

## **How can we use open data to help people get the best out of renting**

As a competition, the NESTA / ODI challenge has at its heart 20 million potential beneficiaries in the UK, about half of whom live in the private rented sector and about 5 million people each in either council or housing association accommodation.

Don't worry, you don't have to help all of them at once! We've commissioned user research to explore the challenges different renters have on their experiences. We're interested in any ideas that meet a need, use open data, and can be funded sustainably.

You might have an idea of how to help renters with disabilities, or those living in specialist Ministry of Defence accommodation. Your idea might be about improving maintenance or about how you engage people more closely in their community. Your idea might be about combatting isolation among older renters.

And then there's data. Open data is information available to everyone to use without cost. We have collected a range of data sets, mainly from government departments and non-departmental bodies, and we're looking for more. Our challenge requires you to use one or more open data sets in your entry. But you can use other data too, whether that be semi restricted data, user generated data or even commercial data (as long as you have an agreement to use it).

We've collected a range of data sets for your use but you are not limited to these. We've focused on housing data but you might want to use crime statistics or school performance tables.

But what if you don't know the first thing about making databases or websites? That's the joy of this competition. All you need is an idea and some enthusiasm. We're actively encouraging people who know about housing to enter and we'll network you with a team of data and web experts. All you have to do is turn up with your knowledge and expertise and an open mind.

### **Existing open data projects in the renter space**

As a competition we're looking for innovations and that means we don't want to create competitors to existing projects. Here's a few of the projects we've seen and heard about. They're not all 100% live but are almost there if they are not.

Spareroom

[www.spareroom.co.uk](http://www.spareroom.co.uk)

Open data: Geolocation

For letting out spare rooms and finding flatmates

[www.movebubble.com](http://www.movebubble.com)

Open data: Geolocation

Rental finding site with references of tenants, landlords and contractors.

[www.flatchecker.com](http://www.flatchecker.com)

Open data: Geolocation, licensing data

For finding a place to live, while checking the licensing status and professional memberships of the landlord.

[www.locatable.com](http://www.locatable.com)

Open data: Geolocation

For helping house sharers to manage their finances together

[www.rentalraters.com](http://www.rentalraters.com)

Open data: Geolocation

A site for logging references of a landlord

[www.fixflo.com](http://www.fixflo.com)

Open data: Geolocation

For logging maintenance requests

## **Emerging ideas**

What's clear from the projects that already exist is that there's a bigger commercial push for products in the private rented sector. It's also clear that most of them are using geolocation data but there isn't a great deal of exploitation of other data sources. We're looking for a range of ideas, not all focused on the private rented sector. Here's some thoughts that have emerged so far.

### Gay friendly

Often, when LGBT people move house they temporarily go "back into the closet" while they assess how comfortable they are in their new community. Could an app be developed where tenants could declare their estates "gay friendly" and push this data out to websites like Rightmove and Sparreroom? Could similar products be created for other minorities who sometimes feel under threat? Alternatively, could you strip out gay hate crime stats and plot them against location to find out where LGBT tenants might be most safe?

### Isolated

Is there a way open data could be used to facilitate neighbours finding opportunities to help those who are isolated? Could this be done in a way that respected people's security, while combatting the loneliness of some people in their old age?

### Landlord reference

Should tenants be able to check a landlord's reference before letting a property? Can Courts Service data be used to find a landlord's history of prosecutions before you move into their home?

### How nice?

If you're thinking of moving, could there be a "how nice is the area" app? The user could rate each factor in order of importance to them, eg schools, healthcare, crime stats etc, and the app could generate a list of locations that best suit them, potentially by house price value.

### PRS finder

A simple system for helping local authorities find PRS homes that are not compliant with deposit protection and other Laws, using deposit protection and OS data. Council uploads a list of all households in the authority to the system, having first deleted any address where the council tax and voter registration information are both complete and have not changed for 3 years. The system then returns the list to the Council having deleted any address where there is a deposit protected. The remaining list is highly likely to be a list of PRS properties where tenants don't have protected deposits and

where other legal standards are also not being met. OS data would be used to present the info to councils in a geographically relevant manner.

#### Hidden fees

Letting agents are obliged to publish their fees on their website and in their offices. However, another underfunded council department, trading standards, is responsible for enforcing this. Could you use open data, perhaps companies house data, to track agents who flout the law and provide a reporting service for tenants to alert their trading standards officers?

#### Alternative homes

A number of organisations exist that provide housing options outside the standard buy or rent model. There are housing associations who offer shared ownership or shared equity homes, community land trusts offering affordable rentals and housing co-operatives where you might own a stake in your whole community. There's even an innovative housebuilder called [www.gentooogroup.com](http://www.gentooogroup.com) offering to sell you a share of your home each month as part of your rent, without ever needing a deposit. Could you build something that would map these alternative housing options as homes become available?

#### Whatever you do...

- 1. Make sure you're addressing a real problem and delivering some beneficial social impact. Check out our user research for some thoughts of where the problems might be or search for other research that has been conducted to evidence the problem.**
- 2. Be innovative.**
- 3. Use open data. The more you use the better. And if you use better quality open data that is even better. Projects that have open data at their heart will be preferred of those for which it is peripheral. It OK, in fact good, if you find a new data set that can be opened, for example through a Freedom of Information Act request.**
- 4. Think about the financial sustainability. It could be a fee to the user, or a grant from a funder, or even a profit making awards night once a year – but your proposal for how the project can be sustained financially must be credible.**