

Consultation Response

A reformed Decent Homes Standard for social and privately rented homes

Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government

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About this consultation

This consultation considers decency standards for social and privately rented sector housing.

Key points and recommendations

- Age UK welcomes the proposal to extend the Decent Homes Standard to the private rented sector and to amend the current requirements.
- The number of people ageing in the private rented sector is predicted to more than triple over the next twenty years with 36% of older people forecast to live in social and privately rented homes by 2042.¹
- 30% of older tenants in the private rented sector live in a non-decent home with impact on their health and quality of life,² and 11% of housing association residents.
- An Age UK survey showed that 44% of private renters over the age of 66 said that they were worried about the condition of their home as they thought about ageing, 18% were very worried. The numbers for social housing are similar.
- There is an extreme shortage of accessible rented housing, and we would like to see the Decent Homes standard used as a tool to ensure that renovation incorporates accessibility where possible and extends the use of adaptations for those who need them.
- We would like to see a requirement for basic flooring, security measures, adequate access and cooking facilities to be included within certain limitations.
- If the standard is to have any real impact though, we need to see local authority enforcement teams properly resourced and a move towards more pro-active enforcement for vulnerable tenants.
- Longer-term we need to ensure that the Government's objective to build 1.5 million homes includes accessible, adaptable, affordable homes for older renters who currently have an extreme shortage of suitable options. 70% of older renters currently say that if they had to move, they would find it difficult to find a new home.³ Again and again, Age UK sees cases of older people struggling to find suitable accommodation in the rented sector. With few choices, particularly few accessible choices, older people are forced to compromise and accept poor standards. Increasing the supply of rented homes is key to improving condition.
- With so many bits of legislation covering standards in the rented sector, it is hard for tenants and landlords to understand what their rights and responsibilities are. A new Decent Homes Standard together with other planned changes, must provide clarity. The various references to cooking facilities, for example, are hard to pull together, and it is difficult for all parties to fully understand what is required without advice.

About Age UK

Age UK believes every older person should be included and valued. We're working locally, nationally and internationally to change the way we age. Together with our partners, we're changing the day-to-day experience of getting older through essential services and local support. We transform older people's wellbeing in the ways that matter most to them – whether that's getting online or getting more active. Our specialist, impartial advice helps change older people's worries into answers. And our friendship services change loneliness and isolation into comfort and connection. We campaign to put older people at the heart of public policy and shift the way ageing is treated and represented.

Introduction

Age UK welcomes this review of the Decent Homes Standard and the extension of the standard to the private rented sector.

The number of people ageing in the private rented sector is predicted to more than triple over the next twenty years with 36% of older people forecast to live in social and privately rented homes by 2042.⁴

Recent data from an Age UK survey conducted in January shows the extent to which older renters are worried about the condition of their home as they think about ageing. Condition was defined as damp, cold or basic amenities not working – so the standard was not high.

- 44% of private renters over the age of 66 said that, as they thought about ageing, they were worried about the condition of their home, 18% were very worried.
- The numbers for the social housing sector are similar. 45% of social renters over the age of 66 said that they were worried about the condition of their home, 19% were very worried.
- A quarter of private renters with a household income below £30,000 live in a home which needs repair and maintenance which is not being done. 58% say that their landlord is aware of the work needed but is not doing it. Amongst social renters 36% say their home needs repairs and half say they are not being done.

A revised Decent Homes standard can do more to address these concerns, clarifying what is required and incorporating some additional elements such as flooring, security and cooking facilities.

We would particularly like to see accessibility added to the standard. There is a huge shortage of accessible rented housing and retrofitting without taking accessibility into account is wasting an opportunity to incrementally increase the number of homes which are suitable for the growing number of older renters. Few landlords will think about accessibility unless it is mandatory to do so and we would therefore like to see it dealt with in the standard itself, rather than the guidance. There is no point making a top floor flat with no lift accessible so flexibility will be required and wording needs to be practical.

The standard should also reference adaptations. Private renters are less likely than those in other tenures to receive the adaptations they need and housing association tenants

face particular delays. In an Age UK survey conducted in January of this year 43% of renters over the age of 66 said that they would need to make an adaptation to their home if they were to continue living there with some restricted mobility, The example given was finding stairs difficult or struggling to get in or out of a bath – common issues associated with ageing.

