

## Response ID ANON-H65J-VZ45-P

Submitted to Housing Supply Strategy Call for Evidence  
Submitted on 2021-07-15 12:02:45

### Introduction

1 Please confirm whether you are replying as an individual or submitting an official response on behalf of an organisation:

I am submitting an official response on behalf of an organisation

If you are replying on behalf of an organisation, please provide the name of your organisation:

NI Rural Residents' Forum - we are a committee of residents from across NI Housing Executive estates in Rural NI. RRF is part of the Housing Executive's Community Involvement Framework. The RRF meets ten times a year and secretariat support is provided by Rural Community Network

2 Do you agree that a 'Whole System' approach given the challenges is the right one?

Yes

If no, please explain your answer:

The whole system diagram needs to include profit and tax to ensure that the whole system approach considers how profit and tax regulations influence the housing market and can distort it in areas of high demand for housing. By including these factors specifically in the whole system diagram we can begin to discuss the steps that need to be taken to use taxes to control excess profit making in land and housing.

3 Do you agree with the 15 year timeframe proposed for the Housing Supply Strategy?

Yes

Not Answered

Please explain your answer:

We agree with the 15-year timeframe for the Housing supply strategy due to the deep-seated structural issues that need to be addressed. The HSS needs to consider the most appropriate intermediate targets that can be set to address the range of inter-related issues it will address.

4 Do you agree with the proposed vision for the Strategy?

No

If no, please explain your answer:

The RRF agrees with the general aspiration of the vision but believe that what constitutes affordable housing needs more careful definition. What is affordable for one household is not necessarily affordable for the next. Also the use of the term "affordable" may pigeon hole the strategy as a supply strategy for affordable housing instead of a strategy which will be looking at the issue of affordability across all tenures.

5 Do you agree with the following proposed objectives for the Strategy:

Yes

If no, please explain your answer:

No

If no, please explain your answer:

The proposed objective should be re-written to read:

"Reduce housing stress and homelessness by increasing the supply of social and affordable housing and improve housing solutions for the most vulnerable"

No

If no, please explain your answer:

The proposed objective should be re-written to read:

"Improve housing quality and safety to ensure housing can meet the needs of all across our communities"

Yes

If no, please explain your answer:

No

If no, please explain your answer:

The proposed objective should be re-written to read:

"Support a just transition to carbon neutrality by reducing whole-life carbon emissions from both new homes and existing homes."

6 The terms good quality, sustainable and affordable mean different things to different people - how would you define these terms?

Good quality:

Good quality means housing that meets people's needs and can adapt as their family/health needs change built to good design standards from materials that can withstand the climate here and ensure thermal comfort at a reasonable running cost.

Sustainable:

Sustainable means housing that is built to high environmental standards which are as carbon neutral as possible across their lifetime

Affordable:

Affordable, to us, means housing that costs no more than 35% of household income

7 What do you believe are the three main barriers to delivering the objectives for the strategy?

Barrier 1:

In rural communities the availability of suitable sites for housing within settlement limits at an affordable price for developers appears to be the main barrier constraining the delivery of housing across tenures.

Barrier 2:

The second major barrier are infrastructure deficits – particularly in relation to Waste water treatment which is preventing development of new homes across a range of settlement sizes and all tenures.

Barrier 3:

Is the availability of funding for social and affordable housing. With approximately 44,000 households on the waiting list and nearly 70% of those in housing stress it will take more than 20 years to build the new homes required to meet this need even if no-one else comes onto the waiting list. The HSS needs to bring a step change in the prioritization of public funding for the provision of social and affordable housing.

8 To what extent do you agree that there is a need to establish a more robust understanding of NI Housing Stock, e.g. by tenure, location, condition, etc.?

Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

RRF strongly agrees that there is a need for better understanding of local housing/rental markets. This is particularly important to inform the local development plan process and allow the Department and local authorities to plan better for housing need and housing supply. A deeper understanding at very local level of the condition of the housing stock across all tenures will be vital as NI Executive implements Energy strategy proposals which will require retro fit of insulation and transition away from OFCH which is a particularly challenging issue in rural communities off the mains gas network.

9 Are you aware of any specific data sources or methodological approaches to estimating existing housing stock, e.g. by tenure, location, condition, etc.?

No

If yes, please include data sources or methodological approaches here:

Sustainable Communities & Homes

10 How can housing supply help create and maintain sustainable communities?

How can housing supply help create and maintain sustainable communities?:

Housing supply in rural communities is vital to ensure their future sustainability. New build social housing in rural communities meets some of the housing needs of rural citizens but it also benefits the rural economy and contributes to sustainable development across the region:

"Support strong, sustainable growth for the benefit of all parts of Northern Ireland: A growing regional economy will benefit from strong urban and rural areas. This needs a co-ordinated approach to the provision of services, jobs and infrastructure and a focus on co-operation between service providers.

Balanced regional growth Building a Better Future and tackling regional imbalance are critical issues for the region.”  
Regional Development Strategy RDS 2035 Building a Better Future

“Our Economy is Globally Competitive, Regionally balanced and Carbon Neutral” is one of the 9 outcomes in our Draft Programme for Government. Without an adequate supply of housing across all tenures in a range of settlements this ambition is unlikely to be realized. Additional housing in rural settlements will contribute to ensuring schools and other public services remain viable. It also contributes to the sustainability of local small businesses and with improved broadband connectivity rural living can be much more carbon efficient than in previous decades. Housing supply in rural settlements also needs to consider the development of appropriate infrastructure and services. It also needs to consider rural mobility issues and how housing can link into active and public transport networks to enable people to access the employment and services they need.

11 How do we engage communities more effectively in place making?

How do we engage communities more effectively in place making?:

We need to invest more resource in engagement with local communities at grass roots level. The area plan development process is technical, time consuming and dominated by developers, landowners and statutory consultees. If we are serious about place making then we need to invest time and resources in it and listen to what local communities want from their local places.

12 To what extent do you agree that housing led regeneration policy contributes to reversing the physical, social and economic decline of:

Not Answered

Please explain your answer:

Not Answered

Please explain your answer:

Agree

Please explain your answer:

The provision of housing is an important factor in addressing physical, social and economic decline in rural communities but in the most deprived rural communities housing, on its own, cannot address social and economic decline. There are a complex range of factors at play across communities in terms of economic and social decline which then can manifest in physical decline and in the worst cases dereliction. The provision of housing, on its own, to address physical decline in rural communities is doomed to fail. We need to integrate the development of housing with a more equitable spread of services and employment opportunities (including remote work) across Northern Ireland to enable sustainable economic development. This requires continued investment in broadband and mobile phone networks and policy that supports small business development. The approach to transport and rural mobility of citizens that reduces households carbon footprint also needs to be designed into our re-development of rural communities based on just transition principles.

Not Answered

Please explain your answer:

13 How can we change the approach to housing led regeneration and ensure that it is more integrated in delivering wider policy outcomes?

How can we change the approach to housing led regeneration and ensure that it is more integrated in delivering wider policy outcomes?:

14 To what extent do you agree that it should be a priority to deliver more shared housing developments throughout NI?

Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

This is an important priority in many rural settlements which are already shared spaces and where shared housing developments can support the ongoing development of shared communities. We would suggest that many more rural settlements have the potential to benefit from the shared housing approach. Where services are struggling for survival sharing of those services can be second nature in some of those rural communities. It is however, important to recognize that many rural areas are a segregated as their urban counterparts and the concept of shared housing may be rejected as it is in some urban communities.

