

**Housing
Rights**

Celebrating

**Sixty
Years**

1964 - 2024

Private Rented Sector

Innovating in the Private Rented Sector

Hybrid conference

#PRS24

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The Speakers

#PRS24



Kate McCauley

Chief Executive Officer, Housing Rights

@HousingRightsNI/ @K8McCauley

Kate is the Chief Executive of Housing Rights, Northern Ireland's leading specialist housing advice organisation. Since 2015, Kate has worked in a variety of roles within Housing Rights leading the policy, research and development services prior to becoming Chief Executive in February 2023.

With over 15 years' experience working in housing and within the community and voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, Kate previously worked in a grassroots human rights project focused on socio economic rights and has served on the Boards of a number of organisations in the sector. Her background is in law and human rights and she is especially interested in innovation to prevent homelessness and in the empowerment of marginalised groups.



Professor Paddy Gray OBE

@Paddygray1

Paddy Gray is an established academic and has wide experience of academic and applied research. He is currently an Ambassador for the Housing Safety and Well Being Task Force set up by Aico. Paddy Gray is an established academic with over 400 publications. In 2010 he became the first Irish President of the Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH). He is Chair of Wheatley Foundation in Scotland, and until recently was Vice Chair of Wheatley Homes Glasgow. In Ireland he Chairs Tuath Housing, and iCare Housing, and is a board member of Residential Tenancies Board (RTB). In NI he Chairs the Private Rented Tenants Voice and is a past Chair of Connswater Homes, Ulidia Housing Association and Citizens Advice North west. In 2017 he was named the top housing power player in the UK. 2019 awarded an OBE. 2021 appointed to the new Housing Commission in Ireland. 2023 was named Property Personality of the year at the Belfast Telegraph Property Awards and in 2024 he received a Lifetime Achievement Award at the Aico Community Awards in Birmingham.



Minister for Communities,
Gordon Lyons MLA

In February 2024 Gordon Lyons MLA was appointed as the Minister for Communities. His remit is wide ranging and covers housing, regeneration, sports, arts, culture, languages, libraries, museums, historic environment, benefits and pensions, community and voluntary sector, residential building safety, child maintenance services, tackling disadvantage and promoting equality of opportunity.

Gordon served as a Councillor on Mid and East Antrim Council from May 2014 to August 2015 when he was appointed as MLA for East Antrim and subsequently re-elected in 2016, 2017 and 2022.

In January 2020, Gordon was appointed to the Executive as a Junior Minister. He acted as Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs for a short period and was appointed Minister for the Department of Economy from July 2021 to October 2022.



Jordan Buchanan

Chief Operating Officer, PropertyPal

@Propertypal/ @jbuchanan0707

Jordan Buchanan is the Chief Executive Officer at PropertyPal, acting as the spokesperson for the company and a trusted subject matter expert on all UK and Northern Ireland economic and housing matters. Jordan is member of the Board of Directors in Co-Ownership, Northern Ireland's shared ownership provider and a Committee Member at the National House Building Council for Northern Ireland.

The Speakers

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Anna Evans
Director of Indigo House Group

Anna is a Director of Indigo House consultancy and a specialist in housing strategy and housing service review and change. She combines a portfolio of consultancy, research, and interim executive management to achieve transformational change in housing organisations and local and national housing policy. In her research work, Anna's specialisms are in housing market assessment and housing strategy development, the private rented sector, homelessness and temporary accommodation.



David Polley @communitiesNI 
Director of Housing Supply Policy, Department for Communities

David's area has responsibility for the development and implementation of most aspects of policy in relation to the Supply of Housing in tenures other than social housing, as well as the design and implementation of a programme of strategies aimed at improving housing supply. Work that Housing Supply Policy is responsible for includes:

- Role and regulation of the private rented sector
- Affordable Housing
- Shared neighbourhoods under Together: Building United Communities (TBUC)
- Homelessness
- Housing supply across all tenures
- Affordable warmth scheme



Aisling Cunningham
Advice Services Manager, Housing Rights

Aisling Cunningham is Advice Services Manager at Housing Rights. She has a background in court advocacy, civil litigation and public law, having qualified as a solicitor in 2009 and working for Housing Rights since 2015, where she continued to provide legal advice and support to clients. Aisling has developed and applied her skills and knowledge to help Housing Rights clients with their housing issues and challenge unfair decisions.



Renters' Voice

@RentersVoice 

Renters' Voice is a group for people who rent from a private landlord or through a letting agent in Northern Ireland. Their experience of renting motivates them to create change by campaigning for improvements across the private rental sector: they speak out to influence public and political discussions; they ask to be involved in relevant decision making; they empower other renters to create change. As well as being a strong voice for renters in NI, Renters' Voice want to embed a culture of tenant participation among decision makers.

