

18 OCT 2013

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Date: 17 October 2013

North Belfast Residents' Group
c/o Participation and the Practice of Rights
133 Royal Avenue
Belfast
BT1 1FG

Re: Social Housing in North Belfast

Dear North Belfast Residents' Group,

Thank you for your letter of 20 September 2013 to Nelson McCausland, Minister for Social Development, about social housing in North Belfast. Your letter has been passed to me to reply.

You included copies of five letters you have individually sent to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) regarding your accommodation needs. I am informed that NIHE has replied to you directly regarding these and is responding to your concerns regarding the standard of your accommodation. Under NIHE's complaints procedure, if, once your complaint has been exhausted, you are still unhappy with the decision of the Chief Executive, you have the right of recourse to the Commissioner for Complaints who may decide to investigate the case independent of the Housing Executive.

In respect of your letter to the Minister, the Department does not accept your statement that there is religious inequality in social housing. The Department and NIHE operate at a regional level across Northern Ireland, where housing services are widely recognised as being delivered on fair and equitable basis. Different geographical areas within Northern Ireland inevitably have their own localised housing issues, and the most appropriate solutions to these will vary.

Contrary to your statement that there is 'a failure to officially recognise a problem exists', the Minister for Social Development, Nelson McCausland, has previously highlighted the housing issues in North Belfast, including the need to build more homes and improve poor housing conditions.

This Department has, through the Housing Executive, invested over £358 million of public money in North Belfast with £222m spent on new build since 2001. In this period 2,494 additional new social homes have been provided; not only the lion's share of new social housing in the city but across Northern Ireland.

In addition, Northern Ireland's Housing Strategy, recently launched by Minister McCausland, outlines a number of initiatives which will impact on the future for housing across Northern Ireland in the years ahead. It proposes an overall direction which can be translated into programmes to meet the needs of specific areas. Support for shared communities, tackling anti-social behaviour, social housing allocation policy and the new build social housing programme are all included.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. Brown', with a stylized, flowing script.

Heloise Brown