

[Home](#) > [DLUHC areas of research interest](#)

[Department for Levelling](#)

[Up](#)

[Housing & Communities](#)

Research and analysis

# DLUHC areas of research interest

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## Contents

### [Foreword](#)

- [1. Introduction and purpose](#)
- [2. The role of research and evidence](#)
- [3. Thematic summary of research needs](#)
- [4. Working with DLUHC](#)



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# Foreword

The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) published its first [areas of research interest \(ARI\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mhclg-areas-of-research-interest) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mhclg-areas-of-research-interest>) document in May 2018. It generated positive dialogue with a range of academic teams and other experts, both at the time of publication and subsequently. It also helped in setting up some short-term student interchanges, and also more general sharing of key projects.

In September 2021 it was [announced](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambitious-plans-to-drive-levelling-up-agenda) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ambitious-plans-to-drive-levelling-up-agenda>) that MHCLG would become the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC). This ARI reflects the department's ongoing and latest priorities, and summarises some of the most important research questions facing DLUHC over the coming years.

Central to this department's mission is UK-wide implementation of the [Levelling Up white paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-levelling-up-plan-that-will-transform-uk) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-unveils-levelling-up-plan-that-will-transform-uk>) published in February 2022. This set out a plan to transform the UK by spreading opportunity and prosperity to all parts of it. Delivery of this plan needs a fundamental shift in thinking: in how decisions are made right across government; and in how we work with local leaders and devolved governments, the private sector and civil society, to put levelling up at the heart of everything that we do.

Collecting and sharing evidence on what works to level up is an agenda we share with other government departments and decision makers at all levels of government. And we have a particular interest in improving access and use of comparable UK-wide data and sharing evidence on what works to deliver better public sector outcomes across the UK. [Other departments' ARIs](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/areas-of-research-interest>) should also be referred to for aspects of the levelling up agenda that relate to their responsibilities.

Alongside cross cutting policies on levelling up and strengthening the Union, DLUHC's responsibilities include: housing and planning; homelessness and rough sleeping; overseeing local government and local government finance; building safety; and integration and communities. Further, the government has committed to reaching net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and it will require significant research and innovation to achieve this.

We work closely with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) on our shared interests of net zero, climate change and housing. In addition, we are concerned with recovering from and living with COVID. All of these topics and others are covered in the body of this document. We are interested in taking a systems approach and we encourage researchers to build understanding of the synergies, overlaps and cumulative impacts of the themes.

More broadly, we want to capture the learning from recent events (such as COVID) to understand how we better manage future uncertainty to improve our

performance and resilience as a department.

The purpose of the ARI is to build on the relationships we have with academics and other experts across the UK, and to raise awareness and improve understanding of our research needs in a transparent way amongst the research community (for example, universities, the private and voluntary sector, and What Works Centres), and more generally. Overall, we want this document to act as ‘the start of a conversation’ between the department, research providers and funders, and others interested in helping us further build our evidence base in areas of mutual interest.

Section 4 suggests various way in which we hope to promote ongoing and strengthened engagement. We are particularly keen to hear about current research which connects to our key objectives, and we look forward to hearing from you.

**Stephen Aldridge, Chief Economist and Director for Analysis and Data**

**Professor Alan Penn, Chief Scientific Adviser**

# 1. Introduction and purpose

1. Policy is often developed at pace and informed by internal research, or research which we commission and pay for. We aim through the ARI to build on current knowledge and stimulate research in areas of longer-term future need. The ambition is to continue building our engagement and collaboration between the government, research funding agencies, research providers and more widely, including internationally. This will enhance the department’s capability and capacity to answer complex and important questions by:

- drawing on a wider range of evidence across the UK and international expertise
- exploiting more diverse and innovative data sources and methods, which can generate different perspectives and insights, and therefore help to provide more complete answers to specific research questions
- building and developing our departmental capability to generate world-class analysis through knowledge transfer

2. A robust evidence base is key to the department being able to deliver on its priorities. DLUHC has an active programme of data gathering, analysis and research to inform policy development, and we regularly review where further evidence could inform the areas in which we work. Our team of analysts continue to build upon the expertise, knowledge, and support of external parties, including academics, to build the evidence base to support policy development and delivery.

3. Across all of the thematic areas outlined in this document we are keen to see evidence from all parts of the UK. Devolution in the UK enables different approaches to be taken to tackling common challenges, and therefore offers potential for all levels of government to learn from each other about “what works” in different policy areas. DLUHC is keen to support this on policy areas relevant to the department’s work and to facilitate evidence sharing and learning with decision makers in devolved governments and local government. DLUHC’s evidence

requirements are extensive and evolve over time. This document is not an exhaustive list of our research needs. It is intentionally high-level and is intended to open conversations – see Section 4 on next steps. It targets areas where we have identified that there is most scope and value from further research, and where we believe the research community is well placed to enhance the evidence base.

