

# Tackling fuel poverty in the private rented sector using the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)

The Housing Health and Safety Rating System could take most of the private rented sector out of fuel poverty at relatively little cost to the taxpayer. This project involved developing:

- A toolkit to provide resources to local authorities to enable them to make maximum use of this power; and
- A report with recommendations for policy makers on how local authorities can be supported in using this power.

## Background

In 2008, an Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes (EEPH) project investigated how the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS)<sup>1</sup> could be used to cut fuel poverty. The study, carried out by Impetus Consulting, found that HHSRS could take most of the private rented sector out of fuel poverty at little cost to the taxpayer (since landlords could be required to pay for the improvement measures). However, few local authorities were proactively using HHSRS to eliminate Excess Cold hazards.

In 2010-11, Impetus Consulting, in partnership with NEA and Blooming Green, undertook a second project to improve resources, knowledge and implementation of HHSRS to tackle fuel poverty. The project was primarily funded by eaga Charitable Trust, with additional support from the Energy Efficiency Partnership for

Homes and the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC).

## Approach

A steering group, comprising representatives from, inter alia, the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, the Energy Efficiency Partnership for Homes, the Energy Saving Trust and a number of local authorities, was convened to oversee this project. Research involved a desk review and a stakeholder workshop, followed by the drafting of a series of detailed case studies focusing on authorities that have proactively used HHSRS to cut excess cold.

This was followed by the drafting of a comprehensive toolkit to provide local authorities with facts and figures on HHSRS and its potential to cut excess cold in the private rented sector, information on Residential Property Tribunal cases that have related to Excess Cold, and inspiring case

<sup>1</sup>

[www.eeph.org.uk/uploads/documents/partnership/Final%20HHSRS%20EPPH%20summary.pdf](http://www.eeph.org.uk/uploads/documents/partnership/Final%20HHSRS%20EPPH%20summary.pdf)

studies from a number of proactive local authorities.

The draft toolkit was piloted with the following six councils:

- Brighton and Hove City Council;
- Carlisle City Council;
- Durham City Council;
- Flintshire County Council;
- Hambleton District Council; and
- London Borough of Lambeth.

The piloting involved presentations and workshops with environmental health officers, senior managers and private landlords at each of these councils. Based on the feedback from the pilots, the toolkit was then finalised, in consultation with the project steering group as well as DECC and CLG representatives.

The toolkit will be published on NEA's website and disseminated to local authorities throughout England and Wales.

## Recommendations

HHSRS has the potential to play a major role in improving housing standards, particularly in the private rented sector. Based on the findings of this project, to ensure HHSRS is used as effectively as possible, NEA and Impetus make the following recommendations to national and local government.

National government should:

- Ensure that the statutory duties relating to HHSRS are retained<sup>2</sup> and take action to ensure that local authorities are fulfilling their statutory duties, for example by requiring authorities to publish the number of complaints they

<sup>2</sup> The government are reviewing statutory duties placed on local government:

[www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/tacklingburdens/reviewstatutoryduties/](http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/decentralisation/tacklingburdens/reviewstatutoryduties/).

receive about housing condition and the action taken as a result.

- Provide guidance to local authorities that assessing housing conditions and taking action on poor housing is an important area that they should be prioritising.
- Make an assessment of how local authorities should resource implementation of Part 1 of the 2004 Housing Act.
- Reconsider the decision not to review the HHSRS guidance in relation to Excess Cold. (There is still a great deal of confusion surrounding the guidance and its implementation at a local level.)
- Work closely with landlords' associations to encourage voluntary improvements in standards (before mandatory standards are introduced in 2018) and uptake of the Green Deal.
- Ensure that Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) data is shared with a wider range of officers within local government, which in turn will lead to the targeting of the worst properties.

Local government should:

- Ensure HHSRS remains on the local government agenda. This includes ensuring that:
  - HHSRS is referenced within relevant strategies (on housing, fuel poverty and/or climate change);
  - Officers have sufficient resources to use HHSRS to improve standards in the private rented sector (e.g. utilising the power to charge for enforcement

- activity and / or leveraging in additional funding from other sources where possible); and
- A systematic review of the housing stock to identify hazards is carried out, as required by the Housing Act.

- Move from passive to proactive approaches in terms of implementing HHSRS. The case studies in our toolkit demonstrate the impact that a proactive approach to using HHSRS to improve standards can have. Approaches involving partnerships with health programmes, selective licensing, area-based approaches and using F and G EPC ratings to identify potential hazards have all proved effective for a number of authorities.
- Carry out ongoing awareness raising campaigns with both private landlords and tenants. Landlords need to be made aware of their duty to provide properties that are free of Excess Cold hazards, as well as the forthcoming mandatory minimum energy efficiency standards, and grants and financial incentives to make improvements, such as the Landlords Energy Saving Allowance (LESA) and the forthcoming Green Deal and Energy Company Obligation (ECO) schemes. Tenants also need to be made more aware of their rights in relation to housing standards and HHSRS. However it is important to note that, where there is awareness, there are concerns that HHSRS enforcement action taken against landlords could lead to retaliatory eviction and/or raised rents.

### For more information

The toolkit can be downloaded from:

[www.nea.org.uk/publication-list/](http://www.nea.org.uk/publication-list/)

and

<http://www.eagacharitabletrust.org/projects>



The policy report can be downloaded from:

[www.impetusconsult.co.uk/publications.htm](http://www.impetusconsult.co.uk/publications.htm)

and

<http://www.eagacharitabletrust.org/projects>



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