Chartered Institute of Housing
Northern Ireland

RETHINKING SOCIAL HOUSING NORTHERN IRELAND

Final report

About CIH

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) is the independent voice for housing and the home of professional standards. Our goal is simple – to provide housing professionals and their organisations with the advice, support and knowledge they need to be brilliant. CIH is a registered charity and not-for-profit organisation. This means that the money we make is put back into the organisation and funds the activities we carry out to support the housing sector. We have a diverse membership of people who work in both the public and private sectors, in 20 countries on five continents across the world.

Further information is available at: **www.cih.org**

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Foreword

It is encouraging that providing secure and affordable homes continues to be a relatively high priority in Northern Ireland. There seems to be a strong public belief that this is a central policy, key to building a successful society. As a result, our Programme for Government document talks of aiming to close the gap between the number of homes we have and the number we need.

However, our strategic approach to social housing has not changed for some time. We are facing record levels of housing stress. Our society continues to see major changes, while the public spending environment remains extremely tough, with many calls on resources. All this presents significant challenges for the housing sector.

So it is really important that we now pause and ask ourselves fundamental questions about social housing, and what it should look like as we go forward. In many ways, the future of social housing is a conversation about what kind of society we want to live in, and how we make that fair, open and dynamic. We need to be very strategic, just as much as we need to be focused on practical solutions.

What is the value of social housing to Northern Ireland? Is social housing reaching its full potential? Who is social housing for?

Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland was launched to consider questions like these. Our approach focused on new research, with an aim of helping to shape the future of social housing. And we also were determined that the people who live in it, work in it and are connected with it are to be central to this dialogue.

Over 230 people participated in our research through workshops, roundtable discussions and an online poll, 35 per cent of whom were tenants or residents. This report combines the results of what they told us, along with our desk review of the evidence.

Overall, in this debate, we were constantly told about the value of social housing. We were reminded of the major role it plays in improving public health, reducing poverty and building a strong economy. Social housing is central to achieving so many people's main aspirations.

However, we were also challenged by the areas where change is required. This report offers an ambitious series of recommendations to help ensure that social housing is fit for the future, taking account of what we heard from our research participants.

The recommendations include roles not just for central and local government, but also for the housing sector, including the Chartered Institute of Housing. Everybody needs to recognise that they have to be part of the change.

We hope that this report will continue to facilitate dialogue going forward, where areas of agreement are found and plans for change are developed. We all hope for the restoration of an Executive government but to maintain the momentum in the meantime we suggest the housing sector takes the conversation forward.

So we are at the beginning of a process. We need to develop further the thinking and provide robust challenge around the report's recommendations.

Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland could not have happened without the support of many people. Thank you to our sponsors, steering group members, participants in the research and everyone who helped out this year.

We hope you find this report useful and challenging. Above all we hope it plays a role in ensuring that social housing continues to be relevant and responsive to people's housing requirements well into the future.
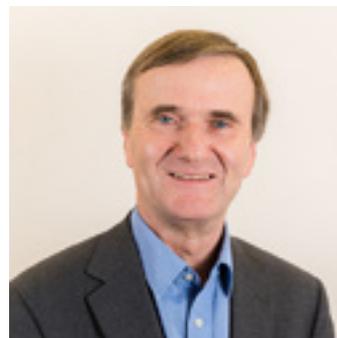
Will Haire CB,
chair of the *Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland* steering group

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Executive summary

Background

Northern Ireland remains a traditional housing market that primarily features social, private rented and owner-occupied housing. Broadly speaking, the way social housing is approached in the strategic policy setting has not changed significantly over the past 15 years. However, there have been major changes in the financial and public environment, including changes to social security policy, which has changed the position of social housing.

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) believes it is therefore timely to consider the role and purpose of social housing in today's society, to help inform thinking around the future direction of housing policy. This led CIH to launching the *Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland* project.

About the project

Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland followed two major approaches. First, it established a baseline by evidence review of the current role and purpose of social housing. Second, it undertook original research by gathering and analysing the views of 231 people in Northern Ireland on what they thought the role and purpose of social housing is, or should be. This was conducted through group interviews and via an online poll.

The people who participated in the research were tenants and residents; homeless service users; politicians; housing professionals; and associated professionals such as health and social care professionals, people working in homelessness, planners, architects and economists.

Evidence review and research findings

The evidence review demonstrates that social housing has played a significant role to date in a wide range of social outcomes, such as addressing poverty and improving health and economic outcomes. This is highly relevant to many sections of society including government departments, particularly in the context of Northern Ireland working to an outcomes-based Programme for Government.

The research findings reveal the top themes that people consider central to the role and purpose or nature of social housing going forward:

1. **Creating security and stability** – primarily in terms of a home for life, but also homes that are safe – was raised in 74 per cent of responses. Secure tenancies were seen as central to maintaining communities. Some people considered security of

tenure as an important factor in creating a sense of 'home' and 'ownership', as well as a foundation upon which tenants were able to build their lives.

2. Housing that is about **meeting need**, or is for people in need, was mentioned in 73 per cent of responses. However, here was no strong and consistent view about the definition of need. A number of people raised arguments that there is insufficient allocations priority at present for people in financial need such as those paying expensive market rents.

3. **Affordability** or housing that is low cost was raised by 69 per cent of participants. While people participating in the research did not explore the definition of affordability, several responses highlight the relationship between affordability and/or rent levels and: state assistance (capital subsidies, social security, welfare reform); the not-for-profit status of social landlords; and community stability.

4. **Building and maintaining a community** including through social and tenure mixing was mentioned by 63 per cent of participants. There was a good amount of commentary around what those communities should look like. 'Sustainable, mixed' communities that feature income, social and religious mixing were seen as desirable, including as a way of addressing the relationship of social housing to community segregation.

5. **Good quality housing**, including high standards and well-maintained homes, came up in 54 per cent of responses. Many people discussed what good quality means to them, including standards and design. In relation to design, differences in appearance between social and private housing was raised as contributing to a 'stigma' surrounding social housing.

6. Housing that is or should be **for everyone** was raised by 53 per cent of participants. There is a tension evident in the research between social housing being for people in need and social housing being for everyone. In some responses 'everyone' referred to universal access, with allocations still made on the basis of need. However other participants want to see a broader mix of tenants living in social housing.

7. Housing that **interacts with the private sector**, such as stepping in to fill gaps in the market or enabling home ownership through the house sales scheme (right to buy), came up in half of the responses. Social housing was seen as part of a housing system. Sometimes its nature and value was defined as 'what the private sector might not have' such as tenure security, affordability and quality. There was also commentary around the house sales scheme, on which opinion was very much split.

The future role and purpose of social housing

Based on the evidence review and research findings, CIH offers the following definition of the future role and purpose of social housing in Northern Ireland for government, the housing sector and related sectors to consider.

> *Social housing is good quality, genuinely affordable rented housing provided by registered not-for-profit social landlords with capital subsidy, which is available to everyone. It acts as a dynamic part of the housing system while offering tenancy security, building and maintaining mixed communities and enabling people to live independently. It is allocated in a fair and transparent way with priority established according to a common definition and understanding of need.*

Recommendations for change

The evidence gathered presents social housing in positive terms and CIH believes social housing must be championed as an essential service to society, but there are areas where change is required. We offer the following recommendations for change that we believe are required to ensure social housing fulfils the role and purpose outlined above.

I. Supply

Fundamentally, in order for social housing to be available to more people, its provision needs to be subsidised, more of it needs to be built and more existing stock needs to be retained. Nevertheless, even with a substantial increase in social housing supply, it will not be available for everyone on the waiting list. There is clearly a gap in the housing market for more rented housing options that are affordable for lower to middle income working households.

CIH recommends that central government:

(a) **commit to providing the investment in social housing required to reduce housing stress**

(b) **explore a mid-market rent housing option**

(c) **end the house sales scheme for social housing providers.**

CIH recommends that the housing sector:

(d) **work with government to explore a mid-market rent housing option.**

II. Mixing and stigma

Social housing and what it offers was valued by research participants. At the same time they do not want to see large, single-tenure social housing estates being built. Instead, mixed-tenure developments are valued as they are seen to support sustainable communities. They can also facilitate a mix of people from different community and income backgrounds.

We believe a 'whole system approach' to social housing is needed that also serves to tackle the stigma and false perceptions surrounding the tenure, which was also discussed by research participants. It is important in our view that social housing works better with the private sector generally, particularly given the greater supply and demand mismatch of social housing while the private sector is experiencing steady growth.

CIH recommends that local government:

(a) **facilitate mixed-tenure schemes through the planning system**

(b) **implement systems of planning obligations for social and affordable housing.**

CIH recommends that central government:

(c) **introduce a central developer contributions policy for social and affordable housing**

(d) **provide a level playing field between new social and private developments at community consultation stage.**

CIH recommends that the housing sector:

(e) **develop more mixed-tenure schemes**

(f) **ensure that housing staff are equipped with skills and competencies relating to good housing and tenancy management**

(g) **tackle stigma through a parity of tenure approach wherever possible**

(h) challenge negative perceptions through educating the public on the benefits of the regulated social housing sector.

CIH will:

(i) work with the housing sector to ensure that staff are equipped with skills and competencies relating to good housing and tenancy management

(j) engage with NI political parties to make the case for the value of social housing to society.

III. Eligibility and priority

The current points system was unpopular among research participants. However we believe that many of the issues raised will be addressed by the Department for Communities' proposed changes to allocations policy. Many people felt that greater allocations priority should be given to people with certain needs, such as care leavers and people in financial need. We believe there are acute disparities in how different types of need are determined by the selection scheme.

CIH recommends that central government:

(a) preserve universal access and adopt a common definition and understanding of need.

IV. Security and independence

CIH supports secure tenancies and their function as a suitable approach that plays a vital role in maintaining communities, enabling tenants to enjoy a sense of place without fear of unreasonable tenancy termination and the stress that this can induce.

At the same time, security of tenure does not have to mean remaining in the same property indefinitely – social housing providers require flexibility in pursuit of tenancy sustainment and good stock management, particularly in the context of welfare reform. We therefore support the principle of 'security of tenancy' to reflect the distinction.

Participants saw tenant participation as an important tool in sustaining communities. In our view, participation is also an important tool in enabling tenant independence through empowerment.

While private rented housing policy falls outside the scope of this report, many prospective social housing tenants including those on the waiting list continue to rent privately and, for some, the insecure nature of the private rented sector does not meet their needs.

CIH recommends that central government and the housing sector:

(a) protect security of tenancy within social housing but review relevant policy and practice to ensure there is flexibility to relocate for sound housing management reasons

(b) enable tenants to live independently, including through support where tenants want or need it, while avoiding paternalistic approaches

(c) promote tenant empowerment through participation.

CIH recommends that central government:

(d) increase security in private rented housing.

Introduction

Background

Northern Ireland remains a traditional housing market that primarily features social, private rented and owner-occupied housing. Broadly speaking, the way social housing is approached in the strategic policy setting has not changed significantly over the past 15 years.

However, there have been major changes in the financial and public environment, which has changed the position of social housing. In particular, there have been changes to social security policy, which is inextricably linked to housing policy, both in Northern Ireland and also in Great Britain. The latter has also experienced broader change in relation to housing, as well as the tragedy at Grenfell tower which has amplified the public dialogue surrounding social housing. This change context and dialogue has arguably elevated social housing in the public mind.

In Northern Ireland, the relationship of social housing to community segregation has been an issue of long-term concern and this issue continues to play an important and distinct role in Northern Ireland policy.

In this environment, Northern Ireland works to a new Programme for Government (PfG) that recognises the necessity to close the gap between housing need and supply. Its focus on outcomes is also highly relevant since housing clearly has a significant role to play in a wide range of social outcomes, such as addressing poverty and improving health and educational outcomes.

The Chartered Institute of Housing (CIH) believes it is therefore timely to consider the role and purpose of social housing in today's society, to help inform thinking around the future direction of housing policy. This led CIH to launching the *Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland* project. It is hoped to use this resulting document to engender a wider dialogue over the coming months to help develop areas of common agreement where development may prove possible.

The project combines original research and stakeholder engagement to explore fundamental questions about social housing and suggest recommendations for change.

The sponsors of the project are the Department for Communities (principal sponsor), Choice Housing, Clanmil Housing, Radius Housing and Triangle Housing.

Aims and objectives of the research

Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland aims to:

- stimulate a wide-ranging debate about the future of social housing
- understand and challenge perceptions of social housing
- influence and shape the direction of future housing policy.

This report will be of particular interest to:

- **The housing sector**. *Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland* represents an opportunity for housing providers to consider how their work is relevant and responsive to people's housing requirements.
- **Government departments**. The findings represent an opportunity to consider how the potential of social housing can be maximised to provide housing solutions. To this end it will concern multiple government departments, with the outcomes-based approach of the PfG underpinning cooperation between the departments for communities, health and infrastructure to deliver social housing.
- **Political parties**. The report offers an evidence base on the current role and purpose of social housing and explores collective experiences and views about its future, which will be of interest to political key decision makers.

The project

Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland was divided into three work streams.

Work stream one tested and gathered views on the role and purpose of social housing from the housing sector and other associated professions, including but not limited to homelessness, health and social care[1]. To address this, three primary questions were set. These questions also naturally explored sub-questions and related issues.

