

## **Improving security for tenants will mean little if we don't build more homes**

We have to be really careful that we balance the rights of tenants and the rights of landlords, and we keep up a supply of housing so we can keep people housed.”

So said Labour's minister responsible for housing last year in response to calls for a rent freeze in Wales. I agree. They are words which could be used about the Renters (Reform) Bill published last week.

Across the country, demand for private rented homes outstrips supply, as even the government has admitted. That's not the fault of landlords, but it is a result of our collective failure as a country to build enough homes of all tenures.

With the private rented sector operating under severe pressure, new government reforms must inspire the confidence of responsible landlords so that the supply crisis doesn't worsen.

The government's commitment to ensuring landlords can swiftly and effectively reclaim their properties when faced with anti-social tenants and those not paying their rent is to be welcomed. However, this is only one piece of the rental reform jigsaw.

With Section 21 “no-fault” repossessions gone, the courts will need to consider more time-consuming “grounds-based” claims when weighing up how to tackle unruly or nonpaying tenants. Yet as the cross-party housing select committee has rightly noted “the courts system is already struggling to process housing cases quickly enough”.

Ministers have pledged to digitalise the system to ensure cases are processed more swiftly. We welcome this step but, like several other aspects of the bill, more detail is needed about how it will work in practice. Crucially, no amount of technology can compensate for the urgent need to invest in more court staff to speed up the processing of legitimate repossession claims.

The bill will also fuel ongoing uncertainty across the student housing market.

Plans for open ended tenancies mean landlords and new tenants will have no certainty about whether a property will be available at the start of each academic year. Landlords will be wholly reliant on sitting tenants giving notice to leave their rental accommodation in good time to enable new students to move into the property.

Students look for homes for their next academic year well in advance. Under the new system there will be no guarantee that these homes will actually be available for them to move into when they need to. The government must also ensure landlords can bring student tenancies to an end so they can let them to new students each year and protect the cyclical nature of this market. Ministers have already ceded the principle by exempting private halls of residence from plans for open ended tenancies.

With changes, the bill provides the basis for a package of reforms that could work for responsible landlords and tenants, and an opportunity to overcome some of the divisive rhetoric that has characterised the sector for too long. But as MPs and peers get to grips with the details, they need to remember that greater security for tenants means nothing if the homes to rent are not there in the first place.

**May 23 2023**

**Ben Beadle, Chief Exec, NRLA**

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