4. This ARI aims to encourage academics and researchers from any discipline to explore these topics to help build DLUHC's evidence base and stimulate future collaboration. The purpose of this ARI is not to constrain the research done but to provide guidance about the topics where further research may be most likely to have a positive impact on DLUHC policy.
5. We hope that this document will help those applying to funding bodies by enabling proposals for new research to draw a direct line to DLUHC's areas of interest and thus strengthen the case for the possible public impact of the research. We intend to update this ARI document at regular intervals.
6. We welcome feedback on this document and details of any work you are doing or planning that is potentially relevant to these areas of interest. We are keen to hear from individuals or organisations if you have underway or are planning projects that are of direct relevance to our policy agendas. But please note, the department cannot respond to speculative approaches for research funding, as research projects are competitively tendered, usually via the [Dynamic Purchasing System \(DPS\)](https://www.crowncommercial.gov.uk/agreements/RM6126) (<https://www.crowncommercial.gov.uk/agreements/RM6126>).
7. Following publication we intend to hold a series of roundtable sessions across key themes, to bring together the research community, policy officials and our analysts to explore key topics. To express an interest in being involved in these sessions, or to discuss the ARI, or collaborating on research more generally, please contact us.
8. The lead contacts are: Lesley Smith, Senior Principal Research Officer, Analysis, Research and Co-ordination Unit, Analysis and Data Directorate: [Lesley.Smith@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:Lesley.Smith@levellingup.gov.uk) and David Hughes, Head of the Chief Scientific Adviser's office: [psChiefScientificAdviser@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:psChiefScientificAdviser@levellingup.gov.uk).
9. The senior oversight is provided by Stephen Aldridge, Chief Economist and Director for Analysis & Data [Stephen.Aldridge@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:Stephen.Aldridge@levellingup.gov.uk) and Professor Alan Penn, Chief Scientific Adviser: [psChiefScientificAdviser@levellingup.gov.uk](mailto:psChiefScientificAdviser@levellingup.gov.uk).

## 2. The role of research and evidence

10. The core mission of the department is to level up opportunity across the United Kingdom. We do this by: empowering local leaders and communities to seize their own destiny; boosting living standards, particularly where they are lower; spreading opportunity and improving public services, particularly where they are weak; and restoring local pride across the UK. DLUHC's strategic priorities are to:

- Level up the United Kingdom

- Regenerate and level up communities to improve places and ensure everyone has a high quality, secure and affordable home
- Enable strong local leadership and increase transparency and accountability for the delivery of high quality local public services; and improve integration in communities
- Ensure that buildings are safe and system interventions are proportionate
- Strengthen the Union to ensure that its benefits, and the impact of levelling up across all parts of the UK, are clear and visible to all citizens

11. Data is at the heart of our policy and decision-making and service delivery. DLUHC is at the forefront of work in government to routinely release data in more open and useful formats. The department has developed its own [open data platform \(http://opendatacommunities.org/\)](http://opendatacommunities.org/) which now hosts over 200 fully open and linked datasets, mainly drawn from our own statistical outputs. This is furthering our goal of being a data driven organisation and our vision for smarter working. We strive for continuous improvement and innovation in the way we collect and analyse our data, in line with the aspirations of the [National Data Strategy \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-data-strategy\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-data-strategy).

12. The department is responsible for collecting and commissioning a range of data used to produce and publish over 50 National Statistics and other Official Statistics releases of varying frequency. These include statistics on the housing market, house-building, homelessness and rough sleeping, planning applications, land-use change, and local government finance. These can be accessed at [DLUHC statistics \(https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities/about/statistics\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-levelling-up-housing-and-communities/about/statistics). The department's statistical products meet professional standards set out by the UK Statistics Authority in its statutory [Code of Practice for Statistics \(https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/\)](https://code.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/), and many have 'National Statistics' status. We are also one of the largest contributors to [data.gov.uk \(https://data.gov.uk/\)](https://data.gov.uk/). Most of these housing statistics cover England only; some cover England and Wales.

13. The department is supportive of the refreshed [UK Statistics Concordat \(https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/concordat-on-statistics/\)](https://uksa.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/publication/concordat-on-statistics/), which provides an agreed framework for cooperation between the UK government and the devolved administrations in relation to the production of statistics. We are also working with the Office for National Statistics to improve coherence of UK-wide data in relevant policy areas.

14. As well as ongoing data collection and systematic synthesis of the available evidence, DLUHC needs to carry out new research and data collection to address key evidence gaps. Some work is carried out in-house, but we also commission some projects. We have strong links with the Evaluation Task Force, and a number of our evaluations feature in their list of good practice examples. DLUHC has strong links with the [What Works Centres \(WWC\) \(https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/what-works-network) that are closest to our interests – particularly the WWC for Local Economic Growth, the WWC for Wellbeing, the Centre for Homelessness Impact, and the Early Intervention Centre. They take forward bespoke projects, provide synthesis

work, and help shape some of the evaluation work we do. We also engage with the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE).

15. MHCLG's ARI generated positive responses from a number of universities who were developing more active engagement with government departments. Some research teams contacted us to highlight ongoing work programmes which were relevant to our policy areas, which facilitated discussion with policy teams. We were introduced to some early career academics who were working on projects that closely related to our policy interests, and were able to offer some short-term placements to PhD students keen to carry out detailed synthesis work and analysis relevant to our policy areas. We are keen to build on these links but in particular to expand our engagement with the research community in both academia and more widely. We are particularly keen to hear about ongoing and current research which connects to our key objectives. We work closely with a range of government departments where there is mutual interest, and welcome views from those who are already engaging with other departments on these topics.

16. We are keen to support researchers in their bids for funding on research that aligns with the themes in this publication and encourage you to get in touch to discuss your research proposals – see contact details in Section 1, paragraph 8.

### 3. Thematic summary of research needs

17. DLUHC requires rigorous, robust, relevant and timely evidence to design and deliver policies to achieve its vision and objectives. Consequently, our research and evidence priorities below link to our strategic objectives.

18. This ARI has been developed through extensive discussions with policy and analyst colleagues within the department. As our research and analysis requirements evolve over time, we have grouped these needs into the themes which most directly address our responsibilities, and where there is most scope and value from further research. As set out in the Foreword, the department has a particular interest in improving access and use of comparable UK-wide data and sharing evidence on what works reflected in all these themes. Since our requirements do inevitably evolve over time, we're always interested to hear of research in new areas that could be useful to us.

