

Simon Community response to:

**Department for Communities consultation on
Notice To Quit Periods**

March 2026

Who is Simon Community?

Simon Community is Northern Ireland's largest homelessness charity, working to help people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. We are determined in our commitment to end homelessness and work across Northern Ireland offering preventative services, temporary accommodation and specialised support to help people rebuild their lives. We also amplify the voice of people impacted by homelessness and push for policy change through story-telling, campaigning and research. Our aim is not only to provide immediate assistance but also long-term solutions that end the cycle of homelessness for good.

Executive Summary

Simon Community welcome plans to introduce longer notice-to-quit periods which we believe will help reduce the risk of homelessness by giving tenants more time to find somewhere else to live.

We acknowledge the proposed reasons where the longer notice periods may not apply. However, we stress that even in these situations, all efforts should be made to ensure that eviction does not lead to homelessness.

In our response below we highlight that:

- A two-week notice period runs counter to commitments to prevent homelessness.
- The rising cost of rent may prevent people from finding somewhere else to live.
- Early signposting to support services is vital to reducing the risk of homelessness.
- Landlords can help prevent repeat homelessness among people transitioning from temporary accommodation into independent housing by recognising their specific support needs and signposting them to relevant services.
- Communication with landlords and tenants about their new responsibilities and rights and ongoing monitoring of landlord adherence to the new notice periods is vital for increased fairness and stability for tenants.
- The impact of shorter notice to quit periods should be kept under review.

We also highlight our concerns around:

- The lack of alignment between the extended notice-to-quit periods and the current threatened with homelessness window, and how this could contribute to increased risk of homelessness.

- The lack of plans to ban ‘no-fault’ evictions which can still happen in standard cases.

Introduction

A safe and secure home is a basic human right. Unfortunately, for 1 in every 31 of us in Northern Ireland, that right is being denied. Today, 62,888 people are officially homeless, many of them children and young people under 18.ⁱ

Due to a severe lack of social and affordable homes and with over 91,000 people on the social housing waiting list,ⁱⁱ more and more households are turning to the private rented sector to find a safe and stable home. Yet every day at Simon Community we hear stories of people being evicted from their private rental home through no fault of their own or for being unable to afford the increasing cost of rent.

“Life was normal. I was working, paying rent and managing fine. But then Covid hit and over the years, the rent kept rising - £650, then £800, then £870. I couldn’t keep up.

I was trying so hard to stay on top of my bills but soon I was skipping meals, going to my mum’s house for dinner, just to make ends meet. Every month it was just getting harder and harder. I was having to choose between heating the house or eating.”

Simon Community client who become homeless along with her newborn baby due to rising rent

Loss of rented accommodation is consistently one of the top reasons for households presenting to the Housing Executive as homeless. Official data shows that between April and September 2025, 1,197 households presented as homeless due to losing their rented accommodation.ⁱⁱⁱ Of these households, the majority (91% / 1,091) had lost their home in the private rented sector, often due to the landlord selling the property.

Strengthening renters’ rights is therefore a vital part of what needs to happen to ensure everyone in our society has a decent and affordable place to call home. We strongly welcome the plans to introduce longer notice-to-quit periods which we believe will give tenants more breathing space and more time to find somewhere else to live, reducing the risk of homelessness.

While we recognise the proposed circumstances where longer notice periods may not apply (i.e. substantial rent arrears, engagement in serious anti-social behaviour, conviction of a relevant criminal offence, possession for occupation by the landlord or their family), it is essential that these situations remain clearly defined exceptions. Reducing notice periods in any situation increases the risk of homelessness and eviction should always be a last resort. Even in exceptional cases, all reasonable alternatives should first be explored to see if eviction can be avoided. If eviction is unavoidable and longer notice periods are deemed to not apply, robust support and signposting must be provided as early as possible to prevent homelessness.

