Welcome to Southend-on-Sea Borough Council’s Landlords’ Forum Newsletter brought to you by the Private Sector Housing Team

This newsletter is to share useful information and articles so that we can work together to improve Southend’s Private Rental Sector and work more closely with our partners.

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<td>2:00pm – 3:00pm</td>
<td>Registration, refreshments and an opportunity to network and visit stands provided by Council teams and partner organisations.</td>
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<td>3:00 pm</td>
<td>Commencement</td>
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<td>David Colwill - Team Leader, Private Sector Housing</td>
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<td>3:05 – 3:45 pm</td>
<td>Sprinklers in Residential Premises &amp; Compartmentalisation</td>
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<td>Assistant Division Officer Richie Farrant &amp; Neil Guyett – Essex Fire &amp; Rescue Service</td>
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<td>3:45 – 4:00 pm</td>
<td>HARP’s PRS Scheme</td>
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<td>Nicola Collis – Landlord Liaison Officer – HARP</td>
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<td>SEAL (South East Alliance of Landlords, Agents &amp; Residents): Improving the private rented sector in Southend – Progress update</td>
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<td>Martin Ransom (Spokesperson)</td>
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<td>4:25 – 4:45 pm</td>
<td>Welfare Reform – an update for Landlords</td>
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<td>Tracey Nicola – Training &amp; Development Officer, Benefits Section, Southend Council</td>
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Would you like to write or suggest a future topic for an article?

Do you have some interesting stories or information to share?

If so then please email: landlordsforum@southend.gov.uk
A third of Britain ‘out of reach’ for low-income families

A third of Britain is effectively off-limits to lower-income working families because private rents are unaffordable, a new report claims. The report comes from the Resolution Foundation, which campaigns on behalf of low to middle-income families. It says most of southern England is now beyond the reach of less affluent households.

With social housing usually unavailable and home ownership unaffordable for many first-time buyers, renting privately is often the only option for households on lower incomes. The Home Truths report identifies local authorities that are “affordable” for a couple with a child requiring a two-bedroom property on a household income of £22,000 a year. Affordable is defined as a rent that is no more than 35% of net household income.

On that basis, 125 of 376 local authorities in Britain (33%) are unaffordable for less-affluent working families.

“The private rented sector is now, in large parts of the country, the most expensive form of housing,” says Vidhya Alakeson, of the Resolution Foundation. “It is also the only option for most low to middle-income households, many of whom are faced with the unenviable choice of forgoing other essentials in order to pay for housing or living in overcrowded conditions to reduce their housing costs.”

Housing Minister Mark Prisk described the report as “alarmist” as it “suggests rents are soaring when in fact they have fallen in real terms”. “And it fails to recognise that housing benefit provides a safety net which ensures that up to a third of private properties in most areas are affordable to low income families,” he said.

Following an amendment to the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform Bill, tabled by Baroness Hayter, the Government yesterday proposed an alternative, ensuring tenants and landlords are better challenge potential negligence. The bill will require, for the first time, all lettings and management agents to sign up to a redress scheme. This means that unsolved grievances with agents can then be referred to the Ombudsman.

RICS has long been campaigning for increased regulation in the sector. Whilst the change to the law will give landlords and tenants much needed access to recourse in the event of poor practice, it only offers the consumer support after the damage has been done. This is a step in the right direction, however there is still more to be done to raise standards in the market; protecting the consumer throughout the transaction.

Peter Bolton-King, RICS residential director, said: “The lettings market has for far too long been in danger of becoming the Wild West of property industry. While, clearly, there are good agents out there, the market has been dogged by poor practice and a lack of consumer protection.

From now on, should a tenant or landlord experience problems due to poor service, they will be able to register their grievance with an independent redress scheme which, if appropriate, will investigate and award compensation.

“RICS has long called for regulation of the lettings industry, and this is a step towards ensuring tenants and landlords are comprehensively protected. What we would now like to see is lettings and managing agents required to sign up to a professional regulation scheme that would ensure a better standard of professionalism right across the sector. We still think there is a very strong business case for better targeted regulation and we are working with Government to this effect.”

Government forces lettings agents to take responsibility

Those who rent property will soon receive a right to challenge ‘rogue’ lettings agents after the Government demanded that all agents sign up to an approved redress scheme. Until now, many agents who let property have been able to operate totally unchecked, with consumers having no way out should they fall foul of malpractice or unethical behaviour.
Landlords Forum Newsletter

Private landlords are putting lives at risk by ignoring electrical faults

More than a quarter of London's private tenants are being put at risk by their landlords who are not carrying out their health and safety obligations, it was claimed yesterday. A study has found that the capital has the highest percentage of tenants who have reported electrical faults that are either ignored or acted on too late. Experts said that one in four private tenants were waiting for problems to be fixed, while nearly a third have expressed concern about the electrical safety of their rented home.

