



Women's Regional Consortium Consultation Briefing Paper, November 2015 Department for Social Development's 'Review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector'

1. Synopsis

This paper outlines an ongoing consultation exercise from the Department for Social Development (hereafter, DSD): 'Review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector'.¹

The consultation is the **first stage of the department's review** of the role and regulation of the private rented sector. The review aims to identify 'where improvements can be made to help make the ... sector a more attractive housing option', while giving due regard to both tenant protection and the avoidance of 'unnecessary or cumbersome' regulation in respect of so-called 'good landlords'.²

The **purpose of the consultation** is to garner stakeholder views on a discussion document, which sets out key issues affecting the private rented sector – from the perspectives of both tenant and landlord. The **issues covered** include housing supply, housing standards, empty housing, anti-social behaviour, rent control and penalties, rent affordability, letting agent regulation and regeneration.

It is intended that **feedback** from the consultation process will help 'inform the future direction' of the private rented sector.³ A further paper is subsequently planned, outlining DSD's proposals for change.

2. What is being proposed?

(a) Overview

Since the consultation document is a discussion paper only, it does not contain any actual departmental proposals for action. Rather, as noted, it is instead intended that feedback on the paper will itself inform the eventual drafting of proposals to improve the sector.

¹ DSD, 'Review of the role and regulation of the private rented sector', DSD: Belfast, 2015.

² Ibid., p. 2.

³ Loc. cit.

(b) 'Key objectives' of the review

The review has 5 key objectives:

- to evaluate the actual/potential contribution of the private rented sector to increasing housing supply, meeting need and demand;
- to identify 'key enablers' to support the sector;
- to gauge the effectiveness of current regulation of the sector;
- to make recommendations for improvement of the sector; and,
- to assess the actual/potential contribution of the sector to supporting shared housing.

The review will also consider policy and practice developments on related subjects such as housing supply, housing standards and regeneration.

(c) Scope of the consultation document

(i) In taking forward these objectives, the document considers:

- the actual/potential role of the private rented sector in meeting housing need and demand;
- the scope for growth of the sector;
- opportunities and challenges for tenants, landlords and landlord representatives; and,
- 'lessons learned' from policy and regulatory developments at the local level and beyond.

(ii) Issues covered

Issues covered in the consultation document include:

- tenant management;
- rent levels and affordability;
- housing investment;
- housing management;
- tenancy deposit;
- regulation enforcement;
- landlord licensing and accreditation;
- shared housing;
- security of tenure;
- housing supply, need and demand;
- housing standards;
- empty housing;
- eviction process;
- resolution/redress;
- repairing responsibilities
- regeneration;
- property fitness, rent control and penalties;

- anti-social behaviour;
- energy efficiency; and,
- gas, electrical and fire safety;
- letting agent regulation.

4. Next steps

(a) The **closing date** for this consultation is **5 February 2016**.

(b) **Focus groups:** in order to garner the views of affected women on the discussion paper, it is planned that focus groups will be held by consortium partners by **18 December**. The **deadline** for return of any associated focus group notes to WSN is **8 January**.

(c) Suggested **focus group questions** are set out below in Table 1.

Table 1: Focus group questions

Question 1 What kinds of private rented housing issues are faced by women in disadvantaged and rural areas of Northern Ireland; and, what impact can such issues potentially have on their everyday lives?

Question 2 Do you think government does enough to try to address these issues?

Question 3 As it considers the future regulation of private rented housing providers (both landlords and landlord representatives) and their services, what more do you think government could/should do to take account of these issues?

Question 4 In setting out these proposals, government aims to 'protect' tenants: what more do you think it could/should do to achieve this specific objective?

(d) A **draft version** of the consultation response will be sent in due course for consideration by consortium partners.

(e) The **full consultation** document is currently available to download on DSD's website: <https://www.dsdni.gov.uk/consultations/review-role-and-regulation-private-rented-sector>