Examining Energy Efficiency & Electrical Safety in the Private Rented Sector

Dr Tom Simcock • June 2018
State of the PRS: Quarterly Report
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The home for landlords

The RLA represents the interests of landlords in the private rented sector across England and Wales. We’re home to over 50,000 landlords nationwide, with a combined portfolio of over a quarter of a million properties. A growing community of landlords who trust and rely on us to deliver day-to-day support, expert advice, government campaigning, plus a range of high-quality services relevant to their needs.

At the RLA, we understand the challenges faced by a landlord - after all, we’ve been fighting their corner for over 20 years. Providing the expertise, support and tools they need, so they can do the right thing – for themselves, their tenants and the industry as a whole.

We campaign to improve the private rented sector for both landlords and tenants, engaging with policymakers at all levels of Government. Our vision is to make renting better for everyone involved in the private rented sector. We will go the extra mile to deliver a better informed, more educated and more supported membership community.

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PEARL, the RLA’s research lab, was set up to provide high-quality research and analysis on the economic, social, and political issues facing the private rented sector.

The RLA believes in the importance of policymakers considering the evidence and the potential consequences in their decision-making. Through PEARL, we provide the expertise, evidence, and research, to enable evidence led policy making in the private rented sector.

Our ultimate aim is to influence decision makers in order to translate our research findings into an improved renting experience. Enabling landlords to do the right thing - for their businesses, their tenants, and the industry as a whole.

For more information about the RLA’s Private renting Evidence, Analysis & Research Lab (PEARL), please visit research.rla.org.uk
You can also call us on 0161 495 9317, email research@rla.org.uk or tweet us @RLA_PEARL
About the Author

This report is written and researched by Dr Tom Simcock of the Residential Landlords Association.

Dr Tom Simcock MBPsS is the Senior Researcher for the RLA. Tom leads the RLA’s research arm; the Private renting Evidence, Analysis and Research Lab (PEARL). His expertise lies in researching change in society, public policy, and quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Tom’s research on housing has received national media coverage, featuring on the front page of The Times, has influenced government policymaking, and has been cited in debates in the House of Commons, House of Lords and by the London Mayor.

Disclaimer

This research report has been written to inform and stimulate policy debate. While effort has been made to ensure that the data and other information are accurate, some errors may remain. The purpose of the report is to provide information, analysis and background regarding the issues affecting landlords and the private rented sector. It is neither intended for use in advertising and promotions nor for market forecasting, and no liability is accepted in either regard.

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Executive Summary

The energy efficiency standards of the private rented sector have come under greater scrutiny over the past three years, with new regulations coming into force in April 2018 meaning no property can be let for a new tenancy if it is below an E EPC rating. Along with these, there have been wider taxation and regulative changes, with housing now rising to the top of the political agenda. This report builds upon our previous quarterly reports on the private rented sector and provides the opportunity for a deeper understanding of the issues facing private landlords, tenants and the wider sector. The principle aim of the research was to examine the reactions of private landlords to the introduction of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) and wider energy efficiency conditions across their portfolios. While the secondary aims of the study were to continue to monitor and investigate key trends in the private rented sector (PRS). The present study reports the findings from a longitudinal research project and survey data collected from 2,696 responses.

Key findings

- While the majority of landlords have been unaffected by the new regulations concerning the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES). Of those landlords who do own an F or G rated property, over 1-in-3 landlords reported that they could not afford to bring it up to at least an E rating. On average, landlords reported that it would cost £5,789.76 to do so. Furthermore, 20% of landlords reported they would have to sell their F or G rated properties, and 51% of landlords reported they would have to increase their rents to mitigate the changes. On the basis of these findings, how tax relief is currently imposed on residential properties for improvements needs to be rethought. Tax relief for certain improvements should be applied against rental income, rather than at the sale of the property.

- The present study provides deeper understanding of the costs associated with undertaking repairs in private rented properties. 92% of landlords reported they had carried out a repair in the past 12 months, with an average cost of £1,391.77. This is down £311 on the previous year. One potential reason for this is that landlords are seeking to reduce costs due to the government’s tax changes. Our previous research identified the tax changes would have a negative impact on landlords, with 62% having their profitability reduced by at least 20% and 67% were seeking to reduce investment in their portfolio (Simcock, 2018). Therefore, it is possible that landlords are being forced to spend less on repairs than before or undertaking repairs themselves rather than seeking out a contractor. This could then have a negative impact on the local economy. We will be commissioning further research to investigate and calculate this impact.

- The rapidly changing environment that landlords are operating within is taking its toll on the sector. The proportion of landlords that have bought property in the past 12 months has declined by 11 percentage points since Q3 2016. At the same time, the proportion of landlords that are planning to sell properties in the next 12 months has increased by four percentage points since Q3 2016 and now stands at 23%. We estimate that this could be 133,000 net loss of properties to rent over
the next 12 months. This is especially concerning since the number of homes to rent in 2017 has already decreased by 46,000 properties (MHCLG, 2018a). Future contraction of properties in the sector will increase competition and lead to higher rents for tenants, making it more difficult for families to find an affordable home to rent.

- A final concern is that a large proportion of the F and G rated properties were reported to be built before 1919. This is not surprising since there is a large proportion of properties in the sector that were built before 1919 (MHCLG, 2018b). While this is not an argument that because a home is old that it does not provide a safe, secure and affordable home, however, the question is, do the homes of the past offer what is needed for the homes of the future?

**Key Recommendations**

The findings of this research provide a greater understanding of the issues facing the private rented sector and a deeper insight into the attitudes and behaviours of private landlords. From these findings, we have developed some key recommendations that we believe will improve the current private rented sector and work to secure a modern private rented sector of the future that works for all.

1. Change current taxation policy on relief for improvements. Current policy sees relief generally provided at the sale of the property for individual private landlords; this should be switched to relief against rental income to encourage and support more landlords to make improvements to their properties.

2. Identify and target greater grant funding in the private rented sector for energy efficiency works. This is especially pertinent due to the higher levels of fuel poverty in the private rented sector, and also a higher proportion of older dwellings that are linked to increased levels of fuel poverty (BEIS, 2017a). Taking steps through increased grant funding and a change to taxation policy to support landlords to improve energy efficiency to at least a D rating across the private rented sector will help to bring up to 941,000 households in England out of fuel poverty.

