



The
United
Reformed
Church

Help and Advice

Northern Synod Office, 4 College Lane, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 8JJ (0191-232 1168)

Bulletin 74: PROPERTY UPDATE

The Help & Advice Group was set up by Synod in 2009, to support local churches in being informed and effective in their life and mission. The group was disbanded in 2014, as part of a simplification of Synod committees, and its work continues through the Trust Officer, under the oversight of the Trust's Property Subgroup. We are willing to try to provide specific advice on particular topics. Please get in touch if you have questions or suggestions.

This article is part of a series giving an overview of particular subjects of interest for local churches. We also circulate general updates from time to time. Bulletins are also posted on the website <https://www.urc-northernsynod.org/resources/legal>, with direct links to other websites.

Where readers are directed to web-based resources, the Synod Office is willing to respond to reasonable requests for printed out information for readers without web access, although they may find it more satisfactory to follow up their interest through their local library's web access.

Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard

Churches may recall that since 2007, buildings must have an energy performance certificate (EPC) before they may be offered for let or sale. Listed buildings and places of worship are exempt from that requirement. The certificate gives a rating on a scale of A-G, with recommendations for improvements, and is valid for 10 years.

In addition, non-domestic buildings with a total useful floor area of more than 500m² that are frequented by the public should display their certificate on the premises. The current requirements are contained within the Energy Performance of Buildings (England and Wales) Regulations 2012.

Now, a new requirement has been introduced that churches will need to take on board.

The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 introduced the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard, requiring all new lettings to have an EPC rating of E or above from 1 April 2020. This will also apply to all existing residential lettings from 1 April 2021 and to existing non-domestic lettings from 1 April 2023. Some exemptions from *this* new requirement are available, but should be registered.

Further guidance is available for residential properties at:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/domestic-private-rented-property-minimum-energy-efficiency-standard-landlord-guidance>

Guidance for non-domestic properties is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-domestic-private-rented-property-minimum-energy-efficiency-standard-landlord-guidance>

- Churches are reminded that whenever a new tenancy begins, they need to have an unexpired EPC in place
- As a matter of good creation care, churches should consider following recommendations in the EPC to improve the energy efficiency of their let properties, even if they exceed the minimum legal requirement. Some changes can be made easily and cheaply, others may be factored in when doing other works on site

Almost all current EPCs for URC properties in the Northern Synod currently meet the Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard, but a small number do not, and churches will need to consider how to proceed. Grants may be available if affordability is an issue:

<https://www.urc-northernsynod.org/resources/grants/>

Existing certificates can be viewed online at:

https://find-energy-certificate.digital.communities.gov.uk/find-a-certificate/search-by-postcode?lang=en&property_type=domestic and

<https://find-energy-certificate.digital.communities.gov.uk/find-a-non-domestic-certificate/search-by-postcode>.

Electrical Safety Testing

The Electrical Safety Standards in the Private Rented Sector (England) Regulations 2020 require landlords to have the electric wiring inspected by a qualified electrician every five years to the latest standard, BS 7671. New tenants and those rolling over on periodic tenancies after 1 July 2020 (which will be most of them) should be given a copy of the electrical installation condition report, and this will also apply to existing tenants from 1 April 2021 (within 28 days of the inspection).

- Churches should note that five-yearly inspections before 2019 may no longer be compliant with the new standard, so may wish to bring forward the next inspection, or at least be satisfied that the electrics are safe.

Although the regulations don't apply to manses, the Trust continues to strongly recommend that ministers are given the same level of safety as tenants.

For further information, consult the official guidance:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/electrical-safety-standards-in-the-private-rented-sector-guidance-for-landlords-tenants-and-local-authorities/guide-for-landlords-electrical-safety-standards-in-the-private-rented-sector>.

As above, grants may be available if affordability is an issue:

<https://www.urc-northernsynod.org/resources/grants/>.

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