



Social Housing Reform in England

Too many social tenants are still living in dangerous, unfit homes. Introducing a bill to regulate social housing in the upcoming Queen's Speech represents an opportunity to put words into action and place well-managed, well-funded, social housing at the heart of levelling up. Shelter is calling on the government to:

- Expand and make clear consumer standards to ensure tenants are well-informed and the regulator can enforce against clear criteria.
- Remove the serious detriment test to allow the regulator to inspect landlords proactively.
- Ensure the regulator is able to enforce standards properly by scrapping caps on fines for non-compliance and the ability to arrange emergency repairs.

The need for better regulation

Nearly five years on from the Grenfell Tower fire, we're still waiting for the government to act to better regulate social housing. As seen in recent news stories, too many social tenants are still living in dangerous, unfit homes.

We recognise that the conditions of social housing are overall not as poor as we find in the private rented sector but it's clear that the management of social housing stock needs to improve. Justice for the bereaved and survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire and those still living in substandard conditions won't be achieved until the law on regulation is changed to ensure tenants are not ignored.

The changes promised in the Social Housing White paper are a vital first step in ensuring that these changes are achieved. The Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has promised that legislation will be brought forward in May/June. This is urgently needed to allow the regulator to start designing a system that works for tenants.

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Expand and clarify consumer standards

At present, the Social Housing White Paper proposes to give the regulator powers to set a code of practice, to go alongside newly revised consumer standards.

The consumer standards must be strong, specific and accessible. This will ensure that tenants are provided with clear information on what to expect from their landlord and the regulator can identify more effectively where standards have been breached.

Proactive and proper enforcement

Currently, the economic management of social housing is proactively regulated, while the consumer side is not. This must change to ensure that tenants are protected from living in substandard conditions.

As a first step, the government must remove the 'serious detriment test', which currently prevents the regulator from intervening in cases.

Following this, the regulator should introduce a regular inspection regime for social housing. Shelter recommends that these include unannounced inspections that engage with tenants as part of the process.

On top of this, the regulator should be empowered to enforce standards with tougher sanctions for poorly performing landlords.