The Electrical Safety Council, the charity which conducted the study, warned landlords that they were putting lives in danger and called on them to take action or face fines of up to £20,000. Electrical accidents are the cause of more than 350,000 serious injuries each year and cause more than half of all accidental house fires. Landlords are required by law to ensure that electrical installations are maintained in a safe condition. But more than half of all landlords and tenants in London admitted they had no idea who was responsible for safety.

Phil Buckle, director general of the ESC, said: “We’d like to see tighter guidelines for landlords on electrical safety but with the number of non-professional landlords increasing every day, we also need to address this now. “We need all landlords to understand that they are not only putting people's lives at risk, but they could also face serious financial loss through fines.”

Laura Trevelyan, campaigns manager at housing charity Shelter, said: “Shelter believes that the majority of landlords are well intentioned and that many of those who break the law or operate at a low standard do so out of ignorance rather than intent. As the rental sector expands, it’s more important than ever that landlords take their responsibility for electrical safety seriously.”

Newham has become the first UK borough to license all private landlords in a bid to clampdown on poor housing.

Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility

In Southend everyone is committed to protecting children, young people and vulnerable adults. Owners of Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) share this commitment and responsibility to protect the most vulnerable in society.

In recognition of this shared responsibility and commitment, Southend-on Sea Borough Council, Local Safeguarding Children's Board and Vulnerable Adults Board launched, in 2009, a cross boundary protocol for the placement and accommodation of vulnerable children, young people and adults in HMOs. The purpose of this protocol was to support improvement in the safety and welfare of young people over the age of 16 and vulnerable adults who are placed across local authority boundaries in unregulated settings.

Periodically we want to remind owners of HMOs of the protocol and their responsibilities. The protocol says that HMOs which house children, young people or vulnerable adults need to:

- Comply with local Child Protection procedures
- Comply with local Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Guidelines
- Ensure an enhanced CRB Disclosure is obtained for all paid/unpaid staff working on premises, including volunteers
- Ensure all contractors on premises are supervised
- Have a Child Protection policy in place in accordance with local child protection procedures
- Have a whistle-blowing policy in place
- Ensure all staff working on premises have completed, as a minimum requirement, Local Safeguarding Children Board Basic Awareness Training
- Ensure all staff are familiar with guidance ‘What to do if you’re worried a child is being abused’
- Ensure all staff have attended Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Awareness Training (offered free of charge by the host authority)
- Demonstrate regard for the Mental Capacity Act 2005

Also for each vulnerable child, young person or adult placed in an HMO, owners will require from the placing authority:
- An assessment of their needs and risks
- A Care Plan
- A written agreement regarding the placement

The Local Authority is able to assist with this and if you would like further assistance please contact; Laurence Doe – Child Protection and Safeguarding Co-ordinator – Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (01702 534539) laurencedoe@southend.gov.uk www.southend.gov.uk

Southend seafront could be transformed with new homes

A new hotel could spark the demolition of a derelict eyesore blighting Southend seafront and bring 65 jobs to a deprived area. Esplanade House, a half demolished office block that towers over Eastern Esplanade, will be flattened if Premier Inn’s plans for a five-storey budget hotel on the neighbouring former gasworks site get the green light.

The development should also reignite long-dormant plans for a separate hotel, restaurant, shops, 216 flats and 50 affordable homes on the Esplanade House site. Perry Gamon, managing director of the Robert Leonard Group, which owns the site, said: “It will mean a brand new development and jobs for the Premier Inn hotel and we can get rid of the eyesore of Esplanade House, which a lot of people don’t like looking at.” The Robert Leonard Group has a contractual agreement with Premier Inn to tear down Esplanade House, which has marred the town’s seafront vista for more than five years, if the hotel is approved.

The developer already has outline approval for a separate 64-bed hotel, four blocks of flats and affordable homes on the Esplanade House site, but Mr Gamon warned the permission was set to run out in August and would need to be extended before any development – including the Premier Inn – takes place. If the deadline is extended, Mr Gamon said a housebuilder was waiting in the wings to build the affordable homes next year. He refused to name the housing association, but revealed his group was no longer planning to work with the Guinness Partnership as previously suggested. Mr Gamon said: “The property market is starting to pick up and I hope to announce a joint development with a housebuilder and see development taking place next year. It’s a massive development on the seafront.”

Private landlords should not be surrogate police or border officers

Plans to make landlords responsible for immigration checks on prospective tenants are seriously flawed. Landlords may flee the lower ends of the market that this legislation is most likely to affect.

If the proposed legislation, the Immigration Bill, announced in May’s Queen’s Speech, is introduced as planned, private landlords will be required to check the passports and visas of prospective tenants to ensure they are legally permitted to be in the country. Failing to do so could leave them in breach of the law and incur fines amounting to thousands of pounds.

But the risks don’t end there. If the planned legislation is passed into law, landlords would be required to make a judgment about whether the documents presented to them by prospective tenants are false or not.

If they reject a tenant simply because they suspect their documentation is not legitimate and it is subsequently found to be fine, they could be sued for discrimination under the Race Relations Act.

