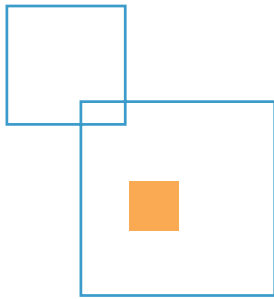




renting privately a strategic framework





renting privately a strategic framework



**“ The important
role that the
private rented
sector plays
within the overall
housing market
and the wider
community
has been
recognised and
acknowledged ”**

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“
Today the
private rented
sector is a
key part of
Northern Ireland’s
housing market
”

Foreword

In recent years there has been a resurgence in private renting in Northern Ireland: from 38,00 units in 1996 to 49,400 in 2001. Today the private rented sector is a key part of Northern Ireland's housing market and represents 7.6% of our total housing stock. The sector provides homes for people across the economic and social spectrum and meets housing need and demand from a range of households from highly paid professionals to the most vulnerable people in our community.

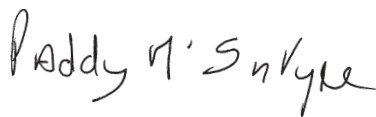
In April 2003, the Department for Social Development consulted on proposals for a new legislative framework to replace Northern Ireland's existing outdated private rented sector legislation. In June 2003, the Housing Executive issued for consultation a Draft Strategy for the private rented sector in Northern Ireland. This Draft Strategy contained proposals for policy and practice which sought to improve the management and the operation of the sector.

Initial consultation showed that there was widespread support for the introduction of a coherent strategic framework for the private rented sector. As a result staff from the Department for Social Development and the Housing Executive have worked together in the past few months to integrate the proposals. This document, therefore, sets out the strategic framework for dealing with the legislative, strategic and operational issues which will influence the sector in the future and which will be implemented in partnership with others.

We would like to thank all those who responded to the consultation and who helped to develop this strategic framework. We believe this framework will promote and sustain a healthy private rented sector. A sector which offers greater choice and flexibility and, at the same time, improves the quality and management of the accommodation it provides. We look forward to implementing this framework and to building on the partnerships which have already been established through its development.



ALAN SHANNON
Permanent Secretary
DSD



PADDY MCINTYRE
Chief Executive
NIHE

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”
Northern Ireland

SECTION 1: Introduction

The private rented sector in Northern Ireland plays a vital role in the overall housing market and provides accommodation for those who are unable, or would prefer not to, access home ownership or the social rented sector. Although the sector experienced decline through most of the twentieth century, there has been a steady increase since 1991 in the number of dwellings available for private renting and it now makes a significant contribution to meeting housing need and rising demand.

The sector is diverse and complex and until recently there had been little research carried out into its position within the housing market. It has been acknowledged that the legislation governing the sector, the Rent (NI) Order 1978, is cumbersome and outdated. This complex legislation focuses primarily on rent control which is determined by the letting history of the property. As such, it does not focus on unfitness or provide remedies for poorer quality housing in the sector.

Initial consultation has demonstrated that there is widespread support for the introduction of a coherent strategic framework for the private rented sector in Northern Ireland. The Department for Social Development has consulted on proposals for amendments to the legislation pertaining to the sector and the Housing Executive has consulted on proposals for a strategic approach to private renting. Following on from consultation, the Department for Social Development has determined a new legislative structure for the private rented sector which aims to target unfitness and disrepair, reduce inequities between tenure types and simplify, clarify and raise awareness of landlord and tenant obligations. The Housing Executive has also developed a strategy which will introduce practical and achievable goals for policy and practice, to improve both the perception and operation of the sector.

This policy statement provides a unified structure of legislative, strategic and operational changes which will shape government intervention in the sector over the coming years. The need for legislative change and the key features of the new structure to be introduced are explained. The strategic and operational policies which flow from this have been developed through consultation and aim to build on the strengths of the sector while tackling its weaknesses. Partnership working between a range of government and voluntary agencies will be a key feature of this integrated strategy which has been designed to have a positive impact on the supply, condition and management of the private rented sector.

**“
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”**

SECTION 2: Consultation and policy issues

Department for Social Development Consultation on Review of Legislation

In April 2003, the Department for Social Development issued a consultation document *'Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland: Proposals for Reform'*. Overall, there was widespread general support for the proposals and the responses to consultation confirmed that the main areas of concern in relation to the current legislation governing the private rented sector are as detailed below.

