



# shelter

Northern Ireland  
Combating Homelessness

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## Shelter Northern Ireland – emergency sleeping shelter

Shelter Northern Ireland welcomes the spotlight on homelessness that has been created by this emergency sleeping shelter. We support the intervention and applaud this innovative attempt to address rough sleeping on the streets of Belfast. Such an idea contrasts strongly with parts of inner London where spikes were embedded in the ground to dissuade people sleeping rough.

Perhaps we have become complacent about housing and are roused to debate housing only when people are offered an emergency sleeping shelter. As a society we seem to take account of and debate the asset value of housing only. We appear to have forgotten that housing is a necessity to everyone and not just a commodity for investment purposes.

In our view, the focus on the debate about the use of the box is masking the real problems facing housing and the main causes of homelessness in Northern Ireland; that is the continuing shortfall in affordable housing supply.

The Department for Social Development hopes to start 2,000 new homes for rent this year. But this level is to be reduced next year because of the lack of public funding. We have seen Health, Education, Training and Employment being debated as priorities for public funding, but the housing debate has almost disappeared. With private developments for sale only beginning to emerge, it is the private sector for rent which has produced an answer to Stormont's prayers, because without the spectacular increase in private housing for let, the present dire situation would be approaching biblical proportions. We believe that private rented sector has a role to play in housing but primarily it is there to make a profit, it has no responsibility to meet the needs of vulnerable homeless people, or to give leadership in relation to housing standards, affordable housing or housing related support.

We call on the Stormont Executive to respond to the real issues here. The answer to rough sleeping, homelessness and severe housing need does not lie in an emergency homeless shelter, however innovative. We believe that the Stormont Executive needs to prioritise the new housing supply and to fund the provision of a minimum of 5,000 new social homes per year for each year of the next Comprehensive Spending Review period.

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