1. **What is social housing?** In seeking to define social housing we started with a working definition that we tested widely and expected to shift. This defined social housing as a function of three factors – need, quality and cost. The sub-questions and issues explored included who provides social housing and the relationship between subsidy, cost and quality.

[1]The full list of stakeholders is available at Appendix 2

2. **What does social housing do?** This question explored the social and economic value of social housing. The sub-questions and issues discussed included security of tenure, sustainable communities; social housing facilitating home-ownership through the house sales scheme (right to buy); the value for money and contribution to wider government objectives including health outcomes; equality issues and social/tenure mixing; the effect on poverty and homelessness levels; and the impact of support services on independent living.

3. **Who is social housing for?** In the context of demand for social housing exceeding supply and its consequential rationing as a scarce resource, this question discussed the rules governing prioritisation and access, as well as the demographic profile of tenants living in the tenure.

These questions also considered stakeholders' aspirations in relation to the issues – that is, what should social housing be; what should it do; and who should it be for?

Work stream two captured a broader range of views on the role the purpose of social housing – primarily the experiences and perceptions of people living in social housing, homelessness service users and political parties[1]. To do this, the questions outlined in work stream one were applied.

Work stream three developed an understanding of who is living in social housing and who is not, with the aim of improving understanding around the demographic profile of tenants living in the tenure and how this may change over time.

The results of these work streams have helped to inform the ideas and recommendations on what social housing should look like in the future and who will live in it.

[1]The full list of stakeholders is available at Appendix 2

Methodology and how the report is structured

The methodology adopted followed three main approaches:

1. An evidence review on each of the project work streams, the summary of which is set out under part 1 of the report. This review of evidence is intended to establish a baseline and includes quantitative and qualitative evidence from published literature, grey literature and legislation. It covers literature from Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Belgium. It explores the role and purpose of social housing primarily in the Northern Ireland context. The key questions addressed were:
   - What is social housing?
   - What does social housing do?
   - Who is social housing for? Who is currently living in social housing? Who isn't living in social housing?
   - What are the experiences and perceptions of people living in social housing?
   - What are the political parties' perceptions of social housing?

2. Information collection and analysis including:
   - for part 1 of the report:
     - o the demographic profile of tenants living in housing association homes via data provided by the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
     - o the way Housing Executive tenants feel about the general image of their area via data provided by the Housing Executive's Research Unit
   - for part 2 of the report:
     - o the views of individual people on the role and purpose of social housing submitted via an online poll, which was publicised through communications by CIH and project stakeholders as well as social media.

Although not part of the project scope, there was an aspiration to gather the views of the general public on social housing. Face-to-face street interviews are to be conducted for CIH and the Department of Communities by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Logistically it was not possible to conclude these interviews prior to this report's publication, so the findings will be produced as a supporting document at a later date.

3. Qualitative group interviews with stakeholders, the results of which are set out under part 2 of the report. The interviews were undertaken to gather their views on what social housing looks like now, as well as what it should look like in the future to help inform the project's recommendations. Stakeholders interviewed included housing and associated professionals, social housing tenants, homelessness service users and political parties. The key questions addressed were:
   - What is social housing? What should it be?
   - What does social housing do? What should it do?
   - Who is social housing for? Who should it be for?

In total, 231 people participated in the research via the various methods outlined above. Their anonymised views are reported in part 2 of the document, with their profession or interest attributed (as outlined above under work stream one and two) as well as the location where the interview was held where this maintained anonymity.

CIH also launched a project in England *Rethinking social housing*, which similarly combined original research and stakeholder engagement to explore fundamental questions about the future of social housing. We considered that divergence of approaches to social housing meant that evidence and views on the tenure would vary in the devolved nations. For this reason different but complementary projects were established to reflect local circumstances and contexts, with the added value of the additional projects being able to draw upon *Rethinking social housing* and its resources where appropriate. These additional projects are *Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland* and a wider reaching three-year project *Tyfu Tai Cymru*.

Rethinking social housing Northern Ireland was supported and informed by a steering group comprised of project sponsors and a group of leaders from across the sector. The steering group was independently chaired by Will Haire CB. Its role was to:

- inform thinking around the proposed key questions
- help identify opportunities to deliver specific activities
- provide feedback on the work streams, activities and related outputs, and
- help monitor progress on delivery of the project.

The members of the steering group were:

- Clark Bailie, chief executive, Northern Ireland Housing Executive
- Hazel Bell, chair, Choice Housing (sponsor)
- Deborah Brown, director of housing policy and performance, Department for Communities (principal sponsor)
- Justin Cartwright, policy and public affairs manager, Chartered Institute of Housing (staff)
- Ben Collins, chief executive, Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
- Paddy Gray, professor emeritus of housing, Ulster University

- Will Haire (chair)
- Deborah Howe, senior policy officer, Equality Commission
- Janet Hunter, director, Housing Rights
- Angus Kerr, director of planning policy, Department for Infrastructure
- Chris Matthews, director of mental health, disability and older people, Department of Health
- Seamus McAleavey, chief executive, Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action
- Clare McCarty, group chief executive, Clanmil Housing (sponsor)
- Nicola McCrudden, director for Northern Ireland, Chartered Institute of Housing (staff)
- Colm McDaid, chief executive, Supporting Communities
- John McLean, chief executive, Radius Housing (sponsor)
- Raymond Nicholl, director of housing and development, Triangle Housing (sponsor)
- Ronan O'Hara, strategic adviser (asset management), Strategic Investment Board
- Ricky Rowledge, chief executive, Council for the Homeless Northern Ireland.

Part 1: Evidence review

This section establishes a baseline by evidence review of the key questions: what is social housing, what does social housing do and who is social housing for? It considers information relating to the perceptions of Housing Executive tenants as well as Northern Ireland political parties relating to social housing. Some of the themes explored cut across these questions and are therefore reflected more than once.

1. What is social housing?

The definition, characteristics and role of social housing varies considerably not only between jurisdictions within the UK but also internationally. However Fitzpatrick and Stephens discusses social housing provision across Europe and summarises that social housing has "two essential characteristics", namely that "it is normally let at below market rates and is allocated by administrative process" (2007). It goes on to suggest that defining social housing is a function of three factors: eligibility, quality and cost.

Considering these three factors in the Northern Ireland context has implications for eligibility in particular. When considering eligibility or entitlement, Muir highlights the use of social housing in Northern Ireland to meet housing need in particular (2016).

1.1 Need

The Housing Selection Scheme Rules, which govern eligibility and allocations for all Housing Executive and registered housing association homes (except Co-Ownership Housing), observe the principle of 'universality' or universal access. That is, almost all Northern Ireland adults are able to apply for social housing regardless of their circumstances. Applicants must be aged 18 or over (there are exceptions for 16-17 year olds) and have a substantial connection to Northern Ireland, unless they are applicants who are homeless with full duty status. Most people who meet these criteria can be registered on the Common Waiting List ("the waiting list"). There are some exemptions including for example where there is a history of serious anti-social behaviour.

However, at the same time the rules give allocation priority to people in most need (the different categories of need are summarised under section 3). Meanwhile demand for social housing continues to exceed supply – the latest Northern Ireland Housing Statistics show there were 37,611 households on the waiting list in 2016-17, but only 7,672 households were allocated a home (DfC, 2017).

In the context of this supply and demand mismatch and notwithstanding universal access, the vast

majority of people allocated a social home are those in most need. Paris observes that a common selection scheme for both housing associations and the Housing Executive is "recognition that both types of social landlord are catering for broadly the same disadvantaged groups" (2001a: 174).

Therefore the implication concerning eligibility and the allocation by administrative process characterised by Fitzpatrick and Stephens is that social housing in Northern Ireland is ultimately for people who need it, rather than people who are eligible for it.

This is reflected in the Housing Executive's definition of social housing, which is rented housing that is provided by social landlords (i.e. the Housing Executive and housing associations) who aim to provide good quality, affordable housing (cost) to people in housing need (eligibility) (NIHE, 2018a).

1.2 Cost

Young et. al. is indicative of the aim of affordability when considering cost (2017: 10,22). While the authors highlight the difficulty and lack of consensus surrounding the definition of affordability and how it is measured, they observe "housing associations in … Northern Ireland … arguably have a greater incentive to review the affordability of rents due to their freedom to set rents. Whilst not conclusive, the impression formed from the interviews [in the research] is that social landlords … have historically 'kept an eye' on affordability".

As Young et. al. implies, there is no social rent setting policy in Northern Ireland. Housing associations have freedom to set their own rents and Housing Executive rent setting is the responsibility of the Minister for Communities.

The Northern Ireland Housing Statistics show that the Housing Executive average net weekly rent was £66.60 in 2015-16 while the housing association rent was £80.46 (DfC, 2017). This compares with an average market rent of £131 during the second half of 2015 (Ulster University, 2016) demonstrating housing let at below market rates.

These rents for 2015-16 represented 12 per cent of average earnings in Northern Ireland for the Housing Executive and 15 per cent for housing associations (Stephens et. al., 2018: 211).

The Housing Executive rent of £66.60 compares with the UK-wide average of £83.40 for public/local authority rents (DfC, 2017). The average local authority rent for 2015 in England was £88.15, which represents 14 per cent of average earnings

in England (Stephens et. al., 2018: 193). PwC infers a tension between the cost and quality of Housing Executive homes, with their "relatively low levels" of rent partly constraining the organisation from maintaining and investing in its homes (2011: 7-9).

Young et. al. also mentions this tension, stating that "the average housing association and Housing Executive rent for properties of different sizes remain lower than the comparable rent in most other parts of the UK … it is possible that the gap between the average Housing Executive and housing association rent may, at least in part, be consistent with differences in the quality and condition of properties in the two sectors … housing associations do appear to set higher rents for new build than for older housing stock" (2013: 58-59).

1.3 Quality

The Decent Homes Standard is the administrative standard for social housing and exceeds the statutory fitness standard, which is the minimum legal standard for house conditions in Northern Ireland (DSD, 2016). In addition to meeting the statutory minimum standards for housing, the House Condition Survey defines a decent home as one that "is in a reasonable state of repair … has reasonably modern facilities and services … [and] provides a reasonable degree of thermal comfort" (Brown et. al., 2018). The 2016 survey showed that 97 per cent of social homes were decent, compared with 94 per cent owner-occupied homes and 89 per cent of private rented and other homes.

There is also currently a departmental requirement for housing associations to build according to a number of design criteria under the Lifetime Homes Standard (DfC, 2018). These are aimed at making houses more adaptable over their lifespan, thereby reducing the costs typically associated with adaptations for disabilities.

Frey and Brown highlights how Housing Executive maintenance and improvement continues to drive conditions, but that it is constrained by funding (2016: 119,124). From 2001 "expenditure on improvements and on the repair and maintenance of the Housing Executive's own stock continued to be a very significant driver of housing conditions" but "financial constraints as well as the very considerable reduction in capital funding from the sale of Housing Executive homes meant that [the] target date [to meet the Decent Homes Standard] has had to be revised on several occasions".

1.4 History of housing in Northern Ireland

Considering supply, quality, affordability, equality and residualisation

Social housing in Northern Ireland is very much defined by historical circumstances and contexts. Therefore it is worthwhile to consider the changing nature of social housing over the 20th century. This also serves to offer context to what social housing does and who it is for today, which is discussed under sections 2 and 3.

As demonstrated in this section, the Northern Ireland housing story could be thought of as having five key experiences:

- direct and indirect state provision and support in social housing provision
- the role of social housing in raising house conditions through improvement programmes, new supply and slum clearance
- a focus on rents that are affordable as well as the relationship between rent levels and size/quality of the home
- the use of social housing structures and supporting policies to ensure fairness and equality in housing provision
- a move from housing the working classes to housing the non-working poor in general needs accommodation.

1883 – 1944

Prior to World War I, subsidised housing was provided in Ireland for the working classes. Fraser testifies that "…Ireland, prior to 1914, was the first and apparently the only, country to have a national policy of state housing based on centrally subsidised municipal dwellings and recommended design types … within the context of Europe and America before 1914, it is clear that Ireland had by far the most socialised system of working class house building" (1996: 292). O'Brien suggests that public housing was concentrated in rural areas, where "rural district councils in Ireland were encouraged by government grants to build cottages for farm labourers from 1883" (1953: 60).

Following the partition of Ireland in 1921, there were low levels of local authority building in Northern Ireland during the interwar period. This stands in contrast to the active building programme in England and Wales being undertaken at the time (ibid).

Murie puts this down to a lack of supporting laws and public funds in Northern Ireland, summarising that "after 1920 subsidies and legislation were not revised in parallel with those in England and Wales … subsidy to private building remained but little was done to encourage public provision" (2001: 25).

The relatively low levels of housing activity in Northern Ireland also included a lack of action on slum clearances. Over the 20 years to 1939, some 250,000 slum units were cleared in Great Britain while the problem remained "practically untouched" in Northern Ireland (O'Brien, 1953: 60).

As a result of the low level of housebuilding, 100,000 homes were needed "immediately to provide reasonable housing conditions" according to the first report on housing in Northern Ireland, which was published in 1944 by the Planning Advisory Board.

