

Social Housing and Building Safety House of Commons Debate 9th June 2022

Electrical Safety First is the only UK charity dedicated to reducing deaths, injuries and fires caused by domestic electrical accidents: www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk

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Electrical Safety First is the UK charity committed to reducing deaths, injuries, and fires caused by electricity in the home. For more information about our work, visit: www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/westminster.

Overview

Electricity causes the majority of house fires. However, there are several disparities that mean social tenants in England do not enjoy adequate protections provided through regular electrical safety checks:

1. Social tenants in England do not have the same protections as their counterparts in Scotland and Wales.
2. Social tenants in England do not have the same protections as their counterparts in the Private Rented Sector (PRS).
3. Social tenants do have the same protections in relation to electrical safety as they do with gas safety.

As such, five-yearly electrical safety checks should be introduced in the Social Rented Sector (SRS). This has wide-spread support from social housing landlords and could also assist with wider access issues which these landlords currently experience.

It is, therefore, crucial that the draft Social Housing Regulationsⁱ announced by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities and included as the Social Housing Regulation Bill in the Queen's Speech are introduced without delay. Without these protections, tenants in the SRS continue to be unprotected from the risks posed by electricity.

Number of fires

- Electricity is the primary cause of house fires in England – accounting for 53% of all accidental dwelling firesⁱⁱ.
- Looking at London alone, there are significantly more fires in the SRS caused by electricity than by gasⁱⁱⁱ.
- Indeed, electricity caused over 5 times as many fires than gas – causing 1055 fires compared to 181 fires caused by gas^{iv}.
- Across England, there is a similar trend, with six times as many residential fires caused by electricity than by gas between 2010 and 2019^v.
- It is, therefore, essential that the cause of electrical fires is addressed – requiring regular electrical safety checks will be crucial in helping to achieve this.

Lack of parity

Lack of parity across the United Kingdom

Social tenants in England are not afforded the same electrical safety protections as tenants living in other parts of the United Kingdom. For instance:

- From June 2021, amendments to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard mean that social tenants in Scotland are protected by mandatory electrical safety checks^{vi}.
- From July 2022, the Renting Homes (Wales) Act 2022 will mean that social tenants in Wales will be protected by mandatory electrical safety checks^{vii}.

Given the context across the United Kingdom, the 4 million households living in social housing in England should be afforded the same protections^{viii}.

Lack of parity with the Private Rented Sector (PRS)

- Under the Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020, tenants in the PRS are protected by regular electrical safety checks^{ix}.
- Responses to the social housing Green Paper showed overwhelming support for consistency in safety measures across social and private rented housing^x.
- In its Social Housing Charter, the Government said unequivocally that 'safety measures in the social sector should be in line with the legal protections afforded to private sector tenants'^{xi}.
- However, at present, the Government has not met the commitments in its Social Housing Charter. Social tenants deserve the same protections as their counterparts in the PRS.

Lack of parity with gas

- Under the Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998, social landlords are required to undertake annual gas safety checks^{xii}.
- This is a valuable protection and social tenants should have the same protections in relation to electricity. This is especially given that electricity causes a greater number of fires than gas.
- In addition, the risk posed by electricity is likely to increase due to the increased electrification of heat^{xiii}.

Access issues

- Several social landlords already undertake electrical safety checks on a five yearly basis as best practice. For instance, Southern Housing^{xiv}.
- However, unlike with gas (where safety checks are mandated by law), research by York University demonstrates that landlords experience far greater difficulty in gaining access to properties to undertake electrical safety checks^{xv}.
- Lack of explicit legislation and lack of awareness by tenants were two barriers cited by landlords^{xvi}.

- Creating clear legislative requirements would remove these barriers, helping with access for landlords and guaranteeing protections for tenants.

Support from the sector

- There is overwhelming support for mandatory five-yearly electrical safety checks from providers of social housing^{xvii}.
- A consultation undertaken by ESF found that 98% of social landlords support the introduction of mandatory electrical safety checks^{xviii}.
- Respondents to the consultation included some of England's largest social housing providers^{xix}.

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ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-housing-regulation-draft-clauses>
ⁱⁱ Electrical Safety First analysis of Home Office Statistics 2018-19 <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/our-policies/westminster/statistics-england/>
ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/mtlslsfls/social-rented-sector-policy-paper-march-2021.pdf>
^{iv} Ibid.
^v Ibid.
^{vi} <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2016/12/electrical-installations-and-appliances-private-rented-properties/documents/guidance-electrical-installations-appliances-pdf/guidance-electrical-installations-appliances-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/SG%2BSTATUTORY%2BGUIDANCE%2BON%2BELECTRICAL%2BINSTALLATIONS%2BAND%2BAPPLIANCES%2BIN%2BPRIVATE%2BRENTED%2BPROPERTY%2B%2528updated%2B15%2BFeb%2B2021%2529.pdf>
^{vii} <https://gov.wales/housing-law-changing-renting-homes#:~:text=The%20Renting%20Homes%20Act%20is,in%20rented%20homes%20in%20Wales>.
^{viii} <https://www.pbcotoday.co.uk/news/building-control-news/electrical-safety-social-housing-draft/108556/>
^{ix} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electrical-safety-standards-in-the-private-rented-sector-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities>
^x <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-new-deal-for-social-housing/outcome/a-new-deal-for-social-housing-and-call-for-evidence-on-social-housing-regulation-summary-of-responses>
^{xi} <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-charter-for-social-housing-residents-social-housing-white-paper>
^{xii} <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ksxi/1998/2451/contents/made>
^{xiii} <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/q1knvqz/electrical-safety-first-future-homes-report-september-2021.pdf>
^{xiv} <https://www.shgroup.org.uk/media/986345/electrical-safety-policy.pdf>
^{xv} [https://pure.york.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/electrical-safety-in-the-social-rented-sector\(9aea6c00-5c6c-4d33-85a1-c1ef3533948a\).html](https://pure.york.ac.uk/portal/en/projects/electrical-safety-in-the-social-rented-sector(9aea6c00-5c6c-4d33-85a1-c1ef3533948a).html)
^{xvi} Ibid.
^{xvii} <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/mtlslsfls/social-rented-sector-policy-paper-march-2021.pdf>
^{xviii} Ibid.
^{xix} Ibid.