15 How can more shared housing developments be delivered here?

How can more shared housing developments in Northern Ireland be delivered?:

In settlements where there are high levels of residential segregation these don't lend themselves to shared housing as they will struggle to meet the minimum criteria to allow settlements to be considered shared. One way around this may be to consider clustering small settlements that are largely single identity from both sides of the community. These could then provide prospective tenants for a shared housing scheme. This approach would need careful community engagement before any schemes were approved but may present an opportunity to expand shared housing development into new areas.

16 To what extent do you agree that housing should be an integral part of the care and support system?

Strongly agree

If you agree with the statement, how do you feel this would be best achieved?:

Housing that meets the needs of older people and people with disabilities is a crucial part of our housing mix. We currently build too many units with 3 bedrooms and there is a dearth of one and two bedroom housing across rural settlements to meet the needs of smaller households and people with care needs. These issues need to be considered as part of much more detailed planning at local level predicting housing need. Provision of disabled facilities grants and design that allows homes to be adapted as tenants/residents needs change is also part of the solution.

17 What challenges do you see in delivering a wider range of housing types e.g. housing more suited to the needs of older people or those with disabilities and how can these be overcome?

What challenges do you see in delivering a wider range of housing types and how can these be overcome?:

18 How important is mixed tenure to addressing housing supply issues in NI?

Fairly important

Please explain your answer:

Housing supply in smaller settlements in rural communities has had a mixed nature across small villages and towns. What has been missing is a need for affordable housing in many rural settlements where people will not be eligible for social housing but cannot afford to buy in the private market. The impact of the pandemic and the economic problems it has already brought has seen an increase in demand for social housing in rural settlements. We suspect that some of this demand has been caused by tenants wishing to relocate from the private sector (with more insecure tenancies and higher rents) into the social sector.

19 What challenges do you see in progressing mixed tenure developments, and how could these be overcome?

What challenges do you see in progressing mixed tenure developments and how could these be overcome?:

Stigma associated with social housing where residents and developers may view social housing tenants as "people on benefits" or even more pejoratively as "problem families". This needs addressed by providing local leadership through community groups, sporting and cultural organisations and faith communities at the grass roots level. Where demand for private sector housing is high sites in those settlements are likely to be sold to private developers at prices that housing associations are unable to compete with.

Area development plans need to include a planning condition on housing development so that a certain percentage are set aside for social or affordable housing depending on need in that area. Housing Associations need to ensure that affordable housing in mixed tenure developments is retained as affordable housing in perpetuity.

## Equality and Human Rights

20 The Equality Commission has framed local housing demand and supply in relation to three constructs – accessibility; adequacy; and sustainability. Are you content with this framework or are there other issues that may warrant inclusion?

No

Please include any other issues that you feel should be included here:

While RRF recognizes the need for a fair housing allocations policy and a transparent points based system we also recognize that in popular rural locations it can be difficult to maintain affordable housing stock when second homes and short term rentals become popular. RRF would suggest that policies developed in the South West of England to address second homes and short term rentals may be worth examining for lessons for Housing Supply in NI. See <https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/planning/planningpolicies/affordablehousing>  
<https://www.cornwall.gov.uk/housing/affordable-housing/affordable-housing-policy/#section106>

21 In addition to the inequalities or data gaps already identified in the Equality Commission's Statement and the Wallace Report, are there any other issues that should be considered?

Not Answered

Please include any other issues that you feel should be included here:

22 In relation to the issue of using multivariate analyses, are you aware of any work already undertaken that would be useful?

Not Answered

If yes, please include any suggestions here:

## Housing Supply in Rural Areas

23 To what extent do you agree that the housing supply strategy should address the need for affordable homes in rural areas?

