



Daniel McCrossan  
Chair  
Public Accounts Committee  
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26 November 2025

Dear Daniel,

## **Public Accounts Committee Evidence Session**

Many thanks for your letter of 19<sup>th</sup> November requesting some further information. Given that the Committee is holding a further evidence session on Homelessness in Northern Ireland, I thought it would be useful for members to have as much of the requested information as soon as possible. We are still working on data requested on house sales and will provide this when it is available.

### **1. Homelessness Data**

***There are 31,719 homeless households with full duty applicant status. How many individuals does this represent?***

Full Duty Applicants (FDA) are applicants accepted as being homeless, to whom the Housing Executive owes a duty under the Homelessness legislation, Article 10(2) of the Housing (NI) Order, 1988 to “secure that accommodation becomes available for his/her occupation”.

As at end March 2025, there were 31,719 FDA households across Northern Ireland; the standard measurement for FDA across the UK is households. This represented 61,245 individuals.

Please note that the household group is recorded at point of application and may not reflect the current composition of the household.

It is also important to note that the data on individual persons on the waiting list has been drawn from a system subject to retrospective amendments / live reporting. It is therefore subject to change on a daily basis, and figures are correct at time data is downloaded rather than when it was inputted.

**Please provide a breakdown of the 31,719 homeless households by household type (single males, families, single females, complex needs etc)?'**

FDA households – March 2025, by household type

<b>Household Type</b>	<b>Total</b>
Single male	9,772
Single female	5,283
Small family	8,499
Large family	2,589
Small adult	1,288
Large adult	690
Older person	3,598
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>31,719</b>

<b>Description</b>
<b>Single Person Household</b> (1 person aged 16-59)
<b>Small Adult Households</b> (2 persons aged 16-59)
<b>Small Families</b> (1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over and 1 or 2 child/children aged 0-15)
<b>Large Families</b> (1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over and 3 or more children aged 0-15 or 3 or more persons aged 16 or over and 2 or more children aged 0-15)
<b>Large Adult Households</b> (3 or more persons aged 16 or over with or without 1 child aged 0-15)
<b>Older Small Households</b> (1 or 2 persons aged 16 or over. 1 or both of whom aged 60 or over)

FDA households – March 2025, with complex needs

<b>Complex needs in household*</b>	<b>Total</b>
No	22,281
Yes	9,438
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>31,719</b>

\*At least one person in the household with complex need

**Notes:**

Applicant Information is as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

***Breakdown of those not captured within statutory homelessness (sofa- surfers, hidden homeless, adults 18+ unable to form separate households, other categories).***

These groups are not captured through existing reporting mechanisms and are less visible to services. It is worth noting that Simon Community commissioned research on hidden homelessness across the island of Ireland in May 2024. This report found that 8,500 households, with a range of between 3,500 and 13,500 that fall into this hidden homelessness category in Northern Ireland. The report is available via the following [link](#).

While such individuals are not included in statutory reporting, the [Homelessness Strategy 2022-27](#) recognises the importance of primary prevention, which is defined as follows: *'Primary Prevention Activity – Universal policies and interventions for the population as a whole which will not only be related to housing. This will also include raising awareness to assist in the public's understanding of the complex nature of homelessness to ensure households approaching crisis can access support.'*

The Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 [Year 4 Action Plan](#) contains a number of actions which seek to raise awareness of homelessness support which in turn increases the likelihood of households with the Housing Executive and therefore being included in statutory reporting. The specific actions contained within the Year 4 Action Plan are as follows.

Action 15 – 'We will continue to showcase collaborative work in the sector, within relevant Housing Executive departments and Homelessness Local Area Groups. With the support of our internal Communications Department, we will raise awareness of homelessness and the available support for households using a variety of media and channels, with a specific focus on homelessness prevention.'

Action 31 – 'We will seek to deliver a public awareness campaign to shift mind-sets towards and raise awareness of homelessness prevention. This will include support and promotion of Northern Ireland's Homelessness Awareness Week.'