Below we set out some further detail on our main concerns and considerations:

In relation to situations where longer notice-to-quit periods would not apply and mitigation measures to address potential adverse impacts:

A two-week notice period contradicts efforts to prevent homelessness

In cases of ‘serious anti-social behaviour’ and ‘conviction of a relevant criminal offence’, a special case two-week notice period is being proposed. This is significantly shorter than the current 28-day ‘threatened with homelessness’ period during which the Housing Executive should provide support to prevent homelessness. We believe two weeks is nowhere near long enough for people to access information and support to prevent homelessness and would put increased pressure on an already-stretched Housing Executive. We also believe this runs counter to various strategies such as the Programme for Government and the Ending Homelessness Strategy which both commit to homelessness prevention. We therefore urge the Department to reconsider the shorter notice period for these special cases and ensure that they are at least four weeks to align with the current ‘threatened with homelessness’ definition.

Rising cost of rent may prevent people from finding somewhere else to live

Poverty is one of the main drivers of homelessness with rising living costs, stagnating wages and unaffordable rents pushing more households in Northern Ireland into poverty. For many people, the journey to homelessness doesn’t start with losing a home, but with the daily struggle to make ends meet. Poverty forces people into impossible choices: heating or eating, paying the rent or keeping the lights on. Over time, that pressure erodes stability and homelessness takes hold.

This may be the reality facing tenants who fall into rent arrears, and we would be very concerned that tenants evicted for this reason would struggle to find another affordable option within one month, increasing their risk of homelessness.

According to PropertyPal, the average cost of rent is now £995 per month with the organisation's CEO saying they "*expect rents to continue rising in 2026*".^{iv} Recent news reports have highlighted that rents have surged by around 50% across Northern Ireland over the past five years with rents rising faster in Belfast than any other UK city.^v The average monthly rent in Belfast is now around £1,160.^{vi} In comparison, the current monthly Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate for a two-bedroom home in the Belfast area is around £623 - meaning many private renters must find an additional £500 or more each month just to pay their rent.^{vii} The ongoing freeze on LHA is making it increasingly difficult for people on lower incomes to find a safe and affordable place to call home, pushing more and more households into homelessness. Demand and competition for rental properties also remains very high with around 52 enquiries per listing.^{viii} Overall, this creates a very challenging environment for people to find somewhere to live.

We note that the regulations guidance does state that if a tenant pays the amount owed within the one-month period, the notice becomes invalid and the tenancy continues. However, we would be concerned that trying to make this payment in one lump sum could force a household further into debt and possibly leave them vulnerable to illegal money lenders. We would therefore encourage the Department to urge landlords to consider a longer-term payment plan where appropriate, which is something Simon Community may be able to offer tenants support with. In these cases, we think the notice-to-quit should become invalid as soon as a household enters into such a payment plan.

Given the link between poverty, the increasing cost of living and homelessness, we would strongly urge that eviction due to rent arrears should be an action of last resort, particularly if there are no other issues with the tenancy. Rather, support and payment plans should be put in place to help the tenant retain their home and prevent homelessness. This would also benefit the landlord who would be saved the cost and hassle of sourcing a new tenant and who would, over time, recover the owed rent.

Early signposting to support services is vital to reducing the risk of homelessness

We acknowledge the proposed mitigations set out in the EQIA document, including signposting people to advice and support from Housing Rights and others. Supporting people at risk of eviction at the earliest possible stage will offer the best chance of preventing homelessness. However, we would like further information on how this signposting would work in practice – would it be the landlord who provides this information and how will it be monitored to ensure that they do this?

We would also suggest that affected tenants be signposted to Simon Community’s Deposit Service, which helps people overcome barriers to private renting by providing grants to cover part or all of a tenancy deposit. Last year, we provided 179 deposits – ending homelessness for 106 households and preventing it for a further 73 households. We can also provide Emergency Financial Interventions for households at risk of homelessness to provide financial support for food, fuel and electricity. As mentioned above, we may also be able to support tenants with rent arrears. These services can be accessed by visiting our [website](#) or by phoning our Homeless Advice Line on 0800 171 2222.

Simon Community Tenancy Deposit Scheme Case Study

When Michael contacted us, he was experiencing homelessness and living in his car while trying to maintain employment. The main barrier preventing him from moving into stable housing was the upfront cost of both a tenancy deposit and his first months’ rent.