Strongly agree

Please explain your answer:

The HSS absolutely needs to address the need for social and affordable homes in rural areas. At 01.06.21 there were 6491 households on the housing waiting list who wanted to be housed in rural communities and 4077 of those were in housing stress (Statistics presented by NIHE Rural Unit at Rural Residents' Forum meeting 01.06.21). This represented 14.7% of the overall social housing waiting list in NI. This is compounded by a lack of supply of temporary accommodation in rural areas. In 2020, the Housing Executive published research conducted by Campbell Tickell on the subject of temporary accommodation. The research found that the temporary accommodation which is available is clustered particularly around Belfast and to a lesser extent around Derry/Londonderry. They describe rural provision of temporary accommodation as "sparse." ( McCrudden et al, "Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation", para 4.37.) The absence of temporary accommodation in rural areas can lead to households being removed from support networks which can help maintain wellbeing. Especially in cases where households have medium to high support needs, this can lead to difficulties which may have been avoided if such temporary accommodation was available. For families with school age children, taking up an offer of temporary accommodation many miles from where their child goes to school can cause significant disruption and may lead to a family in need of temporary accommodation refusing to take up an offer. Having suitable temporary accommodation available in local communities may help with the transition in to long-term accommodation as it would provide greater stability for those in need of temporary accommodation as they consider housing options. As McMordie notes, "where temporary accommodation is of good-quality, self-contained, and close to established support networks" the negative impacts associated with having to utilise temporary accommodation can be reduced. The Housing Supply Strategy could contribute in this area by considering how to boost the supply of suitable temporary accommodation in rural areas.

The new build target for social housing in rural communities set by the Housing Executive has not been achieved in 6 of the last 7 years. It is generally agreed that the level of housing need recorded by the Housing Executive through the housing waiting list does not reflect the true level of housing need in rural communities. Many rural residents see no social housing in their area, and do not see any prospect of social housing being built so they turn to the private rented sector. This is acknowledged by the Housing Executive who carry out a programme of housing need tests each year in rural communities to identify hidden housing need (24 tests are programmed for the year 2021/22). The numbers of homeless households presenting to the Housing Executive from rural communities has risen. At 01.06.21 2693 households from rural communities were homeless and defined as Full Duty Applicants. For the majority of these households the reason for homelessness was that their accommodation was no longer suitable to meet their needs, another demonstration of the housing supply issues faced in many rural communities. The demand for social and affordable housing is likely to increase further due to the end of furlough and any negative economic effects of the pandemic. The private rented sector which is the only housing option for many low-income households in rural communities often has higher rents and is in effect, subsidized from the public purse through housing benefit. In areas where housing is in short supply this is causing hardship in low-income families where housing benefit will only meet a proportion of the rent and tenants are forced to find a higher proportion from their own income.

The need for affordable housing in rural communities has also been identified by the Housing Executive Rural Unit through their programme of Rural housing need tests. There is a cohort of people in rural communities who cannot afford to buy on the private market but are unlikely to be eligible for social housing either. An affordable housing option (to buy or rent) would meet the housing needs of this cohort.

24 To what extent do you agree that community led housing should be supported and enabled in rural and urban areas across NI?

Neither agree nor disagree

Please explain your answer:

Community led housing could provide housing in smaller settlements. RRF would be concerned about how community led housing might work with social housing. Obviously social housing is allocated on priority housing need from a common waiting list in an area. Community led housing which involved people from a local community being prioritized in housing developments will not necessarily allocate housing to those most in housing need. This model may be more appropriate for private or co-operative developments but it is unclear how it can be used to develop and allocate social housing using the common waiting list.

25 How can additional innovative multi-agency projects (or approaches such as 'Tackling Rural Poverty & Social Isolation') be created to deliver more affordable housing supply in rural areas?

How can additional innovative multi-agency projects (or approaches such as TRPSI) be created to deliver more affordable housing supply in rural areas?:

Multi agency projects such as TRPSI may be used in future to support additional service delivery alongside the development of social and affordable housing in rural communities. Housing Associations have stated that small numbers of social houses in small settlements dispersed over a wide rural hinterland are not necessarily more expensive to build but are more expensive to manage. Additional multi agency projects may be able to draw down funding to meet other policy delivery objectives e.g. in relation to older people, women, people with disabilities, fuel poverty etc. that require services to be wrapped around social housing.

