

Details of Support for Social Housing Proposals in Belfast City Council Area

1. The criteria used to determine whether to support a social housing proposal and the following data for the last year for the Belfast area:
 - The total number of requests for support for proposals made by developers, housing associations and others of the Housing Executive.
 - The total number of requests which received support from the Housing Executive.
 - The total number of requests which were denied support by the Housing Executive.
 - The reasons for approval or rejection.

Details of the total number of requests for Housing Need support received annually within the Belfast City Council Area is not recorded in any way that would enable electronic extraction of, and reporting of, this information. There can be multiple pieces of correspondence received on a given site over a year, with multiple housing mixes proposed and ongoing discussion about suitable proposals for site before a formal request to support a particular proposal is received. It would be a manual exercise to identify, locate and extract all relevant hard copy and email correspondence for the year 15th March 2022 to 14th March 2023. This would have to be individually reviewed by a suitably informed officer or officers to identify that correspondence which falls within the scope of the request and that which does not, and from that overall correspondence to extract the specific details you have requested. The Housing Executive therefore considers that fulfilling this request would be manifestly unreasonable under regulation 12(4)(b) of the EIR Regulations and it is refused on that basis.

Regulation 12(4)(b) is subject to the public interest test which is set out below:

The public interest test

In considering the public interest test, the Housing Executive has identified the following points:

In favour of disclosure:

- Disclosure of information held by public authorities is in the public interest in order to promote transparency and accountability and to aid in understanding the reason why certain decisions were made, including the advice on which they were based.
- There is a public interest in demonstrating that the Housing Executive is seeking to address Housing Need in the Belfast City Council Area.

In favour of maintaining the exemption:

- There is a public interest in the Housing Executive being protected from exposure to disproportionate burden in terms of both cost and staff time in handling information requests.
- There is a public interest in the Housing Executive not diverting its expert resources in housing need assessment from their core work of assessing and supporting appropriate new social housing proposals so that future social housing supply can be directed and monitored effectively.

Balance of the public interest arguments

The main drivers in relation to disclosing the information requested rest around transparency in decision making. This has to be weighed against the impact that fulfilling the request would have on the ability of Housing Executive officials to attend to their core work, and the impact that being taken away from their core work would have upon the speed and quality of the decision making processes around giving support to new social housing proposals.

On balance, the greater public interest is, in the view of the Housing Executive, held in protecting the organisation from a disproportionate burden in fulfilling this request.

However if you wish to refine your request, the Housing Executive can provide you with an explanation of the criteria/process used to determine if a social housing proposal can be given support and give you the total number of social housing proposals given formal support by Housing Executive for the period 15th March 2022 to 14th March 2023 as this information is more readily accessible and can be collated without creating an undue cost and time burden.