Through our Deposit Service, we were able to remove this financial barrier and help Michael secure a private rental. Having a safe place to live enabled him to keep his job, regain independence and improve his mental health and wellbeing.

“The service was amazing and easy to access. Gaining my own tenancy gave me my life back and improved my mental health. The money offered the freedom to get ahead in my life”.

The unique support needs of people transitioning from temporary accommodation into independent housing must be recognised

The number of households residing in temporary accommodation has rapidly increased over the past five years, with the latest count showing over 5,400 households living in this type of accommodation as of October 2025.^{ix} Of these households, 27% are living in either a hostel, hotel or B&B. While the end goal is always for these households to move to long-term independent housing, a recent rapid evidence assessment shows that people who are resettled into the private rented sector often have a higher risk of tenancy failure.^x

In Simon Community's experience, the risk of tenancy failure for people transitioning from temporary accommodation to independent housing is highest in the first four to eight weeks of a new tenancy. This is often due to isolation, stress and the burden of practical set-up challenges, such as registering for utilities, furnishing the property or navigating a new community.

Simon Community therefore developed our Step In and Set Up pilot project to provide short-term, practical and time-bound support to people leaving our services and entering new tenancies. The project aims to prevent homelessness by reducing tenancy breakdown, addressing practical barriers to tenancy set-up and promoting community integration and improved confidence and independence.

Since this project started in September 2025, we have supported over 30 people to settle into new homes following temporary accommodation and provided help with accessing benefits, healthcare, education and employment. This pilot is showing very positive results in terms of tenancy sustainment, repeat homelessness prevention, mental health improvement and substance management.

Given the growing numbers of people currently residing in and eventually transitioning out of temporary accommodation, regulations and guidance for landlords should consider their specific support needs and aim to reduce the risk of tenancy failure and repeat homelessness. Signposting to appropriate support services such as the Simon Community could help with this.

Communication with landlords and tenants about their responsibilities and rights is vital

To ensure that these changes provide the intended stability for tenants, it's vital that they are communicated clearly and widely once they come into effect. Research from Northern Ireland has shown that many renters often feel uncertain about their entitlements around notice periods, repairs and deposits.^{xi} We would therefore like to see further information from the Department on their communications plan for these changes – how will tenants and landlords proactively be made aware of their new rights and responsibilities?

Research from the Republic of Ireland also shows that even with new tenant protections, such as rent caps and extended notice periods, many renters still encounter landlords who ignore regulations or fail to maintain their properties.^{xii} We therefore ask the Department how they plan to monitor these regulations to ensure landlords are abiding by the new notice periods and special case exceptions are being implemented fairly and consistently? How can the Landlord Registration Scheme be utilised to support adherence to the new notice periods? We feel ongoing monitoring is particularly important as the proposed changes do not include any new proposals around alternative dispute resolution services should a tenant feel they have been unfairly evicted.

Access to timely, clear and reliable information is essential for fairness in the private rental sector. When tenants are aware of their rights and landlords understand their responsibilities, housing relationships tend to be more stable and disputes occur less often – ultimately leading to better outcomes for everyone.

The impact of the new notice to quit periods should be kept under review

We would encourage the Department to review and report on the impact of these changes, ideally within a year following their introduction. In particular, it would be beneficial to monitor the impact of the special case shorter notice to quit periods on homelessness presentations.

We also note that increased regulation of the private rented sector often raises some concerns about negative impacts on landlords' appetite to remain or invest in the sector. While Simon Community fully support increased protections in the sector for tenants, which we ultimately believe will help prevent homelessness, we would be concerned that any contraction of the sector due to landlords leaving could lead to people remaining stuck in the homelessness cycle. This potential unintended consequence should also be kept

under review and mitigated against by ambitious investment in increasing housing supply across all tenures.