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Juha Kaakinen
Professor of Practice, Tampere University

@JKaakinen 

An experienced and passionate developer of innovative housing solutions to homeless people and social housing. After 9 years as a CEO of Y-Foundation Juha Kaakinen retired in 2022. Before, he has worked in public administration of the City of Helsinki and as a CEO of Social Development Ltd, a company devoted to developing social and health services for cities and municipalities. He has also worked as a programme leader of a national programme to end long-term homelessness, and as a researcher and a consultant. He is internationally known as an advocate of Housing First policy. Starting from 01/04/2023, Juha Kaakinen has been invited as a Professor of Practice in the faculty of Social Sciences at Tampere University.



Connel McKenna
Senior Operational Lead - Housing First, Simon Community

Connel McKenna has worked homelessness support and prevention services for almost 15 years. In his current role, he leads on the implementation of Simon Community's Housing First 4 Youth service, which supports young people exiting the care system into immediate housing, coupled with wrap-around support.



Julie Lavery
Head of Private Rented Branch, Department for Communities

@communitiesNI 

Julie is Head of the Private Rented Branch in the Department for Communities. Private Rented Branch have policy and legislative responsibility for the Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland. The team embarked on a review of the role and regulation of the Private Rented Sector back in 2015, which culminated in a set of firm proposals for change in 2017. Since then they have introduced the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 and have been working on regulations to bring this legislation into effect. Julie hopes to use this breakout session to inform the team's early thinking on the setting of Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) for the Private Rented Sector.



Eamonn Hunt
Head of Tenancy Deposit Scheme Northern Ireland

@TDSNI 

Eamonn has over 20 years experience within the Private Rented sector, dealing with various aspects of lettings industry and disputes.

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Tom Dinnen

Hosford Community Homes Manager, East Belfast Mission

@ebelfastmission 

Tom Dinnen has worked for EBM for 12 years and leads our Hosford Community Homes project. He has a Masters in maths from Exeter Uni, and Post Grad diploma in housing from CIH and is a qualified PRINCE2 practitioner. He is a passionate believer in the importance of good housing and the power of the community.



Aidan Byrne

Manager at Hosford House, East Belfast Mission

@ebelfastmission 

Aidan Byrne is the manager of Hosford, the Homelessness Service of East Belfast Mission. Aidan has worked in the homeless sector for almost 20 Years. During this time Aidan has managed temporary accommodation, homeless prevention, and housing services.



Andrew Grounds

Deputy Director, QCAP Queen's University Belfast

@QUBCommunities1 

As Deputy Director of Queen's Communities and Place at Queen's University Belfast, I have an established track record in high-impact research on urban regeneration, social enterprises and community development. My career is marked by successful collaborations with key government bodies and community partners across Northern Ireland, translating academic insights into actionable projects that create impact at the point of need.



Meabh Cormacain

Strategic Adviser - Fuel Poverty Strategy, Department for Communities

@communitiesNI 

Meabh is supporting the development of a new Fuel Poverty Strategy at the Department for Communities, following on from her lead role in the delivery of a new Energy Strategy - The Path to Net Zero Energy - in 2021. She brings a decade of experience in Northern Ireland's energy industry and a background in overseas development to this role.

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Dr Charlie Berry
Public Affairs Officer, Shelter

@Shelter 

Charlie Berry is a policy officer at Shelter, currently on secondment in the public affairs team. She works on private rental affordability, social security and homelessness policy, and led Shelter's successful 2023 campaign to end the freeze on the local housing allowance. Prior to joining Shelter, she was an academic researcher.



Michael Byrne
Lecturer, University College Dublin

Michael Byrne is a lecturer in the political economy of housing at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, UCD. His work focuses on housing with a particular focus on the private rental sector. Michael recently published the first piece of research on the impact of new the cost rental housing tenure in the Republic of Ireland.



Justin Cartwright
National Director Northern Ireland, Chartered Institute of Housing

@JustinCar1 

Justin leads policy and external affairs work for CIH Northern Ireland. He is a chartered member of CIH and holds a Bachelor of Applied Science (Honours) from RMIT University in Melbourne, having undertaken research on acoustics in the built environment. He is a trustee of Supporting Communities and of the North of Ireland Family History Society.



Richard Smyth
Property Manager and Chartered Surveyor, Landlords Association for Northern Ireland (LANI)

Richard Smyth is an Estate Agent based in Belfast, specialising in residential property management including HMOs, family and professional lettings. Richard is a Chartered Surveyor and also a LANI committee member.

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Ciara Ferguson MLA
Sinn Féin

@ciaraf44

Ciara is the Sinn Féin MLA for Foyle since 2021, is the Deputy Chair of the Assembly Communities Committee as well as a member of the Assembly Justice Committee and Audit Committee and is the Chair of the All Party Group on Homelessness and All Party Group on Housing. She is a housing graduate (1994), with post graduate qualifications in management and sustainable investment in the third sector.