Addressing disrepair and unfitness

It is accepted that the current complex and unwieldy legislative structure is failing to meet its original objectives of improving conditions in the private rented sector. Significant problems of disrepair and unfitness remain both within the controlled sector and also within the uncontrolled sector where there is an absence of regulation. There are major differences regarding access to repair remedies, as controlled tenants have access to statutory repair remedies whereas uncontrolled tenants have only limited access under Public Health legislation. There is support for the introduction of a more simplified legislative structure, based on a determination of 'fitness', which would address inequities and more effectively target unfitness.

Rents

There are marked differences between the amount of rent chargeable under controlled and uncontrolled tenancies. Controlled tenancies are governed by a complex system of registration and independent appeal and have their rents determined in accordance with a legislative formula. Uncontrolled tenancies are subject to no statutory regulation and market forces determine the amount of rent chargeable. The current application of rent control imposed by the Rent Order has little impact on the condition of the property and it is accepted that it would be more appropriate to introduce a system of 'fair rents' linked to the Fitness Standard.

Security of Tenure/Succession

Controlled tenancies under the current legislation have extensive security of tenure and statutory protection covering rent levels, deposits and succession rights. However, uncontrolled tenancies, which are the majority of private rented tenancies, have very little security and no rights of succession. This disparity of rights between the controlled and uncontrolled sectors needs to be addressed.

Advice, information, training and publicity

There is evidence, supported by agencies working on the ground in the private rented sector, that there is a lack of awareness among both tenants and landlords of current legal rights and responsibilities. It has been accepted that there needs to be comprehensive and co-ordinated advice, information and publicity provided in relation to the private rented sector and in particular regarding the introduction and application of a new legislative framework which will apply to the whole of the sector. There is support for this to be provided by a multi-agency approach. There would also appear to be support for the establishment of a voluntary disputes resolution mechanism to arbitrate in disputes between landlord and tenant in order to minimise costly and protracted legal action.

Housing Executive Consultation on a Strategy for the Private Rented Sector

In June 2003, the Housing Executive issued a consultation document '*Private Renting: A Strategic Framework*'. This consultation highlighted a number of common themes which have been addressed in this document, as detailed below.

Housing Benefit

Many private rented sector tenants are dependent on housing benefit and many responses were in relation to difficulties being experienced by these households. Although housing benefit is administered by the Housing Executive, it is a social security payment made in the name of the tenant. The housing benefit regulations therefore, are determined by the Department for Work and Pensions and are normally applied nationally and therefore are beyond the scope of this review. However, developments in relation to changes proposed in housing benefit will be monitored. Research in relation to local reference rent levels and discretionary housing benefit payments will also be conducted in order to determine the impact these have on affordability in the private rented sector.

Grants

The provision of grant aid to landlords has made a significant contribution to tackling unfitness in the private rented sector. Many of the responses to consultation were in relation to the grants process and the system of landlord contribution. It is accepted that a more strategic approach to the improvement of housing conditions in the private rented sector and targeting of available resources where they are needed most is required. This will be facilitated by the recent introduction of a mainly discretionary, as opposed to mandatory, grants system.

Affordability

Responses highlighted issues of affordability and difficulties experienced by low-income households in the private rented sector that were not felt to have been adequately reflected in the strategy. In order to address this, Objective 4 of the strategy has been amended.

Facilitating high management standards

It is widely accepted that managing property to a high standard and ensuring that tenancies run smoothly is by no means an easy task and that landlords should be supported and encouraged in this role. The responses to consultation indicated that there is wide support for the dissemination of good practice, the development of guidance for letting and renting property, and for providing support and training for landlords.

Inter agency partnership working

Improvements in the private rented sector will best be achieved through partnership working and a multi-agency approach, which identifies and promotes good practice. The responses to consultation support this approach and forums for key stakeholders in the sector will be established.

Further research

A number of areas where further research is required were identified in the consultation document and the responses to consultation confirmed and supported these. Further research is underway with more research planned for the near future. This will help develop knowledge of the sector and inform the implementation of the strategy, as it evolves.

Improvements in the private rented sector will best be achieved through partnership working and a multi-agency approach, which identifies and promotes good practice.

**“ Our aim is to
promote and
sustain a
healthy private
rented sector ”**

SECTION 3: **Aim and objectives of the strategy**

Aim

To promote and sustain a healthy private rented sector, which offers choice and flexibility by influencing supply and securing a better quality, better managed sector.

