

THE NORTHERN IRELAND FEDERATION OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

**38 Hill Street, Belfast, Northern Ireland BT1 2LB ☎ (028) 9023 0446 Fax No: (028) 9023 8057
E-Mail Address: info@nifha.org - Web: www.nifha.org**

29th March 2007

**Ms Avril Hiles
Housing Policy Branch
Department of Social Development
James House
2 – 4 Cromac Avenue
BELFAST
BT7 2JA**

Dear Avril,

Re: Respite Care – Housing Association Guide

Thank you for affording us the opportunity to respond in relation to the above issue and sincere apologies for the delay. Following some consultation and discussion with our members, NIFHA would like to make a number of points on their behalf.

Our members feel that this proposal which suggests amending the guide so as to limit respite lettings to a maximum of six weeks is too restrictive. Whilst a lot of respite lettings are indeed short term, there are some instances where the letting is required to go beyond six weeks, mainly because of the extensive medical problems of the residents concerned. In light of this we would recommend that some consideration should be given to extending this six week period for up to twelve weeks, though the Housing Association must clearly demonstrate that respite in excess of six weeks was in response to a critical situation. However, there would have to be a cut off point and our members' experiences suggest that they would not expect respite to ever exceed a twelve week period.

Care Managers and Social Workers who refer clients in need of respite care are going to find a six week limit difficult to operate and this may prove counter productive for the resident concerned, for example, a housing association has illustrated an example where a person needed eight weeks respite care, and under the new regime they would only be able to stay in this association's accommodation for six weeks and would have to be moved again to another home for a further two weeks. It is clear that such a move can be quite traumatic, particularly for an elderly person.

The use of accommodation for respite can be infrequent, since housing associations hold waiting lists for all their supported housing schemes. On a rare occasion a housing association may have had a void and have used respite to reduce the void loss. In such cases the average respite period can be for about two weeks and/or due to a family crisis. There certainly can be some cases where a period of respite is just short of six weeks.

The draft revision refers to grant claw back if the six week rule is not adhered to. There is no clear guidance on how the Department for Social Development intends to calculate what proportion of capital grant to re-claim, for example, if a person stays for six weeks and a day. This reference is extremely vague and the relevant guidance needs to be more specific.

Representing and promoting housing associations in Northern Ireland

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

VAT Registration No: 311 2120 40

Understandably we would prefer the currently more flexible guide approach than the more prescriptive one, as has been proposed. These changes will afford less flexibility and prevent beneficial respite usage of schemes.

I trust that this information is satisfactory and should you wish to discuss any of the points raised above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Henderson". The initial "D" is large and stylized, with a vertical line through it. The name "Henderson" is written in a cursive script.

DONALL HENDERSON
HOUSING POLICY AND RESEARCH MANAGER