

Housing Policy in Northern Ireland

Paddy Gray & Chris Paris

University of Ulster

Tallinn 12th September 2005

Overview

- Distinctive constitutional history
 - Had devolution since 1998 but Assembly now suspended
 - Still deep division over constitutional status
- Distinctive housing history
 - With a changing housing system
 - Affected by continuing community divisions
 - Social housing changing rapidly
 - Distinctive economy & demography
- Uncertain constitutional & housing futures



NI political context

- NI: a 'place apart'
 - 1921 Partition: imposed 'solution' to Irish question
 - Unionists/loyalists wanted (& *still* want) to be part of UK
 - Nationalists/republicans aspired (& *still* aspire) to united Ireland
- Distinctive political history since partition
 - Devolved parliament with Unionist control to 1971
 - Recurring inter-communal violence
- Mainly Direct rule from Westminster 1971-1998
- Distinctive NI party system on ethno-religious basis
 - Various unionist (& loyalist) & nationalist (& republican) positions

Housing Pre War

- Government of Ireland Act 1920
-housing became the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Ministry of Home Affairs
- Low level of Local Authority Building compared with England and Wales
- Strongest evidence of neglect was the war-time Planning and Advisory Board report
-estimated that 229,500 of the stock of 323,000 dwellings required repair.

Housing after 2nd World War

- Setting up of Northern Ireland Housing Trust to complement LAs
- Still inactivity in LA housing Activity
- 1956 Statutory Duty to deal with problems of unfitness was imposed on LAs
- 1960s and 1970s saw various attempts to improve the housing stock
- Wilson report 1965 recommended that the Government should adopt a target of at least 12,000 houses a year by 1970
- Between 1964 and 1969 an annual average of 10,500 was achieved
- Still lagged far behind conditions in GB

Housing Tenure in Ireland and GB 1961

	Owners %	Private Rented %	Public Sector %
Great Britain	51	18	31
Northern Ireland	42	36	21
Ireland	60	22	18

Political Violence and Civil Rights 1960s

- Process of Reform as a result of civil disturbances (Caledon squatting incident)
- Cameron Commission set up in 1969 listed complaints on housing including: the inadequacy of housing provision by certain local authorities; the misuse in certain cases of discretionary powers of allocation of housing in order to perpetuate Unionist control of the local authority
- Oct 1971 NIHE set up and by 1973 had taken over the responsibility for 155,000 dwellings









Distinctive housing policy history

- Smaller role for councils than GB 1921-1971
 - Little construction/urban renewal: poor conditions
- Unique arrangements from early 1970s
 - Councils re-organised, *lost* all housing & planning
 - One province-wide public housing: NIHE
 - Ensured non-discriminatory housing allocation
 - HAs small/specialised: most tenants 60+, PF later than in GB
- Rapid growth in supply & improved conditions
 - Major NIHE programmes of new build & renewal in 70s & 80s
 - Late start: NI public stock *younger* than GB & *little* high-rise
- Most GB policies implemented after 1970s
 - Though usually *after* GB & virtually *no* stock transfer

