

[Press release: New tougher electrical safety standards to protect private tenants](#)

Recommended new safety measures to better protect private tenants by reducing the risk of electric shocks or fires caused by electrical faults were published for [consultation](#) today (17 February 2018) by Housing Minister Heather Wheeler.

Five yearly mandatory electrical installation safety checks for all private rented properties and safety certificates for tenants, to prove checks and repair work have been completed, are part of a package of independent recommendations to improve safety.

The government is also consulting on how best to enforce the strengthened safety regime along with whether landlords who do not comply should face tough penalties of up to £30,000.

As well as making homes safer for tenants, electrical installation improvements benefit the landlord as a material improvement to their properties, helping prevent fires which could cause costly and significant damage.

According to the most recent data tenants in the private rented sector face a higher risk of electrical shock and fires caused by electrical faults in their homes compared to social housing tenants.

To address this the government introduced new powers in the Housing and Planning Act 2016 to set and enforce tougher electrical safety standards in the private rented sector and established a working group of independent experts from industry and a range of other sectors to develop recommendations.

This builds on other measures already introduced or planned to improve the quality of private rented properties including fines of up to £30,000 for rogue landlords and agents and banning orders for the worst offenders.

The government is also supporting a Private Member's Bill which will require all landlords to ensure their properties are safe and give tenants the right to take legal action.

Housing Minister Heather Wheeler said:

Everyone deserves a safe place to live. While measures are already in place to crack down on the minority of landlords who rent out unsafe properties we need to do more to protect tenants.

That's why we introduced powers to enable stronger electrical

safety standards to be brought in along with tough penalties for those who don't comply.

We want to ensure we strike the right balance between protecting tenants while being fair for landlords. So I want to hear from as many people as possible whether these independent recommendations are the right approach.

Independent recommendations published for consultation today, include:

- 5 yearly mandatory electrical installation safety checks for all private rented properties.
- Mandatory safety certificates confirming installation checks have been completed along with any necessary repair work provided to both landlord and tenants at the beginning of the tenancy and made available to the local authority on request.
- A private rented sector electrical testing competent person's scheme should be established to ensure properly trained experts undertake this work. This would be separate from existing building regulations competent person.
- Landlord supplied electrical appliance testing and visual checks of electrical appliances by landlords at a change of tenancy should be promoted as good practice and set out in guidance.

Today's consultation seeks views on each of the safety recommendations as well as how best to approach enforcement – including what the penalty for non-compliance should be.

Final proposals will follow the conclusion of Dame Judith Hackitt's [Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety](#). Dame Judith is due to submit her final report to ministers in spring this year.

Legislative powers only cover the private rented sector. We will publish a social housing green paper in spring which will cover a wide range of issues including the safety and quality of social housing.

The government has also provided UK consumers with the highest ever levels of protection, investing an extra £12 million each year in the product safety system through the new [Office for Product Safety and Standards](#).

See the consultation: [Electrical safety in the private rented sector](#). The consultation runs until Monday 16 April 2018.

Latest data from the English Housing Survey (2015-16) shows 60% of homes in the private rented sector had all 5 recommended electrical safety features

installed compared to 74% of local authority homes and 76% of housing association homes. These 5 features are modern PVC wiring, modern earthing, modern consumer units, miniature circuit breakers and Residual Current Devices.

As part of the Housing and Planning Act 2016 the government introduced powers to set requirements for electrical safety standards in the private rented sector along with their enforcement through secondary legislation. A working group of independent experts was established to provide recommendations to ministers.

Representatives from the following organisations were part of the working group: Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors, British Gas, Electrical Safety First, Chief Fire Officers Association, Association of Residential Letting Agents, Shelter, Residential Landlords Association, National Approved Lettings Scheme, British Property Federation, National Landlords Association, Local Government Association, Chartered Institution of Environmental Health, Institution of Engineering and Technology, NAPIT and Electrical Safety Round Table and the Health and Safety Executive.

There are existing regulatory requirements to help protect tenants:

- mandatory 5 yearly electrical installation checks for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)
- the Landlord and Tenant Act 1985 requires landlords to keep installations in the property, including the supply of electricity, in good repair and proper working order
- building regulations since 2010 have required all circuits in new or rewired homes to comply with the wiring rules in BS 7671 and include the installation of a Residual Current Device (RCD) covering any new circuits in the consumer unit since July 2008
- local authorities have powers, through the Housing Act 2004, to take action where there are electrical hazards in a property

Government has announced tough new powers to crack down on bad practices, stamp out overcrowding and improve standards for those renting in the private sector: Current and proposed powers include:

- introduction of civil penalties of up to £30,000 as an alternative to prosecution
- extension of Rent Repayment Orders to cover illegal eviction, breach of a banning order or failure to comply with a statutory notice
- database of rogue landlords/letting agents convicted of certain offences from April 2018
- banning orders for the most serious and prolific offenders from April