3. Introduce positive taxation policies to support the private rented sector. Recent research has identified that removal of mortgage interest relief acted as a psychological barrier to investment in the Irish private rented sector (Dunning, O’Brien, & Moore, 2017). From our analysis of key trend data, we recommend a pause to the current roll-out of changes to mortgage interest relief, to enable greater understanding of the impact of these changes on the sector.

4. Review the current stock of homes and plans to increase housing across the country, in order to develop a new tenure-neutral house building strategy that ensures we have enough homes to meet the challenges of the future.
1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Method

The research presented in this report is part of a longitudinal research project being conducted by the Residential Landlords Association’s (RLA) Private renting Evidence, Analysis & Research Lab (PEARL) to understand the state of the private rented sector in the United Kingdom. As part of this project, RLA PEARL conducts four quarterly surveys of landlords each year, where each survey focuses on changes in different policy areas. These are Finance and Investment, Property Conditions and Energy Efficiency, Welfare Reform and Homelessness, and Regulation and Enforcement. This report presents the research relating to the Property Conditions and Energy Efficiency survey of 2017. The primary aim of this quarterly survey was to examine the response of private residential landlords to the introduction of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) and wider energy efficiency conditions of their portfolios. A further aim of the research was to monitor and analyse key trends across the private rented sector.

The findings of this report are based on a survey that received 2,696 responses from landlords across the UK in Winter 2017. To recruit participants for this survey an opportunity sampling approach was utilised to ensure a large representative sample of landlords was drawn upon. This approach included contacting the RLA’s database of landlords (including over 30,000 members and associate members, and over 35,000 RLA non-member service users) with an email requesting participation in the research. The landlords were sent a further two direct emails over the course of 7 weeks. The research was also advertised to the wider landlord community across multiple third-party websites, advertised on the RLA website, the RLA Campaigns and News Centre, and was advertised on social media by the RLA and partner organisations.

These sampling methods were used to ensure the opportunity to take part in the research was available to as many landlords as possible. However, there are some limitations over using an opportunity sampling approach that needs to be highlighted, as with all sampling approaches there is the possibility of introducing bias. As the survey and associated advertising were online, this could have biased the sample and excluded those who do not use a computer regularly or have limited access to the internet. While we are currently making progress in identifying trends in demographics of landlords across the sector, there is still very little known about the general demographics of landlords across the sector, and because of this, it is not possible to demonstrate whether this sample is truly representative of all landlords. This should be taken into account when interpreting the results. Yet, the size of the sample in this instance and the multiple streams of attracting participants provides us with confidence that a wide spectrum of the sector is represented in the sample. A further caveat that should be noted, is the report refers to ‘landlords’, this is done regarding expediency and should be viewed and interpreted as ‘landlords sampled’.

This research helps the RLA to develop important insights into the issues affecting the sector, and the survey covered a range of topics. This included demographics of tenants, landlords and their properties. This survey included a number of questions relating to the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards, questions focusing on F and G rated properties, and questions on property conditions and repairs. Finally, the survey included key trend
questions carried over from previous surveys enabling us to track and monitor important data longitudinally.

The findings of this research help to provide foundations for the RLA’s campaigning to make renting better for all. We also anticipate that this research will provide the opportunity for evidence-based decisions by policy-makers and a more in-depth understanding of landlords, tenants and the private rented sector in general by journalists, academics, and the wider public.

1.2 Structure of the Report

This section of the report has provided the background to this research and the methodology used to collect the data. In the next section, the report explores the key trend data that has been tracked over the past year. Following this, we explore energy efficiency issues in the private rented sector and in particular the impact of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards on landlords with F and G rated properties. Finally, the next sections of the report then present the findings relating to the demographics of the landlords who participated in the research, the types of tenants whom the landlord lets to, and the types of properties that form the landlords’ portfolio.
2. Energy Efficiency and Private Renting
2. Energy Efficiency and Private Renting

In April 2018, the new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) came into force for new tenancies or renewals. This means that landlords with a property with an EPC below an E rating cannot sign a new tenancy agreement or renew the tenancy. In addition, from 2020 this will apply to all tenancies meaning that the property cannot be let out if it is below an E rating. In this section of this research report, we analyse landlord’s responses to the new regulations, current energy performance ratings, landlord reactions to MEES and the support for different policy suggestions.

Key findings:

- 79% of landlords reported that the majority of their properties were C or D rated
- 2.4% of properties across landlord’s portfolios were F or G rated
- 8% of landlords reported having an F or G rated property
- 57% of F and G rated properties were built before 1919
- 37% of landlords (with an F or G property) reported that they could not afford to bring the property up to at least an E rating
- On average, landlords reported that it would cost £5,879.76 to bring their property up to an E rating
- 51% of landlords reported they’d have to increase rents to fund improvement works to bring the property up to an E rating
2.1 Energy Efficiency Conditions across the Sector

This section of the report explores the energy efficiency conditions and the responses of landlords to the introduction of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES). In figure 2.1 the findings of two questions are displayed. The first question asked landlords what the average EPC rating was across their whole portfolio, while the second question asked landlords to provide the number of properties they owned in comparison to each EPC banding. The findings of this quarterly survey identify that the most common EPC ratings across landlord portfolios were C and D ratings (79% of landlords). From the analysis of EPC’s across landlord’s portfolios, only a small proportion of properties were rated as an F or G (2.4% of properties).

