



Amendments to the Welfare Reform Bill

Note to North West Members of Parliament

The House of Lords has secured an amendment to the **under occupation** proposals in the Welfare Reform Bill, meaning that tenants will still be able to claim full housing benefit if they have **no more than one spare room** or if **no other suitable accommodation is available**. This is good news for the many tenants for whom this would have had a negative impact, providing that this is not overturned when the Bill returns to the House of Commons.

The Forum has previously raised concerns around the impact of the proposals and we are now **calling on North West Members of Parliament, from across all political parties**, to support this amendment.

Impact assessments (as outlined in a previous briefing to MPs from the Forum) estimated that the impact of the changes would be much greater in the North West than in other parts of the Country, and that there are questions over whether the policy would indeed have the desired outcomes of freeing up properties where they are most needed.

Our greatest concern is that the original proposals do not take into account the real effect that this will have on people's lives. Extra bedrooms are required for many and varied reasons, some out of necessity. The family who provides emergency foster care needs that room to take in a vulnerable child. A tenant suffering ill health may need the room so that a helper or carer can stay overnight.

Under the original proposals, a family of 2 adults with 2 teenage children of the same sex, would be deemed to be under occupying a three bedroom property. Common sense would say that this is the appropriate size property for this family, however the legislation would only allow for the children to share a bedroom, with the third being seen as a spare room. Not only is this absurd, it takes no account that having their own space helps children with their studying and reaching their educational potential. This is crucial if we want to encourage a generation of children to become economically active adults.

We would therefore urge you to take a longer term view, and consider the impacts that this will have in the future rather than the short term financial gains.

Furthermore we are not convinced that there is the supply of 'suitable property' as stated in the Bill, to provide for those who would be deemed as having an extra bedroom. For example, where does the single person or couple who occupies a two bedroom property move to? Social Housing providers on the whole have not been investing in building new one bedroom properties for a number of years, with two bedrooms being the basic standard. Therefore it is unlikely that sufficient properties of an 'acceptable' size would be available. These problems will also be more acute in rural areas where there is already a severe shortage of housing.



North West Housing Forum

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Representing Members Across The North West

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We are therefore concerned that if this legislation is introduced we could place tenants in the position of losing benefit just because they are unable to find alternative accommodation.

Many of our Members have been gathering evidence and assessing impacts at a local/constituency level, and this information is available directly from the Local Housing Authorities. Colleagues at the Northern Housing Consortium have also been using this data to give a wider picture across the North, and they will be sending this directly to you.

We are urging all North West Members of Parliament to endorse the amendments put forward by the House of Lords. These changes will have a real impact on your constituents, and without the amendments many who are already vulnerable will be placed in an even worse position. We are asking you not to introduce legislation that is unfair and unjustly penalises our tenants for the sole reason that their home has a spare bedroom.

Councillor Paul Andrews
Chair

North West Housing Forum

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