



From: The Minister

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Via email: planning@causewaycoastandglens.gov.uk

Dear Denise,

RESPONSE TO THE ISSUES RAISED AT THE COUNCIL MEETING ON 4 FEBRUARY 2025

Following the meeting between Causeway Coast and Glens Council and myself, on Tuesday 4th February, I agreed to provide a response to the following matters:

- The work of the Social Housing Development Programme in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council
- The need to utilise the figures from the Housing Executive's NIHE Strategic Housing Market Analysis (SHMA) reports and how Councils can account for local factors
- DfC's requirement to approve land disposal at 'less than best value' and
- The investigation around land transfers in Council and the origin of the complaint.

I will now respond to each of these matters in turn.

Social Housing Development Programme work in the Council area

Social housing in Northern Ireland is delivered through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) in a tri-partite arrangement between my Department, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and Registered Housing Associations.

Whilst my Department sets overall housing policy and provides funding, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive is responsible for the assembly and day to day management of the SHDP. The NIHE ensures that the Programme is distributed equitably across a range of programme policy areas and targets those areas of greatest social housing need.

In the last 5 years, 2019-2024 505 new social homes were started in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area, supported by a Housing Association Grant of £48.9 million. In the same period a total of 361 new social homes were completed in the Causeway Coast and Glens Council area. A further 56 units have been completed so far in 2024/25. Additionally, a further 221 social housing units are currently under construction. Subject to budget, within the Causeway Coast & Glens Council area, 596 new social housing units are programmed to start through the SHDP.

The Housing Executive's NIHE Strategic Housing Market Analysis (SHMA)

In relation to the discussion on the use of the Housing Executive's Strategic Housing Market Analysis (SHMA), and how Councils account for local factors, it should be noted that the SHMA is policy neutral and within that context may serve as an evidence base that sets out projections of future housing need and demand in different housing market areas. The Housing Executive has previously stated that SHMAs are not intended to set

housing targets but are to inform decision makers in preparing housing policy and supply objectives, including housing policy in Local Development Plans.

It is a matter for Councils to assess any local factors and the policy response required in the Local Development Plan, to ensure the spatial growth requirements of the local area can be met. Action to address locally specific issues that may impact on housing requirements in an area, for example affordable housing needs, is primarily taken forward by Local Councils working with the Housing Executive Place shaping teams.

Within CC&GB Council it is recognised that 'second homes' is one such specific local factor that is causing concern in relation to the impact on housing requirements. Currently, there is limited information about second homes in Northern Ireland, but my Department is taking forward early work on research into the issue. The purpose of this research study is to provide a more informed position of the extent of second homes in Northern Ireland, including trying to identify settlements or local areas where there are concentrations of second homes.

DfC's requirement to approve land disposal at 'less than best value'

Section 96(5) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 1972 states that the approval of the Minister/ Department must be sought by a council wishing to dispose of land at less than best price. What constitutes a land disposal is set out in section 45 of the Interpretation Act (NI) 1954.

Amendments to primary legislation would be required to change this position. Local Government and Housing Regulation Division officials are currently undertaking a review of the DfC process for council land disposal applications and the associated guidance. Following the review, consultation will be undertaken with the eleven district councils on any proposed changes to the land disposal process/guidance.

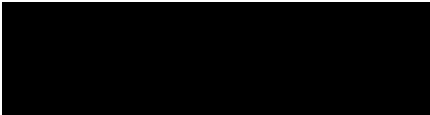
The investigation around land transfers in Council and the origin of the complaint

Finally, regarding allegations around land transfers, I was asked about correspondence received from a Public Representative and if I can reveal their identity.

I have been informed that the Department has withheld the name of the public representative under the exemption contained in Section 40(2) of the Freedom of Information Act, as it constitutes personal data.

I trust you find this information useful.

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Gordon Lyons.

Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities