

# Former head of Housing Executive named new chair at NIFHA



**John McPeake, a former chief executive of the NI Housing Executive, has been named as the new chair at the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA).**

An urban planner, Dr McPeake joined the NI Housing Executive in 1982 and rose to the rank of chief executive before his retirement in 2014. He has been a member of the NIFHA board for several years and holds board roles at Wales and West Housing in Cardiff and DePaul Housing in Dublin. In addition, he is an Honorary Professor in Planning at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the International Advisory Committee for the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence.

**Key priorities are reclassification, development,**

## **Supporting People and welfare reform**

Speaking after a meeting confirming his appointment on Friday, Dr McPeake said more social and affordable homes are urgently needed across Northern Ireland, as well as vital supports to help people keep living in their homes.

He explained: "There are a number of key issues to ensure that we can meet these needs effectively.

**"Most urgently, reclassification means that housing associations could lose access to private funding as early as next month. This would halve the number of social homes that could be built and jeopardise affordable housing programmes. That's why the UK Government's recent commitment to addressing reclassification is so important. We look forward to the Secretary of State providing more clarity as soon as possible."**

The issues of welfare reform mitigations and Supporting People programme funding must also be addressed, Mr McPeake continued.

## **Hardship and threat to new homes**

"There is tremendous uncertainty around the current status and continued availability of welfare reform mitigations in Northern Ireland.

"These mitigations were argued for by the sector and its partners and hard won through the actions of local politicians and Ministers. Not addressing this matter on a timely basis raises the risk of significant hardship amongst the tenants of member organisations. It also presents a major risk to rental income which in turn is likely adversely to impact on the new build programme, at a time when Government wants associations to build more.

"Equally, there is major concern over the level of funding devoted to the Supporting People programme. The need for the programme is greater than ever, with new needs arising every day, but the funding has been frozen for more than a decade and subject to other reductions. We don't dispute the need for the funds to be used sensibly, but the real issue is increasing gap between need and available resources. The programme has proved itself to be effective and life changing."

Mr McPeake pledged that NIFHA will continue to work closely with its partners, including the Department for Communities, the NI Housing Executive, elected representatives and local councils to build great homes and help sustain thriving communities.