



# NI Assembly Election 2011: Asks and Offers – the detail

## Introduction

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents registered and non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland. Collectively, our members provide nearly 36,000<sup>1</sup> good quality, affordable homes for renting or equity sharing. Further information is available at [www.nifha.org](http://www.nifha.org).

## Background

Election 2011 gives an opportunity for political parties to examine their policies to ensure they are fit for purpose. Those elected will have the chance to implement policies which aim to improve the social and economic status of our citizens.

A roof over one's head is a basic necessity<sup>2</sup>. Housing associations in Northern Ireland consistently work to supply enough homes to meet the assessed need. However, Northern Ireland is experiencing the highest levels of housing stress since the 1970s. At 30 September 2010 there were over 39,344 applications for social rented housing and the NI Housing Executive confirmed the number of households in Northern Ireland accepted as homeless had risen from 8,934 to 9,914<sup>3</sup> - an increase of 11% in the year.

As at 31 January 2011, the level of homelessness was 16,074. Half of these (8,254) were accepted as statutorily homeless and awarded Full Duty Applicant status<sup>4</sup>.

We recognise there are tough times ahead and are committed to playing our part by working together for better housing.

## An Enabling Policy Environment

Housing associations need an understanding and supportive policy environment in which to work. To enable this we have a number of suggestions.

### Housing associations ask for:

#### A Housing Strategy for Northern Ireland

We believe an overarching **housing strategy** for Northern Ireland, based on a shared vision and meshing with the strategies for Sustainable Development, Regional Development, Economic Development and Health and Social Well-Being, would help integrate the efforts of the many housing players in the private, public and voluntary sectors.

The Independent Housing Commission's consultation with key stakeholders confirmed there was widespread agreement on this recommendation and NIFHA calls for the production of an overall housing strategy to be started.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: NIHE Housing Market Review & Perspectives 2011-14 (p105). This figure was correct at the time of writing. However, it will regularly increase as new homes are developed and made available for letting by Registered Housing Associations.

<sup>2</sup> Maslow's hierarchy of needs: proposed by Abraham Maslow (1943) *A Theory of Human Motivation*.

<sup>3</sup> Source: NIHE

<sup>4</sup> Source: NIHE

## Synergy Group

We call for a high level **DSD-NIFHA Group** to identify overlap between the public policy priorities of government and the community benefit purpose of independent housing associations. Coupled with the principles built into the Executive's new Concordat with the Voluntary and Community Sector, this should provide a sound basis for the most productive relationship between the housing association movement and the DSD.

## Regulation

The housing association movement advocates a **healthy regulation culture** which is proportionate, accountable, consistent, transparent and trusted. We seek support for regulation which goes beyond validating administrative processes to focus on identifying and learning from positive **outcomes**. Increasingly, process seems to be to the fore with little to no evaluation of the impact housing associations and, in some cases, their joint management partners are having on their tenants' quality of life.

Since many housing associations are subject to regulation by several authorities (notably the DSD, the Charity Commission NI and the Housing Executive as the administrative authority for the Supporting People framework) we also need a system of **'pass-porting'** to help streamline overlapping regulation. To the greatest possible extent, other regulators should rely on the work of a 'lead regulator' to minimise wasteful duplication of effort.

### On this basis housing associations offer:

- to re-invigorate our emphasis on promoting maximum benefit for the community and, through this, improved regulatory results.
- full co-operation with government to achieve positive outcomes throughout our community and to ensure the housing association movement remains fit for the purpose of delivering and managing social housing in Northern Ireland.

## Conclusion

NIFHA and its members remain committed to Supporting Northern Ireland but we recognise there are difficult times ahead for our sector but we know that working together for better housing offers the best way forward. We therefore welcome opportunities to engage with all our elected representatives. Please contact us if you would like to discuss the above information.