



Renters' Voice!

Housing
Rights



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FOUNDATION

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Foundation
Northern Ireland

Renters' Voice Legislative Theatre Event Report

May 2026



About Renters' Voice

Renters' Voice is a group for people who rent from a private landlord or through a letting agent in Northern Ireland. Our experience of renting motivates us to create change by campaigning for improvements across the private rental sector:

- we speak out to influence public and political discussions.
- we ask to be involved in relevant decision-making.
- we empower other renters to create change.

As well as being a strong voice for renters in Northern Ireland, we want to embed a culture of tenant participation among decision makers.

Renters' Voice is supported by Housing Rights and funded by the Community Foundation Northern Ireland, but our voice is our own.



Legislative Theatre project

In May 2026, Renters' Voice collaborated with Arts & Homelessness International on a Legislative Theatre process aimed at preventing homelessness for private renters in Northern Ireland.

Legislative theatre brings experts by experience and policymakers together into creative, constructive dialogue, to co-create more equitable and effective policies and laws.

The initiative brought together a group of private renters who co-created and performed a short play reflecting their first-hand experiences as private renters, which had left them at risk of homelessness. Audience members who attended and participated in the event included private renters, government officials, representatives from statutory bodies, elected representatives and charities.



"The play was exceptional which provided a powerful message and very thought provoking. The audience participation was fantastic."
Audience member

Key issues raised

After having watched the performance, audience members were asked to identify the issues highlighted in the play. These included:

- Landlord discrimination (through refusing to rent properties to):
 - People from other countries
 - Global majority/ethnic-minority communities
 - People in receipt of benefits
 - Young People
 - Older people
 - Students
 - Single parents
 - People with pets
- Long list of requirements from letting agents in order to be able to access properties
- Landlord entering properties without permission
- Estate agents charging illegal letting fees, such as admin fees
- Damp and mould
- Requests for repairs being ignored and not carried out
- Passing of responsibility for repairs from estate agent to landlords
- High demand for properties leaving private renters desperate and having no choice but to accept poor standard, unaffordable properties
- Landlords charging unlawful deposits which are higher than one month's rent
- Landlords not protecting and refusing to return deposits
- Landlords issuing rent increases without the requisite 3 months' notice in writing
- No fault evictions leaving tenants vulnerable to retaliatory evictions if they ask for repairs or advocate for their rights
- Lack of regulation and enforcement of existing legislation and policies in place to protect private renters
- Private renters not being able to access support from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive until 28 days before their eviction date
- Private renters not being able to access temporary accommodation from Northern Ireland Housing Executive until their eviction date



Co-creation of policy proposals

Having identified the above issues, audience members were invited to suggest and test potential solutions by participating in interactive scenes on stage with the actors.

We believe that everyone is a creative policy maker, so following these improvisations, the actors and audience members collaborated with a panel of policymakers to co-create policy proposals to address the key issues raised in the play. This involved actors and audience members working in small groups to put forward policy proposals. These were then summarised into 3 key proposals by a panel of policy-makers based on which proposals were most popular, innovative and feasible.



Actors and audience members then discussed the 3 proposals, had the opportunity to propose amendments, and voted on the amendments they felt were most important to prioritise. Finally, the audience members, alongside the actors and policy team members, were asked to vote to prioritise the 3 policy proposals. They were also given the opportunity to dissent any of the proposals that they thought would weaken rather than strengthen protects for private renters.

The co-developed policy proposals and amendments are listed below in order of priority, along with issues raised by dissenting audience members.



Policy Proposals

Top Policy Proposal

Improve minimum fitness standards by introducing new energy efficiency standards (including a minimum of Energy Performance Certificate D) and improve enforcement of landlord breaches of housing standards through the Landlord Registration Scheme.

Amendments:

1. Introduce a landlord licencing scheme with a tighter timeframe, enforceable by councils.
2. Changing the proposal to be more about the overarching fitness standards rather than just Energy Performance Certificates.
3. On renewal of registration, information to be shared to allow councils to determine whether landlords have met their minimum duties and to deny them registration if they have not (this would go through a Council licensing committee).
4. Raise the proposed minimum Energy Performance Certificate from band D to band B.
5. If a tenant has made a certain number of reports to Environmental Health this will trigger an automatic investigation of the property's fitness standard.
6. Landlords must be able to prove that there are no mortgage arrears or threat of repossession properties they are renting out.

Dissent: 3 audience members dissented due to concerns that this proposal could put off good-faith landlords from renting out their properties if no funding was provided.



