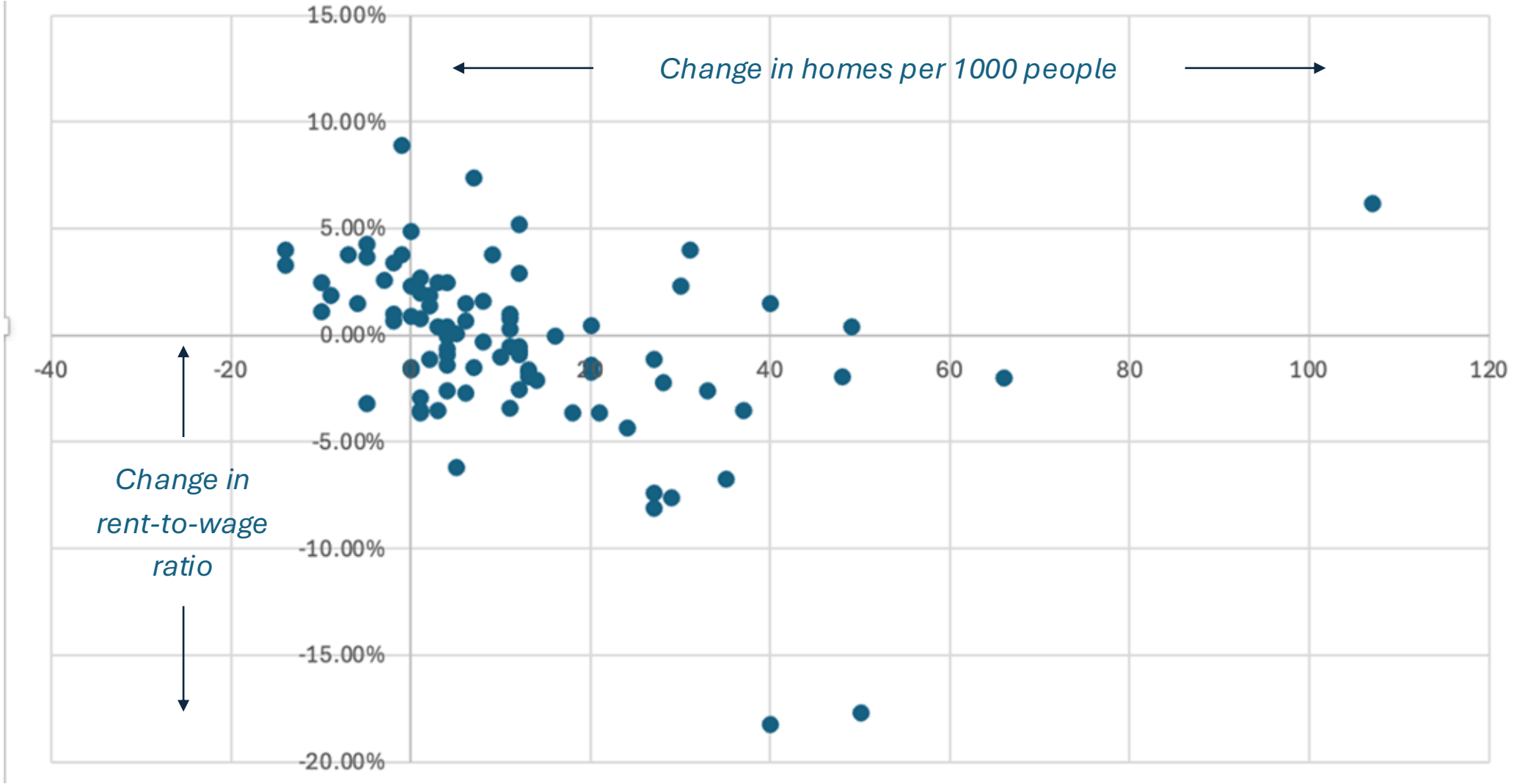
Rent controls: essential defense or sticking plaster?





Can we build our way out of the crisis?

Relationship between homes-to-population ratio and rent-to-wages ratio, England 2015-2023



Source: https://www.generationrent.org/2024/08/01/homes-not-landlords-are-the-key-to-rent-affordability/

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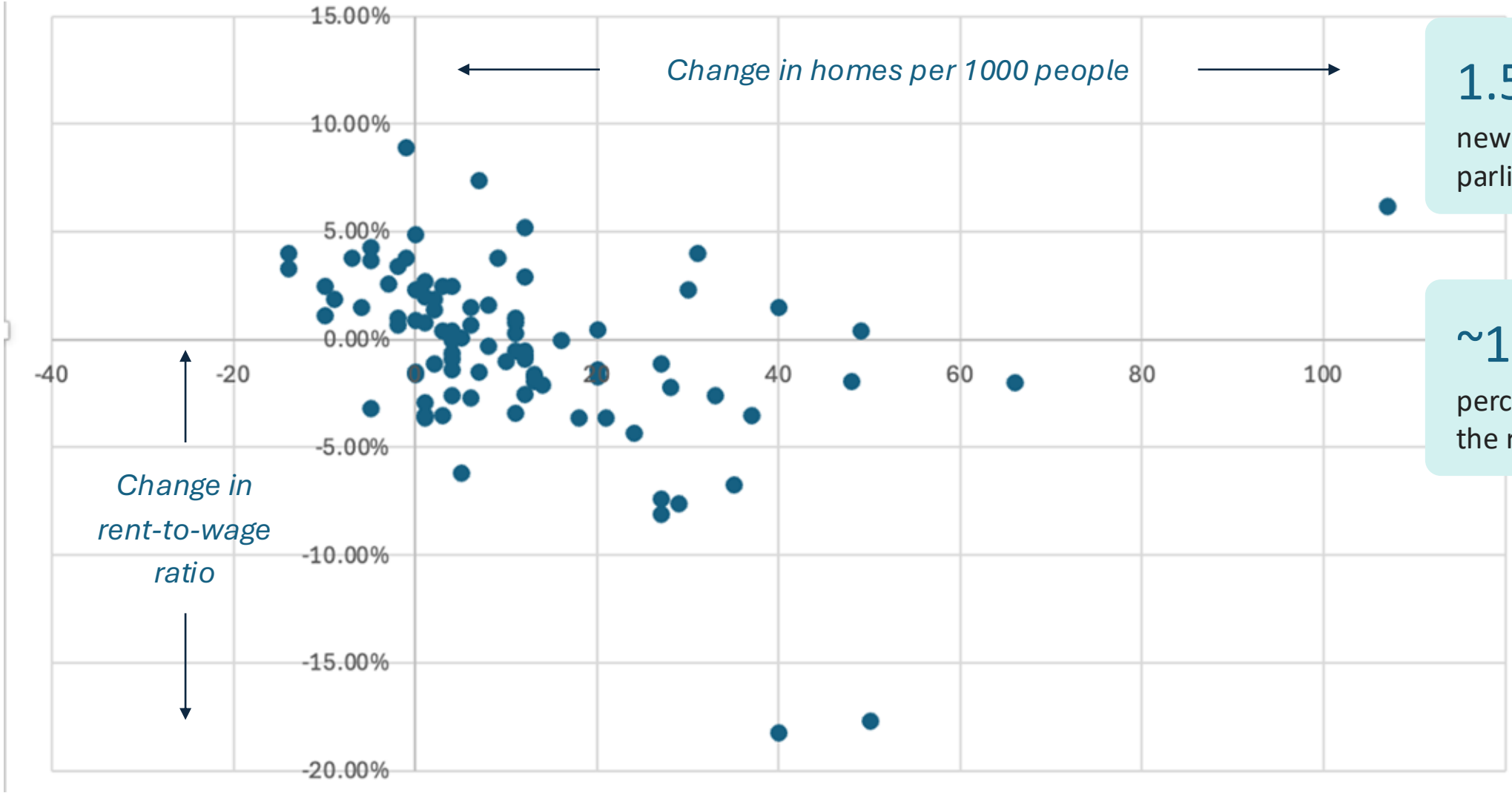

