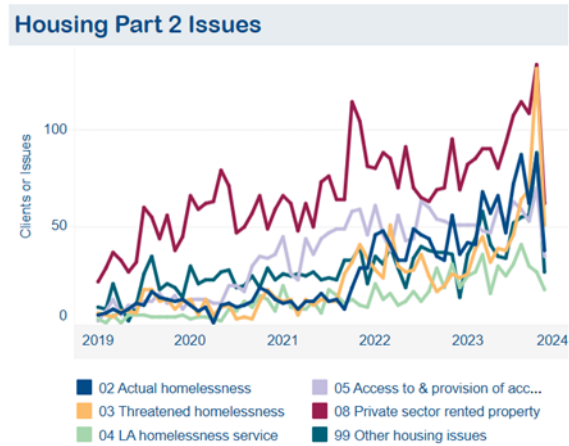
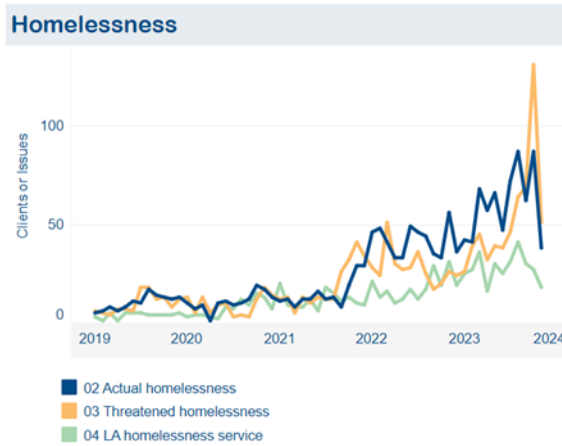


Written evidence submitted by Citizens Advice Newcastle and Citizens Advice Gateshead Joint Submission to the Renters Reform Bill Committee for Parliamentary Scrutiny (RRB41)

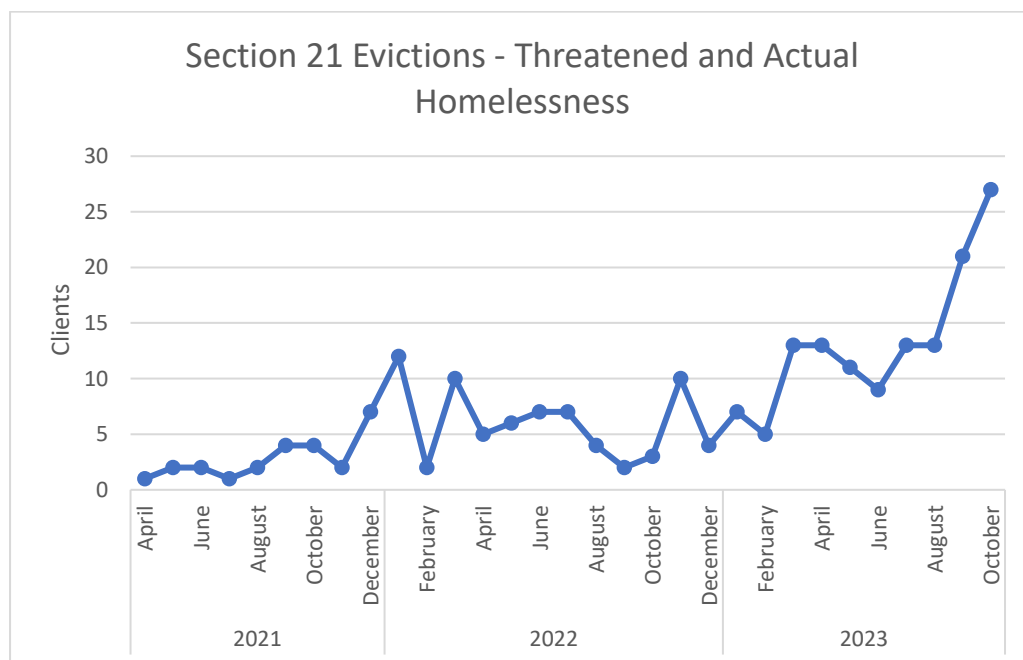
Organisational Background:

Citizens Advice Newcastle (CAN) and Citizens Advice Gateshead (CAG) are both independent charities who are part of the Citizens Advice network, which provides free, confidential advice and information on a range of issues. In recent years, private rental problems, housing insecurity and Section 21 evictions have spiked to crisis point. The Renter’s Reform Bill is a once in a generation opportunity for the government to right the wrongs that we handle at our advice drop-ins and phone lines.