***The NIHE outlined that NI has a more generous and wider definition of homelessness. Can this please be explained further?***

The duty to provide temporary (or interim) accommodation in England and Wales is found in Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996, titled 'Interim duty to accommodate in case of apparent priority need.' It provides:-

*'If the local housing authority have reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need, they must secure that accommodation is available for the applicant's occupation.'*

It is notable this interim duty is triggered when the local authority has reason to believe an applicant may be homeless, eligible for assistance and have a priority need. The Northern Ireland equivalent provision (Art 8(1)) is silent on eligibility. Section 188 provides the local authority 'must secure' accommodation. The Northern Ireland Art 8 uses the language 'shall.' The language in both provisions is mandatory.

In Northern Ireland, the equivalent duty is found in Art 8(1) of the 1988 Order, titled 'Interim duty to accommodate in case of apparent priority need.' It provides:-

*'If the Executive has reason to believe that an applicant may be homeless and have a priority need, it shall secure that accommodation is made available for his occupation pending a decision as a result of its inquiries under Article 7.'*

In contrast, our Art 8 is silent on eligibility. The duty is triggered when NIHE has reason to believe an applicant 'may be homeless and have a priority need', without any reference to eligibility for homeless assistance. The duty is that NIHE 'shall secure that accommodation becomes available'.

It is relevant to note the subsequent duty to accommodate on local authorities in England and Wales when they are satisfied an applicant is homeless and eligible. In such circumstances Art 189(B) applies, it provides:-

- (1) *This section applies where the local housing authority are satisfied that an applicant is—*
  - (a) *homeless, and*
  - (b) *eligible for assistance.*
  
- (2) *Unless the authority refer the application to another local housing authority in England (see section 198(A1)), the authority must take reasonable steps to help the applicant to secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least—*
  - (a) *6 months, or*
  - (b) *such longer period not exceeding 12 months as may be prescribed.*

There is no provision in Northern Ireland that changes the duty to provide temporary accommodation in any way as the inquiries progress. The initial Art 8(1) temporary accommodation duty applies until a decision is reached. Thereafter, in the event of a negative decision, NIHE has a discretion to provide accommodation pending the outcome of any of request for review (see Art 8(3)) or an appeal to the County Court on a point of law (see Art 11C(5)).

***Can a comparison with the statutory definitions of homelessness in Scotland, England and Wales please be provided, noting where the definition in Northern Ireland is both wider and narrower?***

This is answered in the Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Information Service published a report in April 2025 titled 'Homelessness: a comparison of legislative frameworks in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales' which can be accessed on this [Link](#).

***Is it the Housing Selection Scheme rather than legislation which means the discharge of the accommodation duty in Northern Ireland is more restrictive?***

NIHE would consider this to be a legislative issue on the basis of the following, which is relevant to the Housing (NI) Order 1988.

## *Discharge – Article 12*

The Housing Executive can discharge its statutory duty by making available suitable accommodation held by it, or by securing suitable accommodation from some other person, or by providing advice and assistance to the person to find suitable accommodation.

As drafted the duty only ceases through action on the part of the Housing Executive. It does not, for example, provide that the duty may end where the person secures their own suitable accommodation. This creates an ambiguity, and legislative clarity is required as to when the Housing Executive would cease to be subject to the statutory duty, for example in circumstances where the person secures their own accommodation and/or an offer of suitable private rented sector tenancy of a specified minimum duration.

Under Proposal 4 of the ongoing Fundamental Review of Allocations (FRA), work is ongoing to scope out the practicalities and safeguards necessary to enable the Housing Executive to move from the long-established custom and practice of discharging the statutory duty through the Housing Selection Scheme to discharge on a tenure neutral basis. Legal certainty is required in relation to the circumstances when the main statutory housing duty would cease in order to avoid, or at least to mitigate in as far as is reasonably possible, the potential risk of challenges by way of judicial review as to the nature and duration of the tenure neutral alternative. For example, in England the Housing Act 1996 sets out when and how the duty ceases in relation to Private Rented Sector offers of accommodation.