1.5m
new homes this parliament

~1
percentage point fall in the rent burden

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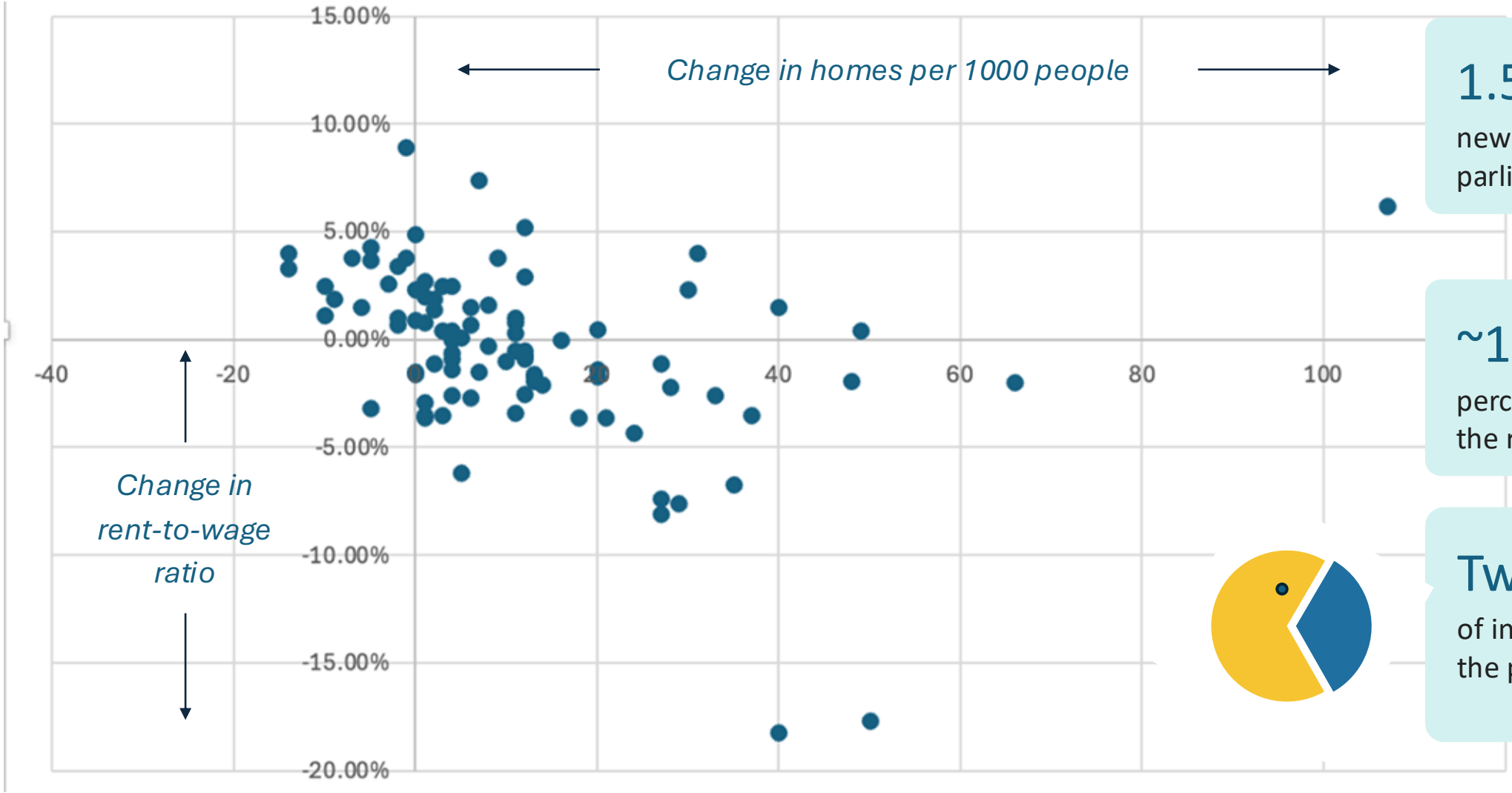

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~1
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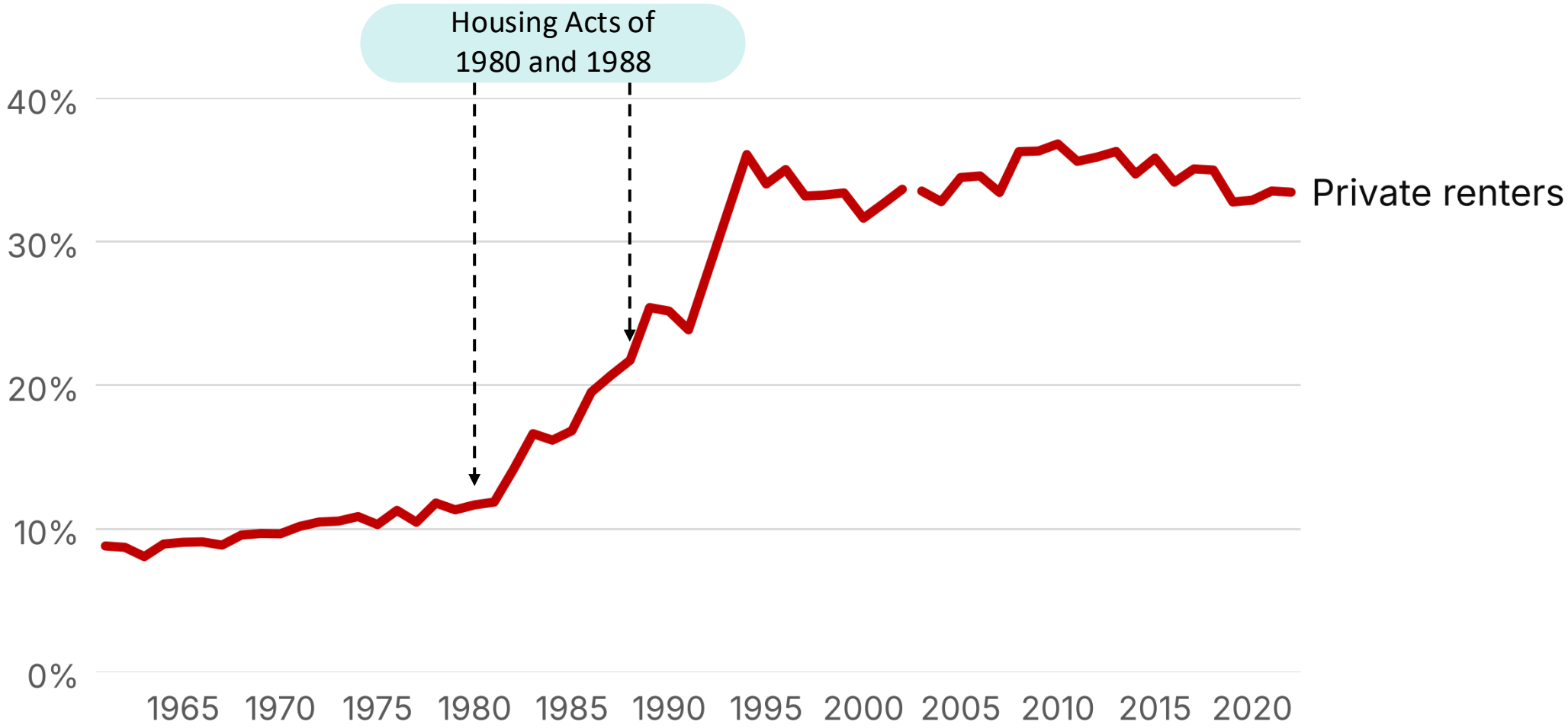
Two thirds
of income goes on rent for the poorest fifth of renters

Source: https://www.generationrent.org/2024/08/01/homes-not-landlords-are-the-key-to-rent-affordability/

Scrapping rent controls led to a tripling of the rent-to-income ratio in 14 yrs

Rent as a proportion of household income, GB to 2022, UK thereafter



Source: Resolution Foundation analysis of IFS HBAI (FES) 1961 to 1991; DWP HBAI (FRS) 1994 to 2002; again, DWP, HBAI 2003 to 2022. 1992 and 1993 are interpolated. Data is in fiscal years i.e. 1994 represents 1994-95 fiscal year.

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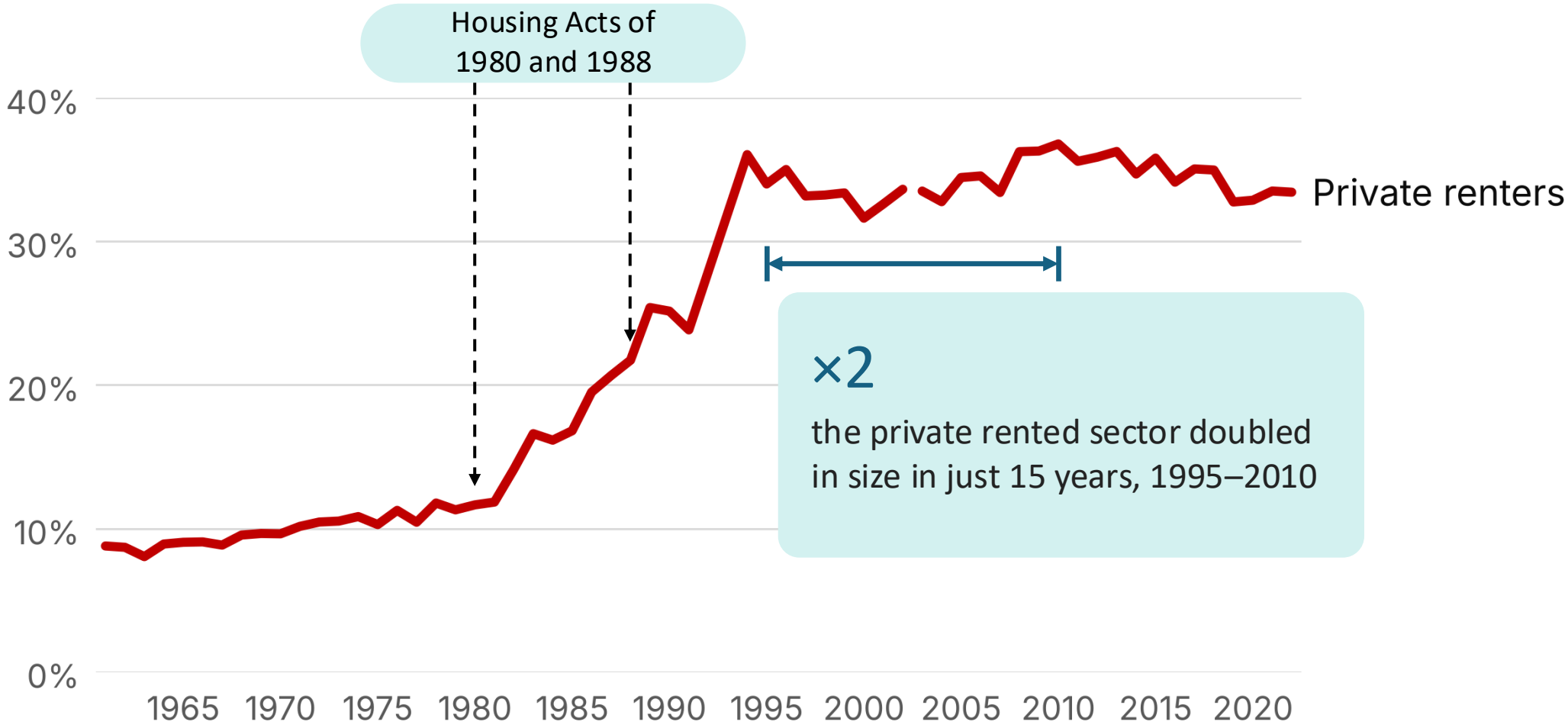

