

# Delivering warmer homes for private renters in Wales

Cold, draughty homes are leaving Welsh renters with high bills and health risks. With energy prices still 50% higher than in 2021, nearly half of private renters (49%) are struggling to pay their energy bills, and a quarter told us they couldn't heat their homes to a comfortable temperature last winter.<sup>(1)</sup>

High energy costs are exacerbated by poor energy efficiency. Almost two-thirds (60%) of rented homes in Wales have poor energy ratings (EPC D or below)<sup>(2)</sup> and those at EPC E, the current minimum energy efficiency standard for rented homes, pay an average of £317 more a year than those in EPC C homes.<sup>(3)</sup> The previous UK Government first launched proposals on improving minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) in the private rented sector to EPC C in 2020 and we welcomed the recent consultation on progressing this.<sup>(4)</sup> But 5 years on, private renters are still waiting for improvement.

Regulation will be crucial for lifting property standards in the private rented sector. Most renters lack confidence to ask landlords for improvements, fearing rent hikes, inaction, or damage to the relationship with their landlord. Yet many would welcome upgrades if offered, showing clear demand but significant barriers to asking for these proactively.



Whilst our [previous research](#) found that most landlords feel it is their responsibility to provide safe, living environments to their tenants, most are not looking to make energy efficiency improvements in the next 5 years. This year, we commissioned an online survey with private renters in England and Wales as well as in-depth interviews and focus groups to better understand private renters' perspectives on energy efficiency.<sup>(5)</sup>

To make homes warmer and safer for private renters, it is vital that we see regulation change from the UK Government to progress plans to raise MEES. Alongside this, we need sustained action from the Welsh Government to support renters and landlords to enable meaningful change in the private rented sector and protect renters from unintended consequences of regulatory change by:



**Improving tenant information:** Lead public awareness campaigns to ensure private renters understand their rights and available support for energy efficiency.



**Strengthening protections:** Protect renters from unfair rent increases or evictions that might follow energy efficiency upgrades.



**Accelerating retrofit of inefficient homes in Wales:** Expand funding for the Nest scheme to provide trusted advice and fully funded energy efficiency upgrades for low-income households.

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

Many renters continue to be at the sharp end of the cost-of-living crisis, facing skyrocketing rents as well as higher energy bills over the last few years. Our new research shows that many are still struggling with bills and that more than half are living with damp, mould or cold.



25% couldn't heat their home to a comfortable temperature.



49% were struggling to pay their energy bills



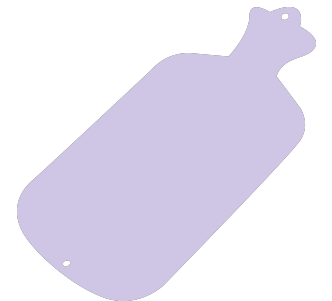
54% of private renters in Wales are living in a rented property with damp, mould, or excessive cold.

*"We don't have the luxury of like, just not putting it on, which is what we used to do before because we've got young kids, but before we had young kids, we did, like, just sort of would have, like a box of blankets and this would just use those...but not at the minute. We have to keep [the kids] warm."*

With nearly a quarter of households in Wales now estimated to be in fuel poverty<sup>(6)</sup>, we know that private renters are often at disproportionate risk of fuel poverty<sup>(7)</sup>. Renters told us they often struggled to heat their home sufficiently without pushing their bills up too high and often had to find ways to cut back, such as using electric blankets instead of putting the heating on or getting into bed early.

*"Every time I use energy and switch on the heating, even when it's cold, it's stressful. And then when you get your bill, you're like 'God I can't believe I spent that much'."*

*"I just wear my hoodie or if I'm really cold, I just get in the shower and then get into bed."*



## Private renters often don't ask for energy efficiency improvements

Despite a clear need for warmer, healthier homes, more than half (56%) of private renters in Wales haven't asked their landlords to install energy efficiency measures in the last 5 years.

Many say this out of a fear of negative consequences such as rent increases, or "rocking the boat" with their landlord, potentially putting their tenancy at risk. Others assumed requests would be dismissed due to a lack of incentive on the landlord's part.

