

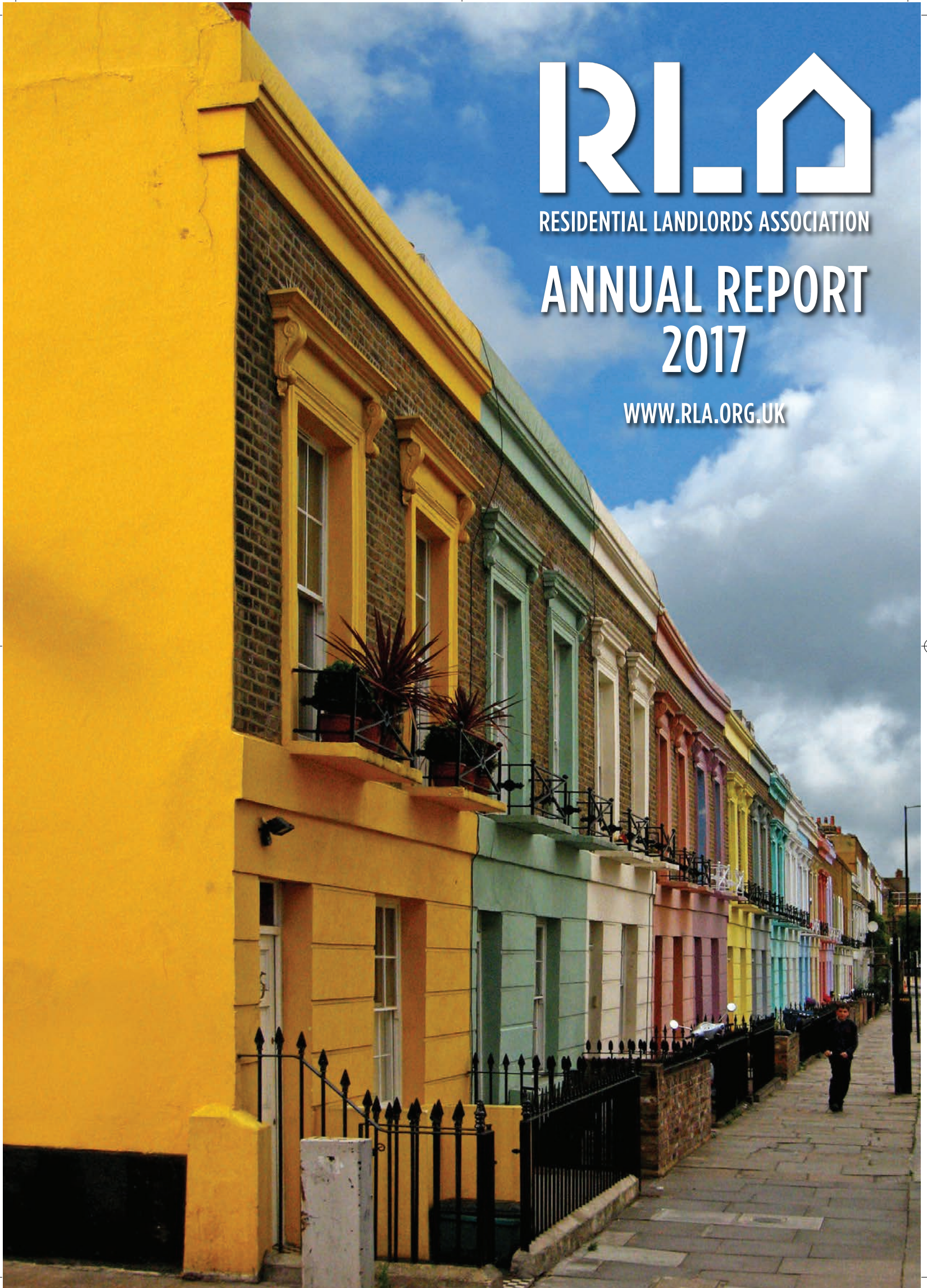


RLA

RESIDENTIAL LANDLORDS ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2017

WWW.RLA.ORG.UK



Letter from the Chairman



I am delighted to report that, once again, your association is going from strength to strength. As we enter our 20th year membership is continuing to grow, as is revenue which is, in turn, being reinvested in improving services for you, our members.

In the last 12 months we have swelled the number of advisers available on our helpline to guide you on your journey through the complex landscape of the PRS, with our experts taking more than 45,000 calls, as well as adding a live chat service.

We have also established our own research centre, RLA PEARL, to provide Government the evidence it demands to back up our arguments – something that is vital if we are to change hearts and minds in Westminster, Cardiff and town halls.

