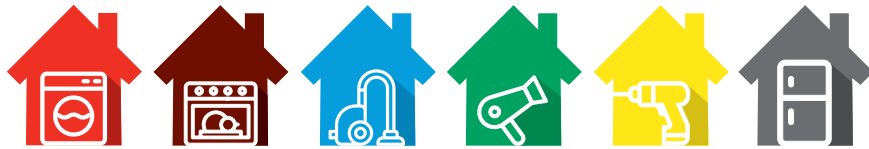
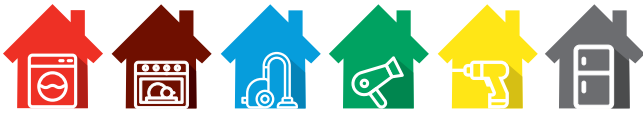


IMPROVING ELECTRICAL SAFETY FOR TENANTS IN THE SOCIAL RENTED SECTOR IN ENGLAND





About Electrical Safety First

Electrical Safety First is the only UK consumer protection charity dedicated to reducing deaths, injuries and fires caused by electricity. We campaign on behalf of consumers and electrical trade professionals to improve safety regulation and raise awareness of electrical risk in the home. We work with Government, NGOs and Industry as the leading campaigning charity and technical authority on electrical safety.

For any comments or questions on this paper please contact:

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Acknowledgements

In developing this paper Electrical Safety First consulted widely with the social housing sector. This included opening a consultation with the sector and also gaining responses to Freedom of Information requests from local authorities. We would like to thank and acknowledge the many organisations that gave their time and shared their knowledge and experience of the issues. The Charity looks forward to continuing to collaborate with the sector to help keep its tenants safe.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

Electrical Safety First's primary commitment is to ensure that everyone – regardless of tenure – can live safe from electrical risk in their own home. This paper focuses on electrical safety in the Social Rented Sector (SRS) in England. By definition, we mean housing which is provided for rent at an affordable cost by housing associations and local authorities.

Electrical Safety First believes a series of measures, primarily **mandating five yearly checks of electrical installations performed by registered competent persons**, would bring benefits to both tenants and landlords in the Social Rented Sector. This paper considers the current situation, explores the potential challenges ahead and reflects the views of the Local Authority sector and other housing providers on our recommendations for the Government to implement mandatory periodic electrical safety checks in the SRS in England.

Background

The UK Government introduced mandatory five yearly electrical safety checks for the Private Rented Sector (PRS) in England from June 2020 and in doing so highlighted its commitment to making sure that rented homes are safe, secure and high-quality places to live, work and raise families. The requirement is for a periodic inspection to be carried out on the electrical installation, after which an Electrical Installation

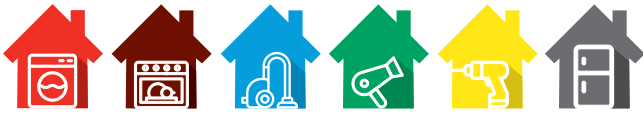
Condition Report (EICR) will be issued. This report provides an assessment of the current in-service condition of a property's electrical installation against the requirements of British Standard BS 7671, regardless of the age of the installation.

The Government highlighted that it is already best practice for landlords to organise periodic inspections and testing and to provide a report to the tenant. They acknowledged however, that whilst many had done this, making five yearly inspections mandatory would help ensure all tenants in the PRS were protected from injury or death due to electric shocks and fires caused by electrical faults - not only those whose landlords applied best practice.

This development followed the introduction of mandatory periodic electrical checks in the PRS in Scotland five years earlier in 2015. Social landlords in Scotland must also arrange for electrical safety checks to be carried out every five years. This requirement was introduced in June 2020 through an amendment to the Scottish Housing Quality Standard¹. The Welsh government intends to mandate the introduction of electrical checks to both private and social rented housing sectors at the same time.

Social housing providers in England are required to ensure their stock is electrically safe. However, the regulatory requirements fall across a range of legislation, from ensuring the safety of households, staff and employees, to the safety of those undertaking repairs and checks for electrical safety. A significant feature is that the legislation does not clearly prescribe how social housing providers should demonstrate that households are safe. Instead, there is scope for interpretation around the issue of guidance for best practice.

1. <https://www.gov.scot/publications/shqs-technical-guidance-for-social-landlords/>



Clear legislation, such as that introduced in the PRS, would clarify the requirements and remove the confusion that currently exists.