Objectives

- 1 To create a legislative structure for the private rented sector which addresses inequities and targets unfitness through repair enforcement and rent control
- 2 To clarify and promote the rights and responsibilities of private rented sector landlords and tenants
- 3 To improve housing conditions in the private rented sector
- 4 To facilitate housing choice, by promoting the private rented sector as a viable and affordable housing option
- 5 To influence the levels of supply of accommodation available for private renting
- 6 To promote high standards of management within the private rented sector.

Objective 1

To create a legislative structure for the private rented sector, which addresses inequities and targets unfitness through repair enforcement and rent control

Categorisation of tenancies

In order to remove many of the inconsistencies and inequities of the present system and address the problems in the sector it is proposed to introduce a two-tier system of regulation based on a determination of 'fitness', as defined in the Housing (NI) Order 1992, Schedule 5.

All tenancies will be categorised according to fitness. The distinction between restricted and regulated tenancies in the controlled sector will be abolished and replaced by a determination of fitness.

In future, new tenancies of properties which are deemed to meet the Fitness Standard will be uncontrolled. A determination of fitness will be required for all new lettings not falling into the 'deemed fit' category (see below). Other tenancies will be inspected for fitness at the request of the landlord or tenant or by any statutory authority. All shorthold tenancies will become uncontrolled tenancies on expiry of the present tenancy term.

“ Any regulation will be based on a determination of fitness”

As a consequence of these measures, the question of whether a tenancy is let furnished or unfurnished will cease to have any relevance to its status.

Rents

A new system of 'fair rents' will be applied to controlled and 'interim controlled' properties through independent inspection. Rents will be based on the Housing Executive's points scheme as at present, but consideration will also be given to other factors such as local reference rents, furnishings, outbuildings and gardens. The listing and assessment process will be more simple and streamlined than the current registration system.

Fitness inspections

Information from the House Condition Survey 2001 indicates that the majority of unfit properties were constructed before 1945 with the vast majority falling into the pre 1919 category. Using a cut off date of 1945 will serve to focus enforcement action on those properties considered most likely to be unfit.

New tenancies of properties built before 1945 will require a fitness inspection prior to reletting. Most properties currently controlled under the Rent (NI) Order 1978 are likely to require a fitness inspection. Any private tenancy will also be inspected on request by the landlord or tenant or by any statutory authority. A fitness certificate issued as the result of an inspection will be valid for a period of 5 years, regardless of any change of tenancy during this period, unless a re-inspection is requested.

The new system of regulation aims to be speedy and self-regulating, as far as possible. It is proposed to place responsibility for fitness inspections with local councils. The legislation will require the landlord of rental property to have a fitness inspection carried out, where required, by the local council. Local council environmental health departments will have responsibility for conducting these inspections and a suitable fee will be determined. Where the property is found to be unfit on inspection, an appropriate Schedule of Works required to make the property fit will be completed. Liaison with the Housing Executive will be instigated where it becomes necessary to issue a Repairs Notice. After a further inspection to confirm compliance with the Schedule, the local council will confirm that the property meets the Fitness Standard.

All properties found to be unfit on inspection will be 'interim controlled' by the local council. Rent control, through the Rent Officer Service, will apply until the work required to render the property fit has been completed. Rents will be determined as

for controlled tenancies. This new system envisages a more active implementation of the Repair Notice procedure to deal with unfitness where this is found to be the most appropriate course of action.

Security of tenure and succession

The security of tenure and tenancy succession rights currently applicable to existing controlled tenancies, whether or not registered, will be modified. The lifetime security of tenure, which currently applies to three successive tenants within a single 'chain of succession', will be abolished.

Lifetime security of tenure will be limited to the current tenant, with succession restricted to the spouse or partner of the tenant or, in the absence of a spouse or partner, to a family member resident with the tenant for one year at the time of the death of the tenant. No further succession will be possible where the current 'chain of succession' has been completed, that is, where the existing tenant was the second successor to the tenancy under the provisions of the Rent (NI) Order 1978.

