

RH 04

Y Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a Llywodraeth Leol/  
Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee  
Bil Rhentu Cartrefi (Cymru)/Renting Homes (Wales) Bill

Ymateb gan: Nwy Prydain

Response from: British Gas



## Executive summary

British Gas welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the call for evidence on the Renting Homes (Wales) Bill and is supportive of the Welsh Government in bringing forward proposals for improvements to legislation for renting homes in Wales.

In particular, we welcome proposals in the Bill to require landlords to ensure the property has no serious (Category 1) health and safety hazards and see real benefits in including a landlord's repairing obligations in the occupation contract.

We were encouraged by comments during the statement on the introduction of the Bill in the Assembly, both by Assembly Members supporting improvements to safety in rented properties and the acknowledgement of these issues by the Minister for Communities and Tackling Poverty.

British Gas believes that people in the private rented sector (PRS) have a right to expect protections against basic safety hazards in their homes. The Bill presents an ideal opportunity to ensure that gas and electric safety standards in the PRS in Wales are in line with those now being introduced around Britain.

## Introduction

- As Britain's largest energy supplier, British Gas supplies gas and electricity to around 375,000 homes in Wales, including those which are rented from a private or social landlord as well as owner-occupied. We employ around 400 engineers across Wales who are visiting Welsh homes on a daily basis and have first-hand experience of dealing with some of the problems which could be addressed by this Bill.
- The social housing sector is also a key partner for British Gas. Under the Energy Company Obligation, we have carried out a number of insulation schemes with local authorities and housing associations across Wales as part of our work to improve energy efficiency

- In 2012, British Gas and Shelter joined forces to help tackle the problem of poor quality private rented homes across Britain, aiming to improve the quality of one million rented homes over five years.
- Over the partnership to date, British Gas has campaigned with Shelter Cymru, as well as Shelter in England and Scotland, to help raise standards through changes to legislation.
- Working with Shelter Scotland, Scottish Gas successfully called for the Housing (Scotland) Act 2015 to introduce mandatory carbon monoxide alarms and electrical safety checks for the private rented sector in Scotland. We are pleased that both these measures will be required from later this year.
- Along with Shelter, British Gas has welcomed regulations introduced at Westminster this month which require all domestic properties in the PRS in England to have carbon monoxide alarms fitted by 1 October 2015.
- British Gas notes that the Renting Homes (Wales) Bill aims to ensure rented homes fit for human habitation, with landlords given clear responsibility to meet their obligation to keep properties in a good state of repair and maintenance. Both as a business and employer in Wales, we want to see the same protection being given to our customers and employees as are now found in other parts of Britain.

## Insight into the private rented sector in Wales

- With Shelter Cymru, British Gas carried out the biggest survey of private tenants in Wales in December 2013 and January 2014 to get a better understanding of conditions in the private rented sector in Wales, questioning 602 adults who lived in the PRS at that time.<sup>1</sup>
- Nearly two thirds (64 per cent) said that they had had at least one of the following problems in the last 12 months: damp, leaking roof or windows, electrical hazards, mould, animal infestations or gas leaks.
- The research revealed that just over half were aware that a gas safety check had been completed at their property in the last 12 months. Furthermore, one in six (17 per cent) said they had electrical hazards.

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<sup>1</sup> Fit to rent? report, March 2014, based on research commissioned by Shelter and British Gas, including survey of 602 adults living in the PRS in Wales surveyed 11 December 2013 to 16 January 2014 (YouGov) <http://www.sheltercymru.org.uk/fit-to-rent/>

- The consequences of poor conditions were shown to be serious. One in 10 tenants told us that their health had been affected due to their landlord not dealing with repairs and poor conditions. Of those tenants with dependent children, 11 per cent said told us their children’s health had been affected.
- The survey also showed smaller numbers reporting serious problems such as gas leaks, carbon monoxide poisoning and fires in the home caused by poor conditions. Four per cent said they had a gas leak in the last 12 months while, over the same period, three per cent claimed they had experienced carbon monoxide poisoning and two per cent blamed a fire at the property on poor conditions.
- Further joint research with Shelter suggests that just over four fifths (81 per cent) of landlords ensure they have some sort of electrical check carried out at their properties. Of the estimated 189,600 properties in the PRS in Wales, this means there are likely to be around 36,000 without any planned electrical checks.

## Improving safety, warmth and well-being

British Gas wants to see safety and well-being in the private rented sector improved through simple steps.

- Requiring the presence of an audible carbon monoxide alarm mandatory in all private rented properties that have gas appliances.
- A five yearly electrical safety check would provide significant additional protection for tenants and is a relatively low-cost way for the Welsh Government and the rented sector in Wales to demonstrate leadership and best practice.
- Landlord to provide Energy Performance Certificate, a gas safety certificate and proof of electrical safety checks to the tenant along with the contract at the start of the tenancy and every 12 months during the life of the tenancy.
- Reducing the number of tenants in cold and damp accommodation by promoting measures to increase energy efficiency and reduce fuel poverty such as:
  - encouraging landlords to commission improvements and take advantage of funding that is currently available through the Energy Company Obligation to do so.
  - ensuring that greater numbers of landlords adhere to their statutory duty to provide Energy Performance Certificates to their tenants by requiring that copies are presented to tenants
- Requiring the inclusion of a landlords’ obligations on repairs within the rental contract would be enhanced by adding a Service Level Agreement. This would require a

landlord to make any repairs within an agreed specified timetable – for example broken boilers within 24 hours of the issue being flagged to a landlord.

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