Around 86% (20.5 million) of dwellings in England have access to mains gas supply. However, close to 100% of English homes have electricity². Furthermore, given that the UK intends to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050, and that from 2025 it is intended that new homes will no longer have gas or oil boilers- and existing boilers may not be able to be replaced when they break³ - there is even more need to ensure that our homes are electrically safe.⁴

All landlords have been required to undertake regular gas safety inspections of their properties for almost 20 years, whilst no similar requirement exists for electrical installations.

Findings from consultation with the Social Rented Sector

The SRS is in favour of mandatory five yearly electrical checks. The results of engagement by Electrical Safety First with the SRS, including responses to the consultation issued by the Charity as part of the development of this paper, demonstrate that it is a sector which takes the safety of its residents extremely seriously and generally operates a “Best Practice” approach to safety.

The majority of those who responded to the consultation are already conducting five yearly checks, but they would like to see them made mandatory. The sector believes that electrical

safety checks should be given equal importance to gas safety checks. Gaining access to properties to carry out checks or maintenance is a sector-wide issue which it was felt would be significantly improved if electrical safety checks were mandatory.

Recommendations

Electrical Safety First believes that all properties in the English SRS, including those owned and maintained by Local Authorities (LAs), Housing Associations (HAs) or charitable organisations, should be subject to mandatory five yearly electrical safety checks, performed by a registered competent person.

We believe that the level of safety provided should not depend on the nature of the tenancy or the location within the UK. There should be parity for all tenants regardless of geography and whether they rent in the Private or Social Rented Sector. Given that the net zero transition will increase reliance on electricity it also is evident that electrical safety must be given parity with gas.

Given the strong positive response from the sector, it is clear that there is support for the introduction of mandatory five yearly electrical safety checks in the SRS. Mandating the checks will clarify the requirements, remove the confusion that exists and make access easier - saving time, money and, most importantly, lives. The Government should commit to aligning the Social Rented Sector with the PRS by introducing such legislation.

2. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817757/EHS_2017-18_Energy_Report.pdf

3. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/945899/201216_BEIS_EWP_Command_Paper_Accessible.pdf

4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/the-future-homes-standard-changes-to-part-l-and-part-f-of-the-building-regulations-for-new-dwellings>

1. CONTEXT: ELECTRICAL SAFETY IN ENGLAND'S SOCIAL RENTED SECTOR

The SRS includes those homes owned and managed by LAs and private landlords (as defined in Section 80 of the Housing and Regeneration Act, 2008). The latter predominantly includes HAs, which are not-for-profit bodies that provide low-cost housing. According to the English Housing Survey, in 2017 there were 1.56m occupied dwellings managed by LAs and 2.35m managed by HAs respectively - a combined total of 3.91m. This compares to 4.29m in the PRS⁵.

Available data on electrical fires and risks in the PRS and SRS obtained from London Fire Brigade, the English Housing Survey and Home Office fire data all show that fires and risks arising from electricity in the SRS are comparable to those in the PRS. London Fire Brigade data shows 1,055 electrical fires occurred in homes in London's SRS between 2010-2019. During the same period, there were 1,169 electrical fires in PRS homes⁶.

The comparison between fires attributed to gas and electricity is useful for illustrating the difference in risk. Looking at London alone, there are significantly more fires in the SRS caused by electricity than by gas.

BETWEEN 2010-2019 THERE WERE **181** FIRES CAUSED BY GAS IN THE SRS IN LONDON COMPARED TO **1,055** CAUSED BY ELECTRICITY.

Across England in the year 2019-20, six times as many residential fires were caused by electricity than by gas.

DATA FROM THE HOME OFFICE SHOWS THAT FOR RESIDENTIAL DWELLINGS **13,855** FIRES HAD AN ELECTRICAL SOURCE VERSUS **2,272** CAUSED BY GAS.

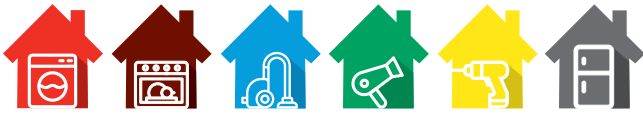
For every year from 2015 to 2020, electricity was five times more likely than gas to be the cause of a fire in domestic dwellings⁷.