Action Points

- **Introduce new legislation in accordance with Departmental policy**
- **Convene the multi agency partnership to bring forward comprehensive information and guidance for all interest groups**
- **Arrange information seminars for all interest groups**
- **Produce and disseminate information materials**

Objective 2

To clarify and promote the rights and responsibilities of private rented sector landlords and tenants

The private rented sector in Northern Ireland provides homes for a diverse range of households, including some of the most vulnerable people in our society. There is evidence to suggest that there is a lack of awareness of rights and responsibilities among both tenants and landlords. This is compounded by the

“ The introduction of new legislation, more appropriate to the private rented sector of today, will address the present inequities in relation to rights and responsibilities”

fact that the current legislation in relation to the private rented sector, the Rent (NI) Order 1978, is cumbersome and outdated. Under this legislation, certain tenancies are ‘controlled’ by the Rent Order and there are statutory entitlements and obligations, which cover rent, deposits, security of tenure, succession and repairing remedies. The controlled sector is in decline, with the number of properties being ‘de-controlled’ on vacancy exceeding those being registered.

The majority of private rented sector tenancies in Northern Ireland are uncontrolled. These tenancies are subject to minimal intervention, open market rents can be charged and the tenants have few legal rights. Rent levels, deposits, tenancy terms and repairing obligations are all matters for negotiation between landlord and tenant and should form the basis for the tenancy agreement. However, the experience of agencies working on the ground would suggest that written tenancy agreements are often not provided and the conditions of the tenancy are not specified. This leads to an absence of any real form of recourse for both tenants and landlords if problems with the tenancy arise.

The proposed new legislative structure for the private rented sector will help to address these difficulties. This new structure will replace the Rent (NI) Order 1978 and will rationalise the complexity of private rented sector legislation generally. The introduction of new legislation, more appropriate to the private rented sector of today, will address the present inequities in relation to rights and responsibilities.

It is proposed to make a written tenancy agreement mandatory for all private tenancies with the form and content of these being prescribed by regulation. A default tenancy term of 6 months will also be provided in legislation. This will apply to all private tenancies, other than controlled tenancies, but only in cases where a tenancy agreement has not been provided or where one fails to specify the duration of the tenancy. Where the default tenancy term is in force, the tenancy will be deemed to continue for successive periods of 6 months until a tenancy agreement specifying a term is provided or a valid Notice to Quit brings the tenancy to an end.

Default repairing obligations for both parties will be provided in legislation. These will apply in the absence of any more specific obligations set out in the tenancy agreement and the rent book or where either of these has not been provided. The default repairing obligations will be similar to those provided in Articles 41 to 45 of the Rent (NI) Order 1978, which currently apply to regulated tenancies.

As the provision of comprehensive advice, information and training for all stakeholders was highlighted as necessary, a multi agency partnership approach will be established, comprising all the key players in the sector. The need for a disputes resolution mechanism will be further researched and it is proposed to conduct a pilot voluntary disputes project to arbitrate in disputes between landlord and tenant.

The Action Points and activities planned to achieve this objective are detailed below.

“ A multi-agency approach for advice, information and training will be established”

Action Points

- **Establish a forum for agencies providing advice and assistance to private rented tenants and landlords**
- **Co-ordinate and conduct an advertising and awareness campaign on rights and responsibilities for private rented tenants and landlords**
- **Co-ordinate an improved multi-agency service of advice, assistance and support for private rented tenants and landlords**
- **Produce best practice standard documentation which may be used by private sector tenants and landlords, including model tenancy agreements**
- **Research and evaluate the need and desire for the provision of an Arbitration Service and possible options for delivery.**

Objective 3

To improve housing conditions in the private rented sector

One of the prime objectives of this Strategy for the private rented sector in Northern Ireland is to improve the quality of accommodation and reduce unfitness in the sector. The stock in the private rented sector is generally old in comparison to other tenures and the unfitness rate is higher. In 2001, the overall unfitness rate in Northern Ireland was 4.8%. However, in the private rented sector the rate of unfitness was 8.7%,

“ One of the prime objectives of this Strategy for the private rented sector in Northern Ireland is to improve the quality of accommodation and reduce unfitnes in the sector”

compared to 2.8% in the owner occupied sector, 2.1 % in housing association stock and 0.8% in Housing Executive stock. It is now time to take a strategic approach to the improvement of housing conditions in the private rented sector and target limited resources where they are needed most. This will be facilitated by the new Discretionary Grants System, which was introduced by the Housing (NI) Order 2003.

The Department for Social Development's Review and proposals for new legislation in relation to the private rented sector should also enable a more focused approach to addressing unfitnes. Under these proposals, the fitness of a property will be the determining factor as to whether a property is made subject to any form of rent control. This control of rent in properties determined as unfit will be one method used to address unfitnes.