The Decent Homes Standard needs to be enforced to be effective though and local authority enforcement teams need to be properly resourced. The Committee of Public Accounts' report on the Regulation of Private Renting concluded that local authority regulation does not provide appropriate and consistent protection for tenants. Even if a tenant has identified the relevant legislation and reported their issue, the likelihood of a case being taken to final formal enforcement is slim. For older tenants, who are less likely to complain, may find accessing information online difficult and struggle to push their cases through the system, challenging poor conditions is particularly difficult. We need to move towards more pro-active enforcement.

Longer-term we need to ensure that the Government's objective to build 1.5 million homes includes accessible, adaptable, affordable homes for older renters who currently have an extreme shortage of suitable options. 70% of older renters currently say that if they had to move, they would find it difficult to find a new home.⁵ With few choices people are reluctant to challenge poor conditions and are forced to accept accommodation in poor condition. Increasing the supply of suitable rented homes for an ageing population is key to improving standards.

Consultation questions

Question 11:

Do you agree that age should be removed from the definition of disrepair?

Yes.

Question 12:

Do you agree that the thresholds used to define disrepair for each component should be updated to reflect a more descriptive measure as proposed?

Yes

Question 13:

Do you agree that the number of items or components which must require major repairs for the component to be considered in disrepair should be reduced?

Yes

Question 15:

Do you agree that kitchens and bathroom components should be considered as "key" i.e. one or more in disrepair would cause a property to fail the DHS?

Yes.

Question 16:

a) Do you agree with the proposed list of building components that must be kept in good repair?

Yes

We agree with the proposed and welcome the addition of the new features.

Question 17:

Do you agree with the proposed “key” components and “other” components as listed?

Yes

Question 20:

a) Do you agree that under the new DHS landlords should be required to provide at least three out of the four facilities listed?

No, the four facilities listed are: A kitchen with adequate space and layout, an appropriately located bathroom and WC, adequate external noise insulation, adequate size and layout of common entrance areas for blocks of flats.

We don't think the multiple-choice formula is helpful. Each element has its own set of issues and grouping such disparate factors together could mean that one important facility is not included.

- A bathroom is always essential.
- There are circumstances where a home could be rented without a kitchen and there are some tenants who would find this arrangement acceptable. So, any wording needs to reflect these cases but for most people some kind of cooking facilities are necessary. Eating out tends to be more expensive and less healthy. The ability to cook is central to the psychological difference between temporary accommodation and a home.
- Adequate access layout. As with a kitchen one can imagine a home where the access was complicated but the home otherwise decent. Any wording must make sure that these homes don't fail the standard. However, given that the Decent Homes Standard is most likely to be useful in dealing with poor standard homes at the bottom end of the market there needs to be some reference to adequate access layout which covers properties where too many homes have been forced into small spaces and access is unacceptable. For older people in particular, poor access can be really difficult.

These facilities need to be dealt with independently of each other.

b) If you said No, are there any of the facilities that you would prioritise?

See above.

c) Do you believe that the “multiple choice” nature of Criterion C (i.e. landlords must provide at least three out of the four facilities listed) could lead to any practical implications for tenants, landlords and/or organisations responsible for regulating/enforcing the standard?

YES. See above.

d) If there is anything else you would like to add on this specific proposal, please do so here

Covering such a wide variety of different types of home with prescriptive requirements is difficult. Some discretion is necessary but references to discretion must take into account the funding environment for enforcement teams. With such restricted funding, enforcement teams will prioritise – and therefore possibly only take action in – circumstances where their obligations are mandatory.

Question 22:

The following questions relate to additional home security requirements in the DHS:

a) Do you think that home security requirements in relation to external doors and windows are sufficiently covered in the Decent Homes Standard?

No

Age UK conducted a survey in January 2025 of older people's attitude to various aspects of their housing. The survey asked a representative group over the age of 50 to think about their home as they aged and whether they were worried about security. Responses showed that a third of people over the age of 50 are concerned about the security of their home as they age. Security was expressed as feeling safe from break ins. Looking at those aged 66 and over by tenure:

- 31% of social renters were worried
- 23% of private renters were worried
- 36% of homeowners were worried

Feeling safe is fundamental to a decent home.

b) If you responded No to part a), should we consider additional security requirements in relation to external doors and windows in the Decent Homes Standard?

YES

c) If you responded Yes to part b), should we consider giving landlords the option to comply with Part Q requirements in Building Regulations?

YES

Question 24:

a) Do you think that landlords should provide suitable floor coverings in all rooms at the start of every new tenancy from an agreed implementation date?