1945 – 1970

The centralised Northern Ireland Housing Trust was established in 1945 and tasked with providing 25,000 homes, with the remaining 75,000 to be delivered by local authorities and the private sector. All sectors, both public and private, benefitted from some form of state loan and/or subsidy.

While progress was slow to achieving these targets, in relative terms there was a step change in building activity. Over the 31 months to the end of 1946, only 232 Housing Trust and local authority homes had been provided. However by 1952 the annual figure was 5,719. Almost 37,000 new homes across the public and private sectors were delivered over this eight and a half year period (ibid: 67).

In its earliest days the Housing Trust focused on keeping rental costs low and at a level that "most workers could pay". In order to achieve this, the Trust built smaller houses than were being built in Great Britain at the time. O'Brien stated that a "visitor [from across the water] will … regard some of the houses as being smaller and more austere … this is the result of the Trust's deliberate policy to keep down the rents" (1952: 62,65).

Despite the progress on more low-cost housing being provided, compared with the Housing Trust local authorities were not particularly active in the provision of rental accommodation (Paris, 2001b: 14). Another issue in relation to local authorities was also developing that would shape the future of housing in Northern Ireland. There were reports of discrimination in the provision of housing by way of various building and allocation decisions being made by certain local authorities based on the religion of applicants.

As Murie summarises, "between 1945 and 1970 there is evidence that political parties used their council housing powers to gain political and electoral advantage. Discrimination cannot be shown to have existed in a persistent and systematic fashion, but there are sufficient examples of building decisions being based on electoral calculation and of individuals receiving preferable treatment because of their religio-political affiliations for the discrimination element in policy to be undeniable" (2001: 26).

The Cameron Commission, which investigated the circumstances surrounding the civil disturbances of 1968-69, concluded that housing grievances were a primary cause of the civil unrest. These included "inadequacy of housing provision by certain local authorities" and "unfair methods of allocation of houses built and let by such authorities" (Cameron, 1969).

1971 – 1999

As a result of Cameron, housing was removed from local authority responsibility and transferred to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, which was established in 1971 as "a single-purpose, efficient and stream-lined central housing authority" to replace the Housing Trust (British and NI governments, 1969). Registered housing associations were subsequently established under the *Housing (NI) Order 1976* – many were community-based while others were originally subsidiaries of English housing associations.

Mackay and Williamson write that in 1978 "a circular from the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland reinforced the view that the Housing Executive should concentrate on mainstream housing and that housing associations should confine their activities to relatively specialised fields" (2001: 113-114).

These specialised fields are listed as sheltered housing for elderly people; community-based housing renewal; accommodation for single people; supported housing for people with special needs and new types of tenure and equity sharing.

Over the 1970s and 1980s, social housing was not residual, discrimination was all but eliminated and its reputation was high. Murie cites relatively high expenditure levels as a contributing factor for its success, stating that "the importance of Northern Ireland in United Kingdom politics had again resulted in more innovative and generous treatment of housing than applied in the rest of the United Kingdom where privatisation and an anti-municipal stance resulted in a residual housing policy" (2001: 32).

Social housing also continued to raise house conditions through slum clearance and improvement programmes, which Murie affirms is evidenced by the greater fall in unfitness levels in areas where the Housing Executive was particularly active (ibid: 31).

'General needs' social homes housed a broad range of people including people in poverty and the affluent working classes. However, residualisation of people on low incomes began initially in the 1970s with the private sale of Housing Executive properties, where "those who remained in the sector were increasingly those who could not afford to buy" (ibid: 34).

Further residualisation took place by the late 1980s due to broader tenure restructuring – with the private sector experiencing higher investment in new build – and due to demographic change with an increasingly elderly tenant population.

This all resulted in "a move away from housing the affluent worker towards housing the non-working poor" in general needs accommodation, particularly that which was owned by the Housing Executive (ibid). By the mid 1990s, 44 per cent of association housing was general needs, 40 per cent was older people's accommodation and 16 per cent was 'special needs' (Mackay and Williamson, 2001: 114).

During the 1990s social housing experienced a number of major changes. New fairness and equality duties were placed on publicly funded bodies and designated public authorities, including housing associations.

These required social housing providers to address perceptions of potential discrimination, as well as actually promoting equal and fair treatment. The duties were placed by the Policy Appraisal and Fair Treatment Guidelines and subsequently section 75 of the *Northern Ireland Act 1998*.

Mackay and Williamson states that this equality agenda served to stimulate 'homogenisation' within social housing (2001: 121). Some housing associations considered and carried out mergers and name changes and they all began using the Common Waiting List, submerging "any hint of individuality that could be interpreted as favouring one section of the community at the expense of another".

All new social housing began to be built by housing associations as a result of the housing policy review of 1996 "Building on success: the way ahead", with the last Housing Executive home built in 2001/02.

This was a result of the introduction of the "mixed funding regime based on the system in England and Wales with the aims of increasing output for a given amount of public funding, of improving value for money and encouraging associations to bear more of the risk of development" (Mackay and Williamson, 2001: 114).

The Northern Ireland housing system highlighted above was unique in many ways in the UK throughout the 20th century. Meanwhile – until 1999 – there was an identifiable housing system in Britain which has since diverged.

Perry and Stephens reports that housing policy in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland has maintained and/or strengthened the "safety net" approach whilst England has "questioned" it (2018: 34).

This is made more problematic in all nations as control over welfare policy (inextricably linked to housing policy) has not been devolved to the same degree. While social security policy is devolved in Northern Ireland, many regulations mirror the GB ones for reasons of parity. Muir explains that this parity agreement is "to deliver the same system in recognition of the common personal taxation provisions that exist across the UK" (2016: 19).

2. What does social housing do? What is its social and economic value?

2.1 Poverty reduction

Social housing reduces poverty by leaving tenants with more disposable income.

Low rents are important for reducing poverty. Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) highlights that "housing can mitigate or exacerbate the impact of poverty on people's lives" (2013).

Poverty and low incomes act as barriers to people accessing and sustaining affordable housing options. The JRF study analyses a decade of UK evidence to explore the relationship between housing circumstances and the experience of poverty; the relative importance of housing costs and other factors in the impact of poverty on people's lives; and the role of housing in enabling people to take up employment and increase income from work. It found that good quality low cost housing can break the link between poor housing conditions and poverty in the UK.

In one example, JRF shows Northern Ireland housing costs cause poverty levels to increase by just one per cent – this compares with 11 per cent in London (2016).

Brown et. al. finds that just ten per cent of social housing stock features fuel poverty – where a household has to spend more than ten per cent of its income on fuel use to maintain an acceptable temperature level – compared with 23 per cent owner-occupied and 26 per cent private rented/other (2018). This reflects "in part the much newer stock managed by housing associations" as well as "the investment in energy efficiency measures in Housing Executive accommodation over the decade 2006 to 2016" (ibid: 60). It also reflects the fact that private dwellings are most likely to have oil central heating (ibid: 75).

Gregory et. al. investigates the ways in which social housing can prevent poverty and develops new policy to help it continue to do so. The report makes a case for a new approach to social housing, calling for a "return to the principles that drove early post-war public housing" based on Bevan's "vision of a 'living tapestry' of a wide range of different types of households in the same tenure". It goes on to argue that "such a system would cross tenure boundaries to respond to the social needs, rights and duties of all households in a good society", with diversity historically being a hallmark of social housing (2016).

2.2 Independence and support

Social housing with support services improves the lives of people with specialist and complex needs, and enables them to live independently.

Accommodation based services enable people to live independently – this is demonstrated in RSM McClure Watters which evaluates services funded by the Supporting People (SP) programme (2015). Acheson highlights the "continuing dominance of community-care related expenditure" in SP including in relation to mental health; physical, sensory and learning disabilities; and older people (2016).

Boyle and Palmer reports that there are notable improvements in the lives of people resettled from long stay hospitals to supported housing schemes (2017).

According to an evaluation also by Boyle and Palmer, Housing First service users report better health and social networks, while there is a reduction in levels of alcohol use and in the use of PSNI and emergency services (2016). For every £1 invested in the service, there is a social value of £15 returned. 19 of 24 service users in the study maintained their tenancy.

2.3 Impact on health and the economy

Social housing contributes to wider government objectives and saves money in other areas of public spending such as health.

NICVA estimates that every £1 spent on Supporting People – which provides some of the services highlighted under section 2.2 – saves the public purse £1.90 (2015).

Regarding health, BRE estimates that reducing category one hazards (as measured by the Housing Health and Safety Rating System) in Northern Ireland's housing stock would save the NHS £33 million per annum and save society £82 million (2012).

BRE highlights a particular impact for older households – 24 per cent of the 75 years and older group live in homes with category 1 hazards compared with 18 per cent of all households. Older people are the most vulnerable with respect to falls associated with steps and stairs, falls on the level and excess cold.

While the BRE report is cross tenure, Brown et. al. shows that 96 per cent of social housing has no hazards, compared with 92 per cent in private rented/

other and 91 per cent of owner-occupied homes (2018). Therefore it can be said social housing makes a greater contribution to reducing pressure on the NHS through its higher quality accommodation.

Regarding jobs and the economy, Foden et. al. estimates that £1.15 billion of economic output was supported by social housing in 2012/13; £460 million gross value added (GVA) was created for the Northern Ireland economy (1.4 per cent of total GVA); and 15,436 full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs were associated with Northern Ireland's social housing (2015).

2.4 Addressing homelessness

Social housing plays an important role in addressing homelessness.

The *Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988* places a duty on the Housing Executive to provide accommodation for certain groups who are homeless.

Boyle and Pleace summarises that "housing remains fundamental to delivering an end to homelessness. Ensuring that adequate, affordable housing with reasonable security of tenure is available is essential to delivering effective homelessness prevention and reducing the extent and duration of homelessness" (2017).

Fitzpatrick and Stephens is an international comparative study in which homelessness and social housing experts across 11 countries were surveyed (2007). It states that "the underlying 'structural' factor usually said to be driving homelessness is a shortage of affordable rented accommodation".

Pleace, Teller and Quilgars explores "the role of social housing providers in the fight against homelessness and severe housing exclusion at a moment when the social housing sector is under pressure to clarify and justify its mission in terms of public interest" (2011).

2.5 Conflict management and mixed-religion neighbourhoods

Social housing allows engineering of religious mixing and contributes towards equality issues.

Looking at housing in the context of conflict in Northern Ireland, Murtagh states that "housing-led regeneration is central to any progressive agenda on conflict management at both the local and macro-political levels" (2016: 165).

In the case of social housing during the Troubles, Murtagh reports that "not a single case of discrimination was upheld against the Housing Executive as 'colour-blind' rationalised policies and systems legitimised the new institution and more importantly, effectively removed housing from

the centre to the margins of the conflict. … Social housing, perhaps more than any other apparatus of the state, was effectively mobilised as a stabiliser to manage the conflict in more inclusive and less volatile ways" (ibid: 168).

In relation to current housing policy facilitating religious mix, he goes on: "the Shared Community theme [of the Together Building a United Community (TBUC) strategy] resulted in a joint programme between the Department for Social Development (DSD), the Housing Executive and housing associations to create ten purpose-built mixed-religion neighbourhoods. … the use of fiscal instruments, managing allocations within the constraints of the selection scheme and designing intensive community support arrangements represent a serious attempt to deliberately produce new mixed-religion neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland." (ibid: 170-171)

2.6 Tenure security

Social housing creates established communities including through security of tenure.

The *Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1983* provides that social landlords are only permitted to end a tenancy on limited grounds.

Sixty per cent of Housing Executive tenants have been tenants of the organisation for more than 15 years, according to the Housing Executive (2013).

Though in the case of supported housing, Acheson observes "although formally legally licensees of the HA, [one mental health scheme's] residents' continuing occupancy is in practice subject to case management review and psychiatric assessment" (2016: 233).

2.7 Facilitating home-ownership

Social housing allows eligible tenants to buy their rented home.

Secure tenants of the Housing Executive and housing associations who have a minimum of five years' tenure have the right to buy their rented home at a discount (NIHE, 2016a). This is subject to certain exemptions, such as for certain property types. The discount ranges from 20 per cent, to the lower of 60 per cent or £24,000, depending on the length of tenancy.

NIHE reports that the organisation has sold approximately 119,000 dwellings to sitting tenants since 1979 (2015).

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3. Who is social housing for?

3.1 Everyone

Social housing is for everyone.

The Housing Selection Scheme Rules state that to apply for social housing, people generally need only be aged 18 or over (there are exceptions for 16 or over) and have a substantial connection with Northern Ireland.

The universal declaration of human rights article 25 states that "everyone has the right to a standard of living for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family including….housing".

Fitzpatrick, Bengtsson and Watts distinguishes between a 'legal' right to housing (i.e. an individual's formal right to a dwelling of a certain standard) and 'programmatic rights' (i.e. what general housing standard members of a certain society can legitimately expect) (2014).

Fitzpatrick and Watts also explores this idea, and asks whether a rights-based approach to housing delivers what we expect it to in practice (2010). It asks whether 'programmatic' citizenship rights and positive legal rights are effective in tackling homelessness, and whether the idea of universal human rights is applicable.

