

Voluntary Right to Buy – reactive Q&A for answering tenants

The national Voluntary Right to Buy scheme has not yet been launched and we are awaiting details to be announced by the Government.

The Government has confirmed that there will be a new regional pilot of Voluntary Right to Buy. We're awaiting further details from the Government on the location that the pilot will take place in and the eligibility criteria for tenants, and will update on these details as soon as possible.

1. What is Voluntary Right to Buy?

The Government committed in the last General Election to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants. Housing associations offered to voluntarily work with the Government to make this a reality. Since then, we have been working together to agree how this new offer will work in practice.

For updates or more information about the scheme, tenants can sign up for updates from the Government or contact the Right to Buy Agent service at righttobuy.gov.uk.

2. When will Voluntary Right to Buy start?

The start date for the national Voluntary Right to Buy scheme has not yet been confirmed.

The Government has confirmed that there will be a regional pilot of Voluntary Right to Buy. We're awaiting further details from the Government on the location of the pilot and the eligibility criteria for tenants, and will update on these details as soon as possible.

To receive the latest progress updates from the Government, sign up at righttobuy.gov.uk.

3. Will the pilot go ahead now there's a General Election?

During the run up to an election the Government is unable to make any policy announcements, therefore details on the upcoming pilot will not be confirmed until after the General Election. When further details are confirmed they will be available on the Government's Right to Buy website: righttobuy.gov.uk.

4. Hasn't Voluntary Right to Buy already started in some places?

The Government worked with five housing associations to pilot Voluntary Right to Buy in limited locations to help inform the design and implementation of the main scheme. This original pilot started in January and is now closed to applications. More information can be found at righttobuy.gov.uk.

5. Will this pilot continue?

As there were a limited number of sales available under this pilot scheme, online registration has closed. Tenants who have already registered an interest in this pilot will be contacted by their housing association to help them progress their application.

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We are awaiting further details from the Government on whether this pilot may reopen to new applications.

6. Why is there another pilot?

The new pilot will test two important parts of the scheme that weren't tested in the original pilot, one for one replacement and portability – that is, in the event that a tenant cannot purchase their current home, the option to port their discount to an alternative property of their own or another willing housing association. Testing these elements will enable a smooth experience for tenants once VRTB is rolled out nationally.

7. Where will the new pilot be?

We're awaiting details from the Government on the location of the pilot and the eligibility criteria for tenants, and will update on these details as soon as possible.

8. How long will the new pilot last?

The new pilot will last for one year.

9. What if I'm not in the region of the new pilot?

The Government committed in the last General Election to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants across England in a national scheme. When the national scheme has launched, tenants from inside and outside of the pilot region can apply for a government Right to Buy discount.

For updates on the national scheme, you can visit the Government's website, righttobuy.gov.uk.

10. If I'm eligible, will I be able to buy the home I'm living in now?

Tenants who meet the Government's eligibility criteria will be entitled to a Voluntary Right to Buy discount and, in most cases, we expect that tenants will be able to use their discount to buy the home that they live in.

However, there may be cases where housing associations cannot sell that particular home. Each housing association will publish its individual policy outlining which homes would be sold and which wouldn't, and why, nearer the date of the scheme launch.

11. Which homes won't you sell?

Until the final details of the national scheme are confirmed, and you have published a policy on this agreed by your board, we recommend you do not give tenants speculative information on your own approach. As a general response:

We will publish an individual policy outlining which homes will be sold and which won't, and why, nearer the date of the national scheme launch.

12. Why are housing associations doing Voluntary Right to Buy?

The Government made an election manifesto commitment to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants and was voted in by the public to do this. Housing associations agreed to work with the Government to deliver it voluntarily as this addresses concerns we had about aspects of a statutory scheme. For example, it will allow us to replace the homes sold and protects certain, hard-to-replace homes from being sold.

13. Why is the scheme called ‘voluntary’?

The Government made an election manifesto commitment to extend the Right to Buy to housing association tenants and was voted in by the public to do this. Housing associations agreed to work with the Government to deliver it voluntarily as this addresses concerns around supply and independence of the sector. For example, it will allow us to replace the homes sold and protects certain, hard-to-replace homes from being sold.

14. Will Voluntary Right to Buy mean we lose social/affordable housing?

A key part of housing associations’ agreement with the Government is that, because they will get full compensation for each home they sell, they will replace every home sold with another affordable home and continue boosting the nation’s housing supply. Last year, housing associations delivered 40% of all new homes in the country.

15. Will the replacement homes be the same kind as those sold?

Housing associations will be able to replace affordable homes flexibly in a way that reflects what each local community needs. Whether it is a home for shared ownership or a home for social or affordable rent, housing associations will be able to use their unique understanding of their communities to assess what is needed.

16. Do you agree with selling high-value council assets to fund the scheme?

The Government makes decisions about how it funds its manifesto commitments and these are not for housing associations to take. Our priority is to ensure that the scheme works for our tenants and allows housing associations to replace homes sold.

17. If I currently have shared ownership, can I purchase my house?

If you are a shared owner you are not eligible for Voluntary Right to Buy, but you can talk to us about buying a further share of your home.

18. How do I get my discount?

The national Voluntary Right to Buy scheme has not yet launched. When it has launched, information on how to apply for a government discount be confirmed as part of the application process. For updates on the scheme, you can visit the Government’s website, righttobuy.gov.uk, and sign up for email newsletters.

19. Why do we still not know who will be eligible/when the scheme will start?

At the moment, the scheme is being tested through pilots and the detail is being worked through to make sure the new scheme works as well as possible.

The Government will, in due course, finalise the tenant eligibility criteria and when the national scheme will start. You can sign up for updates or contact the Right to Buy Agent service with questions by visiting the Government's website, righttobuy.gov.uk

20. How can I register my interest?

You can register your interest on the Government's website, righttobuy.gov.uk

21. Who can I speak to if I have any other questions about Voluntary Right to Buy?

You can visit righttobuy.gov.uk to speak to one of the Government's Right to Buy Agents or sign up for emails.

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