YES

In some areas and in some cases, there are charity sector, and local authority grants to cover buying basic items such as fridges, beds and floor coverings for those on low incomes. These are not always available though and living in a home without basic flooring is difficult. Age UK's Information & Advice line receives calls from those struggling with poor flooring in rented homes. Adequate flooring is important for warmth and older people are more likely to experience health impacts from cold housing.

Question 26:

Do you agree with the proposal that the primary heating system must have a distribution system sufficient to provide heat to the whole home?

YES

Question 28:

If there is anything else you would like to add on this specific topic please do so here

Moving to EPC C in the private rented sector has the potential to improve outcomes for tenants and act as a catalyst for wider improvements. Ensuring that the proposals reduce, not increase energy bills should be a base assumption of the way requirements are set up and support needs to be put in place for older and other vulnerable renters who will need help dealing with the changes. Evidence from the Age UK Warm Homes Programmes suggests that older renters may need help navigating builders, moving furniture, understanding their rights, moving home if necessary and will be concerned about rent increases once the work is completed.

Question 29:

a) Our expectation is that, to meet the DHS, landlords should ensure their properties are free from damp and mould. Do you agree with this approach?

YES

b) Criterion E will be in addition to the requirements under Awaab's Law as it aims to prevent damp and mould reaching a level that is hazardous. If, however, damp and mould in a property were to become severe enough to cause 'significant harm', landlords would have to comply with Awaab's Law to ensure prompt remediation and, if they do not, tenants will be able to take action in the courts. The damp and

mould standard in the DHS should however help to prevent damp and mould getting that severe. Do you agree with this approach?

YES

Question 30:

To ensure the standard is met, regulators and enforcers will consider whether the home is free from damp and mould at bands A to H of the HHSRS, excluding only the mildest damp and mould hazards? Do you agree with this approach?

YES

Question 38:

a) What information and/or topics would you like included in the proposed additional best practice guidance for social and private landlords and tenants? (Select all that apply)

- **Accessibility**

84% of the forecasted growth in households between 2018 and 2043 is accounted for by households over the age of 65. There is an extreme shortage of accessible housing. Only 12% of households over the age of 75 have step free access to their home⁶ and in 2022/2023 a third of wheelchair users in the social sector were placed in homes which were not accessible or adapted for wheelchair use.⁷ This is difficult for individual older people, restricting their ability to lead a full and active life, and it puts unnecessary pressure on unpaid carers, social care, local authority finances and the NHS.

We need to address accessibility and adaptations in the Decent Homes Standard. The aim must be to achieve an increase in the number of age friendly, accessible rented properties and ensure tenants can get the adaptations that they need without reducing supply of rented properties or placing an unacceptable burden on landlords.

There are two elements which need to be considered. Accessibility – the structure of homes (step free access, plumbing that can take a shower, walls that can take a grab rail) and adaptations (the shower, the stair lift, the grab rail).

- **Accessibility**

Accessibility is currently dealt with through the guidance and the wording says: “Landlords may also want to consider other factors when carrying out work to make homes decent. For example, ensuring that works undertaken do not make the home more difficult to use for a person with disabilities, considering lifetime homes and carrying out works in an environmentally sustainable way.”

We need to go further. It is a waste of resources to retrofit without addressing the impact on accessibility. Small changes at no additional cost can help to incrementally increase the number of homes that are suited to an ageing population.

Energy efficiency retrofit as a result of the new MEES requirements is a case in point. An insulated wall can only support a grab rail where the rail is placed on one of the batons which support the wall. The batons therefore need to be set in appropriate places where a grab rail may be needed. Unless this is done, a tenant who needs a simple grab rail would have to ask permission for the newly insulated wall to be taken down and rebuilt with the strength to hold the rail. This is a waste of resources.

Few landlords are likely to think about accessibility when they renovate without some pressure to do so. To have any impact this a requirement would have to be mandatory and therefore in the main body of the standard. The wording has to be realistic though and allow flexibility. We cannot expect landlords to include accessibility into all renovation and accessible features can only be incorporated where practical.

Wording must make it clear that this is an issue to be considered seriously and implemented where possible, so that the exception is the renovation scheme where there is no consideration to accessibility rather than the other way round. This is particularly important for social landlords - large scale refurbishment must increase the number of accessible homes.