3.2 People in need

In relation to rationing a limited resource, social housing is for people in most need.

Demand for social housing continues to exceed supply – the Northern Ireland Housing Statistics show there were 37,611 households on the waiting list in 2016-17 against 7,672 allocations (DfC, 2017). The Housing Selection Scheme Rules give allocation priority to those in need, so in the context of the supply and demand mismatch social housing allocations are made to those in most need.

The Rules define the different categories of need as cases of: intimidation; homelessness; sharing; dependent children; overcrowding; lack of amenities and disrepair; time in housing need; and poor health and social wellbeing.

Cowan and Marsh observes the tension between needs-based allocations and criteria based on suitability and choice (2006). Needs-based allocations lead to residualisation and unpopularity of social housing, and it means that risk management is a recurrent theme of housing management practice.

Social housing is for people who are homeless.

The *Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 1988* states that if the Housing Executive is satisfied that eligible homeless applicants have 'priority need' and have not become homeless intentionally, it has a duty to offer them accommodation (and offer temporary accommodation beforehand) as 'full duty applicants' (FDA).

As a group in need, households who are homeless are afforded a high priority under the Housing Selection Scheme Rules (70 points).

The Northern Ireland Housing Statistics show that 11,889 households presenting as homeless in 2016-17 were accepted as FDAs. Of those households, 1,842 were discharged. (DfC, 2017)

Discharging primarily involves re-housing the applicant in the social sector. It is not a requirement for the Housing Executive to discharge applicants using only social housing, but to date it has been its custom and practice to do so (although this is currently under review). Therefore 1,842 discharged households are at least in part comparable against the 7,672 overall allocations to social housing mentioned above.

Discharging is also possible through re-housing in the private sector or the applicant re-housing him/herself.

Social housing is for people with specialist needs including mental health needs, learning disabilities and dementia.

Supported housing with care and dementia friendly schemes operate outside the Housing Selection Scheme and is normally accessed though social services. Acheson gives an example of one scheme with a Supporting People provider and housing association partner where "control over who lives in the scheme remains entirely with the Health and Social Care Trust" (2016: 233).

It goes on: "Places are only available to people who have previously been long-stay hospital patients and they are identified through a care planning and care management process that is professionally and administratively led by the trust.

"Only after they are selected are they then placed on the housing waiting list so they can qualify."

3.3 Older people

The most common age group living in social housing is 60 and over.

The House Condition Survey 2016 shows household reference persons aged 60 and over constitute 38 per cent of social housing, while 24 per cent are aged between 25 and 39 (Brown et. al., 2018). Data submitted to us by NIFHA shows that 39 per cent of allocations to housing association homes went to people aged between 25 and 44 over the five years to 2016/17, with 28 per cent to people aged 60 plus. This paints a partial picture of younger people now joining an overall tenant profile that is older.

These profiles may change over time given the ageing population – NISRA 2016-2041 population projections estimate "a 65.1 per cent increase in the number of people aged 65 and over, rising from 297,800 people to 491,700".

Increasingly older people are being allocated social housing as homelessness applicants. The Housing Executive states that "while overall [homelessness] presentations have dropped, acceptances have increased. An ageing population coupled with increasing numbers of clients with complex needs

such as mental health problems, addictions etc. means that more households are meeting the 'priority need' test than previously" (2017: 7).

Furthermore Paris reveals that the highest proportion (71 per cent) of 50 – 70 year olds by tenure who thought their current accommodation would continue to meet their needs in the longer term rented from a housing association (though numbers were quite low) (2013).

3.4 People on lower incomes

Most people who live in social housing are economically inactive or unemployed.

A high proportion of people living in social housing are reliant on welfare benefits. The 2016 House Condition Survey shows that 75 per cent of household reference persons in social housing were unemployed or economically inactive. The remaining proportion was working full-time or part-time (Brown et. al, 2018). Similarly, the Housing Executive's Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey 2016 revealed 79 per cent of its tenants were unemployed or economically inactive (NIHE, 2016b).

4. Perceptions of social housing

While the perceptions of tenants and residents in social housing developments are discussed throughout part 2, there is also a small amount of literature that helps to further explore the views of Housing Executive tenants and political parties.

4.1 Housing Executive tenants

Draft data submitted to us by the Housing Executive offers a window into the views of their 85,000 tenants on their neighbourhood, as well as future intentions relating to their tenure with the Housing Executive (forthcoming 2018b).

When asked "overall, how satisfied/dissatisfied are you with your neighbourhood as a place to live?" 91 per cent of respondents – representative of almost 78,000 tenants – said they were satisfied with their neighbourhood. Just five per cent said they were dissatisfied, with four per cent responding 'neither'.

Furthermore, when asked "how do you feel about the general image of the area, if friends and relatives come to visit?" 77 per cent responded that they were proud of its general image. Nineteen per cent had no strong feelings and just four per cent said they were ashamed.

Ninety five per cent stated that they intended to remain a Housing Executive tenant for the next five years. Three per cent intended to move to owner-occupation and less than one per cent intended to move to another rented housing provider. The remaining two per cent stated 'other/don't know'.

The above statistics suggest high levels of satisfaction among Housing Executive tenants in relation to their social housing estate and their tenure with the social landlord.

4.2 Political parties

Local parties' manifestos for the most recent NI Assembly election in March 2017 all contained commitments in relation to social housing. This serves as a helpful litmus test of parties' perceptions and attitudes towards the tenure.

The manifestos demonstrate a strong consensus in favour of social housing. Most of them make ambitious commitments on the number of new social homes, while some delve deeper into the themes surrounding social housing and offer points of action for change.

This consensus was also strongly reflected in the participation of party representatives in this research – many of their quotes are indicative of this in part 2.

For example, of the parties interviewed (the largest six by MLA count), almost all reiterated their aspiration to build more social housing and stated that rents should be affordable. All voiced support for the security that social housing offers to tenants; one party representative suggested that tenure security is "the biggest point in relation to what social housing does".

All representatives supported social housing meeting people's needs, albeit almost all variously suggested that certain needs are not being catered for at present – this is discussed further in section 5.1 which follows.

Part 2: Research findings

This section summarises the themes and views expressed by people in the individual surveys and at the CIH roundtable and workshop discussions.

5. What is social housing? What should social housing be?

Social housing in Northern Ireland can be defined as good quality, affordable rented housing provided by the Housing Executive and housing associations to people in housing need.

When we asked people for their views on what they thought social housing was or should be as part of the roundtables, workshops and online poll, the top themes were:

- Housing that is about **meeting need**, which was mentioned in 73 per cent of responses
- **Affordable** or low-cost housing was raised by 69 per cent of participants
- **Good quality** housing, including high standards and well-maintained homes, came up in 54 per cent of responses.

5.1 Meeting need

There was a strong sense that people believe social housing should fundamentally be housing that meets a need. However, there was no strong and consistent view about the definition of need. It is clear that need means different things to different people.

Section 3.2 outlines some of the needs that prioritise people for housing allocations, which could be summarised as needs arising from social issues and physical house conditions. Some of these needs were variously supported during the roundtables and workshops:

"Social housing is not a commodity. It is designed to meet a particular need – not just for sake of it – with a mixture of diverse people i.e. disability, mental health and addiction." – Homelessness worker (voluntary sector), Derry/Londonderry

"Social housing is housing that provides specified support for different needs – mental health, health and age." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

Section 1.4 highlights how social housing has increasingly met complex and multiple needs over the years, rather than need more broadly. Comments from some respondents observed this shift while raising housing supply as both a contributing factor and the reason why social housing must now focus on meeting need. Others mentioned the ideal of including broader groups while noting supply as a barrier:

"Social housing is housing for people in need. Due to current supply it needs to focus on need." – Housing professional, Belfast

"Social housing isn't a choice for everyone, but it should be an option for everyone. However you can't give up objective need. If you had the required supply, there wouldn't be a need to ration it." – Member of the legislative assembly (MLA)

In relation to access, a number of people raised arguments that there is insufficient priority for financial need. This is evidenced by comments such as those below.

> "Social housing is for the vulnerable, homeless, special needs, elderly. However sometimes people with low needs but who have low income are excluded." – Homelessness worker, Derry/Londonderry

> "Rural areas feature a low wage, fluctuating economy. Some people get bouts of work, some are seasonal workers, and some are self-employed with varying levels of income, which erects barriers to these groups accessing housing as a market and sustaining a home. Social housing is a secure and affordable option to address the housing need of these groups." – Tenant/resident, Cookstown

> "Social housing should be based on financial and social need. Somebody's financial situation could change tomorrow and they need social housing. There's a need created where there wasn't one before. It's financial – it's about affordability, it's down to money." – MLA

> "Social housing is provided with state assistance – there is some level of government subsidy. It is housing provided at an affordable level." – Housing professional, Belfast

> "Affordability of social housing and the not-for-profit status of its providers are important. Social housing is housing that is provided without the profit motive." – Political representative

> "A rural area may have reached its development limit or there is otherwise no further social housing provision. In this case there is little choice but to move – for people who need affordable and secure housing. Otherwise, people may remain and pay market rent that is unaffordable for their circumstances." – Tenant/resident, Cookstown

> "The amount of state funding determines social rents. Welfare reform is taking money away from help with housing costs, impacting on affordability." – Housing professional, Belfast

5.2 Affordable

Sixty nine per cent of people considered social housing fundamentally as housing that is affordable or low cost. As section 1.2 discusses, there can be a lack of consensus surrounding the definition of affordability. While people did not explore the definition of affordability, several responses highlight the relationship between affordability and/or rent levels and:

- state assistance (capital subsidies, social security, welfare reform)
- the not-for-profit status of social landlords
- community stability, particularly in rural areas.

Participants' responses included:

5.3 Good quality

Fifty four per cent of people said that social housing is good quality. Many people discussed what good quality means to them.

However, further to the point about quality in relation to design, differences in appearance between social and private housing was also raised as contributing to the 'stigma' surrounding social housing (discussed further in section 7.3).

"Social housing is excellent quality, better than some owner occupied homes." – MLA

"Social housing should drive the debate on housing design, construction and regeneration. It is principled and innovative – a good quality, market leading sector showing the way and informing the debate about housing design." – Architect, Belfast

"Social housing is about standards. Private landlords aren't providing the standards that social housing providers do. There's no point putting people into houses that aren't up to scratch in relation to quality standards, where there is no investment and houses haven't been maintained for a long period of time." – MLA

"Where I live, Housing Executive houses aren't tenure blind and are easily identifiable, and there is a stigma or label attached which isn't good." – MLA

"NI is known for its sectarian segregation but in fact its social segregation and attitudes are just as bad and problematic. In large part this is because social housing was built in spatial ghettos and was built in a particular form and visual appearance that looks different from other housing." – Architect, Co. Antrim

"Developers should have to build a certain percentage of social homes in new developments as they do in Ireland and Britain. They should build them to the same standard and quality as the private homes, for a tenure blind finish. This would help to stop the stigma associated with social housing." – Homeless service user, Belfast

6. What does social housing do? What should it do?

Social housing in Northern Ireland has wide reaching social and economic value, much of which is outlined in section 2. It does many things, from poverty reduction to a positive impact on social and financial aspects of public health and the economy.

The top themes that people participating in the research considered central to the contribution of social housing were:

- **Creates security and stability** – primarily in terms of a home for life, but also homes that are safe – was raised in 74 per cent of responses
- **Builds and maintains a community** including through social and tenure mixing was mentioned by 63 per cent of participants
- **Interacts with the private sector**, such as stepping in to fill gaps in the market or enabling home ownership through the house sales scheme (right to buy), came up in half of the responses
- **Enables independence and support** was mentioned by 41 per cent.

6.1 Creates security and stability

The theme that featured most strongly (both for this section and for the whole research) having been mentioned in almost three quarters of responses was that social housing provides stability and security for people, primarily by way of secure tenancies.

Secure tenancies were seen as central to maintaining communities, a point which is explored further under section 6.2:

"Social housing should provide stability and hope for people. Changing accommodation is stressful, where short leases are involved."
– Planner, Derry/Londonderry

"The role and purpose of social housing should be to sustain people and populations in areas where they want to live, through security of tenure, rents that are affordable and house sizes that can facilitate family growth." – Tenant/resident, Cookstown

Some people considered security of tenure as an important factor in creating a sense of 'home' and 'ownership':

"It's very important to build sustainable communities and not just housing. Security of tenure in social housing plays a role in doing this, as residents settle rather than leaving which creates turnover."
– Tenant/resident, Belfast

"A 'house' could be temporary, but social housing should offer somewhere you feel is home. The things that make a house into a home are contents, security, pride and a sense of ownership, if not literal ownership. That's a home. When you rent from a private landlord he or she can come along and say I want you out in a month's time. But having your own social home – you've got rights and it's seen as home for life."
– Homeless service user, Belfast

Security as a foundation upon which tenants were able to build their lives was a concept that was explored by many:

> "When people are in social housing they feel that it is their home. They can make alterations to it. When people in communities rent privately there is fear that they don't have security of tenure." – MLA

> "The security that social housing offers is important. If you have a secure tenancy, you can plan your life." – Political representative

> "Security of tenure creates a sense of ownership with strong communities and families – people are able to put down roots. In the private rented sector there is fear of being given 28 days' notice to quit. Private landlords are unregulated and people are afraid to complain in case they are evicted." – Housing professional, Dungannon

> "Social housing ensures tenure security – sustainable homes are important for all tenants so they can make life choices. A home is central to stable communities, jobs and infrastructure." – Housing professional, Derry/Londonderry

The security of tenure that social housing offers as expressly distinct from the private rented sector was a common theme. There was a recurring view that private rented housing should offer greater security of tenure.

