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Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister
Stormont Estate
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12th December 2007

Dear First Minister & Deputy First Minister,

I am deeply concerned about the lack of priority for investment in housing in the draft Budget. The Budget misses an important opportunity to tackle the social and affordable housing crises in Northern Ireland, and to prevent the problem from getting worse. Although there has been a recent slow down in the increase in house prices, over the past number of years house prices have been increasing at a rapid rate and first time buyers are struggling to get on to the property ladder. Social housing is in short supply and there are pressures on temporary accommodation and supported accommodation which means that the needs of extremely vulnerable people are not being met. The number of applicants on the waiting list is rising and homeless figures are increasing more every day. The recent Review into Affordable Housing recognised that more social and affordable homes to buy and rent are urgently required.

The Government has accepted the need for more new social and affordable homes and has set a target of 10,000 new homes, to be completed over the next five years. However the Government has not provided sufficient resources or means to ensure this target can be delivered.

By committing the resources to build 10,000 new homes, the number of applicants on the waiting list will be reduced, as will levels of homelessness and the number of applicants in housing stress. It will also assist first time buyers into home ownership and provide affordable homes to buy and rent. Temporary accommodation and supported accommodation to meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our communities can be provided.

This draft Budget provides a once in a generation opportunity to ensure that everyone has access to a decent affordable home in Northern Ireland and to build sustainable and inclusive communities. I urge the Northern Ireland Executive to realise these opportunities, to put social housing at the top of the political agenda and to deliver the homes that are urgently needed.

Yours ~~very~~

WilliamHouston
Manager