



Information Booklet

**For those interested in
Voluntary Service
on the Board
of a
Registered Housing Association**

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What is a Housing Association?

A housing association is a **voluntary organisation** dedicated to helping people obtain decent, affordable accommodation which meets their needs.

What is a Registered Housing Association?

These are associations which are registered by the **Registrar of Industrial and Provident Societies** and the **Department for Social Development (DSD)** under the Housing (NI) Order 1992.

Registered associations are eligible to receive **Housing Association Grant (HAG)** from DSD but are subject to tight control and monitoring of all their main activities:

- ◆ housing management (including tenant selection);
- ◆ housing development; and
- ◆ finance.

HAG cannot be paid to non-DSD registered housing associations. There are a number in Northern Ireland which are members of NIFHA.

What are the responsibilities of a Housing Association Board?

Even though most associations employ qualified staff to advise the Board of Management and undertake the day-to-day work, it is the Board which carries ultimate responsibility for the association's affairs.

Boards of housing associations comprise 7 - 15 members elected by the shareholders. Each elected Board member holds a single £1 share in the association and this generally represents the limit of his or her personal liability. Associations

usually arrange insurance to cover Board members against the remaining risks, except where gross mismanagement is involved.

It is a fundamental principle of the housing association movement that, apart from expenses for travel and/or care of dependents, Board members receive no payment, compensation for loss of earnings or any other benefit from the association on whose Board they serve.

This also applies to their close relatives and continues for 12 months after the Board member severs his or her connection with the association.

If a Board member, or a close relative, is connected with any individual or organisation (e.g. a firm, landowner or housing applicant) with whom the association is dealing, the Board member should declare the interest and the association must follow strict rules to ensure that its decisions are not prejudiced.

What is a Housing Association?

Service on a housing association's Board can be very interesting and satisfying. Associations must be run in a business-like fashion and Board members need to consider matters such as:

- ◆ setting the association's general strategy;
- ◆ risk management;
- ◆ continuous improvement;
- ◆ performance standards;
- ◆ equal opportunities;
- ◆ considering regular reports on housing management, finance and development progress;

- ◆ approving plans, estimates and private loans for new schemes;
- ◆ selecting senior staff; and
- ◆ attending official functions, conferences or training sessions.

But above all, there is also the satisfaction of working with others to provide decent homes for those who need them.

I'd like to apply. What happens next?

This guide only gives a summary of the points NIFHA considers most relevant to those interested in serving on a housing association Board. If you wish to proceed with an application, please complete the application form and return it to NIFHA.

By completing it as fully as possible associations can assess how well your experience or expertise matches what they are seeking.

We would prefer all of your details, including name and address, to appear on the register but if you wish to remain anonymous until a real possibility of a successful 'match' with an association emerges, please tick the appropriate box and NIFHA will act as a 'go between' in the first instance.

Equality Matters

Associations are expected to apply the principles of equal opportunities to all members of the community. This includes the composition of their Board of Management. To that end any association on which you may serve as a Board member is likely to ask you to provide some personal information to help them check the effectiveness of their equal opportunities policies.

It's not Automatic

Registering your interest is **not** the same as applying to become a shareholder of a housing association and is **no guarantee** that you will ever become a housing association Board member.

Any association affiliated to the Federation may peruse the register but it will be up to the association to initiate any further action. You may, of course, withdraw from the confidential register at any time.

If you are approached the Federation recommends that, before making your decision, you should ask the association for information about its housing activities and the responsibilities of its Board members.

Joining the register is not the only way to become a housing association Board member. You can take a direct approach by applying for a share and, if approved, standing for election at the Association's next Annual General Meeting. Associations may also co-opt a certain number of people, shareholders and / or non-shareholders, to their Boards.

NIFHA hopes you will take the time to complete a register of interest and return it to:

Chris Williamson
Chief Executive
NIFHA
6c Citylink Business Park
Albert Street
Belfast BT12 4HB

In the meantime, thank you for the interest you have shown in the voluntary housing movement.

Useful information on Registered Housing Associations

- ◆ They are independent organisations providing accommodation, on a not-for-profit-making basis, for those who need it;
- ◆ Housing associations are major social businesses in Northern Ireland with a collective turnover of £110 million per annum;
- ◆ Since 1998 they have built virtually *all* new houses in the social rented sector in Northern Ireland;
- ◆ Housing associations are controlled by unpaid Boards;
- ◆ Finance comes from a combination of government grants, private loans and rental income;
- ◆ The private finance registered Housing Associations have attracted since 1996 has resulted in an additional 5,800 homes for social accommodation;
- ◆ They work closely with the Housing Executive, Health & Social Services authorities and housing-related charities;
- ◆ Housing Associations manage over 30,000 units of accommodation for senior citizens, families, single persons and people with additional needs. This equates to a quarter of all social housing in NI;
- ◆ They vary considerably in their size, geographical coverage and degree of specialisation; and
- ◆ Housing associations are legally required to act fairly and promote good community relations.

For more information log on to:

www.nifha.org