- 28% of those who hadn't asked for improvements said they were worried their landlord might raise the rent
- 20% felt it wasn't their responsibility to request such measures
- 21% were worried about creating tension with their landlord
- 23% didn't believe their landlord would be willing to make improvements.

*"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', suddenly you find yourself looking for somewhere new to live and paying triple the price...so sometimes it just feels easier to stay a little bit quiet and be like, put up and shut up I guess is the best way to phrase it."*

*"I **personally wouldn't even bother** [asking the landlord] because mine is just rubbish...my boiler [broke] and he replied to me two months later. So it's just a joke. So I wouldn't even bother to be honest."*

*"If I'm completely honest, I hate asking for anything to be done because I feel like **it's just going to be put on the next rent increase.**"*

### Emma's story

Emma is a private renter living in a one-bedroom flat in Cardiff. She struggles to keep her home warm each winter. Despite doing everything she can to manage her energy use, poor insulation and an outdated heating system mean the flat is expensive to heat. High energy bills strain her already tight budget meaning she often has to go cold.

Emma can get frustrated as whilst her bills are high she can't make meaningful improvements to her flat such as better insulation, improved windows, or a more efficient heating system without her landlord choosing to do so.

Despite struggling with the cold, she avoids raising the issue of improvements with her landlord as she's worried that they might increase her rent or see her as a 'difficult tenant'. The fear of jeopardising her housing stability means that for Emma, putting up with poor living conditions feels like the only safe option.

*"I'm the one paying the bills, but **I have no say** in making the flat warmer or cheaper to heat."*

## But renters are open to improvements if offered

Whilst renters have concerns about asking for improvements, **the majority (87%) would be interested in having energy efficiency improvements** installed in the next 12 months if their landlord offered, with those who are younger or on a higher income expressing more interest.

Renters we spoke to were particularly interested in the potential cost savings and increased comfort of having a more efficient home, though nearly a third also cited that they wanted to reduce their carbon footprint.

- 67% of those interested said this was because they wanted to reduce their energy bills
- 60% said this would be to increase the comfort of their home.
- 30% said they wanted to reduce their home's carbon footprint

For many renters, a more efficient home would also be more attractive when looking for a home to rent (86%), though many told us they are simply unable to make this their first priority when looking for a home to rent, often needing to prioritise cost, location and size.



*"I'd love to have an air source heat pump. They're just very expensive but basically in an ideal world you would have one of those."*

*"To be comfortable in your home environment is kind of the minimum that you would want."*

*"I would probably go for wall, floor and roof insulation if they can all be kind of done in one."*

# Most still have some concerns about having measures installed in their homes

Higher standards in the private rented sector will help provide safer, more comfortable homes to many private renters. Still, despite high levels of interest, most renters (75%) still have some concerns about having energy efficiency measures installed on their rented home. These are important to understand and address as higher standards are implemented.

For a third (37%) this is still linked to fear around whether having measures installed would lead to their landlord raising their rent, making it unaffordable to them. Others are concerned about faulty installation or things going wrong with the work (17%).

Some renters also shared concerns over the process and consequences of having changes made to their property such as experiencing disruption or having to move out temporarily. This was raised more by renters who work from home or are at home during the day:

*"I work from home a lot so **it would be a bit of a hard sell if I had disruption and loads of noise for more than a week** as my colleagues wouldn't be able to hear me which would probably be quite difficult"*

*"I would **want to know how long this work would be going on for.** How disruptive is it going to be day to day? Especially because we're not necessarily planning on staying here long-term"*

*"I think **so long as I'm given information on how long it's [the disruption] is for...**because I know it's for the greater good and what it will achieve in the long run I would be okay with it."*

Despite having concerns, there were actions and protections that renters felt would make them more willing to agree to having improvements installed:



52% would be more likely to agree to measures being installed if they had a guarantee there would be no rent increase as a result



42% if there was clear communication from the landlord about the process and timeline



39% if they had a guarantee that if any issues arise they would be resolved quickly



39% if they given clear evidence that improvements would lead to energy savings and cost reductions

## Views on energy efficiency schemes

The majority (82%) of renters in Wales had heard of at least one energy efficiency scheme, with 43% aware of ECO4 and 61% of the Nest scheme - part of the Welsh Government's 'Warm Homes Programme' to tackle fuel poverty. There were also multiple spontaneous mentions of 'Nest' in focus groups and interviews. And whilst renters had reservations about asking their landlords to make changes, nearly two thirds (61%) said they would be interested in applying for a scheme to cover the costs of changes.