![Energy Performance Certificate Ratings across landlord portfolios](image)

*Figure 2.1. Energy Performance Certificate Ratings across landlord portfolios*
In figure 2.2 above, we compare the proportion of properties with different EPC ratings from this survey in comparison to the previous quarterly survey. This enables us to analyse whether there have been any significant changes in the composition of the housing stock owned by landlords. Surprisingly, there has been little change in the proportion of homes with an F or G rating, with this remaining at 2.4% of properties. Across the other ratings, there have been some slight changes with a one percentage point change for a number of the individual ratings, for example, 34% to 33% for the C rated properties. It must be noted that this, however, could be due to slight sampling variances rather than changes to the composition in housing stock, with further data and comparison to other sources, it is likely that the accuracy of this finding can be improved.
The majority of landlords reported that they had an EPC for all of their properties (90%), and of those with an EPC, 93% of landlords reported that the EPC results were consistent with similar properties that they own. This suggests that there is a good degree of consistency in how EPCs are calculated and how housing stock has been inspected. However, it is a concern that 7% of landlords reported that there was a lack of consistency with EPC results, this could be due to issues with the property or inconsistencies with the calculation of EPCs by assessors.
Just over 1-in-5 landlords (21%) reported that they had made improvements to their properties because of the legal minimum requirements for EPCs. In addition, 8% of landlords reported that they’d been required to spend more than £5000 per property to bring it to an E rating or above. This is significant expenditure during times of change in regards to the taxation of the private rented sector and could put pressure on landlords finances. Furthermore, 17% of landlords reported that they were considering increasing rents to fund future energy improvement works. These findings are displayed in full in figure 2.4 above.

**Figure 2.4. Landlord responses to the introduction of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES)**

Because of the legal changes to the minimum EPC requirements I have made improvements to my properties (N=2,341)

I have been required to spend more than £5000 per property to bring it to an E rating or above (N=2,270)

I am considering increasing rents to fund energy improvement works (N=2,284)
**Figure 2.5.** Landlord responses to Energy Efficiency work and implementation of a cap on energy efficiency work

58% of landlords reported they thought it was right that as a business that they should invest in their properties to ensure they are the highest EPC standards.

**Figure 2.6.** Different types of energy efficiency improvements made by landlords over the past 12 months

We then asked landlords how much on average they had spent per property on energy efficiency in the past 12 months. On average, landlords reported spending £1,369.71 on energy efficiency works (N=1,662). The most common type of energy improvement
work carried out in the past 12 months by landlords was to install a new boiler (54%), followed by energy-efficient lighting (43%), and then double glazing (31%) and loft insulation (31%). The least common type of energy improvement work carried out was Renewable Energy improvements such as solar panels, biomass and heat pumps (1%). This is slightly disappointing; however, it is not surprising since these improvements are usually more expensive. An interesting policy suggestion to increase the installation of solar panels or other renewable energy sources would be for greater grant funding for the private rented sector. Increasing the uptake of renewable energy sources in the private rented sector, such as the use of solar panels could help to reduce demand on the national grid and encourage further developments and innovation in renewable energy technology. Further research that explores the benefits and costs of grant funding in this area would be an interesting addition to the current body of knowledge regarding the private rented sector and could have significant policy implications.

Figure 2.7. The different routes landlords took to fund the improvement works to their properties

The most common way for landlords to fund energy efficiency works over the past 12 months has been through rental profits (55%), followed by savings (37%), and then the landlord using a credit card (8%). The two least selected options by respondents were Personal Finance (Personal Loans) at 4% and Grant Funding at 4% of the sample. This suggests that there has been little distribution of grant funding such as Energy Company Obligation (ECO) into the wider private rented sector.
The majority of landlords (94%) reported that their tenants had not requested any Energy Efficiency improvements in the past 12 months. This could be that tenants are unaware of the changes that allow them to request improvements or that the property didn’t require any improvements. It is pleasing to report that the majority of landlords (89%) were aware of the changes to the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES), however, as one-in-ten landlords are unaware of the new standards, potentially as they either are unaffected by the changes or have not seen the communications regarding the changes, this does suggest that more work is needed to make landlords more aware of the changing regulations.

2.2 The Impact of MEES on Landlords with an F or G Rated Property

The following section of this report examines the impact of the new MEES standards on landlords with F or G rated properties. Respondents were asked to answer a filter question, which asked them if they had F or G rated properties. If they responded yes to this question, they were then shown the questions reported in this section. 8% of respondents (N=2,454) reported they had F or G rated properties.
Figure 2.9. Age of F/G rated properties

The majority of landlords with F or G rated properties reported that their properties were built before 1919 (57%), while only a small proportion (2%) reported that they had been built in the last 20 years. This is not surprising since the greater amount of properties in the sector that were built before 1919 (MHCLG, 2018b). This, however, does pose a question on how we as a society can improve conditions across the whole of the private rented sector, and what are the future plans for these homes that were built before 1919. While we are not arguing that just because a property is old that it does not provide a safe and secure home, however, do the homes of the past offer what is needed for the homes of the future? As we become more concerned with the energy efficiency of properties, along with population growth and an ageing population. A question to answer is whether the current stock of properties meets the needs of these challenges. These questions cannot be answered here but should be the focus of future research into the private rented sector and the wider housing need for the UK.
Figure 2.10. Type of Dwellings for F/G rated properties

The most common type of dwelling that was F/G rated was a Terraced House (32% of landlords), followed by converted flats (27% of landlords). The least reported type of dwelling was Bungalow (2% of landlords). The full findings can be found in figure 2.10 above.
Figure 2.11. Landlords with F/G rated properties responses to the MEES changes

37% of landlords reported that they could not afford to bring their property up to at least an E rating or above. As over 1-in-3 landlords with F/G rated properties are unable to bring their properties up to the new standard, it would be worthwhile for the government to explore different options to support landlords to do so. This could be through increasing grant funding, or through positive taxation changes.

Currently, tax relief is generally only available for capital property improvements at the sale of the property for individual residential landlords. A change that could make it more feasible and to encourage landlords to make the improvement to the property would be to offer tax relief against rental income. This positive taxation measure could actively support landlords to make improvements sooner rather than later.

In the next question, 20% of landlords reported they’d have to sell their F or G rated properties, and 51% of landlords reported they’d have to increase the rents because of the new regulations. Therefore, rather than properties leaving the market, this adds to the argument for greater support of landlords from the government in order to increase EPC ratings. Not only would positive taxation policies support landlords to make needed improvements sooner, but this would also help to secure more energy efficient properties for tenants without a burden on rental prices.

We then asked respondents to estimate the average cost per property to bring the F/G rated property up to an E rating. On average, landlords reported that it would cost £5,879.76 to bring their property up to an E rating (N=147). This is significantly higher
than the proposed £2,500 cap being proposed by the government (BEIS, 2017b), which the government itself proposes would only cover 30% of F or G rated properties, while the rest would be unable to make the E rating and would need an exemption. It would, therefore, make more sense to support landlords to make improvements to their properties through positive taxation measures. Not only would this enable landlords with F or G rated properties to better afford the works needed, but this could provide support to landlords with E or D properties to attempt to bring properties to an even higher standard.

