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Press release

James Brokenshire announces overhaul of broken housing complaints system

A new Housing Complaints Resolution Service is announced for the entire housing market.

Published 24 January 2019

From: Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (<https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ministry-of-housing-communities-and-local-government>) and The Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP (<https://www.gov.uk/government/people/james-brokenshire>)



- Communities Secretary announces plans for new housing complaints service for entire housing market – ensuring both homeowners and tenants know where to go when things go wrong
- For first time ever, private landlords will be legally required to join a housing redress scheme – boosting protection for millions of renters across the country
- Move builds on government reforms to create a housing market that works for everyone – no matter what type of home they live in

Dissatisfied homeowners and tenants will have simple and quick access to help when things go wrong, thanks to new plans announced today (24 January 2019) by Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP.

From broken boilers to cracks in the wall, the new Housing Complaints Resolution Service will potentially help millions by providing a straight-forward way of getting help when faced with unresolved disputes about problems with their home – such as repairs and maintenance.

Unlike other sectors, such as financial services, the housing market has several different complaints bodies, with homeowners and tenants having to navigate their way through a complicated and bureaucratic system just to work out where to register a grievance.

Establishing a single housing complaints service for all residents – no matter whether they rent or own their home – will prevent people from battling with their landlord or builder to resolve issues on their own and make it easier to claim compensation where it's owed.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon James Brokenshire MP, said:

Creating a housing market that works for everyone isn't just about building homes – it's about ensuring people can get the help they need when something goes wrong.

But all too often the process can be confusing and overly bureaucratic, leaving many homeowners and tenants feeling like there is nowhere to go in the event of problems with their home.

The proposals I have announced today will help ensure all residents are able to access help when they need it, so disputes can be resolved faster, and people can get compensation where it's owed.

Currently, the housing complaints system is confusing – there are multiple complaint bodies covering the housing market, and membership of redress schemes is compulsory for some tenures but not others.

For example, in the private rented sector, there is currently no obligation for landlords to register with a complaints system – leaving thousands of renters without any course for redress.

To combat this, the Communities Secretary has today announced that private landlords will be legally required to become members of a redress scheme – with a fine of up to £5,000 if they fail to do so.

And to protect the interests of home-owners who buy new build homes, government has also reiterated its commitment to establishing a New Homes Ombudsman which will champion home buyers, protect their interests and hold developers to account.

Legislation will be brought forward at the earliest possible opportunity to require all new developers to belong to the Ombudsman – giving homebuyers the confidence that when they get the keys to a new home they are getting the quality of build they expect.

Developers will also have to belong to the new body by 2021 if they wish to participate in the government's landmark Help to Buy scheme.

The Housing Complaints Resolution Service will be developed with a new Redress Reform Working Group made up of representatives from across the sector, working with industry and consumers.

This is part of on-going work by the government to make the property market fairer and more transparent for everyone.

Further information

These measures form part of the government response to the consultation *Strengthening consumer redress in the housing market* (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/strengthening-consumer-redress-in-housing>), which ran from 18 February to 16 April 2018, and received over 1,200 responses.

The consultation looked at a range of issues including:

- how the current complaints and redress landscape works
- whether streamlining redress in housing could help improve delivery of services
- how the 'in-house' complaints process and other practices and processes in redress could be improved
- how any gaps in housing redress could be filled, with a particular focus on purchasers of new build homes and private rented sector tenants

The policy proposals in this document primarily relate to England. Where proposed legislation has scope outside England with regard to devolved matters, we will continue to engage and consult the devolved administrations to seek agreement.

Redress for social housing residents is being considered separately. The response to the social housing green paper (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-new-deal-for-social-housing>) and the call for evidence for the review of social housing regulation (<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/review-of-social-housing-regulation-call-for-evidence>) are due to be published in spring 2019.

The government announced the proposal to create a New Homes Ombudsman service in October 2018 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-new-housing-measures>). This response indicates how that service will sit in the wider redress landscape and the next steps of its implementation.

The Housing Complaints Resolution Service will provide a single point of access to resolve complaints for housing consumers, when 'in-house' complaint processes have been exhausted, through the current schemes providing alternative dispute resolution, while preserving the expertise of existing providers.

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