

Article

Private rental growth measures, a UK comparison: July to September 2019

Compares growth in the Index of Private Housing Rental Prices (IPHRP) with other measures of private rental growth.

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1 . Introduction

The [Index of Private Housing Rental Prices](#) (IPHRP) measures the change in price of renting residential property from private landlords. The same private rent price indices are also used for the rental equivalence measure of owner occupiers' housing costs (OOH) in [Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs](#) (CPIH).

Superficially, there can be considerable difference between the Office for National Statistics's (ONS's) measures of rents (the IPHRP and OOH) and comparable indicators from the private sector. However, once adjustments are made for differences in what the indices are measuring, the Office for National Statistics's (ONS's) measures of rents are more closely aligned with the other sources of rental prices. This article is part of a series that explains the reason for these differences in more detail.

2 . Comparing our rents data and private sector data

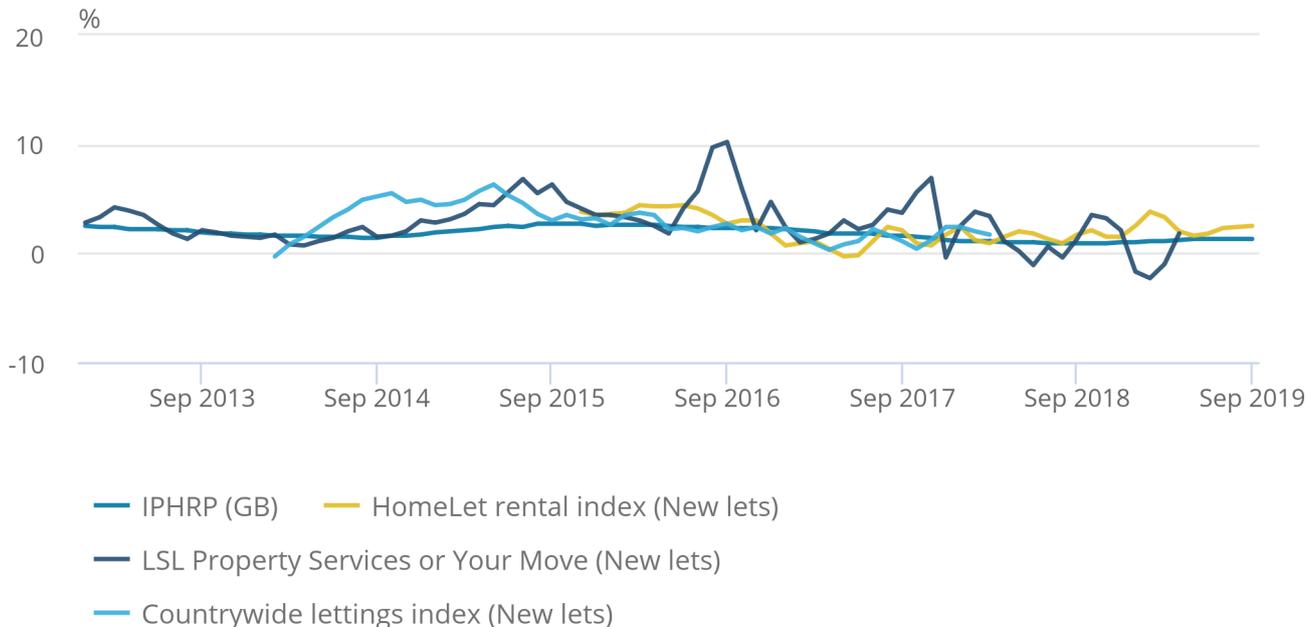
Many private sector organisations, including estate agents and property companies, produce estimates of changes in rental prices. These include [HomeLet](#), [LSL Property Services](#), [Your Move](#) and [Countrywide](#). In addition, other companies such as Zoopla and Rightmove are a rich source of rental data. These sources provide an extensive range of rental data, but a closer look at these rental measures provides a diverse picture (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Index of Private Housing Rental Prices measure is more stable

Index of Private Housing Rental Prices and private sector measures of rents, percentage change over 12 months, UK, January 2013 to September 2019

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Index of Private Housing Rental Prices and private sector measures of rents, percentage change over 12 months, UK, January 2013 to September 2019



Source: Homelet, LSL Property Services plc or Your Move, Countrywide plc and Index of Private Housing Rental Prices

Notes:

1. The Countrywide lettings index is calculated as a three-month rolling average rather than lets agreed in the last month.
2. The Countrywide lettings index latest available data are April 2018.

