

Safer Renting Press Release

Government landlord licensing proposals ‘risk leaving tenants at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords’, say experts

March 2024

Safer Renting has published a new research report: *Licensing Private Rented Homes; Insights and Experiences from Five London Boroughs*

“ This study tells us Selective Licensing needs strengthening with enhanced programmes of inspection and enforcement. This report adds to the government’s own data (in ‘A Fairer PRS’), showing that even where licensing is in place, landlord non-compliance is the norm. The report recommends improving enforcement powers with measures such as annual property inspections and continuing schemes until there is evidence it is no longer required.

“Abolishing selective licensing risks undermining the entire stated purpose of Renters Reform Bill: improved security of tenure for renters isn’t really worth having if the homes they have the right to stay in aren’t Fit for Human Habitation. ”

Almost all private rented properties brought forward for licensing are non-compliant, this study has found.

The findings come from research into five London local authorities’ introduction of discretionary licensing schemes.

It suggests that introducing a landlord register alone won’t be enough to tackle poor property conditions, unless supported by an inspection regime.

The findings come at a time when the Renters Reform Bill is making its way through parliament. If passed, the bill will introduce a new ‘Property Portal’ – a national registration scheme.

Currently, local authorities can set up a local landlord licensing scheme if approved by the Secretary of State.

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Licensing Private Rented Homes: Insights and Experiences from Five London Boroughs

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Without a licensing programme and resources to inspect, local authorities have very little data on property conditions in their local rental market.

When they set up a licensing regime, all five boroughs in this research were shocked by an unanticipated high degree of non-compliance.

Environmental Health Professionals found that complaints, “in 9 times out of ten, 19 times out of twenty”, related to a property that had been licensed. One borough reported an estimate of 95 % of properties that had applied for a licence had not complied with its conditions.

Many were failing because of ‘Category 1’ hazards, which constitute the most serious risk to health. On top of this, many properties required multiple inspections before reaching the required standard.

The report is based on case study work in five London boroughs: Camden, Ealing, Enfield, Waltham Forest and Westminster.

Notes to editors:

Other findings

1. Local authorities aiming to introduce discretionary (including selective) licensing regimes may find the process prohibitively expensive and time-consuming. Decision-making around securing Secretary of State approval for licensing demanded data, which is either unavailable or unreliable, requires a technical workforce that is in short supply nationally. In its application, the approval mechanism lacked transparency.
2. It took time for a licensing scheme to ‘bed in’: in early years, the scheme helped gather intelligence on non-compliance, which then enabled strategic decision-making about how hard-line enforcement should be targeted.
3. The report recommended that, for licensing to be of value rather than a ‘tick box’ process, local authorities needed to be resourced to deliver annual inspections, and that licensing regimes should be in place unless and until no longer needed, a period of at least ten years.

Broader context

In London, the proportion of non-decent PRS dwellings in 2020 was 22.8 per cent, slightly higher than the national average of 21.1 per cent. Licensing often targets ‘houses in multiple occupation’, or shared properties. Surprisingly, little information is available on HMOs in the private rented sector. This kind of property is regarded as having a higher risk of fire; failure to meet property standards is equated to poor-quality conversion. London has the highest

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proportion of households living in households with other unrelated adults (6.2 per cent; the national figure is 2.8 per cent). This equates to around 550,000 individuals. Local authorities are often unaware of the number of HMOs in their area specifically, or indeed of the size and geographic dispersal of PRS properties more generally.

This research was undertaken by the Safer Renting tenancy rights advocacy service, which works across ten London boroughs. They find that 73 per cent of their clients whose landlord should have secured a property licence had not done so. Safer Renting routinely finds that where a property is not licenced, there is evidence of multiple contraventions including failure to secure gas safety inspections, and lack of adequate fire protection measures.

Further information

1. Media Enquires: Roz Spencer, 07539 326012, rspencer@ch1889.org
2. To find out more about Safer Renting please visit <https://ch1889.org/safer-renting>
3. Safer Renting is a service established by Cambridge House in 2015 to protect the rights of private rented sector tenants exploited and victimised by criminal Landlords. In 2020 it published the award-winning report "[Journeys in the Shadow Private Rented Sector](#)" and in 2023 it published its [2022 Illegal Evictions Count](#).

Safer Renting:

- Works in partnership with local authorities and the police to intervene in illegal evictions and prevent homelessness.
 - Provides access to justice for victimised tenants.
 - Inform the development of public policy by undertaking research that exposes the activities of criminal landlords and the devastating impact on vulnerable families.
4. Cambridge House is an independent social action charity established in 1889 to create positive change in the lives of those most impacted by poverty, social injustice, and social inequity in our society. For more information about Cambridge House please visit <https://ch1889.org/>

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