The Renters' Rights Act: What the Reforms Mean for Private Tenants

Since 1 May 2026, the private rental market has operated under a substantially reformed legal framework. The Renters' Rights Act 2025 introduced some of the most significant changes to renting in nearly four decades, with the aim of giving tenants greater security, flexibility and confidence in their homes. The reforms affect most private landlords, letting agents and tenants in England, and they change both the structure of tenancies and the rules governing possession, rent, applications and pets.

One of the most important changes is the abolition of Section 21 "no-fault" evictions for most private tenancies. Previously, a landlord could use this procedure to seek possession without having to prove that the tenant had breached the agreement. Under the new system, landlords must rely on a recognised legal ground for possession and follow the correct notice and court process. These grounds include circumstances such as serious rent arrears or anti-social behaviour, as well as situations in which the landlord intends to sell the property or enable the landlord or a close family member to move in. The change is intended to protect responsible tenants from sudden and unexplained loss of their home while preserving legitimate routes for landlords to regain possession.

The Act has also replaced the traditional six- or twelve-month assured shorthold tenancy model with a system of assured periodic tenancies. Instead of ending on a fixed date, a tenancy generally continues from month to month, or in line with the relevant rental period, until it is lawfully brought to an end. This gives tenants greater freedom to respond to changing employment, family or financial circumstances. In most cases, a tenant may end the tenancy by giving two months' notice. Existing fixed-term assured shorthold tenancies were brought into the periodic system when the reforms took effect, although transitional arrangements may apply where possession action had already begun.

Further measures are designed to make the cost of renting more transparent and predictable. Landlords and letting agents must advertise a clear asking rent and must not invite, encourage or accept an offer above that amount, bringing an end to rental bidding wars. The amount of rent that can usually be required in advance is limited to one month, reducing a substantial financial barrier for prospective tenants. Once a tenancy is under way, the rent may generally be increased only once in any twelve-month period. The landlord must use the prescribed procedure and give the tenant at least two months' notice. A tenant who considers a proposed increase excessive may be able to challenge it through the appropriate tribunal process.

The reforms also address discriminatory practices during the letting process. Landlords and agents must not impose blanket restrictions that exclude applicants simply because they have children or receive welfare benefits. Applications may still be assessed using reasonable and consistent affordability and suitability checks, but an applicant should not be rejected solely on either of those grounds. This change is intended to widen access to privately rented homes and ensure that prospective tenants are considered on their individual circumstances rather than on broad assumptions.

Pet ownership is another area in which tenants now have stronger rights. A tenant may make a formal request to keep a pet, and the landlord must consider that request reasonably rather than applying an automatic “no pets” policy. The landlord is normally required to respond in writing within 28 days, and any refusal must be supported by a justifiable reason connected to the property or the circumstances of the tenancy. This does not mean that every request must be approved, but it creates a fairer and more transparent process for tenants seeking a suitable home for themselves and their animals. Taken together, the reforms represent a major shift towards a more secure and balanced private rented sector. Tenants should nevertheless read their tenancy terms carefully, keep copies of notices and correspondence, and seek independent housing or legal advice where their circumstances are complex or a dispute arises.

For advice about conveyancing/tenancy matters please contact the conveyancing department at Alison Fielden & Co on 01285 653261.