Press release: Rogue landlords put on notice as government announces tough new powers

Rogue landlords have been put on notice as government has announced today (28 December 2017) a raft of new measures to crack down on bad practices, stamp out overcrowding and improve standards for those renting in the private sector.

Housing Minister Alok Sharma has set out how, subject to parliamentary clearance, landlords renting properties in England occupied by 5 or more people, from 2 or more separate households will need to be licensed.

The move, affecting around 160,000 houses, will mean councils can take further action to crack down on unscrupulous landlords renting sub-standard and overcrowded homes.

Government has also set out details of criminal offences which will automatically ban someone from being a landlord. From April next year, someone convicted of offences such as burglary and stalking can be added to the database of rogue landlords and be barred from renting properties.

These latest measures build on government action to date to drive up safety and standards in the private rented sector. This includes bringing in fines of up to £30,000 for dodgy landlords, protections for tenants from revenge evictions and £12 million funding for councils to take enforcement action in hotspot areas.

Housing and Planning Minister Alok Sharma said:

> Every tenant has a right to a safe, secure and decent home. But far too many are being exploited by unscrupulous landlords who profit from providing overcrowded, squalid and sometimes dangerous homes.
>
> Enough is enough and so I'm putting these rogue landlords on notice – shape up or ship out of the rental business.
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> Through a raft of new powers we are giving councils the further tools they need to crack down these rogue landlords and kick them out of the business for good.

The move will also benefit wider communities fed up with living near shoddily maintained properties without proper bins, dumped rubbish and anti social behaviour. Landlords will be held responsible for making sure the council's rules on refuse and recycling are followed.

New rules will also come into force setting minimum size requirements for

bedrooms in houses of multiple occupation to prevent overcrowding. As part of the licencing requirements, local councils will be able to make sure only rooms meeting the standard are used for sleeping.

The new measures announced today were subject to consultation with the majority of responses supporting the new proposals:

Houses in multiple occupation

There are around 4.3 million households in the private rented sector in England, with around 500,000 houses in multiple occupation.

The new licensing rules only apply to certain houses in multiple occupation in England.

National mandatory licensing currently only applies if properties are 3 or more storeys. This is being changed so flats and one/two-storey properties will be brought within scope.

Minimum space requirements

Rooms used for sleeping by 1 adult will have to be no smaller than 6.51 square metres, and those slept in by 2 adults will have to be no smaller than 10.22 square metres. Rooms slept in by children of 10 years and younger will have to be no smaller than 4.64 square metres.

The licence must specify the maximum number of persons (if any) who may occupy any room and the total number across the different rooms must be the same as the number of persons for whom the property is suitable to live in.

Banning orders and landlord database

A small number of rogue or criminal landlords knowingly rent out unsafe and substandard accommodation.

The Housing and Planning Act 2016 introduced a range of measures to tackle rogue landlords:

- civil penalties of up to £30,000 as an alternative to prosecution – came into force April 2017
- extension of Rent Repayment Orders to cover illegal eviction, breach of a banning order or failure to comply with a statutory notice – came into force April 2017
- banning orders for the most serious and prolific offenders – to be implemented in April 2018
- a database of rogue landlords/letting agents convicted of certain offences – to be implemented in April 2018

Press release: Better mobile and Wi-Fi connectivity for rail passengers

- Proposals could allow everyone onboard to stream videos simultaneously
- Fibre optic cables and mobile masts could be rolled out alongside tracks to provide gigabit speeds to trains
- Ministers now looking at “future proofing” rail connectivity to help pave the way for a 5G rollout

The Government has fired the starting gun on an ambitious plan that could see the UK’s train passengers to benefit from a dramatic improvement in onboard mobile and Wi-Fi connections.

The rapid growth of mobile data requirements and the use of smartphones and tablets now means that consumers expect high quality, reliable connectivity everywhere. As part of its 5G strategy the Government has committed to improving coverage where people live, work and travel – including on trains.

Minimum standards for mobile connectivity on new franchises already being introduced, but today’s proposals set out how, working with industry, connectivity for passengers on all mainline routes could be dramatically improved by 2025.

Each train could get speeds of around 1 Gigabit Per Second (Gbps). This would future proof the connectivity, and in practice could allow several hundred passengers to stream uninterrupted video content at the same time.

Minister for Digital Matt Hancock said:

> We want people to be able to get connected where they live, work and travel. This means improving connections on Britain’s railways now, and making sure they are fit for the future. We’ve got a long way to travel but our destination is world-class signal for passengers. This will not only make journeys more enjoyable and productive, but will help improve the operation and safety of the railway and deliver economic benefits for the whole of the UK.