This discrepancy can be explained in part by the omnipresence of electrical installations throughout the vast majority of homes in the country. Not only does almost every home in the country have mains electricity, it will be present in almost every room in these homes. Gas, in comparison, will often only be present in two locations – supply to the boiler for central heating and hot water and to a gas oven and/or hob.

5. English Housing Survey 2017 Table DA 1101 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/stock-profile>

6. Data provided to Electrical Safety First by London Fire Brigade for the consultation document





7. Electrical Safety First analysis of Home Office Data: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/fire-statistics-data-tables>






However, despite the above, social landlords must undertake statutory gas safety checks annually but are not mandated to carry out regular electrical safety checks. Mandatory electrical safety checks, and advice on using electricity safely in SRS homes, are likely to help reduce fires caused by electricity, as well as offering clarity to the sector and customer alike. A further benefit of mandatory checks may be an increase in the likelihood of tenants granting access to their homes, a known issue across the sector.

2. CLARITY OF COMPLIANCE

Social housing providers in England are required to ensure their stock is electrically safe. The regulatory requirements fall across a range of legislation, from ensuring the safety of households, staff and employees, to the safety of those undertaking repairs and checks for electrical safety. The relevant legislation and standards include the following:

-  The Landlord and Tenant Act 1985
-  Localism Act 2011
-  Housing Act 2004 (with regard to the Housing Health and Safety Rating System that includes the identification of electrical hazards)
-  Electricity at Work Regulations 1989

-  Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999
-  BS 7671:2018 plus amendments (Requirements for fixed electrical installations – also known as IET Wiring Regulations)
-  Part P ‘Electrical Safety’ of the Building Regulations 2010 (Approved Document P: Electrical Safety – Dwellings)

As well as the regulations and standards listed above, social landlords are also legally required to ensure electrical installations are safe, but there is no legal requirement for them to undertake checks at regular intervals, unlike in the PRS.

RECENT DEBATE HAS HIGHLIGHTED SOME OF THE ISSUES FACING **SOCIAL HOUSING LANDLORDS** WITH REGARD TO COMPLIANCE AND ELECTRICAL SAFETY⁸.

A significant feature is that the legislation does not clearly prescribe how social housing providers demonstrate that households are safe. Instead, there is scope for interpretation around the issue of guidance for best practice.

Currently both the law and professional guidance differentiate between types of dwellings in their advice and/or instructions regarding electrical safety. In offering guidance

8. <https://www.insidehousing.co.uk/sponsored/sponsored/getting-compliance-right>

on the intervals between periodic inspection and testing of electrical installations, the Institution of Engineering and Technology (Guidance Note 3 – ‘Inspection and Testing’) distinguishes between domestic dwellings that are owned and those that are rented. It recommends, for the initial inspection and testing, a shorter five yearly interval for rented homes and ten years for other domestic properties, and at change of occupancy for both owned and rented properties.

Mandatory electrical checks for the PRS have been introduced, however there are no such plans for the SRS. Electrical Safety First believes there should be legal parity between the sectors with a requirement for mandatory electrical checks every five years in both sectors. Clear legislation, such as that introduced in the PRS, would clarify the requirements and remove the confusion that exists currently.

Electrical Safety First believes that all sectors should be subject to the same basic safety standards to avoid the continuance of the current multiple-tier housing system. Whether in private or social housing, all tenants must be certain that their homes are safe. Whilst an analysis of the results of the English Housing Survey (EHS) carried out for Electrical Safety First⁹ shows that the SRS performs better than the PRS overall, the ageing housing stock of the SRS means that unless standards are maintained, this situation will deteriorate. It should not be the case that one tenure is improved whilst another declines, and a uniform set of safety measures across all rented tenures will help prevent this.

3. ACCESS ISSUES

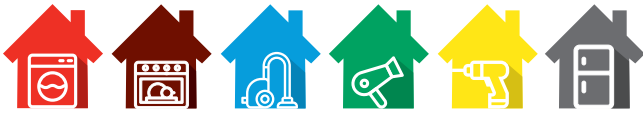
Research by York University¹⁰ found that many social housing landlords were frustrated at being unable to secure access for electrical inspections in a proportion of tenants’ homes. Many landlords reported that their ability to secure access to properties to undertake periodic inspections was problematic, which was inhibited by the lack of prescription in landlords’ legal obligations. The introduction of more frequent periodic inspections itself posed a problem with regard to a lack of awareness by tenants of the need for such regular inspections. Mandating five yearly checks should improve access for landlords and clarify the necessity for tenants.

