

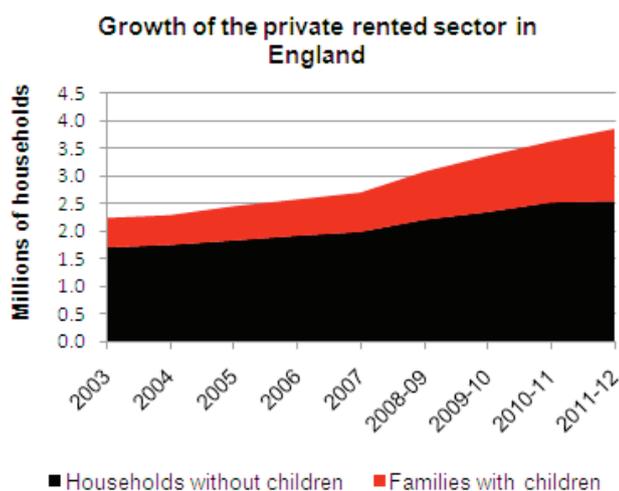
# Evict Rogue Landlords campaign briefing: Home or health hazard?

Private renting is fast becoming the new normal. More than 9 million people now live in private rented housing in England, and it is the only housing tenure that is growing.

With home ownership increasingly out of reach and not enough social homes available to meet need, many families are now renting privately for the long term. And as demand for rented homes increases, rogue landlords flourish, taking advantage of people with limited choices. This means too many private rented homes are not fit for families. Homes in the private rented sector are more likely to have a serious problem with damp, be in a dangerous state of disrepair or fail to provide adequate warmth than other forms of housing. Rogue landlords refuse to make repairs and continue to let out dangerous, poor quality accommodation which endangers renters' health. This is not acceptable.

## Who rents in 2013?

Renting is changing. There are now 1.3 million families with dependent children renting privately, many on low or moderate incomes. Families with children have



Source: English Housing Survey, DCLG

<sup>1</sup>In November 2012 Shelter commissioned YouGov to survey 4327 adults in England living in the private rented sector. Fieldwork was undertaken between 16th November and 10th December 2012. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of the English private rented sector (aged 18+). All figures are taken from this survey unless otherwise stated.

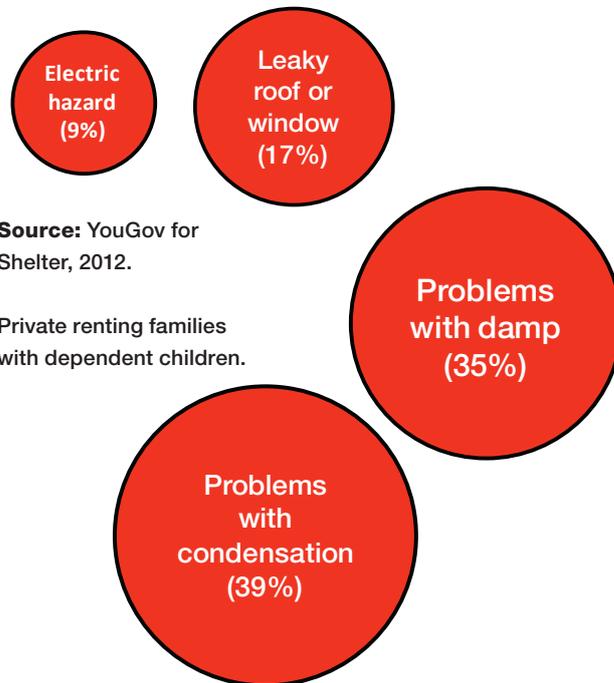
accounted for forty percent of the recent growth in the private rented sector. The private rented sector clearly needs homes that are fit for families with children.

## Unacceptable conditions

More than one in three private rented homes fails the government's own Decent Homes Standard. Private rented homes are in worse physical condition than both owner-occupied housing and social rented housing, this is seriously damaging many renters' health. Shelter has found that:

- One million renters say their health has been affected by their landlord failing to make repairs or dealing with poor conditions. (Source: YouGov for Shelter, 2012)<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly 300,000 parents who rent also reported impacts on their children's health. (Source: YouGov for Shelter, 2012)<sup>2</sup>

## Healthy family homes?



Source: YouGov for Shelter, 2012.

Private renting families with dependent children.

<sup>2</sup>Based on a response by adults with dependent children living in the private rented sector who agreed with the statement: My children's health has been affected due to my landlord not dealing with repairs and poor conditions in my property.

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- Almost one in six councils in England say that private landlords' neglect of property has required the intervention of health services. (Source: Shelter FOI 2012)

## Mandy's Story

For the last few years Mandy and her 14 year old son Alex they rented a house which had extensive mould and damp problems. After repeatedly complaining to her landlord about it, it took over a year before work was carried out, during which time both Mandy and her son suffered health problems.

Mandy explains, 'Alex had so many chest infections, headaches and nausea. He had to have a month of school at one point. I have cystic fibrosis and living with damp problems meant I kept coming down with a lung infection that I'd never had before or since we moved out. Our landlord didn't seem to get that for us, the tenants, that property is our home, and a place we should be able to feel safe in, not in fear for our health.'

## Who is responsible?

Private landlords are legally responsible for the basic physical safety of the homes they let out. Landlords must ensure that their properties contain no serious hazards (under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System) that would endanger their tenants' health. Landlords also have a responsibility to provide an annual gas safety check and certificate.

Most landlords do provide decent accommodation, but are let down by a dangerous minority of rogue landlords who don't meet basic safety standards. Some fail to make necessary repairs while others do not provide essential checks on gas safety. Almost one in ten renting families reports that their home contains dangerous electrics. Local authorities must make do all they can to enforce the law and stamp out rogue landlords so that private renters in their area are protected.

## What can be done?

Local authorities must take tough action against rogue landlords who are endangering the health

of renters. These rogue landlords show no willingness to improve their approach and continue to let out dangerous, poor quality accommodation. Where local authorities are seeing the same landlords time after time, there is a clear case for stronger enforcement.

By serving notices under the Housing Act 2004 powers, and making prosecutions where these are not complied with, local authorities can send a strong message to all landlords that poor conditions and practices won't be tolerated.

In a time of tight resources, councillors and officers will rightly ask whether any activity is good value for money. Shelter knows that tough, well publicised enforcement sends out a strong message and can save money in the long run. By ensuring that successful prosecutions of rogue landlords are publicised locally, all landlords will be encouraged to ensure that their properties meet legal requirements reducing the need for enforcement in future.

## What councils should do:

As local private rental markets differ across the country, it is vital that councils consider their own approach carefully. Our research indicates though that there are several steps that all councils can take to tackle rogue landlords:

- prosecute rogue landlords when they do not comply with the law
- publicise their tough stance on rogue landlords in the local press
- give renters the support they need to bring complaints to the council
- proactively inspect properties to make sure that they are appropriate homes for renters
- produce a local strategy for improving housing conditions in the private rented sector, taking into account new public health responsibilities.

## Contact:

To sign up to Shelter's **Evict Rogue Landlords** campaign or for more information contact:

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Shelter's **Evict Rogue Landlords** campaign is endorsed by:

