



Response to Consultation

Shaping the Future of Care Together

Date: 16 December 09

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents registered and non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland. Collectively, our members provide 30,000 good quality, affordable homes for renting or equity sharing. Further information is available at www.nifha.org

Background

The 2001 census statistics indicated that around 19% of the population in Northern Ireland was over 60 years of age. It is expected that this percentage will have increased when the results of the 2011 census are analysed. Life expectancy in Northern Ireland according to the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety for Northern Ireland (DHSSPSNI) is around 76 years of age for men and 81 years of age for women. According to the DHSSPSNI Annual Report 2008, 14649 people died in 2007 and significantly more than half of them were 75 or older when they died.

General Comments

NIFHA welcomes the opportunity to reply to this consultation document especially as can be seen from the statistics above that Northern Ireland has an increasingly aging population which has implications for health and disability needs. Changes to the way care and benefits are provided may have implications for our members and their clients. NIFHA members have a diverse client base which requires them to provide a range of housing including sheltered and supported housing and other services enabling them to meet their clients' varied needs.

Extracts from the Green Paper, Shaping the Future of Care Together Specific Comments

Page 15:

NIFHA have strong concerns regarding the integrating of Attendance Allowance into other aspects of the support systems or the removal of the benefit. Attendance Allowance provides a non means tested cash sum which enables people with disabilities to live independently giving them a degree of choice over the support, if any, they wish to fund. The paper does not identify the future care and support system that it envisages which means we cannot evaluate its impact on our members and their clients.

Page 72:

“More joined up working between care and the benefits system”

NIFHA welcomes any attempt to reduce the complexity of the benefits and social care systems. We recognise that many of our member's clients come to the benefits

system and may require specialist housing services at a time of crisis in their lives. A single point of entry to the full range of support and benefit systems would assist vulnerable people to get targeted and therefore more effective support at a time when they need it most.

Pages 101 – 104:

“Sources of funding for care and support”

NIFHA expects that the need for funding for social care will increase as the average age and life expectancy of the Northern Ireland population increases. We recognise that funding is limited and have concerns that the level of funding would not meet the needs of an increasingly aging population. This would therefore lead to the need to prioritise the support given with those in most need given the greatest support. Our concern is that those people who would have had the means to provide a range of support for themselves through their Attendance Allowance benefits will no longer have this choice available to them and consequently, because of the pressure on funding, they will not receive any support at all.

Disability Benefits

It is not clear if the paper is suggesting that all benefits should be subject to means testing. NIFHA’s concern is that people should have choice in the range of care services that they use. This choice should be based on their individual needs and not on whether there is enough money in the budget to make their needs a priority. It is acknowledged that having one funding stream will assist people in having their needs assessed but assurance is needed that the aim of the paper is to increase and simplify the level of service to vulnerable people and not as a method of reducing the cost of supporting people with disabilities.

Simplifying and integrating sources of support

NIFHA’s concern again is that by integrating or removing benefits such as Attendance Allowance vulnerable people’s choice is reduced or removed from them. We also have concerns surrounding the capability of the social care system to respond to those people with lower level needs given the pressure on budgets and funding. We would also be interested in examining the outcome of the green papers equality impact assessment.

Building on the strengths of the current system

NIFHA considers that it is unclear how, given budgetary pressure to make reductions, support for people with low and high levels of need will be provided. It is suggested that the further means testing of benefits and a system of rigorous assessment will mean that less money and support services will be provided to a number of people. We envisage that more people will be required to contribute to or pay for services they use. This could have an impact on their ability to buy other necessities such as food and fuel which may be detrimental to their health in the longterm.

The Federation regards the Green Paper as a useful framework for debating a number of important questions regarding how we care for our vulnerable people with disabilities. Our comments are intended to be constructive and we hope they will

assist the Government to find appropriate solutions when working with our Assembly.

Submitted on behalf of NIFHA by:

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