

Mr Clive Betts MP
Chairman of the Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

1st June 2023



British Property Federation
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Dear Clive,

Renters' Reform Bill

I noticed and welcomed your letter to the Secretary of State last week, enquiring about several aspects of the Renters' Reform Bill. I particularly noted your third last paragraph on court reforms – the most important aspect of the reforms for landlords.

The package of reforms in the Bill has always been portrayed as a balance, between the needs of tenants and landlords. Thus, the abolition of s21, has the counterweight of improved grounds for possession.

That counterweight is only effective, however, if landlords have efficient access to the courts. If landlords have difficulties accessing the courts, the balance in the bill is illusory.

It is why we have pushed strongly for digitalisation of the courts, and why we have welcomed the Committee's push for service standards.

Digitalisation of the possession process is being pursued within the Ministry of Justice, and that is to be welcomed. The project started in early 2022, but as far as we are aware has made little progress over the past 15 months or so. Of significant concern, is the time it will now take to deliver the project. It will need to be procured, tested, staff training provided, etc. The Government has promised to align court reform with the broader reforms, again a welcome move, but without significant progress on digitalisation soon, that promise of alignment could significantly delay the delivery of the other reforms, like the abolition of s21.

For the good of all who support the reforms, and the confidence of landlords in them, there is a need to regularly scrutinise the progress of Ministry of Justice on the delivery of digitalisation, and the other measures it is taking to support the Bill. At present, because court reform is not really a part of the Bill, we fear the Bill process will not give it proper scrutiny.

It is not for us to suggest the agenda of your Committee, but it would certainly give stakeholders such as ourselves greater confidence in the objective of a balanced set of reforms, if the Select Committee, either individually, or in conjunction with the Justice Committee, was to regularly enquire of the Ministry of Justice's progress with digitalisation, and the broader measures it is taking to speed up access to justice in possession cases.

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I hope that suggestion is taken in the spirit in which it is intended, which is to ensure that delays are minimised in the delivery of these important reforms.

Kindest regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Fletcher', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ian Fletcher
Director of Policy

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