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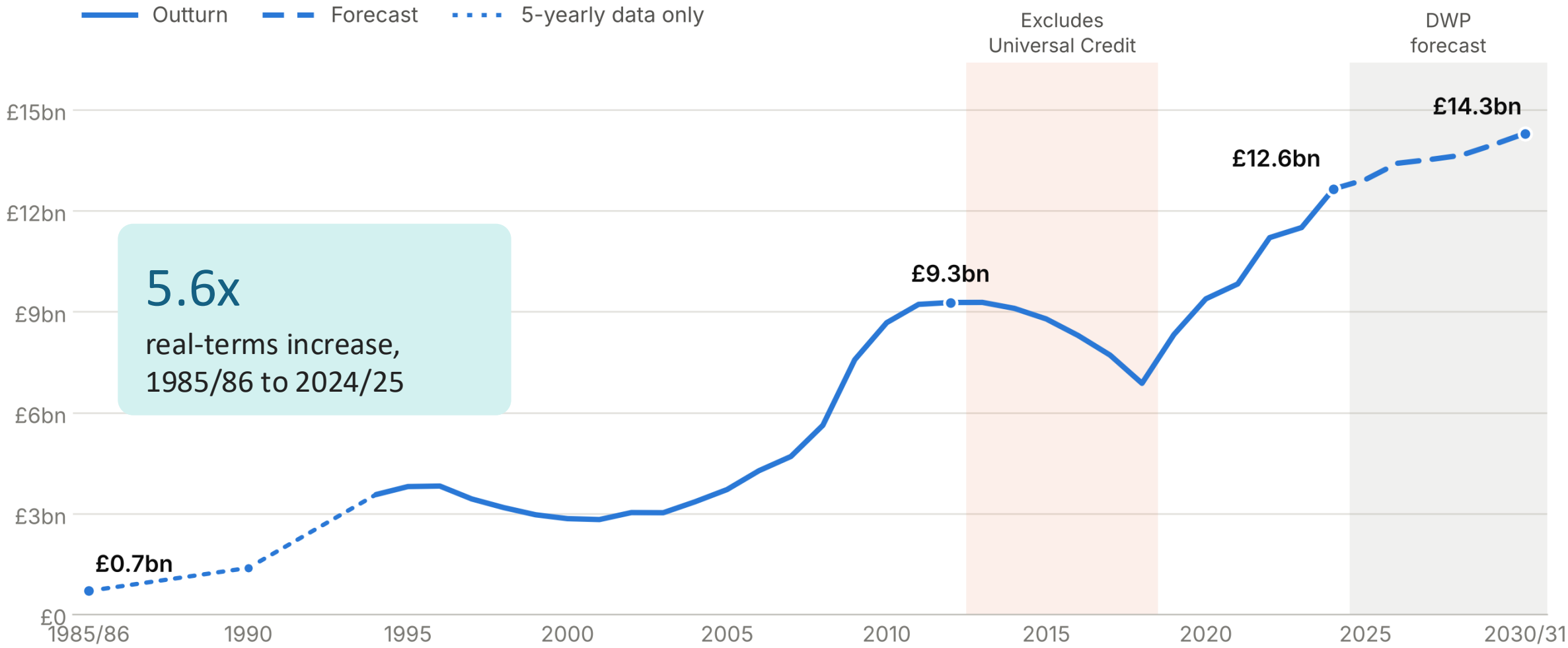
Housing support for private renters, Great Britain

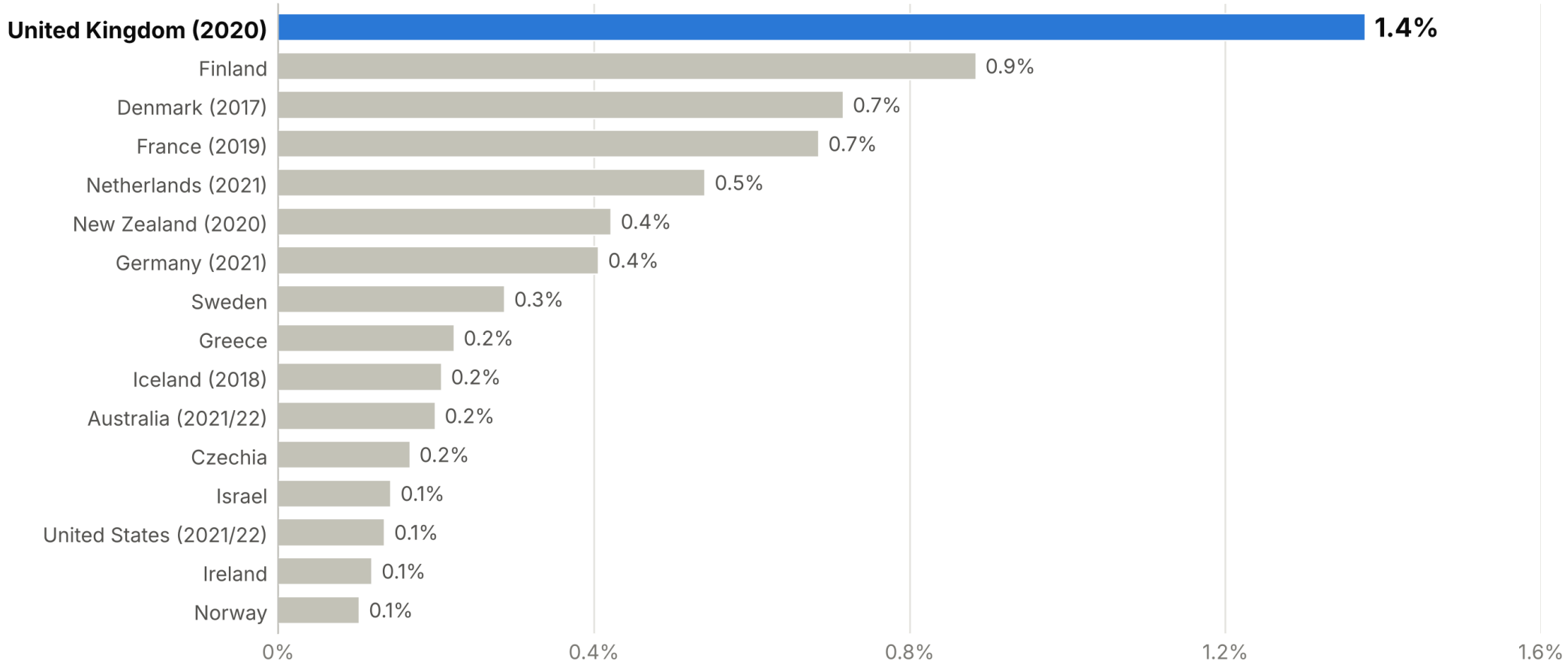
Housing Benefit + Universal Credit housing element, £bn a year, cash (nominal) prices



Source: DWP Outturn and forecast tables, Spring Forecast 2026 (1994/95 on); CIH UK Housing Review Table 116a (1985/86, 1990/91). Real-terms change uses HM Treasury GDP deflator (Oct 2026). 2013/14–2018/19 counts Housing Benefit only.

The UK spends more on housing allowances than any other OECD country

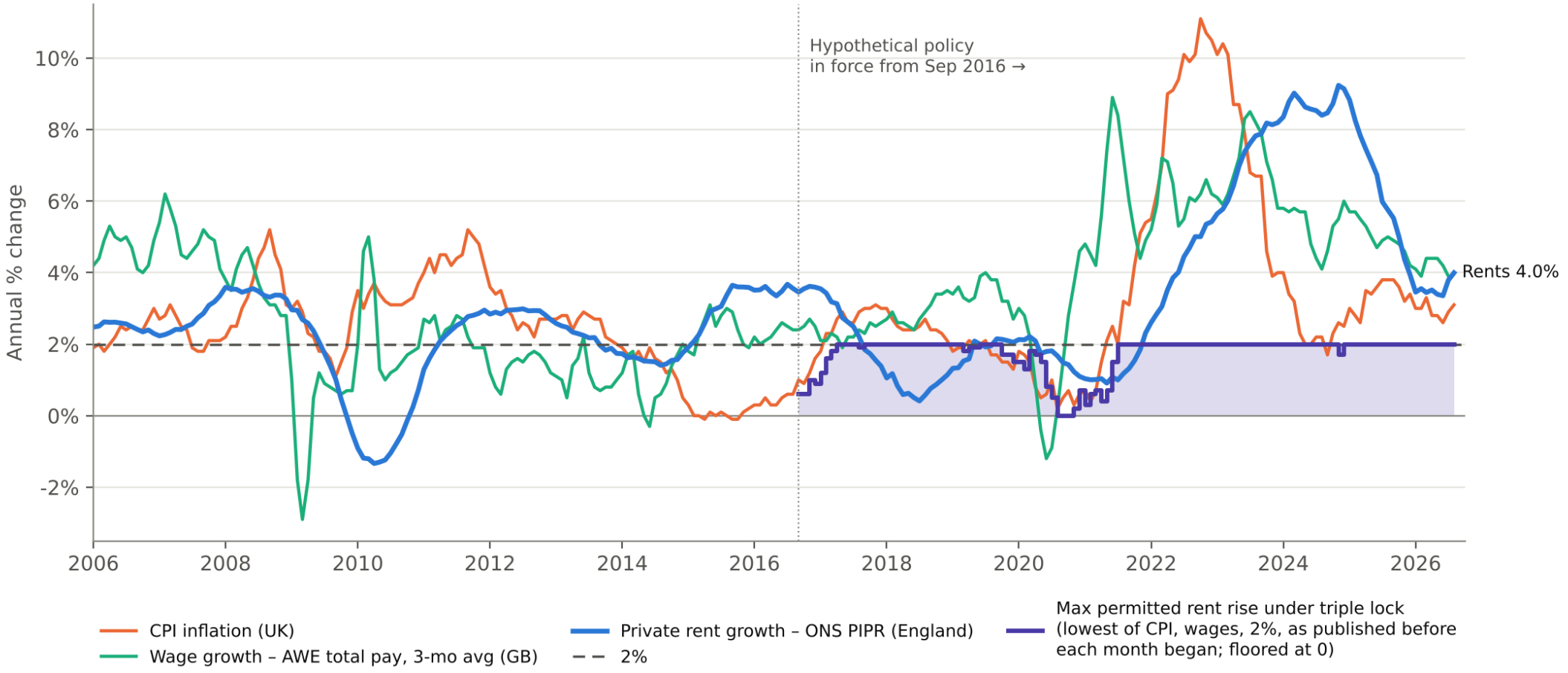
Public spending on housing allowances (means-tested help with rent and housing costs paid to households), % of GDP, 2022 or latest year available



12 further OECD countries report less than 0.1% of GDP. Year shown where not 2022. Housing allowances only: excludes help for homebuyers (e.g. Help to Buy), homeowner tax relief and spending on building social or affordable housing. Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database, indicator PH3.1 (June 2024).

