

HIGHLAND AND ARGYLL & BUTE

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

1. Highland and Argyll & Bute

Highland and Argyll & Bute is one of the 9 Regional Networks of Registered Tenants Organisations (RTOs) formed in 2008 and cover the local authority areas of Highland and Argyll & Bute. We are a committee of 10, elected annually, and generally represent the views of our tenant and resident members of 33 RTOs across our area.

2. General comments on the Bill

We welcomed being involved in the extensive consultations held on many of the proposals included in the Bill and we particularly welcome the proposals to abolish the Right to Buy and the provisions on social sector allocations and tenancies.

3. Issues not included in the Bill

We are disappointed that the proposal to create a Housing Tribunal for the social rented sector and the introduction of Probationary/Initial Tenancies are not included in the Bill.

4. The Bill

4.1 Right to Buy (RTB), Part 1

We are pleased that the Scottish Government has announced the ending of the Right to Buy and welcome this decision.

However, we believe the proposed transitional period of 3 years is too long and feel that this should be reduced to a period of one year from the date of Royal Assent.

4.2 Social Housing (Part 2)

Allocations

We agree with this measure as it removes an unhelpful barrier to landlords wanting to allocate to particular groups in specific situations and believe the Bill makes it explicit that removing this age bar does not mean that landlords can discriminate against particular age groups or that it contravenes the Equality Act 2010.

Probationary Tenancies (Initial tenancies)

The outcome of the Government's consultation concluded that the majority of the sector, including tenant responses, were in favour of introducing Probationary

tenancies (or Initial Tenancies) and we are disappointed that it was dropped for this Housing Bill.

We strongly support the introduction of initial tenancies and support the introduction of probationary tenancies for all social housing tenants and believe that the benefits of introducing this outweigh any negativity especially when it has the real potential to help deal with tenancy problems, such as anti-social behaviour the cause of which may be identified, sooner.

Short Scottish Secure Tenancies (SSST)

We generally welcome the introduction of this SSST extended power.

4.3 SHR Amendments.

These changes were not the subject of previous consultation.

We strongly disagree with this provision and would like to see this removed from the Bill and that the consultation with tenants clause is retained.

We feel that tenants should always be consulted on issues as important as this and that consultation could be carried out quickly without jeopardising any actions that the SHR takes or requires the RSL to take to protect the interests of tenants and their homes.

4.4 Private Rented Sector, Parts 3 & 6

We are pleased to see the focus on the Private Rented sector and making it fairer and safer for the growing number of tenants relying on the sector. The difficult financial situation and the growing waiting list have made renting in the Private Sector the only housing option for many families and individuals, yet despite this growth there continues to be a lack of protection for tenants in this sector.

The Regional Networks feel that the regulation of the private sector still does not give adequate protection for tenants in this sector.

Letting Agents

We are disappointed that the proposed regulatory framework for letting agents falls far short of proper and full regulation similar to the way the social rented sector is regulated. We would like to see a mandatory set of professional standards for letting agents introduced and monitored. This will ensure proper checks and balances where there are disputes between Agents and Landlords/Tenants.

Tackling poor housing standards in the Private Rented Sector

We believe that the Bill does not go far enough and want effective and transparent mechanisms in place to ensure that Private Landlords adhere to the new legislation and that they will be monitored for compliance with the legislation.

4.5 Housing Tribunal

The decision not to introduce a Housing Panel for the Social Rented Sector in the Housing (Scotland) Bill is disappointing and we believe this has been a missed opportunity.

A Housing Panel for the Social Rented Sector would be more efficient in dealing with complex housing needs and vulnerable people and it would take less time than going through the court system.

**Highland and Argyll & Bute
21 February 2014.**