

2024 Radius AGM Thursday 27th June

Chair's Address

Ladies and Gentlemen, re-establishing the local Assembly was an imperative if we were going to start to address the structural challenges within our public services. However if we were expecting a quick-fix to the issues in the Health or Water Services or some form of funding windfall this clearly wasn't going to happen. Having said that we were all taken aback by the extent of the cut to this year's departmental budget for new social homes.

Estimates are that new starts could be as low as 2-300 homes, the lowest on record, with the commitment likely to be taken up by those schemes which just missed approval in the previous year. Despite having a healthy pipeline of over 350 projects, Radius could realistically have less than 100 actually starting. And that's based on us utilising our disposal proceeds funds. That will make life extremely difficult not only for the communities we serve but for our valued partners and suppliers in the construction industry – people who have consistently served the social housing sector for many years.

In a time when decisions and planning are becoming increasingly short-term and short-sighted, allowing housing stress levels to grow beyond record levels is extremely short-sighted. The impact on health, education and employment – these will endure for years to come, leading to more people and children living in poverty. Good quality and energy efficient housing, this unlocks the potential in our communities. It provides the platform for making Northern Ireland a more equal society, it raises self-esteem and will make us a more competitive part of the UK. Conversely, housing-for-all, leaves us much better placed to attract opportunities into our communities for now and future generations to come.

We must ensure that next year's housing budget returns the social housing programme to somewhere close to previous year's figures. Whatever disposal proceeds funds we may be able redirect towards new starts in 2024/25, this modest funding pot can only be used once. Radius is playing its part in partnership with NIFHA, in educating MLA's, the media and others, of the very serious implications of allowing housing stress levels and homelessness to grow further and failing to support the most vulnerable and marginalised in our communities. It's clear we are in a new operating context.

When record hospital waiting lists have become the norm, when developments in whole towns have stalled due to no sewage capacity, the Assembly has its work cut out. Tough decisions are now required. And if as widely expected, Labour turns out to be the new UK government, we are not expecting quick fixes for the UK never mind Northern Ireland. It really is down to us to plan and sort out our local problems.

But make no mistake that Radius is primed to play its part in regenerating neighbourhoods and reducing waiting lists and housing stress.

As important as new-build is, it represents 2-3% of our programme of total homes. Hence we have been prioritising for our 14,000 homes increased investment, more social impact services and enhanced tenant engagement. Our priority is to protect tenancies and make our communities more empowered and resilient.

Gold Award

We were absolutely delighted with the conferring of 'Gold' on Radius, following our latest Tenant Participation audit by Supporting Communities – another Northern Ireland first by Radius. Last year we had no less than 10,000 attendees at over 160 events and programmes over the 12 months. And for over 3 years, as living, energy and fuel costs shot up, Radius moved to shield our most vulnerable tenants from the true cost of service and heating charges – last year that assistance hit £1.6m.

We firmly believe that our new Radius Foundation, launched today, will enable us to go even further in the years to come – that's helping more tenants to help themselves.

Tenant Safety

Tenant safety remains our topmost priority and we were very keen to rise to the challenge of developing the most effective strategy for tackling dampness and mould and to do so in partnership with our tenants.

Where it is viable to do so, we are upgrading our older properties and have a dedicated response to dampness cases which present.

We have invested in new ICT systems and commenced the process of cleansing data and assuring our compliance systems – all under the guidance of safety experts.

Summary

So in summary, protecting tenancies, investing in our homes and communities, prioritising safety and reducing housing stress – these remain the priorities of the Board as we move forward. I do want to pay tribute to our voluntary board who play a critical supportive and oversight role to the organisation. They give generously of their time whether that's advocating on behalf of all our customers, challenging performance and new business proposals or upholding good governance – truly we are well served in this regard. Radius holds the highest rating of any UK housing association by Moodys International. They have cited Radius's clarity of vision together with our sound financial footing as key strengths – a firm endorsement of our governance and our people.

I also want to pay tribute to our Tenant Executive, our Tenant Representatives who serve on Radius boards and the many tenants who volunteer to take part in scrutiny panels and focus groups. Through your advice and lived-experience, our services are improving – we are getting better.

Ladies and gentlemen, yes we are operating in challenging times with our public representatives, customers, delivery partners and Radius, all having to make difficult choices.

However my challenge to us all, as we move forward is - given the professionalism and innovation of our people, the positive collaboration of our tenants and suppliers, and the guidance of our Board.

We must continue to pursue new service levels, look to enhanced results and even greater value. All while protecting more tenancies and enabling our communities to thrive.

Through working together we can all make a difference and ensure everyone has a place at Radius.

Thank you

Martin Pitt, Chair