

# Alliance

## A New Deal for Private Renters

### Easy Read

We are the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland. This booklet is about our ideas for private renters. We want private renters to have a better deal and more **rights**.



**Rights** are things you are allowed to do. For example—you have the right to vote or to get married.



**A landlord** is someone who owns property and rents it out. This means people pay them money to live in their property.



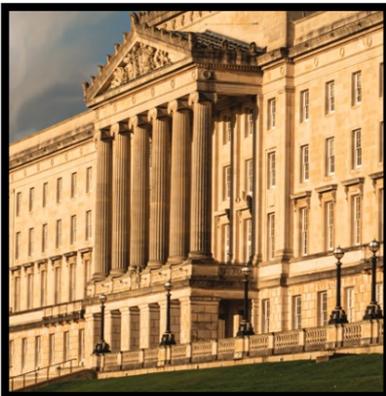
**A private renter** is someone who does not own their home, but rents their it from a private landlord.

Private renters rely on landlords to have places to live. 1 in 6 renters in Northern Ireland rent from a private landlord in a deal called a **private tenancy**.

There are many things that make life difficult for private renters.

We want the **Minister for Communities** and the **Department of Communities** to fix these problems.

The **Minister for Communities** and **Department of Communities** are the are the parts of the government that deal with housing.



**A Minister** is the person in charge of a government department. So the Minister for Communities is in charge of the Department for Communities.



**The Department for Communities** is the government department that takes care of things like housing, disabilities, and benefits.

We have found three areas which most of the problems for private renters come from.

1. Too low supply and too high cost. There are not enough houses available. The ones that are available cost people lots of money. Usually over a third of their money each month.



The people earning the lowest **wages** are often spending as much as half of their money each month on their rent.

This means people don't have as much for heat, electricity, food and other important things.



**Wages** are the money people receive for doing their job. People are usually paid each month or every two weeks.

## 2. Insecure tenures or tenancies.

**Insecure** means not certain. It means you don't know how long something will continue or if it will continue.



A **tenure** or a **tenancy** for a renter is how long they live in the same place that they are renting. A private renter usually stays in their home under a **tenancy** for about 12 months.



Landlords are also allowed to **evict** tenants on a **no-fault basis**.

**Evict** means to make a renter leave their home permanently.

A **no-fault basis** means that the renter did not do anything wrong, like cause damage or upset neighbours.



When renters are evicted, only need to be told 4 weeks before they need to leave.

This does not give them much time to move and find somewhere else to live.

### 3. Standards and Maintenance



**Standards** are what tells us what a place to live, like a house or a flat, needs to have to be a place good enough for people to live.



There is a lot more a home needs to have to be safe for living than electricity or running water.

Sometimes, renters are not getting the best **standards**. Some houses have mould or they need repairs that the landlord has not fixed.



**Maintenance** means fixing problems with a home and making sure things that are broken are repaired or replaced.

Good **maintenance** means keeping a renter's home up to good standards.



People need their homes to be safe and in good condition. It is important for repairs to be done quickly, so that renters can have a safe place to live.

All these problems for renters need to be fixed. We have put together some ideas on how to help and sort out these issues:



1. Create an **empty homes taskforce**.

A **taskforce** is a group of people who aim to fix a specific problem.

**An empty homes taskforce** would be a group led by experts who could look for ways to bring empty or abandoned homes back into use as housing for people.



2. Limit **short-term lets** of holiday homes.

A **short-term let** is a short amount of time someone pays to stay in a house, usually for a holiday or a trip.

There are lots of houses that are for holidays or short trips only. They could be used for renters to live in instead.

We think councils should be allowed to limit how many short-term lets are allowed in their local areas.

Especially when there is not enough housing for people living there.

