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Daniel McCrossan MLA
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Via email: Committee.publicaccounts@niassembly.gov.uk

Dear Daniel

Homelessness in Northern Ireland

I am writing with an update on the Department's progress against the recommendations outlined in the Committee's report on Homelessness in Northern Ireland.

Recommendation 1: The Committee recommends that the Department should make more meaningful, people focused data on homelessness publicly available. Within six months of this report, the Department should ensure that published homelessness data includes the number of individuals as well as the number of households affected.

As previously advised, due to the nature of data assurance required, the Housing Executive was able to report on this from 1 April 2026.

Therefore, the number of homeless individuals on the Waiting List was included for the first time in the quarterly Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin released on 27 August 2026 (Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin). This Recommendation will be fully completed with the inclusion of this data in the next edition of the biannual Northern Ireland Homelessness Bulletin due for release in December 2026.

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Recommendation 2: The Committee recommends that the Department should work with the Housing Executive to explore options for strengthening homelessness prevention through the introduction of a statutory duty and bring forward proposals to the Minister within 12 months. In doing so, the Department should review and assess the impact of similar statutory duties in other jurisdictions, including those where the threat of homelessness duty afforded to households extends to at least 56-days.

Officials have undertaken preliminary engagement with key housing stakeholders and delivery partners, as well as independent experts, and are of the view that an ambitious and comprehensive review of our homelessness legislation is required.

Minister Lyons agreed in principle to initial proposals for a Homelessness Commission on 13 August 2026. The Commission will consist of two independently Chaired panels. An Expert Panel will take forward a legislative review and make recommendations on all parts of our homelessness legislative framework with an objective to bring legislative change as soon as possible in the next mandate.

The proposed approach is similar to the independent reviews which have already taken place in England, Scotland and Wales. Work is completing on scoping and the drafting of Terms of Reference for the legislative review.

A separate Implementation Panel will progress a wider review of the homeless system and identify operational and institutional changes required to support legislative reform. This panel may make recommendations that can bring change and improvement quickly, without legislative reform.

A paper will be submitted to the Executive by the end of September for agreement to the proposals for a Homelessness Commission for Northern Ireland.

Given the significance of this work, resources have been reallocated from elsewhere in Housing Division to prioritise it.

Recommendation 3: The Committee recommends that the Department and the Housing Executive put in place systems to capture data on prevention initiatives across both statutory and VCS service providers they fund within 12 months. Systems must support long-term outcomes monitoring and reporting, which should commence before the end of the 2026-27 financial year.

The Housing Executive has developed a new system specification to support the capture of homelessness prevention activity by frontline services, aligned to the agreed P1E definition of homelessness prevention. Work is continuing to develop the IT systems

required to monitor outcomes and report on the effectiveness of funded services; this is scheduled to complete by April 2027.

Recommendation 4: The Committee recommends that, by 30 June 2026, the Housing Executive completes an assessment of the pilot projects delivered with additional strategic prevention funding in 2025-26. The Department and Housing Executive should then work with VCS organisations in 2026-27 to develop plans for long-term investment in relevant prevention projects.

An impact assessment and an evaluation of the 2025/26 Homelessness Prevention Programme have been completed and were considered by the Housing Executive's Executive Team in June 2026.

The findings have already informed decision making around the continuation of projects and initial allocations under the Homelessness Prevention Fund 2026/27 and will continue to be used to inform future service planning and investment in homelessness prevention activity.

Recommendation 5: The Committee recommends that the Department and Housing Executive agree a single vision for prevention, and a range of measures and indicators for assessing long term outcomes within 12 months of this report. In developing these measures, the Department should consult with VCS partners and those with lived experience of homelessness.

The Department and the Housing Executive have agreed that the definition of prevention will continue to be based on P1E and this will be clearly outlined in the new Homelessness Strategy for 2027-2032 which is currently in development.

Initial engagement with voluntary and community sector partners, including on the measures and indicators for assessing outcomes, has been taken forward through focused monthly meetings of the Central Homelessness Forum. A full public consultation on the draft Homelessness Strategy will take place in the Autumn to ensure that the new Strategy can be finalised before the pre-election period comes into effect.

