

Date: 11 January 2011
Consultation: Good Neighbourhood Agreement

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents registered and non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland. Collectively, our members provide 34,000 good quality, affordable homes for renting or equity sharing. Further information is available at www.nifha.org

General Comments

NIFHA fully supports the introduction of good neighbour agreements to supplement the content of tenancy agreements and assist both our tenants and Associations to develop stable neighbourhoods and communities. Our members are fully committed to promoting good community relations and hope that good neighbourhood agreements will contribute to the prevention of anti-social behaviour by clarifying the behaviour expected from our tenants and the action that will be taken by Associations with respect to any breaches of the agreement.

A number of our members have already introduced these types of agreements an example of which is the Neighbourhood Charter introduced by Apex in their new Oakland Park developments. This was developed in partnership with the tenants and residents and the Triax Neighbourhood Management Team. The initiative has been very successful and Apex are currently in the process of extending it to 3 further estates.

Specific Comments

NIFHA does however have a few concerns regarding the wording of the actual document and are therefore pleased to be given the opportunity to consult with our members and make comments on their behalf regarding the content of the model agreement.

The final paragraph on page 1 requires re-wording as it mentions Housing Associations obtaining an Anti Social Behaviour Order (ASBO). Housing Associations cannot apply directly to the court for an ASBO, they are required to work with an agency such as NIHE or a District Council for them to obtain an order on behalf of the Association.

Bullet point 2 on page 2 mentions, "the less fortunate", NIFHA considers that this is a subjective term and we are unclear about how these people are defined, this should either be reworded or removed from the point completely.

Bullet point 8 on page 2 should include reference to the Housing Association instead of Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

We would also like to see something included in the bullet points that gives recognition to residents in flats or other shared buildings having additional responsibilities regarding being a good neighbour given that they live in closer proximity to each other than other tenants and this may have implications for noise levels and shared access areas.

With regard to the process for introducing the agreement across the Housing Association movement, I would suggest that the model agreement is included with the model statement on policy and procedures on anti-social behaviour in the Housing Association Guide. A briefing document could be developed and issued to all RHA's suggesting that it is good practice for the model agreement to be used, or tailored to suit the needs of individual Associations. The briefing document may suggest that in the first instance Associations could "ask" prospective new tenants to sign up to the Good Neighbour Agreement when signing their tenancy agreement.

In the case of new developments the Association could discuss the Good Neighbour Agreements at their community consultation meetings and hopefully gain agreement for either the template document or a document tailored to suit particular estates to be used. This then would be used as a supplement to the tenancy agreement.

To implement the use of the agreement with existing tenants would require consultation with individual tenants and the community to ensure ownership of the terms of the agreement. This may prove to be very time consuming and therefore have cost implication for Association in terms of staffing.

In any eventuality, realistic timescales would have to be set for the implementation of this proposal across the sector as a whole to acknowledge the time required for consultation with both the community and individual tenants.

I hope you find these comments useful please do not hesitate to contact me if you require any further information or clarification on any of the points raised.

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