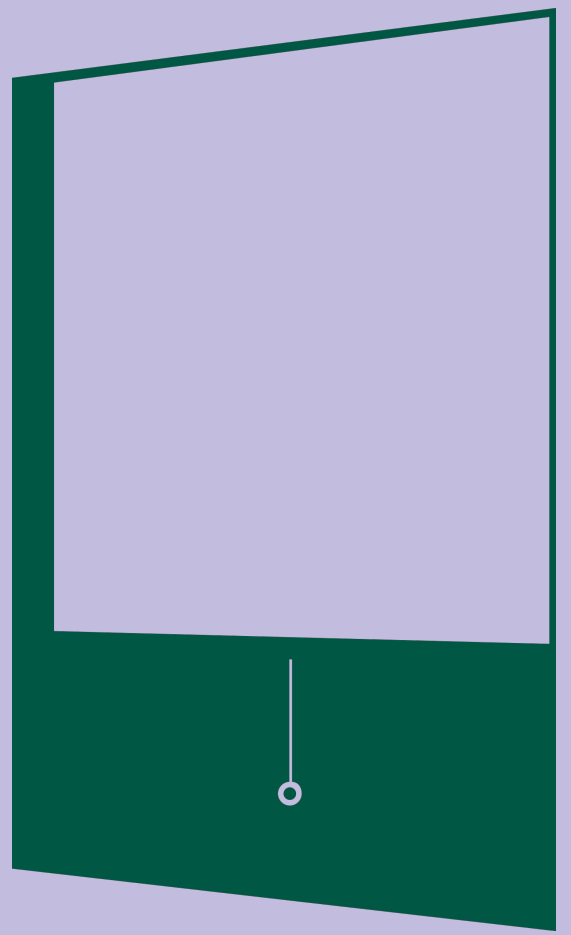
Window of Opportunity

Delivering warmer homes to private renters



citizens advice

September 2025

Executive summary

Poor energy efficiency and disrepair continues to damage private renters' health and finances. Millions are unable to keep their homes warm during the winter, with over half (57%) experiencing damp, mould or excessive cold.(1) And inefficient homes make it more difficult to stay comfortable all year round, with 40% of private renters also struggling to keep their homes cool this summer.(2)

This can lead to negative health impacts, stress and higher bills. Those with properties at the current minimum Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of E are paying hundreds of pounds extra every winter compared to if their homes were raised to EPC C,(3) with private renters living in properties below EPC C in England and Wales wasting over £4 billion on excess energy costs since the start of 2021.(4)

Our research found that private renters are extremely open to energy efficiency improvements, with 82% saying they would be interested in having energy efficiency measures installed in the next 12 months if their landlords offered this to them. But despite this, most private renters don't request improvements from their landlords. 70% of private renters haven't asked their landlords to install any energy efficiency measures in the last 5 years, with many fearing negative reactions or tension with their landlords.

This indicates that renters are ready to accept energy efficiency improvements but face barriers to requesting these measures proactively. With high interest in measures, we need to make it easier to upgrade homes in practice. Improved regulation on landlords through increased minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) can help translate renters' enthusiasm for energy efficiency into action from landlords.

Improved standards will be a key pillar of the Government's wider reforms in the housing and energy space and turbo-charge real change for tenants. When delivered as part of the Government's package of the Warm Homes Plan, Renters' Rights Bill and overhaul of consumer protections for home upgrades, these changes can ensure that tenants are able to live in secure, safe and healthy homes.

Yet despite strong interest in energy efficiency measures, most private renters (77%) still expressed at least some concerns around the installation process. Home upgrades will need to be installed in a way that provides tenants with the support and protection they need.

Citizens Advice is calling for the Government to:

Progress plans to increase minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector to the equivalent of EPC C by 2030, giving certainty to both tenants and landlords.

Support renters through the installation process, ensuring that tenants have appropriate information and advice about any changes to their homes. This should include guidance to landlords on communicating effectively with their tenants about improvement works, as well as access to independent advice and support for renters.

Protect renters from any unintended consequences of MEES. This should include wider consumer protections to ensure that improvement works are performed to a high standard, and specific protections for renters against unfair rent increases - particularly where funding from Government schemes has been used.

Introduction and methodology

The previous Government first launched proposals on improving minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector to EPC C in 2020.(5) But 5 years on, private renters are still waiting for change. In the meantime, private tenants in England and Wales have been forced to waste billions in excess energy bills and risk dangerous damp and mouldy conditions.

We welcome the current Government's commitment to raising these standards, and its consultation on boosting minimum EPCs to C for all tenancies by 2030.(6) When implemented, its proposals will help to cut bills for private tenants and make rented homes safer and healthier to live in.

Raising minimum energy efficiency standards to EPC C would help protect around 6.6 million private renters in England and Wales from leaky homes.(7)

The private rented sector is steadily growing with the proportion of dwellings that are privately rented in England and Wales increasing from 12% in 2003 to 19% in 2023.(8)

Now it is essential that the Government confirms its final plans as soon as possible to give certainty to both landlords and tenants, and puts supporting infrastructure in place to ensure this policy delivers practical improvements for renters. Related policy reforms in the private rented sector, such as the ban on Section 21 "no-fault" evictions set to be delivered through the Renters' Rights Bill, will also be essential to give renters the security to request upgrades.

In 2024 we published Room for Improvement, which used quantitative research with private landlords to explore attitudes to energy efficiency improvements. It found that while landlords feel positively about their responsibilities to provide warm and efficient homes for their tenants, there is low awareness of energy efficiency regulation. We called for information and support to help landlords make improvements, backed up by robust enforcement action for those who refuse to comply with their obligations.

