

THE CASE FOR LANDLORD TRAINING

By **Graham Kinnear**

I was recently reading about a case where three landlords of property in Cambridge were fined around £8,000 after a number of their HMOs were found to be unlicensed.

The article stated that an inspection of the first house was carried out after a review of council records in February this year. It found that the property was housing five tenants and had been operating on an unlicensed basis since 2018, meaning it was potentially unsafe for the tenants living there.

In July the landlords were issued with a Financial Penalty Notice for the offence, totalling just under £2,000. An inspection of the second house found it was housing seven tenants and this one had been unlicensed since 2014. Again a fine was issued, this time around £3,500. After an inspection of a third property, similarly unlicensed, another fine of around £2,500 was issued.

More interesting to me than the level of the fines was that in this instance, when the council subsequently issued licences for their properties, the licences contained an additional condition that required the landlord to undertake recognised landlord training within a six-month period.

I wondered to myself what constituted recognised landlord training and further contemplated how many landlords that I know have undertaken any formal training in property letting and management. Furthermore, I wondered how many undertake any ongoing formal learning that could constitute Continuous Professional Development (CPD) as is required in so many other professions.

Based on the Landlord Q&A events that I host monthly throughout the year, I know there are landlords operating throughout the country whose knowledge could be hugely augmented by some additional training and qualifications.

Indeed, everyone will benefit from ongoing CPD. There is continually changing legislation and requirements relating to fire precaution, thermal requirements of buildings, and tenant eviction, to name but a few. What have you got in place to ensure your knowledge is kept up to date?

Whilst I acknowledge that the Rent Smart Wales system requires all landlords to be accredited, there is no such provision in England. Some landlords I know have undertaken a one-day accreditation course to avail themselves of cheaper selective licence fees, but there is no wholesale requirement for training and competence for landlords, and certainly no requirement for ongoing learning to keep abreast of changing legislation and best practice. Whilst better than nothing, I believe a one-day course is completely inadequate to equip a landlord with all that they need to know.

Being of the opinion that education is never wasted, I would like to urge you all to further your learning within our industry. Who knows, if we all held a minimum level of technical knowledge and an understanding of its practical application, then the public's view of us could start to change to a more positive one. Being optimistic, we could even see some support for our operations from some of the housing charities.

Encouraged by this idea, I researched what courses are available. Most prominent on an internet search were the NRLA who appear to offer courses on, amongst others, repairs, ending a tenancy, property standards and HMO Licensing. Indeed, some of their HMO courses appear to be local authority specific and could therefore be very helpful if you operate or are considering operating this strategy.

NFOPP (The National Federation of Property Professionals) provide technical awards in

respect of letting and management, and whilst perhaps more suited to the role of a letting agent or property manager, could provide you with enhanced skills and understanding. In fact, these courses are some that I can speak about with some experience, as I have previously written and delivered training for NFOPP.

I also found the Guild of Residential Landlords, who provide a course entitled Private Rented Sector Accreditation Scheme.

Many commentators in our industry believe that the government's desire is to drive out the small private landlord and allow a more open playing field for the larger firms, as this will assist in regulation.

Why not play them at their own game by getting better qualified and overhauling your operation to be a more service-focused version of the big firms? Hold professional indemnity insurance, adopt a complaints procedure and implement thorough, compliant and transparent services for your tenants, all with the reassurance that all of your team have achieved a given professional standard.

By professionalising what we do, we should be able to get the profession of being a landlord to be held in higher regard, tenants will receive a uniformly better service and the government may then take the view that further enforced regulation of our sector is no longer required.

Regardless, the learning should be enjoyable and rewarding and it will doubtless have a positive impact on you and your business.

As always, I am happy to assist YPN readers and can be contacted on 01843 583000 or graham@grahamkinnear.com

