



# Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee

House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA

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The Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP  
Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government  
Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

23 July 2018

Dear James,

## **The Private Rented Sector: Electrical Safety**

I write further to my letter of 17 July regarding your Department's response to the Committee's Report into the Private Rented Sector.

Whilst we are awaiting your response to that letter, I wanted to write now to highlight that the Committee was very pleased to note your announcement of 19 July that the Government will introduce a mandatory requirement on landlords in the private rented sector to ensure electrical installations in their property are inspected every 5 years.

This corresponds with the Committee's recommendation in our Private Rented Sector report, that the Government should "implement the recommendations of the Electrical Safety Standards Working Group as soon as practicable, including the introduction of mandatory five-yearly checks on electrical installations in private rented accommodation".

This is very positive news and will mean private sector tenants will now have much greater protection from electrical health and safety hazards in their homes.

Notwithstanding the above, the Committee's wider concerns about the Government's response to the Committee's report, that I outlined in my letter of 17 July, remain. I hope these will be addressed in full in your response, particularly concerning reform of the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), improvements to selective licensing, and greater powers for local authorities to break the business models of the worst rogue landlords.

We look forward to your response to our letters.

**Clive Betts MP**  
Chair, Communities and Local Government Committee



Ministry of Housing,  
Communities &  
Local Government

- 6 SEP 2018

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Our Ref:3840681

4 September 2018

*Dear Clive,*

Thank you for your letters of 17 July and 23 July further to the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's inquiry into the private rented sector. I thank you again for the work that your Committee undertook during the inquiry and for taking the time to contact me.

I am grateful that you acknowledge the work that is in progress to reform the private rented sector such as the review of selective licencing, mandatory electrical safety checks, the Tenant Fees Bill and the longer tenancies consultation. We are working hard to support those that are most vulnerable and residing in properties at the lower end of the market.

We are taking the Committee's recommendations seriously. As I explained in the evidence session on 9 July, making renting in the private sector fairer and more affordable is a key priority for me. Given the amount of work that is underway to reform the private rented sector and to rebalance the relationship between tenants and landlords, we do not agree that the time is right to fundamentally overhaul the entire legislative framework. The current framework has, and is, delivering real benefits for tenants and serving to tackle rogue landlords and agents. We do accept that further action is needed and are taking steps to deliver that, for example our commitment to require letting agents to meet minimum standards and to require landlords to join a redress scheme.

With regards to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), I want to reiterate what I said on 9 July, that the Government has not rejected the recommendation to update the baseline assumptions that underpin the HHSRS. We certainly accept it has been a number of years since the methodology was introduced and we will now carefully consider whether the framework and associated guidance needs to be updated, and, if so, how. In doing this, we would certainly need to reflect on who is best placed and has the necessary expertise to carry out such a review.

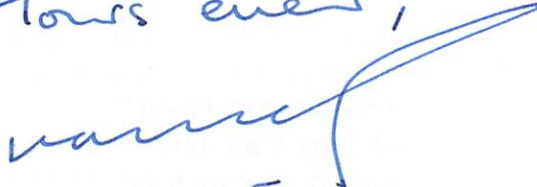
My officials carried out 5 engagement events from 13-20 July across the country with around 200 local authorities. As part of that, they acknowledged the Select Committee's recommendation on the HHSRS and invited views on the current framework and if minimum standards would be appropriate. A large majority regarded the HHSRS as a useful tool for objectively assessing whether a property contained hazards and the risk of harm that may occur as a result. There was broad agreement that the underlying methodology and associated guidance needed to be updated and reviewed. Some called for minimum standards but many others were concerned that setting minimum standards could lead to a race to the bottom with the minimum standard becoming the default. We will take account of the range of views, including those presented to the Committee, in taking this work forward, which will include exploring the scope for introducing minimum standards where that would be appropriate.

With regards to wider enforcement, I would like to assure you that my Department is working with local authorities across the country to ensure that they are given the support that they need. We have put in place robust tools for local authorities to tackle rogue practices including extending rent repayment orders and increasing civil penalties in April 2017 and introducing banning orders in April 2018. It is too early to say that these powers are *not* effective; indeed we know that many authorities are only now beginning to put in place processes that will enable them to make full use of them. We are committed to supporting local authorities in using these tools. At recent regional events my officials engaged with local authorities to understand barriers to enforcing legislation and how we could help them to overcome these, including through further guidance and communications. We are also committed to requiring landlords to join a redress scheme, which will ensure all tenants have access to dispute resolution when poor practice arises.

As you know, I am committed to carrying out an independent review of selective licensing. This will be broad, looking at how selective licensing is used and assessing the outcomes from the schemes to find out how well it is working for local communities. The invitation to tender will be issued imminently and the review is expected to report late Spring 2019.

I am pleased that you welcome the consultation on overcoming the barriers to longer tenancies and I would like to remind you that the effectiveness of the existing retaliatory eviction provisions will also be examined through this consultation. I am also pleased that you have welcomed our commitment to introduce a requirement on landlords to ensure electrical safety installations in their property are inspected every 5 years.

Thank you once again for writing to me. I trust that this letter reassures you that the Government is dedicated to improving the private rented sector and that this work is continuing apace.

Yours ever,  


**RT HON JAMES BROKESHIRE MP**