Historically, the rent increases quantified by the private sector measures have differed from those shown in the Index of Private Housing Rental Prices (IPHRP) and tend to be more volatile. This is because the private sector measures primarily focus on newly let properties, while the IPHRP includes a mixture of newly let properties and existing lets. This is important, as evidence obtained from Valuation Office Agency (VOA) rental officers suggests that the greatest price rises occur when properties are newly let, compared with existing tenants, who tend to see smaller price increases.

In early 2016, the VOA placed a question in the [BDRC Landlords Panel survey](#) whose respondents comprise [National Landlords Association](#) members with a wide range of portfolio sizes and geographies. The question asked, "What was the typical level of rent you were able to achieve in 2015?", was broken down by "new tenants" and "renewals with existing tenants". It was reported that 23% of new lets were charged at the same rate as the previous letting, but 46% of renewals saw no increase. For those whose rent did increase, the average increase for new lets was 5.0% while for renewals this was lower at 3.4%. Similar results were found when this exercise was conducted again the following year.

To summarise, landlords were less likely to increase rents for existing tenants and, when rents were increased, it was by a smaller percentage. This is thought to happen because landlords make a considered business decision, preferring a small increase from a known reliable tenant, rather than experiencing a void period, where their property is left unoccupied, with no income and the associated cost of reletting. Consequently, larger price increases tend to occur when the existing tenant moves out and the property is advertised.

In addition, analysis of contract length statistics finds that rental contracts tend to last for around 12 months. During this contract period, a tenant's rent is unchanged. The IPHRP, as a measure of the stock of rental properties, includes all new lets, those renewing their contract and those within their existing contract. This results in a smoother series than those that simply focus on new lets, where there is more volatility between each month.

Further detail on these data sources and their differences is available in the [April to June 2018 publication](#) of this series.

3 . Comparison of Index of Private Housing Rental Prices with the private rents data of the Valuation Office Agency

In evaluating measures of rental price, some users have focused on the difference between the average rental prices published by the [Valuation Office Agency](#) (VOA), as part of their [Private rental market statistics](#) (PRMS) publication, and the Index of Private Housing Rental Prices (IPHRP). Both are based on the same underlying private rents data collected by VOA rent officers for England.

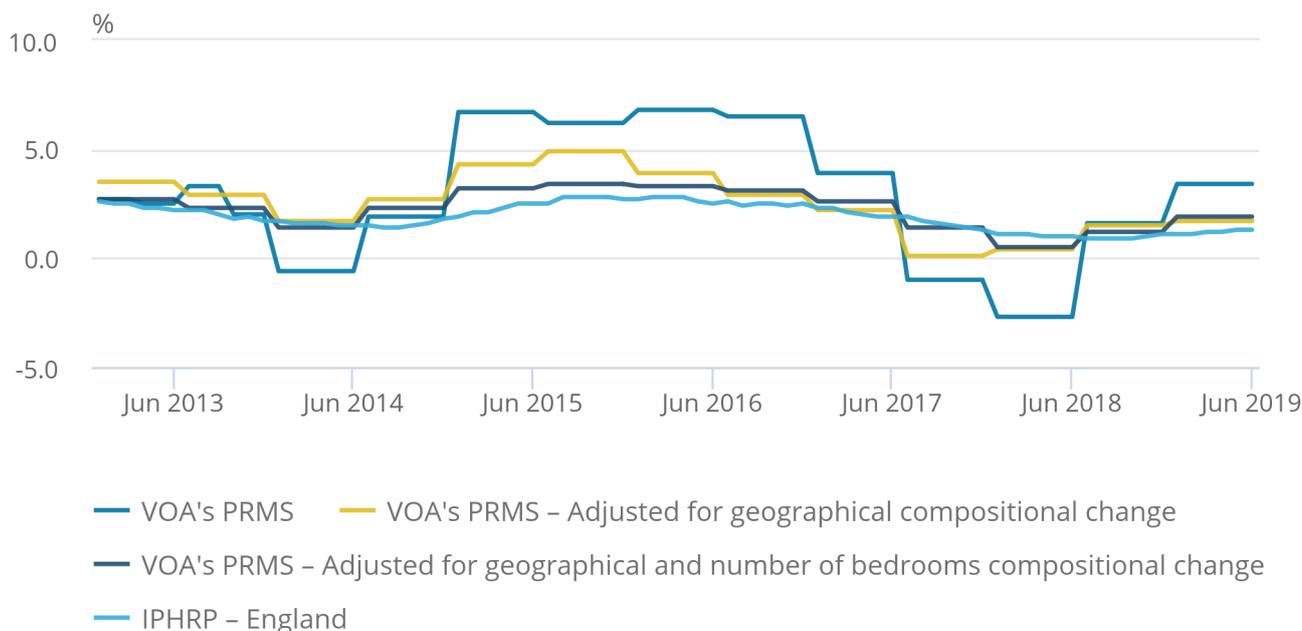
Figure 2 presents the 12-month growth rates for the VOA's PRMS series and IPHRP (using the England IPHRP series for comparability). Two additional series are also shown, which adjust for changes in the composition of the VOA's PRMS sample over time.

