

NI Assembly: Committee for Communities Private Tenancies Bill – Invitation to Provide Evidence

Response from Dr Kim McKee, University of Stirling/Co-Investigator in the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence

In October 2021, the Committee for Communities launched a consultation asking for views on the proposed Private Tenancies Bill. In this response, I draw on recent research I have been involved in. There are two main relevant strands of research; i) research by the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE) examining the impact of private renting on wellbeing ii) research funded by SafeDeposits Scotland exploring how landlord and letting agent behaviour can impact their tenants' ability to 'make a home'.

I would also like to signpost this report by my CaCHE colleagues "[The private rented sector in the UK](#)" which provides an in-depth overview of changes in how the PRS has changed and how policy and regulatory responses vary across the UK. This report was the first of many collaborations between CaCHE and [TDS](#) and [SDS](#) looking at "[Raising standards in the PRS](#)". It provides valuable context for discussion about policy and/or legislative reform in the UK context.

Private Renting and wellbeing

In proposing to extend the notice to quit period a landlord must give tenants, restrict rent increases, and limit security deposits the Northern Ireland Assembly will be following the path of other devolved administrations in the UK, not least Scotland, which has made all new private tenancies open-ended and already has restrictions on rent increases and tenancy deposits. The results of some of these more recent legislative shifts are still unfolding, but emerging evidence from CaCHE's work is highlighted below.

The psycho-social effects of tenure insecurity in the private rental sector are something that CaCHE has explored in depth. In "[The frustrated aspirations of generation rent](#)", CaCHE conducted 16 in-depth interviews with low/mid-income young people living in the private rented sector (PRS) in England and Scotland. They found tenure insecurity to be a major source of stress and anxiety for tenants in England, with the costs of renting also adding to renters' sense of precarity. Poor property conditions were a further source of frustration.

Tenure insecurity is often thought of as a young person's problem, but the number of older renters is [also increasing](#). The CaCHE report "[Beyond generation rent](#)" interviewed 17 older private renters from different parts of the UK, and found that the



financial stress of renting and the challenges of making a rental house a 'home' were exacerbated for families with children. Poor property conditions also remained a key concern amongst renters in this age group.

Finally, a more recent CaCHE study co-funded with [TDS](#) and [SDS](#), "[Health and Wellbeing in the UK Private Rented Sector: enhancing capabilities, part 2: findings from tenant interviews](#)" highlighted that some tenants experienced the PRS as 'capability depriving'. This was linked to poor property conditions, feelings of insecurity, illegal or poor landlord/letting agent practices and issues of affordability. CaCHE conducted 53 interviews with private renters across the UK in this study, with a further key theme emerging being the importance of the landlord-tenant relationship in shaping tenants' feelings of security.

Together, all three of the reports above suggest that reducing insecurity in the PRS, tackling poor property conditions, and addressing (un)affordability will have positive effects on the well-being of tenants living there.

Making a Home: the key role of landlords and letting agent behaviour

Colleagues from Stirling, Edgehill and Cardiff Universities published an [evidence review](#) and [good practice guidance leaflet](#) in 2021, both of which highlighted the key role landlord and letting agent behaviour has on their tenants' ability to make a home. This review was funded by [SDS](#) and based on a systematic review of the international peer-reviewed and grey literature, of which 66 publications were reviewed in full.

The research highlighted seven key areas where landlords and agents can make a positive contribution: investment in property quality, adaptations and energy efficiency; positive responses to dealing with repair requests; avoiding jumping to conclusions when selecting new tenants to avoid discriminating against and/or excluding certain groups; considering letting to families and households with pets; allowing tenants to personalise the property; being respectful and supportive of tenants; and offering longer tenancies with stable rents where possible.

This research highlights the importance of professionalisation, upskilling and sharing good practice in order to raise standards in the sector.

Contact

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