## **2. Temporary Accommodation**

***Full breakdown of the 5,412 households in temporary accommodation (type, cost, duration, geography).***

The table on the following page shows a breakdown of both type and location of households in temporary accommodation on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2025. Please note that location relates to the Council Area managing the placement rather than the location of the unit of temporary accommodation. The following figures are extracted from a live database therefore may differ from published figures. **Rates for accommodation below are commercially sensitive, and should not be shared.**

Please note that within the private single let category we have two forms of single lets:

- Traditional single lets account for circa 1,400 of the total single lets at any one time. We only reimburse the differential between the local housing allowance and the agreed weekly rent for the property. Commonly known as the top-up, the current average cost per week is circa [REDACTED] per unit.
- Block book single lets account for circa 1,900 units of the total single lets, at any one time. We currently pay the full cost to the landlord which on average is circa [REDACTED] per week. This is the cost before any housing benefit or contributions from the individuals towards the cost of the accommodation.

Please also note that voluntary sector hostels have no associated cost for the accommodation to NIHE. The providers are responsible for the collection of any housing benefit/ Client contributions towards the cost of the accommodation.

NIHE hostels represent a cost to the landlord part of NIHE who will collect and housing benefit or contributions from individuals towards their accommodation. There is no cost to the (NIHE) Strategic Housing Authority for these placements.

Council	BAFTA: Farset	DIME	HMO	NIHE Temp Acc	Single Let**	Housing Association Temp Acc	Voluntary Sector Hostel*	TOTAL
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0	0	0	64	223	0	0	287
Ards & North Down	0	0	0	10	219	5	33	267
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	0	0	0	9	301	3	54	367
Belfast	39	118	64	116	1267	4	751	2359
Causeway Coast & Glens	0	0	0	29	58	1	25	113
Derry & Strabane	0	0	6	71	405	2	300	784
Fermanagh & Omagh	0	0	0	0	203	0	28	231
Lisburn & Castlereagh	0	0	0	4	226	38	42	310
Mid & East Antrim	0	0	0	41	161	0	84	286
Mid Ulster	0	0	0	4	88	0	51	143
Newry, Mourne & Down	0	0	0	23	207	0	36	266
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>3358</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>1404</b>	<b>5413</b>
Change from previous month	-	-	+9	+1	+34	-	-	+44
Change YTD	-	-	+31	+7	+123	-	+11	+172

The below table shows a breakdown of the current banded length of stay for households in temporary accommodation. The following figures are extracted from a live database therefore may differ from published figures.

Banded length of stay	< 6months	6 to < 12 months	1 to < 5 years	5 years +
Number of households	2085	977	1962	440

***From 2017, can you provide a breakdown by year of the number of placements in temporary accommodation?***

Please see below table which shows current households in TA from 2017 to 2025. The following figures are extracted from a live database therefore may differ from published figures.

	Apr-17	Apr-18	Apr-19	Apr-20	Apr-21	Apr-22	Apr-23	Apr-24	Apr-25
	Households								
Total	1,710	1,825	2,005	2,501	3,219	3,568	4,062	4,696	5,140

***To add to the analysis presented in the NIAO report, can you provide a breakdown by accommodation type (single lets, hostels, hotels, B&Bs etc) of the number of temporary accommodation placements on 1 April 2025?***

Please see below table which shows current households in TA by accommodation type on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025. The following figures are extracted from a live database therefore may differ from published figures.

Scheme	Number of households
Private single lets	3085
Voluntary Sector Hostels	1007
External (Hotel/B&B)	511
NIHE Hostels	324
Leased property (DIME)	105
Bespoke Facility of Temporary Accom	39
Housing Association TA	30
HMO	39
<b>Total</b>	<b>5140</b>

***The Committee was told the unit cost of hotels and B&Bs has reduced by 11%. Can the supporting data and analysis for this please be provided?***

The average nightly rate for non-standard accommodation during the financial year 2023/24 was circa ██████. At the mid-point (September) of 2025/26 the average nightly rate for non-standard is circa ██████. This represents an overall reduction in the average nightly rate of 11%.