Figure 2: Valuation Office Agency rents measure and IPHRP are very similar when measured on similar basis

Valuation Office Agency Private rental market statistics adjusted for compositional change against IPHRP, percentage change over 12 months, England, January 2013 to June 2019

Figure 2: Valuation Office Agency rents measure and IPHRP are very similar when measured on similar basis

Valuation Office Agency Private rental market statistics adjusted for compositional change against IPHRP, percentage change over 12 months, England, January 2013 to June 2019



Source: Valuation Office Agency - Private rental market statistics (PRMS) and Index of Private Housing Rental Prices

Notes:

1. Analysis of compositional change was conducted at the local authority level using published data from the [VOA PRMS](#).

There are clearly some major differences between the VOA's PRMS series and the IPHRP. This raises the question, "How can we have confidence in the IPHRP if it diverges so much from the VOA's private rents series?" These differences can be explained.

The IPHRP is a "price index", in that it seeks to make pure price comparisons, while the VOA's PRMS is a simple "average of transactions" collected during the period; the latter is designed to provide a "snapshot" of the rental market over the previous 12 months.

Between January 2013 and June 2019, the average annual growth rate of the VOA's PRMS was 3.0% compared with an average annual growth rate in the IPHRP of 1.9%. The difference of 1.1 percentage points can be accounted for as follows: - geographical compositional effects (0.5 percentage points), as shown by the lightest (yellow) line in Figure 2 - compositional changes relating to the number of bedrooms of properties in the VOA's PRMS sample (0.2 percentage points), as shown by the darker (blue) line in Figure 2 - coverage differences between VOA's PRMS and IPHRP (0.2 percentage points), as shown in [Explaining private rental growth \(PDF, 446KB\)](#)

The remainder (around 0.2 percentage points) of the difference can be explained by:

- the application of price index methodology to calculate price indices (a matched sample and mix adjustment); this is discussed further in [Explaining private rental growth \(PDF, 446KB\)](#)
- changes in composition below the local authority level
- a general improvement in the quality of the private rental sector – changes in quality would impact an average price measure but are intentionally removed from a price index; in recent times, the size of the privately rented housing stock has more than doubled and some of this supply has come from the owner-occupied market, which is generally in better repair than the rental market; evidence from the [English Housing Survey](#) suggests that rented properties are now better maintained than they were a few years ago

We are therefore confident that we understand and can explain the differences between the tracks of the IPHRP and the VOA's PRMS and that the IPHRP is a fair reflection of the increase in rental prices over time.

4 . Comparison of Index of Private Housing Rental Prices with owner occupiers' housing costs

The Index of Private Housing Rental Prices (IPHRP) measures the change in price tenants face when renting residential properties from private landlords. But what about those who own and live in their own home? If we are specifically interested in the cost of purchasing a house, the [UK House Price Index](#) (HPI) will provide an estimate of the average price and how much it has increased or decreased.

