

28 August 2024



Mr. John O'Dowd MLA
Minister for Infrastructure
James House
2 - 4 Cromac Avenue
Belfast BT7 2JA

By email: private.office@infrastructure-ni.gov.uk

Dear Minister O'Dowd

RE: TACKLING THE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS CRISIS – AN AGENDA FOR CHANGE

I am writing to you on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Housing Northern Ireland to share our latest report, *Tackling the housing and homelessness crisis: An agenda for change*. Our report highlights several critical issues within the housing sector, including the urgent need to address the challenges faced by NI Water.

As you are aware, the ability to unlock investment for water infrastructure is vital for the future development of Northern Ireland's housing sector. NI Water's current financial and operational structures significantly limit its access to much-needed capital investment. This lack of investment poses a risk to future housing developments and broader infrastructure projects. The restrictions under the current model have led to a situation where the capacity for growth is constrained by infrastructure limitations, especially in areas where housing demand is high.

We believe that exploring a revised structure for NI Water is essential to overcoming these limitations and unlocking opportunities for investment. Such a change could enable NI Water to operate more effectively, allowing for improvements and expansions that will meet the current and future needs of Northern Ireland's communities. Addressing these issues is not only crucial for housing but also for ensuring the sustainability and resilience of our infrastructure in the face of climate challenges and growing population demands.

Given the importance of this issue, we kindly request information on how your office is prioritising the exploration of NI Water's structure to unlock access to investment. We are eager to learn about any measures being planned or implemented to address this critical bottleneck. Understanding the Department for Infrastructure's strategy and priorities regarding NI Water will help us align our efforts and support initiatives that aim to facilitate investment and development.

Our report suggests that potential solutions could include revisiting funding models, encouraging public-private partnerships, and considering structural changes that

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allow for increased financial flexibility. We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these proposals further and explore how the Chartered Institute of Housing can support efforts to improve Northern Ireland's water infrastructure and, by extension, its housing capacity.

We hope that this report will serve as a catalyst for action and foster collaboration between your department and other stakeholders to address these challenges. We are committed to working closely with you and your team to ensure that Northern Ireland's housing and infrastructure sectors are well-equipped to meet future demands.

Thank you for your attention to this pressing issue. We look forward to your response and the opportunity to discuss how we can support your efforts to enhance NI Water's ability to access investment and drive infrastructure development.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Cartwright', is positioned above the typed name.

**JUSTIN CARTWRIGHT CIHCM
NATIONAL DIRECTOR
CIH NORTHERN IRELAND**