## Housing & Poverty

26 Is there a need for this housing supply strategy to play a role in reducing poverty?

Yes

Please explain your answer:

Adequate housing that is not overcrowded and is adequately heated should be a minimum right for all citizens in Northern Ireland. There are clear links in global research between inadequate housing (homelessness, housing conditions, fuel poverty) and increased poverty.

27 Currently housing stress is identified as 'those experiencing intimidation, insecurity of tenure, housing conditions, health and social wellbeing issues'. Do you have any comments on this definition of housing stress or are there other causes of housing stress that need to be considered?

Not Answered

Please include any comments or causes of housing stress that you feel should be considered here. :

28 To what extent do you agree that more needs to be done from an interdepartmental perspective to improve the lives and life chances of those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness?

Strongly agree

If you agree with the statement, please provide suggestions of what else you feel could be done here.:

There is a lack of suitable accommodation to address homelessness in rural communities. Not only is there a lack of supply of social housing in general but a lack of housing for single homeless or for couples without children i.e. one bedroom housing. A lot of housing stock is 2 bedroom plus and without bedroom tax mitigations this type of accommodation will place individuals/couples in financial hardship if they are to be offered this type of accommodation rather than 1 bedroom.

Secondly, people are being encouraged to consider private rented housing. The demand has surged and prices have increased as a result. This leaves the private rented sector out of reach for many people because it would mean increased financial hardship. Even where properties are available many landlords overlook those on benefits in favour of those who work and are not dependant on benefits. There would need to be an effort to regulate the private rented sector to make it available to everyone.

The long-term leasing arrangements currently being considered may be a solution to this as the NIHE would then be able to keep the rental costs down.

At 01.06.21 there were 6491 households on the housing waiting list who wanted to be housed in rural communities and 4077 of those were in housing stress (Statistics presented by NIHE Rural Unit at Rural Residents' Forum meeting 01.06.21). This represented 14.7% of the overall social housing waiting list in NI. This is compounded by a lack of supply of temporary accommodation in rural areas. In 2020, the Housing Executive published research conducted by Campbell Tickell on the subject of temporary accommodation. The research found that the temporary accommodation which is available is clustered particularly around Belfast and to a lesser extent around Derry/Londonderry. They describe rural provision of temporary accommodation as "sparse." ( McCrudden et al, "Strategic Review of Temporary Accommodation", para 4.37.) The absence of temporary accommodation in rural areas can lead to households being removed from support networks which can help maintain wellbeing. Especially in cases where households have medium to high support needs, this can lead to difficulties which may have been avoided if such temporary accommodation was available. For families with school age children, taking up an offer of temporary accommodation many miles from where their child goes to school can cause significant disruption and may lead to a family in need of temporary accommodation refusing to take up an offer. Having suitable temporary accommodation available in local communities may help with the transition in to long-term accommodation as it would provide greater stability for those in need of temporary accommodation as they consider housing options. As McMordie notes, "where temporary accommodation is of good-quality, self-contained, and close to established support networks" the negative impacts associated with having to utilise temporary accommodation can be reduced. The Housing Supply Strategy could contribute in this area by considering how to boost the supply of suitable temporary accommodation in rural areas.

29 How do we help homeless people transition from temporary accommodation to long term homes?

How do we help homeless people transition from temporary accommodation to long term homes?:

30 To what extent do you agree that housing plays a significant role in reducing economic inactivity/enabling individuals to take up employment?

Not Answered

Please explain your answer:

## Land & Property

31 Are there changes to land & property legislation, policies, processes or procedures that could transform housing supply for the better?

Are there changes to land & property legislation, policies, processes or procedures that could transform housing supply for the better?:

32 Should the options for making public sector land (local and central government) available to support a wider variety of housing options be explored?