Combined CAN and CAG data for homelessness issues and private sector related housing issues.

Section 21 Evictions:



Combined CAN and CAG data showing monthly Section 21 eviction client cases.

1. Delay to the removal of Section 21 evictions for court reform will cause even more lives to be uprooted. Whilst court reform would be welcome, the need to remove Section 21 ‘no fault’ evictions is unsurpassable and urgent. Since April¹ this year, we have seen someone made *legitimately* homeless through a Section 21 eviction every 2 weeks. In September and October 2023 this increased to 2 people every week. The number of those on the brink of homelessness is also far higher. Court reform must sit alongside changes to the private rented sector but the removal of Section 21 evictions cannot wait – through no fault of their own people’s homes, safety and security are being taken away.

“My landlady has decided to sell the property”. Laraib (not the client’s real name) lives with her daughter and struggles with anxiety, depression, and mobility impairments. She was issued with a Section 21 notice despite being up-to-date with her rent payments. Laraib was incorrectly banded as priority band C rather than B by social housing services due to their limited supply of homes. She is unable to bid for social homes as they are still processing her application. Being reliant on Universal Credit, affordable private rented housing alternatives are impossible to find.

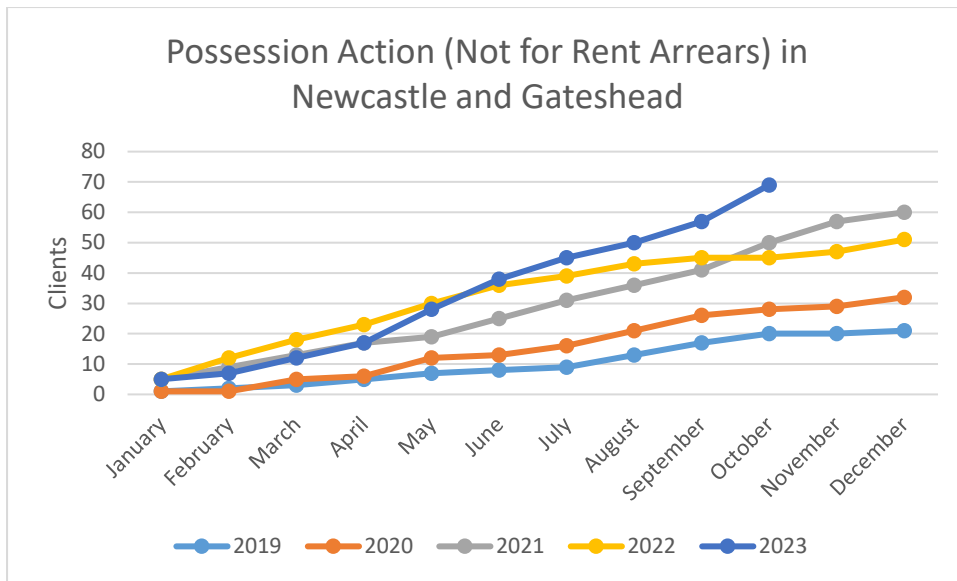
Laraib was never notified if her deposit was protected for her current property, so whilst struggling with poor health and at risk of homelessness, Laraib is now banking on this negligence to save her court defence - and her home.”

2. Under the proposed Section 8 evictions expansion, Laraib would be in an even more insecure position than she is today – her landlord wants to sell the property, which is covered as a new no-fault ground, she would still face this eviction. Furthermore, the few current protections against no-fault evictions (such as EPC certificate or deposit protection requirements) are now removed. This expansion arguably embeds ‘no fault evictions’ further into law.

With meagre social housing alternatives, this bill has overly considered landlords’ interests to keep their desperately needed properties in the rental market², rather than put safety and security measures in place for tenants like Laraib, losing sight of the original purpose of the bill.