As ever, you, as landlords, continue to be bombarded by increasing regulation, nationally and locally.

The Housing and Planning Act received Royal Assent in 2017, with the Tenants Fees Bill, banning agents from charging fees and capping deposits, also announced.

Campaigning

With the Government's eagerly awaited Housing White Paper released in February failing to deliver the radical changes promised for the PRS, we ramped up our campaigning on the issue of Mortgage Interest Relief.

In all more than 500 of you sent letters to your MPs, with 100 of you asking for the opportunity to meet them to discuss the impact of the changes on you and your business.

And while we are unable yet to change the Government's mind on MIR – despite this mammoth effort by our members – the year has not been without its successes.

We saw some significant wins in 2017, not least in terms of welfare reform.

Chancellor Philip Hammond announced a raft of changes to the way the Universal Credit is administered following years of campaigning by the RLA, including much work behind the scenes with the DWP.

These include moves to make it easier for claimants to have the housing element of their award paid directly to their landlord – an issue the RLA has been particularly vocal on.

A new system to help first-time buyers ensure their history of meeting rental payments on time is recognised in credit scores and mortgage applications – championed by ourselves – also received

Government backing.

And one of our key election asks, for a new housing court, was also backed by the Government.

Tragedy

It is impossible to talk about 2017 without mentioning the devastating blaze at Grenfell Tower that cost so many lives.

The RLA has led the response from the PRS in the wake of the tragedy and continues to put pressure on the authorities for a comprehensive overhaul of fire safety regulations, regardless of tenure.

We will continue to campaign on this issue.

Confidence

Trustpilot reviews, giving us an average of four out of five stars in 2017, show you value highly the service you receive and have confidence in the association, with our work reaching an ever-increasing audience.


There were more than 1.5 million visits to our website last year and almost a quarter of a million visits to our news pages, with the RLA making headlines across print and broadcast media.

Reflecting the move to eLearning we trained more landlords online than ever before last year, with exciting plans to develop our offer further in 2018.

November saw us host our first Future Renting conference in Cardiff. The inaugural event in our new conference programme welcomed Welsh housing minister Rebecca Evans as the keynote speaker and saw more than 200 landlords and agents gather to discuss the future direction of the sector.

Challenging

While these are and will continue to be challenging times for PRS landlords we want you to be confident that the RLA is there, on the frontline, fighting for a fair deal for you, our members, as part of our bid to make renting better for all.

As always, I would like to thank all my colleagues at the RLA for their hard work over the last 12 months. My email address is below, and I welcome any comments or information you would like to send my way. 

Alan Ward

Chairman, Residential Landlords Association

alan.ward@rla.org.uk

Summer 2018

Finance

In 2017 we recorded 11.3% annual growth and maintained high levels of retention.

The RLA has had its strongest financial year yet with record levels of income as membership continues to grow.

The growth of the RLA over the past few years continues with:

- Membership growing by 11.3% between 2016/17
- Income increasing by 8.5%

The financial success of the RLA is down to our ability to provide the services you need, and we have been particularly pleased with the contribution from our training department, with more than 2,600 of you benefitting from our courses.

The strong financial performance allows us to continue to invest in further improving the RLA.

In 2017 we saw significant investment in our landlord advice team and the introduction of the 'Live Chat' service and a new eLearning platform.

Training

In 2017 we trained a total of 2,677 landlords and agents and have continued with the development of the online learning offer.

Our online training scored four out of five stars in our annual survey and 94% of you believed that the online training had provided you with valuable advice and information.

New courses have been created and we have invested in a new eLearning system due to launch mid 2018 which will vastly improve the accessibility of our online courses.

Our new system will be able to be used on more devices than before, allowing you more options when it comes to accessing courses.

It will also allow landlords, agents and local authorities who

have bought courses for their employees the ability to monitor their progress.

The custom built system is easier to navigate, has a more attractive layout and more content delivery options. We have introduced eight new topics to our library of courses (see box overleaf) and continue to write more content for further new courses in 2018.

The introduction of eLearning is allowing us to create shorter, more bitesize content which can really focus in on specific topics, such as

Section 21. Our classroom courses are still well attended by those who prefer a face to face approach.

We pride ourselves on the expert advice delivered at our classroom courses and 85% of members rated the trainer's knowledge as above average or excellent.

We have spent time reaching out to more organisations such as local authorities to provide them with in-house training.

This enables us to create more bespoke learning based on their individual requirements.

LANDLORD ADVICE TEAM



Growing from six to 10 members, plus manager, the Landlord Advice Team managed to maintain a high level of service with 95 out of every 100 callers talking to an adviser when they called, rather than being asked to leave a message.

