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New rules for better living conditions for London's 'generation rent'

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A new "kitemark" for London's growing army of private landlords is launched today aimed at raising living conditions for "generation rent."

The Mayor's new "London Rental Standard" lays out 15 "best practice" rules that landlords must meet to qualify for the so called "Boris badge" showing they have been accredited under the scheme. There are also a further nine requirements for letting and managing agents.

Today's initiative follows an explosion in the number of Londoners renting from private landlords over the past 20 years to around two million, or around a quarter of the capital's population. This is expected to rise to 40 per cent within a decade.

Many housing charities complain that the sector is underregulated leaving tenants at the mercy of "rogue" or incompetent landlords.

To meet the standard landlords must commit to meeting all 15 requirements, which include: dealing with emergency repairs on the day they are notified; making themselves "always" contactable and providing at least two contact numbers and an email address; providing written rental agreements; giving at least 24 hours notice in writing when they access to the property and giving tenants written details of how their deposit is protected.

The standard is voluntary but landlords who are members of London Landlord Accreditation Scheme, the National Landlords Association or the Residential Landlords Association will have to sign up to it.

Deputy Mayor for Housing Richard Blakeway said that the standard was aimed at improving the image of private renting "which is still portrayed at times as a Rachmanite sector."

Peter Rachman was a notorious landlord operating in the Notting Hill area in the late Fifties and early Sixties known for cramming huge number of tenants, often immigrants, into squalid flats, whose name became a by-word for exploitation.

Although conditions have improved hugely since then there are still concerns that landlords can get away with treating tenants badly. A survey carried out for the Mayor found that more than 60 per cent of London's 300 landlords have no professional experience.

Rob Hunter, who owns 11 homes in Haringey who today became the first landlord to be awarded the badge, said the scheme

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would bring "consistency" and give tenants confidence that their landlord "is not going to abscond with their deposit money."

One of his tenants Cameron Baverstock, said of his previous landlord: "My housemates and I would sometimes spend weeks without hot water with the landlord responding slowly and poorly to complaints. With nobody to hold the landlord to account there was very little we could do. Living in one of Rob's houses for the last two years or so, I've received a dramatically different level of service."

Soaring property prices means that many young Londoners, in particular, stay in rented homes far longer than previous generations before being able to climb on the housing ladder. Increasingly families with young children who would have hoped to own the roof over their heads remain "trapped" in the private rented sector.

But Alex Hilton, director of campaign group, Generation Rent said: "This expensive vanity scheme will not help a single tenant. There is no voluntary landlord scheme that attracts more than 6 per cent of eligible landlords.

"The fact is only landlords who do everything right already will join the scheme, so their tenants won't benefit, while those with bad landlords who ignore the scheme won't benefit either. On top of that, this scheme duplicates work that many London boroughs are already doing, and wasting hundreds of thousands of pounds in the process."

Boris Johnson said: "With more of London's workforce and young families living in rented homes, this growing sector is vital to meeting this capital's housing needs and must not be overlooked. This standard aims to improve the experience of everyone involved, from landlord to tenant, with a clear set of good practice rules. "Alongside this we are investing huge sums in more homes specifically to rent, and helping Londoners who want to buy into low cost home ownership, as well as a raft of other measures to help provide the homes hard working Londoners need."

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