Repair enforcement

A new, cooperative, service delivery mechanism in relation to repair enforcement between district councils and the Housing Executive is envisaged, as follows:

- Where a local council assesses an occupied dwelling to be unfit, a Schedule of Works with costings will be drawn up for consideration by the Housing Executive, together with a notice indicating the council's intention to serve a Repair Notice in 28 days. This system of scheduling and costing is already in place and working effectively in relation to other housing matters.
- If the Housing Executive deems the most appropriate course of action to be a Closing Order, Demolition Order or Deferred Action Notice, it will notify the council of its intention to issue such an order or notice, as a consequence of which the council will take no further action.
- If the Housing Executive considers a Repair Notice to be the most appropriate course of action it will notify the local council, which will serve a Repair Notice and pursue enforcement.

In Northern Ireland there is currently a gap in the range of enforcement remedies available to tackle serious disrepair falling short of unfitnes. Section 190 of the 1985 Housing Act applicable in England and Wales provides for Repair Notices to be issued in relation to serious disrepair falling short of unfitnes. An amendment introduced in the 1989 Local Government and Housing Act qualified the application of this power, which now only applies to tenanted properties and to properties located within renewal areas. Authorities also have

discretion to exclude properties due to be included in a group repair scheme within 12 months. It is proposed to introduce similar provisions to Northern Ireland, which will be available across all private sector tenancy types. The introduction of these powers will also ensure that risk of physical injury, now excluded from action under Public Health legislation as a result of a Court of Appeal ruling, can be addressed.

Article 3 (1) (a) and (b) of the Defective Premises (Landlord's Liability) Act (NI) 2001 will be repealed, thus ensuring that all landlords are liable for defective premises regardless of the status of the tenancy.

The Action Points and activities planned to improve the quality of accommodation available for renting in Northern Ireland are:

Action Points

- **Introduce new legislation capable of tackling unfitness and disrepair more effectively**
- **Determine the current nature and condition of stock in the private rented sector**
- **Implement a co-ordinated approach to addressing unfitness and determining priorities, to ensure the most appropriate action is taken in instances where unfit properties are identified**
- **Develop, in consultation with District Council EHOs, a system for enforcing repairing obligations**
- **Determine the potential for targeting grants under the Discretionary Grants System when priorities have been identified**
- **Examine how fuel poverty in the private rented sector can be addressed and energy efficiency improved.**

“ We aim to facilitate housing choice and promote the private rented sector as a viable and affordable housing option”

Objective 4

To facilitate housing choice, by promoting the private rented sector as a viable and affordable housing option

One of the strengths of the private rented sector is its flexibility and ease of access and this should be acknowledged and built upon. For a range of people in short term housing need, for example newly formed households and young mobile singles, it provides easy access accommodation. For many lower income households it can provide longer-term accommodation, often where they are unable to secure social housing, particularly in areas of high housing stress. However, access and entry into the private rented sector can be difficult or restricted. There is often a lack of awareness of the availability in the sector and of the possibility of private renting being an alternative, affordable tenure for those in housing need. Landlords with accommodation to rent may also face difficulties when trying to identify suitable tenants for their property.

One of the main objectives of this strategy, therefore, is to facilitate housing choice and promote the private rented sector as a viable and affordable housing option. The desired outcome is to ensure more effective alignment of private rented sector supply with demand and to realise the potential for the sector to assist in meeting housing need.

The main Action Points and activities planned to achieve this objective, by increasing awareness of and improving access to the sector, are detailed below:

Action Points

- **Assess demand for and interest in private rented sector accommodation when assessments for housing are carried out under the Common Selection Scheme**
- **Assess demand for and interest in the private rented sector through rural latent demand testing**
- **Increase awareness of the private rented sector among applicants for housing and the general public**

- **Research the dynamics of the private rented sector in relation to inter-tenure flow of stock and tenants**
- **Research how the Housing Executive, in partnership with other bodies, could promote the private rented sector**
- **Evaluate existing access schemes (Rent Guarantee Scheme, Smartmove), to determine their effectiveness and make recommendations for the development and/or expansion of such schemes, taking account of affordability issues**
- **Explore the potential for alternative models of temporary accommodation for homeless applicants within the private rented sector accommodation**
- **Research issues of affordability in the private rented sector, including housing benefit.**

Objective 5

To influence the levels of supply of accommodation available for private renting

The role that the private rented sector plays in Northern Ireland varies from one location to another. It is vital therefore, that the supply of private rented accommodation is influenced in accordance with effective up to date local market analysis of supply and demand. In areas of high housing stress, the private rented sector should be encouraged to play a greater role in meeting housing need, which may have previously been met by the social housing sector. However, in areas of low demand, care should be taken to avoid an over supply of affordable accommodation for rent, which could result in decline of the neighbourhood and all the associated social and economic problems.