The Landlord Advice Team responded to 54,702 enquiries from members, including 45,437 calls to the helpline, up 15% on the previous year.

In addition to the calls there were 1,049 email enquiries. The advice team also introduced a new service, Live Chat, which allows you to talk to advisers through online instant messages as well as providing support by email.

Over the 12-month period, 8,216 of you used the new service, currently available Monday – Friday between 10am – 6pm.

As always, there has been a strong focus on training the advice team to keep staff abreast of all the changes affecting the private rented sector, whilst retaining the support of the senior adviser and experienced solicitors and consultants for more complex queries.

Policy

In the spring of 2017, the Government published its Housing White Paper.

While the focus was on boosting home ownership and increasing supply, it also set the tone for the Government's engagement with the private rented sector – support for build-to-rent and further regulation of independent private landlords and measures to help tenants with issues of affordability and security.

The Housing and Planning Act received Royal Assent, paving the way for civil penalties, the extension of rent repayment orders, a register of 'rogue' landlords and banning orders.

With the first phase of mortgage interest relief restrictions due to start in April, we launched a campaign urging you to contact your local MP to ask for a meeting to discuss the impact of the changes.

Almost 2,000 of you were contacted by telephone, with more than 500 letters sent to MPs as a result – with 100 of you requesting a meeting with your local MP.

This was quickly overtaken by the calling of a snap general election,

NEW COURSES

New courses in 2017 included:

- Agents Principles of Lettings
- Agents Principles of Lettings (eLearning)
- Complete Fire Safety
- Foundation Fire Safety (eLearning)
- Section 21 (eLearning)
- Antisocial Behaviour (eLearning)
- Becoming a Landlord (eLearning)
- Managing Rent Arrears (eLearning)

Membership up 11.3% in 2017
Income up 8.5% in 2017
Profits up 2,268% since 2012
2,600+ courses taken
246,351 article views

as the Conservatives sought to capitalise on their large lead in the opinion polls.

The RLA was quick off the mark, producing a six-point manifesto calling for:

- Tax policies to support growth in the sector to meet rising demand
- Justice reform to speed up court processes
- A fairer welfare system
- Effective enforcement rather than new regulations
- Support for landlords to improve the energy efficiency of their properties
- A deposit trust for tenants to cut the upfront cost of renting.

We also encouraged you to contact your local candidates during the election – and 1,800 candidates received an email from you through our election campaign centre.

However, two of our planned hustings meetings were cancelled following the horrific terrorist attack on the Manchester Arena, as campaigning was rightly suspended.

Another surprising result was delivered, with the slender Conservative majority of 2015 wiped out, as the Conservative stumbled short of the winning line.

One of the casualties was the Housing Minister, Gavin Barwell, who popped up soon after as Chief of Staff at Number 10.

Election analysis showed the growing number of private renters had decisively backed Labour, giving new impetus to tenant-friendly policies and measures to help people on the housing ladder.

Proposals to abolish fees charged to tenants by agents and landlords were quickly confirmed, while Communities Secretary Sajid Javid used the Conservative Party conference to announce further measures, including compulsory redress scheme membership for landlords, agent regulation including client money protection and, in a nod to the RLA manifesto, a consultation on a specialist housing court.

The Grenfell Tower tragedy dominated the summer news and has led to two inquiries.

One is looking directly at the causes of the fire and the official response, while the other, led by Dame Judith Hackitt is looking at building and fire safety regulations.

The RLA has led the private rented sector response, calling for a simplification of regulations and clarity in responsibility for fire safety in residential buildings.

We are also working hard to bring together the relevant lenders, freeholders and Government in seeking a solution to the cost of ongoing emergency safety in affected high rise blocks and the cost of removal and replacement of

unsafe cladding.

The RLA was reappointed to provide the secretariat to the APPG for the Private Rented Sector and in September Chairman Alan Ward met with then housing minister Alok Sharma.

The RLA also hosted a fringe event at the Conservative Party Conference in Manchester.

Questions centred on regulation, mortgage interest relief, short term lets and their threat to the sector, build to rent, landlord training and homelessness, with speakers including Kevin Hollinrake MP, Vice Chairman of the APPG for the PRS.

The Autumn Budget saw no movement on landlord taxation, but there was some success on welfare reform.

Landlords have been increasingly reluctant to let to tenants claiming benefits, especially following the roll-out of Universal Credit.

A number of key changes, called for by the RLA were announced, although there remains much work to do to restore landlord confidence.

As the deadline for implementing minimum energy efficiency standards in private rented property approached, we secured the first ever Affordable Warmth funding ring-fenced for private rented properties through a partnership with EON.