19. There are 11 themes set out in this section, as follows:

- **Levelling up** – This section sets out the key areas where we want to deepen our understanding to drive the levelling up agenda, and to unleash opportunity, prosperity and pride in place across the UK. In addition, we want to understand in more granular detail which interventions best drive local growth (local growth is an area of joint responsibility between BEIS and DLUHC).
- **COVID-19 recovery and future resilience** – The questions that will help us to grow our understanding to support the recovery from the pandemic, and to inform the medium and long term strategy for 'living with COVID', in areas relevant to DLUHC responsibilities.

- **Housing** – Including seeking to boost our evidence and understanding of what drives housing affordability, and how transitions and changes in people’s lives affect that.
- **The planning system** – Enhancing our understanding of the longer-term best methodologies for evaluating the impact of different interventions, and the recent experiences of reform outside of England both across the UK and internationally, to inform our own reforms.
- **Homelessness, rough sleeping, and policies to support vulnerable groups** – To facilitate greater collaboration on research around the drivers of homelessness and rough sleeping, and further explore social, economic and fiscal costs. And to build the evidence on the most effective measures to support people to remain off the streets.
- **Net zero carbon emissions and housing quality** – Focusing on decarbonising buildings, to consolidate evidence around the potential effects of net zero on the housing stock, housing supply and the housing market.
- **Building safety** – Key areas here are developing our understanding of the drivers of behaviour across the industry, and the benefits and potential risks that technological change may bring.
- **Devolution** – Further building our evidence and understanding on which public services, delivered at which level of government, deliver greatest public value and what we can learn from different policy approaches taken across the UK.
- **Electoral registration, voting and electoral systems** – Growing our evidence base on how best to deliver electoral systems that are efficient, inclusive and fair for all.
- **Integration and communities** – Including bringing together further evidence on what the social and economic impact of having a more integrated and cohesive place is.
- **Cross-cutting research methodologies** – We are keen to hear about cutting-edge approaches the research community is using which could have applications to our work. Particularly in ground-breaking evaluations, with robust focus on impact and value for money, what works and using more innovative techniques and data sharing.

## Levelling up

Implementing the [Levelling Up white paper](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom>), to spread opportunity, boost living standards, and create higher paid jobs all across the UK. Our outcomes are to raise productivity and empower places so that everyone across the country can benefit from levelling up.

Transformative growth in cities and towns is pivotal to the levelling up agenda. We want to build our understanding of ‘what works’ to reduce spatial disparities, particularly in areas where policy responsibility has been devolved and has been delivered in different or innovative ways. We want to understand in more granular detail which interventions best drive local growth, including through

comparison of relevant international models. We also want to develop our understanding of how best to work at place level to stimulate local growth and to develop, retain, and attract skilled people. We want to be able to better estimate and understand the productivity differentials that exist across geographies and what explains and drives this difference.

We also want to explore what more we can do to improve the evidence base for local decision-makers, and to deepen our knowledge of the interactions between different aspects of society and the economy that have led to economic and social disparities. Pages 149-155 of the white paper address the role of data, monitoring and evaluation.

20. We want to deepen our understanding of the following research areas:

### **Satisfaction with place**

- What are the determinants of people's subjective sense of satisfaction in the place in which they live? What matters most to different cohorts at different times in their lives in different places?
- What are the drivers of life chances which lead to poor life outcomes and what are the opportunity areas in the UK? How do these correlate with traditional proxies for local economic success, such as rates of job growth?
- Can we further explore quantitatively the role of expectations and narrative in determining the economic fortunes of regions and sub-regions of the UK?

### **The role of Research and Development (R&D) spending**

- What are the estimated social gains to R&D in the UK? What is the estimated value of spillovers, and how important is geographical proximity to their capture?
- What are the spatial drivers and distribution of R&D activity? Within that, what are the relevant roles of infrastructure, excellence and capacity?
- Can we estimate the relative social returns of increased spending on R&D compared to improving the diffusion of innovation and the adoption of new technologies?

### **Local resilience and economic performance**

- Which factors, or characteristics, make some areas perform better than others at different spatial scale (towns, cities, regions)?
- Institutional capacity and capability – what are they, how should they be measured, and which dimensions best advance desired outcomes?

### **The role of different levels of government**

- What does the evidence show is most effective in improving economic, social and other outcomes for Mayoral Combined Authorities in terms of devolved

powers, budgets and accountabilities?

- What do different parts of the country need from central, devolved and local government interventions? What does that tell us about where funding is most needed?
- What does international evidence tell us about effective combinations of government and devolved support for local growth? How important is this in tackling productivity differentials between areas?

## **Local growth interventions**

- Do longer term funding packages result in better outcomes? What's the evidence?
- Does a tightly prescribed set of target outcomes achieve better results than locally flexible targets and interventions? What's the evidence?
- What is the evidence for which local growth interventions are most effective in different scenarios? Does the mix of interventions matter, and how should we measure impact and value for money in that scenario? What are the displacement and spillover effects of place-based interventions to surrounding areas?
- What more we can do to improve the evidence base for local decision-makers, and to deepen our knowledge of the interactions between different aspects of society and the economy that have led to economic and social disparities?
- What are the best ways of ensuring local growth interventions benefit intended beneficiaries in an area (e.g. disadvantaged local residents) rather than inward commuters?
- What does the evidence tell us about the interplay between further and higher education, industry and government and improved productivity? How can effective models be best enabled?