![Graph showing the proportion of landlords planning to make energy efficiency improvements before April 2018](image)

**Figure 2.12.** The proportion of landlords planning to make energy efficiency improvements before April 2018

The proportion of landlords that reported they were planning to make improvements was just less than 1-in-2, at 49% of landlords. On the other hand, this shows that 51% of landlords were not planning on making improvements before April 2018. This would mean that if their current tenant left after April 2018, they would be unable to sign a new tenancy agreement before the necessary improvements were made.
91% of landlords reported that they currently have a tenant in situ in their F/G rated properties, and just over 3-in-4 landlords reported that the tenancy was now periodic rather than a fixed term tenancy. Reassuringly, 90% of landlords were aware that they’d be unable to renew their tenancy after April 2018 without first making improvements to their property. However, this still shows that further work is needed to communicate the changing legislation to landlords to empower them to be compliant with new regulations.
Figure 2.14. Landlords planned actions once a tenant leaves their F/G rated property

The most commonly selected option for landlords for when their tenants leave the property would be to bring it up to an E rating (35%), while just over a quarter of landlords reported they’d get a new EPC calculation. 21% of landlords reported that they’d remove the property from the private rented sector, through the sale of the property (15%), let the property as a short-term holiday let (3%) or to leave the property empty (3%). What is concerning is that 2% of landlords reported that they would seek to let the property illegally. Landlords should not seek to engage in illegal behaviours or offer substandard accommodation, this damages the wider reputation of good landlords who improve their properties to meet required standards.
Figure 2.15. Landlord awareness of changes to SAP figures

A majority of landlords (64%) reported that they were unaware of the introduction of new SAP figures for the calculation of EPCs. While 46% of landlords believed that a small change to the SAP figure could be beneficial to bringing them over an E rating. 

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3. Key Trends in the Private Rented Sector
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In this section of this research report, we provide an analysis of the key trends in the private rented sector. This includes an analysis of how plans to change the size of property portfolios have changed, planned changes to rent, and changes in tenant demand. The findings of this survey are also analysed in comparison to the findings of previous quarterly surveys that we have conducted; this enables in-depth analysis of how attitudes and behaviours of landlords are changing in the sector over time.

Our key findings are:

- The proportion of landlords who have added to their portfolio in the past 12 months is continuing to decline and now stands at 16%, down 11 percentage points since Q3 2016
- The proportion of landlords who have sold properties is now at 12%, down one percentage point on the previous quarter
- The proportion of landlords that plan to sell properties continues to increase and is now at 23%, up four percentage points since Q3 2016
- More landlords are planning to sell properties than buying properties, potentially meaning that a future under-supply of privately rented homes, with an estimated net loss of 133,000 properties to rent
- The proportion of landlords who have reported increasing tenant demand in the past three months decreased by four percentage points on the previous quarter
- Landlord confidence remained consistent with the previous quarter, with the same proportion reporting they had confidence in the sector
- The proportion of landlords that had increased rents in the past 12 months is down two percentage points in comparison to the previous quarter
- The proportion of landlords that plan to increase rents has decreased by eight percentage points, and now stands at 41% of landlords
- The main reason for future rent increases was because of the changes to Mortgage Interest Relief (30%)
3.1 Trends in Landlord Portfolios

We have included in each quarterly survey of this longitudinal research project a number of key trend questions relating to both landlords’ portfolios and rents. The analysis of the findings of these questions is showing a downbeat attitude towards the private rented sector.

Since the first quarterly survey in Q3 2016, there has been a significant decline in the proportion of landlords that have added to their portfolio. What is surprising is that in this quarter, the proportion of landlords that have sold at least one property has decreased by one percentage point. This suggests that landlord selling activities have stabilised between 11 and 13% per year.

Our analysis of the survey data has identified that 16% of landlords have bought at least one property in the past 12 months, this is down two percentage points on the past quarter, and down 11 percentage points on Q3 2016. The full findings of this question and the comparison to the previous quarterly surveys can be identified in figure 3.1 below.

![Figure 3.1. Quarterly changes to landlord property portfolios](image)

The next set of questions looked to understand the landlord’s plans for their portfolio and asked whether they were looking to sell properties, buy properties or keep their portfolio the same. The proportion of landlords that are planning to keep their portfolio the same has remained relatively consistent across the past quarterly surveys and this quarter has been the same.
In contrast, the proportion of landlords that are planning to sell properties has increased from 19% in Q3 2016 (Simcock, 2016) to 23% in Q4 2017, a rise of four percentage points. At the same time, the proportion of landlords that plan to buy properties has decreased from 20% in the same period to 16%, a decrease of four percentage points. This now leaves a seven-percentage-point difference in between the proportion planning to buy and those planning to sell. This finding indicates that there will be a net loss of properties in the private rented sector.

From the data provided by the respondents to this survey and in conjunction with data collected in the previous quarterly survey (to be used as a benchmark and for validation), we calculated that the mean number of properties landlords were planning to sell was 1, and we calculated that the mean number of properties landlords were planning to buy was 1 property.

It is possible to estimate that if this is extrapolated to the wider sector and all private residential landlords, and if these landlords only reduce their portfolio by one property, this could equate to a net loss of 133,000 properties to rent over the next 12 months. The full findings of this question and the quarterly comparison to the previous year can be found in figure 3.2 below.

