



Thousands of pensioners 'could lose their homes' as charity bosses warn of crisis

Low-rent housing provided for more than 37,000 people, but landlords are under threat

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Thousands of **older people** could lose their homes as **charity** landlords struggle to cope with new fees. Those at risk include more than 37,000 people living in properties known as almshouses, which provide low-rent homes for life. Most are retirees on low incomes.

The Almshouse Association, which represents 1,600 charities, has issued a plea for the Government to offer more support. Chief executive Nick Phillips said: "The impact will be that over time our almshouse providers will diminish. They won't be able to afford to keep going."

A key concern is a licensing system designed to target poor landlords in the private sector. Councils can now require landlords to pay hundreds of pounds for each property, with costs higher for homes shared by more than one household.

However, the fees also apply to almshouse charities, some of which have been operating for hundreds of years. Many are small, local charities providing housing and other forms of support to older people on low incomes, and have little money to spare.

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Costs vary but the London Borough of Wandsworth charges £1,647 for a three-bedroom property every five years.

Almshouses have to pay the fees, known as selective licensing, because they are not included in the official definition of “affordable housing”, unlike housing authorities and council housing. This also means the charities are ineligible for sources of funding such as money paid by private housing developers to support local communities, in what are known as Section 106 agreements.

Some of the charities were set up to help people from specific professions, such as retired miners, fishermen or shop staff. They typically provide purpose-built flats and bungalows designed to allow older people to retain their independence as long as possible, with facilities such as disabled access, sophisticated alarms and storage for buggies. Some do not have age restrictions and house people such as armed forces veterans and their families.

Mr Phillips said: “They face the biggest threat for many years. The Government is bringing in legislation which is absolutely right in many ways, but the way they see it, you are either in social housing, such as a housing association, or renting privately. The thousands of charities, who don’t just provide housing but also a caring environment, have been completely missed.”