## **Regeneration**

- What are the international examples of effective interventions to regenerate town centres and cities? What does this show us about the roles of the public and private sectors, the type of investment required, and in different contexts?
- More generally, what international evidence could be relevant to inform decisions in the UK?
- To what extent, and how, can regeneration drive productivity, including the contribution from physical and broader regeneration initiatives?
- Following COVID, the shift to online retail and increasing densification of cities, what does the evidence show that sustainable urban living looks like, to cater to society's economic, environmental and social needs?
- What is the evidence that culture-led regeneration is effective?
- How is the strategic regeneration of large areas best managed over the long term?

- How can government finance regeneration and recycle the benefits to reduce the costs to taxpayers?

## The future of cities

- What does the evidence show are the factors that create the greatest potential to build agglomeration economies that benefit local areas and residents in question? And what are the key elements that bring agglomeration benefits—housing, transport, local skills, R&D and – housing, transport, local skills, R&D and business dynamics? Are there costs to agglomeration that that worsen outcomes for residents and neighbouring areas?
- What is the role of commercial property development in supporting growth in places? And what does the evidence suggest about how this may change going forward?

## Wellbeing

- How does well-being matter in the context of levelling up? What are the most effective levers for government (central and local) to affect well-being? How does well-being interact with other place based interventions such as housing and regeneration?

## COVID-19 recovery and future resilience

Contributing to the national and local response to COVID-19 and in supporting the recovery from the pandemic, including in terms of our responsibilities for local government in England.

We want to continue to build our understanding of the longer term implications, challenges and opportunities of COVID-19 across all of our key responsibilities. We need to grow our understanding of the emerging new environment to inform our decisions on where to target our interventions in order to produce the best outcomes for people, and to build the evidence to inform the approach to 'living with COVID'.

21. We are interested in further exploration and broadening our understanding of the following research areas:

### Housing and COVID-19

- What does the evidence show about how the pandemic has affected people's preferences about where they live and where they are able to work (e.g. rural areas versus cities)? How are these preferences different across cohorts, such as socio-economic, and locations? Are any such trends likely to be long-term?
- How can housing help to mitigate COVID-19 impacts over the longer term?

- What emerging evidence is there about the future housing market in a post-pandemic world? And how will net zero carbon emission homes affect this?
- How might the COVID-19 pandemic affect homelessness and rough sleeping in the longer term?

## **Vulnerable people and COVID-19**

- What are the likely longer-term consequences of COVID-19 for vulnerable groups and communities in terms of the volume and type of need? What new considerations does this introduce in terms of central government's role, and that of other levels of government and other providers?
- What can we learn from the COVID-19 shielding programme and other programmes that supported our most vulnerable groups during the pandemic? What were the costs and benefits of different interventions?

## **Local government and COVID-19**

- What has the pandemic taught us about what a good governance structure in local government looks like? How is this measured? And how can central government best support continuous improvement of place leadership?
- What has the pandemic taught us are the necessary pre-conditions for effective devolution of a public service to the local tier? Within that, what has the pandemic taught us about how accountability, such as managing public money, should be managed? And where does the evidence show that centralisation is more appropriate?
- What does the evidence show was more or less effective about the particularly intense engagement between local and national government during the pandemic, and what we have learnt about the key enablers developed between the tiers of government in this last period? Which of these would most helpfully be sustained in future (e.g. data sharing)?

## **Local economic performance and COVID-19**

- What is the emerging evidence of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economies and productivity of cities and regions, coastal/rural, and deprived areas? How does this vary across the different parts of the UK?
- What can we learn from COVID-19 about helping local areas to be more resilient to economic, and other, shocks? And what is the impact of changes in demand for land, such as office, retail, housing etc in particular locations?

## **Housing**

Our principal outcomes sought are more, better quality, safer, greener and affordable homes.

We want to better understand what drives housing affordability, and how transitions and changes in people's lives affect that. We also want to improve our understanding of the factors which drive people's housing choices, including where to live and tenure choices. Across these areas, we want to learn how we can best identify and support those most in need, and build our understanding of the potential impacts of other strategic changes such as COVID-19 recovery. For reference, the framework used by the department for monitoring and evaluation activities related to housing policy interventions is set out in our [Housing monitoring and evaluation strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-monitoring-and-evaluation-strategy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-monitoring-and-evaluation-strategy>).

22. We are interested in further exploration and broadening our understanding of the following research areas:

### **Housing supply and affordability**

- What are the key drivers of housing affordability? And what is the role of housing supply within these?
- What are the most effective interventions governments can implement to increase housing supply where most needed?
- Is the housebuilding market more concentrated/less intensely competitive than other markets? How has this changed over time, and how does the UK compare in this respect with other countries? What are the implications of this?
- To what extent is housing tenure (e.g. social rented, private rented, home ownership etc) driven by choice? What drives people's choices? For example, is private renting seen as a 'stepping-stone' to home ownership? And how does this vary across different geographical areas?
- What are the benefits of a more diversified housing supply market (in the sense of having a varied mix of small, medium and large-sized developers)? Can they be monetised for use in business case appraisals?

### **Need and demand**

- How can we ensure the right housing is built in the right places, and at the right time?
- What does the evidence show about the future housing needs of older people, and how government interventions affect these needs?
- What is the future need/demand for supported housing and how do its costs/cost-effectiveness compare with alternative types of support?
- What factors will shape the demand for home ownership in future? What will the future trend in homeownership look like under different scenarios?
- How does demand and need for housing compare between London and the rest of England?

## The private rented sector

- What is the trade-off between security of tenure and investment in/supply of private rented housing? How best can the two be optimised?
- What does the evidence show in terms of the impact of regulation on private renters? (e.g. if landlords are required to invest heavily in their properties to improve standards, will rents rise?). How does that vary across the income groups of private renters?