![Figure 3.2. Quarterly changes in landlord plans for their portfolios](image-url)
Across 2017, the findings of the research show that the majority of landlords have experienced either increasing or stable tenant demand for privately rented homes. The proportion of landlords that reported tenant demand as stable has remained relatively consistent, and in Q4 2017 this is up three percentage points in comparison to the previous quarter. In comparison, the proportion of landlords that have reported tenant demand as increasing has declined by four percentage points in comparison to the previous quarter and down seven percentage points in comparison to the start of the year. Nevertheless, the findings of the present study show that the majority of landlords (84%) experienced either increasing or stable demand from tenants for homes to rent.
Following the previous quarter where the gap between the proportion of landlords that were confident and those not confident in the sector tightened. This quarter, while those landlords who were confident in the sector remained flat, the proportion of landlords that reported they were not confident has dropped by four percentage points in comparison to the previous quarter. This now means that the proportion of landlords that were not confident in the sector has reached the same levels as the start of 2017 and up two percentage points on the past 6 months (Simcock, 2017a).
3.2 Trends in Rents

Over 2017, the proportion of landlords that have kept their rents at the same level has remained relatively flat between 52% and 54% of landlords. At the same time, the proportion of landlords that have increased rents has also remained relatively consistent between 41% and 43%. In this quarter, the proportion of landlords who have increased rents is now 13 percentage points below those who have kept the rent the same. The full findings and comparison to the previous quarterly surveys can be found in figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5. Quarterly changes in the proportion of landlords changing their rent levels in the past 12 months
Figure 3.6. The primary reasons why landlords had increased rents in the past 12 months

When asked for the primary reasons why landlords had increased their rents in the past 12 months, the most selected reason was to keep the rent in line with market rents (27%) followed by because of the changes to Mortgage Interest Relief (24%). This was then followed by because it was a new tenancy (15%). While these findings indicate a number of reasons behind why landlords are increasing rents, an important finding is that nearly 1-in-4 landlords are increasing rents due to the taxation changes, and this is only during the first year of the phasing of the changes. This finding is surprising since our previous research identified that the majority of landlords would be negatively impacted by the changes to mortgage interest relief (Simcock, 2016, 2018). The full findings can be displayed in figure 3.6 above.
The final part of this section investigates landlords' plans for rent levels over the next 12 months. From the analysis of the data, this quarter there has been considerable change on the previous quarter. In the previous quarter the gap between the proportion of landlords planning to keep the rent the same and those planning to increase rents had closed (Simcock, 2018). However, this quarter the portion of landlords that plan to increase the rent levels over the next 12 months has dropped significantly and is now eight percentage points below the previous quarter. At the same time the proportion of landlords planning to keep their rent levels the same has increased by eight percentage points. This indicates that landlords are looking for stability when it comes to their portfolios and taking steps to minimise void periods. The full findings can be seen in figure 3.7 above.

Figure 3.7. Quarterly changes in landlord plans for the rent over the next 12 months
When asked for the primary reason they would be increasing rents in the next 12 months, the most common reason was the changes to Mortgage Interest Relief (30%). Therefore, nearly 1-in-3 landlords will be increasing their rents in the next 12 months due to the tax changes. This is not unexpected, with the gradual removal of this taxation relief by 25% each year until 2020. Our previous research identified that 70% of landlords would be negatively impacted by the changes, with 62% reporting their profitability would be reduced by at least 20% (Simcock, 2018). Therefore, it is not surprising that this is the most common reason for increasing the rent and we expect this to continue well into the future. The second most common reason for future rental price increases was to keep the rents in line with market rents (25%) and followed by ensuring that the landlord can meet increasing costs (22%). The full findings of this question are displayed in figure 3.8 above.

Figure 3.8. Primary reasons for landlords increasing rents in the next 12 months
In figure 3.7, it was identified that 58% of landlords were planning on keeping the rent the same for the next 12 months. When examining the underlying reasons for this, 3-in-4 landlords (75%) reported that this was to keep their tenant in the property for the long term. Over the course of the year, this has increased by 12 percentage points. Overall, this finding is showing that the majority of landlords are looking for stability and keeping a good tenant in their property for the long term, rather than risking a costly void period, especially at a time when there is uncertainty relating to economic, political and regulative issues. The full findings can be identified in figure 3.9 above.
4. Electrical & Fire Safety
4. Electrical & Fire Safety

This section of the report explores and investigates the attitudes and response of private landlords towards electrical safety in their properties. In addition, this section examines the experiences of fires by landlords and their attitudes towards fire safety.

**Key findings:**

- 84% of landlords don’t have a burglar alarm installed across their properties
- 62% of landlords have carried out an electrical safety check for their properties
- 56% of landlords support the introduction of a mandatory 5-year electrical safety check
- 61% of landlords support the mandatory introduction of Residual Current Devices to improve electrical safety
- 87% of landlords understand their fire safety obligations

4.1 Electrical and Property Safety

![Graph showing percentage of landlords with different security and safety features](image)

**Figure 4.1.** The proportion of landlords with different security and safety features installed at their properties

The most common safety feature that was reported to be installed was smoke alarms on each floor of the property (98% of landlords). While 84% of landlords reported that they didn’t have a burglar alarm fitted to their property. If this is representative of the whole private rented sector, this could leave PRS properties open to burglary and break-ins, which could cause further damage to the property. It could be more cost-effective for landlords to install burglar alarms to act as a deterrent to crime. Furthermore, 1-in-3
landlords reported that the locks on the doors and windows of their rental property doesn't meet the BS3261 standard or equivalent for safety. There were 438,791 Burglaries in 2017 (Office for National Statistics, 2018), and potential improvements to properties could help to improve the safety of private rented properties and support efforts to reduce crime. If the government introduced taxation relief for improvements to properties against rental income rather than at sale of the property, this would act as encouragement for landlords to make improvements to their properties. The benefit of these improvements could help with wider social issues, such as through safety improvements such as new doors/windows and burglar alarms that could reduce the impact of crime. It is anticipated that improvements to properties supported by a change in government taxation policy for improvements would lead to reduced costs for insurers, landlords, tenants, the police, and the wider society.

Figure 4.2. Landlord perceptions of Smart Meters and Portable Appliance Testing

30% of landlords reported they supported the introduction of smart meters, while 41% of landlords were indifferent to the introduction of smart meters. Only a small proportion of landlords (22%) reported they carry out annual PAT testing across all of their properties, and only 8% of landlords reported they had undergone training so that they can carry out PAT testing.
The majority of landlords reported that they carried out electrical safety checks for their properties (62%), and just over half of landlords reported they supported the introduction of a mandatory 5-year electrical safety checks (56%). Similarly, 61% of landlords reported that they support the mandatory introduction of Residual Current Devices (RCD) to improve electrical safety. Overall, these findings show that landlords in general support efforts to improve electrical safety across their properties and also the majority already engage in additional efforts to check the electrical safety of the property. Therefore, we can conclude that landlords would be supportive of attempts to provide simpler and more robust regulations regarding electrical safety in private rented homes. The full findings are displayed in figure 4.3 above.

