

**Department of Finance
Memorandum on the Twelfth
Report from the
Public Accounts
Committee
Mandate 2022-2027**

Homelessness in Northern Ireland

**Presented to the Northern Ireland Assembly
by the Minister of Finance**

27 April 2026



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Glossary of Abbreviations

DfC Department for Communities

HSSG Homelessness Strategy Steering Group

VCS Voluntary and Community Sector

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE MEMORANDUM DATED 27TH APRIL 2026 ON THE 12TH REPORT FROM THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE MANDATE 2022-2027

Twelfth Report

Department for Communities

Homelessness in Northern Ireland

PAC Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Department should make more meaningful, people focused data on homelessness publicly available. Within six months of this report, the Department should ensure that published homelessness data includes the number of individuals as well as the number of households affected.

The Department for Communities (DfC) accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: June 2026.

It is the intention of the DfC that as part of the quarterly Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin and the biannual Northern Ireland Homelessness Bulletin, this data will become part of the Official Statistics published by the Department.

The next Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin is due to be released in May 2026, and the next Northern Ireland Homelessness Bulletin is due to be released in June 2026.

PAC Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Department should work with the Housing Executive to explore options for strengthening homelessness prevention through the introduction of a statutory duty and bring forward proposals to the Minister within 12 months. In doing so, the Department should review and assess the impact of similar statutory duties in other jurisdictions, including those where the threat of homelessness duty afforded to households extends to at least 56-days.

The DfC accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: February 2027

The DfC will work with the Housing Executive to develop a paper to be presented to the Minister for Communities by the end of February 2027 outlining options that could be used to strengthen homelessness prevention, including the introduction of a statutory duty.

This work is dependent on the DfC being able to identify and allocate sufficient additional resources to take this forward.

This paper will include an assessment of the potential impact of a prevention duty, drawing on the experience of other jurisdictions where this is already in place, as well as an extended threatened with homelessness definition. It will also consider the current powers available to the Housing Executive to support homelessness prevention and whether these are being fully leveraged.

PAC Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Department and the Housing Executive put in place systems to capture data on prevention initiatives across both statutory and VCS service providers they fund within 12 months. Systems must support long-term outcomes monitoring and reporting, which should commence before the end of the 2026-27 financial year.

The DfC accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: April 2027.

The Housing Executive already has systems in place that capture a range of outcomes across those projects that are supported through funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). This includes, where appropriate, a specific outcome on the PIE¹ definition which is an indicator in the current Homelessness Strategy 2022-27. New systems are currently being developed by the Housing Executive to fully capture the activities carried out by internal teams on homelessness prevention activities. Work is progressing well, with the specific homelessness module already configured and developed to record early intervention and prevention activity. This forms part of wider changes with a new IT system scheduled for completion in April 2027.

This work is due to conclude in advance of the introduction of the new Homelessness Strategy 2027 – 2032 in April 2027.

In addition, Housing Rights, which is funded by the DfC, reports the number of cases where its activity has prevented homelessness. Funding conditions require the organisation to supply detailed performance data, including the number of cases where homelessness has been prevented through formal six-monthly monitoring returns. These returns are supplemented by sample file reviews to validate accuracy and ensure compliance. The DfC will work with the Housing Executive to ensure this aligns with their data capture systems.

¹ The PIE was a quarterly data return used in England to record homelessness prevention statistics on households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

PAC Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that, by 30 June 2026, the Housing Executive completes an assessment of the pilot projects delivered with additional strategic prevention funding in 2025-26. The Department and Housing Executive should then work with VCS organisations in 2026-27 to develop plans for long-term investment in relevant prevention projects.

The DfC accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: June 2026.

By 30 June 2026, the Housing Executive will have completed a full assessment of the pilot projects that were delivered via the additional strategic prevention funding in 2025-26.

The Housing Executive identified strategic prevention priorities including:

- private rented sector access / financial inclusion;
- young people leaving care;
- prison release initiatives;
- individuals experiencing domestic abuse; and
- women vulnerable to and experiencing chronic homelessness.

The applications were assessed in relation to their alignment to one of the strategic priorities. The strength of alignment was considered in the context of a range of indicators, which included:

- demonstrating compatibility with the objectives of specific actions plans e.g. the Domestic Abuse and Youth Homelessness action plans;
- whether they provided additionality and were complementary to other proposed or existing projects;
- whether they built on established links with local Housing Executive offices;
- if had a focus on case management approach; and
- whether demonstrated potential to scale up and have potential longer-term impact.

The Housing Executive has called for applications from the VCS for a three-year Homeless Prevention Programme covering 2026/27 to 2028/29. The application process closed on 13 March 2026, and the applications received will now be assessed by the Housing Executive in line with their agreed strategic prevention priorities.

The assessment process will also be informed by the continuing assessment of those pilot projects that were delivered via the additional strategic prevention funding in 2025/26. This will enable the Housing Executive to carry out detailed planning and allocation of the available 2026/27 budget and indicative planning for years 2 and 3 which will cover 2027/28 and 2028/29.

Beyond the assessment of applications, the Housing Executive maintains collaborative relationships with VCS partners. This partnership working will continue and will directly inform the development of long-term strategic investment plans for 2026/27–2028/29.

PAC Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Department and Housing Executive agree a single vision for prevention, and a range of measures and indicators for assessing long term outcomes within 12 months of this report. In developing these measures, the Department should consult with VCS partners and those with lived experience of homelessness.