## Social housing

- What is the latest evidence on the affordability of social housing – including across different areas of England, different groups, and/or for different types of social housing? What are the impacts of this?
- What are the most effective methods for increasing landlord accountability to residents?

## Leasehold reform

- How should leasehold and commonhold reforms be designed to improve transparency and fairness for leaseholders (and freeholders on private and mixed use estates), protecting leaseholders from abuse and poor service, and driving increased take up of commonhold?

## Housing quality

- What are the wider impacts of improving the quality of rented homes (e.g. the impact on well-being, health outcomes, landlords, renters, and the housing market)?
- How can housing quality interventions maximise the benefits of living in a good quality home?
- What explains the sub-regional variation in poor quality housing? How does this vary across the UK?

## The planning system

This strongly links to the housing outcomes set out above, and also with emphasis on planning reforms (incorporating local planning and major infrastructure).

In taking forward changes to create a modernised and more effective planning system, we want to understand more about the recent experience of reform outside of England and understand ‘what works’. This includes how best to harness technology to improve the operation of planning systems. The department is committed to implementing a new funding model to replace [s.106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990](#)

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1990/8/section/106>), and the Community Infrastructure Levy, and wants to build on its understanding of the current models in designing their successor. We also want to enhance our understanding of what the best methodologies are for evaluating the impact of different housing and planning measures.

Further, we want to continue our work on understanding national infrastructure planning challenges as part of [Project Speed](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/launch-of-project-speed-challenges-rail-industry-to-cut-time-and-costs-of-rail-upgrades) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/launch-of-project-speed-challenges-rail-industry-to-cut-time-and-costs-of-rail-upgrades>). We are also interested in design and beauty, and how the planning system can support environmental objectives.

23. We are interested in further exploration and broadening our understanding of the following research areas:

- What is the evidence of the efficacy of different planning systems across the UK and internationally? Are there particular countries that exemplify the role land use planning can play in serving and supporting communities? How have outcomes been selected, measured and assessed?
- What can we learn from regimes where planning and regeneration powers have been devolved from central government towards regions and local stakeholders?
- What evidence is there more generally of the efficacy of different planning interventions? Which interventions does the evidence show best support prosperity, health and wellbeing?
- What role can the planning system play in supporting levelling up? What are its limits?
- What methods could be used best to assess the impact of planning reforms on housing supply? How might they indicate long term impact on the affordability and quality of both construction and the surrounding environment, as well as achieving net zero housing?
- How have other countries outside of the UK approached planning reform, and what have the impacts been?
- What are the most significant benefits arising from developing brownfield sites and can these be monetised for use in business case appraisals?
- Which planning regime measures have been shown to be most effective in meeting local housing need in different scenarios?
- What financial pressures does new housing put on local authorities? How does this vary between types and tenure of home, and to what extent are these costs recovered through developer contributions, council tax and other forms of local authority revenue?
- What is the operational efficiency of the current Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIP) planning regime and how can it be improved?
- What does the evidence say about the relationship between the environmental impact of development and public attitudes towards new development? In particular, is there evidence that greater transparency on the scale of impact and effectiveness of offsetting increases support for new development?

- What is the evidence on the most efficient means of securing environmental enhancement through the planning process? What is the evidence on how environmental and biodiversity gains agreed through the planning process are realised and sustained?

## Homelessness, rough sleeping and policies to support vulnerable groups

We are seeking to end rough sleeping and reduce homelessness, by investing in effective prevention as well as crisis prevention.

We want to learn more about the drivers of homelessness and rough sleeping, and further explore the social, economic and fiscal costs associated with them. We are keen to build our understanding of the most effective measures to support people to remain off the streets. We also want to learn from innovative approaches across the UK, informed by comparable data that can help to answer our key questions and support individuals.

24. We are interested in further exploration and broadening our understanding of the following research areas:

### Homelessness and rough sleeping

- What are the most important factors protecting people from homelessness and rough sleeping?
- What further evidence is needed to understand better the causes of homelessness, the relationship between structural factors and personal circumstances, and how they interact?
- What interventions are most effective at helping people to sustain tenancies after receiving support?
- What is the impact of housing access, affordability and associated support on homelessness?
- What does the evidence tell us about what works to reduce and prevent homelessness, including virtual and digital interventions? What are the most robust impact evaluation methods for assessing the impact of our specific policy interventions in this complex area?
- Which elements of a multi-agency/multi-departmental approach to addressing homelessness have the biggest impacts?
- What are the key economic and social costs of homelessness, including the impacts on children, and can they be quantified?
- Who is most/least effectively helped by the Homeless Reduction Act? What does that mean for how interventions are best targeted?

### Vulnerable groups more generally

- What more can be done to improve how we identify vulnerable populations and those facing multiple disadvantage? What is the role of data collection and data sharing in this?
- Beyond the UK, what can we learn from other countries in developing predictive models to help us target prevention more effectively at vulnerable groups?
- What is most effective in framing and targeting policies and programmes so they reach vulnerable black and minority ethnic groups, and increase take-up by those most likely to benefit?
- How can services be better co-ordinated, integrated, timed and targeted to help vulnerable groups? What is the role of coordinating services for people at risk of homelessness who are being discharged from institutional settings (hospital, prison, the military)?
- What lessons can be taken from early prevention strategies targeted at vulnerable groups (e.g. those at risk from domestic violence, rough sleeping and homelessness)? What implications do they have for effective policy design?

## Climate change: Net zero carbon emissions, climate risks and housing

We want to see more, better quality, safer, greener and more affordable homes, whilst achieving net zero carbon emissions by 2050.