Landlords could also find themselves in some very difficult and potentially high-risk situations if they are presented with documents which are obvious forgeries. What would they be expected to do in this event? Clearly it would not be wise to apprehend the individual but on the other hand, taking the documents to the nearest police station would not solve the problem either.
It is a legal requirement for landlords to carry out financial checks on prospective tenants to ensure they are not involved in money laundering activities. These checks are administrative and can usually be carried out based on simple checks with a bank or financial institution. Checking someone's immigration status is a very different matter and requires skills in spotting individuals who may be using forged documents and false identities.

If this legislation is introduced, we could see landlords opting out of the lower end of the market where they might expect to find a higher incidence of illegal immigrants, for example in the student rental market or the social housing sector. This could in turn drive up the cost of rentals in these sectors and make it more difficult for people to find affordable homes.

**Home ownership costs ‘up 70%’ in last decade**

The cost of buying a home in England has soared by more than 70 per cent in the last decade, while the cost of renting has jumped by almost a third, according to new research from the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH).

CIH found the first year of home ownership cost on average £70,538 in 2012 - taking into account a 25 per cent deposit, stamp duty, mortgage repayments and annual maintenance - up 73 per cent from £40,892 in 2002. Over the same period, the cost of renting a home for 12 months - taking into account a six-week deposit and monthly payments - rose by 29 per cent, from £7,492 to £9,662.

CIH chief executive Grainia Long said: "Living in an affordable, decent quality home - whether that's through owning or renting - is becoming a pipe dream for an increasing number of people. Our research shows the cost of owning and renting is soaring - while average wages are flat lining - putting their entire reasonable aspirations ever further out of reach. These figures show just how dysfunctional our housing market has become. We share the concerns expressed by MPs last week that the government's new Help to Buy scheme risks increasing house prices while doing little to boost the number of homes actually being built."

What we need to see from the government is direct investment in building new houses, which would help make things more affordable for everyone."

The analysis is part of a CIH campaign called Uncovering the true cost of housing, launched earlier this year, which aims to define the problems that make up the current housing crisis.

**Landlords warned to get their finances in order to avoid repossession**

Landlords are not factoring in the costs of owning a buy-to-let property with a contingency fund and this is leading to an upward trend in repossession, according to property investment specialists Invest Connect.

Recent statistics show that one in five repossession during the first three months of 2013 were on buy-to-let properties, according to the Council of Mortgage Lenders. In the last quarter of 2012, landlord properties represented 12.8 per cent of the repossessed total.

Charles Brittain, Business Development Director at Invest Connect told the Residential Landlords’ Association: “Buy-to-Let repossessions are on the rise because of a number of major causal factors including rising rent arrears and void periods. If landlords do not have a contingency fund in place to cover these unforeseen circumstances, then they could fall into financial difficulty and potentially lose their property.

“As a general guideline, 30 to 35 per cent of one year’s gross annual rental income should be put aside to cover rent arrears, void periods, maintenance, repairs and refurbishment, white and brown goods replacement and the on-going rental costs, such as gas safety certificates and letting agent fees. This contingency may not be used and should not be seen as an additional annual cost, just part of the investment business plan from the outset for investment protection.

“Redecoration may be needed every 3 to 5 years. Kitchens, bathrooms, boilers, interior doors etc. will probably have to be replaced every 5 to 15 years. New windows, external doors, barge boards, guttering, pathways, driveways, radiators etc. will be required every 15 to 25 years.
Depending on the age of the property and the length of time you retain it, rewiring and re-roofing may be necessary at some point. Major renovation work like this can be expensive, so unless you have budgeted for it in your investment calculations, you may not be able to afford to carry out essential work when required.

“Buy-to-let is very profitable in the long term, but only if you do your sums properly and structure your investment wisely. A property investment is similar to running a business, so you need a business plan, cash-flow forecast, finance and funding. Therefore it’s sensible to budget for all the costs you’re likely to encounter during the life of your investment. The maintenance costs for a new or recently refurbished property are likely to be minimal at first. But over time, those costs will grow in significance, particularly when larger scale refurbishment is required.

**Call to clamp down on unscrupulous letting agents**

More must be done to help clamp down on rogue letting agents, industry experts and disgruntled tenants have told the BBC.

An amendment to regulate letting agents is due before the **House of Commons** this week. If approved, the changes would see agents required by law to belong to an ombudsman scheme. Figures obtained by the BBC show that very few of those acting outside of the law are being punished.

**The Property Ombudsman** (TPO) received more than 8,000 complaints about letting agents from landlords and tenants in 2012 - an increase of 9% on the previous year.

But the BBC’s **5 live Investigates** programme has learned that only 12 prosecutions were carried out last year by trading standards teams in 20 of the biggest councils in England, Scotland and Wales. A leading trade body said it was disappointed by the low numbers being prosecuted."If there is seen to be a robust procedure then that is itself a deterrent," said **Ian Potter**, managing director of the **Association of Residential Letting Agents** (ARLA).

"We do know that a lot of local authorities work very hard when they get a complaint to try to get bad practice improved but I think what prosecution does do is send a warning shot across the bows of anyone that is not operating properly in a market place."