The main Action Points and activities which the Housing Executive plan to implement in order to achieve this objective are detailed below. These will assist in assessing local market conditions, local levels of supply and demand and local methods of influencing the supply of private rented accommodation.

“ We will assess local market conditions, local levels of supply and demand and local methods of influencing the supply of private rented accommodation”

“ We aim to support landlords in managing tenancies to a high standard”

Action Points

- **Carry out a review of the existing Rent Register to update and validate the number and location of private rented properties currently subject to control by the Rent (NI) Order 1978**
- **Map, using the Geographical Information System (GIS), existing private rented sector properties**
- **Further develop District Housing Plans to monitor existing local housing markets, in association with Planning Policy Statement 12, Housing in Settlements**
- **Influence the supply of private rented accommodation through sectoral studies**
- **Influence the supply of private rented accommodation through regeneration initiatives**
- **Investigate the need and potential to target Grant Aid to private sector landlords in areas of high housing stress through the Discretionary Grants System**
- **Examine and explore the scope for increased investment by landlords in the private rented sector in areas of high housing stress.**

Objective 6

To promote high standards of management within the private rented sector

Within the private rented sector in Northern Ireland, there are currently no mechanisms for monitoring the standards of management of tenancies, apart from the tenancy management standards in relation to Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs), which have an emphasis on physical issues. The quality of management standards varies from landlord to landlord and as managing properties to a high standard and ensuring that tenancies run smoothly is by no means an easy task, landlords should be encouraged and

supported in doing so. There is a need, therefore, to introduce methods of supporting and educating landlords in the effective management of tenancies.

The Action Points and activities planned in order to promote high standards of management within the private rented sector are:

Action Points

- **Develop a Northern Ireland ‘Best Practice Guide to Letting and Renting Property’ for use by all landlords**
- **Develop and improve relations and communication with landlords**
- **Assess the support and education needs of landlords and develop a programme for meeting those needs**
- **Expand management standards to be introduced as part of Registration under the HMO Strategy**
- **Develop and improve communications with universities in areas of high HMO concentration**
- **Assess the benefits of extending the licensing of landlords beyond that of HMOs**
- **Determine the benefits of introducing ‘accreditation’ of landlords.**

**“ This Strategy
will continue
to develop
and evolve ”**

SECTION 4: **Implementation**

Implementing the Strategy

An Implementation Plan has been produced and accompanies this document. This sets out the objectives, the Action Points associated with each objective, and the key tasks involved in order to achieve them. It also provides a timeframe against which the tasks are to be completed.

It is likely that this Strategy will continue to develop and evolve as policies are implemented and the results monitored and evaluated. Progress against the key tasks, action points and objectives will be continually monitored and performance against objectives will be reported on annually. Where necessary, the objectives will be updated or amended to reflect the needs of the private rented sector. Key stakeholders in the sector will be actively involved in both the implementation and review of effectiveness as the Strategy develops.

Monitoring and policy evaluation

In order to ensure that new and existing provisions are implemented efficiently, effectively and in a co-ordinated way the Department will retain responsibility for policy development, legislation, regulation and monitoring of the sector.

The Housing Executive will continue to provide an important strategic role in relation to all aspects of housing policy and will be integrally involved in carrying out more detailed monitoring of the private rented sector including the impact of rent control, repair enforcement and other statutory provisions. Close liaison between local councils, the Housing Executive and the Rent Officer Service will inform the Department on the ongoing development of the sector.

The Rent Officer Service will retain its present status as a Non Departmental Public Body, serviced by the Department for Social Development's Housing Policy Branch, and responsible for determining controlled and interim controlled rents. It will also be an integral part of the multi agency partnership developing advice, guidance and training.

The Department will provide detailed guidance for enforcement authorities and set in place monitoring arrangements with the Housing Executive and local councils, which will ensure that government is fully informed regarding the impact of enforcement action on disrepair and unfitness, rent control, and other aspects of the new legislative structure.