My proposal - an emergency triple lock on rents:
Cap rents at the lower of CPI inflation, wage growth or 2%

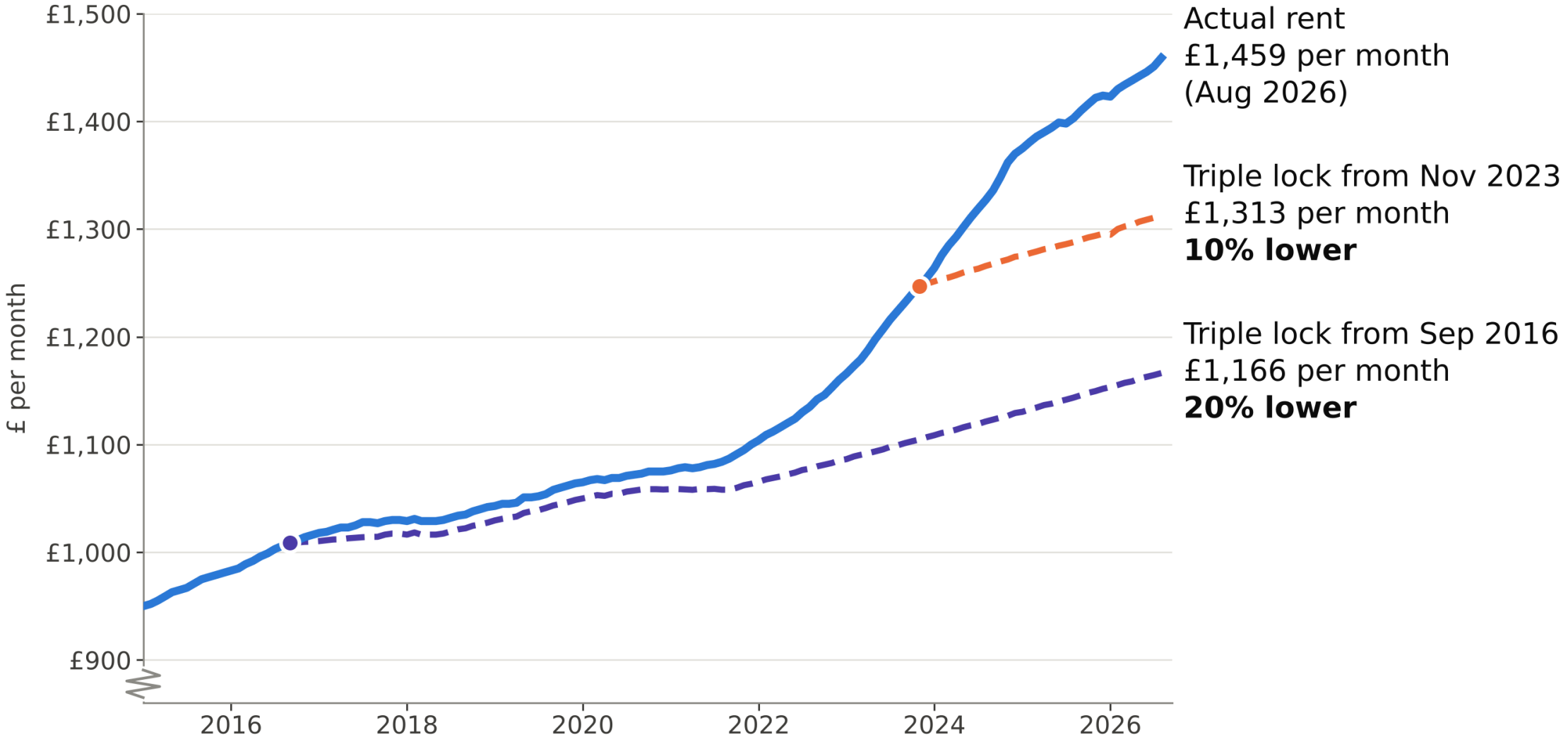
Annual growth in England private rents vs CPI, wages and 2%, Jan 2006 – Aug 2026, with the maximum rent rise a renters' triple lock would have allowed from Sep 2016



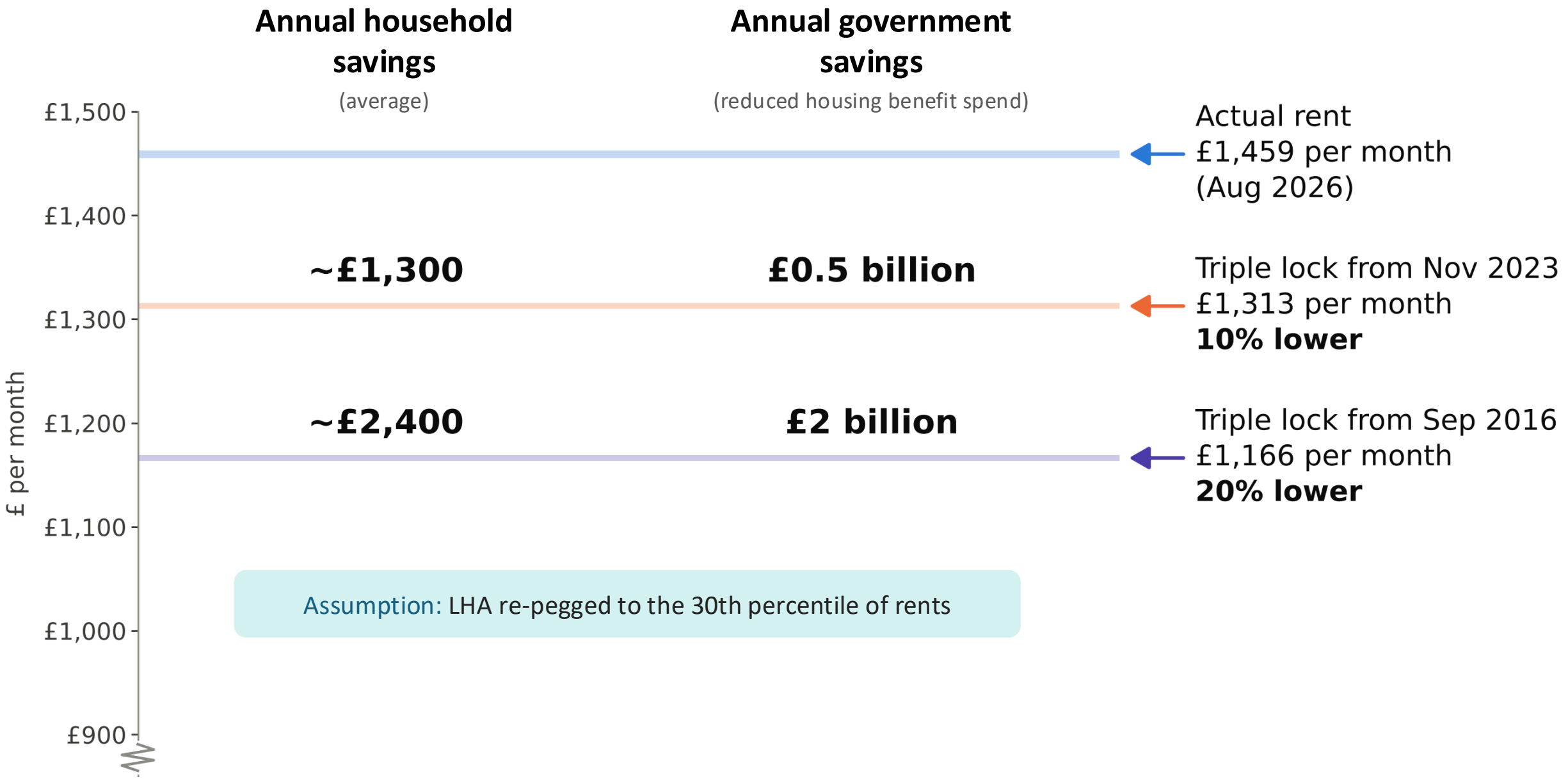
Sources: ONS Price Index of Private Rents (Sep 2026 release; pre-2015 chain-linked to IPHRP); ONS CPI annual rate (D7G7, to Aug 2026); ONS AWE total pay 3-month avg y/y (KAC3, GB, to Jul 2026). Cap uses CPI lagged 2 months and AWE lagged 3 months – the latest figures ONS had published before each month began.