In relation to wider issues with evictions in the private rented sector:

There is a lack of alignment between extended notice-to-quit periods in standard cases and the current threatened with homelessness definition

Currently in Northern Ireland you are threatened with homelessness if you are likely to lose your home within the next 28 days. This definition has remained unchanged since 1988 and leaves the Housing Executive with just four weeks to prevent a person or family from losing their home or to find them somewhere else to live. In contrast, England, Scotland and Wales have all extended the window in recent years to 56 days, and all three nations are now exploring further extensions of up to six months to allow more time for agencies to support people at risk of homelessness and prevent it.

While we welcome extended notice-to-quit periods, we are concerned at the lack of alignment between them and the current threatened with homelessness window. For example, in the case of the shortest notice-to-quit period of eight weeks for tenancies of less than 12 months, evicted tenants would only be able to contact the Housing Executive for support after four weeks have passed from receiving their eviction notice. We do not believe this fits with the Communities Minister's vision of making the 'strategic shift to prevention' and ask why there is such a lack of alignment between these two windows?

'No-fault evictions' can still happen in standard cases

Under the proposed changes, landlords do not need to provide a reason to issue a notice-to-quit in standard cases. While overall we welcome the plans to give tenants more time to find somewhere else to live should they be evicted, we are disappointed that the Department is not willing to go further to protect tenants and consider a ban on no-fault evictions, especially given that a motion on this issue was backed by the Northern Ireland Assembly two years ago.^{xiii}

This is already happening in other parts of the UK. Under the Private Tenancies (Housing) (Scotland) Act 2016, landlords must provide specific grounds for eviction and cannot evict tenants without a valid reason.^{xiv} In England, the Renters' Rights Act 2026 (which will come into effect on 1 May 2026) abolishes Section 21 (no-fault) evictions and means that a

landlord has to provide a valid legal reason to evict you.^{xv} There is an argument that the proposed special case notice-to-quit circumstances, where the longer notice period does not apply, could be used as the basis for exceptions to ‘no-fault’ evictions in Northern Ireland.

We would encourage the Department to explore how these bans are working in Scotland and England (once introduced later this year), any possible unintended consequences and how similar protections may be introduced in Northern Ireland.

Conclusion

Simon Community strongly welcome the plans to introduce longer notice periods which we believe will help relieve some of the pressures that can lead to homelessness. While we acknowledge that eviction may be necessary in some situations, it can carry financial costs and social consequences, and so efforts should be made to avoid it where possible or to signpost impacted tenants to relevant information and support as soon as possible.

Extended notice-to-quit periods are a positive step in the right direction. However, it is only part of a wider solution to ending homelessness – to ensure everyone has access to a safe and stable home, we need to see more genuinely affordable homes, stronger support systems for people experiencing and at risk of homelessness and an enhanced focus on homelessness prevention.

ⁱ NI Housing Executive FOI 1061 – February 2026.

ⁱⁱ NI Housing Executive FOI 1061 – February 2026.

ⁱⁱⁱ DfC Homelessness Bulletin Apr – Sept 2025

^{iv} PropertyPal. *NI Housing Market Update: Q4 2025*.

^v BBC NI, 24 March 2026, [Why is the cost of rental property rising so much?](#)

^{vi} PropertyPal. *NI Housing Market Update: Q4 2025*.

^{vii} [The Housing Executive - Current LHA rent levels](#)

^{viii} PropertyPal. *NI Housing Market Update: Q4 2025*.

^{ix} DfC Homelessness Bulletin April – Sept 2025.

^x Centre for Regional Economic & Social Research. (2025). *Tenancy Sustainment and complex needs: A rapid evidence assessment*.

^{xi} Wallace, A. & Dempsey, K. (2021). *Understanding the private rented sector in Northern Ireland: Regulation, reform and the renter experience*. *Housing Studies*, 36(10), pp.1627–1645.

^{xii} McArdle, R. and Byrne, M. (2022). *Rootlessness: How the Irish private rental sector prevents tenants feeling secure in their homes and tenant's resistance against this*. *Geoforum*, 136, pp. 211-218

^{xiii} [Inside Housing - News - Northern Ireland Assembly backs no-fault eviction ban motion](#)

^{xiv} [Private Housing \(Tenancies\) \(Scotland\) Act 2016](#)

^{xv} [Guide to the Renters' Rights Act - GOV.UK](#)