Policy Proposals

2nd Policy Proposal

Legislate to ban no-fault evictions and illegal letting agent fees.

Explanatory note: The term 'no-fault eviction' is used to describe an eviction where the tenant has not been at fault. Banning 'no-fault evictions' would mean removing landlords' ability to end the tenancy without having a legal ground for eviction.

Amendments:

1. Introducing enforcement so that a landlord cannot let a property if there are repeated complaints by a tenant.
2. Improve enforcement on fees that profit an estate agent or landlord.
3. Introduce dispute resolution and adjudication service, such as a private renter tribunal.
4. Introduce a set of professional standards or a regulatory body that letting agents must adhere to.
5. If future legal grounds for eviction include 'selling the property' or 'moving a family member in,' ensure landlords cannot re-let properties in these circumstances.

Dissent: 2 audience members dissented due to concerns that this proposal might discourage landlords from renting out their property.



Policy Proposals

3rd Policy Proposal

Legislate to introduce a list of criteria a landlord can request from tenants. In addition, improve tenant access to guarantors via third-party guarantors.

Amendments:

1. Include a ban on discrimination against minority communities, people in receipt of benefits etc.
2. Remove the ability for landlords to require a guarantor.
3. Specify what is on the list of criteria.
4. Prevent politicians who are landlords with numerous properties from voting on private rented sector legislation.
5. Insert the word 'defined' before 'list' of criteria.
6. Change it to a list of requirements that tenants can request from the landlord.
7. Emphasise that the list outlines what landlords are allowed to request, not what they must request.

Dissent: 1 audience member dissented due to concerns that if such a list existed, it could have the unintended consequence of landlords always requiring the items on the list, which could act as a barrier to access for certain groups.



Policy Team Commitments

The event concluded with each of the members of the policy-maker panel committing to short or long-term actions to work towards the proposals, which they will report back on over the course of the year following the event.

The policymaker panel included representatives from the Department for Communities, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Alliance Party, the SDLP and Housing Rights. The commitments made by each representative are outlined below:

MLA Kellie Armstrong; Alliance Party MLA, Chair of the All Party Group on Homelessness, Member of the Committee for Communities

Commitments:

- To meet with the Equality Commission to discuss what they can do to prevent discrimination by landlords and letting agents (for example, by not renting to certain groups of people) and explore issuing a warning to the Landlord Association NI regarding landlord discrimination.
- Vote in favour of legislation to stop the charging of illegal letting fees when it comes to the Assembly.



Policy Team Commitments

Catherine Quinn; Private Rented Sector Policy and Legislation Staff Officer with the Department for Communities

Commitments:

- To liaise with relevant departmental colleagues to identify any plans to improve the Fitness Standard.
- In parallel, to engage with the team leading on Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) to assess development and provide an update to the Legislative Theatre group.

Catherine Carey; Homelessness Strategy Manager at the Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Commitment:

- NIHE will focus its 2026 Homeless Awareness Week on homelessness prevention for private renters and will work with Renters' Voice and Housing Rights to deliver this. This commitment will begin to be actioned within 4 weeks of the event.

Councillor Dónal Lyons; SDLP Councillor in Belfast City Council

Commitments:

- Will reply to the Department for Communities' consultation on the Landlord Registration Scheme.
- Will ask Belfast City Council to seek legal advice on how they can move towards a landlord licencing scheme and will campaign to get this issue onto the Council's agenda to progress this work.

Jamie Miller; Head of Policy and Development at Housing Rights

Commitments:

- Housing Rights will produce a detailed policy paper outlining policy proposals for private rented sector reform based on the issues raised in the play. This will be completed by the end of August 2026.
- Housing Rights will support Renters' Voice to share the video of the performance with the Minister for Communities. This will be completed once the video is ready for circulation.

Audience members were also given the opportunity to make commitments to action following the event. These included:

- Louise Kane, Belfast City Council: “I will commit to sharing the video with the Policy and Strategy team (including senior leadership) and the Policy Officers Network in BCC to demonstrate good practice and share learning.”
- Richard Rodgers, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland: “Continue our efforts to secure funds to support work to address issues around housing insecurity & homelessness.”
- Fiona Cole, Trussel Trust “I aim to highlight this in my policy framework: pathways to end the need for food banks.”

“Participating in Legislative Theatre gave me the opportunity to pass on the pitfalls that can be associated with private renting.... Having an expert panel, who have the power to influence change in legislation, was amazing” Actor





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Private Renters campaigning for change

Artwork by Kerry Elizabeth