A failure to undertake gas safety checks leads to penalties – including regulatory downgrades impacting on the borrowing capacities of HAs. Failure to secure access for gas safety checks now only occurs in limited numbers across the sector.

The lack of clearly defined regulations relating to electrical checks was felt by some consultation respondents to hinder access for safety checks as they were not able to use legal routes to gain access for electrical inspections, as they can with gas safety checks. However, some landlords ‘piggy-back’ onto their gas safety inspections, by also sending an electrician to check for electrical safety.

9. <https://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/Electrical%20Safety%20in%20the%20Social%20Rented%20Sector.pdf>

10. *ibid.*



4. CURRENT TRENDS AFFECTING THE SOCIAL RENTED SECTOR

In November 2020 the Government announced a large number of policies aimed at tackling climate change¹¹.

• THESE INCLUDED SEVERAL WHICH ARE LIKELY TO HAVE A DIRECT EFFECT ON THE UK'S SOCIAL HOUSING STOCK, INCLUDING A PLAN TO MAKE OUR HOMES GREENER AND A TARGET THAT WILL SEE **600,000** HEAT PUMPS INSTALLED EACH YEAR BY **2028**.

Additionally further policies were announced to increase the take up of electric vehicles.

All of these policies together are likely to lead to an increase in the electrification of domestic heating and demands for electric vehicle charging. This will increase the importance of electrical installations in the SRS being safe and modern. Failure to do so may lead to some SRS residents being effectively barred from

operating an electric vehicle or benefiting from low carbon technology.

In November 2020 the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee released its summary of the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Building Safety Bill, in which it recommended that the *“Government include supplementary provisions in the Bill for mandating regular electrical safety checks in higher-risk buildings”*¹².

A great many of the dwellings that this recommendation will affect will be SRS housing. If the recommendation is acted upon it would become even more important for a similar universal requirement to be in place for the SRS, regardless of building type. Without it, there would be two tiers of safety measures within a single housing sector. Such a situation would risk increasing confusion amongst those in the sector as to what legal requirements affect individual properties.

5. VIEWS OF SOCIAL HOUSING PROVIDERS

In recommending the best way forward to protect the safety of tenants in social housing it is clearly important to seek the views of those that know the sector and its tenants best – the sector itself. The Social Rented Sector has a strong record of providing good quality homes for its tenants and in being at the forefront of

11. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-outlines-his-ten-point-plan-for-a-green-industrial-revolution-for-250000-jobs>

12. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5801/cmselect/cmcomloc/466/46611.htm>

maintaining standards in the wider housing industry. In developing this paper Electrical Safety First consulted the sector in England widely to solicit their views on the issues facing the sector and the practicality, affordability and desirability of mandating five yearly electrical checks.

The range of organisations consulted has been intended to reflect a broad cross section of the sector, with participants including several of the largest providers in England, responsible for many hundreds of thousands of homes, as well as local authorities and smaller associations.

The responses from social housing providers to our consultation show that the SRS is a highly professional and safety conscious housing provider and that they are supportive of the introduction of mandatory five yearly electrical checks. **A summary of the findings from the consultation with the SRS is shown below.**

The SRS is in favour of mandatory five yearly electrical checks

The SRS responses demonstrated that it is an industry which takes the safety of its residents extremely seriously and operates a “Best Practice” approach to safety. The majority of those who responded are already conducting five yearly checks, but they would like to see them made mandatory. Respondents raised the need for improved guidance to be issued if checks are mandated, as well as support with raising awareness with tenants of their importance.

Overall, respondents stated that they would welcome the move to mandatory checks as it would not only improve safety for their residents but would also improve clarity on the level of service provision for provider and customer alike.

Electrical safety checks should have parity with gas safety checks

The sector was supportive of electrical safety checks being given equal importance to gas safety checks. Many noted that the number of fires attributed to electricity is significantly higher than those caused by gas.

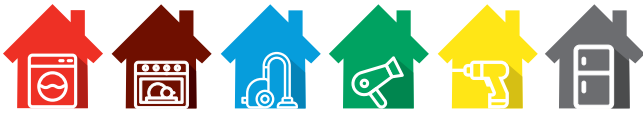
The SRS believes that electrical safety is sufficiently prioritised and resourced at present

Housing providers were asked for their views on funding for electrical safety in their properties, and whether such funding needs to be ring fenced to ensure that a satisfactory level of safety can be maintained. The response to this proposal was that housing providers overall felt that existing levels of funding were sufficient for the purpose, and that ring fencing was unnecessary.

