

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

17 July 2018

Dear James,

The Private Rented Sector: The Government's response to the Committee's Report

Thank you for your Department's recent response to the Committee's Report into the Private Rented Sector.

During our inquiry, we held five public evidence sessions, hearing from 22 witnesses, including academics and experts, representatives of tenants, landlords and letting agents, Councillors and officials, as well as the Minister for Housing and Homelessness. We further received 83 items of written evidence from a broad range of stakeholders.

We heard clear and convincing evidence that, while the majority of tenants in the Private Rented Sector were satisfied with the quality of their homes, there is a significant and growing minority of tenants who live in unacceptably poor conditions. Further, tenants' representatives, including Shelter and Generation Rent, were clear that more needed to be done to protect vulnerable residents from retaliatory eviction, rent increases and harassment.

We were told that the legislative framework was outdated and bloated, and that a key enforcement mechanism – the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) – was too complex and lacked transparency for tenants and landlords.

We heard that enforcement of standards by local authorities had been far too low and inconsistent, driven in part by reduced resources, but also due to a lack of political will in some Councils. We were told that those authorities that wanted to do more were held back by restrictive and overly-bureaucratic Government rules around the use of selective licensing schemes, which are contrary to the spirit of localism found in other policy areas.

It is in this context that we were disappointed by the Government's response to our Report. The Government did not accept any of the Committee's substantive recommendations, other than those which already aligned with the Ministry's existing policy objectives.

In particular, we were disappointed that the Government did not agree with us that the HHSRS requires a complete overhaul, so it is clear to everyone – including tenants and landlords – whether a property meets minimum standards. Your response suggested the Government was not willing to change its approach to selective licensing, despite calls from local authorities and tenants' representatives for greater local control over decision making in this area. We hope that your planned review of selective licensing will, however, take our recommendations in this

regard seriously. It is also regrettable that our recommendation to give local authorities the ability to break the business models of the worst rogue landlords, through powers to levy more substantial fines and confiscate properties, was dismissed so comprehensively.

Our evidence was clear: the Government's approach to the private rented sector may be going in the right direction, but it is not sufficient to address the considerable challenges faced by a growing number of vulnerable tenants at the lower end of the market. A more radical approach is required.

The Committee was pleased to note the Government's recently announced consultation on introducing three-year tenancies for people in the private rented sector. This will provide more long-term security for those tenants in the sector that want longer tenancies. However, this will do little to address some of the more urgent challenges in the sector: protecting tenants at the lower end of the market from unacceptable conditions, retaliatory eviction, rent increases and harassment.

We hope that the Government will reconsider some of the recommendations we have made in our Report. We believe that the Government needs to go much further if tenants are to be better protected, while local authorities need additional support and encouragement to enforce even existing safety standards in the sector.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clive Betts', written in a cursive style.

Clive Betts MP
Chair, Communities and Local Government Committee