

Summary of The Social Housing Regulation Bill

The Social Housing Regulation Bill- what is it?

This bill is a direct response to the White Paper that was published in 2020, outlining approaches for the Government to reform Social Housing conditions. The main goal of this bill is to increase the involvement of regulating organisations who would be responsible for routine check-ins on social landlords with over 1,000 homes. Regulators are meant to oversee the landlord's tenant services and housing conditions. The bill is an approach to improving the tenant and landlord relationship by involving a mediator in response to a pattern of tenant dissatisfaction, disregard, and mistreatment.

How did we get here?

In the years since the fire of Grenfell Tower, and the recent ITV investigation into poor social housing conditions, there has been an evident need for social housing reform. The White Paper (2020) set out ways that this reform can be approached by The Government, and this proposed bill is a framework of how the advice in the White Paper (2020) will be realistically implemented. The history of poor tenant-landlord relationships and the subsequent poor living conditions have gained awareness over the years through media involvement and a call for social housing reform, starting with allowing the Regulator of Social Housing to have more responsibilities and become more involved.

The "Serious Detriment" test, the "Democratic Filter" and the Regulator of Social Housing Transformation

The "serious detriment" test has been implemented into policy as an obstacle that the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) faces when trying to become involved with tenant issues, and since its incorporation, has only let the threat of serious harm warrant involvement of the RSH. The White Paper (2020) outlined that the test be dropped, and its removal is anticipated to improve tenant wait times in response to complaints. In addition, the bill is seeking to ditch the "Democratic Filter" which consists of an 8-week waiting period or contact with a politician before tenants are legally allowed to escalate their case (Inside Housing, 2022). Getting rid of the filter is anticipated to increase access to the Housing Ombudsman and have tenant complaints resolved in a timely manner.

Tenant Satisfaction Measures

A main objective of the Social Housing Regulation Bill is to develop new consumer standards and tenant satisfaction measures (TSMs). TSMs are to be implemented as a tool that ensures social landlords, such as councils, meet certain performance standards

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when maintaining and running their properties. The Regulator of Social Housing will focus on how complaints are being handled, how information is made available to tenants, and tenant safety. The bill aims to support a tenant focused approach to reforming social housing, which includes the involvement of tenants to determine the standards they seek in a social landlord. The five TSMs are: keeping properties in good repair; maintaining building safety; respectful and helpful engagement; responsible neighbourhood management; and effective handling of complaints.

Through data collection and routine inspections of landlord performance, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) intends to improve the tenant-landlord relationship by introducing and implementing tenant centred standards. They hope that TSMs will lessen the severity of issues and avoid poor housing conditions. The TSMs are set to be designed for tenants through open consultations with tenants, landlords, and local stakeholders. It is expected that implementing TSMs will increase landlord accountability and transparency. The proposed bill also emphasises that the performance information of landlords is easily accessible by tenants. It is anticipated that landlords will have to provide this information to the RSH and their tenants.

The Social Housing Regulation Bill is likely to be debated in Parliament this spring and will probably come into effect in Spring 2023.