



Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities

Rt Hon Michael Gove MP

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To: Members of the Renters (Reform) Public Bill Committee

15 November 2023

Dear Committee Members,

RENTERS (REFORM) BILL: UPDATE TO THE PUBLIC BILL COMMITTEE

I want to thank you all in advance for the time and effort that you will be devoting to scrutiny of the Renters (Reform) Bill. This will be crucial in ensuring this landmark legislation is as beneficial as possible for the 2.4 million landlords and 11 million tenants in England. Ahead of your line-by-line scrutiny of the Bill, I wanted to set out further information on the policies in the Bill and on amendments that the Government has tabled, published today.

Existing policies in the Bill

The Bill, as introduced, legislates for policies in the Government's white paper, *A fairer private rented sector*. Measures already in the Bill will deliver the policies set out below.

- **Abolition of section 21 'no fault' evictions** and moving to a simpler tenancy structure where all assured tenancies are periodic – providing more security for tenants.
- **Strengthened landlord grounds for possession** to ensure landlords can get their properties back when needed. For example, if landlords wish to sell property or in cases of repeated serious rent arrears. We will also expand grounds for when close family members wish to move in and have strengthened powers to evict anti-social tenants who are persistently disruptive. This is alongside non-legislative improvements to the court system to ensure it works efficiently in the small minority of cases that end up in the courts.
- **Creation of a digital Private Rented Property Portal** to help landlords understand their legal obligations and demonstrate compliance (giving good landlords confidence in their position), alongside providing better information to tenants to make informed decisions when entering into a tenancy agreement. Councils will also be able to use the Portal to target enforcement where it is needed against a minority of unscrupulous landlords.
- **Introduction of a new Private Rented Sector Ombudsman** that will provide fair, impartial, and binding resolution – supporting quicker, cheaper resolution when there are disputes and reducing the need for costly court proceedings.
- **Prevention of punitive rent hikes designed to force tenants out of their homes, while protecting landlords' ability to increase rent to market levels** – giving predictability to tenants and landlords. Under our approach, there is nothing to stop landlords increasing rent annually, with market rates. As is the case now, decisions can be challenged in court.
- **Giving tenants the right to request a pet in the property**, which the landlord must consider and cannot unreasonably refuse. To support this, landlords will be able to require pet insurance to cover any damage to their property.

Government amendments to the Bill

In addition to these measures, we have tabled amendments published today, as set out below.

- **Apply the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector:** By extending the standard we will ensure all tenants benefit from safe, warm homes in good repair. In line with our consultation proposals, which received broad support, these amendments will place landlords under a duty to meet the standard and will set out provisions for enforcing it. They will allow ministers to bring forward regulations, subject to the affirmative regulation procedure, that set out the content. We will publish a policy statement setting out our direction of travel on revising the content in a way that ensures it is both effective and proportionate, alongside a full consultation response.
- **Ensure the new tenancy system works effectively:** We are making amendments, many of which are technical in nature, so that the new tenancy system works in the absence of section 21 and fixed term contracts. This includes expanding the range of factors a judge must consider when evicting anti-social tenants – as set out in the Government’s Anti-Social Behaviour Action Plan – as well as improving enforcement of the new tenancy system.
- **Protect the functioning of the student market:** We are introducing a ground for possession to protect the functioning of the student market model, while ensuring student tenants have the same flexibility to leave low-quality properties as other tenants.
- **Outlaw blanket bans on renting to those in receipt of benefits or with children in England and Wales:** Our white paper committed to outlaw such blanket bans. While landlords will continue to be able to factor in affordability considerations when deciding to whom to let a property, the amendments we have tabled will prohibit landlords (and anyone acting on their behalf) from adopting discriminatory practices which make it harder for people who have children or who are in receipt of benefits to access secure housing.
- **Strengthen councils’ enforcement powers:** Our amendments will strengthen councils’ investigatory powers to respond to bad practice. This will help drive out criminal landlords who bring down the reputation of the responsible majority. We will also introduce a power for the Secretary of State to require information from councils on enforcement activity to help secure better data. In addition, we are strengthening rent repayment orders and making a minor amendment to enable county councils to enforce measures.

These reforms will deliver the fairer private rented sector that landlords and tenants deserve. My team and I look forward to working with you to ensure the legislation works effectively. My team can be reached at: rentersreform@levellingup.gov.uk.

Yours sincerely,



RT HON MICHAEL GOVE MP
Secretary of State for Levelling up, Housing and Communities