***The Committee was told a VFM framework for Temporary Accommodation has been implemented. Can the detail, please, be provided as to: how the [Centre for Homelessness Impact report](#) value for money recommendations have been addressed; action plans developed for implementation; and progress and impact to date?***

Further to the publication of the, '[Value for Money in Homelessness: A spotlight on Temporary Accommodation in Northern Ireland](#)' report, NIHE has developed a timebound action plan to address the recommendations outlined in the report by March 2027. This has

been approved by the NIHE's Executive Team and was noted at Board in October 2025, with implementation of the action plan commencing thereafter. The Northern Ireland Audit Office report published in March 2025 acknowledged the Value for Money Report and in keeping with recommendation 2, the delivery of the action plan will be monitored by Audit Risk and Assurance Committee on behalf of the Housing Executive Board.

***In terms of the purchase of 600 homes for temporary accommodation:***

- ***have any specific properties been identified for purchase;***
- ***have specific locations been identified;***
- ***is there a specific timeframe for first purchases;***
- ***what process will be followed for purchases; and***
- ***will former social houses be targeted for purchase?***

Following the Minister's announcement on this proposal on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025, NIHE is working to agree and implement new operational criteria, processes, pipeline of potential purchase opportunities and controls to enable the above initiative to move forward in the 2025/26 financial year, subject to DFC approval of Business Case conditions.

The proposed acquisition of 600 properties by NIHE over a 3-year period will be focused on reducing NIHE's current exposure to high-cost temporary accommodation (particularly hotel and B&B forms of accommodation).

Accordingly, the principal considerations will include:

- Geographical areas where exposure to high-cost temporary accommodation is most prevalent (Belfast & Derry/Londonderry).
- The nature of the temporary accommodation client groups (single persons, couples, families).
- The availability of suitable property available to purchase that align with the above criteria.
- Option to Purchase of former NIHE properties
- Value for money considerations.

### **3. Evidence on Higher-Quality Accommodation and Cost Avoidance**

***The NIHE outlined that 'without question' there have been savings for Health, Justice and Education by its decisions: to prioritise own front door temporary accommodation; and to not place children in hotel accommodation for more than two weeks. Can the data, statistical analysis, and breakdown of the financial savings to Health, Justice and Education please be provided for NIHE's statement?***

The reference to savings on health and education budgets of ensuring that children are placed in higher quality accommodation is based on well-established professional research and evidence, on the health, child development, and educational impacts of standards of temporary accommodation, for example, by Shelter across the UK, over many years<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> [Still Living in Limbo.pdf](#)

NIHE can outline the types of impacts associated specifically with the use of own front door temporary accommodation. This model consistently provides better outcomes for households than external (hotel/B&B) accommodation as this is frequently sourced within the household's local area. Households experience greater stability and maintain support networks, better educational continuity for children, improved engagement with health and social care services, and reduced reliance on crisis services.

Separately, the Complex Lives model has provided support to 207 individuals, with 94% having some level of substance use issues, 67% displaying symptoms of poor mental health, and more than half having been in custody. Most individuals supported have had some level of positive outcome, many of these outcomes are soft and span housing, health, criminal justice, and social inclusion. Engagement rates with the cohort of individuals we support have been consistently high, this has been maintained through an active engagement approach and flexing services to meet people at their point of need. The Complex Lives Team has been working with The Dept. of Justice to better understand the needs of individuals leaving prison and look at areas where increased support and planning could result in smoother transitions and better outcomes. A scalable Pilot is being planned to initially work with women with complex support needs leaving Hydebank Wood. At an operational level work has been ongoing with the Prisoner Development Unit within the prison and their Voluntary Sector colleagues to plan for releases more effectively.

In 2024/25, NIHE's Community Prevention and Support programme supported a total of 20 projects which were delivered by 13 different organisations. This includes projects such as support hubs and assertive outreach programmes which provides ongoing support for homeless individuals and outcomes recording by organisations include support to manage physical/mental health, support with addictions, and provision of basic needs.

***The NIHE outlined it had made savings of £13.8 million over the last three years. Can the data and statistical analysis please be provided for these savings? Can the NIHE also confirm these have not resulted in cash savings for NIHE which could be re-invested to prevention?'***

NIHE has been able to demonstrate efficiencies in the provision of temporary accommodation by putting in place new arrangements or extending additional arrangements largely aimed at reducing the need to utilise more expensive non-standard temporary accommodation.

