

# Licensing call to protect letting agents

By Dan Raywood

The Association of Residential Letting Agents (ARLA) has called for licensing for all letting agents to protect against estate agents using the sector as a survival mechanism.

Speaking at ARLA's annual conference, outgoing president, Robert Jordan, has pleaded for licensing rather than regulation in the sector, claiming such a scheme would stop insufficiently qualified estate agents from operating in lettings during the continuing downturn in the property market.

Jordan said: "Unqualified agents, together with amateur investor landlords, are responsible for the majority of problems

in the private rented sector. The missing link is that government should bite the bullet and licence all lettings agents and landlords.

"The professional bodies have the resources and the ability to licence all lettings agents. Such a scheme does not have to cost the government anything."

Jordan also delivered a stark warning to the incoming Housing Minister, Caroline Flint, and Prime Minister Gordon Brown, regarding regulatory overkill in the private rented sector.



Robert Jordan,  
outgoing president,  
Association of  
Residential Lettings  
Agents

He claimed that there was implementation of small pieces of legislation that were added by the government, which were not arduous but made for 'cumbersome administration'. This, Jordan believed, would 'drive responsible landlords out of the market' and further damage the sector's reputation.

Jordan said: "One step too far on the legislative bandwagon and you will kill off the private rented sector. The government's own figures may suggest that there are over half a million landlords in the private rented sector but the market can-

not afford to lose any of them, particularly in troubled times."

Roger Southam, chief executive of property management firm Chainbow, said that the regulation of agents was essential if the industry wanted to promote a professional image. "Managing agents are handling billions of pounds of individuals' money through their service charge, yet there is no requirement for them to have any qualifications or professional affiliations with regulatory bodies or regimes."

Southam added: "The regulation of agents to protect tenants and investors is essential if we want the residential private rented sector to become a truly mainstream asset class."