“ Key stakeholders in the sector will be effectively involved in both the implementation and review of effectiveness as the Strategy develops”

**“ The emphasis
of this Strategy
is to encourage,
support and
enable effective
partnership
working ”**

SECTION 5: **Conclusion**

Government is committed to introducing a strategic and comprehensive approach to the private rented sector in Northern Ireland. This Strategy has been developed on the basis of consultation with all interest groups and seeks to build on the strengths of the sector while tackling the weaknesses that exist. Such a strategy can best be achieved through partnership with landlords, tenants, and all the statutory and voluntary agencies that offer advice and services to the sector. The emphasis therefore is to encourage, support and enable effective partnership working and the dissemination of good practice.

The important role that the private rented sector plays within the overall housing market and the wider community has been recognised and acknowledged. This strategy aims to introduce a coordinated approach which links together a range of housing and related strategies impacting on private tenancies and produce measurable and beneficial change.

Throughout the implementation of the strategy, the Department and the Housing Executive will continue to monitor developments, policies and responses to the private rented sector in other jurisdictions. This will inform our policy development and the regular monitoring and evaluation of progress in relation to our objectives.

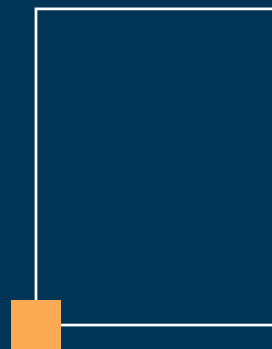
OBJECTIVE 1 – Legislative Structure		
RECOMMENDATION	KEY TASK	TIMESCALE
<p>Introduce new legislation in accordance with Departmental policy</p> <p>Convene the multi agency partnership to bring forward comprehensive information and guidance for all interest groups</p> <p>Arrange seminars for all interest groups</p> <p>Produce and disseminate information materials</p>	Draft legislation for consultation	Consultation period October to December 2004
OBJECTIVE 2 – Rights and Responsibilities		
RECOMMENDATION	KEY TASK	TIMESCALE
Establish forums for agencies working within the private rented sector	<p>Establish Landlords Forum</p> <p>Establish forum for Environmental Health Officers</p> <p>Establish forum for statutory/ voluntary agencies providing advice and assistance to the sector</p>	<p>February 2004</p> <p>May 2004</p> <p>June 2004</p>
Co-ordinate and conduct an advertising and awareness campaign on rights and responsibilities	Produce and distribute literature, leaflets and posters on the rights and responsibilities of private rented tenants and landlords	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders
Co-ordinate an improved multi-agency service of advice, assistance and support for private rented tenants and landlords	<p>Determine the need, in consultation with key partners, for advice, assistance and training to landlords and tenants</p> <p>Develop a framework and protocols for delivering advice, assistance and training</p>	<p>To be determined in consultation with stakeholders</p> <p>To be determined in consultation with stakeholders</p>
Produce best practice documentation for use by tenants and landlords	Develop and produce model tenancy agreements, in consultation with key partners	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders

Research and evaluate the need for Arbitration	<p>Research attitudes of existing tenants and landlords in relation to landlord-tenant relations and need for arbitration</p> <p>Research the need for Arbitration, methods being employed in other jurisdictions and possible options for the delivery of such a service</p> <p>Conduct a pilot voluntary disputes project to arbitrate in disputes between landlord and tenant</p>	<p>November 2004</p> <p>To be determined in consultation with stakeholders</p> <p>To be determined in consultation with stakeholders</p>
OBJECTIVE 3 – Housing Conditions		
RECOMMENDATION	KEY TASK	TIMESCALE
Introduce new legislation capable of tackling unfitness and disrepair more effectively	Draft legislation for public consultation	Consultation period October to December 2004
Determine the current nature and condition of stock in the PRS	<p>Commission research with UJJ to look at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - nature and condition of HMOs in relation to new HMO standards - how the nature and condition of PRS stock has changed since 1996 	November 2004
Implement a coordinated approach to addressing unfitness and determining priorities within the private rented sector	Establish a forum with District Council Environmental Health Officers	May 2004
Develop, in consultation with District Council EHOs, a system for enforcing repairing obligations	Introduce a framework and protocol for the serving of Repair Notices under the new legislative framework	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders
Determine the potential for targeting grant aid when priorities have been identified	Using the discretionary grants system, target grant aid to address the priorities in the private rented sector	Ongoing
Examine how fuel poverty in the private rented sector can be addressed	Conduct an awareness campaign to ensure that PRS landlords and tenants are aware of assistance available to tackle fuel poverty	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders

OBJECTIVE 4 – Housing Choice		
RECOMMENDATION	KEY TASK	TIMESCALE
Assess demand for private rented accommodation through Common Selection Scheme process	Review application form and visit report form to enable collection and release of information on applicants interested in private renting Develop a framework and protocol for enhanced housing advice to applicants on housing options during assessment	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders
Assess demand for private renting through rural latent demand testing	Carry out latent demand testing in 23 rural locations	March 2005
Increase awareness of the private rented sector among applicants for housing and the general public	Produce and publish leaflets, posters, details of PRS accommodation, landlords etc. for display in various outlets Develop the private renting section of the Housing Advice website	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders April 2004
Research the dynamics of the PRS in relation to inter-tenure flow of stock and tenants	Determine the relationship between Housing Executive stock and tenants and the PRS, eg ex NIHE stock in the PRS and former PRS tenants on the Common waiting list	November 2004
Research how the Housing Executive, in partnership with other bodies, could promote the PRS	Establish existing tenant and landlord views on what information could be made available	November 2004
Evaluate existing access schemes to determine effectiveness and recommend development and/or extension	Evaluate Rent Guarantee Scheme Evaluate Smartmove Scheme	March 2005 March 2005
Explore the potential for alternative models of temporary accommodation for homeless applicants within the private rented sector Research issues of affordability in the private rented sector	Value for money study underway Conduct a study of the relationship between housing benefit, private rented sector rents and homelessness Carry out research in relation to local reference rents, discretionary payments and the impact on affordability of private renting	April 2004 To be determined in consultation with stakeholders

OBJECTIVE 5 – Levels of Supply		
RECOMMENDATION	KEY TASK	TIMESCALE
Review the existing Rent Register	Determine the accuracy of the current register of rents Conduct an exercise to update and validate the tenancies currently registered as controlled by the Rent (NI) Order 1978	November 2004 May 2004
Map the location of current private rented properties	Using the Geographical Information System (GIS), map the location of private rented properties according to the 2001 Census, controlled tenancies on the Rent Register and current private housing benefit cases	June 2004
Further develop District Housing Plans in association with PPS12	Monitor existing local supply of and projected need for private rented accommodation	Ongoing
Influence the supply of private rented accommodation through Sectoral Studies	Develop initiatives through the Sectoral studies which might match empty homes with the private rented sector in areas of high housing stress Use access schemes to influence the supply and match applicants to private rented accommodation	Ongoing Ongoing
Influence the supply of private rented accommodation through Regeneration Initiatives	Town Centre Living - Progress the Living over the Shops Initiative in the two pilot areas of Derry and Lisburn	April 2005
Investigate the need and potential for targeting Grant Aid to private landlords	Under the new Discretionary Grants System, examine the potential for targeting grant aid at landlords in areas of high housing stress	Ongoing
Examine and explore the scope for increased investment by landlords in areas of high housing stress	Determine the extent that rate of return influences current landlords' decision to invest in the PRS	November 2004

OBJECTIVE 6 – Standards of Management		
RECOMMENDATION	KEY TASK	TIMESCALE
Develop 'Best Practice' Guidance for Northern Ireland	Develop a Northern Ireland 'Best Practice Guide to Letting and Renting Property' for use by landlords	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders
Develop and improve relations and communication with landlords	Establish and Service a Landlords' Forum	February 2004
Assess the support and education needs of landlords	Determine the support and education needs of landlords in relation to all issues affecting the private rented sector Develop a programme for meeting the identified needs through awareness and training	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders
Expand management standards for Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs)	Incorporate management standards for HMOs as part of Registration Scheme	May 2004
Develop and improve communication with Universities in areas of high HMO concentration	Establish regular contact with University Accommodation Officers	September 2004
Assess the benefits of extending Licensing of Landlords beyond HMOs	Research developments in relation to licensing of landlords in other jurisdictions Evaluate the benefits of extending Licensing Schemes to determine their effectiveness and make recommendations for the development and/or expansion of such schemes	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders
Determine the benefits of introducing 'Accreditation' of landlords	Research developments in other jurisdictions in relation to Accreditation to determine their effectiveness and make recommendations for the possible development of such schemes	To be determined in consultation with stakeholders



This document is available in alternative formats.
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