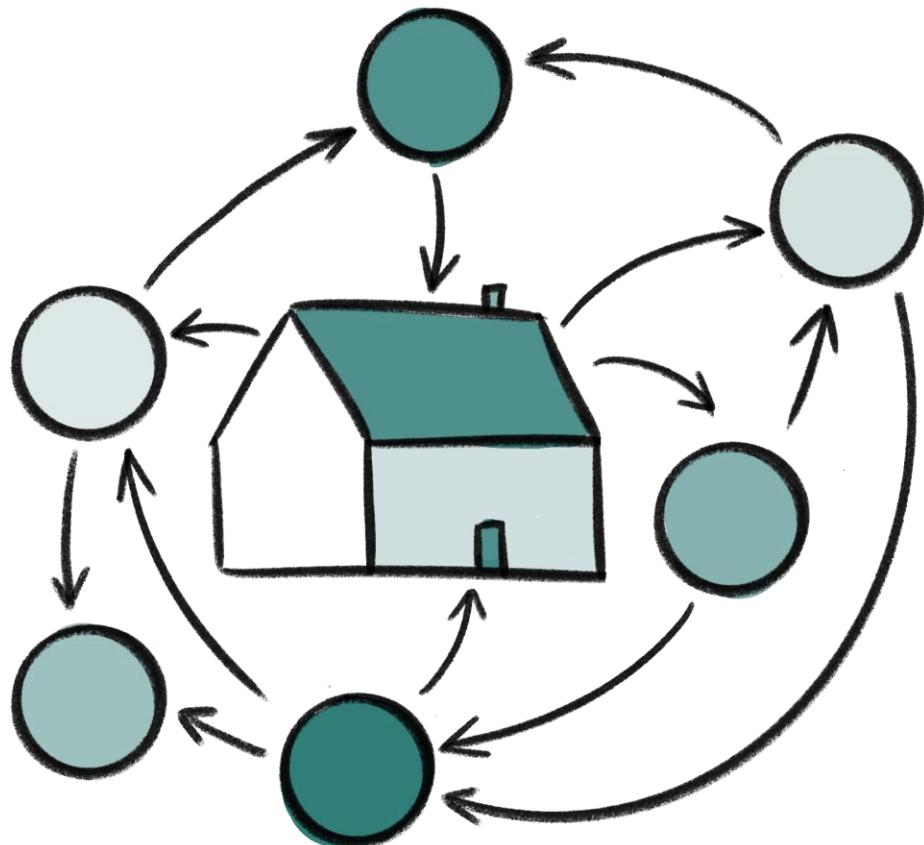
Residents need safe, sustainable and quality homes that do not need remediating in the future.

Efforts to improve housing quality and resident experiences need to be joined up so we don't add to the complexity residents face when things go wrong.

Opportunities for the future



Working within a complex system



Our findings and maps only scratch the surface of the housing safety and quality system.

One of our key takeaways from mapping the system at a very high level is **there is a need to adopt a systems-led approach to design, implement and drive lasting change across housing safety and quality.**

So, we were left with a big question as a team...

How might we support the department adopt and embed more user-centred systems-based approaches?



Potential areas to explore

Within that overarching ambition, these are some of the opportunity areas we found to potentially explore further as a system design team...

How might we embed insights from residents meaningfully into all aspects of our policy decisions and provide feedback loops to those that engage with us?

How might we understand and balance requests on system actors to support housing safety, quality and sustainability?

How might we work across organisational boundaries to consider the holistic experience of residents?

How might we support policy makers and system actors to understand and work within the complexity of the regulatory landscape?

How might we understand incentives play out in practice, how this impacts behaviour, and how they could impact implementation of changes in the system?

How might we use systems change approaches to focus on relationships in the system that can help build trust whilst also developing change networks to support the implementation of wider policy changes?

How might we work with system actors 'on the ground' to understand the impact and benefits of changes when developing system interventions?

How might we support teams to consider the widest range of experiences and situations when designing interventions so that they are holistic?



Get involved

To build our understanding of the system and design interventions that work for those most impacted, we need your help.

We are looking for people who work in the building system or who would be happy to share their experiences as a resident, to join our panel for future research and design activities.

Signing up involves completing a short form so that we know what research would be most relevant for you. Then we will contact you to ask you to participate, when there is research we would like you to get involved in. Joining the panel does not commit you to doing any research sessions, and you can ask to withdraw at any time.

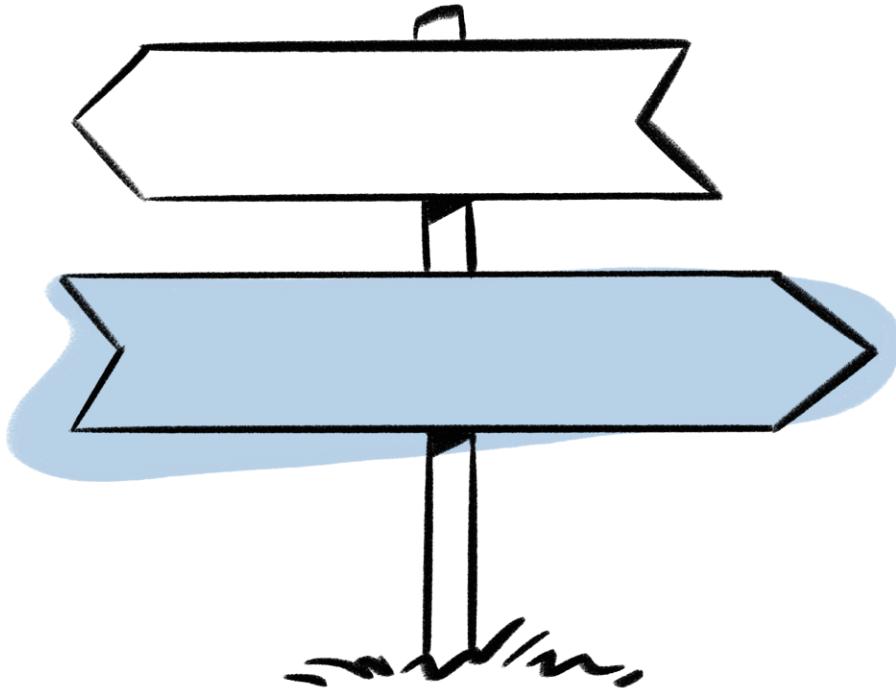
[Sign up to our research panel for future projects](#)



Next steps for System Design



Next steps



System Design can be commissioned to work with teams in MHCLG on complex problems to bring a user-centred systems lens. From this work, a range of projects could be taken forward.

Our next project is focused on understanding barriers and ways to improve access to skills and capacity to deliver remediation enforcement activities, including building identification and inspection.

Get in touch: SystemDesignTeam@communities.gov.uk