A triple lock from 2023 would cut rents 10%; from 2016, 20%

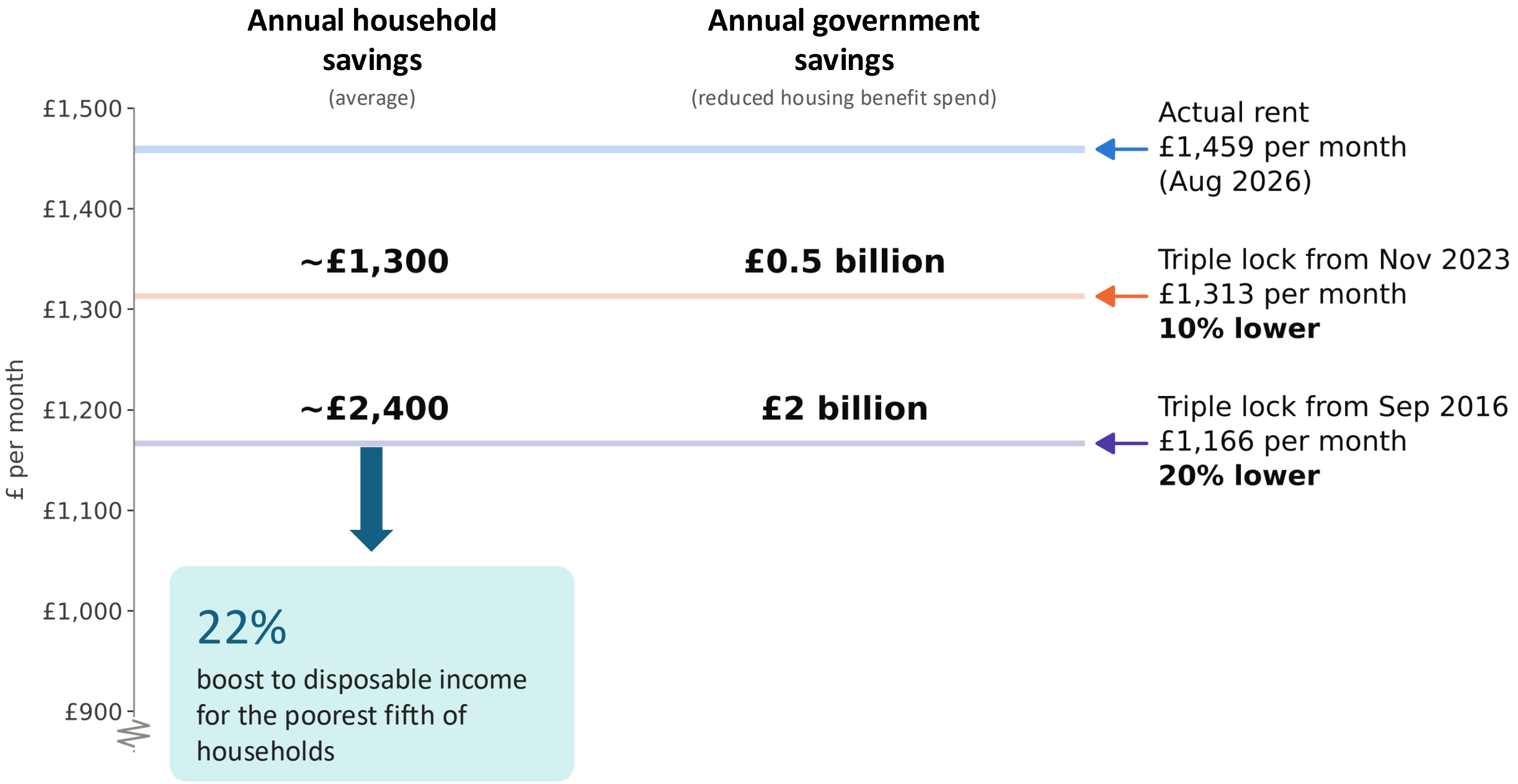
Average monthly private rent in England, Jan 2015 – Aug 2026



Source: ONS Price Index of Private Rents (Sep 2026 release), England average rent. Triple lock: in each 12-month window from the start month, rents rise by the lower of actual growth and max(0, min(CPI, AWE wage growth, 2%)), using figures published before the window began. Assumes all rents move with the average.



Rents: ONS Price Index of Private Rents (Sep 2026 release), England average rent; triple-lock rents modelled from ONS CPI and AWE data.
Savings: IIPPR's tax benefit model, using data from the Family Resources Survey (see Stratford and Beswick, 2016).



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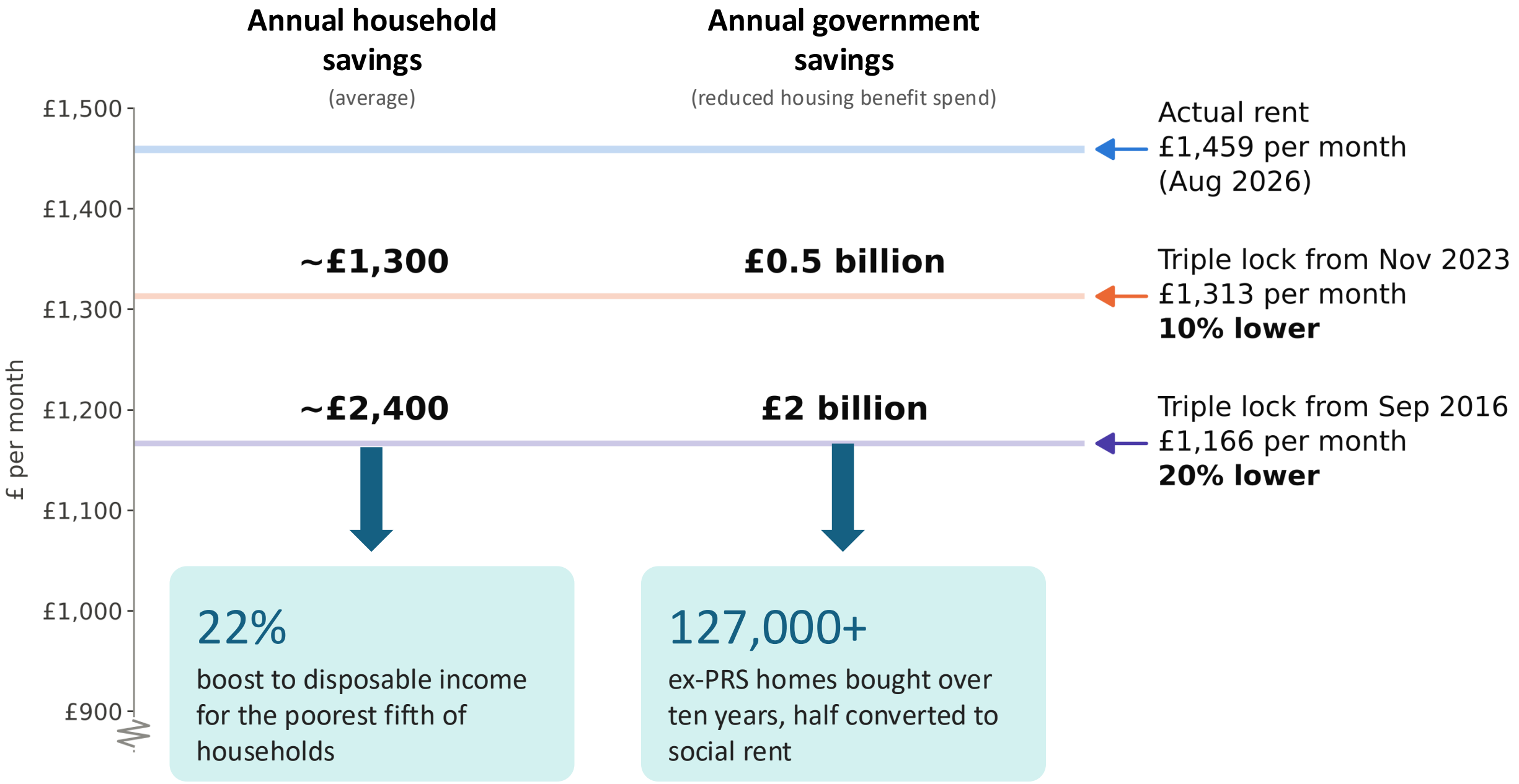

