

**Home Office Call for Evidence: Exchange of sexual relations for accommodation (sex for rent)**

**Response from Propertymark**

**May 2023**

**Background**

1. Propertymark is the UK's leading professional body for estate and letting agents, inventory providers, commercial agents, auctioneers and valuers, comprising over 17,000 members. We are member-led with a Board which is made up of practicing agents and we work closely with our members to set professional standards through regulation, accredited and recognised qualifications, an industry-leading training programme and mandatory Continuing Professional Development.<sup>1</sup>

**Overview**

2. The Home Office's call for evidence seeks the views of those that have been directly engaged in a sex for rent arrangement, whether they engaged in it in an informed and consensual way or whether they were deceived, coerced or compelled into it. It also seeks the views of statutory agencies, law enforcement, the violence against women and girls' sector and internet companies that allow the posting of advertisements for accommodation.

**Sex for rent arrangements, including how they are facilitated and what they involve.**

3. Propertymark believes the exchange of sexual relations for accommodation, or sex for rent, is an abhorrent practice and every effort should be made to stop this practice. The overwhelming vast majority of landlords who operate in the Private Rented Sector (PRS), are good and provide housing accommodation for a variety of people for a fair financial return. However, there is a small proportion of rogue and criminal landlords who do not adhere to these principles and exploit their tenants. We strongly believe that any landlords who do this should be charged under the Sexual Offences Act<sup>2</sup>, dealt with accordingly with criminal proceedings and banned from operating in the PRS for the future.
4. It is highly likely that those landlords who engage in such practices also engage in other illegal practices such as prostitution, human trafficking, and activity in county lines. Likewise, they are

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.propertymark.co.uk/>

<sup>2</sup> [Sexual Offences Act 2003 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2003/32/section/75)

likely to have little or no regard to the health and safety requirements that landlords must adhere to such as ensuring their properties are not overcrowded<sup>3</sup>, and meet the requirements of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (England) Regulations.<sup>4</sup>

**The reasons why those who may be victims of crime do not report cases and the impact it has on them.**

5. A survey from Shelter England found that that 250,000 women in the UK had been offered free or reduced rent for sexual favours over a five-year period.<sup>5</sup> Victims of sex for rent are likely to be some of the most marginalised people in society. With the demand of social housing far outstripping supply, and similar supply and demand issues in private housing, some tenants may feel under pressure to comply due to the fear of losing their home. Some victims might also have vulnerabilities themselves including engaging in drug and alcohol misuse or sex work which might prove to be a perceived barrier in engaging with the police for fear they could be arrested. Furthermore, the first prosecution of a landlord who engaged in sex for rent, targeted homeless females as a 'route out of homelessness' in return for household chores and sex. The impact on victims is likely to have an adverse effect on their mental and physical health. They are also likely to become even more marginalised and less likely to use support services such as welfare and benefits, access healthcare as well as employment and education. Subsequently, their dependence on such landlords is likely to increase where they become reliant on them and would put them in further danger and jeopardy.

**whether existing measures to prevent or detect these crimes are effective**

6. Currently sex for rent is prohibited under the Sexual Offences Act. However, we support the UK Government in their aim in making specific legislation to tackle this issue. We also believe that specific measures are required to tackle sex for rent:
  - Firstly, local authorities need sufficient resources to enforcement standards in the PRS. Currently there is a postcode lottery where some local authorities do not have the resources to check the condition of properties, and this allows rogue landlords to operate carte blanche. As we have already addressed, there is likely to be a synergy between poor housing conditions and offering sex for rent.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1985/68/part/X/crossheading/definition-of-overcrowding>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/3208/contents/made>

<sup>5</sup> [Sex for rent - at last! | Property Surveying](#)

- Secondly, when local authorities do carry out PRS inspections, there needs to be a clear referral route where local authority enforcement officers can refer sex for rent cases and other illegal activity to the police. However, sex for rent will not be tackled by local authority inspections alone especially as most landlords who engage in this practice are likely to be difficult to monitor as they do not operate as a traditional landlord and are likely to be simply people with a spare bedroom.
  - Thirdly, the problem needs to be tackled at source. Responsible property platforms that advertise property for rent would not allow adverts for sex for rent. However, some of the less regulated website platforms may allow these types of adverts or take a while to take them down. Online adverts for sex for rent must be strictly prohibited and taken down as soon as possible.
  - Fourthly, while Propertymark members would not engage in such activity, property agents working in the field may be aware of criminal landlords who do engage in sex for rent. We would be very happy to share some key messages to our members on spotting the signs of landlords who do engage in this practice and what to do if they suspect a landlord does this.
7. In conclusion, Propertymark would be very happy to continue to engage with the Home Office to act as a conduit to our membership in raising awareness of issues and sharing key messages to eliminate the practice of sex for rent.