Not Answered

If yes, what do you see as the main barriers to achieving this?:

One of the main barriers is currently being addressed by Government Land and Property Register mapping exercise being carried out by DoF to map all public sector land across NI. Where public land is identified in areas of high housing need then the potential exists for that land to be developed for housing.

A further barrier that exists is the requirement for public sector land being disposed of to be sold for market value. Where need for social housing exists alongside high demand for general housing Housing Associations will find it difficult to compete with private developers for these sites. Where public sector land is being disposed of for the public good of providing social housing then the requirement to achieve market value should be waived. This may necessitate some asset lock to be placed on any social housing built as a result to ensure it remains as a public asset and is not sold off in future to private sector.

33 Are there land & property practices adopted in other UK or European jurisdictions that you believe would transform supply if adopted here?

Not Answered

If yes, please include your suggestions here:

## Planning

34 Are there changes to planning legislation, policies, processes or procedures that could transform housing supply for the better?

Are there changes to planning legislation, policies, processes or procedures that could transform housing supply for the better?:

Local Development Plans should include a planning condition on new housing developments in rural communities that set aside a percentage of the development for social or affordable housing. Some Councils have included this condition on larger developments e.g. with more than 50 units or on more than 2 hectares but this will not address the need for affordable/social housing in smaller settlements (some Councils are yet to publish their local development plans).

NIFHA and Housing Associations have told us that one of the main barriers to the development of more social housing in rural settlements is the availability of suitable sites. RCN would suggest that we need to consider a mechanism to move development limits in settlements where housing need is emerging. Currently in many areas of high housing demand sites are at a premium and housing associations are unable to compete with private developers.

Planning for infrastructure is another major barrier with the need to invest in Waste water treatment infrastructure in many settlements a barrier to housing development. The Department for Infrastructure needs to commit to invest in smaller WWT works to enable smaller settlements to develop sustainably. Our concern is that the investment in WWT infrastructure announced by the Infrastructure Minister will be directed to larger settlements.

35 Are there planning practices adopted in other UK or European jurisdictions that you believe would transform supply if adopted here?

Not Answered

If yes, please include your suggestions here:

36 Is land banking hindering housing supply here?

Yes

If yes, what could be done to address it?:

There is some anecdotal evidence of land banking within rural communities but RRF do not have access to evidence or data. From our initial scan for the purposes of responding to this consultation question data on this issue does not appear to be easy to access. This may be partly due to the fact that different types of data are held by different stakeholders such as Local Councils, the Housing Executive and DfC. We would suggest that some comparison over a 5 year period between the number of planning approvals for residential units granted vs. the number of completions across all Council areas over the same period may give an initial indication of the extent of land banking.

The question RRF would ask is why does the DfC not have a clear picture of this issue already? The Department should be able to access data that would reveal the extent of the issue. From an evaluation of the extent of the issue the measures needed to address it to tackle housing supply issues can then follow.

We would suggest that the Department explore with the Department for Infrastructure the introduction on stricter time limits for development when approval has been granted and development commenced. Our understanding is that developers can basically mothball sites if they have commenced work and this facilitates land banking.

## Finance

37 To what extent do you agree that the NICS could better utilise existing funding (e.g. Block Grant, Financial Transactions Capital, Housing Association Grant, Reinvestment and Reform Initiative) to leverage greater levels of private finance for housing development?

Neither agree nor disagree

If you agree with the statement, how do you feel this would be best achieved?:

There may be opportunity to use Financial Transactions Capital or Reinvestment and Reform Initiative to lever greater levels of private finance for housing development in the private sector. RRF would be concerned at any further encroachment of private sector funding into the Social housing sector. Housing

Association rents are already higher than Housing Executive rents partly due to the requirement for Housing Associations to service private finance which they have accessed to develop social housing. If Housing Associations are required to attract a greater percentage of private finance to develop social housing will lead to further rent increases which will put further pressure on vulnerable tenants and add additional costs to the public purse through additional transfer of housing benefit.

