

1. Summary

- 1.1 Electrical Safety First is the UK-wide charity committed to reducing deaths, injuries and accidents caused by electricity. **Our primary commitment is to ensure that everyone – regardless of tenure or dwelling type – can live safe from electrical risk in their own home.**
- 1.2 There will be a Westminster Hall debate on 'Reducing Fire Risk in High Rise Social Housing' on Tuesday, 14 September 2021, at 2.30pm. Electrical Safety First is pleased that MPs will get a chance to debate this critically important issue, at a time when private tenants in high rise housing receive higher legal protections for electrical safety than their social tenant neighbours.
- 1.3 MPs should use this debate to raise the need to strengthen the provisions of the Building Safety Bill, currently going through parliament, and call for the Government to introduce **mandatory five-yearly electrical checks by social landlords in High Rise Residential Buildings (HRRBs) in England.** This is a simple, logical and effective way to reduce fire risk in high rise social housing and would protect lives and property. **Our recent research found that the Social Rented Sector is in favour of mandatory five-yearly electrical safety checks.**¹

2. Key Facts and Figures

- 2.1 **Electricity causes around 14,000 house fires a year in England alone – over half of all accidental dwelling fires**². Every year, thousands of people are injured in their homes due to electrical accidents and incidents, and some tragically lose their lives in fires caused by electricity.
- 2.2 There are nearly 5,000 social residential HRRBs in England, estimated to contain over 487,000 individual flats³. In England, 54% of all accidental dwelling fires are caused by an

¹ <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/media/mtllsfls/social-rented-sector-policy-paper-march-2021.pdf>

² Electrical Safety First analysis of Home Office Statistics 2018-19 <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/our-policies/westminster/statistics-england/>

³ English Housing Survey 2018-19 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-housing-survey-2018-to-2019-headline-report>



electrical source of ignition⁴. **These include the fires in Shirley Towers in Southampton⁵, Grenfell Tower⁶, Lakanal House⁷, New Providence Wharf⁸ and Shepherds Court⁹ in London.** These tragic events have demonstrated the fatal risk electrical incidents pose to people in their own homes, particularly in high-density housing such as HRRBs.

2.3 Each of these buildings were mixed tenure – with residents from the social and private rented sectors as well as owner-occupiers. **Yet only those tenants who rent privately would currently receive a legally required electrical check.**

2.4 The UK Government's Social Housing White Paper, published in November 2020¹⁰, said that **'safety measures in the social sector should be in line with the legal protections afforded to private sector tenants'**. Landlords of privately rented properties are required to have an electrical safety check covering the electrical installation by a qualified and competent person at least every five years – but social housing is not included and complaints from social tenants in high rise buildings have been ignored. For example:

- i. In evidence to the Grenfell Inquiry resident Mr Edward Daffarn said¹¹: 'I first became aware of the power surges on 13 May 2013 when I was sitting in my living room and the overhead lights went from being really dim back to really bright. During the power surges residents' electrical equipment would malfunction, smoke would be emitted from electrical fires ...'. Yet he was labelled a troublemaker by the tenant management company.

4 Electrical Safety First analysis of Home Office Statistics 2018-19 <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/what-we-do/our-policies/westminster/statistics-england/>

5 Shirley Towers Fire - <https://www.ife.org.uk/incidents-of-interest/shirley-towers-2010/34619>

6 Grenfell Tower Fire <https://www.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/>

7 Lakanal House Fire <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/uk-england-london-21964603>

8 New Providence Wharf Fire <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-57260742>

9 Shepherds Court Fire <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-37203833>

10 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936098/The_charter_for_social_housing_residents_-_social_housing_white_paper.pdf

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https://assets.grenfelltowerinquiry.org.uk/TMO10005286_KCTMO%20document%20entitled%20%E2%80%9CStage%203%20Complaint%E2%80%9D%20regarding%20Edward%20Daffarn%E2%80%99s%20complaint%20about%20power%20surges..pdf



ii. Earlier in 2021 appalling conditions in a high-rise block in Croydon featured in an ITV News programme¹² which revealed dangerous electrical risks with the electrical system. Yet tenants' complaints were ignored.

2.5 The Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee's report agreed with Electrical Safety First and recommended that mandatory checks should be introduced for HRRBs.¹³

3. Strengthening the Building Safety Bill

3.1 The Building Safety Bill, currently at Committee Stage in the Commons, is a **welcome opportunity for Government to strengthen electrical safety protections for social residents of high rise housing.**

3.2 **Electrical Safety First is calling for the Bill to introduce a requirement for social landlords to complete inspections of the electrical installations in all properties they manage in HRRBs every five years,** conducted by a competent and qualified electrician.

3.3 Fundamentally, **we believe that every dwelling in a HRRB,** regardless of tenure, should be subject to the same electrical safety regime. Extending the requirement already in place for privately rented flats to social housing and leaseholders would be an easy and straightforward way to protect all residents of high rise housing from fire and electrical risk.

For further information about this briefing, please contact William Wright, Policy and Public Affairs Advisor, Electrical Safety First at: william.wright@electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk

¹² <https://www.itv.com/news/2021-03-22/the-worst-ive-ever-seen-the-appalling-and-unliveable-council-housing-conditions-some-have-endured-during-lockdown>

¹³ HCLG Parliamentary Committee – Pre-legislative Scrutiny of the Building Safety Bill <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/3605/documents/35262/default/>