Figure 4.3. Landlord perceptions and actions towards electrical safety

- I carry out electrical safety checks for my properties (N=2,317)
- I support the introduction of mandatory 5 year electrical safety checks (N=2,351)
- I support the mandatory introduction of Residual Current Devices (RCD) to improve electrical safety (N=2,334)
Figure 4.4. Landlord understanding of fire safety obligations

95% of landlords reported that they had a working smoke alarm on each floor of their rented properties, and 87% of landlords reported that they understand their fire safety obligations. On the other hand, this indicates that 13% of landlords are unsure of their obligations towards fire safety and indicates that greater efforts need to be put into raising awareness of landlords’ obligations to fire safety. In regard to the proportion of landlords that own properties that are affected by cladding, 4% of landlords reported they owned property affected. The full findings for these statements can be found in figure 4.4 above.
The majority of landlords (93%) reported that they have a gas safety check completed every year, while 6% of landlords reported that this did not apply to their properties. However, 1% of landlords did report that they did not have a yearly gas safety certificate completed for their properties. This is of concern as it is a legal requirement and helps to ensure that the property is safe. Further work by the RLA needs to be done to improve landlord’s knowledge of their obligations, but there also needs the willingness of landlords to develop their understanding as well. The full findings to this question are displayed in figure 4.5 above.
4.2 Fire Safety in the Private Rented Sector

In regard to fire safety in the private rented sector, only a small minority of landlords (1%) reported they had experienced a fire in their property in the past 12 months. The full findings are available in figure 4.6 below.

![Pie chart showing fire frequency](image)

*Figure 4.6. The proportion of landlords that have experienced a fire in their property in the past 12 months.*

In the following question, landlords were provided with a free text box asking for the cause of the fire. From a content analysis of the data, the main reasons for fires included:

- Tenant Issues (34%)
- Kitchen Appliance (20%)
- Electrical Appliance (14%)
- Smoking (14%)
- Criminal Damage (6%)
- Chimney (3%)
- Candle (3%)

From an analysis of the main causes of fires reported by landlords, tenant issues were identified as one of the most common reasons (34% of landlords). This included issues such as leaving cooking unattended or overloading plug sockets. While the proportion of landlords that have experienced fires is small, our previous research identified that a fire cost a landlord on average £15,117.46 (Simcock, 2017b). Therefore, attempts to reduce the numbers of fires occurring in the private rented sector could decrease significant costs and also limit the risk of injury or death. As tenant issues were identified as the main cause, more education for tenants on the risk of fire and the behaviours that could lead to a fire would be anticipated to be beneficial.
Figure 4.7. The proportion of landlords that have carried out a fire risk assessment

62% of landlords reported that a fire risk assessment had been carried out for their property, with 42% of landlords reporting this was carried out by themselves. The full findings can be found in figure 4.7 above.

Figure 4.8. Landlord understanding of fire safety responsibilities

The majority of landlords (who owned an HMO or flat) (67%) reported they understood their responsibilities when ensuring their property is compliant with fire safety guidance. The full findings are displayed in figure 4.8 above.
5. Property Repairs
5. Property Repairs

This section of the report examines property repairs carried out by landlords in the past 12 months.

Key findings:

- 92% of landlords made a repair to a property in the past 12 months
- On average, landlords spent £1,391.77 on property repairs

![Pie chart showing 92% Yes and 8% No](image)

*Figure 5.1 The proportion of landlords that have made repairs to property in their property portfolio*

In the past 12 months, the majority of landlords (93%) reported carrying out repairs to property in their portfolio. We asked landlords on average in the past 12 months they had spent on repairs for their properties. On average landlords reported spending £1,391.77 per property on property repairs (N=2,080). This is down £311 on the previous year, where landlords reported on average spending £1,702.78 on property repairs (Simcock, 2017b). While it was not asked why landlords have spent less this year in comparison to the previous year, there are a number of potential reasons for this decline, firstly, the repairs that were needed to be made this year were not as substantial in comparison to the previous year. However, it is also possible that landlords are seeking to reduce costs due to tax changes, previous research has identified the negative impact of the changes to mortgage interest relief on landlord’s finances, with 62% having their profitability reduced by at least 20% and 67% looking to reduce investment in their portfolio to mitigate the changes (Simcock, 2018). Therefore, because of these changes, landlords may have sought to reduce their spend on repairs by opting for cheaper replacements or undertaking repairs themselves rather than seeking out a contractor. This will be a topic that is needed to be explored in more depth in further research.
6. Who are Landlords?
6. Who are Landlords?

In this section of this research report, we analyse the types of landlords present in the private rented sector. We examine the demographics of landlords, such as age, gender, but also, how the landlord first entered the PRS, how long they have been a landlord and the size of portfolios across the sector.

Our key findings are:

- Most landlords are between the ages of 55 to 64 (36%), followed by 45 to 54 (26%) and 65 to 74 (24%)
- 43% of landlords reported they owned their own home with a mortgage, while 51% reported they owned the property outright
- The most common employment status of landlords was retired (29%) followed by working full-time (23%)
- Only 18% of landlords classified themselves as full-time landlords
- The most common reason for becoming a landlord was their own choice through borrowing money, such as buy-to-let (33% of landlords)
- A large proportion of landlords described themselves as specialising in letting to families (47% of landlords)
- Most landlords had been providing homes for over 10 years (60%)

The following figure shows the age profile of the landlords who responded to the survey. The largest age group are landlords between the ages of 55 to 64 (36% of the sample), while the smallest age group are landlords aged between 18 to 24 (0% of the sample).

![Figure 6.1. Private Landlord Age Profiles and Gender](image)

From the sample, there is a gender gap in response rates, with 59% of respondents describing themselves as Male, and 41% as Female. The findings are shown in figure 6.1 above.
The most common area where respondents lived was in the South East (21%), followed by the North West (13%), London (12%) and the South West (12%). The findings are displayed in the figure below.

**Figure 6.2. Location of landlord’s primary residence**

When asked about the tenure of their own main home, 43% of the sample reported they own their own home with a mortgage, and 51% reported they owned their property outright. The findings are shown in the figure below.

