



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Housing (Amendment) Bill. Return to committee.socialdevelopment@niassembly.gov.uk by Friday 4th September 2015.

Name: Raymond Crooks, Chairman_____

Organisation: (if applicable) Landlords Association for Northern Ireland

Date: 3 September 2015_____

The Landlords Association Northern Ireland (LANI) is the largest organisation of its kind representing landlords in the private rented sector in Northern Ireland. LANI promotes the highest standard in the practice of renting, managing and maintaining rented accommodation in the private sector.

The members of LANI represent the entire spectrum of private rental accommodation. Members range from individuals with one or two rental properties to landlords with large portfolios, letting agents and estate agents who represent many landlords. The growth in membership reflects the increased importance of the private rented sector in the Northern Ireland economy and the performance of landlords in Northern Ireland appears to be the best in the UK. Within the Association there is a wealth of experience in renting, maintaining and managing private rented accommodation.

In relation to the amendments put forward LANI takes this opportunity to make the following comments.

The Housing (Amendment) Bill does not extend to the Private Rented Sector and

LANI considers that the sharing of information both for the purposes of identifying owners of empty homes, and for the disclosure and sharing of information relating to anti-social behaviour should be made available to those landlords within the Private Rented Sector who provide social housing.

Under section 1, sharing of data, it appears that there is no referral to The Land Registry. The Land Registry is the definite register for ownership of property. It does not show if the property is empty, it merely states who owns the property and the solicitor who acted in the purchase. This information should be readily available to trace "empty" homes. On the other hand the Rating Authority simply knows who may be responsible for rates which is not necessarily the owner.

LANI would also suggest that electricity supply companies be used by Government Departments as an efficient and effective source of information to determine if a property is empty. Currently, if a property is damaged in a fire the insurance company involved checks the electrical usage to help determine if the property was occupied at and around the time of damage. This information helps the insurer to establish whether a claim is valid under the "in occupation" clause of the policy. If there is no electricity usage after a designated period of time perhaps the electrical supplier should be duty bound to report this to the Rating or other appropriate authority.

There appears, from anecdotal evidence, to be a significant problem in N. Ireland with "Bureau drops" where Housing Benefit is paid to individuals who have provided to the authorities a convenience address rather than the address of the property in which they reside. This practice prevents the property being available to others in need. We would suggest that it be made compulsory for the electricity supplier to report non- use of electrical services in a property to the appropriate authority in order to help clarify if a property is occupied.

The section of the Bill relating to the extension of purposes for which information relating to anti-social behaviour may be disclosed only relates to Housing Association. Private Landlords do not have the right to obtain this information. As The Bill aims to make provision for the better sharing of information relating to empty homes or to anti-social behaviour, LANI requests that the sharing of information relating to anti-social behaviour be extended to the Private Rented Sector. This

would provide landlords, supplying social housing, with the same or partial information relating to anti-social behaviour as that to be supplied to Housing Associations. This is a big issue for the Private Rented Sector as landlords often find they are housing tenants who have been involved in anti-social behaviour or evicted from Social Housing. Such tenants frequently cause to problems for themselves, their neighbours and others and damage to property. This often leads to "problem" tenants causing mayhem for Private Rented Sector landlords, who provide social housing, resulting in an adverse effect on the housing stock and on neighbourhoods. LANI is also very concerned that these issues incorporate the wider problem of the eviction process. In Northern Ireland the eviction process is long drawn out, cumbersome and out of synchronization with other parts of the United Kingdom.

In relation to loans and statutory charges this appears to be again solely for social housing. If this would be extended to cover the Private Rented Sector then LANI would not foresee any issues with statutory charges.

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