

Half of Edinburgh's council houses not yet fitted with new smoke alarms

Little more than half of Edinburgh's council houses have been upgraded to meet new fire safety regulations coming into effect from next month, it has emerged.

The City of Edinburgh Council said it was facing "supply and access issues" in efforts to get its properties up to scratch.

New laws being introduced from February will require all homes in Scotland to have an interlinked smoke alarm system in place – meaning if one is set off then the rest are triggered – with one in the living room, each hallway and a heat alarm in the kitchen.

Furthermore, carbon monoxide detectors will be required to be fitted in every room with a carbon-fuelled appliance, such as a stove.

The legislation was drawn up by The Scottish Government in the wake of the 2017 Grenfell fire disaster.

But its introduction has been beset with difficulties, from a lack of public awareness to a shortage of the fire alarms and affordability – with the cost of buying and installing the system averaging £220.

And new figures show these problems have not been limited to home owners, as Edinburgh City Council reveals just a little more than half of its properties meet the new standard.

A council spokesperson said: "Up to 31 December 2021 approximately 55.8 per cent of properties have been upgraded to the current LD2 standard.

"We're doing our utmost to get our remaining properties fitted but there have been delays due to supply and access issues. As these are tenanted properties, we need permission to access and give them an opportunity to book an appointment which may not be possible due to Covid-19 etc. In addition, unfortunately there have been delays in procuring contracts due to market forces."

The Scottish Government has been under mounting pressure to delay the changes for another year, as the laws were originally due to come into effect in February 2021.

This week it confirmed there would be no change to the deadline, but said there will be a "reasonable period" for people to have alarms fitted if they don't have the work completed by February 1.

Labour councillor Scott Arthur criticised the Government's efforts in informing people about the changes but said he recognised the importance of improving safety in homes, having lost his brother in a fire.

"He died in a fire when he was just 12, it was some time ago but I think about it a lot, so I fully support the change," Cllr Arthur said, "but it's been a bit of a shambles."

And he added many of his constituents "have only just found out" about the new laws, whilst others have struggled to buy interlinked smoke alarms.

"People are saying they can't source them and when they can

source them they're surprised about how expensive they are," he said.

"The people who realise they're not going to have it in time for the deadline in February, they've also got concerns about their insurance. As far as I can figure, there's not a stated common position from insurers on this and it's largely up to people to find out for themselves.

"I think what's needed is for the Government to put out a clear statement about what the implications are of people not having them fitted. So legally it's going to be months before there's any chance of everybody having them fitted but a lot of people aren't sure what their insurers are thinking about it."

Cllr Arthur said it was "disappointing" to learn the council has been unable to fit all its houses with interlinked alarms, adding: "They're probably facing the exactly the same issues we have."

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter

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