

Statement of principles for determining the amount of a penalty charge

The Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 (SI 2015/1693)

Introduction

This statement sets out the principles that Sevenoaks District Council (the Council) will apply in exercising its powers to require a relevant landlord to pay a penalty charge.

Purpose of the Statement of Principles

The Council are required under Regulation 13 to prepare and publish a statement of principles and must have regard to this statement on every occasion when deciding on the amount of any penalty charge.

The Council may revise its statement of principles at any time, and where it does so, it must publish a revised statement.

When deciding the amount for the penalty charge, the Council will have regard to the statement of principles published at the time when the breach in question occurred.

The legal framework

All powers come from the Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarm (England) Regulations 2015 (the Regulations), that came into force on 1 October 2015.

The Regulations place a duty on landlords, the definition of which include freeholders or leaseholders who have created a tenancy, lease, licence, sub-lease or sub-licence to ensure that:

- a smoke alarm is installed on each storey of premises where there is living accommodation (definition includes bathroom and lavatory); and
- a carbon monoxide alarm is installed in any room of the premises used wholly or partly as living accommodation, which contains a solid fuel burning appliance.

AND for tenancies starting from 1 October 2015

- checks are made by the landlord, or someone acting on his behalf, that the alarm (s) is/are in proper working order on the day the tenancy starts.

Where the Council has reasonable grounds to believe a landlord is in breach of one or more of the above duties, the Council must serve a remedial notice on the landlord. The remedial notice is a notice served under Regulation 5.

If the landlord, then fails to take the remedial action specified in the notice within 28 days, the Council can require a landlord to pay a penalty charge. The power to charge a penalty arises from Regulation 8.

A landlord will not be considered to be in breach of their duty to comply with the remedial notice, if they can demonstrate they have taken all reasonable steps to comply. This can be done by making written representations to the Council at the address given at the bottom of this document within 28 days of when the remedial notice is served.

The Council will impose a penalty charge where it is satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the landlord has not complied with the action specified in the remedial notice within the required timescale.

The purpose of imposing a financial penalty

The purpose of the Council exercising its regulatory powers is to protect the interests of the public.

The aims of financial penalties on landlords are to:

- Lower the risk to tenant's health and safety;
- Reimburse the costs incurred by the Council in arranging remedial action in default of the landlord;
- Change the behaviour of the landlord and aim to prevent future non-compliance;
- Penalise the landlord for not installing alarms after being required to so, under notice;
- Eliminate financial gain or benefit from non-compliance with the regulations; and
- Be proportionate to potential harm outcomes, the nature of the breach, and the cost benefit to comply with these legal requirements.

Criteria for the imposition of a financial penalty

A failure to comply with the requirements of a remedial notice allows the Council to require payment of a penalty charge.

In considering the imposition of a penalty, the Council will look at the evidence concerning the breach of the requirement of the notice. This will be obtained from a property inspection, or from information provided by the tenant or agent that no remedial action had been undertaken.

For example, it would be considered appropriate if landlords could demonstrate compliance with the Regulations by supplying dated photographs of alarms, together with installation records or confirmation by the tenant that a system is in proper working order.

Landlords need to take steps to demonstrate that they have met the requirement for testing all detection at the start of the tenancy. Examples of how this can be achieved are by tenants signing an inventory form and that they were tested and were in working order at the start of the tenancy. Tenancy agreements can specify the frequency that a tenant should test the alarm to ensure it is in proper working order.

In deciding whether it would be appropriate to impose a penalty, the authority will take full account of the particular facts and circumstances of the breach under consideration.

A financial penalty charge will be considered appropriate if the Council is satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that the landlord who had been served with remedial notice under Regulation 5 had failed to take the remedial action specified in the notice within the time period specified.

Criteria for determining the amount of a financial penalty

The Regulations state the amount of the penalty charge must not exceed £5,000.

The penalty charge comprises two component parts, a punitive element for failure to comply with the absolute requirement to comply with a remedial notice and a cost element relating to the investigative costs, officer time, administration and any remedial works arranged and carried out by the Council's contractors.

The penalty charge is payable within 29 days beginning with the day on which the penalty charge notice is served.

The Council has discretion to offer an early payment reduction if a landlord pays the penalty charge within 14 days beginning with the day the penalty charge notice is served.

The charges are as follows:

- £2,500 for the first breach to comply with a remedial notice
- £1,250 for early payment, representing 50% reduction, for the first breach to comply with a remedial notice
- £5,000 for a second subsequent breach to comply with a remedial notice
- £3,750 for early payment, representing 25% reduction, for second breach to comply with a remedial notice
- £5,000 for a third breach to comply with a remedial notice with no early repayment reduction.

Procedural matters for Penalty Charge Notices

The Regulations impose a number of procedural steps which must be taken before the Council can impose a requirement on a landlord to pay a penalty charge

When the Council is satisfied that the landlord has failed to comply with the requirements of the remedial notice, all penalty charge notices will be served within six weeks beginning with the day on which the authority is first satisfied a breach has occurred.

Where a review is requested within 29 days from when the penalty charge notice is served, the council will consider any representations made by the landlord. All representations are to be sent to the address at the bottom of this document. The Council will notify the landlord of its decision by notice, which will either be to confirm, vary or withdraw the penalty charge notice.

A landlord who has requested a review of a penalty charge notice and has been served with a notice confirming or varying the penalty charge notice, may appeal to the First-tier Tribunal against the Council's decision. Appeals should be made within 28 days from the notice served of the Council's decision on review.

If the penalty charge notice is not paid, then recovery of the penalty charge will be via an order of the court and proceedings for recovery will commence after 30 days from the date when the penalty charge notice is served.

However, in cases where a landlord has requested a review of the penalty charge notice, recovery will not commence until after 29 days from the date of the notice served giving the Council's decision to vary or confirm the penalty charge notice. Where landlords do make an appeal to the First-tier Tribunal,

recovery will commence after 29 days from when the appeal is finally determined or withdrawn.

Remedial Action taken in default of the landlord

Where the Council is satisfied, on the balance of probabilities, that a landlord has not complied with a specification described in the remedial notice in the required timescale and consent is given by the occupier, the Council will arrange for remedial works to be undertaken in default of the landlord. This work in default will be undertaken within 28 days of the Council being satisfied of the breach. In these circumstances, battery operated alarms will be installed as a quick and immediate response.

Houses in Multiple Occupation and other high risk premises

Smoke Alarms – In order to comply with these Regulations, smoke alarms will be installed at every storey of residential accommodation. This may provide only a temporary solution as the property may be high risk because of:

- its mode of occupancy such as a house in multiple occupation or building converted into one or more flats,
- having an unsafe internal layout where fire escape routes pass through a living rooms or kitchens, or
- is 3 or more storeys high.

In such premises a full assessment will subsequently be undertaken by the Council. This assessment will consider in greater detail the adequacy of the existing type and coverage of the smoke alarm system, structural fire separation and fire escape routes. Any further works required to address serious fire safety hazards in residential property, that are not undertaken through informal agreement, will be enforced using the Housing Act 2004, in accordance with the Council's Enforcement Policy.

Carbon Monoxide Alarms – In order to comply with these Regulations, a carbon monoxide alarm will be installed in every room containing a solid fuel combusting appliance.

All communications for representations made against the Remedial Notice (Regulation 5) or the Penalty Charge Notice (Regulation 8) are to be sent to:

Alex Dawson
Property Services Manager
Council Offices
Sevenoaks District Council
Argyle Road
Sevenoaks
TN13 1HG

Or by email to: psh@sevenoaks.gov.uk