This year, we commissioned Yonder Consulting to undertake quantitative and qualitative research with private renters to understand more about their experiences of and attitudes to energy efficiency, and what they needed during any process to improve their homes. This included:

- An **online survey of 2,430 private renters** in England and Wales in February 2025.
- 4 **focus groups with low-income private renters** (2 groups each in England and Wales, with 16 participants in total).
- 5 **in-depth interviews with financially vulnerable private renters** across England and Wales.(9)

All findings in this report are from this research, unless otherwise indicated.

Private renters are being forced to live in cold, mouldy and expensive homes

Renters have consistently been at the sharp end of the cost of living crisis, facing not only rocketing rents and high energy prices but also poor conditions and disrepair. Our 2024 report Through the Roof highlighted that while rents have risen, quality has not. Private renters continue to face significantly higher levels of fuel poverty than those who own their home.(10) Three quarters of private renters (75%) have also lived in a rented property with damp, mould or excessive cold.(11)

And our new research shows that even after the worst of the energy price rises, the situation for many private renters remains critical. Last winter (February 2025):

Over half (52%) of private renters in England and Wales had cut back to afford their energy bills, equivalent to an estimated 5.8 million people.

A third (32%) couldn't heat their homes to a comfortable temperature, equivalent to an estimated 3.5 million people.

57% were currently experiencing damp, mould or excessive cold, equivalent to an estimated 6.4 million people.

Disabled private renters were more likely to have an issue with damp, mould or cold in their homes than non-disabled renters. 64% of disabled renters had an issue with damp, cold or mould, compared to 54% of those who weren't disabled.

Many private renters in our qualitative research also told us their homes were cold and difficult to heat, with some experiencing untreated damp and mould. They told us this left them paying higher bills and still being uncomfortably cold in the winter - describing the conditions as "tough", "freezing" and even "unbearable".

We know that living in an energy inefficient property can add hundreds of pounds to an annual energy bill, with private renters with the current minimum EPC of E paying an extra £317 last winter alone compared to if their EPCs had been improved to EPC C.(12)

And living in damp and cold conditions can have a profound impact on people's health and wellbeing - exacerbating cardiovascular and respiratory conditions, worsening mental health and increasing the risk of social isolation. Meanwhile, inefficient properties that overheat in summer also affect people's health as well as causing stress and discomfort, including difficulty sleeping.

Coping in a cold home - Eileen's story

Eileen is in her 70s and is retired after a career working in the public sector. She is now on a low income, falling just above the limit to receive pension credit. She used to do some part-time work in her retirement, but has had to stop due to health issues, which has reduced her income further.

Eileen's privately rented house is cold and energy inefficient. Eileen finds that she feels the cold more than ever as she gets older, and recognises that this is affecting her health.

Eileen is extremely aware of her energy use and describes herself as "almost paranoid" about checking her smart meter. She has cut back on energy use over the last few years and now only rarely puts the heating on in winter, which she does to prevent frozen pipes and protect her landlord's property.

"If this home worked to somebody's advice on efficiency, I would probably feel much healthier in the winter than I sometimes do because it's cold and **the older I get, it gets into your bones and you're like, oh God, it's so cold**."

She has also reduced the amount she showers to cut down on hot water use, and has stopped using her oven except for when her granddaughter visits so she can cook her granddaughter's favourite foods.
Instead Eileen uses coping mechanisms like wearing extra clothes and gloves inside the house, and using blankets and hot water bottles. In the winter she often keeps her blinds closed to try and keep any heat inside, even though this means being in the dark in the daytime.

Eileen's daughter lives in a modern, well-insulated house and Eileen notices how much warmer it is as it retains heat so much more effectively. She doesn't want to worry her daughter by telling her how cold her own house is, and often tells her she is staying warm even when she isn't.

"My pride won't allow me to say to [my children], **'I can't afford to put my heating on, I'm so cold'**... They still think I'm managing very well."

But tenants are worried about asking for energy efficiency improvements

Despite so many tenants struggling to heat their homes and prevent damp and mould, most private renters (70%) haven't asked their landlord to install any energy efficiency measures in the last 5 years.

This is often because tenants are worried about their landlords responding negatively to a request. 35% of those who hadn't requested improvements said they were worried about getting a rent increase as a result, while 21% were afraid of creating tension with their landlord. Renters in our qualitative research described not wanting to "rock the boat", and feeling they had to put up with poor conditions.

"It **makes me quite nervous** if I bring up [improvements] with my landlord…I don't want them to say, 'Oh well, maybe it's time we offloaded that property' because that means I wouldn't have a home. **So I just keep smiling and keep paying the bills.**"

Eileen, private renter in England

"You **don't really want to rock the boat with the landlord** because if you come across as one of the tenants that's like, 'oh, I want this' and suddenly you find yourself out on your ear…so sometimes **it feels like it's easier to stay a little bit quiet and put up and shut up**."

Nora, private renter in Wales

Many tenants also simply didn't believe their landlord would agree to make improvements, with 28% of those who hadn't requested energy efficiency measures saying it was because they didn't think their landlord would be willing. Renters told us that they didn't see the incentive for landlords to spend money on improvements in the current market, given that the landlords weren't the ones facing the consequences of energy inefficiency through higher bills and poor conditions.

Alan, a private renter living in Wales, asked his landlord to replace a window with a broken seal, but the landlord refused.