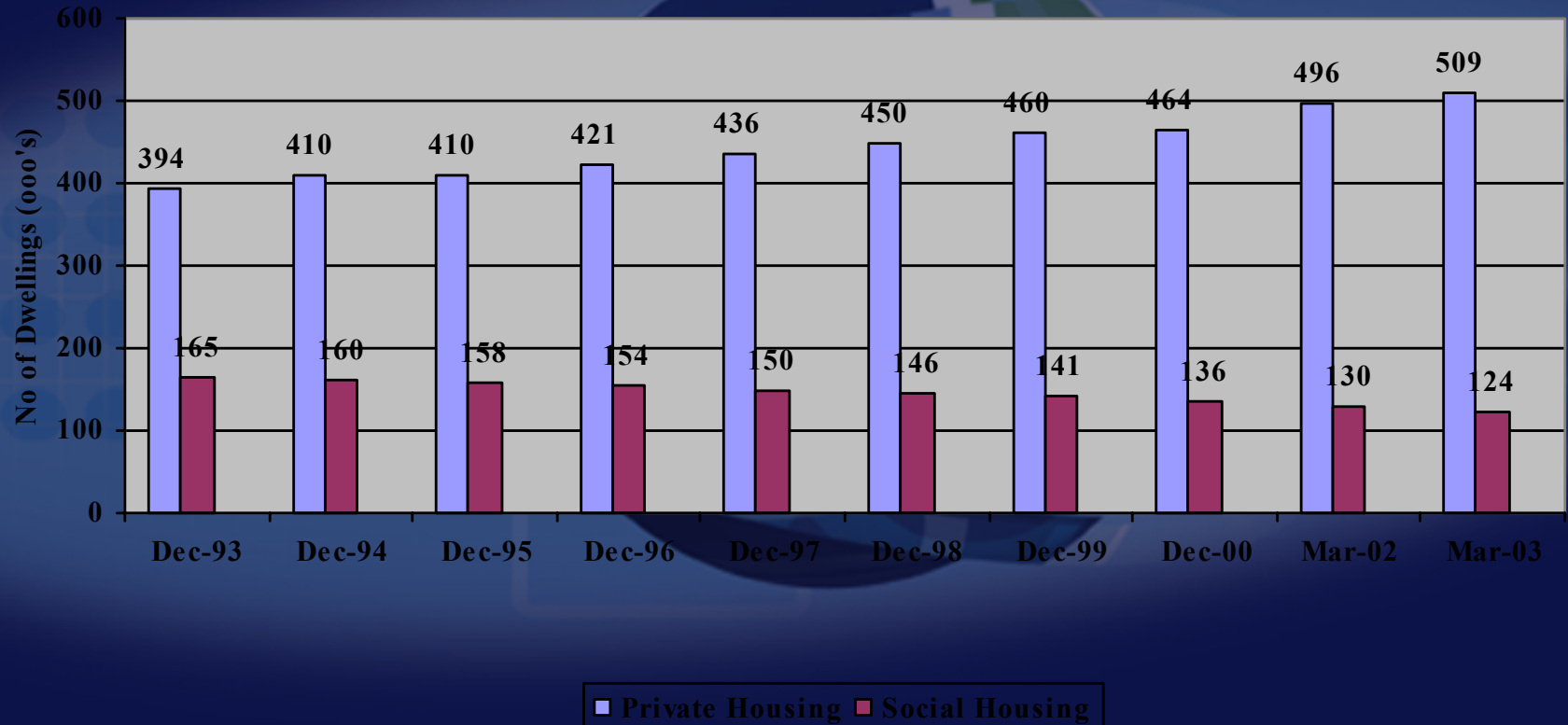
Political reform since the 1990s

- Ceasefires to Good Friday (or 'Belfast') Agreement
 - Referendum May 1998 71% in NI support GFA
- Devolved power-sharing Assembly (108 members)
 - Elected by PR with complicated system of checks & balances
- Main parties initially UU & SDLP, then shift to DUP & SF
- No 'meeting of minds' between DUP & Sinn Fein
 - Deadlock over IRA disarmament & context of continuing paramilitary gangsterism & intimidation
- Assembly remains suspended (since 2002)
- Thus at present 'devolved' *structures* but *direct rule*
- Future remains highly uncertain & strongly contested

A changing housing system

- NIHE action created very big public sector by 1981
 - NIHE tenants: 38% of households; OO 54% (below E &/or W)
- NI housing system then *rapidly* became more private
 - Despite continuing public new build into the mid-1990s
 - Very high & continuing RTB sales *and* falling new construction
 - Rapid growth in private sector output since early 1990s
- Very different tenure mix in NI by 2004
 - DSD estimated OO 73%, social 17%, PRS & vacant both 5%
 - Though census & HCS both suggest *bigger* PRS share
- HAs stayed small & specialised
 - Though now, as in GB, main provider of *new* social housing

Social/private housing split 1993-2003



Social housing under 'devolution'

- Housing & planning functions under 3 ministries
 - Social Development (DSD) for housing
 - Regional Development (DRD) for strategic planning
 - The Environment (DOE) for local planning
- NIHE still by far the biggest social landlord
 - Strong cross-community support but falling stock
 - But its future is uncertain & likely to be contested
- HAs still specialised & small (3% of households)
 - Struggling to achieve building targets
- Local politicians want NIHE to resume building

The Housing (NI) Order 2003

- An Assembly Bill but Westminster Order
- Mainly ‘catching up’ with GB, including:
 - Introductory tenancies & measures relating to nuisance & anti-social behaviour
 - Private sector grants and homelessness
- Of more distinctive *local* interest :
 - New arrangements for Travellers’ housing
 - Substantially being implemented
 - Opened doors for RTB in HAs & LSVT
 - Neither yet taken further significantly