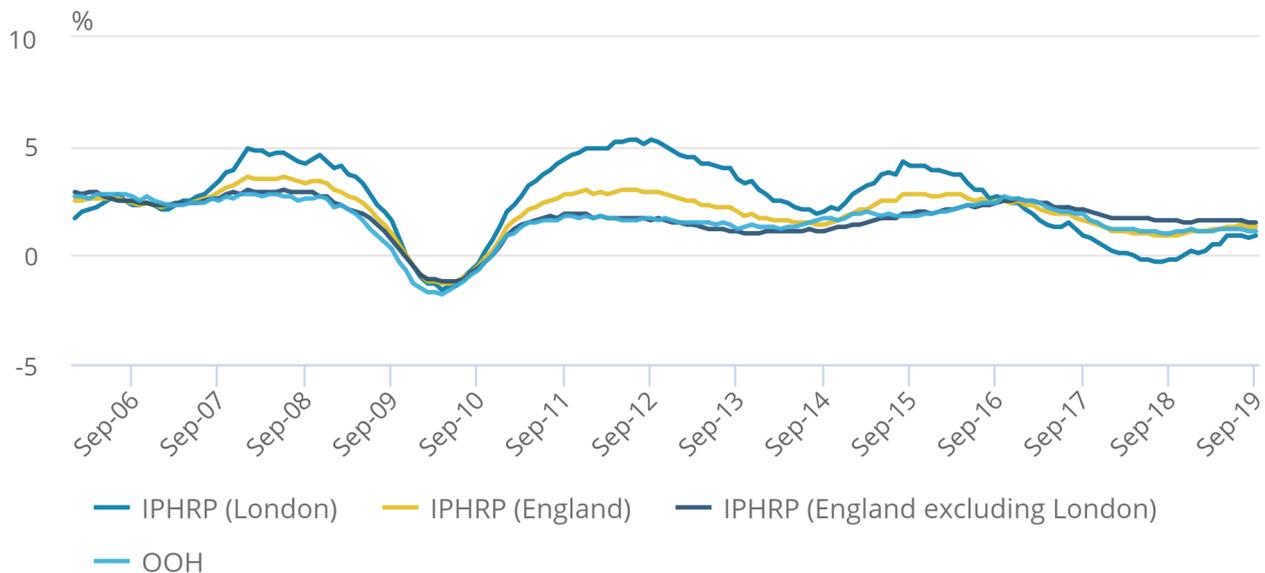
It is more difficult to measure the costs associated with owning or living in a house – referred to as [owner occupiers' housing costs](#) (OOH) – as the [cost of consuming housing services](#) is different to the cost of purchasing an asset, such as a house. The approach the Office for National Statistics (ONS) favours for measuring OOH is known as rental equivalence, which assumes that the rent paid for an equivalent house can be used as an estimate of the cost of housing services. In calculating our OOH measure, we use the same rental data sources that are used in the IPHRP, and so we might expect both series to show the same price development over time. While they are similar (Figure 3), there are good reasons for why they differ.

Figure 3: IPHRP and owner occupiers' housing costs differences explained by different mix of properties

12-month growth rate for IPHRP, England and OOH, UK, January 2006 to September 2019

Figure 3: IPHRP and owner occupiers' housing costs differences explained by different mix of properties

12-month growth rate for IPHRP, England and OOH, UK, January 2006 to September 2019



Source: Index of Private Housing Rental Prices, Owner Occupiers' Housing costs, Office for National Statistics

The main reason for the difference comes from the composition of the housing mix that represents the private rented market compared with the owner-occupied market. The type and location of properties in the private rented sector are different to the type and location of the properties in the owner occupiers' sector, and we take this into account when calculating our estimates. If we just consider location as an example, London has a higher proportion of private-rented stock compared with owner-occupied housing stock. This means that rental growth in London has more of an impact on the IPHRP than OOH. If we compare the IPHRP series "England excluding London" (Figure 3) with OOH, they are very similar, highlighting the impact London is having on the IPHRP.

