

THE NORTHERN IRELAND FEDERATION OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

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9th June 2006

Mr Maurice Rooney
Housing and Regeneration
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Housing Centre
2 Adelaide Street
BELFAST
BT2 8PB

Dear Mr Rooney,

Re: An Equality Impact Assessment of the Housing Selection Scheme

I refer to the above document and would like to thank you for an extension of time so that this organisation had the opportunity to contribute to the consultative process. The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents 44 independent voluntary organisations, which benefit the community by providing affordable accommodation and related housing services to those in greatest housing need. As you are aware, housing associations allocate accommodation through the Common Selection Scheme which is managed by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

NIFHA is also fully committed to a joint project with NIHE on developing a pilot project which will see eight housing associations carry out the housing applicant assessments. Our members recognise the importance of equality in relation to assessment, access and allocation of social housing.

On behalf of our members, NIFHA would like to highlight the following;

1. The EQIA report suggests that there is a longer allocation time for members of the Catholic community. The figures also indicate that members of the Catholic community as well as males are overrepresented in the number of applicants who have been deemed ineligible for assessment for the waiting list because of unacceptable behaviour. It is important that NIHE can demonstrate that these matters are being addressed.
2. NIFHA supports the collation of information in relation to housing need figures for ethnic minorities. Whilst we appreciate that this may prove difficult it is an important issue that needs to be addressed. However, a more robust system should be considered to ensure that the level of information for all categories under Section 75 of the equality legislation is as accurate and up to date as possible, rather than

Representing and promoting housing associations in Northern Ireland

Chairperson: Mr Arthur Canning Dip (Est Man) MBEng Chief Executive: Mr Chris Williamson MCIH


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being dependant on relatively older census data that is likely to be of little or no use. It is also important that such information about housing applicants is made available to housing associations.

3. There is some concern that applicants with access arrangements for children, as a result of divorce or separation may be treated less favourably by only allowing one additional bedroom, in cases where children are reasonably expected to reside with the applicant. This could be construed as a form of discrimination, primarily against males who are the majority in this situation. Policy must be reviewed to acknowledge the need for provision of suitable accommodation based on the number of children, as part of the male applicant's household for the purposes of the assessment.
4. Some applicants may not be resident in Northern Ireland for a long enough period of time to have an established family support network here. Within the limitations of its statutory obligations, NIHE should consider extending this support network to include friends, community support centres and crèche facilities. This would be important to avoid discrimination against persons from abroad.
5. In addition to the point raised above, possible amendment of Rule 14 should be given consideration to grant automatic connection with Northern Ireland to those with connection to Ireland as a whole.
6. The scheme must ensure that applicants with mental health problems are given a status that is equitable to those applicants who have physical disabilities, which are recognised in the "Functionality Matrix" without additional qualifying criteria. This is particularly relevant to those applicants with mental health issues who wish to live independently and at present cannot benefit from the "Support Care Matrix" points.
7. There is also an equality issue if not an equality one in the fact that the "Primary and Other Social Needs Factors" are capped at 40 points and the "Functionality Matrix" is capped at two household members therefore not recognising the full needs of those with the greatest hardship.

I trust that you will find these comments useful and should you wish to discuss any of the above in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "D. Henderson".

DONALL HENDERSON
HOUSING POLICY AND RESEARCH MANAGER