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£5,000 Lost in Sophisticated Rental Scam: Now We're Facing Homelessness

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A group of young professionals in London have been left devastated and financially crippled after falling victim to a highly sophisticated rental scam, a growing crime that is sweeping through the UK's increasingly pressurised housing market.

Joe Greene, Maria Kontouli, Paulina Kasprzak, and Eva Thomas were urgently searching for a new place to live after being served an unexpected eviction notice. With just two weeks to secure alternative accommodation, they came across a seemingly legitimate four-bedroom flat listed on reputable rental platforms including OpenRent and Rightmove.

After attending a viewing with a woman posing as an estate agent, the group were introduced to a “property manager” who requested official documents and payments. Everything appeared legitimate including a detailed 16-page tenancy agreement and the group proceeded to pay a holding deposit and one month's rent, totalling £5,000.

However, suspicions began to grow when the property manager refused to allow a second viewing. Joe visited the address independently and was shocked to find it was already occupied by an unrelated family. At that moment, it became clear that the group had been defrauded.

The incident has had severe consequences. With limited financial support and most of the group working on freelance or zero-hour contracts, some have been forced into temporary accommodation or house shares. Maria is now registered as homeless and relying on friends for shelter. “The experience has been traumatic,” she said. “We feel completely let down and helpless.”

Rental fraud is a growing concern across the UK. According to government data, nearly £9 million was lost across approximately 5,000 reported cases last year with 18- to 39-year-olds accounting for the majority of victims. As housing demand continues to outstrip supply, experts warn that more tenants may fall prey to increasingly convincing scams unless safeguards are urgently strengthened.