"**That's his choice**. **But if I owned the property, that's something I would definitely do** because I just think it would save money on heating and it would pay for itself essentially."

"The landlord should make it more efficient, to be honest. But then that's money out of their pocket and **they're not going to really see a difference**"

Lauren, private renter in England

"They're not paying the bills so **they don't have a financial incentive** and my leverage is not huge."

Rory, private renter in Wales

Tenants often aren’t able to prioritise energy efficiency

Part of the lack of incentive for landlords is due to the competitiveness of the rental market, which means prospective tenants often aren’t able to prioritise energy efficiency when looking for a property.

Good energy efficiency is important to renters looking for a new home, with 79% of private tenants saying they would be more likely to want to rent a property if it had better energy efficiency. But in practice, tenants were often restricted in their choice and needed to prioritise finding an affordable property that met basic requirements around location and size.

However, tenants told us that once they were in the property, poor energy efficiency could have a major impact on their experience of being in the home.

> “I was just bothered about the size of the rooms and the backyard, and stuff like that is my main priority. But then **when you’re in there and you’re living in damp you think, oh, why didn’t I think of that**?”
>
> **Lauren, private renter in England**

And once tenants have moved in, they often find they need to prioritise asking for basic repairs rather than long-term changes. Many tenants in our qualitative research told us that they had experienced landlords and letting agents being uncommunicative and slow to respond even to the most urgent and basic requests around disrepair, making it feel unrealistic even to consider asking for more long-term and potentially expensive improvements around energy efficiency.

> “I personally wouldn’t even bother [approaching the landlord about energy efficiency improvements] because mine is just rubbish. When we had the Beast from the East **my boiler went and he replied to me like two months later**. It’s just a joke. So **I wouldn’t even bother**, to be honest.”
>
> **Kaya, private renter in Wales**

> “Our relationship is pretty much non-existent with the letting agent…**they haven’t responded to anything that we’ve reported ever**.”
>
> **Grace, private renter in Wales**

> “I told [the landlord about a damp issue] during the first year or two I moved in here and **it's still like that now. We're at year nine** now and it's still like that.”
>
> **Daniel, private renter in England**

An insecure private rental market makes tenants feel disempowered to take further action

Many of the tenants we spoke to felt that even if they were putting up with poor conditions, the insecure and competitive rental market meant that they were still better off trying to stay in their current property. Many people felt their only choice was to accept their situation and adapt to it, rather than asking their landlord for improvements or trying to find a better quality property.

> "It's really difficult because **you don't want to jump from the frying pan into the fire**, so you don't want to be like, oh my God, there's a little bit of mould and I've got to move. And **then you move to somewhere that's worse and you're paying triple the amount**. So you've got to take things with a bit of a pinch of salt and you just think, well, it's not that bad. There are people in worse situations."
>
> **Nora, private renter in Wales**

In some cases, people even paid to fix disrepair or poor conditions themselves to avoid the risk of asking the landlord. This ranged from paying to have a broken fence repaired, to replacing an inefficient boiler out of pocket and paying for a more accessible shower.

> "I don't want to ask for too much and **there's a lot of things I've done myself**...You shouldn't feel like that as a tenant. But I know I could probably be charged more for my rent than I am and **I'm a single mum and I don't want to lose my house**."
>
> **Heather, private renter in Wales**

While renters have concerns about asking for improvements, they are open to energy efficiency improvement if offered

While renters can feel hesitant about asking for improvements to their homes, they are very open to energy-saving improvements if a landlord were to offer them.

82% expressed interest in having energy efficiency measures installed within the next 12 months if this was offered to them, though qualitative research found that renters are skeptical that their landlord would propose them.

"I'd be surprised. I'd fall off my chair. But yeah, **I would say go for it**." - **Lauren, private renter in England**

For many renters, interest in energy efficiency is driven by the potential for savings on bills, cited by 71% of respondents.

"**If my energy bills are going down, that means I can spend that money on other better things**. That might be a cinema trip every month that we get to then go on." **- Izzy, private renter in England**

Improved comfort was also an important motivator (cited by 67% of interested respondents). This was a particular concern for older renters and people with health conditions, who face greater risks from living in a cold home. For example, 83% of renters over 65 cited warmth and comfort as their main motivation, compared to 59% of those aged 25-34.

"The older I get, it's got to be my health [that's the most important benefit of energy efficiency] because **I don't want to not look after myself, keep myself warm enough,** when I'm going to end up in hospital." **- Eileen, private renter in England**

A third of renters (31%) are also motivated by environmental concerns, though this varied by age with older renters less likely to cite this as a motivation. In practice, many renters found that they needed to prioritise more immediate concerns around finances and wellbeing, but still saw carbon reductions as a positive outcome that could make energy efficiency improvements even more attractive.

"Actually in my current situation where I have only so much extra money lying around, **if I was able to save 50 pounds every month, that is a big, big thing to me** in comparison to a positive impact on the environment...but as a bigger picture, I do feel **a positive impact on the environment is important**." **- Asha, private renter in England**

