



Subject:	Response to DFC Consultation Paper 'Proposals for Change to the Private Rented Sector'. (PRS)
Date:	7 th March 2017
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director City & Neighbourhood Services Department
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Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues	
1.1	In January 2016 this committee considered and agreed a response to a discussion document published by the then Department for Social Development on the Review of the Regulation of the Private Rented Sector. A copy of this response is attached at Appendix One.
1.2	This public consultation document is the second stage in the Department's Review of this area. It proposes a number of changes which will impact on both landlords and tenants. Officers have prepared a draft response which is attached as Appendix Two
1.3	The consultation closes on 3 rd April 2017 and a copy of the full consultation document is attached at Appendix Three
2.0 Recommendations	
2.1	The Committee is asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider and endorse the draft response.
3.0 Key Issues	
3.1	Owning a home or renting from a social landlord are the preferred choices for most of the Citizens of Belfast but these are becoming increasingly harder to secure. The private rented sector has become the second biggest tenure in Northern Ireland, the highest proportion being in Belfast. Given the existing waiting lists for Social Housing and affordability issues for first time buyers, this sector will continue to play an important and valuable role in the City's Housing

Market.

3.2 The increasing reliance on the Private Rented Sector will make it an important element of any future Housing strategy. The Council recognises that the majority of landlords are good landlords who abide by the law and provide much needed, good quality, accommodation. However management standards can vary so it is important that the Private rented sector is fit for purpose and provides tenancies for people that need them.

3.3 The consultation document sets out proposals to:

- gauge the appetite of institutional investors from Great Britain to invest in Northern Ireland,
- encourage the development of more mixed tenure housing areas,
- scope out the role of Housing Associations in the private rented sector,
- restrict number of times rent can be increased in a 12 month period
- ensure all private tenants are issued with a written agreement which must contain mandatory terms
- increase the minimum notice to quit period for tenancies over 12 months from four weeks to two month
- introduce a Fast Track Eviction process,
- consider a landlord training programme,
- pilot a dedicated landlord advice line,
- develop a tenant information pack,
- amend the Landlord Registration Regulations to incorporate a fitness declaration at the point of registration,
- introduce a regulatory framework for letting agents,
- introduce requirement for landlords to provide smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors and carry out periodic electrical checks,
- introduce legislation around Energy Performance Certificate ratings with possible exemptions,
- move the 1945 date for rent control to 1956,
- establish an independent housing panel.

3.4 The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on these proposed changes. More detailed comments on each are provided in the draft response.

3.5 The Council is disappointed that the Department is not proposing to introduce landlord licensing. Experience in England has shown that it is an effective instrument for authorities to increase the amount of information they hold on the Private Rented Sector in their area, and to open up the

	<p>lines of communication between local authorities, landlords and tenant communities. Licensing schemes would provide Councils with more effective powers to regulate the sector. It would also enable Councils and Landlords to work together in order to improve housing conditions and tackle problems like increased anti-Social Behaviour that often occur in areas with high concentrations of properties in the Private Rented Sector. More detailed comments on licensing are included in the draft response.</p> <p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>3.6 The review may result in new regulations and additional responsibilities for Councils. It is unclear whether any additional resources will be made available to Councils for these.</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></p> <p>3.7 There are no relevant equality considerations associated with the delivery of the strategy.</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p>Appendices – Documents Attached</p>
	<p>Appendix 1 – January 2016 response to a discussion document published by the then Department for Social Development on the Review of the Regulation of the Private Rented Sector.</p> <p>Appendix 2 - Draft response to the DfC Consultation on Proposals for change to the Private Rented Sector.</p> <p>Appendix 3 – DfC Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland - Proposals for Change Consultation Document</p>