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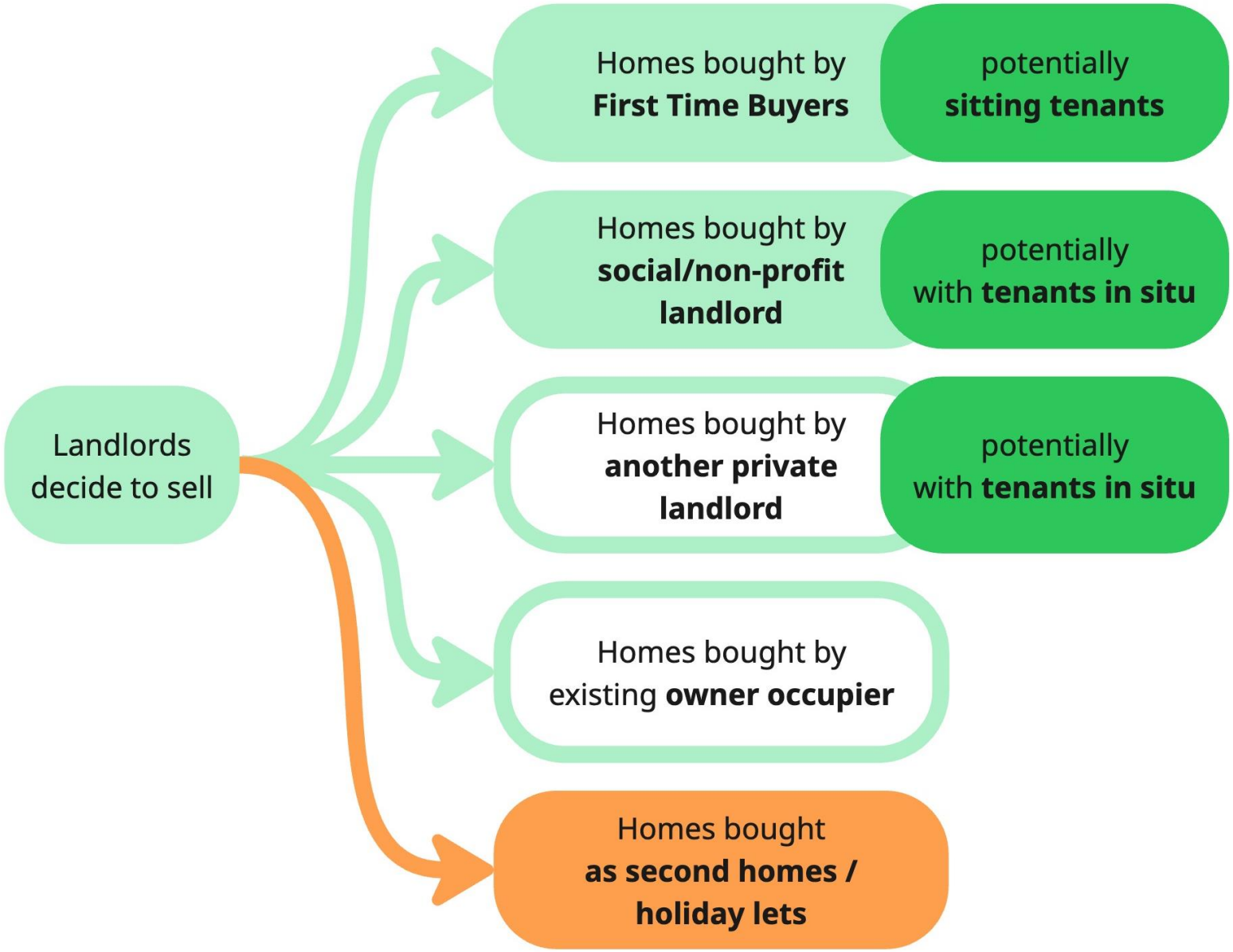
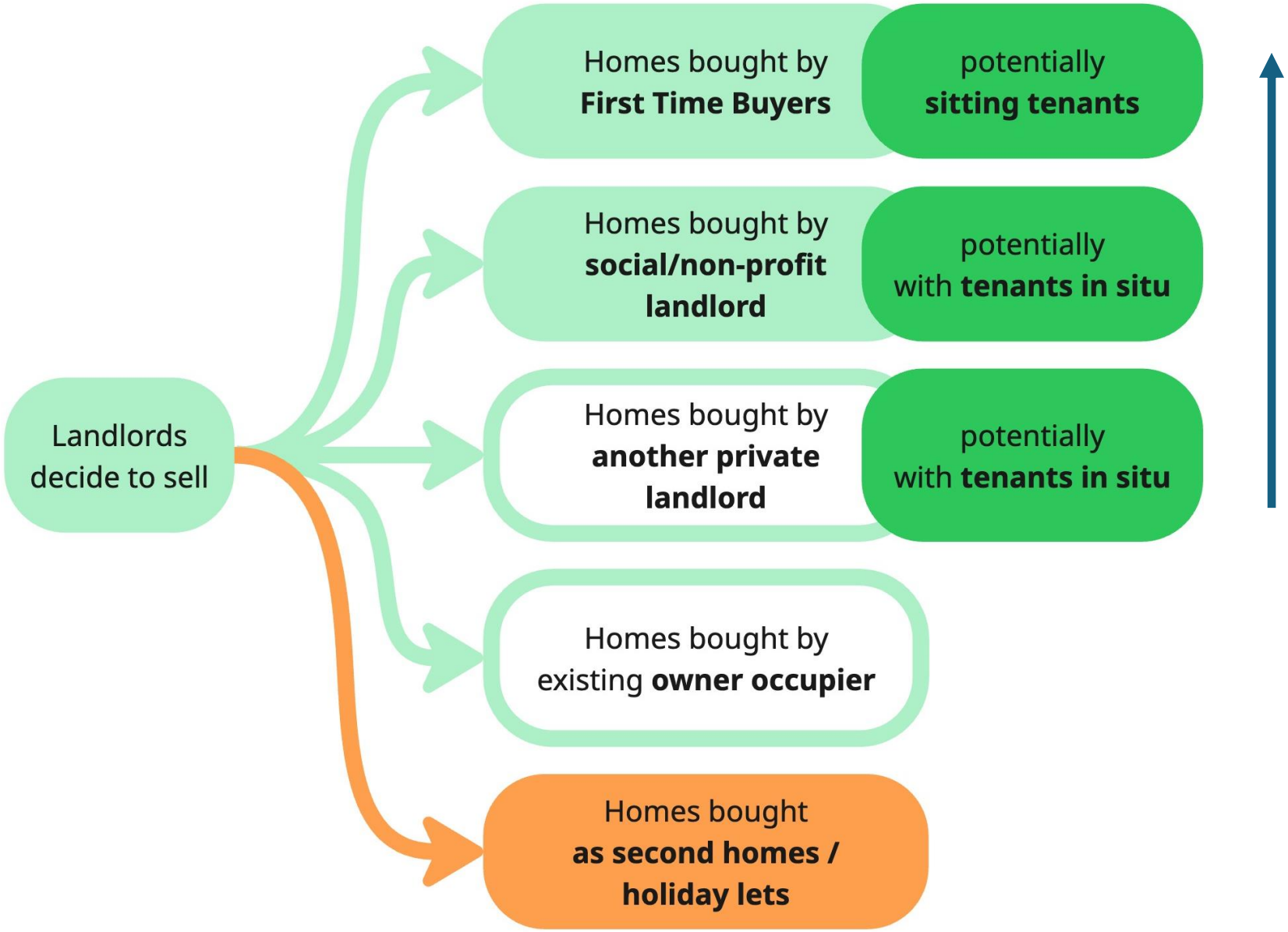
What happens when a landlord sells?

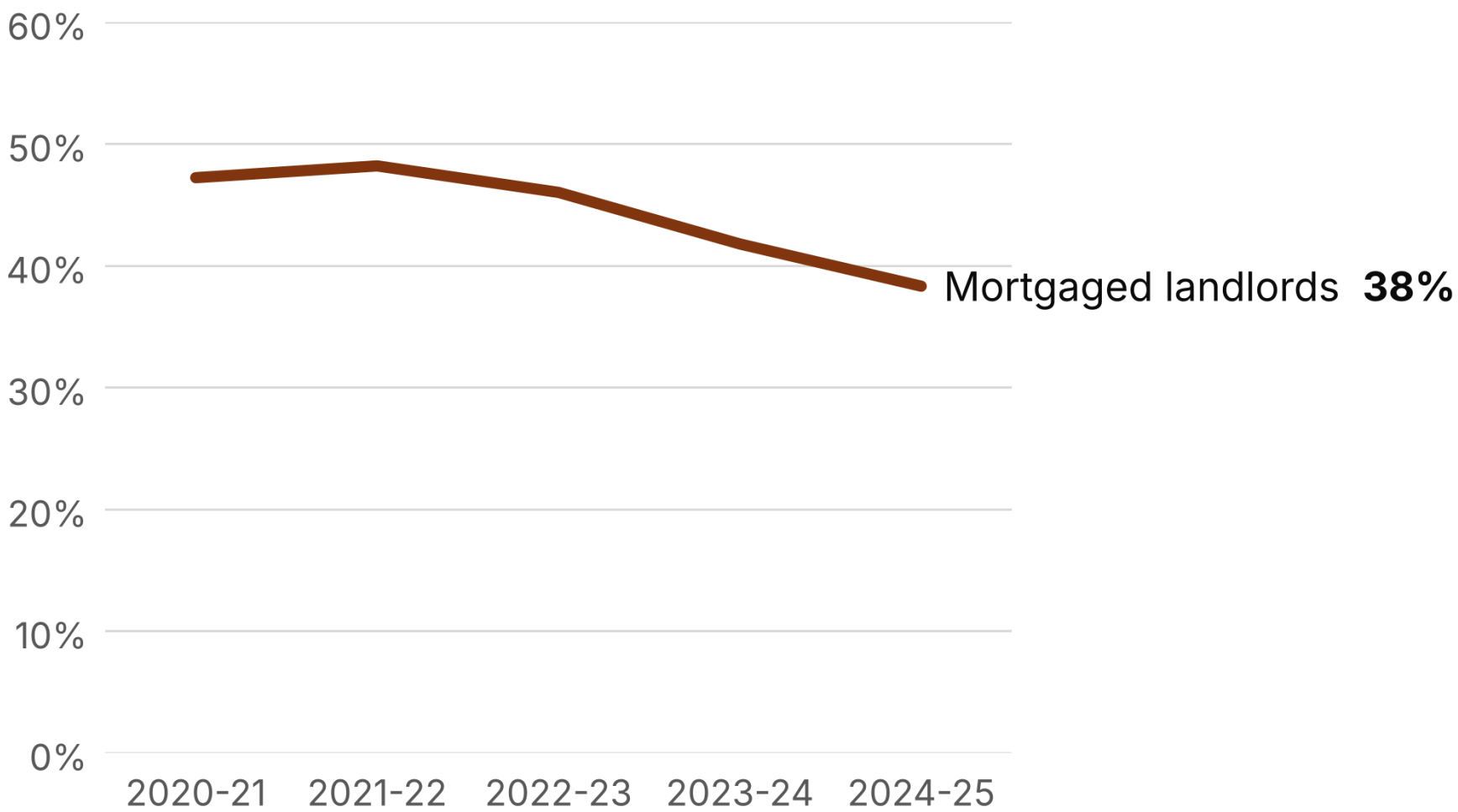


What happens when a landlord sells?



