

# BUILDING GREAT HOMES AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES

NIFHA MANIFESTO FOR NORTHERN IRELAND 2016-2020





**NIFHA** is the representative body for housing associations in Northern Ireland. Our 22 members manage around 47,000 homes including family accommodation, sheltered and supported housing and shared ownership homes.

*Committed to*

**BUILDING  
GREAT HOMES  
AND THRIVING  
COMMUNITIES**



**Housing associations work wherever there is housing need: from Rathlin Island to Rathfriland; Derry-Londonderry to Dromore; and Belfast to Belleek.**

We are the only providers of new social and shared ownership homes in Northern Ireland. We are also providing a wide range of community investment services to help people and neighbourhoods flourish.

Housing associations are charities. As social enterprises, all surpluses are re-invested in providing services for people in need. In recent years, housing associations have also been Northern Ireland's biggest residential developers.

As major independent providers of public services, we are accountable not just to tenants and service users but also regulators including the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI). Through close working with DSD, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and other key partners, local housing associations have an impressive record of delivery.

**We have**

- **Provided over 10,000 new homes from 2011-15**
- **Secured over £700m in private investment for new homes**
- **Built mixed-use, mixed-tenure and shared housing developments**
- **Offered high-quality housing, care and support to thousands of people**
- **Employed 3,000 people; contributing £60m p.a. in wages to local economy**
- **Invested £9m p.a. in additional community services, benefitting 25,000 people**

Housing associations are proud of these achievements, but ambitious to do much more. With continued strong support from the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, our movement can deliver great things for Northern Ireland over the next four years – building great places, regenerating blighted areas, creating jobs and releasing potential.

This manifesto – *Building Great Homes and Thriving Communities* – sets out how working closely together, political leaders and housing associations can deliver what Northern Ireland needs. Our movement is ready for the challenge.

Committed to  
**PROVIDING GREAT HOMES**

Housing associations are the only providers of new social and shared ownership homes in Northern Ireland.

**Delivering against ambitious targets, housing associations provided around 6,000 new social homes and 4,000 homes for first-time buyers through Co-Ownership Northern Ireland from 2011 -2015. Building new affordable housing to meet housing need and supporting people into homeownership is central to our mission.**

Housing associations are committed to providing high-quality, affordable housing in safe and sustainable communities. However, we can't do it alone.

In a challenging landscape, we need the support of the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly to continue developing much-needed new homes.

**Context**

- There are 40,000 households on the social housing waiting list
- Of these, 22,000 are in housing stress
- 11,200 new homes are needed each year according to the RDS
- However fewer than 6,000 homes p.a. are currently being built
- In 2014 only four private housebuilders built more than 100 homes
- Land costs have risen by over 10% since 2011 in some high-demand areas
- Every £1 invested in construction generates £2.84 in total economic activity – a powerful 'multiplier effect'

**6,000**

new high-quality rented homes delivered

EVERY £1 SPENT ON CONSTRUCTION  
**GENERATES £2.84 IN TOTAL ECONOMIC ACTIVITY**



**Over the next four years we can**

- Further improve the quality of existing social tenants' homes
- Provide at least 6,000 new high-quality rented homes for people in need
- Secure private finance to maximise investment in new social housing
- Maintain affordable rents and ensure that people on low incomes can access homes
- Help more people into home ownership through Co-Ownership Northern Ireland and other initiatives
- Develop mixed-tenure and mixed-use schemes to build sustainable neighbourhoods
- Lead the way in shared housing, providing safe and inclusive new developments

**To do this we need**

- An annual capital budget of £100m to deliver at least 1,500 new social homes each year
- Continued commitment to government funding – at least 50% of the costs for new social housing
- An ambitious Programme for Government target to use surplus public land for new homes
- A register of surplus public land to help facilitate this
- A land development and disposal strategy for the NI Executive and action plans for all departments and agencies
- Support from government departments and agencies in developing brownfield sites
- Stronger planning policy support for housing and a link between the Programme for Government targets for housing and new Local Development Plans
- A significant stock transfer programme with realistic expectations and timeframes
- Suspension of the House Sales Scheme to prevent further loss of scarce social homes



## Committed to CARE AND SUPPORT

Housing associations are major providers of housing, care and support to people with particular needs.

### Accommodation-based services include around 14,000 sheltered and supported homes.

Additionally, floating support services enable many more people to remain as independent as possible in their homes. TeleCare and TeleHealth are also offered by Fold Housing Association in partnership with the health sector.

Most of these care and support services are sustained by the Housing Executive's Supporting People (SP) programme.

Among the 26,000 people benefitting annually from SP services are older people, people with physical and learning disabilities, homeless people, young people leaving care and people with dementia. Housing associations work closely with partner organisations including the Health and Social Care Trusts and charities in providing high quality housing, care and support.

### Context

- Between 2013 and 2018, the number of adults aged 65 and over is projected to increase by 12.1%, from 279,100 to 312,900, and by 63.3% to 455,700 between 2013 and 2033
- *Transforming Your Care*, government's vision for our health and social care, has yet to be properly funded and implemented, increasing pressure on acute services
- Investing in Supporting People delivers a net economic benefit to the NI Executive of £125m annually – every £1 invested in SP saves the public purse £1.90
- With project funding frozen for eight years, many SP schemes face a financial crisis

EVERY £1 INVESTED  
IN SUPPORTING PEOPLE  
SAVES THE PUBLIC  
PURSE £1.90

### Over the next four years we can

- Provide high-quality housing, care and support for many of our most vulnerable people
- Help deliver the vision of *Transforming Your Care*, reducing hospital admissions and stays by providing appropriate care and support in the home
- Deliver net economic benefits to the public purse by reducing pressure on other budgets, particularly that of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS)
- Offer innovative services for people with dementia and other complex needs
- Help people with care and support needs to enjoy a good quality of life