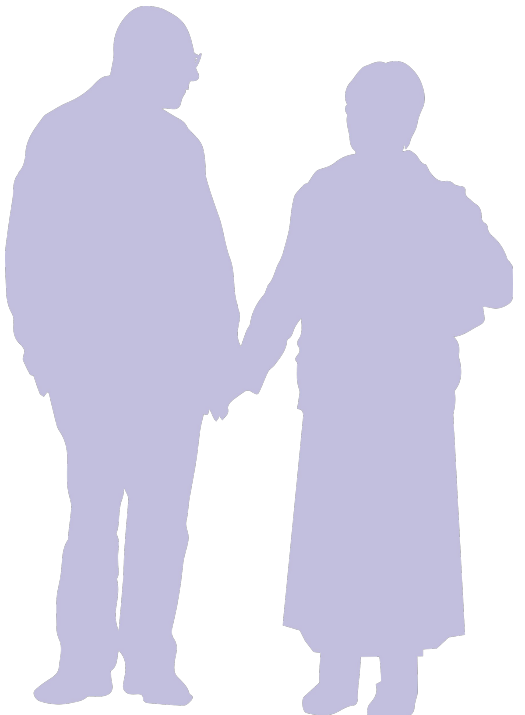
"I think if it's got an environmentally friendly element to it, **you feel like you're doing your bit**." **- Omar, private renter in Wales**

Whilst interest is high overall, it is not uniform across all demographics

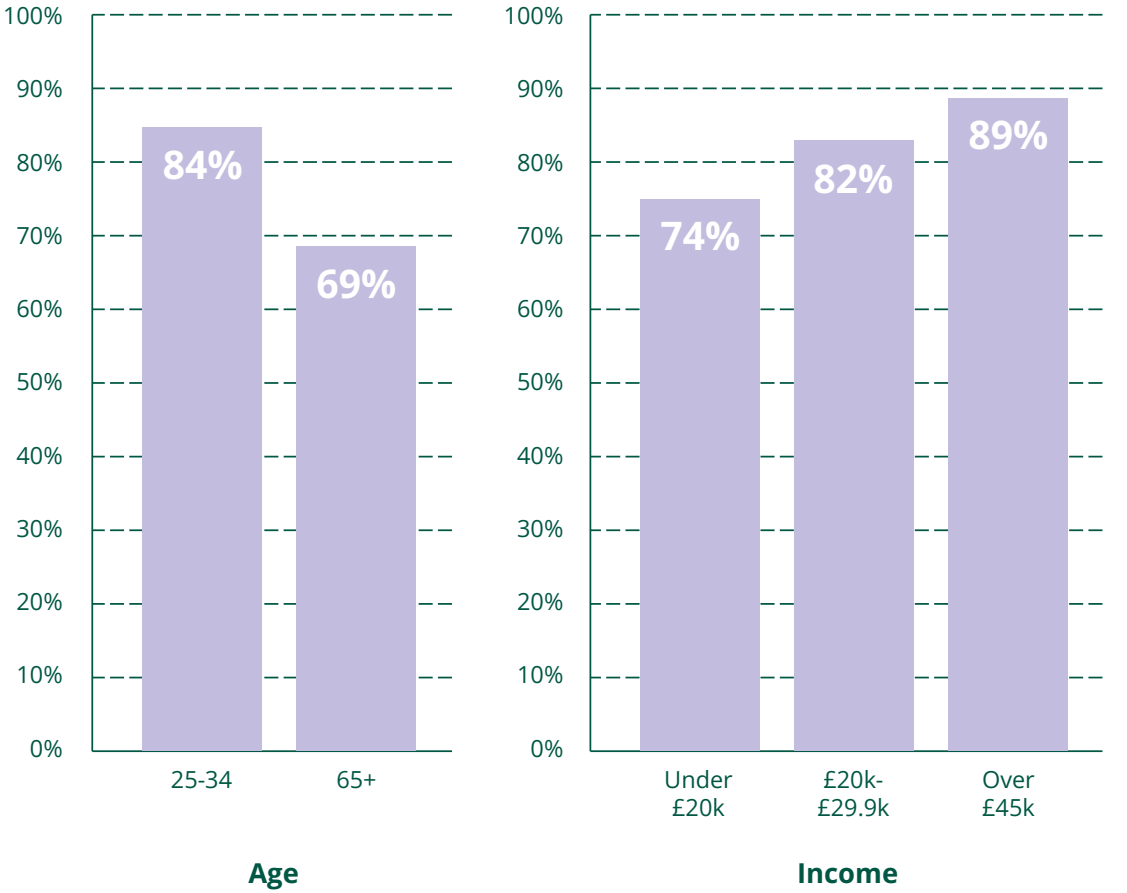
Whilst interest is high overall, it is not uniform across all demographics. Younger and higher-income renters show most interest in home improvement.

Older renters (aged over 65) and those on lower incomes are less likely to say they are interested in improvements than younger renters and those with higher incomes.

This suggests that while most renters are receptive, targeted support may be needed to ensure these groups feel confident accepting and benefiting from the changes.



Interest in energy efficiency improvements among private renters by age and income group



Heat pump perceptions

Interest in heat pumps is relatively strong among renters:

55% of private renters said they would be interested in having a heat pump installed if offered

This willingness stands in contrast to homeowners, where only a quarter (27%) expressed interest in installing a heat pump within the next five years.(13)

"I'd love to have an air source heat pump... They are more expensive to install and there are a few hurdles to overcome... But in the long term, they last much longer than boilers and are more efficient. **That would be a great long-term saving**."

Alan, private renter in Wales

While overall interest in heat pumps is encouraging, it's not consistent across all age groups. Older renters are significantly less likely to be interested than those who are younger: only 25% of those aged 65 and over are interested, compared to 68% of renters aged 18-24.

Although renters are more open to heat pumps, many still worry about the cost to their landlord, even if they aren't paying for it directly. Uncertainty about how heat pumps work and the benefits they offer can also influence enthusiasm. Some renters expressed confusion over how they work or misconceptions such as believing that heat pumps only work in warm weather.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it. Also, **I don't really understand how it works**—taking heat from outside doesn't seem practical when it's rarely hot here. I don't think it would heat my home properly, so it doesn't seem viable."