We need to place accessibility in the main body of the standard if it is to have any impact asking landlords to include age friendly features and elements of the Part M4 Category 2 regulations where appropriate.

- **Adaptations**

There is already an obligation on landlords to allow “reasonable” adaptations so including adaptations in the Decent Homes Standard, as suggested in the previous Government’s consultation, wouldn’t change what was actually required by law. It would provide clarity and focus attention. What those looking for adaptations really need is a clear understanding of what the law requires and what best practice entails so that landlords and tenants know what is expected. It is not always clear to tenants or landlords what “reasonable” really means and landlords are often reluctant to make changes to a property which might cost money to put in and remove. Adaptations are often refused as an easy first response. Research by the NRLA suggested a significant increase in the number of landlords willing to allow adaptations if they had full information about the funding that is available, the kinds of solutions that work and what their rights and responsibilities are. A NRLA survey reported that 78% of landlords have never heard of the Disabled Facilities Grant and a further 16% only know a little about it. Landlord applications are not subject to a means test and so in theory the grant should fund adaptations in the private rented sector. Yet 85% of landlords who were unwilling to allow adaptations cited cost as an issue. 68% said they were likely to allow adaptations once they understood the role of the grant.

We welcome the Government’s plans to use the rental database to help provide clarity and information. The Decent Homes Standard also has a role in clarifying rights, obligations and highlighting the issue.

Question 41 (All):

a) What do you think the implementation date for the DHS should be in the PRS?

2035 / 2037 / Other

OTHER

b) If Other – What do you think the implementation date should be? (Please select one)

2027 / 2028 / 2029 / 2030 / 2031 / 2032/ 2033 / 2034 / 2036 / Later/Don't know

2030 for the private rented sector/2035 for the social sector

There are several factors at play:

- The Decent Homes Standard is about the requirement for a home to be “decent” and assuming that what is required is not excessive the implementation date should be as soon as possible. Some of what is asked is pretty basic – a door that means that you are safe from a break-in, a bathroom with fittings that work, basic cooking facilities, no damp, no mould. It is most useful at the lower end of the market where standards are poor and in some cases, only what is mandatory will be provided. 30% of older tenants in the private rented sector live in a non-decent home with impact on their health and quality of life.⁸
- If we are asking for basic decency, then an implementation date in 2035 or 2037 seems a long way off.
- A lead time of ten years may still have some impact in the social sector where retrofit is planned cyclically and in advance. It is unlikely to have much impact in the private rented sector where retrofit is planned to shorter timescales and in a more ad hoc way. The consultation says, “While we are proposing a long-term deadline, our expectation is that landlords should commence works earlier wherever feasible”. Few private landlords are likely to commence earlier. The regulatory environment may look different in 2035. A new Government might change the requirements. A private landlord might not know whether they will still own the property in ten years’ time. It seems likely that many will wait until nearer the time.
- The move to EPC C by 2030 and the introduction of Awaab’s law is likely to be a catalyst for broader renovation. 55% of privately rented homes in England were below EPC C in 2022 so this will affect a substantial proportion of the private rented market. It would make sense for any retrofit resulting from a new Decent Homes standard to work to a similar timescale.
- However, some rented sector landlords are under financial pressure. Social housing providers are dependent on limited Government funding, face a number of financial obligations and need the resources to build new homes. We see the consequences of this pressure in the poor condition of sheltered housing stock. The financial position of private sector landlords obviously varies from property to property but with the introduction of the Renters Rights bill and EPC C ratings, the sector is subject to considerable change and there are concerns about landlords leaving the market.

We are therefore balancing social sector finances, fear of a reduction in supply of homes in the private rented sector and the need, particularly at the lower end of the market, for the basic standards of a decent home.

At the heart of this problem is the shortage of rented homes and for older people who may need specific features such as step free access or adaptations this shortage is particularly acute. 70% of renters over the age of 65 say that they would find it difficult to find a new property if they had to move.⁹ We need to attract investment into the rented sector and ensure an increase in supply so that these trade-offs become unnecessary.

Local plans must evaluate the needs of an ageing population in more detail, recognising the increasing number of older people living in the rented sector and all new homes must be built to the higher accessibility standards of Part M4 Category 2.

It may be that the social and private rented sectors need different implementation dates reflecting different financial pressures and retrofit cycles. 2035 may work for the social sector but for the private rented sector the deadline will have to be sooner if it is to have any impact on living standards for older tenants over the next five years.