We also persuaded the Government to cut the proposed cost cap on energy efficiency measures from £5,000 to £2,500.

It was also a busy year at local government level.

We relaunched our Local Authority Network, taking a more member-focused approach.

Every local authority in England and Wales has its own page with basic information such as licensing, whilst member authority pages also contain local news and

information on events.

We responded to more than 30 licensing and article 4 direction consultations over the year, with three councils ultimately rejecting licensing.

We have continued to meet with ministers and shadow ministers, civil servants and regional government representatives and officials, respond to consultations and submit evidence to inquiries and committees.

The private rented sector continues to be an extremely challenging and ever-changing environment for private landlords and the RLA is working harder than ever to keep you up to date, challenge bad policy and represent your interests.

Wales



The last few years have been a time of great change in Wales, with the introduction of the Rent Smart Wales registration and licensing scheme and the Renting Homes Act.

Membership in Wales continued to grow in 2017, driven by further changes being brought in under the Renting Homes Act and the implications of C4 powers, allowing councils to limit HMO numbers.

The year began with the news that Wales was to receive new tax powers from Westminster, meaning that for the first time in over 800 years, Wales would set its own tax, Land Transaction Tax, the Welsh equivalent of stamp duty.

In February we revealed the Open Doors project, promoting equality and diversity in the Welsh PRS, to be delivered by the RLA, had been awarded a quarter of a million



Help on hand

With all the changes in the letting world over the last five years it is so reassuring to be able to pick up the phone and check with someone before making changes. Also, to have access to all the forms you need is really useful. The weekly email updates also make sure you don't miss anything new brought in. I would recommend to anyone. Even if it's one property you let out it is worth joining.

Julie

A must for serious landlords

I think if you want to perform your role as a landlord seriously and keep yourself updated with matters relating to renting and letting, then the RLA is a must.

Mr Miller

It's the best decision...

It's the best decision I've made in a long time. The yearly subscription, I feel, has already paid for itself (joined less than a month ago). I've had quite a few issues that all happened at the same time. The info and docs on the website have been a godsend. I've needed to phone several times and the staff have always been very knowledgeable and genuinely understanding and helpful of my queries. They are so on point legally, it makes me feel reassured that I'm doing the right thing. How did I ever manage without them? I wish I'd signed up years ago. My business feels more organised and relaxed. Well done and thank you. I also like how they are active in bringing about changes to the law which improves and helps to protect good landlords as well as tenants.

Sharon

pound lottery grant, with the project already making a difference on the ground by the end of the year.

Following the Grenfell Tower tragedy RLA Director for Wales Douglas Haig was appointed to the Welsh Fire Safety Advisory Group that advised the Housing Minister on fire safety.

This saw him attend high level meetings with RICS and UK Finance to try to ensure owners of flats in blocks could still sell their properties where they had failed cladding tests.

We saw the first prosecutions under the Rent Smart Wales scheme, and consultations launched into plans to ban tenants' fees charged by agents and the implementation of the Fitness for Human Habitation requirements for rented homes.

We attended all the party conferences.

At the Conservative conference we gained a lot of support around the issue of mortgage interest relief and at the Plaid Cymru conference there was an understanding for our housing court proposals and why change was needed.

2017 also saw the untimely death of the Welsh Government's Secretary for Communities and Children Carl Sargeant and subsequent appointment of Rebecca Evans as Minister for Housing and Regeneration.

Rebecca was the keynote speaker at the RLA's inaugural conference, Future Renting Wales in Cardiff in November 2017.

The conference was a huge success with more than 200 property professionals attending to listen to expert speakers and discuss the future direction of the sector in the wake of huge regulatory changes.

The conference hashtag

RESEARCH



In August 2017, we launched the Private renting Evidence, Analysis & Research Lab or PEARL for short.

PEARL was established to provide credible and impactful research on the economic, social and political issues facing the sector.

Since the launch of PEARL, we have been able to publish high-profile research reports that have received significant political and media attention.

This is enabling the RLA to become the first point of call for evidence on the private rented sector, increasing the number of debates in which we are referenced in Westminster, and opening doors to Government departments and MPs.

We have commissioned more research projects than before, commissioning academics from Manchester Metropolitan University to investigate the underlying causes of homelessness from the end of an AST, and a team from Sheffield Hallam University to understand the impact of policy changes on letting to under 35s.

The evidence and research we commissioned on Universal Credit was presented to the DWP Select Committee by our senior policy officer, Natalie Williamson and has enabled significant changes to be secured to the roll out of Universal Credit.