DLUHC has a fundamental role in ensuring the sustainability of our built environment, and particularly the environmental standards of our housing, including reducing both carbon emissions and exposure to climate risks. We want to consolidate the evidence around the potential effects of net zero on the housing stock, housing supply and functioning of housing markets. We need to understand the possible unintended consequences of decarbonising both domestic and non domestic stock, and build our understanding of the most effective implementation models to address key barriers.

As we recover from COVID-19, we also want to increase our evidence of the health related impacts of issues such as poor indoor air quality, overheating, and fuel poverty, against a backdrop of the drive to increase security of our energy supply. We are also keen to share learning from across the UK.

25. DLUHC works closely with BEIS, which is the lead department for Net Zero. In October 2021, BEIS published the [Net Zero Strategy](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-strategy>), including its vision for the role of research and innovation. We share interests with BEIS on a number of research areas, particularly relating to heat and buildings. Further reading on areas of shared interest include:

- [BEIS areas of research interest](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beis-areas-of-research-interest-interim-update-2020) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/beis-areas-of-research-interest-interim-update-2020>), last updated in February 2020.

Questions on energy efficiency, sustainable heating and clean growth in the “Leading the world in tackling climate change” (p30-38) section are of interest.

- UK [Net Zero Research and Innovation Framework](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-research-and-innovation-framework) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/net-zero-research-and-innovation-framework>), published in October 2021, outlines the key challenges and needs over the next 5-10 years. For heat and buildings (p75-85), 7 challenges are proposed, such as ‘driving down emissions associated with construction’. Each is supported by a set of specific research and innovation needs that should be addressed to tackle the challenge.

26. Within DLUHC we are interested in further exploration and broadening our understanding of the following research areas:

### **Climate change, net zero and housing**

- What might be the impacts of the drive to reduce housing stock emissions on housing supply and affordability? What is the evidence, including unintended consequences?
- What factors increase the risk of gaps between design/modelled performance, and actual energy or other performance of buildings? Of these factors, which are the most significant in terms of the ‘performance gap’?
- What are the current and innovative technologies which could help retrofit existing dwellings or otherwise achieve net zero and build in resilience to climate change goals through the built environment at least cost?
- What factors incentivise or disincentivise people to make energy improvements? What are relevant examples of how people’s behaviours have changed (e.g. to invest in energy efficient measures)? And what are the most effective ways to provide trusted advice to individuals to inform their decisions?
- What is the role of local government in influencing people’s decision-making on energy improvements?

### **Climate change, housing investment and housing quality**

- What are the interactions between housing quality, safety, and zero carbon? Where might synergies, tensions, or unintended consequences arise when tackling these priorities?
- What are the most effective ways to assess the health impacts of buildings, and what does this mean for the oversight of the thermal environment, ventilation, noise etc?
- What does the latest evidence show in terms of how best to deliver net zero and also bring health benefits, such as improved air quality? Can better metrics be developed for monetising the health benefits of the move to net zero homes that can be used in business case appraisals?

### **Climate change and levelling up**

- How does the scale of contribution needed to achieve net zero vary for different types of places?
- What are the skills challenges and opportunities related to net zero, and how do they differ by geography?
- What wider factors do we need to consider to ensure that the geography of adjustment to a net zero economy works to the advantage of 'left behind' places?
- What are the most effective ways to identify and measure climate risk to communities?

## Building safety

Ensuring that people are safe in their homes. We are learning the lessons from the Grenfell Tower fire to bring about a fundamental change in both the regulatory framework and industry culture, creating a more accountable and effective system.

The UK government has set out its ambition to reform the building safety system to improve building safety and performance for all buildings and to establish a more stringent regime to strengthen the management of fire and structural safety risks. This includes establishing a new Building Safety Regulator and a new National Construction Products Regulator.

To inform long-lasting reform we need to enhance our understanding of the drivers of behaviour across the industry (comprising a range of different players: designer; owner; investor; manager; client; and trades & professions), and how the regulatory regime can best support the overarching aims and importantly the impact of the new regime on residents. As technology changes we need to understand more about the benefits and potential risks this brings, and the role of the government and the regulators within this. Throughout these areas we are keen to share learning across the UK.

27. Related to this context our key research issues are:

### The regulatory regime

- What more can be done to quantify and/or monetise the costs and benefits of building safety regulatory reform? Are there existing systems which are relevant here?
- How should we measure the overall effectiveness of the regulatory regime? What evidence is there to show what an effective regulatory body looks like? How is the impact of regulatory interventions best evaluated, and what factors are key to it succeeding?
- How should we measure whether the overall system enables redress if things go wrong? Are there effective routes for residents/leaseholders/others to be compensated for historic and new defects? And for those who design/build defective premises to be held to account?

- In terms of product testing, what evidence exists for ways in which designers can effectively test and evidence whether combinations of products forming ‘systems’ are safe (e.g. using digital modelling)? What is proportionate and feasible? What requirements could be placed on manufacturers to support designers when putting a system together?
- What are the wider costs of a major building safety incident? What might the impacts be on undermining resident, insurer and bank confidence in the construction industry and in the built environment? And what are the consequences of this e.g. in terms of property valuations, or ability to secure a mortgage?
- What is the role of the regulation of buildings in a COVID-19 endemic world? What does an ‘endemic-prepared’ building look like?

### **Building safety – technical issues**

- What does evidence from other countries tell us about technical building safety issues, e.g. the key points of failure resulting in fire spread and/or risk of structural collapse in high rise residential buildings?
- What are the opportunities and risks presented by Modern Methods of Construction (MMC), including its role in supporting greater energy efficiency in future?