> "Social housing provides security and peace of mind. It is a key starting point to help tenants address many wider societal issues such as poverty, health, addiction, abuse, protection of children and vulnerable adults and access to employment/training." – Private tenant, Co. Antrim

> "More people wouldn't mind living in it with enhanced security. Private landlords should be forced to take people in receipt of housing benefit." – Homeless service user, Belfast

> "The sector is unattractive where tenants have experienced being given 28 days' notice to quit. Greater security of tenure is needed." – MLA

People generally did not support the concept of social housing as a 'transitional' tenure due to the adverse impact it would have on sustainable communities, as well as people who are vulnerable and older people. It was furthermore recognised that partnership working between social landlords and other agencies was required to maintain tenancies for vulnerable groups:

"Social housing as a transitional tenure is quite a scary concept. Where would people go? It would change the whole concept of community. There'd be such a turnover it would be hard to maintain the community. Some people with complex needs need security too. Should people who are homeless come into an insecure tenancy? Should older people, in sheltered housing?" – Tenant/resident, Ballymena

"Social housing offers security of tenure, but social landlords must work alongside agencies to maintain accommodation." – Health and social care professional, Dungannon

"Social housing is not a 'stepping stone' – it's not about living in a social home until you can afford to buy." – MLA

However, a small number of people explored 'conditionality' around security of tenure, such as probationary periods, means-testing, the way changes of circumstances should be treated, and helping tenants to increase economic activity as an incentive for home ownership:

"Social housing should only be secure for as long as the property is suitable for tenants – i.e. if circumstances change for those who need a wheelchair bungalow and they no longer need this type of accommodation, they should be moved to alternative accommodation and the wheelchair property re-allocated." – Housing professional, Dungannon

"Social housing should encourage people to move on to other tenures." – Housing professional, Derry/Londonderry

"Social housing gives people a foot onto the housing ladder while also enabling people to put down roots. People get their house, it's secure – you can't just keep moving about. People improve their employment situation and then they move on. So we agree with security, but then there is a fine line between security and dependency, which isn't good. That's where support comes in, building someone up to help them improve their employment situation. Should more people exit NIHE houses to move up the ladder? There is no incentive for that at present." – MLA

6.2 Builds and maintains communities

Almost two thirds of responses mentioned that social housing creates communities.

"Social housing is about soul not soil. It's about creating communities not just houses." – Private tenant, Co. Antrim

"Social housing creates a sense of community – knowing your neighbour." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"We need to ensure tenants of all ages are together and that suitable community amenities/facilities and supports are also in place which builds community cohesion. Those who are working should be included in social housing." – Housing professional, Derry/Londonderry

Furthermore there was a good amount of commentary around what those communities should look like. 'Sustainable, mixed' communities that feature income, social and religious mixing were seen as desirable.

There was a strong sense that people want the residualisation of social housing (outlined in section 1.4) wound back, as well as the spatial separation of different groups in housing addressed. People generally want to see higher levels of community cohesion with diverse groups living together, such as working and non-working households, and lone parent and couple parent families. People saw mixed-tenure, mixed use developments and developer contributions as ways of achieving this:

"I think social housing can engender more sense of community than private developments, especially where mixed tenant types live together. Therefore social housing should not just be about bricks and mortar but about building communities where people can support each other and enjoy good community infrastructure." – Health and social care professional, Co. Antrim

"The role of social housing should be social enterprises providing affordable, accessible housing for the whole community. It shouldn't matter what your income is. A sustainable community isn't an exclusive community, whether in relation to income mix or social mix." – MLA

"Mixed-tenure and mixed use developments, the private sector and pepper-potting have a role to play in building sustainable communities, particularly in rural areas. They also help to address anti-social behaviour. At the moment we're creating ghettos which people don't want." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"There needs to be balanced communities – a mix of tenures, sizes of units, workers and non-workers, ages. The design of social housing including layouts needs more emphasis, rather than just quantum of social housing. We do need to define and meet the 'need' – but to do it better and more sustainably for the long-term, not with big estates of social housing." – Housing professional, Derry/Londonderry

"Developer contributions and more mixed-tenure developments would help to address residualisation – these would have an element of social housing, plus some private rented housing, plus some affordable homes. We should try and balance communities." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"In the context of Northern Ireland, social housing should be a vehicle for tackling segregation of all forms – sectarian, political, religious, racial, ethnic, economic etc." – Housing professional, Belfast

People also supported mixed/'shared' housing as a way of having more people from the different backgrounds living together:

"Social housing should take stock of religious segregation in its estates, and think beyond traditional segregation to include black and minority ethnic communities." – MLA

"Social housing should make a positive contribution to creating diverse, integrated and safe communities and wider society. It plays a significant role in ending housing segregation." – Housing professional, Belfast

However there was also acknowledgement that mixing – both in social and religious terms – can be difficult to achieve and must be done correctly:

"It's about having a healthy mix of housing tenures and trying to integrate communities. It's very stark that we have shared neighbourhoods in middle class and affluent areas, while apart from a few exceptions social housing remains segregated." – MLA

"Social housing should be shared housing in the context of religious integration. But it has to be done correctly. Housing management has to be about community development. The best community cohesion work is done on the quiet where integration is encouraged but not forced. The problem with the 'shared housing' agenda is it started at the top. The closer to the ground you get, the less likely people are to support it, although this is changing. But this approach is finance led and prestige led with the unintended consequence of tokenism with no wrap around structures." – Political representative

"Social housing should not just be built to reflect religious segregation. It has the potential to take away barriers while providing what society needs – shared housing builds shared communities. We should be moving towards sustainability, rather than the duplication of public services which is created by division." – MLA

When exploring the reasons for residualisation and segregation, people pointed variously to the lower levels of supply than were achieved historically, the allocations system and the Troubles:

"Social housing should help promote sustainable communities and increase social mix (income, tenure) – to do so don't look at allocations, look at developer contributions. I think a lot of the responses are constrained by the lack of supply of social housing." – Housing professional, Belfast

"Allocations have caused difficulty in terms of settled communities with priority given to some who have background of ASB, drugs etc." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"The social housing we have today is and was influenced by conflict, the Troubles, and political decisions taken around housing. There are sectarian, religious, political and security aspects to it. Ghettos were created in a way – we are dealing with the outcomes of decisions made by people much older than us." – Homeless service user, Belfast

Maintaining communities through different types of housing, suitable services/amenities, community development and regeneration were recurrent themes. Tenure security was also seen as a tool in furthering community sustainability as outlined in section 6.1.

"Most of all social housing is about creating and promoting communities. This includes access to services. There's no point in 'settlements' – building social housing away from amenities, schools, and all the other things that society provides. We need communities to interact and thrive with one another." – MLA

"Social housing can (but doesn't always) add to the creation or sense of community but it's a starting point. It must also include amenities and conveniences and not be isolated." – Associated professional, Co. Antrim

Tenant participation was seen as important to the role of social housing in creating communities:

"Social housing plays a role in creating communities and it facilitates resident and tenant involvement, which is important. Fundamentally, if you want to build or manage social homes, you should speak with people about them. Tenants have a vested interest in their properties." – Homeless service user, Belfast

"Fundamentally social housing is a community and the community is there to support you. It also facilitates tenant involvement, offering tenants a voice. There is more to do on the road to developing tenant involvement, from scrutiny panels to mutuals and co-operatives as good participative structures. But there is also fear on the road – the concept that tenants would be in charge in future is perhaps perceived to be frightening for some." – Tenant/resident, Ballymena

Some people also raised the potential impact of welfare reform on community sustainability:

"The importance of community is evidenced by the bedroom tax. It's mitigated in Northern Ireland and rightly so, but beyond 2020 people may have nowhere to go and they are frightened. If they do move to downsize you're taking people out of communities and destroying the community. A more holistic approach to stock management is needed." – MLA

6.3 Interacts with the private sector

Half of participants stated or implied that social housing was part of a housing system and this was seen as central to the social and economic functioning of both social housing and the wider housing market.

Often in the interviews people defined the nature and value of social housing as 'what the private sector might not have'. Some of these things have already been discussed, such as tenure security, affordability and quality.

However, there was also a sense that the interaction between sectors was much more fundamental. People observed that social housing provides homes that 'otherwise wouldn't be available', for those who 'can't afford or access private renting/buying'.

"Social housing in my view is something that should provide for those without the fiscal means to purchase in the main." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"Social housing provides an alternative to home ownership and private rented." – Housing professional, Belfast

Others suggested that the housing market as a whole cannot function properly in the absence of social housing, or that social housing must take stock of what is happening in the wider market, demonstrating interdependency:

"Social housing should be a dynamic part of the housing system, stepping in where the market has failed and changing depending on what is happening in other tenures – much of the housing system is driven by what's happening in the owner occupation market." – Political representative

"Social housing is a safety valve for an acute crisis. The housing market can only work with a strong social base that offers affordable and secure housing options for low-income groups. If it brings the money out of private rental, it can alter rent yields and people hit loan-to-value (LTV) ratios that they can't justify as an investment anymore, shifting private rentals to home ownership and releasing the pressure in the market." – Economist, Belfast

That social housing should be a tenure of choice in the housing system, rather than one of last resort, was also raised:

"Social housing needs to be presented as an attractive and positive choice rather than an option of last resort." – Housing professional, Co. Antrim

"People should have a choice of tenure including aspiring to own their own home because of stability that brings. It's not possible as a society to say everyone has the right to social housing. You couldn't build and meet that demand. But social housing shouldn't be a 'race to the bottom' i.e. poor housing for poor people in segregated communities. It's not a hierarchy, it's a suite of options." – MLA

"Depending on means testing a right to buy should be incorporated." – Housing professional, Derry/Londonderry

Some people are fundamentally opposed to the policy because social homes are lost and not replaced, particularly at a time when demand for social housing continues to outstrip supply:

"We are totally and unanimously opposed to the right to buy. Social housing is for rent and should not be sold, allowing stock to wither away. Social housing providers lose control of tackling anti-social behaviour relating to homes that have been sold under right to buy in estates. Social rent is a pillar, a marvellous model we have in Northern Ireland, which does take care of people generally. It's a whole support package for people on the waiting list. Why would you sell that off?" – Tenant/resident, Belfast

There was commentary around the house sales scheme (right to buy) – which is covered in section 2.7 – as the tool enabling access to home ownership through social housing. Opinion was very much split on the scheme, although it was generally recognised that it isn't a black and white issue.

"Right to buy is a double edged sword – scrapping it entirely would retain more social homes but might take away the incentive for people to live in social housing in their rural community if they aspire to buy in future." – Tenant/resident, Cookstown

"Social housing facilitates home ownership through the right to buy, which Thatcher brought in and quite rightly so. We live in a home ownership culture." – Tenant/resident, Ballymena

Others suggest that the scheme should continue but with changes, such as funds raised from house sales to be reinvested only in new stock, or certain property types to be exempted:

"Right to buy should not be scrapped. It fits within the totality of housing policy. What is needed are tight, fool proof rules and regulations around right to buy, with the capital receipts going towards building new social homes instead of being invested in existing stock. Levels of discount back in the day were ridiculous. At the same time there shouldn't be a 'fundamental' right to buy, in order to protect certain types of property such as bungalows and properties built for a specific need. Right to buy isn't something that has to bring social housing to its knees." – MLA

Some people thought that the policy should be suspended for as long as the supply and demand mismatch continues.

> *"While social housing supply is so limited, there should be a minimum moratorium against right to buy. However reclassification of housing associations is critical. We need to be able to replenish the stock which isn't feasible."* – MLA

6.4 Enables independence and support

Forty one per cent of people considered that social housing is distinguished by facilitating independent living (particularly but not exclusively for older people and people with specialist and complex needs) through support services, which are provided with or in addition to the physical accommodation. Independent living was mentioned by some as being linked to social inclusion, integration into communities and wider community resilience.

> *"Social housing offers more than a house – part of its function is to support people and promote independent living. So when we talk about allocating according to need, that need may well be for more than housing."* – Political representative

> *"Social housing offers support via its staff. It offers choices to suit different people's circumstances i.e. supported, sheltered and general needs housing. It's not just bricks and mortar – it should build resilient communities."* – Housing professional, Dungannon

> *"Social housing facilitates intensive support tailored around an individual. The most vulnerable in society are supported – leaving care, prison, hospital, residential care home etc. Housing professionals are trained to a high standard including for inter-agency working to promote safety and continuous support."* – Housing professional, Dungannon

The need for adequate funding to sustain supported living schemes was raised – particularly in the context of the ageing population and rising numbers of people with complex needs, as well as the need for more support that is suitable:

> *"There is a requirement to match up funding for development with funding for more support, while recognising that supporting any kind of specialist need is expensive. The danger is having a lot of housing that is only available for low support needs."* – Political representative

> *"Working in the health sector we find it is often difficult for some to access suitable social housing especially those with disabilities – physical, learning and emotional."* – Health and social care professional, Co. Antrim

> *"It terms of addressing homelessness many people end up in hostels and can remain there for quite some time which becomes institutionalised tenures for them. The Housing Executive needs more housing support i.e. floating support."* – Tenant/resident, Belfast

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7. Who is social housing for? Who should it be for?

Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of people suggested that 'meeting need' is a central theme of social housing, as outlined in section 5. This percentage also includes statements expressing that social housing should ultimately be 'for people in need' or 'for people who need it':

- Social housing should meet a need or be for **people in need** – as above, this theme featured in 73 per cent of responses
- **Everyone** – 53 per cent of participants said that social housing is or should be 'for everyone'
- **People who are vulnerable**, including people with additional, special or complex needs, featured in 34 per cent of the responses
- 30 per cent of people referred to the **housing selection scheme** and 'points' to determine priority, almost exclusively in a negative light
- 30 per cent of people also raised the **stigma and perceptions** surrounding social housing
- **People who are homeless** was mentioned by 29 per cent
- **People with a low income** came up in almost a quarter (24 per cent) of responses

7.1 For people in need vs. for everyone

As demonstrated above there is a fundamental tension evident in the research – almost three quarters of participants said social housing is for 'need' while just over half said it is for everyone. The 'need' theme has been discussed in section 5.1.

In some circumstances it was clear or implied that the 'everyone' comment referred to universal access, with people expressing a view that allocations should still be made on the basis of need:

"My own views are that social housing should provide for all people, but particularly should be ring-fenced where resources are low for those with priority need (although I appreciate that this residualises). It's for people who need it, irrespective of anyone's 'moral' opinion on who 'deserves' it." – Housing professional, Belfast

"Ideally social housing should absolutely be for everyone. However, given scare resources we must prioritise those who are in need or who are vulnerable. Unfortunately this contributes to stigma and creates a residualised waiting list." – Housing professional, Belfast

However for other participants it was clear they want to see a broader mix of tenants living in social housing. In some cases it was stated or implied that this broader mix would still be facilitated by needs-led allocations, but using a concept of need that is broader than that currently reflected in the housing selection scheme.

"There was a community focus historically. Everyone had a right to a home. Blended communities are important – it's not just about housing the vulnerable. Social housing should accommodate the full spectrum of needs." – Planner, Derry/Londonderry

"Social housing is for those in need, but fundamentally everyone has the right to a home. Focus on future demographics – millennials will not be able to buy and there will be an increase in the percentage of over 65s in the future." – Architect, Belfast

Others said they would like to see more people housed who are economically active:

"Social housing should be for everyone. At the same time social housing is a scarce resource even though it shouldn't be so it's for everyone who needs it. If someone can afford market housing, they shouldn't be excluded but you might give them less priority for an allocation. Economic activity should have higher priority than it currently does." – MLA

This broader concept of need included a much higher priority being given for financial need, or the need for an affordable home, which was explored in section 5.1:

"Social housing falls short of needs currently. By giving priority only to those on benefits or who are homeless you create ghettos of poverty. Social housing should be for all, including those who work and are caught in a poverty trap with high private rents." – Private tenant, Co. Antrim

"Social housing should be for everyone, including those who are working. There is a need for a mixture of tenants within settlements and a question as to whether the points system is now relevant and accurate. Priority is possible for low income families." – Housing professional, Derry/Londonderry

"Social housing should be for everyone who needs an affordable home. It should be for everyone, but it's not for everyone. Social housing used to have a class mix, but less so now that allocations are needs-based. If you're going to have a sustainable community, you need a mix of people, not a concentration of single people with complex needs for example." – Tenant/resident, Ballymena

"Social housing is mainly for people who don't work. I feel people have their priorities wrong. I myself work full-time, have two children and I'm on the housing list for over four years. I don't get points as I have no issues, so I feel I will never have a home. It should be offered to everyone no matter if they have issues or not – everyone is entitled to a home." – Private tenant, Derry/Londonderry

7.2 'Points' and the housing selection scheme

One third of participants referred to the role of the housing selection scheme and 'points' in determining priority, almost exclusively in a negative light. People generally want to see an allocations system that:

- is more transparent
- better reflects applicants' needs, including financial need and the needs of care leavers
- has fewer perverse incentives and less ability to be 'abused' and 'played'
- contributes more towards community sustainability and less towards the residualisation and stigmatisation of social housing.

The current points system was generally considered as a poor method of allocating social housing, with some people arguing a lack of transparency.

Some participants suggested that points don't always reflect applicants' needs. Some argued that greater priority should be afforded to care leavers, and to people in financial need (a theme that has been covered already in sections 5.1 and 7.1):

"Sometimes points don't reflect need on the ground. You could be sitting in a hostel with 170 points, having to pay to stay there because you're working. On the other hand, intimidation points could help you get to over 300 points." – MLA

"Houses are for everyone but allocated based on need. Based on the points system that is – badly allocated." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"The points system needs to be addressed. There needs to be greater transparency and accountability in the whole allocations system. It is currently a murky process. People come in off the top of the list and cause upheaval." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"Priority should be given to those in need i.e. care leavers. Legislation needs to change to consider the specific needs of care leavers as they leave care when they are 18. There needs to be more work done to acknowledge young people leaving care and allowances made to identify suitable accommodation earlier. This will help transition them into accommodation and maintain it." – Health and social care professional, Dungannon

"Social housing is seen by some as the last resort or the only option. It needs to be more easily available to those who can't afford mortgages or private rents. Change the housing selection scheme rules regarding points and hopefully change the stigma/perception of who lives in social housing. And make it a more dynamic and versatile option for all." – Housing professional, Co. Antrim

On the point about the scheme's perverse incentives and ability to be 'abused' and 'played', people said:

The points system was seen by some as not contributing to sustainable communities, but contributing to residualisation and the stigma surrounding social housing.

"The points system is not fit for purpose. It's more attractive to invite additional problems to get points. When I first told people I was applying for social housing, I was told that I would be 'better off getting pregnant' otherwise I'd be looking at a 5-10 year wait. I didn't want a child, I wanted a home. But one bedroom homes aren't available for single people. And now with the bedroom tax, you mightn't even get a two bed."
– Homeless service user, Belfast

"The points scheme is a total disaster. It can work depending on who can best play the system." – MLA

"We need to have an honest conversation about the definition of need. The common selection scheme needs to be reviewed. At the moment it is a race to the bottom. People should not have to be advised to get a letter from the social worker about their vulnerabilities. This is a perverse incentive to demonstrate debilitation in order to get more points." – MLA

"Points-based allocations mean blocking people together with very intense social needs which can result in anti-social behaviour. A review of the allocations system is needed so we're not just allocating to people with complex and multiple needs. And points can be manipulated – people tell lies. A points-based system seems to be fair, but not the current system we have."
– Tenant/resident, Belfast

"Banded allocations are important. The current method of allocations has caused difficulty in terms of settled communities and priority given to some who have background of ASB, drugs etc." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"A better selection system is needed. Choice of landlord and type of property should be provided. Try not to clump people with complex needs together – have a good mix." – Housing professional, Derry/Londonderry

The following comment summarises many of the above themes:

> "The current needs based model we have isn't good, because it stigmatises social housing. People are in desperate situations but they can't get near the top of the list. If people don't ask for points, they aren't awarded them. The points system lets people down and there is a lack of transparency here. The waiting list doesn't reflect need. Social housing should be available to a much wider group of people when you consider 'need'. For example, when you're younger housing can be less affordable." – Political representative

7.3 Stigma and perceptions

Some people see social housing as having a 'stigma', which has been mentioned across sections 5.3, 7.1 and 7.2. This primarily relates to the image of social housing created by residualisation. However a broader theme which can be summarised collectively as 'perceptions' was discussed during the research. The perceptions theme was raised by 30 per cent of participants and covers issues such as the name of social housing, eligibility and politicisation of the tenure, in addition to the stigma due to design differences (discussed in section 5.3).

It should be observed that research participants generally spoke about social housing in positive terms (as demonstrated particularly by sections 5 and 6). Much of what social housing does (as outlined in section 2) has been acknowledged.

> "There is a stigma attached to the word 'social' in social housing. The word social is both a strength and a weakness. Social is that which society funds – on one hand it can be seen to meet the needs of society, but on the other it can be seen as a drain on resources. Perceptions will depend on people's experience and knowledge. But social housing serves society and that makes it a positive thing." – Tenant/resident, Ballymena

Several people explored the name of social housing in the stigma context, suggesting that the name should be changed:

> "The name 'social housing' has developed a stigma over the past 30 years. Terms like 'affordable', 'public' and 'council' housing don't carry the same stigma as social. Call it affordable housing – does what it says on the tin." – Tenant/resident, Cookstown

> "It's community housing/ public housing/council housing. There are negative connotations of 'social'." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

> "Change the name 'social' to 'community' as it should be a community." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

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On the link between stigma/perceptions of eligibility and the residualisation discussed in section 6.2:

"A series of articles in print media and perhaps on TV would be useful to explore some of the issues surrounding social housing, not the tabloid, sensationalist drivel that is frequently put forward." – Member of the public, Co. Londonderry

"The reduction in housing supply coupled with redefined need has led to the residualisation of the tenure into one of housing for people with complex and multiple needs, building a stigma around it." – Economist, Belfast

"The offer from housing associations is vast and should be recognised as regard to added value given they are only part funded for supplying social housing." – Housing professional, Dungannon

"Residualisation leads people to believe that they aren't eligible for social housing even though in all likelihood they are." – Tenant/resident, Cookstown

"Social housing is open to all but the perception is it isn't due to the points system. Maybe we need to educate young people on social housing and how to access the list." – Housing professional, Dungannon

That social housing is politicised was raised by several participants:

"Keep politicians out of all housing matters." – Tenant/resident, Belfast

"Politics infects and poisons housing. Until electoral politics is taken out of housing I'm not sure how we're going to overcome this." – MLA

Further to the last quote, some people suggested that more people should know about social housing, what it offers and the people who live in it to tackle perceptions, including through awareness raising activities:

"Social housing is for everyone – we need an awareness campaign to let people know it is a housing choice. It provides a variety of housing options and there should be greater awareness among the public." – Housing professional, Dungannon

"You need only look to North Belfast to see that gerrymandering still goes on, just with a bit more technicality." – Homeless service user, Belfast

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Part 3: Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the evidence review and research findings, CIH offers the following definition of the future role and purpose of social housing in Northern Ireland for government, the housing sector and related sectors to consider.

> *Social housing is good quality, genuinely affordable rented housing provided by registered not-for-profit social landlords with capital subsidy, which is available to everyone. It acts as a dynamic part of the housing system while offering tenancy security, building and maintaining mixed communities and enabling people to live independently. It is allocated in a fair and transparent way with priority established according to a common definition and understanding of need.*

The evidence gathered presents social housing in positive terms. CIH believes social housing must be championed as an essential service to society.

However, based on feedback, there are areas where change is required. Below we offer recommendations for change that we believe are required to ensure social housing fulfils the role and purpose outlined above. The recommendations include roles for both government and the housing sector including CIH.

Some of the recommendations are solutions in themselves, while others represent the beginning of a process. It is hoped that *Rethinking social housing NI* will engender a dialogue over the coming months to help develop areas of common agreement where development may prove possible.

Particularly given the role for the housing sector in these recommendations, this dialogue could be facilitated through an independently chaired, sector-led working group to develop the thinking and provide challenge around the recommendations.

It should be noted that the recommendations are designed to be considered collectively – a change to one area of housing policy very often causes an impact on another, which may be beneficial or detrimental (or both) to desired outcomes.

I. Supply

> *Social housing is good quality, genuinely affordable rented housing provided by registered not-for-profit social landlords with capital subsidy, which is available to everyone.*

Fundamentally, in order for social housing to be available to more people, its provision needs to be subsidised, more of it needs to be built and more existing stock needs to be retained. Nevertheless, even with a substantial increase in social housing supply, it will not be available for everyone on the waiting list. There is clearly a gap in the housing market for more rented housing options that are affordable for lower to middle income working households.

CIH recommends that central government:

(a) commit to providing the investment in social housing required to reduce housing stress

(b) explore a mid-market rent housing option

(c) end the house sales scheme for social housing providers.

CIH recommends that the housing sector:

(d) work with government to explore a mid-market rent housing option.

Provide the social housing investment required to reduce housing stress

The commitment in the draft Programme for Government (PfG) was to build an ambitious 9,600 social homes over five years, an average of 1,920 per annum. The target was ambitious because it represented a level of output that has been achieved only once in the past seven years. It was also welcome, because it reflected the Housing Executive's recommendation of an annual target of 2,000 which is based on modelling.

The Outcomes Delivery Plan now reduces the target to 7,600 or 1,520 per annum, although the aspiration to build the original number remains. The lower target is more realistic, but falls short of the number of homes deemed required.