38 Are there other ways the private and voluntary community and social enterprise sectors can leverage other forms of funding to increase housing supply?

Not Answered

If yes, please include your suggestions here:

39 Are there any other areas of market failure that need public and/or private intervention?

Not Answered

If yes, please include your suggestions here:

## Infrastructure

40 Are there changes to infrastructure legislation, policies, processes or procedures, such as the establishment of an Infrastructure Commission, that could transform housing supply for the better?

Are there changes to infrastructure legislation, policies, processes or procedures that could transform housing supply for the better?:

RRF is unsure if an infrastructure commission will transform housing supply for the better. Much will depend on the role, responsibilities and powers of any Commission and ultimately the level of public funding available to NI Executive departments that will enable them to tackle infrastructure deficits.

41 To what extent do you agree that coordination of housing provision and infrastructure services need to be better aligned?

Agree

If you agree with the statement, please provide suggestions as to how this might be achieved.:

Crucial issues to address in the development of new housing are:

1. Access to provision of public services to support residents
2. Provision of effective and affordable broadband infrastructure as a utility for new housing development.
3. Ensure that mobility requirements of households are considered as new housing is being planned and that active and public transport links are integral to design and location of new housing.

42 To what extent do you agree that a Housing Supply Strategy should consider both the provision of new homes and protecting existing supply?

Strongly agree

If you agree with the statement, please provide any evidence you have on how this could be best achieved.:

HSS needs to ensure existing housing stock is utilized as efficiently as possible. That should include schemes that support repair and maintenance of existing properties in the private rented sector where a landlord can demonstrate that they are unable to fund repairs and maintenance and are on the Private landlord register. It also needs to tackle the backlog in Housing Executive housing stock.

The House Sales scheme for social housing should end as we have not been able to replace social housing sold to tenants since the 1980s which has had a disastrous impact on the supply of social housing and led to over 40,000 households on the waiting list.

The HSS also needs to consider design and construction standards in detail to ensure that housing across all tenures can meet the needs of households well into the future.

43 How do we ensure that our housing supply integrates and brings together all the essential infrastructure (hard/soft & critical) required to create thriving homes and communities?

How do we ensure that our housing supply integrates and brings together all the essential infrastructure (hard/soft & critical) required to create thriving homes and communities? :

Unsure of the best vehicle for making this happen but 3 issues are crucial to consider in rural communities when housing (of any tenure if being planned):

- 1 Rural mobility – how will residents use active or public transport to meet their travel needs?
2. How will any new homes connect to fibre broadband to enable home working, access to services and retail and the range of benefits effective broadband access can bring?
3. What is the minimum level of access to services required for people in rural communities?

## Climate Change/ Net Zero

44 Are there changes to climate, sustainability and environmental legislation, policies, processes or procedures that could transform housing supply for the better?

Are there changes to climate, sustainability and environmental legislation, policies, processes or procedures that could transform housing supply for the better?:

A Community energy audit service could be developed as a way of auditing vulnerable and low-income households across NI. This could involve home visits to audit electricity provider and tariff, heating provision, advice on energy efficiency and low carbon heating and eligibility for energy efficiency or fuel poverty interventions. As well as the positive impacts for vulnerable households this could make a significant contribution to the net zero carbon target. Consumer panels could be set up in conjunction with food banks/ social supermarkets etc. to hear from NGOs and vulnerable groups directly about their challenges in relation to energy and to explore proposals to address fuel poverty and energy efficiency.

New design standards for zero carbon homes need to be agreed for all new builds as soon as possible and these standards need to be made a condition of planning permission being approved. Local government building control need to ensure that these standards are adhered to through the construction process.

45 Transitioning to low carbon homes will require significant behavioural changes by householders. Is support required to aid the necessary behavioural changes?

