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WH: SHF Wave 3 project case study guide

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This guidance complements the wider technical support offered by IFF Research

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1.1 What are Case Studies?

Case studies are a research method commonly used in evaluation to provide **detailed insight** into a particular programme, policy, project, site, or individual experience. Case studies typically bring together multiple sources of evidence, including both quantitative data (such as performance metrics, monitoring data, or survey results) and qualitative data (such as interviews, focus group or document review data). By synthesising these sources, case studies can provide a richer and more nuanced understanding than a single method alone.

Within the SHF Wave 3 self-evaluation, case studies are a key research method that can be used to provide in-depth insight into how the fund is being delivered and experienced across different contexts. There are several different options for what the case unit could be, but these could focus on specific projects, delivery partners, measures or households to explore how the scheme is operating in practice.

The case studies should act as key evidence sources for answering your chosen evaluation question (or questions) and can be used in combination with other research methods. Moreover, you are encouraged to use your case studies as learning and communication tools to demonstrate the work you are doing using Wave 3 funding. They can be used to share positive success stories or any lessons learned for future retrofit delivery.

1.2 Analytical Purposes of Case Studies

Case studies can serve different analytical purposes depending on the evaluation's objectives:

- **Illustrate and describe:** to provide a detailed account of an intervention, implementation approach, or participant experience, helping to bring evaluation findings to life through real-world examples. An example of this type of case study would be the SHDF Wave 1 case study on Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, found at [this link](#). This case study highlights a project where a broad mix of measures were installed (including external wall insulation, loft insulation, ground source heat pumps and solar PV).
- **Explore:** to investigate emerging themes, issues, or hypotheses where evidence is limited or where further understanding is needed. An example of this would be the SHDF Wave 1 thematic case study on installing measures in hard-to-treat properties, found at [this link](#). It outlines the decision-making of social housing landlords and highlights enabling factors and challenges in delivering retrofit in hard-to-treat properties.
- **Explain:** to understand the mechanisms, drivers, and contextual factors that contributed to observed outcomes, including how and why change occurred. An example of this type of case study would be the SHDF Wave 1 case study on the Durham County Council, found at [this link](#). This project was selected as a case study as it was identified as a project showing good progress against its objectives throughout delivery.
- **Generate learning:** to identify practical lessons about what works, for whom, in what circumstances, and why. An example of this case study would be the SHDF Wave 1 case study on the Waltham Forest Council, found at [this link](#). It explores how the project was able to overcome the project challenges that led to it being moved from amber to green in the Delivery Partner's reported RAG rating.

The scale and complexity of case studies can therefore vary considerably, from focused, descriptive examples to more analytically rigorous studies designed to examine patterns, processes, and causal relationships.

1.3 Why do we use Case Studies in Evaluation?

Case studies are useful for examining significant, complex, or novel situations in depth, helping evaluators understand not only what happened, but also how, why, and in what context outcomes occurred.

They are particularly valuable when an evaluation needs to:

- Illustrate **examples of good practice** to share practical learning within their organisation or with other organisations delivering retrofit programmes.
- Explore **how implementation approaches vary** across different contexts (such as different projects, housing types, resident groups or geographic areas).
- Examine **complex delivery issues** such as resident engagement, supply chain management, contractor coordination, or consortium working.
- **Capture the experiences and perspectives** of residents, delivery partners, installers, and project teams.
- **Highlight successes and implementation challenges**, including how any barriers to delivery were addressed.
- **Explore unexpected outcomes, emerging issues, or lessons learned** during delivery.
- Demonstrate **how resident, organisational, or delivery outcomes were achieved** in practice.

In this way, case studies can complement wider programme monitoring and evaluation activity by providing richer insight into delivery experiences, contextual factors, and practical lessons from Wave 3 projects.

1.4 Advantages of Using Case Studies in Evaluation

The advantages of using case studies include:

Flexibility: they can be tailored to different SHF Wave 3 delivery contexts (e.g. local authority-led schemes, consortia models, rural vs urban retrofit), evaluation questions (process vs outcomes), and stages of delivery.

Richness of insight: they provide detailed, contextual understanding of how retrofit is delivered in practice, including factors such as property archetypes, tenant engagement, supply chain constraints, and contractor performance that are not captured in monitoring data alone.

Ability to examine complexity: They allow exploration of the complex interactions between retrofit measures, funding requirements, delivery partners, and local housing stock, helping to understand how and why delivery varies across Wave 3 projects

Human perspective: they capture lived experiences of residents and frontline delivery staff, including perceptions of disruption, communication, comfort improvements, and affordability, as well as implementation realities faced by landlords and contractors.

Communication value: they provide real-world examples of SHF Wave 3 in action, helping DESNZ and Grant Recipients to clearly communicate delivery challenges, good practice, and outcomes through accessible and compelling narrative.

Figure 1 Advantages of using case studies as an evaluation method

Challenges and Limitations

Case studies also have limitations that should be considered:



Figure 2 Challenges and limitations of using case studies as an evaluation method

1.5 Selecting case studies

The number of case studies included in an evaluation will depend primarily on the **timeline and budget you have available, as well as the intended balance between depth and breadth of insight**. A smaller number of case studies allows for more detailed investigation, richer evidence collection, and deeper analysis of context, delivery, and outcomes. By contrast, a larger number of case studies can provide broader coverage across different housing archetypes, retrofit measures, and delivery experiences, helping grant recipients to identify patterns in implementation, compare approaches and capture lessons on delivery.

The number of case studies selected will also influence the methodological approach. Case study selection should therefore be purposeful, transparent, and aligned with the evaluation objectives. When identifying suitable case studies, several selection criteria should be considered. These are outlined in Table 1:

Table 1 Case study selection criteria

Selection criteria	Description
Importance	There are often cases that are clearly important to include, whatever the specific criteria.
Comparable and distinct	The case studies should address the same issue or topic (e.g. measures, properties, property types), i.e., drawn from the same pool of potential cases, while remaining distinct from one another.
Access and logistics	You should have a reasonable expectation that you can access the evidence and/or people needed to complete the case study.
Representativeness	It is often helpful if cases are balanced or reflective of the wider 'population' in some way, although this is not essential depending on the purpose of the case studies.
Relevance	Projects, themes or key learnings that are selected for case study are relevant to the interests/needs of the business. Grant recipients should select case study topics that are interesting for them and for their area of expertise.

1.6 Conducting case studies

Once case studies have been selected, a clear and structured process is needed to ensure evidence is gathered systematically, analysed robustly, and presented in a way that supports the wider evaluation. Developing a case study is typically an iterative process involving planning, desk research, primary evidence collection, synthesis, and drafting.

Throughout the process, you should remain focused on

- the purpose of the case study (e.g. illustrate and describe, explore, explain or generate learning).
- the evidence needed to support key findings, and
- how the case study will contribute to wider learning about Wave 3 delivery, resident outcomes, and effective retrofit practice.

Step 1: Defining the focus and reviewing existing evidence

The first step is to define the focus of the case study. This should be aligned with key evaluation questions, such as:

- how retrofit delivery models are operating in practice,
- what challenges have emerged and how these have been addressed, and
- what outcomes are being achieved for residents.

You are also encouraged to design the structure of the case study at this stage. A case study template can help provide consistency in structure, analytical focus, and reporting style across case studies, while still allowing flexibility to reflect the specific characteristics of each case. Templates can act as a guide for both evidence collection and drafting, helping evaluators ensure that key areas are consistently addressed. An example of the structure your case studies could follow is provided in Section 1.7.

A structured review of existing evidence should be undertaken, drawing on sources such as:

- project documentation,
- monitoring and management information (MI) data,

- resident survey findings or feedback,
- contractor and delivery partner reports and
- internal lessons learned.

Reviewing existing evidence at an early stage helps identify what is already known, what gaps remain, and determine which stakeholders (e.g. residents, local authorities, contractors) are best placed to provide further insight on these gaps.

Step 2: Primary evidence collection

Primary data collection and follow-up evidence gathering should be used to deepen understanding, fill evidence gaps, and capture perspectives that are not reflected in project documentation alone.