The table below summaries the various initiatives implemented during the last 3 financial years, and the savings that have accrued as a result.

<b>Homeless Efficiency Savings</b>	<b>2022/23 £k's</b>	<b>2023/24 £k's</b>	<b>2024/25 £k's</b>	<b>Total £k's</b>
NIHE Domestic Voids used as Dispersed Hostels	2,644	4,326	4,988	<b>11,958</b>
Recovery of Service Charge for Dispersed Hostels	82	174	287	<b>543</b>
Implementation of HMO model	0	0	314	<b>314</b>
Implementation of HA leasing arrangements	0	0	607	<b>607</b>
Fasset Lease Savings	0	0	59	<b>59</b>
Increase in HB recovery on non-standard	0	0	362	<b>362</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,726</b>	<b>4,500</b>	<b>6,618</b>	<b>13,844</b>

These savings allowed NIHE to reduce its overall funding requirement from DfC in each of the stated years.

#### 4. NIHE Stock, Viability and House Sales

- Updated social housing completions to 31 March 22025 over the past 10 years

Year	Total SHDP Completions
2015/16	1,209
2016/17	1,387
2017/18	1,507
2018/19	1,682
2019/20	1,626
2020/21	1,304
2021/22	835
2022/23	1,449
2023/24	1,403
2024/25	1,410
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,812</b>

- NIHE stock/void figures over the past 10 years below

Year	Stock Count	Actionable Voids	Non-Actionable Voids
2024/25	82623	351	1303
2023/24	82818	319	1291
2022/23	83252	713	1016
2021/22	83834	595	803
2020/21	84354	539	653
2019/20	84707	251	702
2018/19	85162	250	490
2017/18	85534	377	530
2016/17	86069	418	461
2015/16	86632	476	568

Please note the NIHE does not hold information on Housing Association void figures.

- For the past 10 years, details of the number of House Sale scheme properties:**
- **sold by the former tenant within 5 years of purchase, along with details of discounts fully recovered by NIHE;**

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>No. of properties</b>	<b>Total discount repaid (£)</b>
2015/16	8	79,795.02
2016/17	13	126,888.33
2017/18	5	57,410.00
2018/19	19	278,977.00
2019/20	5	80,400.00
2020/21	10	141,660.00
2021/22	11	145,221.00
2022/23	6	81,472.33
2023/24	5	86,320.00
2024/25	4	64,338.00
2025/26 (7 months to 31 Oct 25)	4	32,990.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>1,175,471.68</b>

**The following information has been requested by the Committee, and is currently being compiled.**

- House sales over the past 10 years below
- Homes sold by the former tenancy within 10 years of purchase, along with details of where NIHE has been given the option of re-purchasing;
- Homes re-purchased by NIHE/RHAs at market value;
- Homes let in the private rental sector; and
- Homes used for temporary accommodation? (You may need to consult with DfC regarding RHA numbers)
- NIHE properties sold under the house sales scheme over the past 10 years, can the number of properties which had planned maintenance works and adaptations performed within the 5 years prior to sale please be provided? Please provide the total cost of these planned maintenance and adaptation works.

## **5. Domestic Violence Protocols**

***Further information on NIHE's domestic violence protocol, allocation outcomes, the Domestic Violence Action Plan and the Sanctuary Scheme.***

Allocation figures are not currently available however once we have established a report for this detail we can provide it.

### **Domestic abuse protocols**

- The NIHE Domestic Abuse policy has recently been reviewed and updated to reflect the changes in legislation and to provide a clear process that staff can follow when a domestic abuse disclosure is made to them by a colleague.
- NIHE is currently developing policy guidance for all staff who have the potential for direct or indirect contact with customers, tenants or members of their household who are experiencing or have experienced domestic abuse.