Nora, private renter in Wales

"So, I know about heat pumps and that **they're very expensive**. I wouldn't dream of asking my landlord to install one."

Elizabeth, private renter in England

The Government is aiming for 600,000 heat pump installations per year by 2028, but there's still a long way to go until this target is reached.(14) Renters and landlords need clearer information to dispel misconceptions about heat pumps and build confidence in their benefits. With cost and comfort the key drivers for renters, heat pumps must also deliver real savings for tenants. This requires pairing installations with necessary fabric measures and making sure systems are installed correctly, so that tenants aren't left with cold homes or unaffordable bills.

Recommendation 1: Increase minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector without delay

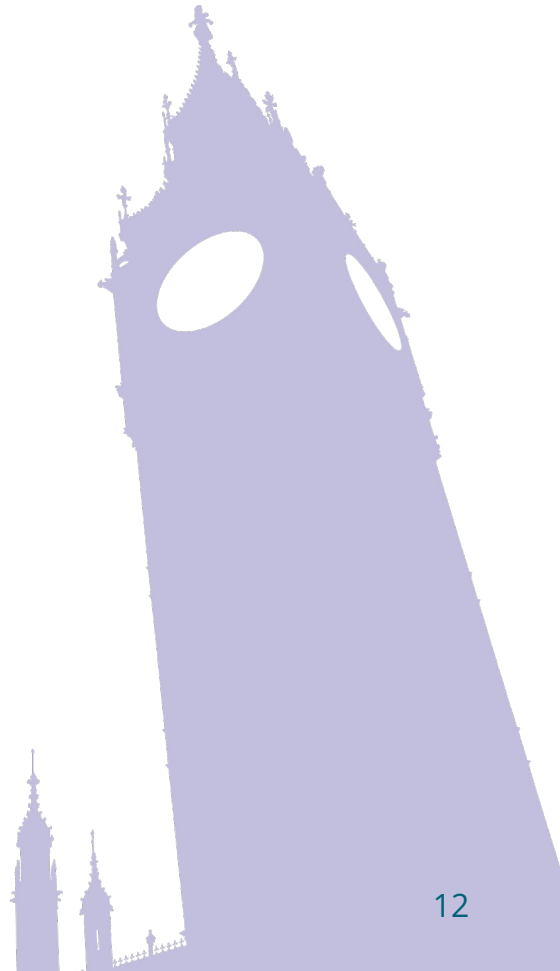
Cold, damp and mouldy conditions are widespread in the private rented sector, and tenants have been paying the price through more expensive energy bills and impacts on their health and wellbeing.

The Government's proposals to increase MEES to EPC C for new tenancies by 2028, and all tenancies by 2030, offer the opportunity to improve conditions for tenants. The Government should press on with implementing these proposals, in particular:

- Ensuring that the 2030 deadline remains in place
- Retaining the £15,000 cost cap for landlords, and removing exemptions that could allow some landlords to evade their responsibilities
- Ensuring that new requirements prioritise improvements to fabric efficiency to deliver financial and health benefits to tenants, alongside secondary requirements around heating systems

Citizens Advice has responded fully to the Government's proposals in our response to its consultation on improving privately rented homes.(15) We have also previously called for support for landlords to meet new regulation, through both clear information and appropriate financial measures.(16) This should be backed up by resources for robust enforcement of the policy.

It is vital that the Government now confirms its plans as rapidly as possible to give certainty to both landlords and tenants, and give time for landlords to prepare to comply. This will also allow the Government to develop information and support for landlords and tenants about the new regulations and best practice for implementation.



Most renters still have concerns about having measures installed in their homes

Even though most renters would welcome energy efficiency measures, most still have some worries about getting them installed. This means that while it's vital that rented homes see significant energy efficiency improvements, it will be important to carry out work in a way that safeguards tenants and takes their needs into account.

Almost **8 in 10 renters (77%) have concerns** about the process and impact of having measures installed.

Many fear that their landlord will raise the rent after the work is done. But for some renters these concerns are about the process and consequences of any changes, including worries over potential disruption or what would happen if something went wrong with the installation. Where the benefits of having the work done are less clear, these concerns are more pronounced.

"I mean, as long as it would be improving the property and improving the existence for the people that live in the property, then yes. If it was something that was going to hike the price of other things up, then you'd have to weigh out the pros and cons and have a... conversation about it."

Jack, private renter in England

Disruption

A quarter of renters (26%) worry about disruption from energy efficiency works, particularly those they see as more invasive such as floor, solid wall, or cavity wall insulation. These concerns are heightened among people with health conditions and those working from home, for whom noise and inconvenience can impact daily life more.

"I work from home a lot, so it would be a hard sell if I had disruption and loads of noise for more than a week."
- **Alan, private renter in Wales**

Despite this, good communication and planning can make a big difference.

Renters are more willing to accept works if:

- The landlord provides a clear timeline and explains the process (47%)
- Work is guaranteed to be completed quickly (40%)
- They are assured disruption will be minimal (37%)

"With a month['s notice], I can get myself together, pack away my papers that I might not want anyone to have access to - all that kind of stuff."
Nora, private renter in Wales

Most tenants are comfortable with short-term disruption of a few days to a week but worried about indefinite or lengthy projects.

They suggested that landlords could also ease concerns by offering practical support, such as help with moving furniture, temporary accommodation, or covering unexpected costs.

