

Housing Executive

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Mr. David Simpson
Chairperson
Social Development Committee
N.I. Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Stormont
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14th May 2009

Dear *Pavin*

I attach a copy of the public statement on the Housing Executive's priorities following confirmation of its budget for 2009/10.

The Housing Executive's focus has been to prioritise its resources to those people and places in greatest need. You will see this statement covers the breadth of our funding and those areas which can be funded this year have been identified alongside the areas for which, at this stage, no funding is available. I want to stress that this shortfall in funding has been caused by the collapse in the housing market and does not represent any lack of commitment on the part of Government to support housing.

I know that the Department will press for extra funding in the quarterly monitoring rounds and we welcome that. However, it would be much better to put housing on a firm financial footing to avoid circumstances where it is bidding every quarter to fund all the pressures on the housing programme.

The local impact of all of this will be published shortly in the District Housing Plans which are scheduled to be presented to all local councils in Northern Ireland from early June onwards.

I appreciate the continued support for housing from the DSD Committee.

Yours sincerely

P. McIntyre
P. McIntyre
Chief Executive

News Release

Embargoed until 00.01 Friday 15 May 2009

Housing Executive Focus on New Social Housing and Protecting Vulnerable People

The Housing Executive Board has today announced details of how it is allocating its 2009/10 funding provided by the Government.

The Board thanked the Minister for Social Development, Margaret Ritchie, for her steadfast commitment to housing, and welcomed the continued support for housing from within the wider political community.

The Housing Executive's Chief Executive, Paddy McIntyre said:

"The global economic downturn has had a severe impact on local housing and on housing funding. We estimate that sales will bring in £6 million this year compared to over £100million two years ago. Consequently money which had previously funded housing programmes and the Private Sector Grants Scheme is no longer available.

"This comes at a time when there are huge pressures on housing. There needs to be an accelerated new social housing programme. The housing needs of vulnerable people must be met and there is a continuing need to improve housing conditions.

"This has been a tough budget to allocate and difficult decisions have had to be taken. The Housing Executive's focus has been to prioritise resources to those people and places in greatest need.

New Social Housing

"Everyone understands the hardship of the thousands of families who are waiting for a home of their own. With the housing waiting list topping 40,000, Minister Ritchie has made new social housing her top priority. The Housing Executive will concentrate its capital funding on meeting this increasing need.

"With funding from the Department, the Housing Executive plans to allocate £157.25 million to Housing Associations for 1,750 new social homes this year. We are pleased to be starting off the year with this level of funding for new social housing and the highest number of homes in recent years, particularly given the shortfall in new build in the previous year.

Returning vacant Housing Executive homes to use

"The Housing Executive has been holding 1,500 properties vacant for use by tenants whose homes were due to be improved. Faced with an indefinite delay to the improvement programme the Housing Executive will not leave these properties empty when so many people are without a home of their own. The Housing Executive will make these vacant homes habitable so that they can be allocated to people on the housing waiting list. We have set aside funding for this very practical measure.

"We want to stress that some empty homes are in places where there is no demand for housing and at this stage it would be uneconomical to bring them back into use.

"Taken together, these measures are good news for people waiting for a home but they are not without difficulty."

Paddy McIntyre outlined the other key priorities for the Housing Executive's Board and the areas of work which are likely to be affected:

Homelessness

1. "Services for homeless people throughout the community will be fully funded and service improvements for these most vulnerable will proceed as planned.

Support to Live Independently

2. "Funding to support people to live independently will be increased to £62 million. These are vital services for older people and people with disabilities in particular and must be supported. To do anything else would put pressure on other budgets such as hospitals and healthcare services.

Housing Executive day-to-day maintenance

3. "The Housing Executive will continue to fund its day-to-day maintenance service. More than 93,000 tenants will see this service protected in line with their conditions of tenancy. This represents our ongoing commitment to maintaining a high quality stock.

Adaptations for people with a Disability living in Housing Executive homes

4. "Work on homes which are readily adaptable (e.g. showers, heating and lifts) will proceed. However, funding for major extensions to Housing Executive homes will limit the number which can proceed this year. As it stands we expect to do 30 major extensions against a higher possible demand for around 200.

Major Improvements to Housing Executive Homes

5. "Full scale improvement schemes not already on site have been deferred until capital proceeds from house and land sales recover. This is likely to affect around 850 Housing Executive homes this year.

Single element work Housing Executive homes

6. "Around 4,600 Housing Executive tenants will see work go ahead this year for external repairs or to replace inefficient heating systems or kitchens. Although the number of planned schemes has had to be scaled back it may become possible to start other schemes later in the year.

Urban Renewal Areas

7. "We have allocated £19.03 million to meet existing Urban Renewal Area commitments this year e.g. 'The Village' Donegall Road.

The Private Sector Grants Scheme

Private Sector Grants are aimed at helping homeowners and landlords maintain/improve their homes. £20.25 million has been made available to the Housing Executive to operate the Grants Scheme this year.

"It is necessary to significantly curtail Grants and we expect to issue 2,000 approvals this year compared to over 7,000 normally. In the absence of more funding, this is unavoidable.

1. The Disabled Facilities Grants scheme will continue to operate normally and will be unaffected.
2. Mandatory Repair Grants will continue to operate and will be unaffected.
3. All Approved Grants applications will continue as normal.
4. Applications for HMO grants, where work has started, will be unaffected.
5. All Group Repair Schemes are being put on hold.
6. We expect that applications for Discretionary Grants including Renovation Grants, Replacement Grants, Home Repair Assistance Grants, LOTS Grants and HMO Grants may only be approved in exceptional circumstances.
7. Discretionary Grant applications already in our system which have not been approved are, in general, unlikely to be approved unless sufficient funds become available.
8. We do not want to raise expectations about the availability of grants or have people incur costs unnecessarily and therefore it is not appropriate to continue to accept any new Preliminary Enquiries. We will be writing to those who have already submitted Preliminary Enquiry forms.

Paddy McIntyre, Chief Executive concluded:

"I know that the Department will try and push for extra funding in the quarterly monitoring rounds and we welcome that. However, it would be much better to put housing on a firm financial footing to avoid circumstances where it is waiting in hope every quarter to fund all the pressures on the housing programme."

Ends