Recommendation 6: The Committee recommends that the Department conducts a review of the existing homelessness structures, oversight groups and action plans within six months of this report, with a view to streamlining these and ensuring that membership is appropriate and that actions, targets and implementation dates are aligned.

The Draft Budget proposals for 2026-2030 reflected an extremely constrained budget position, falling short of the Department's requirements to tackle homelessness over the budget period.

This position has been compounded by the absence of an agreed Executive budget which means the Department continues to operate within a highly constrained financial environment, with associated spending controls in place to enable the continuation of essential services pending an Executive decision. These controls have necessitated a restriction on new spend being incurred.

This has directly impacted on progress against Recommendations 6 and 7 which were agreed on the basis that an independent consultant would be commissioned to conduct a review of existing homelessness structures and oversight groups, including the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (HSSG).

Officials have conducted the preparatory work, including identifying an independent consultant and developing a business case to enable spend to be incurred. Subject to the consultancy team submitting a final Terms of Reference for sign-off, we would expect to initiate a review in September.

The consultancy team had previously advised that it would not be possible to meet the original deadline set by the Committee, however, officials have established that the review should be completed by Christmas.

Recommendation 7: The Committee recommends that the Department and the Housing Executive conduct a strategic review of the HSSG within six months of this report, to include appropriate levels of membership and roles and responsibilities.

As summarised above at Recommendation 6.

Recommendation 8: The Committee recommends that within six months, the Housing Executive publishes details of its plans to purchase the 600 homes designated for temporary accommodation. These plans should include:

- **Timing of purchases;**
- **Identification of specific locations, properties or sites;**
- **Breakdown of type of property to be purchased, i.e. number of single lets, family homes, and so on; and**
- **Estimates of costs and timescales to make properties habitable.**

As you will recall, the Housing Executive outlined the general approach which will be taken with regards to acquisitions during the closed session on 11 June. This includes exercising its option to purchase former Housing Executive properties, particularly in areas of housing need and aligning acquisitions with client group requirements.

Acquisition levels and timescales are shaped by market availability and value-for-money considerations. This makes it difficult to publish meaningful delivery projections in advance. Therefore, when taken into consideration alongside the commercial sensitivities which were covered in closed session, the Housing Executive will focus on publishing information as acquisitions are completed.

The Housing Executive has completed all preparatory work within its control and remains ready to proceed with the acquisition programme once the Business Case conditions have been met.

Recommendation 9: The Committee recommends that the Department develops a more transparent system of reporting on social housing new builds within 12 months of this report which captures the difference between the Housing Supply Strategy ambition, the level of need identified by the Commissioning Prospectus, and the number of new starts which can be delivered by the Department each year. Reporting should clearly outline both annual and cumulative shortfalls across the lifetime of the Strategy, as well as proposals to address shortfalls in later years.

Officials have engaged with the Housing Executive to develop a more transparent reporting framework for social housing starts, measuring progress against Housing Supply Strategy targets and identified need. This will primarily be through the end of year Social Housing Development Programme outturn report.

Recommendation 10: The Committee recommends that the Department conducts a value for money assessment of the Right to Buy Scheme, with a view to presenting the Minister with a range of options within 12 months of this report for adapting or amending the Scheme.

The NIHE's consultation on Amendments to the House Sales Scheme ran from 24 April to 17 July 2026. The consultation sought views on five possible amendments to the House Sales Scheme, including:

- Not selling some homes which have been adapted for people with disabilities,
- Not selling flats or leasehold properties,
- Extending the Option to Purchase period during which the Housing Executive may buy back a home from 10 to 20 years,

- Clarifying rules to avoid the same home being sold more than once,
- Changing how discounts are calculated so time spent in Housing Association homes would not count towards the discount.

While not the focus of the consultation, the document also included a section on "other considerations" seeking views on possible future changes to key elements of the Scheme, such as full scheme closure, eligibility requirements and the level of discount, which would be subject to a separate consultation process.

The Housing Executive are now analysing the responses with a view to bringing proposals to the Department by February 2027, in line with the Committee's timeline.

I hope this update assures you that progress is being made against each of the Committee's recommendations.

Yours sincerely,

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