Kellie Armstrong MLA
Alliance Party

@Kelmba / @allianceparty

Kellie Armstrong MLA is the Alliance Party Spokesperson for Communities, Housing and Public Administration and represents the Strangford Constituency. First elected to the NI Assembly in 2016, Kellie sits on the Communities Committee and is the Chair of the Committee on Procedures. She has served on the Committee for Infrastructure, Assembly and Executive Review Committee (AERC) and the Audit Committee. In the last mandate Kellie was Vice Chair of the Committee for Communities (2019-2022) where she worked on the Private Tenancies Act ensuring tenants' voices were included in the consultation process.

Kellie serves on the following All-Party groups: Housing (Vice Chair), Homelessness (Vice Chair) and Construction (Secretary)



Councillor Séamas de Faoite
Social Democratic and Labour Party

@SDLPlive

Cllr. Séamas de Faoite represents the Lisnasharragh District Electoral Area of Belfast, covering Rosetta, Ravenhill, Orangefield, Glencregagh and Merok. He proposed the creation of Belfast City Council's Climate Crisis Working Group and was a founding member of SDLP LGBT+. During his first year as a Councillor, Séamas served as the Chairperson of the Council's Brexit Committee.

Séamas was a visiting fellow with the San Diego County Democratic Party in 2016 and joined the Party of European Socialists Young Elected Politicians programme in 2019.

AGENDA

09:30am - 10:00am Registration and refreshments

10:00am - 10:10 am Welcome from Housing Rights Chief Executive Officer, Kate McCauley

10:10am - 10:15am Welcome from Chair Professor Paddy Gray

Section 1: Setting the context

10.15am - 10.30am Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons MLA

10.30am - 10.50am Jordan Buchanan, Chief Executive, PropertyPal: The State of Renting: Economic and Housing Market Update for 2024/25

10.50am - 11.10am Anna Evans, Director of Indigo House Group: RentBetter research: Lessons from PRS reform in Scotland

11:10am - 11:30am Panel discussion: Setting the context
David Polley, Department for Communities
Jordan Buchanan, PropertyPal
Anna Evans, Indigo House Group

11:30am - 11:45am Coffee break

Section 2: Homelessness and the Private Rented Sector

11.45am - 11.50am Aisling Cunningham, Advice Services Manager, Housing Rights

11:50am - 12:10pm Renters' Voice: What renting in 2024 looks like

12:10pm - 12:30pm Juha Kaakinen, Professor of Practice, Tampere University: Housing First and Ending Homelessness in Finland

12:30pm - 12:50pm Panel discussion: Homelessness and the Private Rented Sector
Juha Kaakinen, Tampere University
Renters' Voice
Connel McKenna, Simon Community
Aisling Cunningham, Housing Rights

12:50pm - 1:30pm **Lunch**

Break-out Sessions

1:30pm - 2:10pm

1. Julie Lavery, Department for Communities: Setting a Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard for the PRS
2. Eamonn Hunt, Tenancy Deposit Scheme NI: An overview of the tenancy deposit scheme
3. Tom Dineen and Aidan Byrne, East Belfast Mission, Andrew Grounds, QCAP Queen's University Belfast: Affordable community led housing
4. Meabh Cormacain, Department for Communities: A draft Fuel Poverty Strategy

Section 3: Affordability

2:10pm - 2:25pm Dr Charlie Berry, Shelter England: Private renting in England and the renters' rights bill

2:25pm - 2:45pm Michael Byrne, University College Dublin: The Impact of Cost Rental Housing on affordability

2:45pm - 3:10pm Panel discussion: Affordability in the Private Rented Sector
Michael Byrne, University College Dublin
Justin Cartwright, Chartered Institute of Housing
Richard Smyth, Landlords Association for Northern Ireland (LANI)

Section 4: The future of the Private Rented Sector and reflections

3:10pm - 3:50pm Panel discussion on the future of the Private Rented Sector:
Ciara Ferguson MLA, Sinn Féin
Kellie Armstrong MLA, Alliance Party
Councillor Séamas de Faoite, Social Democratic and Labour Party

3:50pm - 4:00pm Close and thanks

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Special thanks to our headline sponsor and long-standing supporter of our conference, TDS Northern Ireland.

Award-winning TDS are Northern Ireland's leading and only not-for-profit tenancy deposit protection scheme.

TDS protect deposits for private tenancies and resolve disputes over their return.

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[Check out their blog #AskTDS](#)

Workshop sponsor



Electrical Safety First is a campaigning charity that aims to reduce deaths, injuries and accidents caused by electricity in UK homes.

They work closely with Government, the electrical industry manufacturers, retailers and consumer safety organisations to improve safety regulation and standards to help people stay safe in their homes.

Find out more about Electrical Safety First's work at:

www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk