

Response to Consultation

Date: 25 November 2008

Consultation: Revisions to the Annual Regulatory Return (ARR) Forms

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents 40 housing associations. This includes 33 of the associations registered and regulated by the Department for Social Development (DSD). Collectively, these associations provide 30,000 good quality, affordable homes for renting or equity sharing. Further information is available at www.nifha.org

Background

NIFHA's members are responsible for about twenty five percent of all social housing stock in Northern Ireland. Along with our members, we would like to highlight the following points in relation to the above request.

General Comments

1. The way that ARR data is defined and split needs some detailed discussion. In its present format, there is some serious confusion for housing associations as the data is split into the following categories:
 - Self-Contained Units
 - Hostel & Shared Housing
 - Supported Housing
2. We have drawn comparisons with England where the ARR is split into the following key groups:
 - General Needs (mainstream)
 - Housing For Older People
 - Supported Rented Stock.

However, this definition would also cause problems for Housing Associations in the short-term because NICORE data is not easily split this way at present. Further consultation with NIFHA and its members is necessary to identify whether this would be a more productive way to split the data in the ARR.

Please note: In England there is also a long version (for larger HAs) and short version (for small HAs) of the ARR.

3. It may prove more useful for Housing Associations in Northern Ireland to split their data into the following categories:
 - Mainstream General Needs
 - Mainstream Sheltered
 - Supported Self-contained

- Supported Hostel

Whichever way the data is categorised there will always be a wide variation of schemes within each category, so it might be useful to ask Housing Associations to describe the type of schemes contained within each definition i.e. provide some context for the data.

Specific Comments on Questions that Housing Associations find hard to complete

- Part C 5(A) – Monitoring of Applicants on the Waiting List – It is widely believed that this information is already on PRAWL (even if in a form that is not easily monitored) and this should be sufficient in order to tick this box. No Housing Associations seem to formally collect data on applicants.
- Part D – Voids - NICORE does provide this data, but the completion rate for the hostel/shared housing sector is very patchy. Housing Associations are dependent on receiving data from Joint Management Partners who carry the void losses. The way the data is split in this section means that some housing associations are double counting (see comment below on Statistical Information). This section might be better included in Contextual Statistics.
- Section I – Statistical Information
 - Section 1 – Question 2 (D) different age split to 2(E).
 - Section 3 – Question 1(C) - Client Group Data - Why does DSD need this data and the data from question 1(E)? There appears to be a duplication of information.

I will be updating NICORE during February 2009 so I would like to incorporate any likely changes to the lettings data into the 2009/10 NICORE log.

Submitted on behalf of NIFHA by:

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