Bruce Williamson from Railfuture said:

> Wi-fi has moved from being an optional extra to something essential for the 21st century rail passenger, so we welcome any improvements to capacity and coverage. It should become absolutley standard for all trains on the British railway network to have seamless connectivity, as it’s essential for attracting the smartphone connected generation to rail, as well as the business traveller working on the move. Very soon, trains without wi-fi will become unthinkable, and rail passengers will look forward to the day when

> the phone doesn’t cut out in tunnels.

Rail passenger connectivity is largely delivered through mobile phone networks operating from remote (non-trackside) masts, meaning coverage is patchy and in many places, non existent. To deliver the improvements, upgraded trackside infrastructure could be required for reliable connectivity in areas of high passenger demand and in hard to reach areas such as tunnels. Delivering this will involve laying fibre along the tracks, mounting wireless devices on masts (and other trackside infrastructure) to transmit the signal to the train; and providing power supplies to these masts.

To help us understand some of the technical and practical deployment challenges of trackside infrastructure, work has already begun on a trial on the Trans Pennine route between Manchester and York, in partnership with Network Rail. This will ensure we know how best to make use of existing trackside infrastructure and utilise Network Rail assets, as well as testing suitable track-to-train radio systems to deliver services to passengers under real-life conditions. This pilot is part of the government’s £31 billion National Productivity Investment Fund, which has already earmarked £1bn specifically for improving Britain’s digital infrastructure, ensuring the UK is match-fit for the future.

Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said:

> We are investing record levels delivering the biggest rail improvement plan since Victorian times to improve services for passengers – providing faster, better and more comfortable trains with extra seats.
>
> Improved mobile connectivity will help passengers to keep up with work, connect with friends or even check the latest journey information online while on the move, as we continue to build and develop a railway fit for the twenty-first century.

A call for evidence has now been launched on the different ways the improvements could be delivered to support the Government’s ambitions to have a digitally connected railway that meets customers expectations and cements the UK’s place as a world leader in 5G technology.

1. Take part in the consultation

2. Network Rail already owns trackside fibre along parts of the rail corridor. Where possible, it will make available access to trackside assets (e.g. fibre, underground ducts, masts and power) on an appropriate basis, to support commercial models.

3. The project could be delivered via:

- dedicated trackside infrastructure comprising base stations/masts, fibre to backhaul the signal from the masts to the core telecoms network, and access to power for these systems

- a radio system external to the train that links it to the trackside system. The radio system including spectrum must be capable of meeting growing passenger demand

- in-carriage systems that provide Wi-Fi and/or mobile network connectivity

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Press release: British medical heroes deploying to combat deadly diphtheria outbreak in Bangladesh

NHS staff members of the UK Emergency Medical Team taking part in a training exercise, December 2016

More than 40 British doctors, nurses and firefighters from the UK's Emergency Medical Team (EMT) are making their way to Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh to save thousands of lives at risk from a rapid and deadly outbreak of diphtheria.

This is the first ever deployment of Britain's EMT since it was certified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 2016 and will see more than a dozen medical heroes fly out shortly after Christmas on 28 December, followed by the rest in the days after.

The UK's latest response follows a formal request for assistance from the WHO and the Government of Bangladesh after more than 2000 suspected cases and 22 reported deaths from the airborne virus. This is expected to increase significantly over the Christmas period and there are currently not enough staff or beds to manage the outbreak.

Diphtheria is a fast spreading, extremely deadly infection, and there are a reported 160 new cases every day in Cox's Bazar which is home to more than 600,000 Rohingya people who have recently fled the violence and military persecution in Burma. It is especially dangerous for children who are particularly vulnerable. It causes extreme difficulty breathing, inflammation

of the heart which can lead to heart failure, problems with the nervous system and fatal paralysis.

People in the UK are routinely vaccinated against diphtheria; however, the overcrowded camps are a breeding ground for this fatal disease. DFID is already providing vaccines in response to the crisis.

The EMT will be deployed to Cox's Bazar for six weeks, where clinicians will work using existing health facilities. This will include 36 NHS medics, such as doctors, nurses and epidemiologists who will provide immediate specialist life-saving care to tackle the diphtheria outbreak, as well as around five logistics staff from UK fire and rescue services who will provide expert advice to create the right infrastructure for the EMT to start their urgent work.

The UK's support will strengthen the capacity of the Government of Bangladesh and NGOs to manage future outbreaks.

An advance team will travel to Cox's Bazar on 27 December to make logistical preparations. Following pre-deployment training, all remaining staff will be deployed from the 28 December, with the first wave leaving from Manchester Airport.