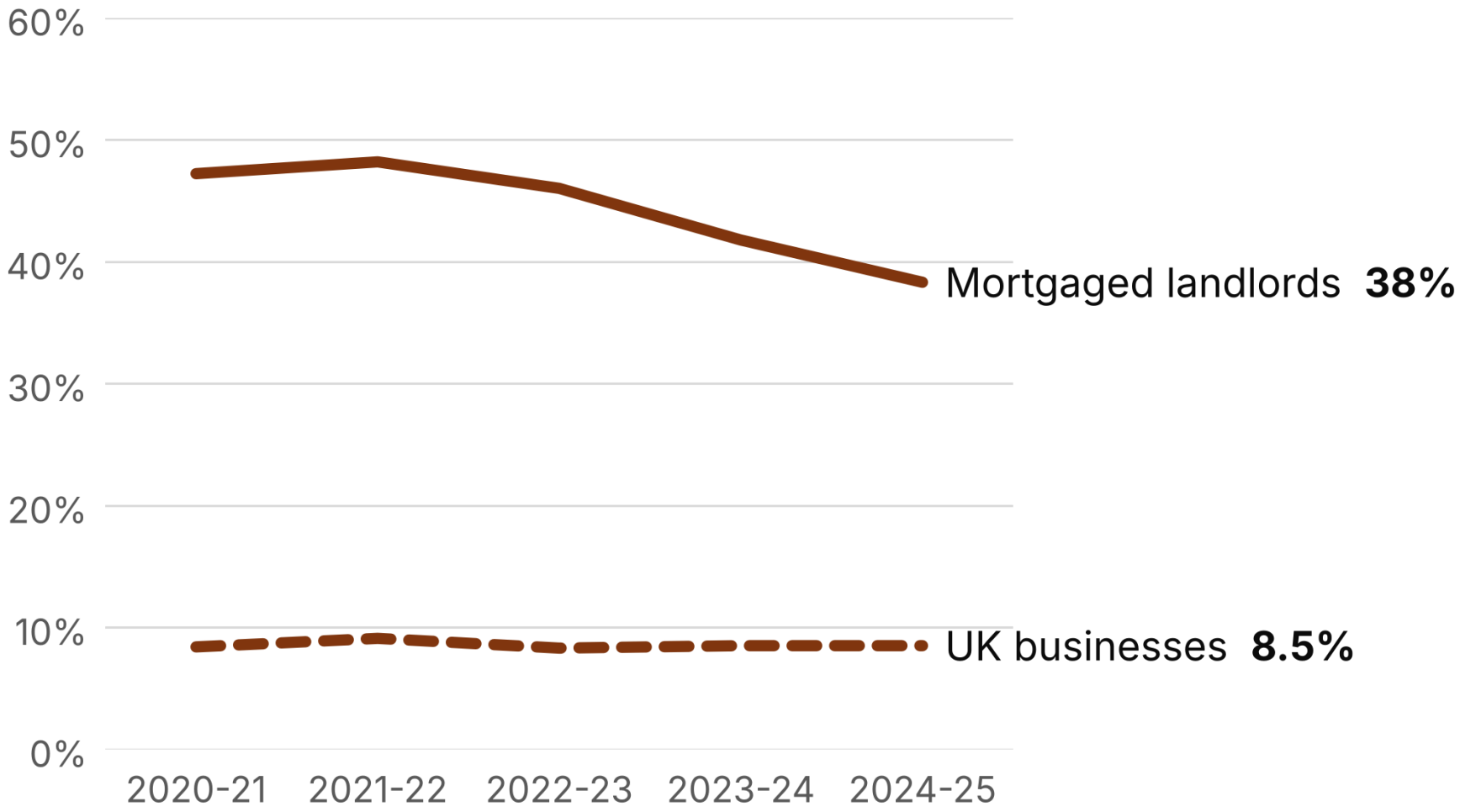
Policy can steer sales in this direction

Median pre-tax profit margins for mortgaged landlords



Source: HMRC data obtained through FOI, see Appendix B and C of Stratford and Beswick (2026), Taking Back Control of Rents

Median pre-tax profit margins for mortgaged landlords, compared to UK businesses



58%

of landlords have no mortgage – their profit margins are even bigger

Source: HMRC data obtained through FOI, see Appendix B and C of Stratford and Beswick (2026), Taking Back Control of Rents

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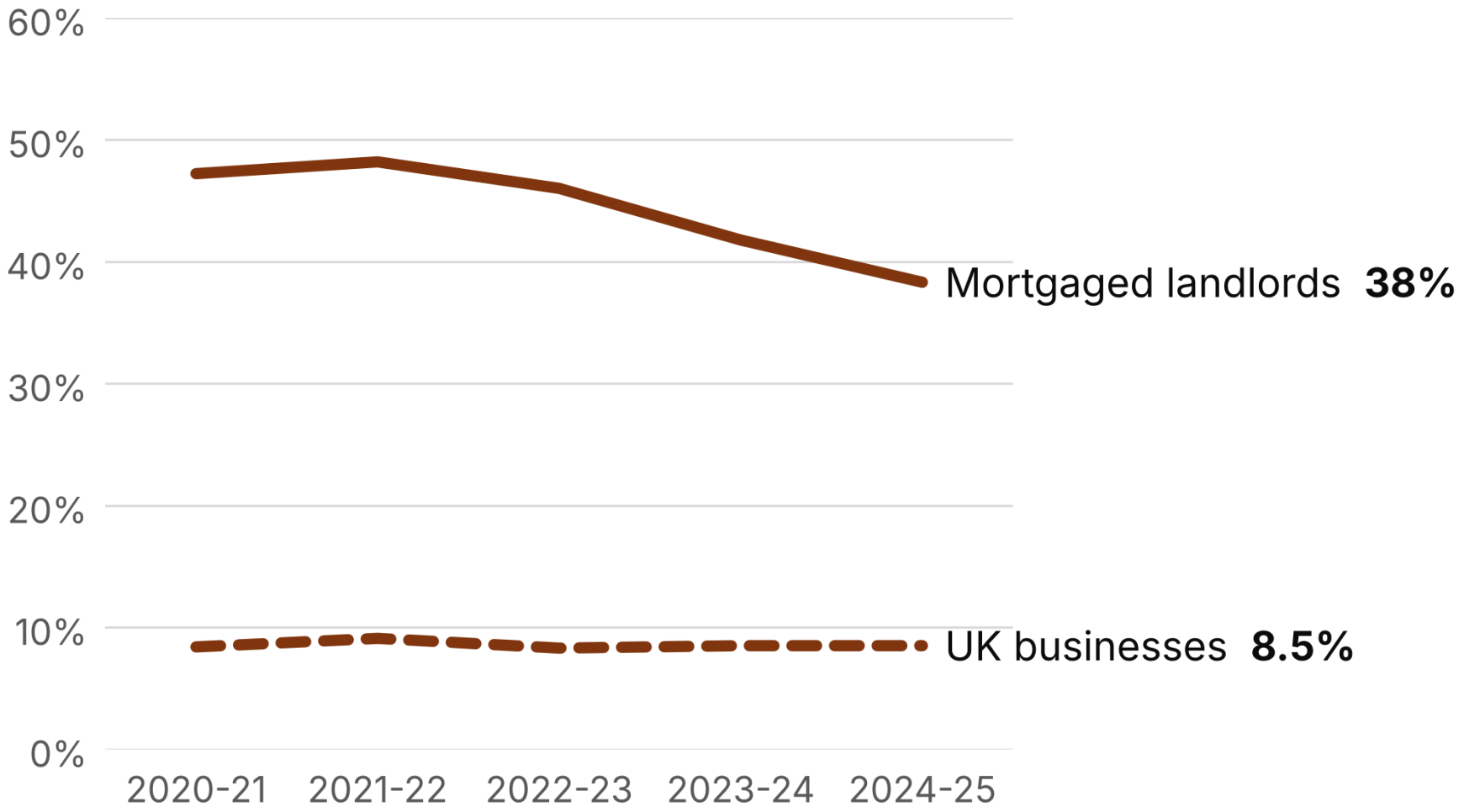

+83,000

landlords in the UK between 2021-22 and 2023-24 (HMRC and Companies House)

+96,000

privately rented homes in England between 2023 and 2025 (MHCLG)

Source: HMRC data obtained through FOI, see Appendix B and C of Stratford and Beswick (2026), Taking Back Control of Rents

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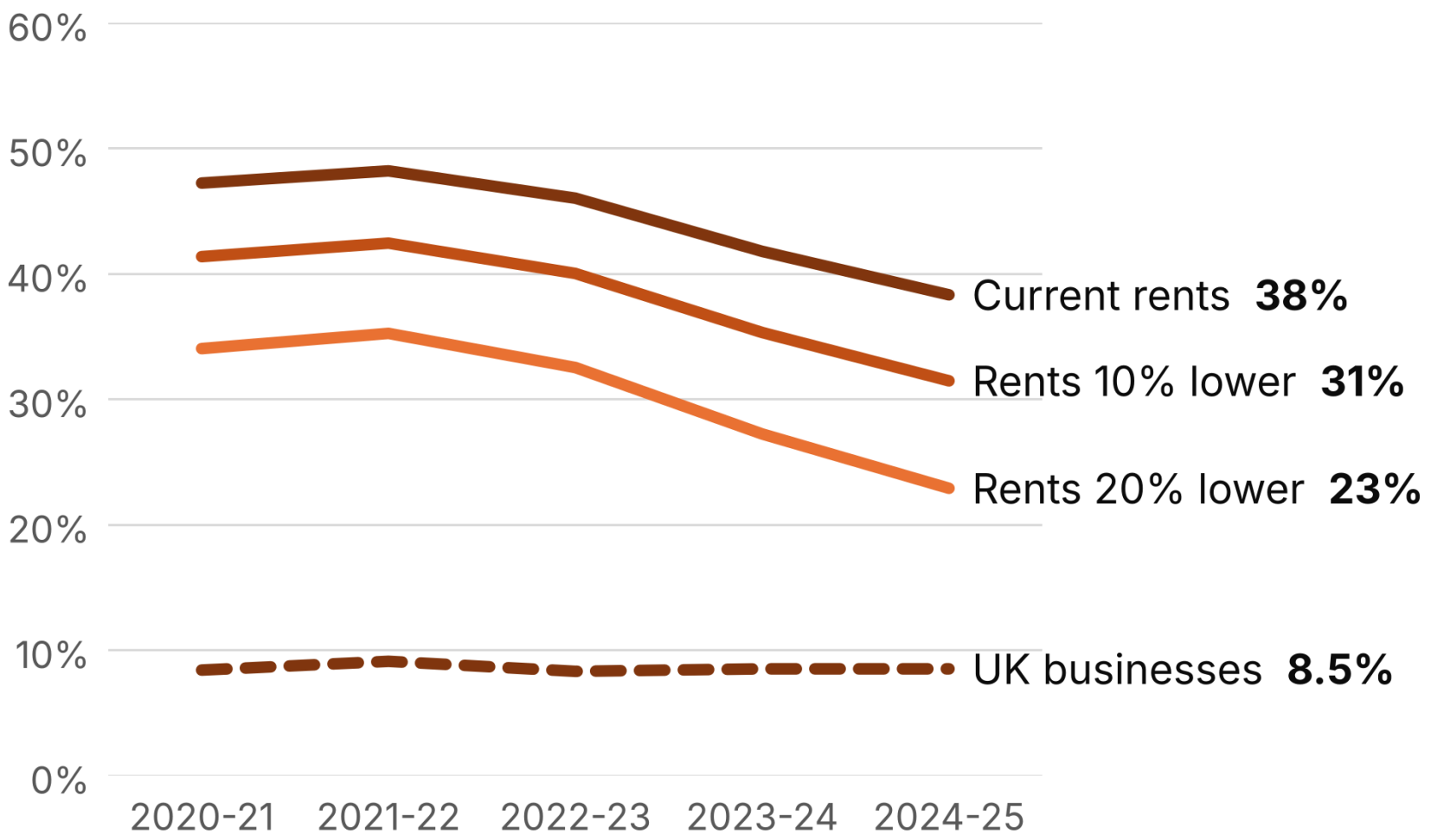


