

# Housing Associations In Strong Position To Face Challenges Ahead



The housing association sector in Northern Ireland is at a critical juncture in its history, but in a strong position to face the challenges ahead, according to the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) at its Annual Conference in the Slieve Donard Hotel.

**NIFHA's Chief Executive Cameron Watt** says the sector is in a good place to deal with challenges head on. The *2016 Sector Global Accounts* published today reveal that turnover of the sector has grown by 10% to nearly £283m in the past year, with an operating surplus of £66.9m (15% growth) and operating margin of 23.7%.

<https://twitter.com/NIFHA/status/786498690705862656>

“Housing associations are in a positive financial position and are well-managed and viable organisations. Welfare changes and other potential threats to rental income, such as a cap on housing benefit at the Local Housing Allowance rate, will undoubtedly put pressure on that financial strength,” he commented.

“However, our members are innovative and creative and as well as continually improving services to existing customers, they are extending their housing offer,

including new homeownership options.

<https://twitter.com/EileenPFold/status/786499031572877312>

“Over the next few years, the housing association sector has ambitious plans. We aim to support tenants through welfare changes, maximise house building and use our wider investment to unleash potential in the communities we serve.”

The recent decision by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to reclassify Northern Ireland housing associations as public bodies is one of the biggest challenges facing housing associations.

Mr Watt added: “Reclassification threatens many elements of our business plans, which is why we are strongly advocating for its swift reversal. Having engaged extensively with ministers and officials we recognise they are fully aware of the issues. We are also encouraged by the NI Executive’s commitment to reverse reclassification and will work with them on this.”

<https://twitter.com/CommunitiesNI/status/786497610123063297>

At the conference, *The Challenge Ahead*, speakers from across the UK and Republic of Ireland came together to tackle the big issues facing the housing association sector.



**Keynote speaker Communities Minister Paul Givan MLA said:** “Housing associations have continued to show that they have an appetite to do more than

just build bricks and mortar by enhancing their role in the regeneration of local communities. In addition, through the use of social clauses in contracts, housing associations have been able to help a number of young people into training and employment.

“The focus of the housing indicator within the draft Programme for Government is on improving the supply of suitable housing. This new focus on outcomes challenges all stakeholders within the housing sector to align our work and pull together towards making a real, tangible, positive difference to society.”