

**Date:** 23 April 10

**Consultation:** The Draft Regeneration and Housing Bill

## **Introduction**

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents registered and non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland. Collectively, our members provide 30,000 good quality, affordable homes for renting or equity sharing. Further information is available at [www.nifha.org](http://www.nifha.org)

## **Background**

NIFHA welcomes the opportunity to respond to this draft Regeneration and Housing Bill. We appreciate the Bill aims to transfer a number of functions and responsibilities currently undertaken by the Department for Social Development (DSD) and Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to the new councils that, we anticipate, will be developed as a result of the Review of Public Administration. NIFHA's members are responsible for about twenty five percent of all social housing stock in Northern Ireland which are widespread throughout the province. Changes in the social and political structures and the way local and central government interact within our society will therefore have an impact on our members and their tenants.

## **General Comments**

NIFHA welcomes and recognises that the Review of Public Administration and devolution of functions from DSD and NIHE to councils should increase and enhance the responsiveness of local government to the needs of the people of Northern Ireland. It is hoped that greater empowerment of our elected representatives will enhance community development and encourage growth within our society. NIFHA considers that the draft Regeneration Bill is a forward move in supporting the creation of structures for further delegation of functions to local government.

## **Specific Comments**

However, NIFHA has a number of concerns with the content of the draft Bill surrounding the implication that councils will have increased role in housing provision in Northern Ireland. Registered Housing Associations working with Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) are the sole agents for the delivery of the Social Housing Development Programme and as such are responsible for identifying and developing schemes for the provision of social housing.

Clause 27 and Schedule 3 transfer of this responsibility for HMO Regulation to councils.

The transfer of the responsibility for HMO functions from Northern Ireland Housing Executive to councils has a number of implications for our members. NIFHA are concerned that the regulations surrounding HMO registration will not be applied consistently between each of the district councils as this would cause difficulties for our members.

Presently liaison is with the existing two HMO offices, HMO East and West based in Belfast and Coleraine. Under the proposed new system our members will be working in liaison with eleven different council offices. NIFHA expects that systems will be put in place to ensure that each council will be adhering to standardised policies and procedures that are not open to varying interpretations.

#### Clause 28 Energy Efficiency

NIFHA welcomes that councils are to be given powers that will enable them to take a more proactive role in the promotion of domestic energy efficiency in their districts and we hope that this will help reduce or alleviate fuel poverty in Northern Ireland. The proposals within the draft Bill indicate that the level of authority and responsibility will increase from two to three agencies.

NIFHA suggests however, that the role presently undertaken by DSD be transferred to NIHE and councils. This would maintain the two tier strategic and operational approach regarding responsibility for the improvement of energy efficiency and reduction of fuel poverty in homes.

I hope you find these comments useful, please contact me if you require clarification on any of the points raised.

**Submitted on behalf of NIFHA by:**

**Maire Kerr**

Housing Policy and Research Manager