

News story: Government makes women's mental health a top priority

The [Women's Mental Health Taskforce final report](#) sets out its principles for better gender- and trauma-informed care.

The Women's Mental Health Taskforce was set up in 2017 in response to evidence of deteriorating mental health among women and poor outcomes for those using support services.

The taskforce's report draws on women's own lived experience of mental ill health. It encourages commissioners, providers and practitioners to promote best practice in their organisations, while considering women's individual, gender-specific needs.

The report looks at:

- the influence of women's roles as mothers and carers on their needs, which is rarely considered in the care they receive
- the trauma experienced by many women in inpatient facilities when they have been victims of violence and abuse in the past

It also considers other issues that often affect women and girls more than men and boys.

For example, eating disorders are more common among women and girls than men and boys. Young women and girls are also more at risk of self-harm.

The report outlines a series of recommendations to be led by the Department of Health and Social Care and its arm's length bodies.

The recommendations include:

- clearly considering women's needs in all future mental health policy development
- improving trauma-informed care
- supporting routine enquiry about violence and abuse in future policy development
- using the principles of the taskforce to inform service design and delivery for women's mental health
- recognising that women's identities, and often their roles as mothers and carers, are important in individual treatment and in-service planning
- ensuring the safety of women in residential mental health care by ending breaches of single-sex wards, and improving practice and reporting processes around sexual harassment and sexual violence

The taskforce was chaired by the Minister for Mental Health, Inequalities and Suicide Prevention Jackie Doyle-Price and Katharine Sacks-Jones, the Chief Executive of women's charity Agenda.

Health Minister Jackie Doyle-Price said:

Women are more likely to experience common mental health conditions than men – this is particularly stark among young women, who are 3 times more likely than young men to experience a common mental disorder, such as anxiety or depression.

Yet, too often, we hear stories of women who describe feeling powerless when it comes to their mental health treatment, those who feel neglected by inadequate aftercare or, more alarmingly, those who feel at risk in inpatient services, whether that's because of breaches in single-sex wards or the fear of restraint or observations by male staff members.

This just isn't good enough. I'm determined that this report will take an important first step towards our aim of tackling the injustices facing women, while ensuring that no vulnerable woman slips through the net. I appeal to partners across the health, justice and social care systems to work together to drive forward our ethos and ensure that women receive the high-quality care they deserve.

Mental health is a top priority for this government and will be a key part of the upcoming long-term plan for the NHS, which will help us drive the outcomes of this report forward.

Chief Executive of Agenda Katharine Sacks-Jones said:

The Women's Mental Health Taskforce was set up in light of rising rates of mental health problems among women and girls. The taskforce heard how many women struggled to get appropriate support from mental health services and were sometimes left further traumatised by the treatment they had received. This is not good enough.

The taskforce identified an urgent need for support that better responds to the realities of women's lives including their experiences of abuse and trauma and their roles as mothers and carers.

We call upon government and leaders across the health service to heed the findings of this report and use the principles it sets out to improve the response to women's mental health, so that all women get the help they need when they need it.

News story: Government welcomes landmark law which will improve the safety of tenants

A new law that will help to boost standards in rented homes and give tenants more powers to hold their landlord to account has been welcomed by Housing and Homelessness Minister, Heather Wheeler MP today (20 December 2018).

Under the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Act, landlords of both social and privately rented properties must make sure that their properties meet certain standards at the beginning and throughout a tenancy. If they fail to do this, tenants have the right to take legal action – making this a landmark moment for the rented sector.

The Private Members' Bill, which has received Royal Assent today, supports ongoing government action to protect tenants and drive up standards in rented properties.

Minister for Housing and Homelessness, Heather Wheeler MP said:

Everyone deserves a safe and decent place to live, regardless of whether you own your home or rent it.

That's why government has introduced a range of measures to help ensure that people who are renting have good quality and well-maintained properties to call home.

This new law is a further step to ensure that tenants have the decent homes they deserve.

The government has introduced a range of powers for local authorities to enable them to crack down on the small minority of rogue landlords and agents who let unfit properties. This includes fixed financial penalties of up to £30,000 and banning orders – possibly for life – for the most serious offenders.

We have also extended mandatory licensing for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) to improve living conditions of tenants in shared homes and tightened up rules on smoke and carbon monoxide detectors. Private tenants can also apply for a refund of up to twelve months' rent if their landlord does not deal with health and safety hazards in their home.

We are also banning unfair letting fees and capping tenancy deposits, saving renters around £240 million a year. The [Tenant Fees Bill](#), currently making its way through Parliament, will bring an end to unnecessary, costly fees imposed by landlords or property agents. This will stop tenants being charged unnecessarily and put hard-earned cash back in their pockets.

Other government steps to reform and improve renting include:

- The launch of a national database of rogue landlords and agents to keep track of those that are renting out unsafe and substandard accommodation;
- A comprehensive review of the rating system used by local authorities to assess the presence of serious risks to the health and safety of occupants;
- Mandatory client money protection – by which rental money held by letting agents is safeguarded against theft and fraud – for all agents;
- Requirement for all landlords to belong to a mandatory redress scheme and;
- New, mandatory five yearly electrical installation safety inspections

This is all part of ongoing government activity to make the private rented sector fairer and more transparent – making a housing market that works for everyone.