**Figure 6.3. Tenure of Landlord’s main home**

The most common employment status was landlords describing themselves as retired (29% of the sample), followed by being working full-time (23% of the sample). The findings can be found in figure 6.4 below.
The following figure explores the reasons behind the respondent first becoming a landlord. The most common reason why landlords first entered the sector was through their own choice and by borrowing money such as through a buy-to-let mortgage (33% of the sample). It is interesting to see that 5% of landlords reported this was due to a spare home from marriage/partnership. The findings are displayed in figure 6.5 below.

A large proportion of landlords reported that they specialised in providing accommodation for families (47% of the sample), followed by specialising in young professionals (40% of the sample). The full findings are available in figure 6.6 below.
A majority of the respondents reported that they have been landlords for more than 10 years (60%), while only 1% have been a landlord for less than 1 year, and 7% of the sample have been landlords 3 years and less. This suggests that there is only a small proportion of new landlords entering the sector. In conjunction with the majority of landlords (63%) over the age of 55, when taking a long-term view, there needs to be a consideration on whether there are suitable incentives for new landlords to invest in the sector or if portfolios are transferred to children, how knowledge and best practices are maintained.
7. Who are Tenants?
7. Who are Tenants?

In this section of this research report, we analyse the types of tenant landlords are renting their properties out to. We focus on the demographics of tenants, including age, employment status, and also the relationship between the landlord and tenant and any tenant issues landlords have.

Our key findings are:

- The majority of landlords reported letting to tenants aged between 25 and 34 (66%), followed by 35 to 44 (58%). While 22% of landlords reported letting to tenants over the age of 65
- A majority of landlords reported letting to tenants who were in full-time employment (86%), while just over 1-in-4 landlords reported letting to tenants on benefits
- Over one-third of landlords (34%) have experienced tenants going into 2 or more months of rent arrears in the past 12 months
- Just over 1 in 4 landlords (29%) have needed to attempt to regain possession of their property
- Out of those attempting to regain possession, 64% of landlords reported that this was because of rent arrears
- On average, per property, landlords are currently owed £1,590.44 in rent arrears
- We estimate that across the wider sector, landlords are owed on average just over £1bn

In figure 7.1 below, we can identify the most common tenant age profile for the sample as aged between 25 and 34 (66% of landlords). The second largest tenant age profile was 35 to 44-year olds, with 58% of landlords reporting they let to this group of tenants. Interestingly, 22% of landlords reported they let to tenants over the age of 65.
The most common tenant employment status was employed full-time (86% of landlords), followed by employed part-time (34%) and then not working claiming benefits (27%). The figure below shows the different employment statuses of tenants currently let to by the sample.

In the following question, the respondents were asked if they had experienced any issues with their tenant in the past 12 months. The results indicate that 34% of landlords had experienced 2 or more months of rent arrears in the past 12 months, and 23% of
landlords had experienced damage to their property. The figure below provides an overview of the issues experienced by landlords.

![Figure 7.3. Landlords negative experiences of letting in the past 12 months](image)

We then asked landlords if they had attempted to regain possession of their rental property in the past 12 months. 71% of landlords responded that they had not, while 10% of landlords said they had to attempt to remove tenants on 2 or more occasions. The full findings can be found in figure 7.4 below.

![Figure 7.4. Number of times landlords have attempted to remove a tenant from their property in the past 12 months](image)

We then explored the different routes landlords were taking to start the process of reclaiming their property back from the tenant. In the past 12 months, 54% of landlords reported starting this process by serving the Section 21 (no fault eviction), while 32%
reported they served a written notice in the first instance. The complete findings are shown in the figure below.

Figure 7.5. How landlords initiated the removal process

Landlords were then asked why they had chosen the Section 21 route over the Section 8 notice route. The majority of landlords (64%) reported that this was because the Section 21 process was quicker than the Section 8 process.

Figure 7.6. Why landlords chose the Section 21 route over the Section 8 notice

A further question asked landlords for the primary reason for attempting to remove the tenant from the property. The majority of landlords (64%) reported the primary reason as rent arrears, followed by anti-social behaviour by the tenants (12%). The full findings for each reason can be found in figure 7.7 below.
Rent arrears continue to be a significant issue in the private rented sector, and especially for landlords with finance attached to properties. High rent arrears could put the landlord’s ability to meet their costs at risk and could mean their investment is at risk of repossession by the mortgage provider. The findings above highlight that 34% of landlords have experienced rent arrears in the past 12 months, and 64% of evictions were due to rent arrears.

On average, per property, landlords reported they were owed £1,590.44 in rent arrears. If we extrapolate this to the wider sector, this does highlight a significant sum of rent arrears. If we estimate that there are 2 million landlords in the sector, (HMRC data for 2016, showed there were approximately 1.9 million landlords (Walmsley, 2017)), and based on this, we can estimate that just over £1 billion is owed to landlords.

Figure 7.7. Reasons for attempting to remove a tenant in the past 12 months
The questions in the final part of this section examine the relationship between the landlord and the tenant. Overall, a majority of landlords reported they felt they had a good relationship with their tenants (84% of the sample), while 79% of landlords reported that their tenants pay their rent on time. The full findings can be found in figure 7.8 above.
8. Landlord Property Portfolios
8. Landlord Property Portfolios

In this penultimate section of the report, we examine and investigate the types of households’ landlords typically let to, typical property locations, and whether the property is typically furnished or unfurnished.

Our key findings are:

- While portfolio size across landlords is widely spread from 1 property to more than 21 properties, 28% of landlords reported having 2-3 properties, followed by 6-10 properties (19%) and 4-5 properties (18%)
- The most popular property/household type for landlords is a 2-bedroom property to 1 family (61% of landlords)
- The South East is the most popular geographical region for landlords, with 23% letting property in this region
- The median average rent collected by landlords was £700
- The average tenancy length was calculated as 3 years

Landlords were asked for the average rent they charge across their property portfolios. The median average rent charged by landlords was £700 (M = £917.76, SD = 932.17, N = 2136).

The next question asked landlords for the average tenancy length across their portfolios, from the analysis of their responses we can identify the average length of current tenancy as 3 years.