¹ 19 clients April-October, with 5 in September and 6 in October. Combined CAN/CAG data.

² **The private rented sector in the UK is in fact growing, despite threats of a market exodus:** Hann, C. (2023, April 6) “Are landlords fleeing the private rental sector?”, *We are Citizens Advice*. [online] <https://wearecitizensadvice.org.uk/are-landlords-fleeing-the-private-rental-sector-a672cb11e05e> [Accessed 17/11/23]



Annual cumulative possession action for clients who are not in rent arrears at CAN and CAG.

Sadly, Laraib is not alone in facing eviction through no fault of her own. Stories like Laraib’s are seen all over the North East and at a national level.

Whilst we do not endorse expansions of Section 8 evictions and the creation of new no-fault grounds, Laraib’s story demonstrates the need for the following recommendations from Citizens Advice³:

- Landlords must provide substantial evidence that they or close family members want to move into a property, rather than simply relying on the 3 month no-relet period to dissuade them from abusing this right.
- The no-relet period should be extended to 1 year.
- In new tenancies, increase the period in which tenants are protected from new ‘no-fault evictions’ from six months to two years. After the turbulence Laraib and her family are experiencing due to her home being taken away at no fault of her own, it is unthinkable to allow her to be subjected to the same injustice again, let alone just 6 months down the line.

Laraib’s story also demonstrates the importance of the new tabled anti-discriminatory clauses on pages 40 to 43 of the amendment paper, which we welcome. Finding a new home for Laraib will be made easier if not facing rejection due to her entitlement to Universal Credit, or having children.

Private Rented Housing Standards:

The new Social Housing (Regulation) Act will introduce “Awaab’s Law”, this will ensure that landlords fix reported health hazards in a required timeframe. The private rented sector is lacking such provisions for tenants, ushering concern for decent homes standards across England. Homes in the private rented sector are more likely to fail the Decent Homes Standard than any other tenure. In

³ Citizens Advice (2023) “An end to unfair evictions?” *Citizens Advice*
<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Housing%20Publications/An%20end%20to%20unfair%20evictions.pdf>

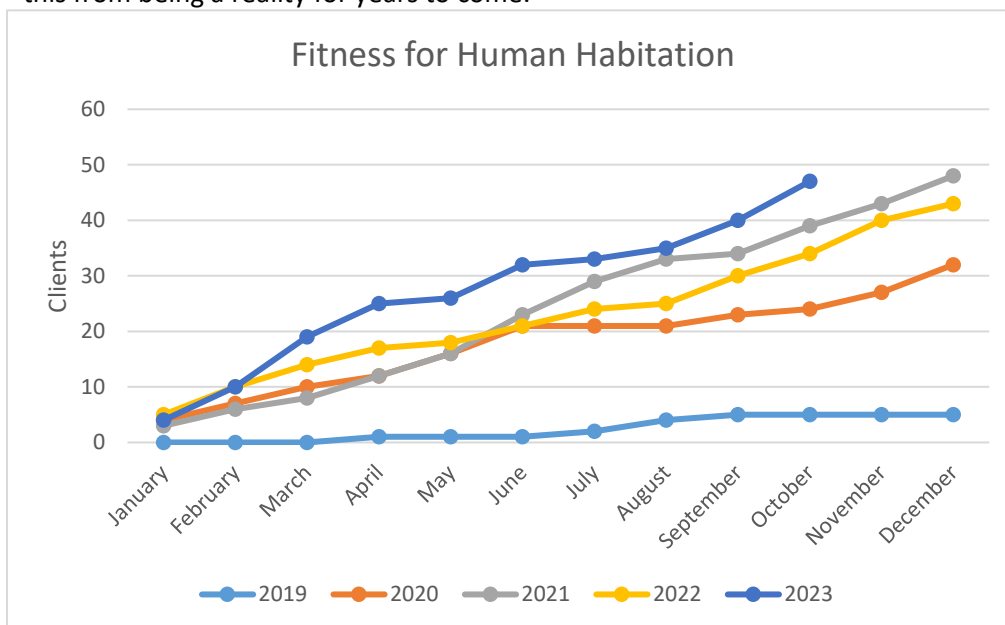
the North East, 12.8% of private rented dwellings are estimated to fail the Decent Homes Standard⁴. In 2021-2022 it was calculated that 19% of all households in England are in the private sector, whereas 17% of households are in the social rented sector. This means there is a significant proportion of households going unprotected from homes unfit for human habitation.