Our research also found that awareness and willingness to apply for schemes was notably higher among renters in Wales than in England, indicating that the more centralised approach to energy efficiency advice and long-standing schemes may have a positive impact on awareness.

Still, there is room for improvement, with private renters suggesting there is a need for better promotion of schemes to raise awareness, possibly through targeted advertising like radio adverts. There are also barriers that renters face to applying for schemes, with many feeling that it could still cause issues with their landlord, as with requesting improvements. In particular, most renters also don't believe that it is their responsibility to apply for schemes so they should not need to take on the additional responsibility of finding and applying for schemes.

*"...it **shouldn't be the stress of a tenant**. That's why you rent, because you don't own the property and you don't deal with those stresses."*

In light of this it is important that landlords take an active role in identifying available support and taking active steps to improve their properties. Additional renter protections could also help to empower renters to request that changes are made, especially when grant funding is used to make changes.

Whilst when MEES regulations are in place, it may be most appropriate for landlords to look to private finance if needed to raise the standard of their properties, the Welsh Government must also continue to use its powers to boost the efficiency of homes and support renters at the highest risk of fuel poverty.

# Recommendations

To make homes warmer and safer for private renters, we are calling on the UK government to finalise its plans to raise Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) in the private rented sector as well as back reforms with protections, including safeguards against poor-quality work. Alongside this, the Welsh Government also has important levers to support tenants:

## **Recommendation 1: Strengthen protections for renters.**

The Welsh Government should ensure that renters are protected from unfair rent increases or evictions following energy efficiency upgrades, particularly where funding from Government schemes has been used.

This should include exploring or strengthening mechanisms to limit post-upgrade rent increases - such as enabling tenants to have such increases formally reviewed or challenged – and broader rent reform measures such as banning no-fault evictions completely.

## **Recommendation 2: Improve access to information, advice and support for tenants in the private rented sector.**

The Welsh Government should build on previous awareness raising to lead targeted public awareness campaigns to ensure tenants understand their rights and the support available to them - particularly in relation to energy efficiency, housing standards, and schemes such as Nest.

This should include clear, accessible guidance on the right to a home that meets fitness for human habitation standards, how to raise concerns about cold or inefficient homes, and where to seek independent advice. Resources should also be tailored to reach those most at risk of fuel poverty.

## **Recommendation 3: Accelerate the retrofit of poorly insulated homes to shield households from energy price shocks and reduce fuel poverty.**

The Welsh Government should commit to using consequential from the UK Government's Warm Homes Plan to accelerate retrofit of poorly insulated homes, including expanding funding for Nest as well as developing an effective area-based scheme.

Landlords will also need clear information and advice around new Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards when they are implemented and their practical implications.

Alongside this the Welsh Government should explore practical support that helps landlords deal with the cost of making upgrades such as 'green finance' options, including low or zero interest loans.

## References

1. Data is based on a nationally representative online survey of 2,430 private renters in England and Wales, conducted by Yonder Consulting between 13th- 26th February 2025 with a boost for Wales - results based on 509 renters in Wales.
2. Rent Smart Wales, [Energy Performance Dashboard - Rent Smart Wales](#), Accessed September 2025
3. Citizens Advice analysis of energy consumption by EPC rating is based on publicly available [data on household energy usage by EPC](#) and on Ofgem's energy price cap. We multiplied the average gas and electricity consumption figures by the relevant unit rates for the period of October 2024 to March 2025 to calculate the average energy cost for each EPC rating last winter.
4. Department for Energy Security & Net Zero and Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2020), [Improving the energy performance of privately rented homes](#)
5. Citizens Advice commissioned Yonder Consulting to carry out qualitative research with private renters on low incomes living in England and Wales. This was a blend of focus groups and in-depth interviews carried out between 3rd-17th April.
6. Welsh Government, [Fuel poverty modelled estimates for Wales \(headline results\): as at October 2024 \[HTML\]](#), August 2025
7. Equality and Social Justice Committee, <https://senedd.wales/media/occhlkie/cr-ld15117-e.pdf>, May 2022

