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PRESS RELEASE

Building our Communities: Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland

“To have access to a home where you can feel safe should be an achievable aim for all of us who choose to live here in Northern Ireland. It is important therefore, when enduring inequalities impact on this aspiration, that those issues should be named and, more significantly, addressed, by concrete, focussed action.” Dr. Michael Wardlow, Chief Commissioner of the Equality Commission said today.

Dr. Wardlow was speaking at a seminar in Skainos, Belfast, to launch the research report carried out for the Equality Commission by The Centre for Housing Policy, University of York and discussing the Commission’s draft Statement into Housing and Communities’ Inequalities in Northern Ireland.

“We cannot underestimate the profound effect that key inequalities in housing may have on a person’s life and on society as a whole. Many of the housing inequalities in Northern Ireland highlighted by this work have endured throughout the last decade.”

Despite a decline since 2001 in residential segregation across Northern Ireland, segregated residential markets still lead to differing experiences of waiting lists for social housing. Catholics applicants experienced the longest waiting times in Northern Ireland as a whole and were allocated a smaller share of social housing than their proportionate share of the waiting list.

“We know that segregated housing patterns, residential preferences and issues of stock availability interact to impact on waiting lists and allocations, but it is vital that everyone in Northern Ireland has access to safe, secure and suitable accommodation. This does not just involve the housing bodies but needs a joined-up, community wide commitment and an effective long-term strategy with concrete actions”, Dr Wardlow said.

“At the heart of this strategy, there must be delivery of appropriate numbers of suitable homes to meet the needs that exist. And the strategy to achieve this must have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations,” he continued.

Accessibility to quality transit and settled sites for members of the Irish Traveller community in Northern Ireland are still limited, with some experiencing a lack of basic amenities. Migrant workers are often subject to tied accommodation with poor conditions and overcrowding.

People with a learning disability or mental health problems are not always given an opportunity to live independently and many disabled people live in homes that are not adequate to meet their needs.

With regards to sustainable housing and communities, the homes of minority ethnic people and migrant groups are vulnerable to racial attacks. Whilst lesbian, gay and bisexual people can feel harassed and unsafe in their own homes and neighbourhoods.

“The event today provides a forum to discuss the research findings with all interested bodies and affords these bodies with the opportunity to help shape the Commission’s thinking around key inequalities in housing. From these discussions, we want to ensure that appropriate action can be taken to address these inequalities,” concluded Dr. Wardlow.

Notes to Editor:

1. In compiling the draft Statement, the Commission has drawn on a wide range of sources. The Commission also contracted independent research from The Centre for Housing Policy, University of York.
2. [Draft statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities](#) (pdf, 1.61mb)
3. [Housing and Communities' Inequalities in NI - Summary Report](#) (pdf, 684kb)
[Housing and Communities' Inequalities in NI - Full Report](#) (pdf, 2.74mb)
4. Full information is available on the Equality Commission’s website:
www.equalityni.org/KeyInequalities-Housing