### To do this we need

- A minimum 10% increase in the £70m Supporting People budget, reflecting steeply rising staff costs such as the new National Living Wage (NLW)
- Annual increases in the regional care rate reflecting NLW and other increases in staff costs
- A prevention strategy to deliver the vision of *Transforming Your Care* reflecting the vital role of housing, care and support services
- DHSSPS to develop and publish a financial model to make the 'shift left' proposed in *Transforming Your Care* a reality
- A commitment by health and social care trusts to fairly share the risks and costs of supported housing schemes in which care is delivered
- NI exemptions from new welfare rules extending the Shared Accommodation Rate for single people aged under 35 and the limiting of social rents to the Local Housing Allowance
- Special Needs Management Allowance (SNMA) to be sustained for Housing with Care schemes that are unsuitable for re-modelling as Supported Living

*Committed to*  
**INVESTING IN PEOPLE  
 AND COMMUNITIES**

Housing associations are about more than great homes.

**As Northern Ireland's biggest charities and social enterprises, we are committed to helping build thriving communities.**

To this end, we are investing in a wide range of services and facilities beyond core housing, care and support. Housing associations are funding regeneration initiatives and place-shaping within their own developments and communities. We are offering training and employment opportunities working with partners such as Women's TEC and Bryson Futures; as well as building community centres, playgrounds and community allotments and gardens.

Housing associations providing homes for older people also offer a range of activities to help overcome social isolation and loneliness, enabling people to flourish in their later years.

**Context**

- Household incomes, poverty rates and the labour market have all worsened in NI in the last five years. In each case, this deterioration has been greater than in Great Britain
- Most social tenants live in single-identity communities, especially in Belfast
- Housing associations deliver 300 community services p.a. through 87 full-time staff
- 25,000 people benefit from these activities
- Services include training and employment schemes; health and wellbeing initiatives; community cohesion initiatives; money and debt advice; environmental improvements and building new community facilities
- £8.7m was spent on delivering these services in 2014/15: 40% from associations' own resources and 60% from external grants and contracts
- Most housing associations are committed to increasing community investment



**ENABLING PEOPLE  
 BUILDING THRIVING  
 COMMUNITIES**

**Over the next four years we can**

- Continue to tackle poverty through our own resources and strategic partnerships with other organisations
- Support the delivery of government policy priorities across key areas such as health, education and economic growth
- Take a leading role in tackling segregated housing and building a shared society
- Respond to local needs and aspirations and support local services
- Help people living in housing association homes feel valued, supported and encouraged
- Measure and evaluate the impact of this social investment



**To do this we need**

- Fair opportunities to deliver services such as training and welfare-to-work programmes
- Stronger support for shared housing and a commission to lead a step-change in activity, addressing challenges like allocations policies and building public confidence
- A Social Value Act to ensure that the public sector procures not just according to the cost and quality of services, but also their social impact
- Ongoing support from the new Department of Communities for housing associations' community investment activity



**300**

community services  
 delivered each year  
 by housing  
 associations

Committed to  
**FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY  
 TO DELIVER**

Housing associations in Northern Ireland are well managed, financially viable and efficient organisations.

**This is demonstrated in the 2015 Sector Global Accounts produced by PwC.**

As housing associations have developed their skills, knowledge and capacity in governance, financial management and procurement, our regulator, the Department for Social Development, has responded by removing some of the constraints and barriers that were holding the sector back.

NIFHA welcomes this approach and wants to see it continue. Housing associations can innovate and deliver. As independent social enterprises, housing associations need freedom from unnecessarily restrictive regulations and flexibility to deliver what Northern Ireland requires of us. To continue to innovate and secure considerable private investment for new homes, we also need to avoid being re-classified as public sector bodies by the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

**Context**

- Housing associations are accountable to multiple regulators including the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) and the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland (CCNI)
- Whilst each regulator has its own role and focus, some of this regulation is unnecessary duplication, diverting resources away from front-line service delivery
- The gold-plating of EU Procurement law through prescriptive NI guidance is hampering housing associations' effectiveness and efficiency, especially in building new homes
- In October 2015, English housing associations were re-classified as public bodies by the ONS due to the level of direction and control of their activities by government



**HOUSING  
 ASSOCIATIONS  
 CAN INNOVATE  
 AND DELIVER**



**Over the next four years we can**

- Continue to be a growing, dynamic sector that contributes greatly to the local economy
- Procure innovatively, maximising the efficiency, effectiveness and social impact of services
- Invest in ongoing improvement within associations and across the sector
- Work with the Housing Regulator to implement new regulatory standards and support housing associations to demonstrate how they meet those standards
- Be open, transparent and accountable to tenants, elected representatives and other key stakeholders

**To do this we need**

- An independent Housing Regulator focused on outcomes rather than process, providing greater assurance to tenants, government and sector investors
- The Housing Regulator to take precedence over other regulatory bodies
- Flexibility to diverge from prescriptive NI Public Procurement Policy to allow us to innovate in maximising the quality, cost and social impact of services
- Freedom to attract appropriate skills and experience to housing association boards by permitting payment of board members
- Urgent regulatory changes to ensure NI housing associations remain independent and are not re-classified by ONS as public bodies



# KEY PRIORITIES

1,500 new social homes each year through annual capital budget of £100m

Sites for new homes supported through ambitious targets for use of surplus public land

High-quality care and support through 10% increase in Supporting People budget

Independent Housing Regulator to assure tenants, government and sector investors

Step-change in delivery of shared housing

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