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It is recognised that high priority continues to be given to investment in new social housing supply in the context of both the available capital budget, and in comparison to housing investment levels in parts of Great Britain.

High grant rates for new social housing contribute towards housing associations being able to set their rents at more affordable levels. Homes that are good quality with high environmental standards contribute towards reductions in fuel poverty levels and better health outcomes. So new social housing supply is also in the interest of multiple government departments, particularly in the context of the outcomes-based PFG.

Therefore it is important to provide investment at a level that delivers the number of social homes deemed required, and reduces housing stress as per the aim of the PfG.

Explore a mid market rent housing option

It is vital that additional routes to housing supply be considered. This includes innovative approaches and new 'products' to address unmet need in the housing market (also discussed in recommendation II).

Households in financial need has been a common theme of the report. As discussed in recommendation III, people aspire to have more of these households included in social housing allocations.

Nevertheless, current supply levels will not cater for all of these households. Therefore, products such as mid-market rent (MMR) are particularly attractive and social landlords are well placed to deliver these.

MMR is a housing option with rents that are lower than the private market but higher than in social housing. It usually targets people with low priority for social housing, but who cannot afford to buy or rent.

Typical tenants in MMR housing in Scotland for example – where there are minimum and maximum income thresholds for eligibility – have modest household earnings, and some rent for long periods. MMR has been funded with housing association grant from the Scottish Government, although over the last few years different approaches have emerged such as investment and off balance sheet models. Going forward, this may signal more diversification of MMR finance away from grant-funding.

Nevertheless, there are limitations in relation to development viability if MMR is priced by local housing allowance. Further work is needed to determine the viability of MMR models for Northern Ireland's local markets.

End the house sales scheme

Supply also comes from existing stock. Ending the house sales scheme will contribute to significantly higher levels of social homes in the long term, given the Housing Executive has sold approximately 119,000 dwellings to sitting tenants since 1979 (2015). We recognise that the current number of house sales is small by historical standards, but is likely to increase with a rising housing market.

It should be noted that recommendations I and II are interdependent in relation to pursuing mixed neighbourhoods. Ending the house sales scheme without an increase in developments with tenure mixing would result in higher overall rates of tenure segregation.

Participants in the research were very much divided on the future of the house sales scheme, as highlighted in section 6.3. The house sales scheme is valued by some as a genuine path to owning their rented home. The scheme creates mixed-tenure estates and facilitates community stability by allowing tenants to buy, while remaining in their homes and neighbourhoods. House sales is a strategic approach that has been actively pursued by some housing associations in Great Britain.

Meanwhile others want to see the policy reformed, suspended or scrapped. This is variously due to:

- social homes being lost and not replaced (especially at a time when demand outstrips supply)
- a disproportionate impact on stock types such as those that address specific needs e.g. adaptations for disabilities
- sold housing eventually being rented out privately and not managed well, working against community sustainability
- discount levels that mean homes sold at a loss, impacting on housing associations' financial performance.

This narrative is not unique to Northern Ireland, but the house sales scheme itself is unique in the UK since it has been mandatory for housing associations since 2003/04. This presents a problem in the context of the recent ONS decision to reclassify registered housing associations as public bodies for national accounting purposes, a decision that was taken due to the level of government control over housing associations.

The decision means that private borrowing by housing associations for new social housing will count as public spending. It will have to compete with other public services in an increasingly constrained budgetary environment, undermining the benefit of the mixed funding regime mentioned in section 1.4

and risking fewer social homes being built in both the short- and long-term when demand will in all likelihood continue to exceed supply.

The Department for Communities has identified the house sales scheme as an 'area of control' over the affairs of housing associations that would act as a barrier in seeking a reversal of the ONS decision. The logical conclusion is the end the scheme. In a Northern Ireland context this would mean ending the scheme for all social housing providers – largely due to the common waiting list arrangements.

If this did not happen, the scheme would become a 'game of chance', where an applicant's ability to buy their home would become dependent on their allocated landlord being the Housing Executive. This would have equality implications, given that the introduction of the house sales scheme for housing association tenants coincided with the adoption of a common waiting list for social housing in Northern Ireland.

We have considered the option of a voluntary scheme, but believe that this approach could have wider equality implications considering the different concentrations of housing association and Housing Executive stock in different communities.

During the research there was no appetite expressed for a move away from a common waiting list which, as mentioned in section 1.4, has served to address perceptions of potential discrimination and promote equal and fair treatment.

Therefore and on the balance of the available evidence, we believe the house sales scheme should end for all Housing Executive and housing association tenants in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless home ownership remains an aspiration for many people, representing a complementary housing option which also addresses housing need and demand. It would be beneficial to explore alternative pathways to ownership in the absence of a statutory house sales scheme.

II. Mixing and stigma

> *Social housing acts as a dynamic part of the housing system while building and maintaining mixed communities.*

Social housing and what it offers was valued by research participants. At the same time they do not want to see large, single-tenure social housing estates being built. Instead, mixed-tenure developments are valued as they are seen to support sustainable communities. They can also facilitate a mix of people from different community and income backgrounds.

We believe a 'whole system approach' to social housing is needed that also serves to tackle the stigma and false perceptions surrounding the tenure. It is important in our view that social housing works better with the private sector generally, particularly given the greater supply and demand mismatch of social housing while the private sector is experiencing steady growth. This is beginning to be reflected in public policy, for example in relation to the current departmental proposal that the Housing Executive be able to discharge its homelessness duty using private rented housing.

CIH recommends that local government:

(a) facilitate mixed-tenure schemes through the planning system

(b) implement systems of planning obligations for social and affordable housing.

CIH recommends that central government:

(c) introduce a central developer contributions policy for social and affordable housing

(d) provide a level playing field between new social and private developments at community consultation stage.

CIH recommends that the housing sector:

(e) develop more mixed-tenure schemes

(f) ensure that housing staff are equipped with skills and competencies relating to good housing and tenancy management

(g) tackle stigma through a parity of tenure approach wherever possible

(h) challenge negative perceptions through educating the public on the benefits of the regulated social housing sector.

CIH will:

(i) work with the housing sector to ensure that staff are equipped with skills and competencies relating to good housing and tenancy management

(j) engage with NI political parties to make the case for the value of social housing to society.

More mixed-tenure schemes

Throughout the research, people referred to mixed-tenure developments as a tool to facilitate cohesive communities which particularly have social and economic diversity. Therefore a broader consideration of demographic factors in addition to 'bricks and mortar' tenure mixing is important

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to incorporate when talking about mixed-tenure developments. This is particularly important when considering the high levels of religious segregation in social housing. The distinction is captured in a definition offered in a recent mixed-tenure thinkpiece published by NIFHA and DfC (2018: 6), which states:

"Mixed-tenure is residential development which combines a range of tenure options, which can include owner-occupier housing, shared ownership housing and rental properties (social, intermediate and private). The focus of mixed-tenure development is fostering greater social, economic and community mix to support thriving and sustainable communities."

Mixed-tenure developments are valuable in a number of ways. They can unlock opportunities for funding – which is important in a constrained budgetary environment – such as cross-subsidy and new funding methods like financial transactions capital. NIFHA and DfC lists the potential social and economic benefits of mixed-tenure schemes (2018: 14):

• reducing 'place and tenure-based' stigma (a point which is explored further below)

• reduced levels of crime and anti-social behaviour

• improved sense of community and social cohesion

• better job prospects and improved school attainment

• improved physical and mental health of residents.

Mixed-tenure developments can also encourage integration across the different community backgrounds (ibid: 13). Nevertheless, the high level of community segregation in social housing is an issue of a considerable scale that will require ongoing, complementary policy approaches. It may be beneficial to review how public policies that promote community integration and cohesion in the housing context are working.

Meanwhile it is clear then that mixed-tenure developments have the potential to support a wide range of outcomes in the PfG and they therefore concern multiple government departments.

Some housing associations have begun incorporating shared equity homes in developments and there is increasingly an aspiration to deliver mixed-tenure developments in earnest.

Introduce a system of developer contributions

We believe addition policy tools such as developer contributions are required to underpin the mixed-tenure agenda and ensure schemes are delivered to their full potential. Contributions were raised by some participants as a way of achieving diverse, cohesive neighbourhoods, as outlined in section 6.2.

Northern Ireland remains the sole region across the UK and Ireland without a region-wide system of developer contributions for social and affordable housing. Contributions have shown elsewhere that they are a successful tool in achieving the aim of sustainable mixed-tenure communities. Part V of Ireland's Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended by subsequent legislation has contributed to increasing social integration and more sustainable mixed-tenure communities.

Developer contributions systems also secure access to land for social housing providers which is a key obstacle for the local sector in delivering more social homes.

Contributions also support supply objectives for social and affordable housing mostly as a minority mechanism, but occasionally as a majority – Savills found 56 per cent of new affordable housing resulted from such contributions (section 106 agreements) for 2010 in England for example. Although it is acknowledged that low levels of government subsidy for new affordable housing contributes to a higher proportion otherwise achieved through contributions or planning obligations.

Furthermore the viability of mixed-tenure and mixed use developments including through developer contributions will often, but not always, depend on the size of developments, so alternative provision of social housing will continue to be fundamental if supply objectives are to be realised.

We are cognisant of the Three Dragons and Heriot-Watt University report on developer contributions in Northern Ireland that suggested "for most of the region, a developer contribution scheme will not work" (2015). However there are several caveats mentioned in the report that are important to highlight.

First, the report made an assumption of no public subsidy, whereas there is subsidy used in some systems across Britain and Ireland and this would serve to improve viability in the local context. The Department for Communities would nevertheless need to satisfy itself in relation to value for money concerns of any subsidy level available to a system in a constrained public spending environment.

Second, the report came with a health warning in relation to data, which suggested for example that development in itself was not viable in parts of Northern Ireland where it was known to be taking place.

This is not to dismiss the viability concerns raised by the development industry. The broader housing industry is near unanimous that the success of any system will be determined by whether the

contributions sought in respect of individual developments are viable. It is not in anyone's interest to delay getting much-needed private homes on the ground through too much negotiation in pursuit of unrealistic contributions.

Nevertheless the housing market has experienced a better than expected improvement since the report was published and can now be described as being in good health, with steady growth and a strong forecast. In this context in particular it is worthwhile revisiting developer contributions policy.

We acknowledge the work of local councils and departments to date in developing planning obligations and policies that support mixed-tenure schemes as a part of the local development plan process. We nevertheless believe a central developer contributions policy is required to add a strong element of standardisation to local approaches.

Concerns surrounding viability particularly in relation to local markets can be addressed by local viability evidence being incorporated into standardised approaches.

A good developer contributions system has:

- a standardised rate(s) of contribution that
    - o is realistic and based on (local) viability evidence and not policy objectives
    - o takes into account land value
    - o is subject to an impact assessment on development
- a specialist contributions team who
    - o carries out negotiations with developers professionally and with regard to local information and evidence
    - o performs wider functions including monitoring the delivery of schemes.

Ensure that housing staff are equipped with skills and competencies required for good housing and tenancy management

Good quality housing management is vital to sustaining tenancies and communities. This includes offering advice and support to tenants who need it, including on ways to maximise their household income. This in turn supports the management basics of rent collection and arrears minimisation.

Conversely, poor housing management can contribute to stigma and negative perceptions (this is true for private rented housing as well). For example, addressing anti-social behaviour (ASB) effectively with an early and proportionate response is vital. The essence of effective practice in dealing with ASB is to use the right powers and tools at the right time –

staff must be fully trained and knowledgeable about the range of approaches available to them, when it is appropriate to use them and be confident in their choice of response.

Local contexts are central to how housing management is carried out – when the nature of housing developments and communities change, housing management approaches including partnership working will vary in response. This has particular significance not just for mixed-tenure developments, but also for other housing developments that aim to achieve social and community mix, such as shared housing developments. The sector, including CIH, must ensure that housing professionals are skilled to:

- advocate, market and communicate mixed-tenure and shared housing developments
- promote acceptance among people from different backgrounds
- help residents feel safe and connected in their communities
- respond to sectarian intimidation and threats including display of inappropriate symbols and imagery.

Provide a level playing field between new social and private developments at community consultation stage and tackle stigma through parity of tenure wherever possible

Stigma is another issue that has been raised by the development industry as a barrier to mixed-tenure developments and a developer contributions system, due to a perception that the presence of social housing impacts on the sale prices of private homes in mixed-tenure developments.

However, the evidence is that mixed-tenure developments do not reduce property prices, provided the housing quality and the design of the development overall are of a high standard.

Tenure blindness is considered good practice in relation to the design of mixed-tenure schemes and helps to tackle the stigma surrounding social housing. It means that as far as is practicable, private and social homes should look similar if not the same and be well integrated in relation to the layout of developments. Research participants raised differences in appearance between social and private housing as contributing to stigma, which is outlined in section 5.3.

Of course practical factors have to be considered when aspiring towards integrating social housing into developments, for example the impact of dispersed units on housing associations in relation to their

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management in larger developments, as well as the cost implications for regeneration work compared with units that are co-located.

Tenure blindness serves to remove unnecessary differences between social and private housing and move towards more of a 'parity of tenure' approach.