Ethnic segregation & community relations

- Continuing 'ethno-religious' segregation in NIHE estates
 - With 'chill factors': flags, emblems, murals etc
- Interface estates particularly problematic
 - 'Peace walls' in Belfast, intimidation in contested areas
 - Peace Walls strengthened &/or erected *after* 1998
- New NIHE Community Cohesion Unit key themes:
 - To reduce the incidence of sectarian symbols
 - To facilitate & encourage integrated housing
 - To tackle & improve race relations issues
 - To improve interface areas
 - To support communities through transitions to peace
- But no reason to expect quick or easy move to 'peace'

Current drivers of NI housing future

- House of Commons NI Affairs Committee
 - Housing policy review 2004 saw need for more social housing
 - But little move towards 'local' housing initiatives under direct rule
- Continuing strong local support for NIHE
 - 'Strategic' authority but declining stock: 5,000 RTB sales a year
 - No more new build : emphasis on upgrading
- Ongoing review of public administration in NI
 - Aims to reduce complexity & over-administration
 - Fewer, bigger councils but new housing roles unlikely
- Other distinctive drivers of NI's housing future
 - Aspects of NI demography & economy remain distinctive
 - Changing relations between planning & housing
 - Uncertain & contested possible scenarios for social housing

NI demography & housing futures

- Near-certain short-term growth in housing demand
 - NI natural increase >> England, Wales & Scotland (7% 1991-2001)
 - Very strong household growth (18% 1991-2001)
 - Highest in areas with high % RC (W of Bann, W Belfast, borders)
- Private sector will meet most additional housing demand
 - Growth in % of OO almost certain; continued PRS revival possible
- No 'low demand' areas as in N. England & Scotland
 - But empty homes in conflict areas & politicised territory
 - Despite need for *expanded* social stock to meet housing need
- Longer-term demographic trends may be less certain
 - Falling birth rate & net migration *loss* 1991-2001
 - Picture could change *rapidly* if economy changes c.f. GB & RoI

NI economy & housing futures

- Economic restructuring & de-industrialisation
 - Rapid loss of manufacturing (mainly protestant) jobs
 - Paramilitary gangs rule poorer areas & organise crime
- Falling unemployment & growing incomes
 - But residual pockets of high benefit dependency
- High levels of public sector employment
 - Growing RC share of new middle class jobs
 - Concerns about sustainability of economic growth
- NI peripheral in UK but growth retarded by tax regime
 - Lower RoI corporation tax: major factor in inward investment
 - NI economy may have boomed if in a united Ireland!
 - NI economic future will be affected by UK *and* RoI economies

An all-island housing market?

- Strong growth in NI private housing output after 1990
- Also strong growth in NI house prices after 1994
 - NI much more like London, SE & SW England than northern England, Scotland & Wales (see JRF *UK Housing Review*)
 - Some see this as a ‘peace dividend’: we see a Celtic Tiger effect
- RoI: economic growth in GDP & migration turnaround
 - Both growing private housing output & high house price inflation
- An emerging all-Ireland housing system?
 - Convergence of tenure systems 1991- present
 - Demilitarised border: cross-border building activity & investment
- Hence NI housing was affected by RoI market
 - Also affected by some RoI housing (& related) policies e.g. rates

Possible scenarios for NI social housing

- Steady as we go
 1. NIHE continues as strategic agency with *current* functions
 2. HAs continue to be sole developers of new social housing
 3. NIHE stock runs down: RTB sales, demolitions & no new build
- Revive/renew the NIHE
 1. NIHE continues as strategic agency with *enhanced* functions
 2. NIHE manages & regulates HAs (*//* Housing Corp. role)
 3. The NIHE & HAs *both* undertake social new build
- Structural change of social housing organisation
 1. Institutional separation of NIHE strategic & landlord roles
 2. Core NIHE as strategic (& possibly regulatory) agency *only*
 3. NIHE stock transfers to existing and/or newly-created HAs
- Some or none of the above!

Conclusions on NI housing

- Continuing *uncertainty* about NI housing futures
 - Though growth of OO is very likely & growth of PRS is possible
- Still a unique & *contested* constitutional context
 - NI Assembly & Executive fragile, uncertain future
 - Institutions of the truce (of the ‘farce’?) > sustainable settlement
- Northern Ireland remains ‘a place apart’
 - Economy & demography affected by RoI developments *not* just UK
 - Distinctive housing market context also affected by RoI
- Many housing policy developments similar to GB
 - But distinctive local housing issues & policies: ERRS, Travellers etc
 - Social housing organisations still different, changing & contested
 - Planning more like GB? (But GB directions not entirely clear.)
- The future all will be much clearer once it’s happened!