The move to an EPC C is probably the most challenging aspect of these changes for most landlords whose homes are in a decent condition and the proposed implementation for MEES reforms is already 2030. To retrofit to EPC C whilst leaving features that would fail a Decent Homes standard doesn't seem satisfactory. An earlier implementation date for the private rented sector seems appropriate.

Question 42 (All):

a) Do you support phasing in some elements of the new Decent Homes Standard ahead of the proposed full implementation dates (2035/2037)?

YES – see above.

b) If Yes – Which elements of the new DHS do you think should be introduced ahead of the proposed full implementation dates (2035/2037)?

YES – for the private rented sector.

Question 47: (For All)

If there is anything else you would like to add on this specific section? If so, please do so here

Much of what is required is already in place but not properly enforced.

Local Authority enforcement teams need to be properly resourced to ensure that a revised Decent Homes Standard actually has impact. Given public finances, it is likely that resources will remain stretched and local authorities will inevitably prioritise those homes where there is a “duty” to take action rather than a “power” to take action.

Older people struggle to navigate a reactive system of redress. Where an authority has a “duty” to act any complaint is much more likely to result in action. Forcing an authority to use a “power” when there are other cases demanding attention will be challenging. By excluding B to E from the Type 1 requirement these elements are likely, in many cases, to be ignored unless they are a serious hazard.

B to E includes elements such as the following:

- basic bathroom and kitchen facilities being structurally sound, free from significant damage or deterioration and fit for their intended use.
- Windows and external doors that are not weather tight, unable to make secure / lock, unable to use properly (i.e. open and close).
- Internal plaster works requiring major repair

Social Rented Sector

Question 48:

a) Do you agree that providers should be given flexibility from meeting the DHS where tenants refuse access?

YES – in very limited circumstances. See below, question 49c.

b) Do you agree that there should be additional guidance issued by the government to provide more detail on tenant refusals?

YES – to ensure that the flexibility is not misused.

d) Do you agree that providers should be given flexibility from meeting the DHS for non-compliance due to sale, demolition, or planned regeneration of properties?

YES but only for a reasonable time period

e) If there is anything else you would like to add on this specific question please do so here.

Private Rented Sector

Question 49:

b) Should statutory enforcement guidance specify that local authorities exercise discretion on enforcement in situations of tenant refusal?

YES – in very limited circumstances

c) If there is anything else you would like to add on this specific question please do so here.

We would like to see a move to more proactive enforcement so that local authorities are not always relying on tenants to raise concerns. Older people are more reluctant to complain about their living conditions and may find reporting concerns difficult, not always knowing the procedure or who to contact. More older people find accessing information online difficult, uploading photographs of issues or pushing a case through a complex and under-resourced system.

The rental database provides an opportunity for more proactive enforcement. If a landlord has five properties that fail the standard, it will be easier to identify the sixth. We also need to encourage referrals from carers, neighbours and family members to ensure that we reach those who are unlikely to self-report. A recent Age UK case involved an older homeowner whose house was in an extreme case of disrepair, with broken windows, only half of a sink and carbon monoxide emissions. Ironically the carbon monoxide was not fatal because of the extent of the broken windows. The man was receiving care, but the carer had not told anyone about the condition of the house. This was a homeowner so not applicable here, but it illustrates how referrals are important.

So, we cannot assume that all cases will be self-reported, In fact, we should be aiming to move to a situation where this is not the case.

However, as the consultations makes clear it is easy to see this exemption being misused so it is important to restrict use to limited circumstances. When they first assessed their exemption register, Cornwall council found that 60-70% of all types of exemption were invalid.¹⁰

¹ [202311-the-uk-pensions-framework-final2.pdf](#)

² English Housing Survey: Older people's housing, 2020-21 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

³ [Hidden renters: The unseen faces of the rising older rental wave | Independent Age](#)

⁴ [202311-the-uk-pensions-framework-final2.pdf](#)

⁵ [Hidden renters: The unseen faces of the rising older rental wave | Independent Age](#)

⁶ [EHS20-21 Older People s Housing - Ch2 - Tables.ods](#)

⁷ [Social housing lettings in England, tenants: April 2022 to March 2023 - GOV.UK](#)

⁸ English Housing Survey: Older people's housing, 2020-21 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

⁹ [Hidden renters: The unseen faces of the rising older rental wave | Independent Age](#)

¹⁰ [E3G-Report-Improving-living-standards-private-renters-England-Wales.pdf](#)