

Building peace one home at a time: edited address by Máirtín Ó Muilleoir to the annual conference dinner of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations



With Cameron Watt, CEO, and Katherine McCloskey of NI Federation of Housing Associations backing the Supporting People campaign.

“The work Housing Associations are involved in is life-saving, life-changing and fundamental to community wellbeing. The dignity and security of a home is a great treasure which all should enjoy. You have taken on the job of making sure that the gift of a home is distributed as widely as possible. We talk a lot about the sanctity of the family in these parts but a cornerstone of a successful family is a home — you are providing the foundation for a thriving community, you are the bulwark and bedrock of families.

“I am a big fan of your Supporting People programmes which ensure that those on

the margins can enjoy the same comforts and supports which most of us take for granted. 26,000 enjoy good quality of life, conversation, dignity, independence, care, fun, stimulation, education all because of the Supporting People Programme.

Funding which has been frozen for seven years must not be reduced. The biggest share of the Supporting People budget goes to the homeless. Those of us who believe that homelessness is an indictment of all of us and who see poverty as a scourge which must be eradicated, believe there is no greater calling than to work with the homeless.

“I want also to say that the Housing Executive and the housing associations are great champions of Belfast. Whenever I see a housing association set up camp in an area, I know it is on the rise. That’s why I think it is preposterous that the latest plan for the city centre of Belfast rules out social housing. Belfast has had enough of exclusion and divisions, the city centre not only belongs to all but it can only succeed if it becomes much more vibrant and part of that vibrancy has to be created by working class homes.

“This society is looking for leaders and they are here in this room so build up neighbourhoods, enliven communities, make it possible for families to flourish, change and save lives by building more homes, transforming more lives and ensuring that the bright light of hope continues to shine at the most important place for all us: home.

“Finally, it’s important for me to say on this spot where 12 lives were lost in one of the blackest hours of our dark days, that my pledge on Council and in Stormont is to ensure we never go back. I take courage and heart from the work you are doing to build peace one home at a time.”