"I wouldn't mind [the installation process] if it was going to benefit me, as long as it's not going to be weeks of builders in and out of my house."
- Lauren, private renter in England

Recommendation 2: Support renters during improvement works

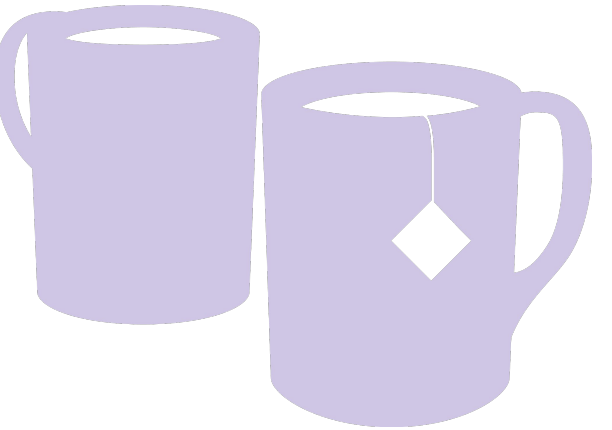
It is vital that any installation process considers tenants' needs and that they have access to information and support. Any process should ensure that tenants have access to:

- **Clear communication from landlords.** In our 2024 report Room for Improvement, we argued that the Government should provide a clear and tailored communication strategy to inform landlords about the new MEES and the support available. This should include expectations for how landlords should communicate with their tenants around the policy and any resulting improvement works.

  Tenants should be kept informed of any work that will be taking place, including measures that will be installed and expected timelines. Disruption should be minimised, and tenants should be offered support where disruption is unavoidable. Clear communication, including around the reasons for work and the benefits it can deliver, can help tenants feel more positively about the installation process and the resulting changes to their homes.

- **Independent advice and support.** Tenants should be given information about both energy efficiency measures themselves and their own rights as tenants. This should include awareness campaigns around new minimum energy efficiency rules and new requirements on private landlords such as Awaab's Law and the Decent Homes Standard, which will both introduce obligations on preventing damp and mould. Tenants should also be able to access free and independent advice about the installation process.

  Tenants should have support and clear routes to hold their landlords to account if they don't meet new standards. But the most effective enforcement regime will include resources for local authorities to enforce proactively, so that minimum standards are provided from the outset and tenants aren't left to enforce against their own landlords.



Knock on consequences of having improvements made

Concerns over the consequences of having measures installed are key for tenants. This doesn't only hold them back from requesting improvements to their property, but also plays a role in shaping how they feel about having measures installed in general. Costs and ongoing savings are a key concern for renters. Nearly half of tenants (48%) told us they were worried that if their landlord carried out work on their property, they would see knock-on increases to their rent which could make the rental unaffordable to them.

This meant that some told us they would prefer to live in sub-standard housing in order to save on rent costs or risk their tenancy. Many expressed concern that if they lost their home, they would struggle to find an alternative that they could afford or, for families, near to their children's school.

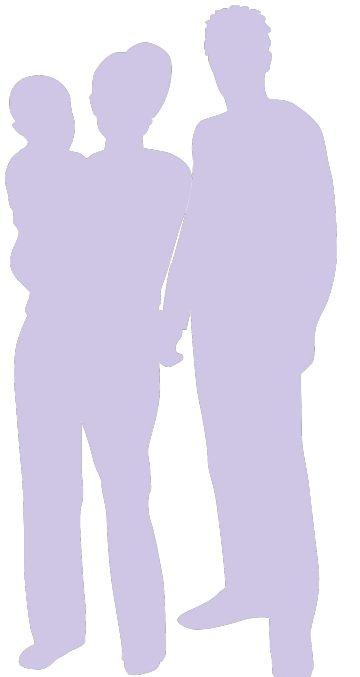
When looking at what would make renters more comfortable with property improvements:

The most important factor they highlighted was **a guarantee that changes would not lead to rent increases** (59%)

Two-fifths said that **clear evidence the improvements would result in energy savings and lower ongoing costs** (42%) would also make them more willing to accept such changes

"If they did all the work, **they'd probably bung it on your rent anyway**. So that's another issue then, to pay more rent."

Daniel, private renter in England



Problems with installation

Some tenants also worry about the quality of work being carried out. Although less common, **13% were concerned about what would happen if something went wrong with the installation** or the measures were faulty.

"I'm very nervous, **I don't want anybody just to come in and give me a lot of rubbish**."

Eileen, private renter in England

Past experiences of delays and inadequate fixes reinforce these concerns.

Asha is a private renter in England and **made repeated complaints about mould and broken windows**, only to face a long wait for a response, the wrong contractors being sent, and ineffective temporary measures – ultimately forcing her to make repairs herself.

"**I have to kind of chase up, chase up** [...] Some of the requirements don't get met. They just drag it and drag it and **they don't do the jobs properly** even when they do do it."

With less control over the work being done or the contractors doing it, two in five renters (39%) say they would be more willing to agree to improvements if guaranteed that any problems would be fixed quickly.

This gives even more urgency to the Government's plans to overhaul the consumer protections regime for all consumers who make net zero home upgrades. A single accreditation scheme for installers and a robust enforcement regime can help to tackle rogue traders and ensure consumers can access high-quality retrofits.

Access to independent advice and a single Ombudsman can give people a clear route to redress in cases where things do go wrong. Citizens Advice will continue to work with Government to improve protections for consumers who make changes to their homes.

Where tenants have a better relationship with their landlord, they are more open to works being carried out

A tenant's relationship with their landlord often influences their openness to energy efficiency improvements. Renters who have a positive and supportive relationship with their landlords are more willing to both request and accept these measures.

