

Housing Bill Amendments Briefing

Lords Amendment No 190

"Decent homes standard for social housing

- (1) The Secretary of State shall ensure that by 2016 all social housing shall as far as is reasonably practicable achieve a SAP rating of no lower than 65.
- (2) In this section "social housing" means housing let by a registered social landlord or a local housing authority."

Briefing Notes:

Under the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, the government has a duty to end fuel poverty. The mechanism for doing this in **social housing** is the Decent Homes Standard. But the government has set the standard so low that it will not end fuel poverty – so the government will be in breach of the law, as well as failing to achieve the target set in its own Fuel Poverty Strategy.

On 5th April 2004, the government's official expert advisers, the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group, directly told the Minister, the Rt Hon Keith Hill MP, that 'the thermal comfort standard of Decent Homes leaves householders remaining in fuel poverty.'

This amendment would rectify this situation by requiring the standards in social housing to equate to those in the Building Regulations 'as far as is practicable': this caveat is necessary because, for instance, it is 'not practicable' to require a house with no cavity wall to have cavity wall insulation.

In particular, this new clause requires that all social housing should be **brought up to a SAP rating¹ of 65**. Support for this 'SAP rating' approach has come from:

- the ODPM Select Committee Report on the Decent Homes Standard of 7th May. They recommend a 'Decent Homes Plus' standard **based on SAP ratings**.
- the **Fuel Poverty Advisory Group** which recommended a **minimum SAP rating of 65** in order to ensure that occupiers are removed from fuel poverty.
- the **government, which has accepted that a SAP rating of 65 is necessary to ensure that people are removed from fuel poverty.**²

¹ SAP rating = Standard Assessment Procedure, the government's method of assessing the energy efficiency of a home.

Lords Amendment No 191

"Improvements in energy efficiency"

- (1) For the purposes of—
- (a) improving the energy efficiency of residential accommodation;
 - (b) increasing the comfort level of occupants of residential accommodation; and
 - (c) alleviating fuel poverty,

the Secretary of State shall take reasonable steps to ensure an increase in residential energy efficiency of at least 20% by 2010 based upon 2000 levels.

- (2) In this section—
- "fuel poverty" has the same meaning as in the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 (c. 31); and

"residential energy efficiency" means the energy efficiency of residential accommodation."

Briefing Notes:

The 20% energy efficiency improvement figure specified in amendment 210 is the figure specified in the Home Energy Conservation Act 1995. It is virtually identical to the saving of 5 megatonnes of carbon (MtC) from domestic energy efficiency³ for which a massive coalition of NGOs and politicians have consistently called (see Parliamentary Question answer at footnote).

Over 350 MPs have signed House of Commons Early Day Motions – EDM 96 and EDM 1341 – in support of the 5MtC/20%. The target has also been supported by the Energy Saving Trust (the government's official advisers), by the Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit (PIU) and by the Government's Sustainable Development Commission.

The government has made 15 commitments to this target, not least in their Energy White Paper. They have now reneged on these promises. The target has been reduced to a saving of 4.2MtC by 2010 – a full 16% reduction. This comes at a time when emissions of CO2 are rising, when the Commons Environmental Audit Committee has reported that the government is likely to undershoot its CO2 reduction target by 25% and when the latest research suggests that the threat of climate change has been underestimated.

² 'Research has shown that bringing homes to a SAP rating of 65 is a level at which there is minimal risk of a household being in fuel poverty' – Environment Minister Elliot Morley MP Hansard 19.4.04 col 138W.