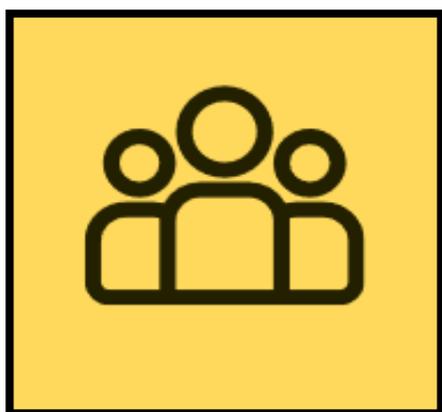


### 3. Create a **Land and Property Services** Private Rented Sector **database**.



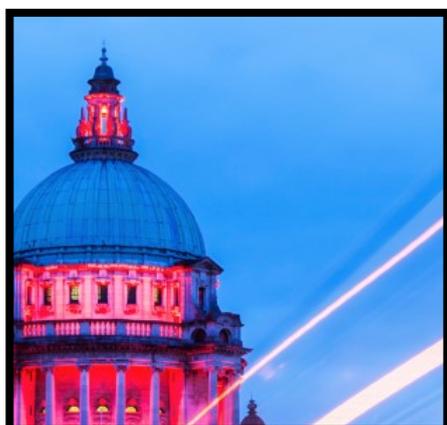
**Land and Property Services** keep track of all the land and properties in Northern Ireland.

They know who owns what parts of land and how everything is divided up.



A **database** is a list of information that can be searched.

A **private rented sector database** would be a list of all the rented properties in Northern Ireland.



This would help us see things like:

- Which areas don't have enough housing.
- Where the short-term holiday lets are.
- Which areas are landlords quitting the most.

#### 4. Pause the **NIHE House Sales Scheme**.



The **NIHE** is the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

They give people housing who cannot afford their own home or do not have a home.



At the moment, people living in **NIHE** homes can buy their home off of the **NIHE** through the **House Sales Scheme**.

This means that hundreds of **NIHE** houses are sold off every year.



This leaves people on the waiting list for **NIHE** homes with fewer options as the **NIHE** doesn't have enough places to offer.



We think this **housing sales scheme** should be paused so that the **NIHE** housing supply can recover.

5. Review the Local Housing Allowance rates for benefits every year.



**Benefits** are money given by the government to help people afford essential things. Things that they would struggle to pay for alone.

**The Local Housing Allowance (LHA)** decides how much money a tenant on housing benefits can get to help pay for their rent.

We think this should be reviewed every year. This would make sure people are getting enough money when rent increases.

6. System of rent controls



**Rent controls** are policies or rules that help protect renters from unfair prices or other issues.

We think that rent increases should only be allowed every 12 months, with a warning at least 3 months before.

Rent increases should also only be for real changes in costs for landlords. Changes like higher bills for electricity or repairs.

This is fairer for renters but doesn't discourage people from being landlords as much as other ideas can.

## 7. Review **minimum fitness standards**



The **minimum fitness standards** are the rules for what a rental home needs to have to be good enough to live in.

We think these standards should be reviewed and updated.

This would help people are get the homes they need.

## 8. Create a Northern Ireland **Housing Ombudsman**.



An **ombudsman** is someone independent who will look at your complaints about something.



A **housing ombudsman** would review disputes between landlords and renters to make sure no one is being treated unfairly.

## 9. Fund a renter's association.



**A renter's association** is a group that could give renters advice on issues they have and what rights a renter has.

**Rights** are protections in law that help someone be treated fairly.

## 10. Introduce a list of regulations for **letting agents**.



**A letting agent** is a company that acts as a go-between for a tenant and a landlord. Some letting agents have tried to charge illegal fees to tenants to make money.

We think there should be a **code of practice** for letting agents. A **code of practice** is a set of rules they would need to follow to work legally.

We also think there should be a **register** of letting agents. **A register** is a list of people or organisations that anyone can view.



This should help renters make sure that they are being treated fairly by a letting agent. It would also help them report a letting agent if they were being treated unfairly.

There are lots of different systems for renters and landlords across the world. We think that we should learn from other countries when trying to make better rules.



Austria has something called **Limited-Profit Housing Associations (LPHAs)**.

These are groups that build homes and rent them to people for a low cost.

**LPHAs** keep their costs as low as they can and are not allowed to make large profits from renters.



40% of all the rented homes in Austria come from **LPHAs**. People who rent from **LPHAs** spend less money on their homes.

This means they can spend more money on other things. This helps businesses and makes the country richer.



Many people rent from **LPHAs**, so lots of different kinds of people become neighbours.

This helps **community cohesion**.

**Community cohesion** is when people living in a local area get on well together.

This system would cost a lot of money to start up and we think it needs some changes on who it should benefit the most.

However, we think a similar scheme to this could help solve our housing problems.

# **Thank you for reading!**

If you need any help or more information please contact us.

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