The DfC accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: February 2027.

By the end of February 2027, the DfC and the Housing Executive will have agreed a single definition of prevention that will be included within the next Homelessness Strategy, which will be published in April 2027. This will be based on the PIE definition used in England to record homelessness prevention statistics on households who are homeless or threatened with homelessness.

Consultation with VCS partners and those with lived experience of homelessness will form a key part of the development of this strategy and will help facilitate the identification of meaningful indicators and measures for long term assessment. The single definition of prevention will be central to this strategy, and the accompanying annual action plans will include fully developed SMART targets which allow for the ongoing measurement and reporting of the longer-term outcomes of the strategy.

PAC Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Department conducts a review of the existing homelessness structures, oversight groups and action plans within six months of this report, with a view to streamlining these and ensuring that membership is appropriate and that actions, targets and implementation dates are aligned.

The DfC accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: August 2026

The formal governance and oversight structures between the DfC and the Housing Executive, including those for homelessness, are outlined in the Partnership Agreement which is currently undergoing a review. The existing oversight groups are the Homelessness Strategy Steering Group (HSSG) chaired by the DfC and the Central Homelessness Forum chaired by the Housing Executive.

The DfC will engage a consultant to conduct a strategic review of the HSSG, including the membership and the role and function of the group, and the existing homelessness structures, oversight groups and action plans.

PAC Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the Department and the Housing Executive conduct a strategic review of the HSSG within six months of this report, to include appropriate levels of membership and roles and responsibilities.

The DfC accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: August 2026.

DfC will engage a consultant to conduct a strategic review of the HSSG, including the membership and the role and function of the group, and the existing homelessness structures, oversight groups and action plans.

A business case will be developed to assess the options for progressing this work. The analysis undertaken to inform the business case will help inform the draft terms of reference for the review.

PAC Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that within six months, the Housing Executive publishes details of its plans to purchase the 600 homes designated for temporary accommodation. These plans should include:

- **Timing of purchases;**
- **Identification of specific locations, properties or sites;**
- **Breakdown of type of property to be purchased, i.e. number of single lets, family homes, and so on; and**
- **Estimates of costs and timescales to make properties habitable.**

The DfC partially accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: August 2026.

The DfC is unable to fully accept this recommendation as some of the information requested is considered to be commercially sensitive. If the Department was to publish the details of specific target areas, streets or property types in advance of purchases completing, it runs the risks of artificially inflating the prices in the specific locations, jeopardising value for money considerations and potentially further reducing the number of homes available for the

Housing Executive to purchase. For this reason, detailed acquisition information can only be shared once any purchases are completed, in line with standard commercial practice and to ensure the efficient use and protection of public funds.

Estimates for costs and timescales required to make properties habitable can only be determined once the individual properties have been identified and the extent of any required works is fully known.

The Housing Executive has already progressed all the preparatory work that is within its control and is ready to move at pace once it receives confirmation from DfC that the Business Case conditions are approved.

A high-level delivery plan is currently being developed by the Housing Executive with the principal considerations including:

- Geographical areas where exposure to high-cost temporary accommodation is most prevalent;
- The nature of the temporary accommodation client groups (single persons, couples, families);
- The availability of suitable property available to purchase that align with the above criteria; and
- Value for money considerations.

It is the intention that this delivery plan, once completed will be published and available on the Housing Executive's website.

PAC Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Department develops a more transparent system of reporting on social housing new builds within 12 months of this report which captures the difference between the Housing Supply Strategy ambition, the level of need identified by the Commissioning Prospectus, and the number of new starts which can be delivered by the Department each year. Reporting should clearly outline both annual and cumulative shortfalls across the lifetime of the Strategy, as well as proposals to address shortfalls in later years.

The DfC accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: February 2027.

The DfC will work in collaboration with the Housing Executive to develop a new framework to deliver more transparent reporting methods for the number of new social housing starts that are delivered each year. This will include reporting progress against the 15-year Housing Supply Strategy ambition (annual and cumulative reporting of progress, emerging shortfalls; and any proposed remedial actions to address shortfalls in the later years of the Strategy), and the ongoing performance against the plans contained within the Commissioning Prospectus.

The new reporting framework will also reflect on the wider context of the social housing sector as a whole and will include the pressures impacting housing supply across all tenures and how this further contributes to homelessness.

PAC Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Department conducts a value for money assessment of the Right to Buy Scheme, with a view to presenting the Minister with a range of options within 12 months of this report for adapting or amending the Scheme.

The DfC partially accepts this recommendation.

Target Implementation date: February 2027.

The DfC partially accepts this recommendation on the basis that work to review the Scheme is already progressed and underway. On 4 December 2025 Minister Lyons agreed that the Housing Executive could proceed to launch a public consultation on several amendments it had identified and proposed to the House Sales Scheme.

The proposed amendments include:

- excluding from sale majorly adapted / accessible homes;
- extending the Option to Purchase period to 20 years;
- excluding flats / leasehold properties;
- preventing re-purchase of repurchased flats by former leaseholders; and
- removing Housing Association tenancy periods from discount calculations.

The development of these proposals included a cost benefit analysis which, while not a full value for money assessment, considered the financial impact of selling houses at a discount against the wider impact of continued loss of stock.

The consultation is due to launch imminently and will run for 12 weeks. Once the consultation has closed and the responses are analysed, options to adapt or amend the Scheme will be presented to the Minister for Communities for consideration.