



Minister Deirdre Hargey

By Email: private.office@communities-ni.gov.uk

29th May 2020

Dear Minister Hargey,



Covid-19 Private Renters Follow-up Survey

Following our initial [survey of private renters in Northern Ireland](#) about the impact of Covid-19 that we conducted in March and submitted to you on 1st April 2020, Renters' Voice has carried out a Follow-up Survey (conducted between 23rd and 27th May 2020) to ask private renters' views about:

- Some of the further measures and guidance that have been introduced to help private renters during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- How people who rent privately have been affected by lockdown and whether they feel it is time yet to ease these measures with respect to allowing viewings of rental properties/house moves and non-emergency repairs to rented homes.

A report detailing the survey responses is included with this letter.

A shorter report was also shared on 27th May with the Department for Communities, focusing on responses regarding lockdown measures and potential easing of these.

Some important themes emerging from this survey are that a lot of private renters are **still very concerned** about **finances, paying rent, potential evictions** and **safety from the virus in their homes**. People also have **new concerns** about **what will happen following the initial crisis** and whether further financial and legislative support will be provided to meet private renters' continued needs.

Regarding lockdown measures, **7 in 10 people** thought that lockdown should be eased to allow for **non-emergency repairs** but **opinion was divided** about whether **viewings of rented properties and house moves** should be allowed yet. **Nearly everyone** who responded thought that there would still need to be some **rules and exceptions** in place when these activities are allowed again.

Private tenants engaged with the Renters' Voice project wish to further emphasise the following points regarding the survey findings:

- That **no respondents** to the survey said that they had **found the Department for Communities guidance for landlords and tenants 'very useful'** and 1 in 6 said it was 'not useful at all'.
- That private tenants appear to have experienced **real difficulties in finding and understanding the official information provided** during the crisis.
- That the **guidance is limited** in how reassuring it can be for tenants when **much of it is just recommendations** rather than enforceable rules, regulations and legislation.
- That there is a **real urgency to let people know what happens next** to address private renters' uncertainties (for example when current lockdown measures, financial supports and the emergency 'notice to quit' legislation are phased out or expire).
- That there is a **need for clarity for landlords and letting agents as well as tenants** and that, without this, the risk is that tenants will not just be impacted by the actions of 'rogue landlords' but also by those of genuinely confused landlords and agents.
- That some of the points raised in the survey point to a **need for better adherence to existing regulations** and **better enforcement of these**, for example in relation to the issues raised about landlords accessing peoples' homes without notice.
- That, while there were **mixed views about whether it is time yet to ease lockdown restrictions**, especially in relation to viewings of rented properties and house moves, there was clear consensus that when this happens **there will need to be rules and exceptions in place** – these will need to be backed by **clear government guidance**.
- That those who responded to the survey made some **good practical suggestions about what these rules and exceptions should be** in relation to both repairs and property viewings and that these will need to be considered by decision-makers.

Renters' Voice is a new project for people who rent privately in Northern Ireland to build a strong voice and influence landlords, politicians and government. We are supported by Housing Rights and funded by Nationwide Foundation. The best way to contact us at present is via email: rentersvoice@housingrights.org.uk.

As with our previous survey, we ask that serious consideration is given to these findings and additional points in relation to measures affecting private tenants in the current crisis and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

Renters' Voice