In the following figure, we explore the different portfolio sizes of landlords. The most prevalent portfolio size was 2 to 3 properties (28%), followed by those with 6-10 properties at 19% of landlords. 9% of landlords identified as having more than 21 properties in their portfolio. The findings are displayed in figure 8.1 below.
In the figure below, we investigate the types of properties landlords are currently letting out. Overall, the most common property types were 2-bedroom 1 family properties (61% of landlords) followed by 3-bedroom 1 family properties (50% of landlords).

The most common geographical regions to let out the property was the South East (23% of landlords), followed by the North West (18%) and then by London (17%). The least common regions were Northern Ireland and Scotland. However, this is likely due to
sample bias as the membership of the RLA is mainly formed by landlords from across England and Wales.

Figure 8.3. The geographical locations of the samples property portfolio (N=2,321)

The majority of landlords reported that their typical property was let as unfurnished (71% of the sample). At the same time, 31% of landlords reported let their property as fully furnished. There is cross-over between the responses, to accommodate landlords who offer a range of different furnishings across their portfolios.

Figure 8.4. The different furnishing options across landlords’ portfolios
9. Conclusions and Recommendations
9. Conclusions and Recommendations

This research report presents the findings of the sixth survey of RLA PEARL’s longitudinal quarterly survey research project on the issues affecting landlords, tenants and the wider sector. The aim of the present study was to examine the reactions of private landlords to the introduction of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) and builds upon our previous research into these issues (see: Simcock, 2017b). A further goal of this research was to continue to monitor and investigate key trends in the private rented sector.

In relation to the introduction of MEES, the findings of this research show that the majority of landlords are currently unaffected by the changes, with only 8% of landlords reporting they owned an F or G rated property. Nevertheless, the research has also shown that landlords with F and G rated properties are feeling the pressure of meeting the new standards. Over 1-in-3 landlords (37%) with an F or G rated property reported that they could not afford to bring up the property to at least an E rating. On average, landlords reported that it would cost them £5,789.76 to install measures that would ensure they met the necessary standards. Taken together, these findings suggest a struggle for private residential landlords being able to afford to meet these new standards. This present study adds to the growing body of evidence on landlord reactions to policy changes and the challenges of operating in a modern private rented sector.

These findings provide an opportunity for policy change that could support landlords in achieving the desired aims of the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards. This could be through either through increased grant funding that targets the private rented sector or through changes to the way property improvements are taxed for landlords. Currently, improvements generally are subject to tax relief at the sale of the property when Capital Gains is calculated. A change that would make it more feasible and that would encourage more landlords, would be to offer tax relief against rental income for certain property improvements (such as Energy Efficiency works). Moreover, in further questions, 20% of landlords reported they would have to sell their F or G rated properties and 51% of landlords reported they would have to increase their rents so they could afford to install new measures. This adds further weight for the need for positive taxation policies that support landlords to make the changes, as this will then stem the potential loss of properties to rent and reduce any potential burden on tenant’s rents to meet the cost of energy efficiency works.

Our findings of the current research provide a greater understanding of the costs associated with undertaking repairs in private rented properties. 92% of landlords reported they had undertaken repairs in the past 12 months, at the cost of £1,391.77 on average per property. This is down £311 on the previous year, where landlords reported they had spent £1,702.78 (Simcock, 2017b). While we cannot fully identify from the findings of this survey why landlords had spent less this year in comparison to the previous year. We can suggest some potential reasons; firstly, it may simply be due to the types of repairs carried out by some landlords in the past 12 months have not been as substantial in comparison. However, it is also possible to theorise that landlords are seeking to reduce costs due to the government’s tax changes. Our previous research
has identified the negative impact on landlord’s finances, with 62% having their profitability reduced by at least 20% and 67% reported they were seeking to reduce investment in their portfolio to mitigate the changes (Simcock, 2018). Therefore, landlords could be seeking to reduce spending on repairs by opting for cheaper replacements, undertaking repairs themselves instead of seeking out a contractor, or shopping around for cheaper deals with contractors. This is a topic that we have identified that requires further investigation and research, to understand not only the reasons behind the drop in spending on property repairs, but also the economic contribution of the private rented sector to local economies.

The secondary aim of this research was to monitor key trends in the private rented sector and the attitudes and responses of private landlords. Our overall findings are showing that the rapidly changing environment that landlords operate within is taking its toll. The proportion of landlords who have increased the size of their portfolio has decreased by 11 percentage points since Q3 2016 and now stands at 16%. At the same time, the proportion of landlords that plan to sell properties continues to increase is now at 23%, up four percentage points since Q3 2016. The further analysis highlights that more landlords are now planning to sell properties than buying properties, potentially meaning a future undersupply of privately rented homes, with an estimated 133,00 net loss of properties to rent. This is especially concerning since the number of homes to rent in 2017 has already decreased by 46,000 properties (MHCLG, 2018a). Future contraction of properties available to rent will increase competition between tenants, make it more difficult for individuals to find a home, and potentially lead to higher rents. While the proportion of landlords that are planning to increase rents in the next 12 months has decreased, 41% of landlords are still planning on increasing rents. With 30% of these landlords citing the changes to mortgage interest relief as the main reason. These findings show that the government’s taxation policy is having a negative impact on the private rented sector and this will ultimately negatively impact on tenants, making it more difficult for families to secure a home to rent.

A final concern is that a large proportion of the F and G rated properties were reported to be built pre-1919 (57% of landlords). This is not surprising since there is a large proportion of properties in the sector that were built before 1919 (MHCLG, 2018b). The latest Government Fuel Poverty Statistics are showing that older buildings have a higher proportion of households in fuel poverty compared to newer dwellings, and at the same time there are higher levels of Fuel Poverty in the private rented sector (BEIS, 2017a). This, however, does pose a question on how we can as a society improve conditions across the wider sector and what are the plans for homes that were built pre-1919. While, this is not an argument that because a property is over 100 years old, it does not provide a safe and secure home, however, do the homes of the past offer what is needed for the homes of the future? As we become more concerned with energy efficiency, fuel-poverty, an ageing population, and increasing societal changes. A key question to answer is whether the current stock of homes meets the needs of future challenges. If we do not build for the future, we will be faced with an even greater housing problem than we do currently.
10. References
10. References