We welcome the creation of a new ombudsman as set out in the Renters Reform Bill, however we call for more to be done to put the onus on landlords to promptly resolve disrepair issues in the private sector, similar to those set out in Awaab’s Law.

“Sarah (not the client’s real name) lives in a private rented property with her 17-month old baby. The standard of the property is poor with a lack of insulation and mould spreading around the windows and corners of the room. The mould has spread to the underside of the mattress in the room where Sarah and her baby sleep. Sarah has reported this problem to the landlord and the letting agents on a number of occasions but has been repeatedly ignored. Sarah is trying to heat the property to target the damp conditions, but the windows are drafty, with ice forming on the inside.

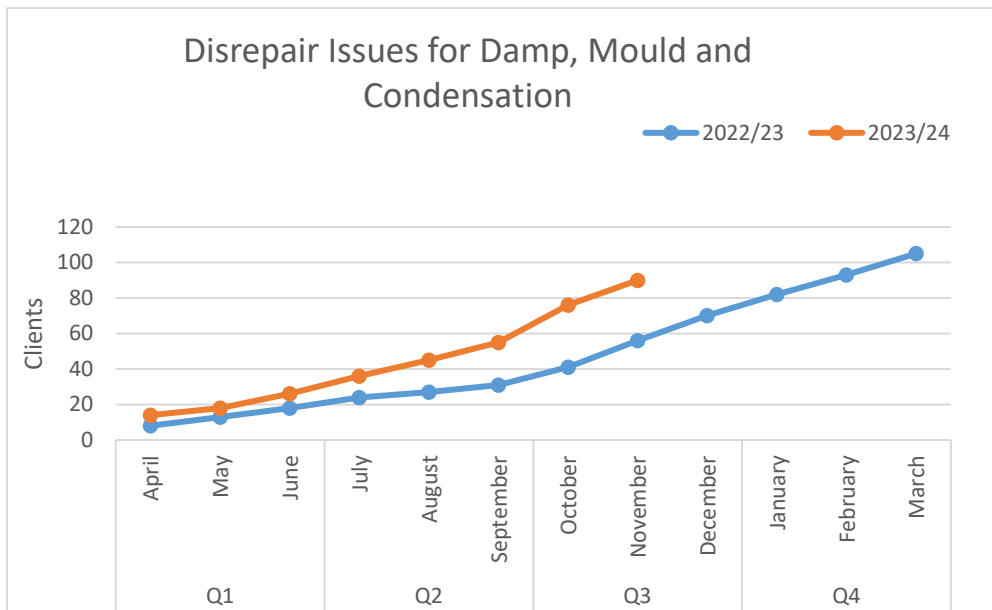
The standard of the property in combination with the cost of energy bills makes Sarah feel she is fighting a losing battle. The situation is causing Sarah stress and anxiety, adding to her existing mental health problems. Her main priority is her baby’s health and being able to keep warm at night but is being failed by private rented sector regulation.”

The graphs below highlight the increase of clients with issues regarding fitness for human habitation and disrepair related to damp, mould and condensation, from both CAN and CAG. 2023 is on track to be a record year for both issues. Sarah’s story demonstrates the living conditions some endure in the private rented sector and changes to regulation concerning disrepair issues are required to prevent this from being a reality for years to come.



Annual cumulative data showing clients with ‘Fitness for Human Habitation’ Housing Issues - combined CAN and CAG data.

⁴ National Statistics (2023, Jul 13) “English Housing Survey 2021 to 2022: private rented sector.” *Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities*. [online] <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-private-rented-sector/english-housing-survey-2021-to-2022-private-rented-sector#profile-of-private-renters> [Accessed 20/11/2023]



Quarterly cumulative data showing clients with disrepair issues related to damp, mould and condensation for CAN and CAG.

November 2023