

# **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](mailto:info@nifha.org) - Web: [www.nifha.org](http://www.nifha.org)**

7<sup>th</sup> April 2006

**FAO Mr Roy McGivern  
Voluntary and Community Unit  
Department for Social Development  
Lighthouse Building  
1 Cromac Place  
Gasworks Business Park  
Ormeau Road  
Belfast  
BT7 2JB**

Dear Mr McGivern,

**Re: Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community**

The Federation represents 44 housing associations which together provide 30,000 affordable homes for people in housing need in Northern Ireland. Our members build about 1,400 homes per year through the social housing development programme. A large proportion of housing association tenants may require advice and assistance in a number of ways. NIFHA and its members recognise the need for provision of a quality advice service which is accessible for every citizen.

We are fully supportive of a Strategy for Supporting Delivery of Voluntary Advice Services to the Community. In particular, we would like to highlight the following key points:

1. NIFHA welcomes the proposal for an integrated strategy, where the objectives are clearly identified. This should be facilitated by joint up thinking across the voluntary, public and private sector.
2. The strategy should take account of advice services which are concentrated in particular areas and make efforts to streamline such provision to avoid duplication.
3. The local government criteria, which the document refers to, must demonstrate a consistent approach that focuses on the need for services provision based on priority. The strategy must also take into account the likely changes to service provision which may be introduced through the review of public administration.
4. The strategy will target those most in need to ensure that they avail of service and this should coincide with greater level of access to clearer information and guidelines in those areas of advice where the highest volume of enquiries arise.
5. The Advice Service Alliance should take responsibility to confirm and secure funding from the various stakeholders for a specific time frame so as to allow realistic planning of service provision

***Representing and promoting housing associations in Northern Ireland***

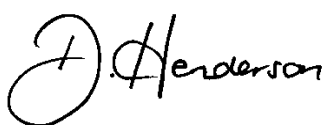
**Chairperson: Mr Arthur Canning Dip (Est Man) MBEng      Chief Executive: Mr Chris Williamson MCIH**

**VAT Registration No: 311 2120 40**

6. As well as the provision of advice, assistance, advocacy and representation, organisations should be looking towards the empowerment of individuals. Furthermore, this strategy should encourage organisations to train and support their own staff to provide specialist advice within their particular field of work. This may be used as an effective tool to combat issues at an early stage e.g. Housing Rights Service and Fold's Debt Counselling Service for tenants.
7. NIFHA welcomes the concept of area hubs and outreach support for those in remote and/or hard to reach areas in the province. In addition, we recommend that the strategy guarantees the same level of service to all citizens in Northern Ireland.
8. The report suggests that 80% of the population should live within five miles of a hub location. This requires careful planning and from an equality perspective accessibility must be taken into consideration to ensure that there is service provision across all communities in Northern Ireland.
9. The strategy does not seem to take account of changes in demographics over a period of time and it is important to allow for some degree of flexibility to cater for demands.
10. NIFHA and its members are satisfied with the roles of the ASA and satellites as outlined in the document, although we do believe that input is required from other organisations in making a positive contribution to the future development of advice services in Northern Ireland.
11. We recommend that the overall strategy consider extending the role of the Government Advice and Information Group beyond the monitoring of advice services and this group should look at ways in which organisations can improve the quality of service provision.

I trust that you will find these points useful and thank you for affording NIFHA the opportunity to respond on this occasion. If you require clarification on any of these issues or would like to have a meeting about this consultation, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**DONALL HENDERSON**  
HOUSING POLICY AND RESEARCH MANAGER

***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**