On the other hand, tenants with limited or negative relationships are more hesitant, feeling that they may face rent increases or lose their home. For example, renters with negative landlord relationships are more than twice as likely than those with a positive relationship to worry about being evicted as a result of the improvements (22% vs. 9%). They are also more concerned about potential disruption, such as having to move out during the work.

"**I am too frightened to look into making changes to my house** and making it more energy efficient because it's really my landlord's house and they can put it up for sale at any time..." - **Eileen, private renter in England**

Renters don’t feel it is their responsibility to apply for energy efficiency schemes themselves

One reason that renters don’t ask for energy efficiency improvements is that **they see this as being the landlord’s responsibility**, with 25% of those who hadn’t requested improvements saying that this was a factor.

This is reflected in renters’ attitudes to energy efficiency schemes such as ECO4 and GBIS, which provide funded upgrades and are open to private renters. Eligibility for upgrades in privately rented homes is partly determined by tenants’ personal circumstances, as well as the condition of the property. This means that the onus is often on tenants to research and apply for schemes themselves, or provide information to their landlord.

But while nearly two-thirds of renters (60%) are aware of at least one energy efficiency scheme, only 39% say they would be willing to apply themselves.

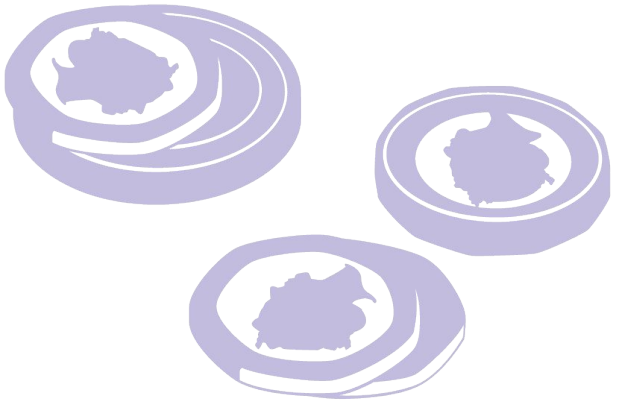
Most renters (85%) believe that the financial responsibility for improving the property lies with the landlord, and 78% think it should be the landlord who applies for any available grants. Applying for schemes can be a time-consuming and stressful process, as we highlight in our Building Support report on experiences of applying for energy efficiency schemes. For some private tenants, this isn’t seen as worthwhile in order to improve a property they don’t own, and 21% said they didn’t have the time and energy to apply for schemes.

“I feel like **it's their responsibility**..., I'm paying them rent to stay in a property where it's livable, and **it's their job to make sure it is livable**, which is the reason why I'm not doing it.”

Asha, private renter in England

“I think **it should be the landlord’s responsibility** to look at making their home more energy efficient. They should sort it out and **the stress shouldn’t be on the tenant** [...] As I rent, I just don’t feel like it’s my responsibility to make investments and changes because at the end of my tenancy, my landlord could just be like ‘see ya.’”

Robin, private renter in Wales

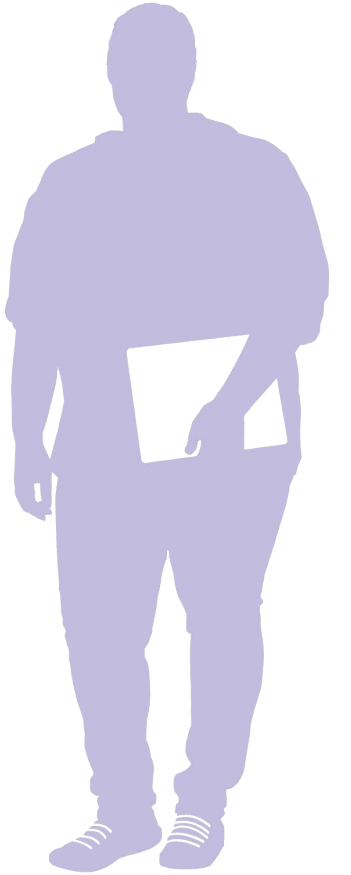


Tenants need protection where landlords use schemes

Citizens Advice has previously highlighted that tenants need more protection against rent increases and eviction when their landlords use energy efficiency schemes.(15) These risks affected tenants' willingness to engage:

Nearly a third (32%) of those who wouldn't apply for a scheme said this was because they **feared a rent increase** if they were to apply. **16% said they feared eviction.**

Many also feel they wouldn't be eligible for schemes (26%) either because they are not the homeowner or because they believe they would not meet eligibility criteria.



Energy efficiency schemes can be a key way to deliver energy efficiency improvements to tenants now, ahead of new MEES requirements. But if landlords are benefitting from funded improvements to their properties and potentially using this support to prepare for future obligations, they must take a proactive role in identifying and applying for this support, minimising the burden on tenants.

Our research with landlords showed that while most agree it is their responsibility to provide safe, healthy and comfortable homes, many are unaware of available support.(18) This further highlights the need to raise awareness of schemes among landlords, encouraging them to take proactive steps to improve their properties.

In the future, when higher MEES are in place, it will be more appropriate for landlords to use routes such as private finance to meet these obligations rather than funding through schemes.

Renters in Wales are more aware of available schemes

While there is still clearly room for improvement when it comes to awareness of schemes across both England and Wales, the research identified significantly better awareness amongst renters living in Wales compared to those in England.