Some housing providers did, however, state that whilst the current financial situation allowed sufficient available funds for electrical safety issues, there were concerns that this could change.

Some of the main electrical issues encountered are related to the age of housing stock

Housing providers encounter a variety of electrical faults in their housing stock. Several observations frequently reoccurred throughout, relating to sockets and Residual Current Device (RCD) provision. Both can be impacted by the age of the property.




With sockets, the issues were to do with the condition and provision. Damaged sockets are a common issue, which is unsurprising given the heavy use these parts of the electrical installation experience.

This issue is one that supports the comments by several respondents on the importance of having supplementary visual checks more frequently than every five years.

The issue of a lack of socket provision was explained in some cases as being due to the age of the housing stock. Older homes generally have far less socket provision throughout the dwelling than modern homes, which can encourage the use of extension leads, increasing the risk of overloading sockets¹³.

An RCD is a sensitive safety device designed to protect against the risks of electrocution and fire caused by earth faults. The provision of this important safety feature is again an issue which most likely relates to the age of properties, as the inclusion of these devices as standard has only been made a requirement in the UK Wiring Regulations (BS 7671) comparatively recently (2008), meaning many older properties will not benefit from RCDs. As properties are repaired or renovated more RCDs will inevitably be fitted, but any action to increase the rate of installation would be beneficial.

 **Access to properties is a sector wide issue which would be significantly improved if electrical safety checks were mandatory**

Many housing providers stated that gaining access to properties to conduct electrical safety work was more difficult than for when other hazards or issues needed rectifying, particularly those relating to gas.

• A GROUP OF RESPONDENTS
• REPORTED THAT THE FIRST
• TIME ACCESS RATE FOR
• CONDUCTING ELECTRICAL
• SAFETY CHECKS WAS **60%**,
• WHEREAS THE FIRST TIME
• ACCESS RATE FOR GAS
• CHECKS WAS **90%**.

Some housing providers have countered this by offering incentives such as vouchers, upgraded equipment and decorating allowances, showing the importance that housing providers are attaching to electrical safety checks. However, as no such incentives are required for gas checks, it was felt that mandating electrical checks would lead to an improvement in access rates.

Access to properties was a well recognised issue in the sector and it was felt that without clear legal backing it would continue to be so. It was noted that some housing providers had achieved very high access rates. It would be very productive in these cases for the techniques and approaches used to be widely shared as best practice across the industry.

13. <https://www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/overloadingsockets>

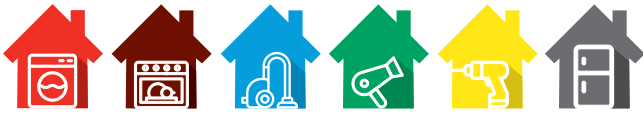
6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the positive response from the sector, **it is clear that there is strong support for the introduction of mandatory five yearly electrical safety checks in the SRS in England. Mandating the checks would make access easier and therefore save time and money as well as lives.**

- 🏠 Whilst there is plenty of scope for further activity and engagement with the SRS there is one key action that should be taken and that is for **the Government to introduce mandatory five yearly electrical safety checks, to be performed by registered competent persons.**
- 🏠 This has **strong support amongst respondents** and the only obstacles are felt to be issues of clarity and implementation in introducing them. Electrical Safety First urges the Government to introduce this measure as soon as is practicable.
- 🏠 For the sector itself, on the issue of access, there is clearly much **good practice in place which should be widely shared.** Whilst the introduction of mandatory checks would be the biggest positive step towards improving access, the sharing of best practice and successful approaches would be beneficial.

Sharing this knowledge would be a high reward activity for very little effort, and Electrical Safety First strongly encourages the sector to work closely on this matter, and applauds those who are already achieving great success.

• THERE IS STRONG
• SUPPORT FOR THE
• INTRODUCTION OF
• MANDATORY FIVE
• YEARLY ELECTRICAL
• SAFETY CHECKS
• IN THE SRS IN
• ENGLAND.



APPENDICES

Appendix A:

Table of responses to Freedom of Information requests

This table outlines the response to a question asked via a Freedom of Information request on LAs' support and lobbying for mandatory electrical safety checks in the SRS in England. "Do you support the introduction of mandatory checks and what if any action have you taken to campaign for change?"

