

Press release: Government supports new measures to improve the safety of tenants

Secretary of State for Housing Sajid Javid today (14 January) confirmed government support for new legislation that will help ensure rented homes are safe and give tenants the right to take legal action when landlords fail in their duties.

The government has already introduced a range of powers for local authorities enabling them to crack down on the minority of landlords who rent out unsafe or substandard accommodation. This includes being able to fine failing landlords up to £30,000 and from April this year councils will also be able to issue banning orders to kick the worst offenders out of the business.

However public safety is paramount which is why government will support further measures proposed by Karen Buck MP in a Private Members Bill to protect tenants in both the social and private rented sectors.

This will give them another route to take direction action and take their landlords to court if they don't ensure their property is fit for human habitation at the beginning of the tenancy and throughout.

Housing Secretary Sajid Javid said:

Everyone deserves a decent and safe place to live. Councils already have wide-ranging powers to crack down on the minority of landlords who rent out unsafe and substandard accommodation.

However, public safety is paramount and I am determined to do everything possible to protect tenants. That is why government will support new legislation that requires all landlords to ensure properties are safe and give tenants the right to take legal action if landlords fail in their duties.

Government has worked with Karen Buck MP to draft and publish the Private Members Bill on Homes (Fitness for Human Habitation and Liability of Housing Standards).

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

Local authority powers to deal with landlords who rent out unsafe or substandard accommodation:

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System – which was introduced by the Housing Act 2004 – is already used by local authorities to assess whether a property contains potentially serious risks to the health and safety of the occupants.

Where a property does contain hazards, local authorities have strong powers under the Housing Act 2004 to require that landlords make necessary improvements to a property. Where a property contains potentially serious risks to the health and safety of the occupants, the local authority must take appropriate action requiring the landlord to reduce or remove the risk.

Government has brought forward a whole suite of measures to make sure local authorities effectively tackle rogue landlords who let unfit properties, including:

- introducing, in April 2017, civil penalties up to £30,000, with the local authority able to keep the proceeds to fund enforcement
- extension of Rent Repayment Orders to cover illegal eviction, breach of a banning order or failure to comply with certain statutory notices (introduced April 2017)
- £12 million made available (2011-16) to a range of local authorities with acute problems with rogue landlords, resulting in the inspection of over 70,000 properties and more than 5,000 landlords facing further action or prosecution for breaking the law
- enabling the local authority to introduce a selective licensing scheme allowing it to target enforcement action where private rented housing in a particular area is suffering from or causing specific problems
- consulted on extending mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation, and following this will shortly be laying regulations

And we've got plans to introduce in April 2018:

- a database of rogue landlords and property agents convicted of certain offences
- banning orders for the most serious and prolific offenders