



Commissioner for Older People
for Northern Ireland

Karen Barr

Department for Communities

Housing Policy, Strategy and Reform

Private Rented Branch

Level 3 Causeway Exchange

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RE Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland – Proposals for Change

I am writing to you on behalf of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI) in relation to the Department of the Communities' consultation document, 'Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland – Proposals for Change.' The role of the Commissioner is to promote awareness of issues relating to older people and to be an authoritative independent champion for them.

The number of older people living in private rented housing is increasing, and the Commissioner is concerned that older people will be affected by poor housing conditions. Older people disproportionately count for the numbers of those living in non decent homes across all types of housing. The private rented sector is where there are the highest proportions of older people living in non decent housing. The Northern Ireland Housing Executive's 2009 House Conditions Survey records that Household Reference Persons aged 60 or older living in private rented sector housing were twice as likely to live in non decent homes than in the same age group living in social housing.¹

The Commissioner envisages that some of the policies outlined in this consultation could be beneficial to older people, as well as other age groups. Proposed measures such as making it a mandatory requirement for private landlords to provide smoke and carbon monoxide detectors, increasing the minimum notice to quit period, and developing a Tenant Information Pack would benefit some older people. However the Commissioner is disappointed that older people are not referenced specifically in this document, and believes there should be further consideration of the growing segment of older people and their specific housing needs when attempting to effect change in the private rented sector.

¹ Alison Wallace, Centre for Housing Policy, 'Housing and Communities' Inequalities in Northern Ireland',

Measures to support accessible housing could potentially assist more older people than other age groups due to higher levels of mobility difficulties among older people.² One of the commitments in Delivery Plan 42 of the draft Programme for Government is to, potentially if finance can be secured, implement an Accessible Housing Register for social housing to identify and support the allocation of suitably accessible and adapted properties.

However, COPNI would urge the Department to go beyond this by re considering a policy priority which was included in initial drafts of the Active Ageing Strategy. This was referred to as the 'Housing (Accessible Homes – Private Sector)', which would have involved the development and piloting of a voluntary code of good practice for renters or sellers. This would improve accessibility among older people to the private rented sector. Given that the issue of non decent homes for older people aged 60 years or more is more prevalent in the private rented sector than in owner occupied or social homes, the Commissioner believes there should be more content in subsequent versions of this document related to older people.

The Commissioner also believes that more support should be available for older people to remain in houses appropriate to them, such as the introduction of support services like a 'Care and Repair' service, and COPNI would urge the Department to consider making explicit reference to these type of programmes in this document.

If you would like to discuss any of these queries in further detail, please do not hesitate to contact the Policy Team via:

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Yours faithfully,

Emer Boyle
Head of Legal and Policy Advice
Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland

² NISRA, 'A Profile of Older People in Northern Ireland – 2014 Update'.