But trading standards officers said prosecutions were a last resort. "If you had very high numbers of prosecutions, that means that trading standards have not succeeded in bringing about compliance," said **Karen Ford from the Association of Chief Trading Standards Officers** (ACTSO). "It is not the case that we get a breach and therefore we go in and prosecute, because that's the polar opposite of what we should be doing," she added.

Since 2008 estate agents have been required by law to be part of an approved redress scheme, but letting agents are not.

Labour peer **Baroness Hayter** of Kentish Town is proposing the amendments to the current Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (ERR) Bill to change that. "Legislation already requires estate agents to be part of an ombudsman scheme. What this amendment would do is extend that so that letting agents would also have to be members of an ombudsman scheme," she said. "At the moment anybody could set up as a letting agent. They don't have to promise to give minimum standards to the tenants or to the landlords."

The proposal was due before the House of Commons on 16 April."People living in private rented homes should be treated fairly and honestly, but we want to avoid excessive red tape that would push up the cost of rents and reduce choice for tenants," a spokesman from the **Department for Communities and Local Government** said.

"The first priority must be to make sure that landlords and tenants are well informed and empowered to exercise their rights. Agents are subject to consumer protection laws and dissatisfied customers can report bad practice to local trading standards officers," he added.

In Scotland, measures have recently been taken to regulate the lettings industry. The law currently prohibits prospective tenants being
charged "premiums" on top of their deposit and rent in advance, but some letting agents have been charging various fees for years. In November 2012 a clarification of the law was put through the Scottish Parliament which states that additional charges such as reference checks, credit checks and inventory fees are unlawful. But a mystery shopper exercise carried out by 5 live Investigates found that some letting agents were still charging fees. The programme contacted 25 letting agents across Scotland and found a quarter were still passing charges onto tenants.

### Southend YMCA

£300,000 to buy flats for vulnerable young people in Southend

Southend YMCA is celebrating a £300,000 Government cash injection to pay for six flats for vulnerable young people. The charity will use the cash to redevelop a disused property in Westcliff.

The funding is part of a scheme to refurbish and bring back more than 6,000 empty and derelict homes and commercial premises across the country. Thurrock Council was awarded £210,000 for similar projects.

Syrie Cox, chief executive of Southend YMCA, said the money was almost half the amount needed for the £700,000 project in Milton ward.

The grant will be boosted by £10,000 raised by a charity outdoor sleepover in March and a further £10,000 funding from other grants. Ms Cox said: “We are acutely aware of a lack of housing provision for young people. We have had our housing project at Newlands House for people aged 16 to 20 for 20 years and want to provide more.

“This will also bring buildings back into use that are no longer economically viable as shops or businesses.”

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### We’re 'let down' by the private rented sector

The London Renters campaign calls for an end to discrimination against housing benefit claimants in the private rented sector.

As letting agents grow in prominence on our high streets, we need to act fast to protect tenants from the ignorance and opportunism that plague the unregulated industry. This month London Renters, a coalition of tenants calling for urgent change in the private rented sector, launched its first cross-capital “Let Down” campaign.

Local campaign groups from Tower Hamlets, Haringey, Hackney, Islington and Lambeth staged a series of events calling for an end to extortionate letting agent fees, escalating rents and discrimination against people on housing benefit.

Together, London Renters have five core demands:

1. **An end to fees for tenants, bringing English policy in line with Scotland**

   Excessive fees are barring large numbers of people on low and middle incomes from the private rented sector (PRS). If you’ve scraped and borrowed enough money for a deposit, an additional £200-£500 in "administration fees" is likely to knock you out the game. Polling organisation YouGov found recently that one in four people had been ripped off by their agent. Earlier this year, the Local Government Association warned that hidden excessive letting agents fees were exacerbating the national housing crisis.

2. **Proper regulation of letting agents**

   Regulation should be introduced which requires letting agents to have a nationally recognised qualification, undergo proper training, be audited annually and report to a national regulatory body.
3. No discrimination against people on housing benefit

If you’re one of the growing number of people who rely on housing benefit to make up your rent, you won’t even get a foot through the door in the private sector. The majority of high street agents (and many mortgage lenders who supply private landlords) have a blanket policy to shut out potential tenants claiming housing benefit. The government has a responsibility to condemn this discrimination against benefit claimants. It must work with agents, landlords and mortgage lenders to open up private rent to those who – at a time when availability of social housing is at an all time low – have nowhere else to go.

4. Action to bring down rents and keep them under control

Our campaign highlights the role played by letting agents in the steep escalation of private rents. Housing charity Shelter found that a fifth of landlords had increased their rents because letting agents had encouraged them to do so.

While demand far outweighs supply, the private rented sector will not offer fair, affordable rents to its tenants. Until the market stabilises, we need government-led rent regulation that caps rent increases in line with inflation.

5. Longer secure tenancies

Lastly, the Let Down campaign is calling for longer, more secure tenancies. Landlords also stand to benefit from longer tenancies which could provide a more certain, sustainable return on their investment. Many of the 8.5 million people renting privately, a third of whom are families with children, desperately want a home that offers more security.

