

PRIVATE-RENTED SECTOR: THE FORGOTTEN PIECE OF THE HOUSING JIGSAW

Housing organisations, including groups representing tenants and landlords, united today to call for local and national politicians to show serious engagement with the private rented sector.

The organisations, including housing charity Shelter, the National Landlords Association, the Association of Residential Letting Agents and the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health say the sector is clearly not a priority for any political party.

They argue that the private rented sector plays a crucial and increasingly significant role in meeting housing need. The sector has grown by almost one million households since 2000 and now provides homes for three million households in England.

In light of this growth in private renting, the Government commissioned Dr Julie Rugg in January 2008 to undertake a review of the sector. The Government's consultation was designed to take forward the recommendations made by Dr Rugg but there are still no firm proposals on the table.

The groups believe that private renting cannot continue to be the forgotten sector in housing and that all political parties must provide election manifesto commitments setting out clear intentions for engagement and reform.

Shelter director of policy and campaigns, Kay Boycott, said: "The Rugg review led to a consultation on proposals for much needed change in the PRS and wide-ranging, productive discussion among the various stakeholder groups. But ministers have failed to produce a clear legislative agenda and are in danger of letting months of hard work go to waste. We are calling on all political parties to demonstrate their commitment to the PRS by identifying clear strategies on reform of the sector."

NLA Chairman, David Salusbury, went on to say: "Across the entire PRS there has been a desire to demonstrate the significant contribution landlords make in providing rental accommodation. The time has now come for politicians to put their cards on the table and start the serious engagement. Where legislation is not working effectively we need to see reform and where local authorities are not using their existing powers we need to see a reprioritisation of resources. However, this current stasis cannot continue."

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health president, Stephen Battersby, said: "It is vital that local and national politicians give a higher priority to engaging with the PRS. One important change would be more investment by local authorities, who have the powers to regulate, but the resources and support for officers to develop effective approaches are lacking."

Chartered Institute of Housing Chief Executive, Sarah Webb, said: "This country needs a better balance between homeownership and other forms of tenure such as renting. The infatuation with home ownership must be tempered, and for this to happen we need strong messages and strong policy from government around all forms of renting. The Rugg review was a great step towards developing a clear and active position on the private rented sector, and we now need government to take the next steps to ensure policy change and implementation."

Crisis chief executive, Leslie Morphy, said: "The PRS has always been a vital part of Britain's housing provision - particularly for those who are not considered in "priority need" for social housing - but for too long it has been the "forgotten sector". The Rugg review set out clear proposals for reforms to the national policy framework to grow and professionalise the sector, improve the experience of tenants, drive out bad landlords and to improve joint-working at local level – we now need

politicians of all parties to set out a clear agenda for the PRS and to take forward these reforms as quickly as possible”

Association of Residential Letting Agents Operations Manager, Ian Potter, said: “We thoroughly support this call to politicians of all parties to recognise the role being played by the Private Rented Sector. The PRS has grown to 14% of the housing stock in a very haphazard way with no control or incentive from the Government, and yet is being more and more relied on to meet the demand from those unable to secure Social Rented Sector tenancies and those who would have had aspirations towards Home Ownership. As the economy continues to remain a real concern for many with lack of job security combined with lack of mortgage funding and increased deposit requirements the PRS has an important role to play but could also pose a threat to many tenants and the quality of housing stock in the future.

The Housing Ombudsman, Dr Mike Biles, said: “Unlike the ‘social’ housing sector there is no coherent system of regulation in the private rented sector. Accordingly, many tenants are unaware of their rights. Many landlords and managing agents provide homes and services that are excellent and are keen drive out rogue landlords, improve the reputation of the sector, and provide their customers with decent homes and services. Rarely has there been a more propitious moment in the history of rented housing to systematise all of these features for the benefit of ‘beacon’ landlords and agents, and the citizens for whom they provide homes.”

Citizens Advice Chief Executive, David Harker, said: "More and more people on low incomes are having to depend on the private rented sector for their long term housing. Urgent action is therefore needed to give private tenants real and enforceable rights to decent homes, by taking effective action to tackle bad landlords and introducing statutory regulation of all letting agents."

Director of Real Estate Policy at the British Property Federation, Ian Fletcher, said:“We already have 1.8 million households on council waiting lists and that figure will rise further if the next Government does not harness the private rented sector’s ability to deliver homes – 1 million over the past decade. Mortgages look set to remain difficult to obtain and investment in social house building is likely to fall victim to a lack of public finance. All political parties should therefore be focused on how they can support the good individuals and institutions who want to invest in quality rented housing, because that is where the lion’s share of our future homes will come from.”

Brent Private Tenants' Rights Group chief executive, Jacky Peacock, said: "It's surprising that politicians haven't woken up to the fact that there are some three million private tenants' votes out there, in a tenure that does not have a natural allegiance to any particular Party. Private tenants would easily be swayed to vote for a Party that really demonstrated it took their concerns seriously. Surely a decent, safe and professionally managed home shouldn't be too much to ask for in the 21st century."

NUS Vice President for Welfare, Ben Whittaker, said: "It is time for all political parties to address the problems associated with the private rental sector, where many students chose to live during their studies and post graduation. They must set out clear steps to ensure that those who live in this vital segment of the housing market are not getting a raw deal."

ENDS

Notes to editors:

Annex 1

The department for Communities and Local Government (CLG) today published the factual results of its consultation *The private rented sector: professionalism and quality*

The consultation follows a review of the private rented sector carried out by Julie Rugg from the University of York. The review was commissioned by CLG in 2008 to take an overview of the PRS.