

Response to Consultation

Date: 17 June 2009

Consultation: Strategic Business Review Public Equality Impact Assessment

Introduction

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents 40 housing associations. This includes all 33 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. We welcome the opportunity to respond to this document on behalf of its members and more effectively their tenants, a large number of whom are elderly, have learning disabilities or physical disabilities.

Comments

1. We would commend the comprehensive and sensitive nature of this document, which envisages to making benefits advice and entitlement as accessible as possible, being mindful of financial constraints and at a time when localised offices are no longer viable.
2. NIFHA would stress that vulnerable groups, in particular, could be disadvantaged if local services are removed. Many would be restricted in terms of telephony or computer access. As far as possible it is essential to maintain localised office service or access to mobile advice from staff visiting clients. There may be potential to look at the use of grouping facilities such as common rooms at sheltered schemes. This would give access to a number of clients simultaneously, about advice and entitlement
3. The concept of 'one stop shops' has been to the fore for some time, and indeed given the current economic climate, it is timely for all agencies in a particular area e.g. social services, housing, citizens advice, medical to share a designated building, both physically and financially. This would encourage instantly access to a range of services. It is clear that many clients may need multiple agencies at any one visit. Furthermore, many housing associations have excellent large communal facilities and separate meeting rooms that could facilitate such one stop shops on a regular basis each week. Some schemes already include a 'community' facility.

NIFHA would hope that you consider these proposals through negotiation of service delivery and working in partnership with our members.

Submitted on behalf of NIFHA by:



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