In a recent study, Shelter found that 44% of renting families thought their children’s lives would improve if their housing arrangements were more stable. Unfortunately, letting agents benefit from a high turnover of tenants and contracts that are renewed regularly. That is partly why six to 12-month contracts have become the market norm. The rental market must adapt to offer longer default tenancies of three to five years for renters who want to put down roots and build a home but can’t afford to get on the property ladder.

If the government is serious about expecting the private renters to pick up the slack from 30 years of dismantling the social housing sector, then it needs to look long and hard at the barriers that exclude people from renting and render them powerless to enter the market.

There are some obvious solutions to the problems we’ve identified. Social letting agents, such as the scheme set up by the London borough of Havering, could provide a genuine alternative to commercial high street agents who will always represent the interests of landlords over tenants.

Taking tough action on letting agents’ fees, discrimination against housing benefit tenants and spiralling rents is a good place to start.

London letting agencies 'out of control' as tenants hit with up to £700 fees

London letting agents were yesterday accused of being "out of control" as figures revealed how some charge tenants up to £700 in fees.

An investigation by housing charity Shelter approached 58 letting agencies and found that all demanded agency fees — many of which are not-refundable and charged under the guise of administration, holding, credit check, check-in or check-out fees — to set up a tenancy.

The national average for the fee, charged on top of deposit and rent, was just over £350, but almost a third charged more than £400 with seven agencies charging more than £700.

According to the report, Letting Agencies: The Price You Pay, Londoners are affected by the issue more than anywhere else in the country. Almost a third — 31 per cent — of Londoners questioned who have used a letting agency in the past three years were forced to borrow money to pay for fees, compared with a national average of 27 per cent. The charges to tenants are additional to the fees that letting agencies usually charge landlords in order to set up a tenancy on their behalf. One in four people in England says letting
fees have stopped them from getting a new home.

In the past six months, the Office of Fair Trading, Advertising Standards Authority and Which? have raised concerns about standards and fees. The Property Ombudsman reported a 12 per cent rise in complaints from landlords and tenants.

A recent report by property and construction body Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, which represents some letting agencies, compared the letting industry to the "Wild West".

Campbell Robb, chief executive of Shelter, said: “This shocking research reveals that letting agency fees have now become truly out of control. When renters have to find hundreds of pounds in fees each time they move, on top of deposits and rent in advance, it’s not surprising that fees are causing real financial hardship and in some cases preventing people from moving. Anyone who’s tried to find a rented home in the past few years knows that affordable, decent places to live are in short supply. The high demand for rented homes means that renters can’t shop around, but instead have to deal with the letting agency their landlord has chosen: they have no choice but to swallow their anger and stump up their cash.”

Shelter said landlords should be forced to cover the costs of setting up a tenancy rather than tenants and called on the Government to put an end to letting fees for renters. It urged people to take action by joining its campaign and signing its online petition.

Labour shadow housing minister Jack Dromey said: “This shocking research shows why Labour was right to call for action to tackle unscrupulous lettings agents who rip off tenants by charging them fees they didn’t know they would face, forcing many of them into debt.”

Tenants take to streets to protest against 'exploitation'

Londoners took to the streets on Saturday to protest against “rip off fees”, spiralling rents and the "exploitation" of private tenants by letting agents.

Campaign groups from Tower Hamlets, Islington, Hackney, Lambeth and Haringey staged a series of protests outside high street letting agents who they accuse of discrimination and anti-social behaviour. The day of action marked the launch of the ‘Let Down’ campaign, which demands:

• An end to fees for tenants, as in Scotland
• Proper regulation of letting agents
• No discrimination against people on housing benefit
• Action to bring rents down, and keep them under control
• Longer secure tenancies

The campaign is being led by London Renters, a coalition of private tenants groups based in different boroughs across the capital.

According to the campaign group, most high street letting agents will charge new tenants fees of between £100 and £500 for services such as reference checks, conducting an inventory or general ‘admin’ fees. London Renters alleges that the actual cost of a tenant reference check is between £5-£20. After moving in, many private tenants will also find themselves hit with fees of around £100-£300 to renew their tenancy agreement or check out of their property.

Protestors claim that letting agents Foxtons charge new tenants around £400 for admin fees per tenant on top of the deposit, and that Felicity J Lord charges new tenants £165 per property and £60 per person.

In Scotland, letting agents’ fees are illegal. Last autumn the law was tightened to crack down on agents charging tenants fees unlawfully. Letting agents are often responsible for encouraging landlords to offer only short tenancies of six to twelve months.
Agents have a vested interest in shorter tenancies as this is where they make their profit. Up to 1988, statutory controls meant tenants enjoyed much more security of tenure.

Campaigners are also calling for an end to discrimination against people on housing benefit.

In 2012, researchers in Hackney found that less than 1% of private rented properties were available to people on housing benefit – either because they were unaffordable or because letting agents and landlords refused to let to housing benefit tenants.

