

Association of Tenancy Relations Officers (ATRO)

Chair and Secretary's Report Annual General Meeting, 24 June 2016

In most towns and cities it seems clear that the private rented sector continues to grow as access to homeownership and public housing becomes increasingly restricted. More than 9 million people now live in private rented housing in England, and it is the only housing tenure that is growing.

The last twelve months have seen a broad range of changes in the law relating to tenancy relations enforcement work. Much of this change has been a step in the right direction in terms of tackling rogue landlords, as the well-worn phrase goes. However, many of us working in Tenancy Relations would question whether the changes will be as effective as hoped, in regulating those landlords who manage their properties badly, and who do much to undermine the private rented sector as a provider of safe and secure homes.

The last year has seen:

- the Deregulation Act 2015 come into force with its:
 - changes to the detail of section 21
 - the introduction of measures to combat retaliatory eviction
 - the closer linking of the landlord's right to give a section 21 notice with the obligation to have met basic safety and management standards
- the introduction nationally, of the requirement for private landlords to carry out checks on the immigration status of tenants
- the passing of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 with
 - banning orders for most prolific offenders
 - database of rogue landlords/property agents
 - civil penalties of up to £30,000
 - extension of Rent Repayment Orders
 - tougher Fit and Proper Person test for landlords
 - tenancy Deposit Protection Scheme data sharing,

which we understand should all be in force next year.

Whilst the problem of abandonment is acknowledged to be a real and justifiable concern for landlords, many members will have misgivings about the measures to be introduced to enable landlords to take possession of a property without the need for a Court Order.

Although it doesn't seem likely that there will be fundamental changes to landlord- tenant law under this government, there may still be some further

change in the form of an extension of a broadening of the scope of local authorities HMO licensing duties.

However ATRO remains very concerned about issues such as the lack of security of tenure the sector provides for vulnerable tenants, and the inconsistency of enforcement of the Protection from Eviction Act across the country.

In relation to security of tenure, ATRO urges the government to monitor the effects of the abolition of the automatic shorthold ground for possession (section 21) in Scotland, and to consider whether, the effects of this change lend any support to the long standing argument, that section 21 is necessary for the private rented sector to be able to play its optimum role in providing safe and viable homes.

This year ATRO has continued to try to make a contribution to support members and influence policy. We have:

- delivered training to 4 different local authorities in Chesterfield, for which we received outstanding feedback,
- updated the Guidance page on our website www.atro-online.com,
- produced newsletters for members publicising issues of interest to TROs
- made representations to the Sentencing Council about PEA offences
- approached the Local Government Association with a view to working with them regarding housing offences and rogue landlord penalties
- liaised with Shelter with a view to writing an article about tenancy relations in Housing Matters

The website, whilst much improved, continues to need updating and adding to the challenge, as ever, being for committee members to find the time to keep it updated and meaningful.

Indeed, there is much more that we could be doing. We need as much help as we can get & would be very grateful for volunteers to join the Committee

In the meantime I think we should at least all have the confidence that with the Private Rented Sector continuing to grow, and fall more and more under the spotlight, and with it, the Local Authority role in policing, facilitating and supporting the Sector, then the argument for tenancy relations services, and for adequate resourcing for those services, becomes all the stronger.

Dave Hickling, Chair,

Andrew Greathead, Secretary

ATRO, June 2016