



Consultation Response to the DfC's Budget 2023-24 Equality Impact Assessment

<https://www.communities-ni.gov.uk/consultations/consultation-department-communities-budget-2023-24-allocations>

Participation and the Practice of Rights (PPR) welcomes the Department for Communities' Budget 2023-2024 Equality Impact Assessment. This is not a full response, but one which focuses on people affected by budget cuts in Social Housing.

PPR, and the homeless families we work alongside on a regular basis are deeply concerned about the shortfall for building new homes:

'[...] given the greatest proportion of the Department's budget provides for new build Social Housing and recent construction industry inflation of 26.2%, the Department's Capital allocation is now £59m (27.3%) short of £275.1m required for 2023-24.' (p 12)

and

'Social Housing is a priority for the Department, but the 2023-24 net capital allocations will have a significant detrimental effect on the numbers of new social homes that can be built through the Social Housing Development Programme in 2023-24. This Programme is the means to counter increasing waiting lists, which are currently at record levels. The target for 2023-24 is 2,000 starts. [...] a high-level estimate of the numbers of New Social Housing which could be delivered with 80% of the total Departmental budget, is 1,400. This represents a 600-unit reduction against the current target of 2,000 units.' (p 23)

We welcome the suggestion that 'The Department will seek to ensure that any available Capital funding made available during the year is allocated to Social

Housing, as was the intention of the previous Executive.’ (p 28) However, we strongly urge the Department to ensure that the targets are met, because any reduction will have a detrimental effect on many people, but particularly on three Section 75 groups:

Children and Young People

Northern Ireland is facing a housing crisis, which affects children and young people in particular. Our research into the latest homeless statistics has revealed that [the number of homeless children in NI has risen by more than a fifth in the last two years](#). The latest NIHE figures for the end of March 2023 showed 45,105 households on the waiting list, with amongst them at least 26,567 children under 18. The 26,310 NI households officially recognised as FDA homeless in March 2023 included at least 17,111 children under 18 – a rise of 23% on the same figure two years earlier.

NI housing policy and programmes were already failing to come close to providing enough homes for the people who most urgently require them before these drastic budget cuts. PPR [analysis](#) of [data from NISRA](#) has uncovered that an average of only 941 social homes have been completed every year across Northern Ireland since 2010. At this rate of development it will take fifty years to house the 44,500+ households currently on the social housing waiting list across the north (or 27 years, if the focus was limited to just housing the families currently holding FDA status).

The absence of a home, or adequate home, affects many areas of peoples’ lives, including health, education and employment. If the issue of housing need is left unaddressed, it will have a significant and adverse impact especially on children. [Housing sector organisations highlighted the human impact](#) a reduction in the target for social housing would have, and the NI Federation of Housing Associations [wrote to the UK Secretary of State](#) for Northern Ireland to urge funding a target of 2,200. We urgently need more social housing; many low-income families with children have nowhere to go. [Private rental prices in Northern Ireland](#) increased by 9.6% in the 12 months to April 2023.

People from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, including Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Lack of adequate social housing also affects people from Black and Minority Ethnic Groups, including Asylum Seekers and Refugees, who face additional barriers to accessing affordable homes.

The [published Home Office statistics for March 2023](#) reveal that there are 3,030 asylum seekers in all forms of accommodation in Northern Ireland. Asylum seekers who are living in hotels, provided by private provider Mears, will need to be housed once they achieve refugee status.

We have documented the impact of [poor housing conditions](#) and also [frequent moves](#) on asylum seekers and refugees, and warn that the knock-on effect of a reduction in new build social housing would worsen the situation of this Section 75 group.

People with different religious beliefs

The DfC's Budget 2023-24 Equality Impact Assessment highlights that the failure to provide sufficient funding for new build housing could potentially impact on people with different religious beliefs:

'This outlines that following examination of NIHE waiting list time data for social housing for the period 2016 to 2021 that Catholic household reference person applicants experienced the longest median waiting times for social housing at the point of allocation in Northern Ireland as a whole (18 months, as opposed to an average of 13 months).' (p 26)

This aligns with our [analysis of Housing Executive data on Full Duty Applicants in Belfast](#), which demonstrated that there were 8,118 FDA homeless households in Belfast in March 2023, up 7.6% from March 2022. The data provided indicates that these households included at least 5,049 children under 18 - an increase of 13% on March 2022 figures. Two thirds of them live in predominantly Catholic areas in West and North Belfast: at least 2,197 in West and at least 1,184 in North.

The UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recently [tabled a request for further information on the housing situation in North Belfast](#) as part of its monitoring work.