~80%

of all landlords make larger profit margins than this – because this is the median for *mortgaged* landlord only

Source: HMRC data obtained through FOI, see Appendix B and C

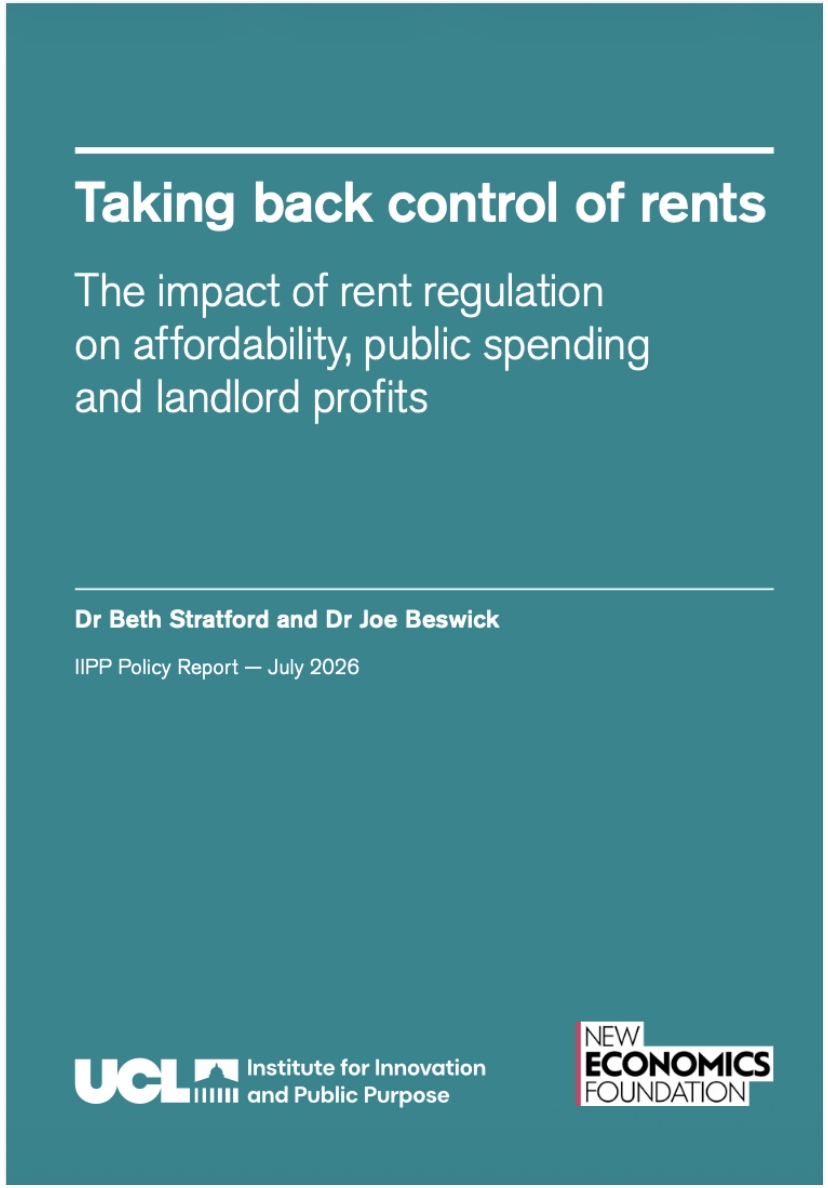
A triple lock implemented ten years ago (or rent freeze in 2023) **would by now:**

- Save the average renting household **£2400 annually.**
- Save the government **£2 billion annually.**
- Allow the median mortgaged landlord to make **profit margins nearly 3 times bigger than median the UK business.**
- Help facilitate a **shift back towards home ownership and social housing.**

Thank you!

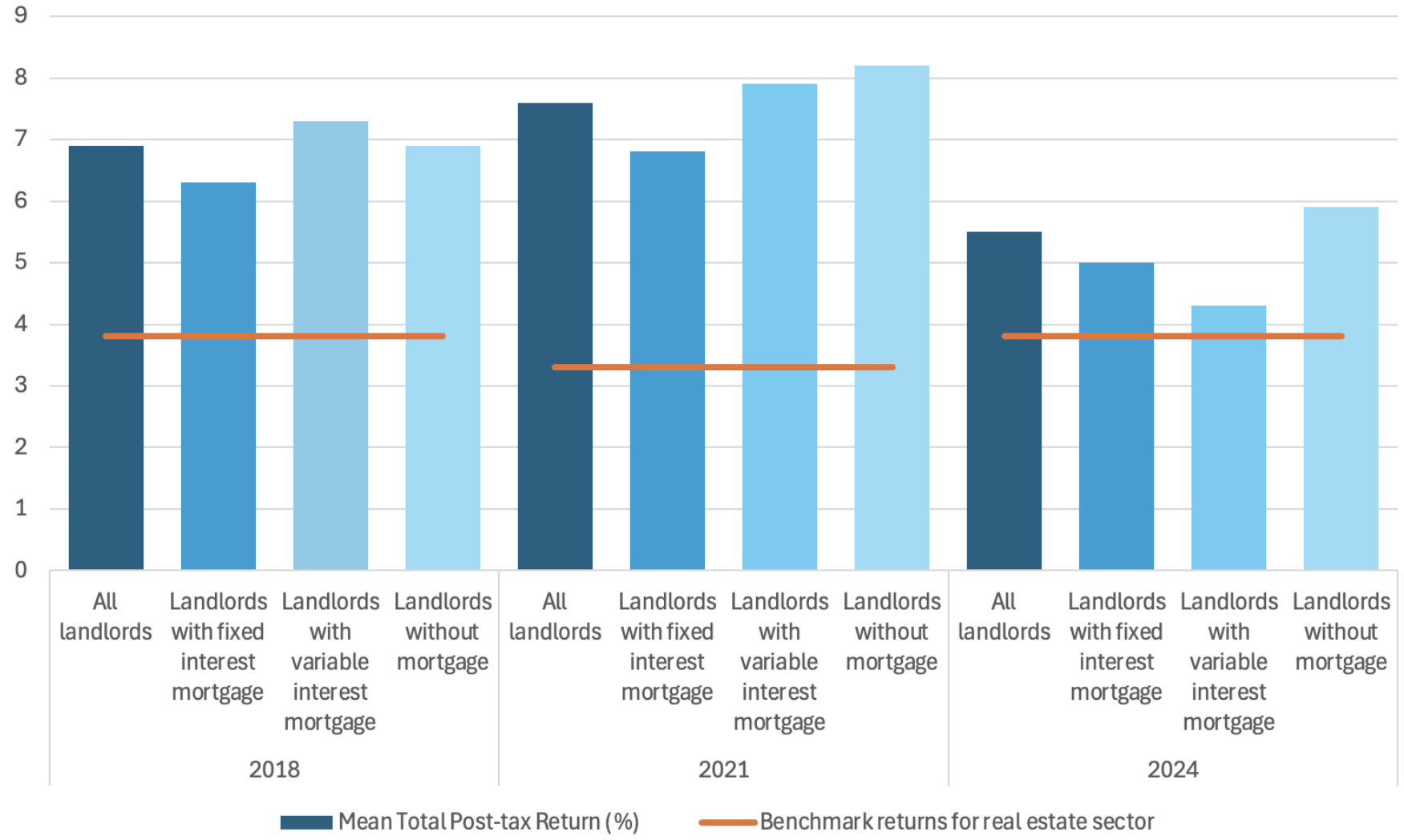
LinkedIn: @bethstratford

@bethstratford.bsky.social



ANNEX SLIDES

Average rate of return for landlords compared to benchmark return for investment in the broader real estate sector, 2018-2024



Autonomy Institute analysis using EPLS, Bank of England, ONS, FCS, HMRC and Refinitiv data. Annual total return is defined as post-tax net rental income plus post-tax annualised capital gains, divided by the equity that would be available upon sale. For methodology see Garcia, L. and Stratford, B. (2026). The Property Premium: the nature and trajectory of landlord profits in England. Autonomy Institute.