- The NIHE Safeguarding Policy was reviewed and updated in May 2025. The purpose of this Safeguarding Policy is to ensure that employees are aware of the issues that can cause harm to children and adults at risk or in need of protection and the procedures in place to report concerns
- NIHE has had a joint working protocol with Women's Aid since 2015. The aim of the protocol is to promote and enhance the safety of those who are experiencing or have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse through increased awareness, collaborative working and effective and efficient referral. This was reviewed and updated in 2024 with Women's Aid and will be reviewed on an annual basis.
- NIHE is currently developing a joint working protocol with Men's Advisory Project with a similar aim to that of the Women's Aid joint protocol. It is hoped that it will be implemented early 2026.

### **Domestic Abuse Action Plan 2024- 2027**

- The Action Plan has been developed to support the delivery of our Homelessness Strategy 2022 – 27 which has a vision of Ending Homelessness Together. It has been shaped by 2 key strategies – The Ending Violence Against Women and Girls Strategic Framework and the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy 2023 – 2030, and recommendations from the 2022 Review of The Sanctuary Scheme.
- This action plan has been developed with a focus on how we as an organisation can support the response to domestic abuse in NI by ensuring that our staff are aware of potential indicators so that we can support our tenants, customers and colleagues in signposting to appropriate support services when required.
- A key part in the development of this action plan has identified the need to engage with minority groups and this will be a guiding principle of our work on domestic abuse.
- The Action Plan includes 16 actions aimed at increasing awareness and understanding of domestic abuse experienced by our colleagues, tenants and customers as well as promoting the Sanctuary Scheme to NIHE tenants as a possible homeless prevention measure.
- The action plan can be found on the NIHE website using the following link: [Domestic Abuse Action Plan](#)

### **Sanctuary Scheme**

- The Sanctuary Scheme is a multi-agency initiative designed to enable Housing Executive tenants, at risk of domestic abuse, to remain safely in their own home by installing additional security measures.
- The primary objective of the scheme, provided by NIHE in conjunction with PSNI and NIHE contractors, is to keep tenants safe from domestic abuse and to prevent homelessness.
- The scheme was piloted in 2007 in the Antrim/Ballymena area and after a successful evaluation in 2011 by NIHE and PSNI was extended to NIHE tenants across NI.
- Additional security measures can include:
  - Solid core sanctuary doors
  - New/extra door and window locks
  - Reinforced, double glazed windows
  - Security lighting
  - Cutting back hedges
  - Removing branches

- Erecting fences and gates
- Securing shared entrances
- Padlocking gates
- Creation of a sanctuary room for high-risk victims of domestic abuse.
- Between 1<sup>st</sup> April – 30 September 2025 43 properties had additional security measures installed through the Sanctuary Scheme. The total cost was £80,124 with the average cost per property being £1,863.
- 18 of the 20 tenancies receiving additional security measures in 2023-25 have been sustained.

## 6. Rehousing and Voids

**Average time homeless individuals spend in temporary accommodation before rehousing as at April 2025:**

- **broken down by less than 6 months, 6-12 months, 1-5 years and more than five years?**

The below figures relate to all current placement on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 banded by length of stay. The following figures are extracted from a live database therefore may differ from published figures.

<b>Banded length of stay</b>	<b>&lt; 6months</b>	<b>6 to &lt; 12 months</b>	<b>1 to &lt; 5 years</b>	<b>5 years +</b>
<b>Number of households</b>	1925	803	2015	397

- **broken down by temporary accommodation type (single let, hostels, hotels etc)?**

The below average figures relate to all current placements on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025 and those terminated within the previous 12 months.

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Average (days)</b>
<i>Private Single Lets</i>	675
<i>Voluntary Sector Hostels</i>	284
<i>External (Hotel/B&amp;B)</i>	40
<i>NIHE Hostels</i>	367
<i>Leased Property (DIME)</i>	202
<i>Bespoke Facility of Temporary Accom</i>	258
<i>Housing Association TA</i>	249
<i>HMO</i>	112
<b>Total</b>	<b>265</b>

I trust the information above is of help to the Committee Members in their consideration its inquiry into Homelessness in Northern Ireland. I will forward the remaining information on house sale as soon as possible.

If you require further information, please to not hesitate to contact me

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Grainia Long". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

**Grainia Long**  
**Chief Executive**