Danny Coakley, a private tenant from Tower Hamlets, said: “I am currently living in a temporary hostel and have been unable to find anywhere in the private rented sector because of discrimination from letting agents and landlords. Discrimination against people like me, who need to begin their tenancies supported by housing benefit, is preventing hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people from moving on with their lives.

“Anyone who has lost their home or job due to factors beyond their control like divorce or redundancy is likely to join the ranks of the ‘hidden homeless’ forced into a temporary hostel, unseen by the rest of society and trying to try climb the greasy pole of finding a job and a permanent, safe, stable home.”

Rosie Walker, a private tenant from Hackney, said: “When I moved into a flat in Stamford Hill the agent asked for a £150 ‘security fee’ on top of the usual deposit and signing fee (about another £100). When I asked what ‘security fee’ meant, they explained that it was ‘highly recommended’ because ‘this landlord could get difficult when it comes to returning the deposit.’ In the criminal world, this is called protection money.”

Heather Kennedy from London Renters added: “The housing shortage and a lack of regulation have left desperate tenants "We call on letting agents and MPs to follow the example of Scotland by scrapping rip-off fees. And we must remove the totally unacceptable discrimination which bars housing benefit tenants from accessing a home in the private rented sector. This has a devastating human cost, particularly because social housing and home ownership are simply not an option for many Londoners.”

Seaside towns trapped in cycle of poverty, warns think tank

Britain is spending almost £2 billion a year on welfare payments to people of working age who live in once flourishing seaside towns, according to a new report.

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) has warned that some resorts are “suffering severe social breakdown” having never recovered from decades of decline. Of the 20 neighbourhoods (LSOAs) across the UK with the highest levels of working-age people on out-of-work benefits, seven are in coastal towns that once attracted millions of holiday-makers.

The report, Turning the Tide, examines five of the UK’s seaside towns: Rhyl in North Wales, Margate, Clacton-on-Sea, Great Yarmouth and Blackpool. It points out that on key measures of poverty – school failure, teenage pregnancy, addiction, fatherlessness and lone parenting, and worklessness – some resorts now have problems as severe as deprived inner-city areas.

Christian Guy, CSJ Director, said: “Living standards in some of the UK’s best known coastal towns have declined beyond recognition and locals are now bearing the brunt of severe levels of social breakdown. We have found inspiring local people, services and charities working hard to turn things around, but they are struggling to do this alone. In one part of Rhyl, two thirds of working-age people are dependent on out of work benefits and, according to a report by Ofsted, coastal towns are among the most educationally deprived in the whole country. Some 41 per cent of adults in Clacton have no qualifications, almost double the national average for England and Wales.”
Some local employers interviewed by the CSJ complained of major skills gaps and said they were forced to turn to migrant labour because the inhabitants lacked either the skills or the will to take up the jobs on offer.

Of the 10 wards in England and Wales with the highest rates of teenage pregnancy, four are in seaside towns; the highest rate is in Great Yarmouth. In some neighbourhoods (LSOAs), more than 40 per cent of families with dependent children are fatherless. Blackpool local authority has the highest rate of children in care in the whole of England – 150 per 10,000 population – far exceeding the English average of 59.

The CSJ heard that some councils in high cost areas take advantage of cheap accommodation in seaside towns and use them to place vulnerable people, such as children in care.

CSJ policy director Alex Burghart, who edited the report, said: “This has caused some areas to become dumping grounds for people with complex needs and intensifies pressure on schools, social workers and other services.”

One theme running throughout the five towns was high levels of houses in multiple occupation (HMO). With less demand for hotels and guesthouses, a large share of accommodation has been bought up by private landlords and converted into HMOs – this has attracted people living on very low incomes and reliant on welfare. The CSJ was told that many of Margate’s social problems were related to poor quality and unsuitable housing.

“vulnerable people – such as children in care and ex-offenders – have been moved in as authorities take advantage of low-cost housing as large properties have been chopped into HMOs. Many parts of these towns have become dumping grounds, further depressing the desirability of such areas and so perpetuating the cycle.”

The CSJ recommends a number of measures, including improving skills in seaside towns and considering the devolution of greater powers to local levels so that they can invest in more proactive services and take greater control.

‘Silent killer’ alarms made compulsory in Scottish homes

Carbon monoxide alarms will have to be fitted when new boilers or gas appliances are installed in Scottish properties, under new building regulations.

A change to the law means the devices, which detect the presence of the so-called “silent killer”, will have to be installed when boilers, heaters, cookers and fires are fitted in houses, hotels and care homes from October this year. The owners and gas engineers will both be responsible for ensuring the new laws are adhered to. For new-build properties, building firms will have to ensure the life-saving alarms, which cost about £15, are in place or face a fine.

Figures show an average of 50 people a year die in the UK from carbon monoxide poisoning. It also leads to about 4,000 accident and emergency admissions.