2018

- introduced protection for tenants against retaliatory eviction where they have a legitimate complaint and stopped landlords from serving an open-ended eviction notice at the start of a tenancy
- required landlords to install smoke alarms on every floor of their property, and test them at the start of every tenancy, and to install carbon monoxide alarms in high risk rooms
- councils can make a direction to remove permitted development rights to convert properties where there are local concerns about the change of use
- government supports the further measures in [Karen Buck MP's Private Member's Bill](#) to protect tenants in both the social and private rented sectors, which passed at the second reading on Friday 19 January

[News story: Lord Ahmad congratulates The Gambia on Commonwealth re-entry](#)

Lord Ahmad handing the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting invitation to President Barrow

Lord (Tariq) Ahmad of Wimbledon, Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister for the Commonwealth, visited The Gambia on 15 and 16 February to offer congratulations on the country's re-entry to the Commonwealth.

The Minister met with senior government ministers, including President Adama Barrow, Minister of Foreign Affairs Ousainou Darboe, and Vice-President Fatoumata Tambajang, where he discussed the Government's commitments to reforms in keeping with the Commonwealth's principles of democracy, equality for all citizens, and good governance.

Lord Ahmad said:

The UK warmly congratulates the people of The Gambia on this country's re-entry to the Commonwealth family of nations. When the Foreign Secretary visited last year, he met many Gambians who share the common values of the Commonwealth and wanted to re-join – and who felt as if they had never truly left.

We have welcomed the Government's progress on human rights and governance over the past year. It is important now that there is continued, concerted commitment and tangible action: human rights, freedom of expression, equality for all, and strengthening rule of law are critical building blocks for a sustainable, successful democracy.

I am delighted to have formally invited, on behalf of the Prime Minister, President Barrow to the UK for the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in April, and we look forward to working with The Gambia as a Commonwealth partner once more.

Lord Ahmad also met with civil society organisations, human rights groups, and members of the international community, including to hear about the challenges facing many women and girls, from lack of access to quality education, to FGM, early marriage and inequality.

Further information

Speech: PM press conference with Chancellor Merkel: 16 February 2018

It's a pleasure to be in Berlin once again and I thank Chancellor Merkel for hosting these talks today. You may recall, she was the first Head of Government that I visited after becoming Prime Minister in 2016, I think underlining the importance of the relationship between our two countries.

Our partnership is vital in defending our shared values and promoting our interests around the world. We are standing side-by-side in Eastern Europe as part of NATO efforts to reassure our allies and deter Russian aggression.

Our Armed Forces are supporting the Iraqi Government to liberate territory in their brave fight against Daesh in the Middle East.

And in areas such as global health, climate change, clean energy, UK-Germany cooperation has shaped the international agenda.

Security

In our talks today, we have discussed the speech I will give to the Munich security conference tomorrow, in which I will reiterate that the UK remains unconditionally committed to European security – and set out my vision for a unique new partnership between the EU and the UK on defence, information sharing, security and law enforcement.

Because as the threats we face grow and evolve, our structures and capabilities must keep pace.

Whether the challenge comes from North Korea's attempts to nuclearise the Korean Peninsula or the Islamist terrorists that continue to seek to do us harm.

We must work together and use all the levers at our disposal to keep people

across Europe safe.

Foreign policy

On foreign policy, we already work very closely together.

Today Chancellor Merkel and I have reaffirmed our commitment to the Iran nuclear deal and the need for full implementation by all sides that we made in October last year. And we agreed that as we continue to work to preserve the deal we also share US concerns about Iran's destabilising activity in the Middle East.

We stand ready to take further appropriate measures to tackle these issues.

We also discussed the Western Balkans Conference, which I look forward to Chancellor Merkel attending in London in July.

Prime Minister Theresa May and German Chancellor Angela Merkel

Prosperity and Brexit

Of course, it is not only in defence of our shared values that the UK and Germany rely on one another.

Trade between our nations secures and generates hundreds of thousands of jobs in both countries, with hard work, enterprise and innovation at its foundation.

Our proud history of commerce goes back to at least the 12th century with the trade between the Hanseatic cities and English ports.

And it is vital to people in both the UK and Germany that this shared tradition continues.

And so we have referred in our discussions to the UK's vision for a bold and ambitious economic partnership once the UK leaves the European Union.

I want to ensure that UK companies have the maximum freedom to trade and operate within German markets – and for German businesses to do the same in the UK.

Much progress has already been made in the Brexit negotiations and we both welcomed the agreement reached last December to secure rights for more than a hundred thousand German nationals in the UK and a similar number of UK citizens living here in Germany.

We're now ready to enter into the next phase of negotiations and our immediate goal is to agree a time-limited implementation period, with the latest round of talks between the UK and the Commission due to begin on Monday.