Evidence gathering could involve speaking to:

- **Residents**, to understand lived experiences of retrofit, including disruption, communication, comfort and affordability
- **Internal delivery teams**, to explore how Wave 3 requirements are being implemented and managed
- **Contractors and supply chain partners**, to capture insights on delivery challenges (e.g. skills, materials, timelines and solutions), or
- **Consortium partners**, to understand how coordination, governance, and decision-making processes are operating in practice.

Primary data collection guidance can be found at the following links:

- [A1 Social Housing Landlord Capacity and Capability guidance](#)
- [A3 Resident survey guidance](#)
- [Focus Group & Depth Interview Guidance](#)

1.7 Data triangulation

Case studies should draw on multiple evidence sources wherever possible, for example, using the self-evaluation data collected in Social Housing Landlord Capacity and Capability form (A1) or the Resident Survey (A3). Combining desk research, programme documentation, monitoring data, interviews, and external evidence helps strengthen confidence in findings and reduces over-reliance on any single source. Triangulation is particularly important when validating claims made in interviews, understanding conflicting accounts, or developing a balanced interpretation of outcomes and impacts. Further guidance on evidence synthesis and triangulation techniques will be developed for grant recipients in Autumn 2026.

1.8 Drafting Case Studies

The final stage of developing a case study is to bring this evidence together into a clear and balanced narrative that is supported by robust evidence. Case studies should aim to capture both successes and challenges honestly, highlighting practical lessons and insights that may be useful to other grant recipients delivering similar retrofit projects.

The body of the case study will vary based on its analytical purpose, and any findings.

Structural suggestions for developing case studies of your SHF Wave 3 projects are outlined below. They are intended to be a guide rather than prescriptive and should be tailored according to your own individual research needs.

Sections and sub-headings could include:

- **Introduction:** including case study overview and project context (e.g. project scale, housing stock characteristics, resident profile or delivery partners).
- **Delivery Approach:** including how delivery was approached in practice and the factors that enabled progress (e.g. experience working with partners, use of existing resident relationships, phased delivery models or innovative procurement approaches).
- **Resident Engagement:** including communication approaches, support provided before, during, and after installation, uptake and barriers to engagement (e.g. resident concerns about disruption, approaches to building trust, tailored engagement for vulnerable residents, or use of resident liaison officers).
- **Supply chain and installation:** including how the supply chain was established and managed (e.g. contractor procurement, installer capacity, PAS 2035 coordination, managing installation timelines, workforce or skills shortages, or quality assurance processes).
- **Outcomes and Impacts:** including both delivery and resident outcomes (e.g. warmer homes, improved resident comfort, reduced energy bills, carbon savings, improved EPC ratings).
- **Challenges to delivery:** including how they were addressed (e.g. resident refusal, planning or technical constraints, supply chain delays, cost pressures).
- **Working in a consortium:** including how consortium arrangements worked in practice (e.g. governance structures, communication between partners, sharing expertise and resources, aligning delivery approaches).
- **Lessons learned and key takeaways:** including what worked well, what would be done differently, and what advice may be useful for others in your organisation who are delivering future retrofit projects, or grant recipients delivering similar retrofit programmes (e.g. lessons on resident engagement, contractor management, data collection and reporting).

Examples of project-specific and thematic case studies developed by Technopolis as part of their evaluation of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund Wave 1 are available at [this link](#). They can be used as a reference for possible structure, content, and approach.

1.9 Supporting materials

Published case studies from the evaluation of the Wave 1 SHDF evaluation can be found at [this link](#).

1.10 Ethical considerations

Case study development should also be undertaken in line with relevant ethical and data protection requirements. This includes:

- Obtaining informed consent where appropriate
- Being clear about how information will be used

- Ensuring confidentiality and anonymisation where required; if individuals or organisations are identifiable in the case study, their consent should be agreed
- Collecting only data that is necessary for the evaluation; and
- Storing and handling personal data securely in line with GDPR and organisational guidance.

Further guidance on ethics can be found on the WH:SHF Wave 3 Knowledge Hub, in the [A3 guidance](#) document, and in the [audio and visual data management document](#).

Further detail on Technopolis' ethical practice, interviewing protocols, and GDPR requirements is provided at [this link](#).