

Who will get the tenant's vote?

With a General Election due to take place on 8 June, we can expect a lot of talk about Brexit. But given that Article 50 has been triggered, and it is uncertain what any political party might achieve in the exit negotiations with the EU, it is likely that domestic issues will come more to the fore as the election gets closer. After all, most people care about how government decisions impact on them and their family, which means that the key battlegrounds will once again be the economy, health, education and housing, albeit against a Brexit backdrop.

Housing: a contentious issue

Over the past decade, housing has become a contentious election issue as Millennials come to the painful realisation that many of them may never be able to access home ownership as house prices rise substantially year on year. The promise of cheaper house prices may have influenced many when they decided how to vote in June 2016. Will it also influence what box they tick in June 2017?

Labour appear to think that housing is an issue that they can win on. They have already released some key details for their housing policy, building on some of the changes that Sadiq Khan has recently introduced as Mayor of London and seeking to reintroduce a minimum standard for rented properties so that they are 'fit for human habitation'. It is clear that Labour thinks that the Conservative government's Housing and Planning Act 2016, which introduced tougher sanctions against 'rogue landlords', should be made tougher still.

A lack of effective legislation

At present there is no legislation to prevent landlords from letting out properties that are not fit for human habitation (other than for short tenancies where the rent is less than £80 per annum (in London) or £52 per annum (elsewhere)).

There is a raft of European legislation to protect consumers in contracts for purchasing everyday items that protections have not been put in place, but the UK tenant has no such protection. Attempts in the last couple of years to provide it have been talked out of Parliament.

Recently, a west London landlord was fined £57,000 and £3,825 costs at Westminster Magistrates Court when the bedsit that he had let to a tenant in the exclusive Holland Park area was found to be a 'death trap', with unsafe wiring and other issues. For the privilege of living in such a property, the tenant was paying rent of £3,530 a month.

A new database held by City Hall will attempt to 'name and shame' such landlords to try and warn tenants about those landlords who have previously been prosecuted for similar offences. The system has limitations however, and at present only six London local authorities are involved in the system.

A recent survey found that six in ten private renters suffer disrepair issues in their rented home, with issues like leaks, poor heating and pest infestation. This is approximately 18 months after the Deregulation Act which significantly increased regulation on private tenancies.

It's not just a private sector issue

Over the last decade we have dealt with dozens of cases involving council and housing association landlords. Is our experience exceptional? Or is serious disrepair in council and housing association properties relatively widespread.

A recent article in the Guardian alleged there were five large housing associations which had properties with serious and longstanding issues of disrepair in their properties. They reported that the issues reported included lifts regularly breaking down, insecure doors giving easy access to the building, heating and hot water problems and leaks. There are even reports of serious and longstanding disrepair in relatively new build estates.

So if new build properties and those owned by large professional housing associations can suffer from significant disrepair, is it just private landlords that should be 'named and shamed'?

What should tenants expect?

It is inevitable with general wear and tear and normal usage that disrepair will arise, but tenants have a right to expect that repairs will be carried out within a reasonable time and with reasonable care and skill, so they are not left to live in poor living conditions which can impact upon their health and causes them significant stress.

Most landlords, public and private, endeavour to fix problems when they arise and ensure that tenants have a good, healthy living environment. However, until politicians put proper measures in place to ensure that there are proper housing standards, and that those standards can be enforced, the good landlords will be penalised for the failings of the bad and vulnerable tenants will be forced into poor quality homes which will exacerbate their health issues.

With a growing number of voters living in rented accommodation, and with so much at stake, which political party will get the tenant's vote?

Help for tenants

Tenants experiencing issues with disrepair in their home should report it to their landlord. If the matter is not resolved in a reasonable time, then they should seek legal advice. A specialist [housing and property litigation lawyer](#) may be able to assist to get a court order to get the repairs done and secure compensation.

Legal aid or other forms of funding may be available to assist tenants to resolve the problem.

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