### **Technological change and data**

- What are the potential impacts of the latest emerging technologies on building safety? Which technologies present the biggest opportunities and what are the biggest risks?
- How do people interact with new technologies in their homes, and what does this mean for how we may need to regulate the industry?
- What are the barriers to the building industry investing in better data management (generating information, saving it, and making it accessible) and how can these be addressed? What sorts of government incentives/interventions are effective to achieve digital transformation of the building industry?

### **Building safety – social and behavioural issues**

- What safety-related interventions work most effectively and reliably to change industry behaviours, norms, and culture?
- What factors can lead to poor building industry compliance within the regulatory regime? And what is effective in motivating industry to comply (including in relation to energy efficiency)?

## **Devolution**

Our objective is to support a sustainable and resilient local government sector that delivers priority services and empowers communities.

We want to understand more about what is most effective in driving better local government and public services to enable the most effective support to local people. In particular, which public services, delivered by local authorities, deliver the greatest increase in public value and retain appropriate accountability? We are also keen to explore greater innovation in this area.

28. We are interested in further exploration and broadening our understanding of the following research areas:

### **Resilience and financial sustainability**

- What does the evidence show about the most appropriate ways of developing and supporting local public services across the UK?
- How should local authority resilience, capacity, capability and financial sustainability be defined and measured? How have they changed over time?
- What does resilient local government look like?
- How do the relative needs of different local authorities vary? How should they be measured?
- What have been the effects of business rate reforms on local growth (both over the short and longer term)?
- What does the evidence show about the effectiveness of fair funding models?

### **Performance and efficiency**

- How should high performing and efficient local government and local public services be incentivised?
- What is the evidence on how local government spending translates into outcomes? And what drives better, more accountable, public services?
- How is allocative efficiency (those activities that offer highest economic and social returns) in local government best promoted?
- To what extent does local authority spending in England on preventative services reduce spending on demand-led services? (e.g. the relationship between 'early help' spending and children's social care spending in Children's Services). How can this best be measured?
- What lessons need to be learned about the respective roles and contributions of the public, private and third sectors in the design and delivery of local public services?
- What does good procurement of public services look like, and what is the role of central government within that?
- How can various data on funding, user satisfaction and other outcomes from local government services be exploited to provide richer insights into the drivers

of resident and user satisfaction? What might they tell us about the reasons for any differences in satisfaction?

- What is the role of transparency and data in driving high quality local public services? What is the evidence of the difference they can make, and what are the resourcing implications?
- What does good design and delivery of local public services to better meet the needs of those from different ethnic backgrounds look like?
- What interventions effectively incentivise and support local councils in England to improve performance?

## **Governance and leadership**

- How representative are existing governance structures (elected and appointed) of the communities they seek to represent, and what are the impacts of that? What are the barriers and enablers of good representation of communities in their governance structures?
- What does a directly-elected mayor in England need in order to be most effective? Does this differ depending on whether the mayor is of an individual local authority or a combined authority in England?

## **Devolution**

- What are the characteristics of public services that should be devolved to the local tier while strengthening local accountability, and which are best delivered at the national level? What can we learn from international comparisons?
- What is the evidence on which decision making structures (at which geographies) work best to deliver effective public services to citizens and level up communities?
- What can we learn from best practice in public service delivery from across the UK?
- What work has already been done to bring together evidence and analysis comparing impact of policy variation in different policy areas across the UK?

## **Local democracy**

- What does the evidence show about stability or changes in the population's identification with local democratic institutions and the strength of their democratic engagement? How has that changed during the pandemic and how is it likely to change in the wider context over the next few years? What does the international evidence show, given the different governance structures?
- What does 'good' look like for engagement of citizens in the performance and accountability of their local authority? What methods and approaches work best and what can we do to improve citizen engagement?"

## **Electoral registration, voting and electoral systems**

Our aim is to deliver electoral registration and electoral systems that are efficient, inclusive, and that work for all.

29. Our research questions include:

- What specific measures would most increase efficiency in electoral registration for administrators?
- How can we ensure an elections and registration system that is accessible for all, and maintains integrity, public confidence and trust through minimal potential for fraud?
- How can we better assess the benefits of an electoral system that is less vulnerable to fraud e.g. in terms of increased trust in government at all levels?

## Integration and communities

DLUHC works with a wide range of specific communities/ groups and places to try and improve local outcomes. These can vary from general aims to bring people together, strengthen social capital and to drive integration/ cohesion between people from different backgrounds. This includes new migrants who arrive in the UK seeking refuge and resettlement (e.g. the Syrian and Afghan resettlement programmes and the most recent Ukrainian resettlement programmes).

It also includes targeted work which aims to better understand and improve the life chances of Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) communities, support for black and minority ethnic groups who suffer disproportionately from poor health outcomes (such as during the COVID-19 pandemic) or marking the contribution made by certain groups, such as the Windrush Monument. DLUHC is focused on tackling the harms associated with religious hatred, divisive community narratives, by considering the drivers that mobilise these harms, and the effective mitigating interventions proven to work. DLUHC is also committed to strengthening efforts to promote the shared and common values that build a cohesive society.

But the challenge we face is showing genuine impact (as much of the change we aim to see will be, in most cases, generational in scale/scope) and also proving the link between our interventions and changes in outcomes. We are also keen to draw out what the social and economic impact of having a more integrated place is, and quantifying how greater equality of opportunity (i.e. ensuring that all members of a community can access the same health, housing, etc) can drive the levelling up agenda.