	Wales	England
ECO4	43%	24%
Great British Energy Scheme (GBIS)	50%	30%
Home Upgrade Grant (HUG)	44%	24%
Local council grants or funding schemes	66%	43%
Nest (Wales only)	61%	N/A

"There's an agency in Wales called 'Nest', isn't there? And to do with energy efficiency, so **might be worth [me] looking at their website**."

Sue, private renter in Wales

The promotion of energy efficiency is a devolved area of policy, enabling the Welsh Government to design and implement its own dedicated advice and support schemes. 'Nest', part of the Welsh Government's 'Warm Homes Programme', has been running since 2011 and offers a combination of free, impartial advice and home energy improvements to reduce fuel poverty.(19)

The scheme is open to all households for advice, and can provide free measures, such as insulation and low-carbon heating, to eligible households. This includes low income homeowners or private renters who live in inefficient homes, typically EPC E or below or EPC D for those living with certain health conditions.(20)

There have been various iterations of the scheme and campaigns to inform households of this support. The current format of the scheme aims to provide an initial contact for advice on energy efficiency, and assessing eligibility for fully-funded upgrades. Those who do not meet the eligibility criteria are then pointed towards other potential routes of support.

A relatively high level of awareness of the scheme amongst renters in Wales may indicate that the more centralised provision of advice helps with building this. The UK and Welsh Governments should proactively share insights and lessons learned from energy efficiency schemes to ensure programmes are effectively reaching households and landlords.

Recommendation 3: Protect renters from unintended consequences of energy efficiency improvements

Energy efficiency improvements delivered as part of increased MEES can help tenants cut their energy bills and live in healthier and more comfortable homes. But it's essential that renters have appropriate safeguards, including:

- **Protection against unfair rent increases.** Fears of rent increases are a barrier to tenants asking for and accepting energy efficiency improvements, and there is a risk that landlords will take the opportunity to hike rents in response to new regulation - particularly if they have incurred costs.

  We have previously called for the Government to take steps to make sure that tenants don't receive rent increases after qualifying for funded home upgrades due to their circumstances or characteristics, for example through the ECO4 scheme. This should include ensuring that the First-Tier Tribunal, which deals with disputes around rent, should treat energy efficiency works as the tenant's own improvement if they have been funded by grants that are based on the tenant's characteristics. This would mean a landlord shouldn't raise the rent based on the increased value from the work, and help tenants challenge landlords who use grant-funded improvements to the property as a pretext to raise rents, cancelling out the financial benefit to the tenant of cheaper bills.

  As well as urgently implementing this step, the Government should act to mitigate wider rent increases in response to regulation, even where schemes haven't been used. Works to meet MEES should be considered as vital maintenance to ensure properties are liveable, rather than additional "upgrades" for tenants. And tenants should have a clear and accessible way to challenge any unfair rent increases. Preventing excessive rent increases will also require wider long-term housing reform to increase the supply of affordable homes.

- **Strong consumer protections to ensure work is carried out to a high standard.** While most people who receive energy efficiency measures see clear benefits, there are well-documented issues around quality of work and rogue traders.

  Citizens Advice has argued for the need for a new consumer protections framework to ensure high standards of work and clear routes to redress in cases where things go wrong. This should include a mandatory single accreditation scheme for traders operating in this sector, access to an Ombudsman, a robust enforcement regime to tackle rogue traders, and advice for consumers. We set out our recommendations on the pillars of a strong consumer protections regime in our report Hitting A Wall: Protecting consumers who install net zero technologies.

  These reforms will be essential to protect households of all tenures undergoing energy efficiency upgrades. But given that MEES policy is expected to prompt higher numbers of installations in the private rented sector over the coming years, it is important that these are in place to protect renters. And these protections can be particularly important for private renters given they will likely have less control over choosing traders to work in their properties, and less of a direct relationship with installers if things go wrong.

Conclusion and final recommendations

Poor energy efficiency and disrepair leave private renters facing high energy bills and serious risks to their health. But many renters feel unable to ask for improvements. Fear of rent increases, concerns about disruption, or past experiences of unresponsive landlords often leave people feeling powerless to make changes that could improve their comfort and wellbeing.

Raising minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector is long overdue and needs to be a central pillar of the Government's approach to fix leaky homes. These improvements will strengthen the Government's wider package of reforms through the Warm Homes Plan, Renters' Rights Bill and consumer protections overhaul.

This will make homes warmer, healthier and more affordable to run, especially for those living in the least energy efficient properties.These wider reforms can also help to unlock renters' interest in energy efficiency and address any concerns around changes being made to their homes.

People told us they worry about poor-quality work, disruption during installation, and being left to cover higher rents once improvements are made. Strong safeguards, communication and enforcement can allay these fears and ensure that MEES improvements deliver real benefits to renters.

Citizens Advice is calling for the Government to:

- **Recommendation 1: Increase minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector without delay.** The Government should confirm plans to increase minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector to the equivalent of EPC C by 2030 as soon as possible, giving certainty to both tenants and landlords.

- **Recommendation 2: Support renters during the installation process.** The Government should ensure that renters have appropriate information and advice about any changes to their homes. This should include guidance to landlords on communicating effectively with their tenants about improvement works, as well as access to independent advice and support for renters.

- **Recommendation 3: Protect renters from unintended consequences of energy efficiency improvements.** This should include wider consumer protections to ensure that improvement works are performed to a high standard, and specific protections for renters against unfair rent increases - particularly where funding from Government schemes has been used.

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We provide free, confidential and independent advice to help people overcome their problems. We're a voice for our clients and consumers on the issues that matter to them.

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