At present, there are no requirements within Scottish building regulations for carbon monoxide detectors to be installed in any properties, although some local authorities state private landlords must have alarms fitted. This will be first time that such regulations have been introduced affecting private homes. Planning minister Derek Mackay said: “Not a year goes by where there isn’t an avoidable death in Scotland from carbon monoxide poisoning caused by faulty heating appliances in buildings. There are also a considerable number of incidents where people are treated in hospital for the effects of carbon monoxide poisoning. That is why, from 1 October, the Scottish building regulations will require carbon monoxide alarms to be fitted when a new or replacement boiler or other heating appliance is to be installed in a dwelling and other buildings with bedrooms.”

Louis Blake, from the Carbon Monoxide - Be Alarmed campaign, added: “An audible carbon monoxide alarm is the only way to protect yourself and your family. This change to the Scottish building regulations will see more detectors in Scottish homes, which will save lives.”

Carbon monoxide cannot be seen, smelt or tasted. Combustion appliances fuelled by solid fuel, oil or gas all have the potential to cause carbon monoxide poisoning if they are poorly installed or commissioned, inadequately maintained or incorrectly used.
Hammersmith & Fulham Landlord Fined for allowing Hazards to Remain

A rogue landlord who forced her tenants to live in squalid conditions has been fined £3,000.

Elizabeth Johnson, owner of Bronze Investments Limited, rented out a home on Waldo Road, near Old Oak. When an officer from Hammersmith & Fulham (H&F) Council visited the property on January, 2012 he found numerous serious hazards. These included inadequate heating, penetrating damp and dampness from condensation, dangerous electrics and poor fire safety.

Johnson, whose business is registered on Finchley Road, is Golders Green, refused to cooperate with the council and the home was served with a Prohibition Order. This meant that it was now illegal for the home to be lived in until the vital safety work had been done. This did not deter the landlord from hell and when the council returned in October 2012 they discovered that the tenants were still living there. Prosecution proceedings were instigated and a subsequent visit in February 2013 even found new tenants living there. The council therefore prosecuted Johnson for breaching the Prohibition Order.

Johnson failed to attend Hammersmith Magistrates on Tuesday May 7. In her absence, she was fined £3,000 and ordered to pay the Council's costs of £1,298 and a victim's surcharge of £15.

Cllr Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler, cabinet member for transport and technical services, said: “This property was a potential death-trap with its tenants living in some quite dreadful conditions. This case should be a warning to all landlords to make sure that their properties are up to a decent standard. This council will clamp down hard on any landlord that is willing to endanger the lives of its tenants and ensure that they face the consequences.”

Landlord fined for risking tenant's health

A landlord who risked a tenant's health by failing to carry out repairs on his damp and mouldy flat has been ordered to pay nearly £3,000.

Mark Tomlinson, of Trojans Estate Agents, in Bush Hill Park, Enfield, was served with an improvement notice by Barnet Council in April last year after the tenant reported severe problems with damp and condensation in his ground-floor flat in Oakleigh Road, Totteridge.

The extensive problems included rising and penetrating damp throughout the flat, along with mould in the bathroom.

Mr Tomlinson pleaded guilty at Brent Magistrates’ Court earlier this month to failing to comply with the council’s order and was ordered to pay £2,745.

Cabinet member for housing Tom Davey said: “This is a positive result for the council and demonstrates our commitment to making sure landlords in Barnet keep their property in a fit and safe condition for their tenants.”

Tottenham rogue landlord must pay council more than £30,000 in housing benefit

A rogue landlord who illegally rented out rooms in unlicensed multiple-occupied houses in Tottenham has been ordered to pay back more than £30,000 housing benefit received for the flats.

Landlord Mehmet Parlak was prosecuted by Haringey Council either side of Christmas for not licensing these HMO properties as required by law, and failing to maintain management standards. Mr Parlak had ignored warnings to licence his properties.
Last week the **Residential Property Tribunal** awarded the council a repayment of £32,278 in housing benefit payments for properties on Markfield Road and High Road N17. It is the first time the council has won rent repayments following a landlord’s failure to licence a mandatory HMO.

Cllr Nilgun Canver, cabinet member for the environment, said: “This is good news. I hope all landlords who do not licence their HMOs and therefore avoid the maintenance and safety inspections necessary to ensure their tenants are safe and suitably housed, will take heed.” The tribunal suggested Mr Parlak pay back the amounts owed in instalments and suggested that he reached a suitable timescale with the council.

### Record fine for slum landlord as council forces him to demolish 'bed with shed'

A slum landlord who was been forced to raze a ‘bed with shed’ to the ground has been hit with a record fine.

Aminur Raja Chowdhury, of Bennett Road, Plaistow, was found guilty at **Thames Magistrates’ Court** last year of planning breaches at two different properties. The crooked landlord had been renting out illegal flat conversions at a property in Holborn Road - where children had been found to be living in cramped conditions - and had an illegal building - consisting of an office and 'shed with bed' - in his back garden on Bennett Road.

Earlier this month, Chowdury was forced to demolish the back garden building and remove the rubble after the council threatened to send in its own contractors at the landlord’s expense. Failure to pay could have resulted in prison. The 43-year-old was hit with an order for confiscation of £15,500, fined £2,200, and ordered to pay Newham Council’s costs of £10,000.