Peterborough City	Yes	Broxtowe	Yes
Central Bedfordshire	Yes	Nottingham	Yes
Southend on Sea	Yes	Northampton	Yes (mentioned Housing & Planning Act)
Tendring	Yes	South Lakeland	Yes
Luton	Yes	Cheshire East	Yes
Norwich	Yes	Lancaster	Yes
Charnwood	Yes	Stockport	Yes
Newham	Yes	Bournemouth	Yes
Sutton	Yes	Exeter	Yes
Stoke on Trent	Yes	Plymouth	Yes- lobbied
Warwick	Yes	South Somerset	Yes
Leeds	Yes- lobbied	Wiltshire	Yes
Sheffield	Yes	Barnet	Yes
Durham	Yes	Brent	Yes
Newcastle	Yes	Leicester	Yes
Eastbourne	Yes		
Canterbury	Yes		
Oxford	Yes		

Appendix B:

Local Authorities approached and FOI questions

The following Local Authorities were approached based on a geographical spread throughout England for this consultation:-

Barnet, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Brent, Broxtowe, Canterbury, Central Bedfordshire, Charnwood, Cheshire East, Durham, Eastbourne, Lancaster, Leeds, Luton, Newark and Sherwood, Newcastle, Newham, Norwich City, Nottingham, Oxford, Peterborough City, Sheffield, South Lakeland, South Somerset, Southwark, Stockport, Stoke on Trent, Tendring, Warwick and Wiltshire.

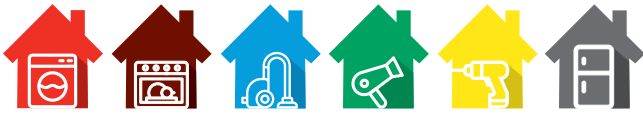
The FOI questions were:

1. What is the current budget allocated to repair Category 1 faults in social housing in your area?
2. How much of the budget is allocated to repair electrical faults?
3. Do you undertake routine electrical safety checks in your housing stock and if yes on what time interval, if any?
4. Do you or a private company undertake the maintenance work on your properties? If the latter, how do you guarantee quality assurance?
5. Would you support the mandating of regular electrical safety checks in the Social Rented Sector by central Government?

Appendix C:

Questions posed to relevant organisations:

1. Does your organisation undertake regular electrical safety checks in social housing you manage or own? If so, what do they comprise and how often are they carried out?
2. With your experience of the SRS what is your general opinion of the standard of electrical safety in the SRS?
3. Has the Grenfell tragedy had a direct impact on the way you approach your electrical safety checks?
4. Has the Grenfell tragedy led to increased pressures on the SRS and if so what are they?
5. What are the most common defects and observations that arise from electrical safety inspections?
6. Is there a greater need for more frequent electrical safety checks due to the increased demands now placed on electrical installations?
7. Would your organisation support mandatory five yearly electrical safety checks being introduced in the SRS, mirroring those now being introduced in the PRS?
8. What are your experiences of funding for maintaining electrical safety in your housing stock?



9. Do you think that there is an appetite for some kind of ring fencing for electrical safety maintenance?
10. Should electrical safety checks in the SRS have parity with gas safety checks?
11. What are your experiences of accessing properties to undertake electrical safety checks? What is your assessment of compliance rates?
13. In your experience, has it been easier to gain access to carry out maintenance work than trying to gain access for electrical safety checks?
14. Are there any other comments your organisation would like to add with regards to the potential for mandatory electrical safety checks in the SRS?

Appendix D:

Contributors

Submissions were gratefully received from many Social Housing Organisations. Those who were happy to be listed are:

100 Houses Society
AB Building & Electrical Ltd
Beyond Housing
Clarion
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council
First Choice Oldham

Flagship
Gentoo Group Ltd
HHS
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
Karbon Homes
Longhurst Group
Magenta Living
Metropolitan Housing Group
Nottingham Community Housing Association
One Manchester
One Vision
Orbit
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
St Leger Homes
Stonewater
Stroud District Council
WDH
Weaver Vale
Wrekin Housing Group
Your Homes Newcastle

Special thanks to the Electrical Safety Roundtable for consulting their members on this matter and compiling the responses.



Appendix E:

For the full report on the consultation of housing providers, please see the webpage below:

www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk/housing





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