A parity of tenure approach and tenure blindness has broader implications than in the context of mixed-tenure developments. It is common practice for some social landlords to 'brand' existing mono-tenure developments – this practice should be afforded careful consideration to ensure that it does not contribute towards the stigmatisation of social housing.

There are also implications for the manner in which new social housing developments are consulted upon. There is a unique requirement for housing associations to carry out community consultation for all developments – we would question the necessity of this requirement and suggest its removal in order to create more of a level playing field between social and private housing providers in this regard.

Challenge negative perceptions through education

Research participants raised the issue of a public perception that people, especially young people, were not eligible for social housing even though in all likelihood they are. This is problematic if the waiting list does not accurately reflect housing needs in areas that are deemed 'low demand' for social housing, particularly rural areas. This in turn means that new social housing is not built in these areas, which reinforces the cycle.

Adopting a common definition and understanding of housing need would contribute towards addressing this, which is discussed in recommendation III. However there is also merit in an awareness campaign from the housing sector and/or government to inform the public that social housing is a housing choice for everyone.

Although not part of the scope of this research, there was an aspiration to gather the perceptions of the general public around social housing and compare these perceptions with established facts. Face-to-face street interviews are to be conducted for CIH and the Department of Communities by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Logistically it was not possible to conclude these interviews prior to this report's publication, so the findings will be produced as a supporting document at a later date.

Participants also raised perceptions of a stigma surrounding the name of social housing, suggesting that the name be changed. In our view this would

be a costly exercise that would not serve to address the wider stigma and perceptions surrounding social housing that was raised during the research.

As one participant said "there is a stigma attached to the word 'social' in social housing. The word social is both a strength and a weakness. … Perceptions will depend on people's experience and knowledge. But social housing serves society and that makes it a positive thing."

So instead, we recommend that the housing sector and its partners undertake a campaign(s) to inform the wider public of the benefits of the regulated social housing sector. It is about the sector demonstrating thought and brand leadership, telling its story and setting the narrative on the benefits of professional housing management and the social and economic value that social housing contributes to society.

III. Eligibility and priority

> *Social housing is available to everyone. It is allocated in a fair and transparent way with priority established according to a common definition and understanding of need.*

As discussed in sections 5.1 and 7.1, there was a strong sense that people believed everyone should be eligible for social housing, while almost three quarters of people said that social housing should meet need or be for people in need. Many participants felt that greater priority should be given to people with certain needs, such as care leavers and people in financial need (for example, those paying expensive market rents or those who are ineligible for a mortgage or Co-Ownership Housing).

While the current points system is unpopular, we believe that many of the associated issues raised will be addressed by the Department for Communities' proposed changes to allocations policy. However there are acute disparities in how different types of need are determined by the selection scheme.

CIH recommends that central government:

(a) preserve universal access and adopt a common definition and understanding of need.

Whenever people raised the selection scheme and 'points' as the method to determine an applicant's need and therefore priority, the scheme was referred to in almost exclusively a negative light. People generally want to see an allocations system that:

- is more transparent
- better reflects applicants' needs, including financial need and the needs of care leavers
- has fewer perverse incentives and less ability to be 'abused' and 'played'
- contributes more towards community sustainability and less towards the residualisation and stigmatisation of social housing.

We recognise that the Department for Communities has:

- recently carried out a fundamental review of social housing allocations policy
- published commissioned research to inform the review, and
- consulted upon a series of recommendations for change, some of which must await an Executive for implementation.

CIH Northern Ireland is generally very supportive of the departmental recommendations. Furthermore many of them serve to address some of the issues that research participants raised. The proposals would:

- preserve universal access
- maintain needs-based allocations, while applicants with similar levels of need are allocated a home based on the time spent on the waiting list through a hybrid points-banded system – this could increase fairness and transparency, helping to address 'points chasing' and perceptions of 'queue jumping'
- abolish intimidation points, which many stakeholders consider a perverse incentive that is abused, for a fairer and more proportionate approach to addressing intimidation.

However one area that we recommend is explored further is the priority that the selection scheme affords for applicants' needs.

For example, an applicant's current accommodation being too expensive is reflected in the housing selection scheme rules, but is addressed under 'other social needs points' and awards the applicant just ten points.

If this were an applicant's sole need, the departmental proposal on the hybrid points-banded system would classify him or her as having 'some need, but not in housing stress', which is the second from bottom band of the six band system. In practice the applicant would have no chance of an allocation in a high demand area, since there is no required quota of allocations from the lower bands in the proposed system.

This is not necessarily to suggest financial need should be considered a high level of need, but it serves to demonstrate how something that research participants consider is need is not afforded priority under the selection scheme rules.

There are acute disparities in how different types of need are determined by the selection scheme, which favours compounded, specifically defined needs rather than needs more broadly.

Nevertheless it is clear from the research that 'need' means different things to different people. And in our experience the selection scheme continues to be seen by many stakeholders as a fair and objective way to assess applicants' housing needs and determine priority for the allocation of a social home.

We therefore recommend that a common definition and understanding of need be developed, which would underpin the new selection scheme. We also recommend an equality impact assessment be undertaken to identify possible adverse impacts on disadvantaged and vulnerable people of a common definition of housing need.

IV. Security and independence

> *Social housing acts as a dynamic part of the housing system while offering tenancy security and enabling people to live independently.*

The theme that featured most strongly for the whole research – having been mentioned in almost three quarters of responses – was that social housing provides stability and security for people, primarily by way of secure tenancies. We support secure tenancies and their function as a suitable approach that plays a vital role in maintaining communities, enabling tenants to enjoy a sense of place without fear of unreasonable tenancy termination and the stress that this can induce.

At the same time, security of tenure does not have to mean remaining in the same property indefinitely – social housing providers require flexibility in pursuit of tenancy sustainment and good stock management, particularly in the context of welfare reform. We therefore support the principle of 'security of tenancy' to reflect the distinction.

As discussed in section 6.2, participants also saw tenant participation as an important tool in sustaining communities. In our view, participation is also an

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important tool in enabling tenant independence through empowerment.

While private rented housing policy falls outside the scope of this report, many prospective social housing tenants including those on the waiting list continue to rent privately and, for some, the insecure nature of the private rented sector does not meet their needs.

CIH recommends that central government and the housing sector:

(a) **protect security of tenancy within social housing but review relevant policy and practice to ensure there is flexibility to relocate for sound housing management reasons**

(b) **enable tenants to live independently, including through support where tenants want or need it, while avoiding paternalistic approaches**

(c) **promote tenant empowerment through participation.**

CIH recommends that central government:

(d) **increase security in private rented housing.**

Protect social housing security of tenancy

Secure tenancies were seen by research participants as:

• central to sustainable communities

• an important factor in creating a sense of 'home' and 'ownership'

• a foundation upon which tenants were able to build their lives

• supporting the needs of people who are vulnerable and older people.

However a number of people explored 'conditionality' around security of tenure, such as:

• probationary periods

• means-testing

• the way changes of circumstances should be treated

• helping tenants to increase economic activity as an incentive for home ownership.

On means-testing, a substantial amount of work was done in England in relation to the 'pay to stay' proposal, which we were pleased that the UK government abandoned. Our concerns included that it would affect many households who could not reasonably be classified as 'high earners'; it would lessen work incentives; and it would be both complex and expensive to administer.

Nevertheless conditionality is an important observation. Tenants can experience better outcomes where housing and support is provided rather than denied or threatened. Any tenancy framework will have conditions that cover reasonable grounds for

altering tenancies to complement this support, or for terminating them as a last resort. These conditions are often to ensure community sustainability, fulfilment of roles and responsibilities under the tenancy and good housing management, as well as tenancy sustainment.

In respect of housing management, a number of research participants raised areas where social housing could do better in the context of welfare reform and changing demographics including household sizes and our ageing population.

> *"Moving people out of larger housing is absolutely crucial. We need a proper strategy for downsizing. It's difficult to do in a system where downsizing may be completely unacceptable in the political context. But if you provide older people with support and opportunities for repairs to be done for example, some people could be persuaded to downsize. However instead of a proper strategy for downsizing we have the bedroom tax."* – Political representative

We believe that more needs to be done to address the real challenges presented by demographic change and welfare reform. In our view tenancy agreements and their terms, the legislative framework that govern secure tenancies and possessions, and housing practice all have a role to play in good stock management. This could help to ensure the right stock is available for the right needs and the right household sizes.

We acknowledge the allocations proposals that DfC has put forward to date that would help to address some of these stock management issues, such as greater use of the mutual exchange service, withholding consent for policy successions relating to properties with adaptations for disabilities, and allocating specialised properties outside the selection scheme.

While acknowledging the benefits of security of tenancy, there are also clear benefits in recognising that security of tenancy does not have to mean security of tenure within the same property. In some cases, while recognising the real sensitivities surrounding relocations, it will be appropriate for a social landlord to secure alternative accommodation for a tenant for stock management and tenancy sustainment reasons.

To this end, it may be necessary to undertake a review of policy and practice to ensure that the required level of flexibility is being facilitated. It may be helpful to undertake this review as part of a strategic approach, for example as part of a strategy for downsizing or a strategy for ageing.

Of course this shouldn't mean that social landlords resort to legislative routes as a default to managing stock effectively. In many cases voluntary approaches will be appropriate and indeed the preferred method, including incentives. However consideration of stock management, the reasons for it and ultimately the people who it benefits would form part of a greater understanding between landlords and tenants, a point which is discussed further below.

Enable tenant independence including through support; promote tenant empowerment through participation

In relation to empowerment through participation, it is important to acknowledge that not all tenants will wish to be involved in participatory structures, instead preferring minimal contact with social landlords and this should be respected.

On the other hand, some tenants want to have a say in the services that affect them. Participatory structures empower tenants to do this, representing a welcome option that is distinct from a transactional landlord-tenant relationship defined solely as service provider and service receiver.

We believe there is more that can be done to further tenant involvement, such as scrutiny panels and mutual and co-operative governance structures. Social landlords and their boards could consider whether these structures are right for their contexts.

Meanwhile independence can be promoted through support. Similarly to empowerment, it should be acknowledged that not all tenants need or want support and this should be respected. Meanwhile, it remains vital for others including people with specialist and complex needs for example, where there is a need to ensure adequate funding to sustain supported living schemes.

However independence through support does have implications for general needs tenants as well.

If one of the roles of social housing is to meet need, then it follows that the need should be addressed rather than simply alleviated by a social landlord.

For example, if a working-age tenant is economically inactive, it may be appropriate to encourage him or her to take up a support service promoting employment or training pathways. This would recognise that work is an important route out of poverty (while not being a guaranteed one) in addition to a social landlord's affordable rents and help with housing costs from the state.

These needs could be identified by better assessments of tenants' broader needs in addition to their housing needs.

Nevertheless it should be recognised that support services and associated charters can become a slippery slope to paternalism, where it is perceived that 'landlords know what is best' for tenants. This should be avoided. Also, it must be recognised that social landlords are not a 'pill for every ill', and pursuing support related work that is not central to the role and purpose of social housing can result in mission creep.

We believe this approach would help to underpin a new relationship between tenants and landlords that is framed more by an independence that leads to social inclusion and community resilience.

Increase security in private rented housing

The research has demonstrated the strong link between social and private rented housing policy as outlined in section 6.3. A common research theme was the nature and value of social housing being 'what the private sector might not be', with tenancy security featuring prominently.

The supply and demand mismatch of social housing means that many prospective social housing tenants including those on the waiting list continue to rent privately, with support of the social transfer of housing benefit. However for some people, the private rented sector does not meet their needs. So the importance of a 'whole system approach' to social housing policy incorporating private rented housing becomes more evident.

While we recognise the fundamental differences between social and private rented housing, we recommend that security in the private rented sector be improved. This is an approach that has been taken recently in Scotland and the Republic of Ireland, so these jurisdictions may serve as an evidence base for local changes.

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Appendix 2: List of stakeholders

Alliance Party of Northern Ireland	Housing policy panel
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	Housing Rights
Apex Housing Association	Kilbroney House residents association
Ards and North Down Borough Council	Lagan Homes
Ark Housing	Market Development Association
Belfast City Council	Martin Property Group
Belfast Health and Social Care Trust	McCartan Muldoon Architects
Central housing forum	Mencap Northern Ireland
Choice Housing	Ministerial advisory group for architecture and the built environment in Northern Ireland
Choice Housing central tenant forum	Nevin Economic Research Institute
Choice Housing south west regional tenants' forum	Newry, Mourne and Down District Council
Clanmil Housing	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Co-Ownership Housing	Radius Housing
Community Places	Riddell McKibbin
Community Relations Council	Royal Town Planning Institute Northern Ireland
Connswater Homes	Rural Housing Association
Covenanter Residential Association	Rural residents forum
Democratic Unionist Party	Sandy Row Community Forum
Depaul Ireland	Shelter Northern Ireland
Derry City and Strabane District Council	Sinn Féin
Disability forum	Smartmove Housing
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	Social Democratic and Labour Party
First Housing	Southern Health and Social Care Trust
Green Party in Northern Ireland	Supporting Communities
Health and Social Care Business Services Organisation	Turley
Homeless service user forum	Ulster Unionist Party
Housing Agency	Western Health and Social Care Trust

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