Our research has also gained interest from stakeholders from across the UK, with our senior researcher, Dr Tom Simcock, being invited to present our evidence on Universal Credit to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

With our research, we will continue to inform policy-makers, ensuring they have robust and up-to-date evidence on the issues affecting the sector and challenging the myths about private landlords.

Our continued innovative work in the years beyond will build upon the foundations we have laid for evidence-based policy-making.

#FutureRenting17 reached first position, trending in Cardiff on twitter during the day.

A second Welsh conference is now planned in autumn 2018.

Marketing

The performance of the website continues to improve with more than 1.5 million sessions and a 38% increase of visits from mobile devices in 2017.

The increase in visits from

mobile devices is encouraging and shows we made the right decision to move to a responsive website back in July 2016.

We have also improved our email marketing and have worked on audience targeting, to reduce the number of emails you receive.

As a result, we have seen open rates improve by 4.84% and click through rates improve by 3.45%, as well as a drop in unsubscribe

rates across all communications. In 2017, we also negotiated tax protection insurance cover, working with insurance partner Rentguard.

At no extra cost, all full members are now insured against HMRC enquiries, reviews, interventions and audits.

We also launched our energy efficiency funding partnership with E.ON, City Energy and Eco-Energi. £1.5 million was secured specifically for you by E.ON, giving eligible members access to funding to bring their properties up to the minimum energy efficiency Standards (MEES) with other grants and finance options also available.

Communications

We published 435 articles on the RLA's Campaigns and News Centre site in 2017, a 31% increase on the 299 posts in 2016.

These articles attracted 246,351 page views throughout the year, again up, by a total of 13% on the previous year.

We also increased the number of people visiting the site from social media – up to 22,541 in 2017 – a 67% increase.

In terms of social media, our twitter following increased from 19,450 to 21,710 an 11% rise.

The number of Facebook followers went up from 4,044 to 4,558, an increase of 12%.

The number of Facebook likes also went up from 4,172 to 4,624, an increase of 10%.

Alongside this there was also an increase in the number of journalists contacting the RLA directly for comment on housing issues.

Indeed, the number of times the RLA was mentioned in the press, be that national, regional or trade increased by 22% in 2017 when

compared with the 2016 figure, from 1,496 in 2016 to 1,831 in 2017.

Throughout 2017 the RLA's campaigning and research work secured coverage in key broadcast media including Sky News, Newsnight, the BBC's Sunday Politics, BBC News, BBC Fivelive, BBC Radio 4 and the BBC's Victoria Derbyshire Show, as well as national newspapers including the Telegraph, the Times, the Guardian, the Independent, the Mirror and the Daily Mail.

We also provided first person opinion pieces for media including The Times, The Daily Mail, The Telegraph, The I, the New Statesman, 24 Housing, City AM, Conservative Home, Lib Dem Voice, Yorkshire Post and the Oxford Mail


Our work is also having an influence in Parliament, with the RLA referenced in the Commons and Lords 35 times in 2017.

Residential Property Investor was consistently produced to a 48-page template during Sally Walmsley's first year as editor, with preparations behind the scenes for a relaunch in early 2018.

Conclusion

2017 was a busy year for the RLA, with 2018 offering further challenges as MIR changes begin to bite and new regulations are introduced, affecting everything from HMOs to Section 21.

We are making progress. Through hard work, determined campaigning and solid research we are being listened to in the corridors of power and are bringing about positive changes for you.

The growing number of landlords and agents turning to us for advice, information, education, representation and protection is testament to these successes and our commitment to making renting better for all. 



Simple, Clear, Decisive

I called the RLA Advice Line with a couple of questions. The advice given was simple, clear, and decisive. There was no wishy-washiness, which I have experienced in the past from other advice lines. It was a pleasure to be able to talk to someone who knew what he was talking about and leaving me in no doubt as to my position as a landlord.

Judith

Great advice and support

The RLA offered me great advice when I had questions about changing an AST that had started a few months back. They were knowledgeable, approachable, and provided all the documentation I needed. As a result, I was confident I could move forward ensuring I protected myself, thinking of all that is involved in amendments to ASTs. I'm glad I'm a member of the RLA! Thank you.

Michela

Excellent service

Have called RLA three times over the last couple of weeks for advice on several things. Each of my questions were answered fully by people who obviously knew what they were talking about. When I didn't fully understand it was explained again. Am very glad I joined.

Jane

A difficult tenant...

Dealing with a difficult tenant who decided he didn't want to pay rent any more. Easy access to the right advice has ensured I use the correct process to gain possession quickly.

Fiona



The home for landlords



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