

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 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.

[Speech: Condemning Hizballah's illegal activities](#)

Thank you very much indeed Mr President. I would like to join other colleagues in thanking the Under-Secretary-General for his briefing and I'd like to join other colleagues in making clear that the United Kingdom also condemns Hizballah's building of tunnels leading into Israel. As others have noted Mr President, it is a clear violation by Hizballah of Security Council

resolution 1701. It threatens Israel's security, it threatens Lebanon's security and it threatens regional stability. We are clear that Israel has the right to defend itself against Hizballah and all other armed militia groups which put the security of Israel at risk. All Israelis, all Lebanese, have the right to live in peace without fear for their security.

For too long Mr President, as other speakers have noted, we have witnessed Hizballah blatantly disregard UN resolutions. Their continued possession of weapons outside of Lebanese state control; their reported attempts to acquire dangerous new missile capabilities; as well as their statements threatening Israel, remain deeply alarming. Without an end to Hizballah's illegal activities in Lebanon, and the region, we will continue to see regional stability threatened.

The United Kingdom recognises the important work carried out by UNIFIL in maintaining calm and stability along the Blue Line over the last 12 years and we pay tribute to those nations who have provided commanders and troops for UNIFIL throughout that time. But the existence of the tunnels reinforces the importance of ensuring UNIFIL's mandate is effective and strong, and that it has full access to all areas within its operation. We condemn any attempts at restricting UNIFIL's freedom of movement. We recognise that there is a question of access to private property in the context of investigating where the tunnels are and we recognise this can be difficult. But it is not impossible to resolve this issue and we look forward to a workable solution being found.

We welcome UNIFIL's response and its actions to monitor the situation in addition, and maintain calm, including by deploying additional troops and liaison teams to sensitive locations along the Blue Line. It is vitally important that UNIFIL continues to liaise closely with the Lebanese and Israeli authorities. We call on the Lebanese state, and in particular the Lebanese Armed Forces, as the sole and legitimate defenders of Lebanon, to take appropriate action to neutralise the tunnels as a matter of urgency, working closely with UNIFIL. And we encourage Israel to continue sharing with UNIFIL, to the fullest extent possible, any information that would assist UNIFIL and the LAF in taking action. Where there are difficulties we urge all parties to work together constructively to overcome these. It is in neither side's interest for the situation to escalate.

Mr President, the United Kingdom has been clear in this Council on many occasions that we condemn Israeli violations of Lebanese sovereignty, whether by land, sea or air. Such actions undermine confidence and stability and we call for all relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular 1559 and 1701, to be respected in full. In this regard, the UK welcomes the commitments by both Israel and Lebanon including the recent statement from the Lebanese Foreign Ministry on the full implementation of 1701, refusal to accept any violations and respect of the Blue Line.

Mr President, finally the UK calls on all sides to continue to abide by their commitments and to avoid actions and rhetoric that could destabilise the situation and region.

Thank you Mr President.

[Press release: Regulator finds quality and transparency in charity accounts has fallen](#)

Charities are not doing enough to demonstrate their public benefit, or explain how they spend their money, according to [reviews of charity accounts](#), published today by the Charity Commission.

Charity trustees are under an important legal duty to publish a trustees' annual report and accounts, by which they are accountable to the Commission and the public. The regulator has therefore carried out proactive scrutiny of charity accounts and trustees' annual reports*, and assessed these against public expectations and public benefit reporting requirements.

Just 70% of trustees' annual reports and accounts in the ['Public reporting review'](#) met the Commission's basic benchmark of user requirements, compared with last year's 74%. The quality benchmark was based on [recent research into trust in charities](#) which found that 'ensuring a reasonable proportion of donations make it to the end cause' and 'making a positive difference to the cause they work for' were the most important factors driving public trust and confidence in charities.

The main reasons why charities' accounts submissions did not meet the Commission's basic benchmark were failure to evidence that their accounts had been subject to independent scrutiny by an auditor or independent examiner, as required by law, and/ or not providing meaningful information about their charity's purposes or the activities carried out to achieve those purposes.

Just 52% of trustees' annual reports in the ['Public Benefit reporting' review](#) met the public benefit reporting requirements. Although this is a 1% increase on last year, trustees are still falling short on the requirements to explain activities undertaken by the charity to further its purposes for the public benefit, and to provide a 'public benefit statement'.

The reviewers looked for evidence of some reflection on the difference that the charity's activities had made. Positive examples of compliance included explaining why the trustees believed that the charity's activities provided public benefit; explaining who had benefitted from what the charity had done, whether a particular group of beneficiaries or the wider public; and explaining the impact of what the charity had done, such as examples of how the charity's services had led to improvements in people's lives.

The regulator has provided guidance to all trustees included in the reviews

that did not meet its expectations. Extensive support to assist trustees and independent examiners on the preparation and scrutiny of reports and accounts is available on GOV.UK.

Nigel Davies, Head of Accountancy Services at the Charity Commission said:

The public want and deserve to know how charities spend their money so this deterioration in the quality of accounts is of serious concern. The trustees' annual report and accounts are a key way to build confidence among supporters, so many charities are clearly missing an opportunity.

I would urge those charities that find reporting difficult to take advantage of the pro-forma reports and accounts available on our website.

We also need to see a step-change in trustees' attitudes to public benefit reporting. It is disappointing that nearly half of charities fail to explain the activities they undertake and the impact they have. We want to see charity thrive, so charities must be clearer about who they help and what difference they are making.

Ends

Notes to Editors

1. *The reviews were based on a random sample of 105 charity accounts submissions, covering accounting years ending during the 12 months to 31 December 2016.
2. The sample was selected in May 2018.
3. The Commission's research into public trust and confidence in charities was published on 11 July 2018 and is available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).
4. The Charity Commission is the regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work see the [about us](#) page on GOV.UK.
5. Search for charities on our [check charity](#) tool.

[News story: DASA Christmas hours](#)



The DASA help line will be closed on the afternoon of Thursday 20 December 2018 until Thursday 3 January 2019.

You will be able to send in an email to accelerator@dstl.gov.uk but no response will be provided until the 3rd January.

We wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

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