International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

> This will be an absolutely critical deployment, in a race against time for men, women and children at risk of dying from one of the world's cruellest infections.
>
> Our brave British medical heroes are the world leaders in saving lives, acting rapidly in crisis to avert a humanitarian catastrophe.
>
> I have heard first-hand the harrowing stories of Rohingya families who have escaped persistent persecution, violence and tragedy. In the face of this new horror it is absolutely right that we step up to end their relentless suffering and stop them falling prey to a rampaging, preventable disease that could kill thousands.

Department of Health Minister Steve Brine said:

> The UK has a proud tradition of supporting nations in need.
>
> Today marks another proud moment in the history of the NHS as selfless clinical staff once again show their skill, commitment and passion for helping people around the world.

Notes for Editors:

1. The UK's Emergency Medical Team is a collaboration between DFID, the NHS, Public Health England, UK Med – a register of NHS volunteers ready to deploy to emergencies, Handicap International and the UK Fire and Rescue Service. This is the first deployment of the EMT since it was verified by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in December 2016. UK medical personnel have previously been deployed to Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013 and the Nepal earthquake in 2015.
2. The deployment will be funded from DFID's Bangladesh humanitarian budget – up to £650,000 has been earmarked for the EMT.
3. Diphtheria is a bacterial infection. It most often causes infection of the upper respiratory tract. Diphtheria is most commonly spread from person to person through respiratory droplets (coughs and sneezes), or by direct contact with either respiratory secretions or infected skin lesions. Respiratory diphtheria usually occurs after an incubation period of 2-5 days. It causes life-threatening airway obstruction (suffocation) if untreated
4. The first suspected case of diphtheria was reported on 10 November at an MSF clinic in Cox's Bazar. The outbreak was confirmed through laboratory testing on 04 December 2017. As of 23/12, 2,248 suspected cases of diphtheria and 22 deaths have been reported.
5. In response to the diphtheria outbreak in Cox's Bazaar, existing clinical facilitates are being converted and scaled up. This is currently being led by Médecins Sans Frontières MSF and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). However IOM and other international NGOs are unable to manage the complex care needs of these patients, which is why they require the support of UK staff.
6. IOM will provide the medical facilities for the deployment. WHO will provide drugs. UK EMT will provide a specialised clinical team, clinical oversight, some key medical equipment not available in country, and accommodation and transport for staff.
7. Following the request for international assistance by the World Health Organisation on 15 December, a UK EMT team travelled to Bangladesh to conduct an emergency assessment, and recommended the deployment of the EMT.
8. Staff will be rotated out of Cox's Bazaar after three weeks, to ensure they remain fresh. Staff will have a diphtheria booster injection before deployment and will then be at minimal risk of contracting the disease.
9. The International Development Secretary visited Cox's Bazar in November 2017, where she announced extra UK aid for the humanitarian crisis, providing urgently needed food now and ensuring more lives are not put at risk when international funding starts to run out in February 2018. This brings the UK's total humanitarian support to £59 million since 25 August 2017.
10. Free-to-use video content is available to download here.

Press release: UK welcomes important prisoner exchange in the conflict in eastern Ukraine

The prisoner exchange between Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatist is an important development, and is a welcome step towards meeting the commitments all sides have made under the Minsk Agreements.

An FCO spokesperson said:

> The UK welcomes the exchange of over 300 prisoners between Ukraine and the Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine. The release of prisoners is a commitment which Ukraine, Russia and the Russian-backed separatists signed up to as part of the Minsk Agreements to resolve the conflict in eastern Ukraine.
>
> We hope that all sides use this positive development to make progress on their remaining commitments under the Minsk Agreements, beginning with all sides adhering to the ceasefire; engaging cooperatively to reduce the humanitarian suffering of civilians on both sides of the line of contact; and Russia withdrawing its weapons and personnel from eastern Ukraine.
>
> The UK is grateful to all those who mediated this agreement, including the Trilateral Contact Group, the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Further information

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Press release: Logging on to festive admin

While over 7 million people tuned into the Queen’s Speech on Christmas day,

figures show that thousands of people also logged on to DVLA’s online services to stay on top of their admin.

From taxing cars to buying personalised registrations, people chose to log on to DVLA’s online services on 25 December 2017.

So, as well as the 10 million turkeys eaten and the thousands of people who took part in a sea swim, on Christmas day this year…

Oliver Morley, Chief Executive of DVLA said:

> Giving customers choice in how, where and when they use our services is at the heart of what we do. We are committed to creating digital services that meet the needs of our customers and clearly, these services are allowing people the opportunity to fit their admin into their lifestyle – 365 days a year.

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