Conclusion

The UK and Germany's shared history, values and culture make us vital

partners and strong allies both bilaterally and through NATO, the G7 and the G20.

And we will continue to work together to strengthen these ties for years and decades to come.

[News story: Troika statement on South Sudan forum](#)

The members of the Troika (Norway, the United Kingdom, and the United States) welcome the parties' constructive efforts toward compromise for the benefit of the people of South Sudan at the High Level Revitalization Forum (HLRF) over the last two weeks in Addis Ababa. The Troika expresses its appreciation for and fully supports the continuing effort by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to restore peace through the HLRF, and commends the tireless efforts of the IGAD Special Envoy Ambassador Ismail Wais and the mediation team.

The Troika underscores the critical importance of the parties creating a conducive environment for peacemaking: fighting while talking is unacceptable and cannot be tolerated. The parties must make good on their promises to implement the Agreement on a Cessation of Hostilities (ACOH) signed in December 2017. We take note and support the intention by IGAD and the African Union to identify and impose consequences on those undermining peace as soon as possible and we stand ready to support them in their efforts. Implementation of the ACOH must also include the release of political prisoners and prisoners of war, the end to the use of child soldiers and sexual and gender-based violence as a weapon. The parties must also allow unfettered access for Ceasefire and Transitional Security Arrangements Monitoring Mechanism (CTSAMM) monitors and for humanitarian assistance and aid workers responding to Africa's worst humanitarian crisis.

While useful dialogue has taken place over the past two weeks, there is much more for the parties to do if the HLRF is to make meaningful and sustainable progress towards peace. The Troika calls on all parties to reconvene as soon as possible, without preconditions, to address the important security and governance arrangements that are essential for peace. We urge all parties to take steps to maintain the momentum of the process and refrain from comments or actions that could make returning to dialogue more difficult. We urge the parties to agree that a negotiated arrangement for an inclusive transitional government that reflects South Sudan's diversity is needed. We encourage the parties to set as priorities the separation of powers, dispute resolution and reconciliation mechanisms, service delivery, and accountability. Arrangements must not advantage any political, armed, or ethnic group. We call on the parties to develop practical security arrangements that end violence and

build confidence, and set out a realistic path to broader security sector reform. We urge the parties to support financial reforms that address corruption and build confidence in public institutions.

The Troika renews its firm view that elections in 2018 are not viable given the continuing conflict, lack of security, displacement of one third of the population, and severe food insecurity affecting half the population. It calls on all parties to reject any unilateral effort to extend power through the ballot box, the legislature, or military means. A negotiated path to elections also means the protection of fundamental political freedoms, and significant improvements in security and humanitarian conditions. The Troika continues to stand with the people of South Sudan and urges their leaders to move expeditiously to achieve the peace their people deserve.

Further information

[News story: Statement from the International Development Secretary on Oxfam](#)

On Friday 16 February International Development Secretary Penny Mordaunt said:

“I have now received a formal response to the set of demands I put to Oxfam in my meeting with Mark Goldring, Chief Executive, and Caroline Thomson, Chair of Trustees, on 12 February.

“I made three demands: that they make clear how they will handle any forthcoming allegations around safeguarding – historic or live; that they report staff members involved in this incident to their respective national governments; and that they fully cooperate with the Haitian authorities, including handing over all evidence they hold. Oxfam has now confirmed that they have complied with all of these points.

“Following our discussions, Oxfam has agreed to withdraw from bidding for any new UK Government funding until DFID is satisfied that they can meet the high standards we expect of our partners.

“My priority is to deliver for the world’s poorest and most vulnerable, while keeping people safe from harm. We want to ensure that programmes we are already financially committed to are being delivered appropriately by Oxfam or any other DFID partner.

“We have asked for assurances from all our charitable partners regarding their safeguarding and reporting practices by 26 February, including Oxfam.

At that stage we will make further decisions about continuing or amending how those programmes are delivered. Our primary guiding principle in this will be the welfare of the beneficiaries of UK aid.

“The UK Government reserves the right to take whatever decisions about present or future funding to Oxfam, and any other organisation, that we deem necessary. We have been very clear that we will not work with any organisation that does not live up to the high standards on safeguarding and protection that we require.

“In taking these actions I am very aware that there are hundreds of good, brave and compassionate people working for Oxfam around the world. They have been poorly served by Oxfam’s leadership team too.

“Clearly Oxfam have a long way to go before they can regain the trust of the British public, their staff and the people they aim to help. The actions and attitude of the organisation over the coming weeks will be critical.

“I am determined that we do our utmost to prevent exploitation and abuse happening – and ensure that where it does happen it is identified and dealt with appropriately.

“The UK will continue to take all necessary action and it is vital now that the whole aid sector – from UK-based charities working overseas, to the UN, to other donor countries – step up and demonstrate the leadership required.”