

**Inside Housing article (8/6/22):**

## **Social Housing Regulation Bill: landlords to be subject to ‘Ofsted-style’ inspections under new law**

Under the new bill, which will be published today, the Regulator of Social Housing (RSH) will be given stronger powers to regularly inspect landlords on things such as health and safety and repairs performance.

Also, the length of time the English regulator has to warn organisations about inspections of properties will now be drastically cut from 28 days to 48 hours.

If the RSH finds that the standard of the home is putting tenants lives at risk, it will be able to order emergency repairs, with landlords footing the bill.

Unlimited fines will be levied at housing associations and councils that are found to be persistently under performing, while the government will set about on a programme of naming and shaming the worst culprits.

The changes come as part of the new Social Housing Regulation Bill, which will be laid before parliament this afternoon. The bill was promised in this year’s Queen’s Speech and will include a number of reforms to shake up the social housing sector.

As part of the regulator’s expanded powers, the RSH will be able to assess landlords on consumer standards, including on complaint-handling.

Changes to social housing regulation were first promised in the months after the Grenfell Tower tragedy in 2017 after it was discovered that repeated concerns around fire safety were raised by residents, but that these fell on deaf ears at the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO), the landlord for the block.

However, there have been many delays to publishing reforms, with a Social Housing Green Paper being published in August 2018 and the white paper being published in November 2020.

Social housing standards have been put further under the microscope in the past 18 months as a result of a high-profile investigation by ITV News. The long-running examination has exposed widespread failings by several landlords and horrendous housing conditions.

Among the other new changes to be announced today, the ‘serious detriment test’ will be scrapped. This test sets a high legal bar for when the RSH can intervene on consumer issues, and only when tenants are at risk of serious harm. This meant the regulator has only taken action against landlords in the most serious cases.

All social landlords will also now have to have a named person responsible for health and safety requirements, while housing associations will also now be subject to a Freedom of Information-style information-sharing process.

Landlords that either breach consumer standards or are served with a maladministration finding by the Housing Ombudsman will be named and shamed by the secretary of state.

Housing secretary Michael Gove did this for the first time last month, when he publicly criticised Clarion, the country's largest association, after it received severe maladministration findings.

Alongside the changes, a new 250-person resident panel will be set up by the government and convene with ministers every four months to share their experiences and inform policy thinking to drive further improvements.

The government will also launch a consultation on electrical safety standards within social housing, in a bid to make tenants feel more safe in their homes.

Mr Gove said: "In 2022, it is disgraceful that anyone should live in damp, cold and unsafe homes, waiting months for repairs and being routinely ignored by their landlord.

"These new laws will end this injustice and ensure the regulator has strong new powers to take on rogue social landlords.

"We are driving up the standards of social housing and giving residents a voice to make sure they get the homes they deserve. That is levelling up in action."