

Title of Report:	Transfer of Landlord Registration Scheme to Local Councils
Committee Report Submitted To:	Environmental Services Committee
Date of Meeting:	11th February 2025
For Decision or For Information	For Information
To be discussed In Committee	No

Linkage to Council Strategy (2021-25)	
Strategic Theme	Healthy and Engaged Communities
Outcome	Enforcement of Statutory Duties
Lead Officer	Head of Health and Built Environment

Estimated Timescale for Completion	
Date to be Completed	NA

Budgetary Considerations	
Cost of Proposal	Nil
Included in Current Year Estimates	N/A
Capital/Revenue	N/A
Code	N/A
Staffing Costs	Nil

Legal Considerations	
Input of Legal Services Required	NO
Legal Opinion Obtained	NO

Screening Requirements	Required for new or revised Policies, Plans, Strategies or Service Delivery Proposals.		
Section 75 Screening	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	EQIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Rural Needs Assessment (RNA)	Screening Completed	N/A	Date:
	RNA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:
Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA)	Screening Completed:	N/A	Date:
	DPIA Required and Completed:	N/A	Date:

1.0 Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information regarding the transfer of the Landlord Registration Scheme to Local Councils.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The Landlord Registration Scheme Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2014 established the requirement for all private landlords to register with the scheme and created a centralised database of landlords operating within the private rented sector.
- 2.2 The Scheme is currently managed by a Landlord Registrar and a small team within the Department for Communities (DfC). Local councils have enforcement powers to act against non-compliant landlords.
- 2.3 In 2023, SOLACE considered a report from DfC outlining the benefits of transferring the functions of the Landlord Registration Scheme to local councils. In March 2023, it was agreed that Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC) would act as the lead council in the preparation for and transfer of the functions under the Landlord Registration Scheme within Northern Ireland.
- 2.4 In September 2023, a Programme Board was established to oversee the delivery of the project with representatives from DfC, LCCC and an independent SOLACE representative to oversee the transfer of these functions from DfC to local councils by March 2025.
- 2.5 Engagement has been ongoing with Councils and other stakeholders throughout the lifetime of the project including various all councils' group including Environmental Health NI (EHNI), IT officers', Head of Communications and Information Governance groups. Other stakeholders have included landlords, agents, tenants, DfC, PropertyPal and those who have contracts with the current scheme.
- 2.6 This scheme operates on a cost-neutral basis, with all services funded solely by the registration fee. There is no financial implication for any council. To date, all funding for the project has been provided by the DfC. Post transfer of functions, all staffing costs, contracts, and future initiatives will be funded through the registration fee.

3.0 New Website and Registration Portal

- 3.1 Following an open procurement exercise conducted by LCCC in March 2024, an IT software company was awarded the contract for the build and management of a new dedicated website and registration portal. Currently, this system is going through the User Acceptance Testing stage which once finalised in early February 2025 will allow the data stored on the current system to be migrated over.

- 3.2 The transfer of the landlord registration functions to local councils will occur on Saturday 1st March 2025 with a 'go live' date for the new system on Monday 3rd March 2025. This will see the completion of Phase 1. Phase 2 will commence shortly after that date with all additional functionality completed by June 2025.
- 3.3 Full training, including user guides for future employees who will access the database, will be provided to all councils and other users to maximise the benefits of the new system.

4.0 Appointment of New Landlord Registration Team

- 4.1 A recruitment exercise for a new landlord registration team was completed in 2024 and a team of three positions have now been filled, including the appointment of a new Landlord Registrar.

5.0 Communications Plan

- 5.1 DfC has developed an advertising campaign as part of a broader communications strategy related to the transfer of functions. This campaign, which includes radio and social media advertisements, will launch in February 2025. The advertisements will emphasize the requirement for landlords in the private rented sector to register with the scheme. Additionally, updates regarding these changes will be communicated via email or letter to those already registered. Following the transfer, future campaigns will be led by the Landlord Registrar and distributed across all councils for promotion through their social media channels.

6.0 Governance Structures Post Transfer

- 6.1 The Programme Board were scheduled to formally agree a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), new operating model and timeline for regulation change being brought forward by DfC, at its meeting in January 2025. These documents will provide clarity to Council on the governance structures for the scheme post transfer and proposes how the Landlord Registration Scheme can become more meaningful to councils and landlords in the long term.

6.0 Recommendation

It is recommended that Members note the above information.