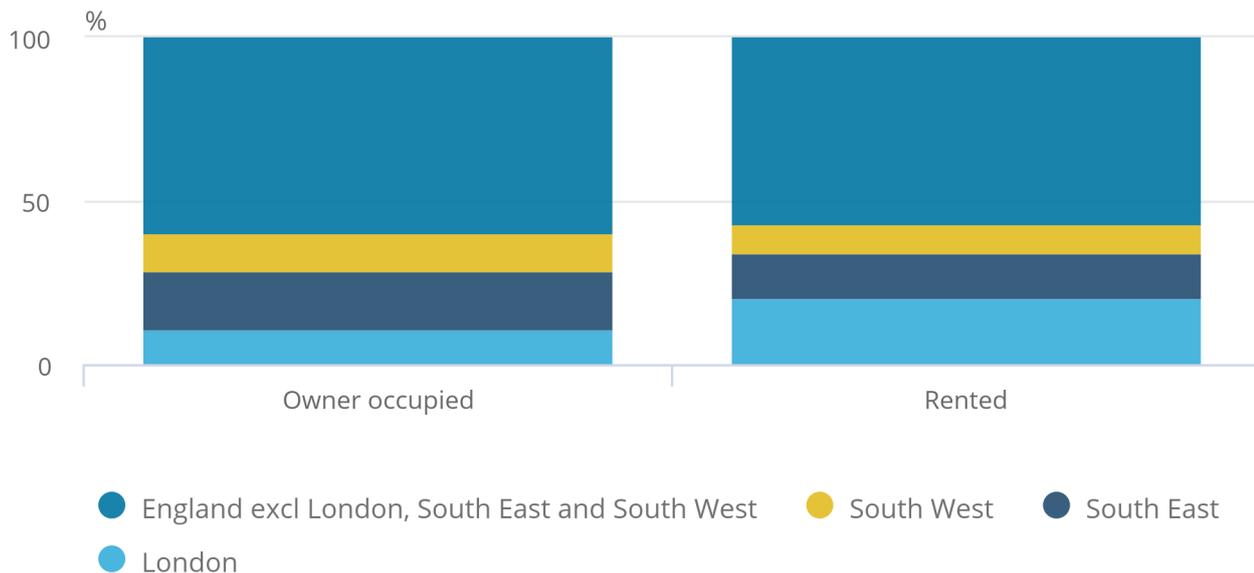
Figure 4 provides an indication of how the proportion of owner-occupied and private-rented stock differs for London, with private-rented stock being much larger. It is worth noting that Figure 4 is based on data from 2011, which are the [latest publicly available data](#) although a similar trend still holds.

Figure 4: London accounts for higher proportion of the private rented dwelling stock

Dwelling stock proportions, by tenure and region, England, 2011

Figure 4: London accounts for higher proportion of the private rented dwelling stock

Dwelling stock proportions, by tenure and region, England, 2011



Source: Dwelling stock (including vacants) - Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government

5 . Conclusion

Analysis as part of this series of articles has shown the wide range of sources available for rental data, and it has highlighted the extent of similarities and differences that exist between them. Where differences exist, they can be explained, which all points to the Index of Private Housing Rental Prices (IPHRP) being a high-quality and robust measure that is fit for purpose in measuring UK consumer price statistics.

6 . Looking ahead

On 18 January 2019, we published an article that brought together [existing UK data sources on the private rental sector](#), to assess comparability, coherence and data limitations. In this article, we listed several planned medium- and long-term improvements to statistics on the private rented sector, which include:

- developments to the Index of Private Housing Rental Prices (IPHRP), including publication of more granular breakdowns for areas of the UK
- consistency between the Valuation Office Agency's (VOA's) [Private rental market statistics](#) (PRMS) and the IPHRP and the development of a methodology to produce comparable measures of rental prices over time

In order to enable these developments, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) required access to the VOA's private rental market microdata. We now have access to this microdata, which will also enable improved assurance of the data used in the construction of the IPHRP and the owner occupiers' housing costs (OOH) component of the Consumer Prices Index including owner occupiers' housing costs (CPIH).

Alongside this, the ONS will also be taking over the production and publication of Private Rental Market Statistics (PRMS), currently published by the VOA. The first release of these statistics by the ONS are scheduled for publication on 12 December 2019.

Access to VOA private rental microdata and the publication of the PRMS will allow us to consider future developments to rental statistics to better meet user needs. We aim to re-develop the IPHRP and PRMS, and produce mix-adjusted average rental prices that are comparable over time periods and between lower geographic levels.

More information and a timetable for these improvements will be released once we have had an opportunity to analyse the rental microdata further.

If you have any queries or feedback on these developments or this article, please contact hpi@ons.gov.uk.