Yes

If yes, what support could be provided?:

Yes support will definitely be required to support behavioural change but must be underpinned by the just transition principle. In rural communities households with low/moderate incomes will need financial support with the costs of retrofitting their homes with insulation and low carbon heating systems.

When home heating has become decarbonised electricity prices must be regulated to ensure fuel poverty levels are reduced and eventually eliminated. Rural households will face additional challenges to decarbonise their home heating as the majority of rural areas do not have access to mains gas as an intermediate option.

To ensure transition to a zero-carbon energy system is just, low income households must be enabled to access funding to retrofit insulation and zero/low carbon heating systems. DfC already has decades of experience it can build on of the delivery challenges for delivering fuel poverty schemes to vulnerable households.

46 Taking into account social impact, what incentives or disincentives could be introduced to positively impact the current and future delivery of low carbon homes?

Incentives:

Grant support for retro fit of insulation and heat pumps in low/moderate income households.

Reduced/zero VAT rates for low carbon retro-fit schemes.

Priority decision in planning process for homes that are low or zero carbon.

Additional percentage uplift in HAG for low/zero carbon homes.

Disincentives :

## Innovation

47 Should existing buildings, including our heritage assets, play an enhanced role in transforming housing supply?

Yes

If yes, please provide evidence as to how this may be achieved.:

Conversion of space over retail premises into homes may be an important way of providing additional housing in smaller settlements. The Housing Executive are already involved with DAERA under the TRPSI programme Village Catalyst Pilot scheme which is seeking to develop heritage buildings in rural communities as community assets. This type of approach could also be used to facilitate conversion of heritage assets into homes.

48 Are you aware of any innovations relating to housing including design, construction, procurement, contracting and commissioning that could help transform supply?

Yes

If yes, please include your suggestions here:

Modern Methods of Construction are being explored at scale by the National Housing Federation in England see <https://www.housing.org.uk/our-work/building-new-homes/building-better/> for more detail on their Building Better Initiative.

ARC Healthy Living Centre in Irvinestown and the NI Housing Executive are part of an EU funded Northern Periphery Project addressing fuel poverty. More information on the Handiheat project is at <https://www.archlc.com/activity/handiheat/>

## Skills

49 To what extent do you agree that the Housing Supply Strategy could act as a stimulus to improve and modernise construction skills and increase the importance of the sector?

Agree

If you agree with the statement, how do you feel this would be best achieved?:

It has potential to stimulate and improve/modernize construction skills. Retro fitting of low/zero carbon adaptations to existing housing or new homes has the potential to create thousands of jobs over the next decades. To support this to happen the government needs to send the signal to the construction industry that zero carbon housing is the future and will be backed by significant government investment.

Skills providers need to be invested in and accredited training/apprenticeships need to be provided.

Greater focus on health and safety and construction workers working conditions will encourage more young people to enter the sector.

50 Does the Construction Sector in NI need support to skill up in digital technologies, Modern Methods of Construction, low carbon construction and the whole life performance of house building etc.?

Not Answered

If yes, how do you feel this would be best achieved?:

51 Does the age profile and make up of the construction sector (older workers/ self employed) require a specific intervention to support our housing supply in the future?

Not Answered

If yes, how do you feel this would be best achieved?:

52 Does NI need some large Green Building Projects such as those being developed elsewhere to help create momentum for a changed skills agenda here?

Yes

If yes, please include your suggestions here:

A comprehensive government investment in tackling fuel poverty across NI by retrofitting insulation to treat the whole thermal envelope of cold properties and retrofitting heat pumps will:

- Build the skills of the construction workforce in zero carbon technology
- Provide stimulus to the construction industry to invest in new skills and equipment
- Tackle fuel poverty issue for the most vulnerable homes
- Provide skills that can be transferred to new build construction in the coming decades.

53 Are there any other areas that could impact on the development of the housing supply strategy that you feel have not been covered in this call for evidence?

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