30. We are interested in further exploration and broadening our understanding of the following research areas:

- What should be the role of communities in the local devolution agenda? What does the evidence suggest works? Does community involvement in public service delivery at the local tier increase efficiency or effectiveness in achieving public value outcomes?
- What works in ensuring that policies are truly inclusive for all parts of a community or place? And how do we shape our interventions to address the different priorities from place to place, or between groups – e.g. health, transport, jobs, education etc?
- What are the factors which make integration and cohesion mutually beneficial? And what community capacity/development is most effective to support that?
- What does institutional and departmental data show in terms of patterns in, and potential causes of, disparities in service use between different groups?
- How can government (central and local government) systems and processes work more effectively, to build a more integrated and socially cohesive society
- What can we learn from local authority social cohesion strategies about what works to counter-extremism, promote greater community resilience, tolerance and trust? And what benefits does this bring to a place?
- What might a new more effective/efficient approach or dynamic between central government, local authorities and other partners (including communities/residents themselves) look like, and how could this help to improve specific outcomes in a place?
- What factors and conditions increase/decrease the chance of successful community-led initiatives (including those which seek to strengthen social infrastructure and social capital) in areas of high deprivation. What makes some areas with the same socio-economics and demographics achieve different outcomes?
- What does the evidence show are the principal causes of deprivation?
- How can we better capture the comparable value for money and non-monetised benefits of different community-led initiatives and interventions (including those which seek to strengthen social infrastructure and social capital)?
- What is the relationship between different models of hyper-local governance and socio-economic outcomes for individuals and neighbourhoods? i.e. what difference does the presence of neighbourhood governance, which communities are engaged and active in, make in terms of more people in jobs, more volunteering, more stable communities, and thriving high streets?
- Who is currently engaged with neighbourhood governance (in terms of demographics) and what are the gaps, patterns, trends, needs and preferences of different groups?
- What motivates people to get involved and active in their area? Some people living in poverty and challenging situations do get involved, many do not; why? What can we do to remove barriers or create better conditions for wider engagement from a broader range of people in areas?
- What is the impact of micro individual behaviours and interaction with neighbourhood infrastructure and community spaces in creating the conditions for wider societal outcomes (e.g. health outcomes, crime reduction, climate

change)? How can we understand where the marginal gains are to be had, i.e. what is the minimum behaviour change needed that creates significant accumulative impact?

- What can we learn from international models of local social infrastructure, local governance and devolution of power to communities?

## Cross cutting methodological approaches

We are keen to engage with experts to enhance our capability to use cutting-edge scientific, technical and analytical approaches, as well as established methodologies, to develop our evidence base in the areas outlined in this ARI. The department is keen to hear about and understand cutting-edge approaches you might be using in your research, particularly on ground-breaking evaluations or data sharing, which could have applications to our work. We also want to learn more about how we can better manage future uncertainty to prepare ourselves and then respond.

31. Areas where we would welcome insights include:

### Building resilience

- What examples are there of methods that can best help the department to manage future uncertainty (such as a pandemic), to improve its performance and resilience?

### Assessing the impacts and value of different policy interventions

- What innovative methods are being developed on evaluation approaches, which could be applied to our different policy areas? Which experimental and quasi experimental methods can we look to which could be applied to our areas? Are there examples we can showcase and learn from?
- What's the best way of tracking the impact of different funding streams on a place?
- What are the best ways to measure the 'softer' outcomes, such as changes in wellbeing, and how to attach a value to such interventions?
- What analytical approaches can best demonstrate the impact and value of policies that seek to prevent such problems arising?
- How should the change in value of an amenity best be assessed where a change of use of a property takes effect (for example, where it becomes housing)?
- What are most effective ways to appropriately account for displacement effects (meaning where the expansion of an activity, such as economic activity, in one location has the effect of bringing about a reduction in that activity elsewhere) of levelling up policies and interventions?

- How can counterfactuals (against which to assess the impact of policy interventions across different spatial levels) best be defined and measured?

## **Maximising the impact of data and research**

- What could government do additionally, or differently, to facilitate increased use of its data, and longer-term monitoring of trends?
- What are the alternative data sources, from outside government, that would help DLUHC answer any of the questions outlined in this ARI document? What is the evidence that these sources can provide additional value?
- What can DLUHC learn from other organisations who are using a data science approach? What drives organisations to develop cutting edge data science? And how can this support delivery in our policy areas?
- What is the potential for using ethnographic and qualitative techniques to support policy development, so it is more user centred and we understand our customers' needs better?
- How can we improve coherence of UK wide data to be able to maximise learning from devolution, including the benefits of experimentation and innovation?

# **4. Working with DLUHC**

## **What we can offer**

32. DLUHC has a wide range of mechanisms for working with external organisations and academia. These include:

- Running a number of seminar series within DLUHC, where leading external researchers and experts share key findings and insights from their work with analysts and policy colleagues
- Running bespoke roundtables/practitioner sessions to discuss key policy issues and the range of external research and evidence available to inform future policy making
- Offering short and longer-term internships for both undergraduates and postgraduates
- Working with external (non-academic) organisations to support them with their own research/evaluation work and building this into our own evidence base

33. We are keen to explore further ways to engage with the research community to support more effective policy making, such as:

- Ongoing and further supporting opportunities for secondments for colleagues to work in external organisations, and for secondees to join us
- Expanding and supporting opportunities we have for undergraduate and postgraduate/PhD internships and similar programmes. We would be interested in hearing from organisations which run PhD placement schemes that are relevant to our policy or methodological interests

- Learning more about what the research community most values from the department in order to best support closer and more effective engagement
- Exploring other initiatives which will support transparency about our evidence needs, to enable effective engagement and collaboration

[↑ Back to top](#)

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