



Response to NIHE ‘amendments to House Sales Scheme’ consultation

17 July 2026

The Housing Executive have [consulted](#) on the House Sales Scheme, otherwise known as ‘right to buy’, in order to “assess whether the Scheme remains sustainable in its current form” (p. 2). .

Since its [introduction](#) as first a voluntary (from 1979) and then a statutory (from 1993) scheme, [over 124,000](#) social homes across Northern Ireland have been [sold](#) to tenants. At the same time, building of new ones has stalled: Department of Finance [statistics](#), based on Building Control figures on new build dwellings, show that in the ten-year period between 2016 and 2025 there were just 8,054 new build social homes started*.

As PPR [reported](#) in 2024, ‘right to buy’ helped to permanently change the face of housing in the north. [Analysis](#) by the Nevin Economic Research Institute (NERI) found that in 1981 the percentage of NI households in Housing Executive social homes was over 39%, dropping over each of the next two decades to just 11.5% in 2011. Today [just one in ten](#) households are Housing Executive tenants, with an additional 4% in housing association social homes. (Housing associations were recognised in NI [law](#) in 1976; the ‘right to buy’ social homes from NI housing associations [ended in 2022](#)).

The loss of social homes through ‘right to buy’, coupled with the slow replacement rate, have pushed housing need in the north to [unprecedented levels](#), with over 50,300 households on the waiting list. More than 33,400 of them are officially recorded as homeless. These homeless families between them have over 20,500 children under 18 – children that the state has formally recognised are growing up without a home.

The fact of this consultation is itself interesting. The Department for Communities’ [draft](#) Housing Supply Strategy, issued in 2021, included a commitment to consult on “the future of the Housing Executive House Sales Scheme” (p. 25) – but (as PPR [highlighted](#)) this was cut from the [final version](#) published in December 2024.

The decision to axe any reference to consulting on ‘right to buy’ was consistent with Communities Minister Gordon Lyon’s statements elsewhere (including in response to a range of Assembly questions from concerned MLAs), where he expressed his firm commitment to continuing the scheme.

The decision to change course and allow this consultation is perhaps easier to understand through a closer look at the consultation contents. This is not a consultation about the 'right to buy' policy itself, its impacts or the advisability -- or not -- of it continuing. Instead, as advertised in the consultation title, it seeks views solely on five specific proposed tweaks ('amendments') to the existing system. Only one part of one question buried in the middle of the 26 questions making up the consultation questionnaire allows any expression of support for ending, as opposed to reforming, the scheme: reform is the only option explored.

For the record, PPR opposes all five tweaks and asserts that **'right to buy' must be scrapped altogether, to protect the north's existing social housing stock**. DFC and NIHE policy staff's effort and time must instead focus on what's most important: making more social homes available to people with the greatest objective need.

In the midst of NI's housing crisis, consulting around the edges of a topic, with substantive changes squarely off the table, is becoming a familiar though baffling practice. As PPR [noted](#) earlier this year in its [response](#) to consultation on the Decent Homes Standard, the DFC could have used the exercise to propose substantive measures -- already brought in elsewhere in the UK -- that would have brought real improvements to people's living standards. Instead it chose to limit its 'consultation' mainly to new, wholly aspirational and non-binding content, or to changes already made via updates to Building Control regulations -- leaving much-needed changes unaddressed.

*For the sake of accuracy and thoroughness we note that the Housing Executive's publicly available Social Housing Development Programme [record](#) (a rolling list of ongoing projects and those 'programmed to start') includes some categories that, while not newly-built social homes, would upon completion add to the overall stock of social homes (schemes listed as 'rehab', 'existing satisfactory purchase', 'off the shelf' and 'reimprovement', for instance). On 3 July 2026 there appeared to be just over 40 such schemes, out of the 597 listed.