Further Information

- The government has worked with Karen Buck MP and has received cross-party support to draft and publish the Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation) Bill.

The Bill ensures:

- That all landlords (both social and private sector) must ensure that their property is fit for human habitation at the beginning of the tenancy and throughout; and
- Where a landlord fails to do so, the tenant has the right to take legal action in the courts for breach of contract on the grounds that the property is unfit for human habitation.
- The Housing and Planning Act 2016 introduced a range of measures to tackle rogue landlords:
- Banning orders to stop rogue landlords renting out in future – with potential unlimited fines and prison sentences if these are breached;
- Civil penalties of up to £30,000 as an alternative to prosecution to punish landlords for serious offences – came into force April 2017;
- Extended Rent Repayment Orders to cover illegal eviction and failure to comply with a statutory notice – and, from April 2018, breach of banning order – came into force in April 2017.
- Our rogue landlord database has been operational since April 2018 and is available for use by councils to crack down on poor and unfair practice in the private rented sector, and to help target their enforcement action. We have committed to making information held on the database available to the public when Parliamentary time allows.
- In October 2018, we extended the existing licensing scheme for HMOs to protect tenants from overcrowding and poor housing conditions, including in smaller HMOs, and set out [new rules](#) on bedroom sizes and rubbish storage space.
- In October 2018, we also [announced reviews](#) of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) used by local authorities to assess whether

a property contains potentially serious risks to the health and safety of the occupant and of carbon monoxide alarm requirements in the home.

- The Tenant Fees Bill will help to make the lettings market fairer and protect tenants from significant fees at the outset, renewal and termination of a tenancy. The Bill successfully passed through the House of Commons with cross-party support and is now progressing through the House of Lords. Implementation is subject to Parliamentary timetables although it is expected in 2019.
- Our consultation Strengthening consumer redress in the housing market looked at how we could make seeking [redress clearer and simpler](#) for consumers. We are considering the responses to the consultation and will respond shortly.
- In July 2018, we announced that we will require all private landlords to carry out five yearly mandatory electrical installation checks. We are working to bring these [regulations](#) into force as soon as possible, subject to Parliamentary approval and timetables.
- We recently consulted on overcoming the barriers to longer tenancies in the private rented sector and sought views on a three year longer tenancy model. We are considering the responses to the [consultation](#) and will respond shortly.

[Press release: Polluter to submit plans for River Witham repairs](#)

The Environment Agency has served a 'notice of liability' for a pollution incident that killed at least 100,000 fish in Lincolnshire.

[Press release: Polluter to submit plans for River Witham repairs](#)

- The notice requires agricultural and fertiliser company Omex Agriculture Limited to submit proposals for repairing the river
- Ammonia entered the River Witham in March of this year and caused the worst river pollution ever recorded in Lincolnshire
- An investigation into the circumstances continues

The company responsible for a major pollution on the River Witham that killed at least 100,000 fish has been told they must develop plans to restore the river.

The Environment Agency has issued agricultural and fertiliser company Omex Agriculture Limited with a 'notice of liability' under the Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) Regulations 2015.

The notice – only the second the Environment Agency has issued since the regulations came into place – requires the company to develop plans for repairing the environmental damage caused when ammonia entered the river in March 2018.

The ammonia affected the river from Bardney to the Wash, severely impacting the condition of the river and its ecosystems. It's thought to be the worst river pollution incident ever recorded in the county.

Manfai Tang, environment manager at the Environment Agency, said:

We know the pollution had a devastating effect on delicate river ecosystems, and issuing this notice means the process of helping the river recover to its natural, healthy state can start sooner.

It's one way we're working to protect and improve our environment for local people and wildlife. We look forward to receiving proposals from Omex for review, and working with them to restore the Witham.

After the incident, Environment Agency experts and biologists worked tirelessly with other organisations to clean up the pollution and mitigate the damage. Fisheries teams have since re-stocked the river with more than 1.5 million fish larvae, including common bream, roach and tench, plus re-introducing around 40,000 roach and common bream ranging from 30 to 40mm long.

Meanwhile, the Environment Agency is continuing to investigate the circumstances of the pollution. Further action will be considered once the investigation is complete.

Anyone who suspects a pollution incident is urged to report it to the Environment Agency's incident hotline on 0800 80 70 60.

- Under the Environmental Damage (Prevention and Remediation) Regulations 2015, a Notice of Liability allows the Environment Agency to require a polluter to take steps to remediate the damage done by a pollution incident.
- Once the notice is served, the recipient has 28 days to lodge an appeal.
- The polluter has until mid-January to submit their proposals. The Environment Agency must be satisfied the plan represents the best results for the environment.
- This measure is taken separate to the ongoing investigation under the Environmental Permitting Regulations.

Press release: New Homes under construction in south Warrington

Homes England and Barratt Homes are working together to deliver 180 new family homes on Pewterspear Green Road, Stretton, Cheshire.