



ACCOUNTABILITY
EQUALITY
PARTICIPATION

**Participation and the
Practice of Rights (PPR)**
Ground Floor
Community House
Citylink Business Park
6a Albert Street
Belfast
BT12 4HQ
info@pprproject.org
Tel: 028 9031 3315

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To: Belfast City Council, Belfast Agenda team at communityplanning@belfastcity.gov.uk
From: Equality Can't Wait / Build Homes Now! campaign
Ref: Input to the Belfast Agenda Call for Evidence

Equality Can't Wait / Build Homes Now! is a campaign group of Belfast residents with experience of homelessness, housing stress, poor housing conditions and life on the social housing waiting list. It is among the groups supported by PPR.

As PPR's submission to the first draft of this Agenda made clear back in 2018: for Belfast to achieve the Agenda's [vision](#) of being "a great place to live", **its people need homes.**

For too many people here, this is not the case. **As analysis of recent figures from the Housing Executive reveals, nearly one household out of twenty in Belfast is officially recognised as homeless.**

A Housing Executive [report](#) presented to a Belfast City Council committee in early August 2021 indicated that 27% of Belfast's 143,500 households -- over 38,700 of them -- live in social homes. Meanwhile, according to Housing Executive figures obtained by PPR through Freedom of Information, at end March 2021 at least 11,781 Belfast households were on the waiting list for a social home. At least 8,689 of them were living in housing stress, and of this group, at least 6,851 -- equivalent to **4.8% of Belfast households** -- were recognised as Full Duty Applicant homeless.



The data further revealed that in the year up to March 2021, only 1,367 Belfast households were allocated a social home -- meaning only a small fraction of the existing acute need was met.

In spite of this, the duty bearers responsible for Belfast local development planning keep failing to prioritise social housing. The [draft plan strategy](#) set aspirational targets of 31,600 new homes for 66,000 new workers in Belfast by 2035 - while **existing acute social housing need** did not even figure as an issue. There is no mention of homelessness in the document's 300+ pages, and no target for new social homes to lessen existing homelessness and housing stress.

Belfast duty bearers do propose policy HOU5, which would require a percentage of 'affordable homes' in new residential developments. However, the Department for Communities' parallel decision to expand the meaning of 'affordable housing' -- to include a wider range of intermediate homes, in addition to social homes -- paves the way for private developers to satisfy HOU5 by simply building more intermediate-level housing for people who can afford it, rather than less-profitable social homes for those most in need.

Meanwhile, alongside decision-making about what 'affordable' really means, the social housing waiting list increased by 9% between December 2019 and March 2021; and the number of homeless families on it rose from at least 6,449 to at least 6,851.

As it stands, the Belfast Agenda includes housing as one of eight equally-weighted priorities for the next four years. This isn't enough. If Covid-19 has shown us anything, it's how important home is for our safety, health and wellbeing. The impact of people's housing conditions on their lives -- their ability to manage lockdown, self-isolation and other stressors, to look after themselves and their families, to work -- has never been clearer, nor has the divide between those who have access to secure, safe housing and those who don't.

The people of Belfast have the right to housing of good standard, that provides a safe, healthy environment and meets the needs of the household. They have the right to security of tenure. They have the right to homes that are affordable, located in places with easy access to their jobs, schools, families and wider communities.

Will they finally be given that chance?

PPR's housing bibliography -- over fourteen years' worth of testimony and analysis around the housing campaigns' efforts to realise the right to adequate housing in Belfast -- is available [here](#).