Newham Mayor Sir Robin Wales said: “We want to ensure that private sector rented properties are well managed and meet a good standard. We also want to deal with the crime and anti-social behaviour that is sometimes associated with bad private sector housing. There are good landlords in Newham and we want to work with them. Unfortunately there are also some unscrupulous landlords who let properties that are unsafe and unhygienic.”

### Brent

#### Landlord fined for ignoring legal notices from Brent Council

A landlord who failed to comply with the council following claims his rented property was in a state of despair has been fined in court.

Vispasp Sarkari ignored legal notices from **Brent Council** in connection with the house in London Road, Wembley.

**Willesden Magistrates’ Court** heard the 51-year-old, who lives in Harrow, continuously snubbed a number of Section 16 notices sent to him following a council inspection of the property. The notices required Sarkari to give the council details of his interest in the property.

Sarkari, who denied that he had not complied with a notice served by the council, argued in court that he completed the form and the document was given to another person to post because he was ill and unable to post it. However he was found guilty of failing to act on a legal notice and was fined £1,000 and ordered to pay legal costs of £1,000.

Cllr Margaret McLennan, Brent Council’s lead member for housing, said: “This successful prosecution and fine demonstrates that Brent Council’s officers will not hesitate to issue enforcement notices and we expect landlords to co-operate. Landlords who fail to respond are risking prosecution and the payment of a hefty fine.”

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ones - and these are the ones we are targeting.

"We will never accept private sector tenants being directly exploited by landlords who force them to live in dangerous and unacceptable conditions. Good landlords have nothing to fear. For the bad ones, we have a clear message: clean up your act or pay the price."

**Slum landlord hit with huge bill for uninhabitable flats**

A slum landlord has been hit with a £12,000 bill after renting out six flats without a licence - one of which was deemed unfit for human habitation.

**Mark Graft**, of Warwick Avenue, north London, had initially pleaded not guilty to six charges of failing to license private rented properties, all of which were on Colchester Avenue in Manor Park. However, the 42-year-old changed his plea to guilty on the day of the trial. Graft failed to attend the hearings. A warrant for his arrest was issued and he was remanded in custody.

**Newham Council** officers discovered that five of the properties were in a very poor and dangerous condition, with one being prohibited for human habitation. Graft took 11 months to comply with an improvement notice for this. Officers discovered damp, mould, fire and electrical hazards, including exposed wires, overcrowding and severely rotten windows. All of the properties are now licensed under an alternative licence holder.

Newham is the first borough in the country to apply licensing to all of its privately rented properties.

**Newham’s Mayor, Sir Robin Wales**, said: "We want to ensure that private sector rented properties are well managed and meet a good standard. We also want to deal with the crime and anti-social behaviour that is sometimes associated with bad private sector rented housing.

"There are good landlords in Newham and we want to work with them. Unfortunately there are also some unscrupulous ones - which these proposals would target."

**Kay Boycott**, director of communications, policy and campaigns at housing charity Shelter, said: "With a chronic shortage of social housing and more and more people being priced out of the housing market, renting is fast becoming the only option for thousands more Londoners. Our advice service for tenants in Newham sees people every day who are suffering at the hands of rogue landlords who are ignoring their responsibilities and wreaking havoc on tenants lives.

"We urge other local councils to follow Newham’s lead in sending a clear signal that enforcing the law against rogue landlords is a priority."

Graft was fined £9,000 fine and ordered to repay £3,000 in costs.

**Redbridge HMO landlord fined £40k for endangering tenants’ lives**

A landlord and his company have been ordered to pay out nearly £40,000 for letting out five houses in multiple occupation where the lives of the tenants were endangered.

**Redbridge Council** successfully secured a prosecution of landlord Amarjit Sanger, 37, after finding premises where tenants were living in High Road, Ilford, with gas leaks and poor drainage, and in cellars. Mr Sanger, of Levett Gardens, Ilford, and his company ARJ Investments, of which he is a director, pleaded guilty to a total of 75 Housing Act offences. **Snaresbrook Crown Court** ordered them to pay fines and confiscations amounting to £39,300 last week.

Redbridge Council discovered the five unlicensed properties, which had been poorly converted to HMOs without planning or building consent, after inspections which started in September 2011. The council served
an emergency prohibition order on one of the properties but found people living in the unsafe premises six months later. The tenants in the properties were living in overcrowded conditions, in cellars without natural light or ventilation, with a lack of handrails or banisters and without fire-rated doors.

Michelle Dunn, cabinet member for housing at Redbridge Council, said: “In terms of the number of offences, to date this is the largest prosecution in the history of the borough. Redbridge is working hard to help drive up standards in the private rented sector and while the vast majority of landlords manage their properties well, there are some who flout the law and place their tenants’ lives at risk.”

Would you like to write or suggest a future topic for an article?

Do you a have some interesting stories or information to share?

If so then please email:

landlordsforum@southend.gov.uk