

25 September 2024

Our Ref: FOI 505

Request

We received your request on 30 August 2024 for the following information:

I am writing to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The main purpose of this request is to gather data on vacant council properties in the United Kingdom.

For clarification, this includes all forms of social housing in the ward of the council, including Housing Association. Specifically, I am seeking information on the following:

Number of vacant homes:

- The number of vacant council properties*
- The number of vacant Housing Association properties*

Reasons for vacancy:

- Breakdown of reasons why said social housing properties are vacant*
- [E.g. awaiting repairs, legal issues, not meeting the Decent Homes Standard, etc.]*

Waiting list size:

- How many residents are currently on the waiting list for social housing*

Waiting list length:

- The average length of the waiting list for a council property*
- The average length of the waiting list for a Housing Association property*

I would like you to provide the information in the following format:

Please provide the information in electronic format, preferably as an Excel spreadsheet or CSV file. Please avoid sending PDFs or Word documents if possible.

If you are unable to provide the specified information:

If you cannot provide the information exactly as requested, please provide any relevant data you have and explain why the other information cannot be provided.

If you have any questions or require further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me via email

03.09.24

To enable us to proceed with this please clarify:

As you have been advised by Newry Mourne and Down District Council, the provision of social housing is not a Council function in Northern Ireland. Social housing is provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and by registered Housing Associations. The Housing Executive is the regional housing authority for all Northern Ireland so we can provide you with data on the number of people on the Waiting List at NI level or using each of the 11 district council boundaries in NI. Can you please advise what information you would like to receive?

Please also be advised that Northern Ireland operates a Common Selection Scheme for social housing. All applicants are on a single waiting list, there is no separate waiting list for Housing Association properties. Therefore we cannot provide you with waiting list data broken down by NIHE/Housing Association.

I am unclear what you mean when you say “average length of the waiting list”, do you mean the average time take to receive an allocation of a social housing property? If yes, we can provide you with the length of time taken to receive an allocation at a Council level but this will be caveated on the basis that it is a coarse average at that level. Allocation time can vary significantly based on the area of choice within a council area, by the number of points a person has been allocated based on their circumstances and by the type of property required. If yes, can you also please confirm the timeframe of your request e.g. over the last 12 months, 2 years or 5 years. Please clarify how you would like us to proceed with this aspect of your request.

03.09.24 response:

- 1. If you could provide the number of people on the waiting list in each of the 11 district council boundaries in NI, that would be great.*
- 2. For the “average length of the waiting list”, please provide the average time it takes to receive an allocation of a social housing property at a council level. For the timeframe, over the last 5 years would be useful to help understand the average length.*

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

Our response

Q1 Number of vacant homes:

- ***The number of vacant council properties***
- ***The number of vacant Housing Association properties***

Q2 Reasons for vacancy:

- ***Breakdown of reasons why said social housing properties are vacant***
- ***[E.g. awaiting repairs, legal issues, not meeting the Decent Homes Standard, etc.]***

The attached spreadsheet provides details of Housing Executive void properties in the South Down Area Office (Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area), broken into void category, as of 31st August 2024.

The Housing Executive does not hold information in relation to void Housing Association properties.

As previously advised, the provision of social housing is not a council function in Northern Ireland. Social housing is provided by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) and by registered Housing Associations. The Housing Executive is the strategic regional housing authority for all Northern Ireland. As also previously advised, Northern Ireland operates a Common Selection Scheme for social housing. All applicants are on a single waiting list, there is no separate waiting list for Housing Association properties. Therefore, we cannot provide you with waiting list data broken down by Housing Executive and Housing Association applicants.

Q3 Waiting list size:

- ***How many residents are currently on the waiting list for social housing***

Further to your clarification email of 3rd September in which you confirmed that you would like the total number of applicants on the Common Waiting List by council area, the table below provides you with the number of applicants and number of applicants in housing stress as at 30th June 2024. The data should be read with the accompanying notes.

Waiting List and allocations data are produced quarterly so the June 2024 figures are the latest available. As requested this data has also been provided in Excel format.

LGD	Applicants	Applicants in Housing Stress	Allocations
Antrim & Newtownabbey	3480	2722	411
Ards & North Down	3330	2457	502
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	3994	2544	502
Belfast	12889	10497	1617
Causeway Coast & Glens	3786	2366	432
Derry & Strabane	6260	4878	600
Fermanagh & Omagh	2162	1529	209
Lisburn & Castlereagh	2548	2005	318
Mid & East Antrim	3176	2360	487
Mid Ulster	2317	1508	295
Newry, Mourne & Down	3994	3271	335
Grand Total	47936	36137	5708

Notes:

- Allocation information refers to the number of allocations in the preceding 12 month period.
- Housing Stress refers to people who have been allocated 30 or more points under the Housing Selection Scheme.
- Social housing waiting list and allocations data held by the Housing Executive, form part of the Northern Ireland Housing Bulletin, which is published quarterly as a National Statistic by the Department for Communities. Therefore, to avoid breaches of the code of practice for statistics, the most recent data provided is based on the most recently published data (end June 2024).

Q4 Waiting list length:

- ***The average length of the waiting list for a council property***
- ***The average length of the waiting list for a Housing Association property***

Further to your clarification email of 3rd September in which you confirmed that for “average length of the waiting list”, you wanted the average time it takes to receive an allocation of a social housing property at council level over the last 5 years, the table below provides you with data on the number of housing allocations to applicants on the social housing waiting list in Northern Ireland by Local Government District for a 5-year period from 01/07/2019 to 30/06/2024. The table should be viewed in conjunction with the accompanying notes.

As requested this data has also been provided in Excel format.

Allocations 01/07/2019 - 30/06/2024 at Local Government District level by Mean & Median Waiting Time (in months) on the Waiting List at the point of allocation			
Local Government District	No. of allocations	Mean Months at the point of allocation	Median Months at the point of allocation
Antrim & Newtownabbey	2,414	24.2	14.0
Ards & North Down	2,710	22.3	12.0
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	2,290	24.6	14.0
Belfast	8,111	29.9	19.0
Causeway Coast & Glens	2,039	27.8	17.0
Derry & Strabane	3,502	30.7	20.0
Fermanagh & Omagh	1,159	22.5	14.0
Lisburn & Castlereagh	1,960	25.6	17.0
Mid & East Antrim	2,474	23.8	13.0
Mid Ulster	1,418	25.3	14.0
Newry, Mourne & Down	1,894	32.5	21.0
N. Ireland Total	29,971	27.2	16.0

Notes:

- This response is based on the most recently published data (allocations up to 30/06/2024).
- Allocations are aggregated over a 5-year period from 01/07/2019 to 30/06/2024 and include allocations to both Housing Executive and housing association properties.
- When a question of “average waiting times” or “average points” is asked, MEAN and MEDIAN averages are provided.

Reasons for this include:

The MEAN is the arithmetic average and as a statistic can often be unreliable, having been skewed by significant outliers i.e. applicants who have been on the waiting list for a number of years.

This degree of skewing makes the arithmetic average, the MEAN, unreliable. Therefore, following expert advice on this matter a methodology that utilises the MEDIAN (a measure of central tendency) as a more reliable indicator in relation to Waiting Lists and Allocations is also provided.

Please further note that allocation time can vary significantly based on the area of choice within a council area that the applicant wishes to live in, by the number of points an applicant has been allocated based on their circumstances and by the type of property required. Therefore, at this high level of classification, the time taken to receive an allocation is a broad average only.