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Eilish McGoldrick, Democratic Services and Governance Coordinator, Belfast City Council. Via email. [democraticservices@belfastcity.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@belfastcity.gov.uk)

Dear Eilish,

Thank you for your correspondence, dated 29 May 2025, to the Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons. As head of Private Rented Branch, your email has been passed to me for reply.

You begin by referring to the Council's letter to the Permanent Secretary for DfC and the Head of the Civil Service in March 2023. These letters detailed the motion, passed by the Council in February 2023, which noted that rents had risen significantly making it increasingly unaffordable for many people, particularly those on low incomes and young families. The ask from the Council was for engagement with the Permanent Secretary and Head of the Civil Service concerning rent controls as one way to help renters combat affordability issues.

The Department issued a response to you on 28 March 2023. This correspondence advised that Section 7 of the Private Tenancies Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 placed a duty on the Department to research and consult on the implications of a rent freeze/cut, and that a report was subsequently laid in the Assembly and published on the Department's website.



The research report highlighted potential unintended consequences of these types of measures, including landlords exiting the private rental market resulting in greater shortage of properties in an already stretched market. It also noted that evidence gathering included an engagement session with council representatives, and that there was some apprehension about such rent controls, including in relation to how such legislation would be enforced.

The correspondence further advised that decisions on rent controls were within the remit of an incoming Minister.

Since the Council's last letter, the primary power to freeze or cut rents, as provided for by the Private Tenancies Act has expired. The power however remained to restrict the frequency of rent increases. This restriction was commenced by the Minister from 01 April this year, and from this date private sector rents can only be increased once in every 12-month period, with a 3-month notice.

Commencing this legislation will assist low-income tenants by providing assurances that they will not face multiple or unexpected rent increases over a short period of time. It also allows landlords to increase rents to meet their costs which have also increased in recent years.

I trust you find this response helpful.

Yours sincerely,

**Julie Lavery**  
**Private Rented Branch**