

Voluntary Right to Buy Scheme for Housing Associations - Update Needed



Please sign the petition at: <https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/200025>

BACKGROUND:

It has now been two years since the Conservative party made a pledge in their 2015 manifesto that the Right to Buy would be extended to housing associations in England, allowing tenants to buy their own homes at a discount. Housing associations offered to voluntarily sign up to the deal with Government to make this a reality. The Housing Minister at the time, Brandon Lewis, said the government "makes no apology for helping people into homeownership". In 2016, he claimed the voluntary agreement with housing associations would over 1 million tenants will have the chance to own their own home, while every home sold would be replaced with a new affordable property. The scheme builds on a policy introduced by the Conservatives in the 1980s, which allowed council house tenants to buy their homes. The VRTB measures were included within the Landmark Housing and Planning Bill which received Royal Assent on 12th May 2016. Despite this, the pledge has not been delivered yet and hundreds of thousands of tenants are now left unable to plan their lives as no updates have been given on when the scheme will be extended, or what the criteria and discounts will be.

OVERVIEW:

This petition calls for an update from UK government on the Voluntary Right to Buy Scheme which proposes for the Right to Buy to be extended to Housing Association tenants in England. In order for tenants to plan their lives and savings and for housing associations to plan the resources they need, this is an urgent call to government for confirmation that the scheme will be extended as pledged, urging ministers to provide a timeline for the second pilot, national rollout and the criteria for the Voluntary Right to Buy.

PILOT SCHEMES:

There have been pilot schemes for the Voluntary Right to Buy in London, Merseyside, Norfolk, Oxfordshire and Surrey, whereby tenants had to have been resident for 10 years before they could become eligible to buy. According to the National Housing Federation, just 790 applications were made to use the scheme out of the 48,000 tenants that qualified. Chancellor Philip Hammond announced an expanded regional pilot in last year's Autumn Statement which would test the one-for-one replacement of homes and portability of discounts. Following two years of waiting for the pledge to be delivered and delays due to a general election and Britain's exit from the EU, housing association tenants now call for improved regular and clear communication about the scheme roll-out and governments plans.

POSITION:

This is a tenant-led politically-neutral petition which simply calls for improved communication on the changes ahead in order for individual tenants and their families to plan their lives and savings and give clarity to housing providers which are receiving thousands of enquiries about VRTB. Thousands of tenants are concerned that the delay in implementing the scheme will mean they will be priced out due to rising house prices, or no longer eligible for a mortgage with most providers due to their age. Many people feel their lives and home aspirations are on hold until clarity is received.

Many housing association tenants have spoken about feeling extremely frustrated, as though their lives are on hold until the government provides clarity on whether the scheme will be rolled out. They state updates have been limited and irregular, leaving hundreds of thousands of people 'in the dark', 'let down' and disengaged as expectations and aspirations were raised and have not yet been met. Individually, we have been trying to raise our voices and request updates but don't feel we are being heard. The Homes and Communities Agency and Housing Minister have not been responding to our emails or letters in which we request updates, and MP responses we have received offer no clarity and say there will be updates in 'due course'. We now join together collectively, we want our voices heard. Housing Association tenants simply want answers so they can plan their lives, savings and aspirations accordingly.

ACTION NEEDED:

The government should confirm intentions to deliver the VRTB scheme nationally as pledged in 2015, communicating clearly and regularly with all affected. Housing associations and tenants simply demand clarification. Detail is needed on when the scheme will be rolled out nationally, and what the criteria will be for those wishing to apply to purchase their home.

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