

Electrical Safety First, Parliamentary Briefing: Queen's Speech – Housing & Standards 27 May 2015

Key Messages

- **Electrical Safety First is a charity committed to reducing deaths and accidents caused by electricity.** We welcome the Housing Bill and Cities Devolution Bills that have been brought forward, but we do believe this is now the opportunity to improve safety standards in the housing stock in England and Wales.
- **A key policy for Electrical Safety First is that people in the private rented sector are protected by mandatory five yearly checks on electrical installations and supplied appliances in rented homes.** Landlords are legally obligated to undergo an annual inspection for gas installations in their properties, but not for electrics.
- Renting has become the norm for millions of people and families in the country. Over 18% of all households in England, over 9 million people and 1.3 million families now rent. **We believe that it is essential that properties are safe and fit for purpose for tenants when they use electrical installations and appliances. At present, there is no legal obligation to inform tenants they live in a property that has had the electrics checked.**

Housing Bill

What the Bill does: - The main aim of the Housing Bill is to extend the Right to Buy scheme to 1.3 million housing association tenants in England.

Under current rules, about 800,000 housing association tenants have a "right to acquire" their homes under smaller discounts, but the Government intends to offer people the same reductions as for those in local authority homes. There is also an intention to extend the scheme to those who currently have no purchase rights at all, estimated to be about 500,000 people.

Electrical Safety First response:

- More people rent today from the PRS looking after 9 million people and 1.3 million families. Over 20% of all households in England are in the sector and nearly a third expects to be doing so for the rest of their lives. **This is why we believe the PRS should be as safe as possible, particularly because some of these 'Right to Buy' homes could be purchased and could enter the PRS at a later date.**
- High demand and increasingly low consumer mobility (nearly 50% of the growth in the sector over the last two years has come from families with children) means that some landlords can neglect their legal obligation to maintain the property in a decent condition, as they are confident their property can be let regardless.
- The Decent Homes Standard does not apply to the PRS. A third of homes in the private rented sector do not meet the government's own standard, with six in ten experiencing an electrical hazard or gas leak in the last 12 months.
- Our proposals to improve housing standards are not burdensome on landlords. This is

not only about the safety of tenants but also protects the landlords assets, with regular electrical checks helping to spot electrical faults and problems before they pose serious risk to a person or property.

- In 2013-14 there were 49 deaths caused by electrical fires in the home – an increase on the previous year's figures. 37% of these were caused by electrical distribution. **We believe that this Bill should include safety Clauses on mandatory five-yearly electrical safety checks, by a competent person, of electrical installations and appliances that are supplied with PRS properties. With a growing PRS, more people living within it, and no regular checks, the risks are becoming greater year on year.**

Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill

What the Bill does: - The will provide new primary legislative powers to devolved powers and budgets to local areas. It will also make provision for elected mayors with extended powers in areas that wish to have them. It is the intention to devolve more powers to England's cities providing them powers over housing, transport, planning and policing.

Electrical Safety First response:

- We welcome the Bill and its intention to give more powers to local authorities and control over issues such as housing.
- Local authorities want housing standards to improve. A 2013 poll of local authority officers and councillors found that 80% of respondents wanted their authority to take a more active role in the PRS in the future, predominantly due to concerns for the health and safety of tenants in relation to gas and electrical safety.ⁱ
- **We recommend that the government looks closely at how local authorities can help improve their local PRS to ensure it is safe for tenants in their local communities.**

ⁱ 'House Proud: How councils can raise standards in the private rented sector', Lauren Lucas, September 2013. Available at <http://www.lgiu.org.uk/2013/09/12/house-proud-how-councils-can-raise-standards-in-the-private-rented-sector/>. Accessed December 2014.