



CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD



It is with great pleasure that I present to you the Federation's Annual Report for the year 2003-04.

The mission of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) remains focused on representing and promoting the

housing association movement in Northern Ireland, whilst supporting them in the provision of high quality housing services that ultimately benefit the whole community.

This is clearly evident as the housing association movement currently provides a diverse range of quality affordable accommodation for almost 30,000 households across Northern Ireland, serving all sections of our community.

As part of its remit the housing association movement plays a significant role in the management of the annual 'new build programme'. This equates to housing associations having full responsibility for building all new social housing properties in Northern Ireland.

On this note, I would like to congratulate all NIFHA members who this year successfully achieved a figure in excess of 1,500 new starts which, I am reliably informed by my friends in the Department for Social Development (DSD), includes an all time record for output of supported housing. I am extremely proud of this achievement and my thanks go to everyone involved.

During the last 12 months there have been many highlights, but perhaps the most memorable was the 2003 Annual Conference, which was held in the Belgian capital city, Brussels. The conference enabled me to learn more about NIFHA and its members in relation to their operations, while at the same time allowing me the opportunity to gain an insight into how our European cousins manage similar housing issues.

However, it was not all work and no play, take it from me! When the formal conference itinerary finished the housing movement certainly was able to let its hair down, but that's a story for another day!

As my first year as Chairperson draws to a close, I conclude that it has been both productive and satisfying. NIFHA has continued to work tirelessly on behalf of its membership, tackling many high profile issues as this year's report clearly demonstrates. I have no doubt that this work will continue in 2004-05 and I have every confidence that the Federation and its members will make a growing contribution to society – the members through the homes they provide and NIFHA by influencing policy.

Finally may I take this opportunity to thank my fellow Council members and the staff at NIFHA. Their help has been invaluable to me, in particular, and without question has allowed me to enjoy a highly successful year.

Arnold Hatch, Chairman, NIFHA

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

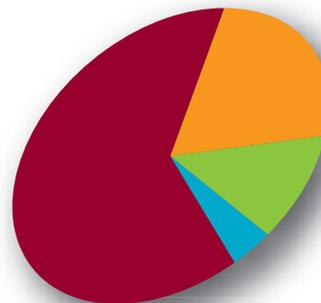
The last year has been a very busy one, both for the Federation and its members. Collectively, our primary focus has been on delivery. From the new build development programme to the 2003 Housing Order, or initiatives like Supporting People and the Statutory Equality Duty, our work centred on putting policy into practice. NIFHA also continued its long-term strategy to raise the profile of housing associations and to highlight the valuable contribution they make, not only to social housing but by providing support services as well.

DELIVERING HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Meeting the Department for Social Development's target for new starts was once again a high priority for all of us. The Federation is delighted that our ongoing work to highlight causes of delay and to share best practice together with our members' determination to meet performance standards resulted in success in 2003-04. In fact a total of 1,526 new units came on site during the year. This level of achievement is crucial at a time when the numbers in serious housing need, including homeless people, show no sign of diminishing.

During 2003-04 housing associations in Northern Ireland let over 4,900 new tenancies in either existing stock or new properties. In addition, Co-Ownership Housing assisted 463 householders into the property market through their shared ownership scheme. These are clear demonstrations of how the work of NIFHA's members delivers practical solutions to real problems like social exclusion and the high price of decent housing.

GENERAL NEEDS AND SHELTERED HOUSING – LETS 2003-2004



- Transfer/Exchange from NIHE
- Transfer/Exchange within HA
- Transfer/Exchange from other HA
- All other allocations (CSS list)



DELIVERING ON THE HOUSING ORDERS

Our last Annual Report outlined a number of challenges facing the Federation and its members. The greatest of these were associated with the changes emanating from the Housing Support Services (NI) Order 2002 and the Housing (NI) Order 2003.



THE HOUSING SUPPORT SERVICES (NI) ORDER 2002

More commonly known as 'Supporting People', the Housing Support Services (NI) Order 2002, has been one of the biggest government reforms to face the housing sector for many years. Prior to its commencement in April 2003 NIFHA staff had undertaken substantial preparation work to assist our members in the implementation of Supporting People (SP) and this assistance continued after the new regime came into force. The Federation played a key role as a source of information, advice and support during the year, while our members tackled issues like:

- Providing extensive data on existing supported housing
- Separating costs of housing, support and care
- Introducing changed or new service models
- Reviewing Joint Management arrangements
- Preparing for interim contracts with the NIHE
- De-registering certain care homes

In addition, the Supporting People Policy Co-ordinator maintained a high level of service for our members through the NIFHA briefings, regular Support Group meetings, liaison with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE),

participation in the SP Inclusive Forum, handling individual queries and not least organising relevant training. The Policy Co-ordinator also carried out in-house training for the scheme co-ordinators of 11 associations and helped 23 prepare for the Quality and Monitoring aspects of the scheme review process.

In recognition of the cross-sectoral nature of Supporting People, NIFHA took a collaborative approach to the process by working with the NIHE, voluntary sector partners and Health and Social Services Trusts as well as housing associations throughout the implementation period. Participants from all of these sectors attended the training on the Quality Assessment Framework (QAF), which the Policy Co-ordinator undertook jointly with staff from the NIHE and the Council for the Homeless (NI). Finally, in response to requests from our members the Federation also worked closely with the NIHE to achieve a situation in which payments under Supporting People could be managed electronically via NIFHA.

THE HOUSING (NI) ORDER 2003

Social housing providers faced a number of challenging initiatives as a result of the Housing (NI) Order 2003 as well, and again the Federation took an active role in helping associations to implement the major changes. Aside from participation in discussions, contributing to policy development, undertaking research and providing information and advice - which are standard elements of NIFHA's service to members - the Federation also organised a range of seminars focused on specific topics.

One aspect of the new legislation, which became available from December 2003, was aimed at countering anti-social behaviour. This section of the Order offered social landlords a number of measures to tackle the problem including:

- the use of Introductory Tenancies,
- extended grounds to end secure tenancies,
- injunctions, and
- the exclusion of people guilty of serious anti-social behaviour from the common waiting list.

NIFHA responded by continuing to liaise with the DSD on individual areas of difficulty for associations and by organising three separate training events to assist our members address the challenges arising from these new powers. Since it was DSD policy that all social landlords adopt these new measures, our primary concerns were to facilitate a common approach and to ensure that the new legislation was implemented in an appropriate way.

NIFHA Council concluded that July 2004 would be a realistic deadline for associations planning to operate Introductory Tenancies.

Another priority in the legislation was to give all secure tenants access to a House Sales Scheme. This particular subject has long been a focus of work both for the Federation and for member associations. In January 2002 NIFHA published research undertaken on our behalf by the



University of Glasgow and to further inform this important debate the Federation had commissioned complementary research, which was completed in November 2003.

This second report by the Helm Corporation concentrated on 'Financial Aspects of Statutory House Sales to Sitting Tenants' - highlighting the issues from an association perspective and contrasting the funding for voluntary social housing providers with that of the NIHE.

To clarify the likely effects of extending the house sales policy to housing associations the Federation circulated a variety of briefings, including the Helm Report, to Ministers, the Housing Council, political parties and policy-makers during the year. We believe all of this work has been influential and has helped to shape the Draft House Sales Scheme, which is expected to issue for consultation in late Spring 2004. When participating in this consultation process NIFHA will continue to lobby for a House Sales Scheme that is appropriate to the needs of both associations and the wider community. A delegation from the Federation was glad that the Minister appreciated this point when we met him in December 2003.

DELIVERING ON QUALITY AND EQUALITY

Since the Federation's formation almost thirty years ago, value and accountability have been key concepts for our members. Although times have changed and operational practices have become ever more professional, these elements are still integral to the work of associations. Under the slightly different headings of quality and equality both aspects of association work have taken a high priority in the last few years.



QUALITY

Best Value provided the framework for NIFHA's members to manage continuous improvement and focus on providing high quality, cost-effective services that customers want. The Service Improvement Officer helped associations with this process by offering practical support such as information, advice, training and sharing examples of good practice. The Federation also facilitated members by co-ordinating a number of benchmarking exercises on topics as diverse as human resources policies, salaries/benefits and arrears management. Member participation in these exercises was high, with over 20 associations involved in one study and 23 committing themselves to the Federation's Code of Conduct for benchmarking.

Aside from our support role, NIFHA continued to add value to its members' work by managing the electronic transfer of Housing Benefit for 30 of the associations and Supporting People payments for 16 of them. Both these electronic services produce major administrative savings and improved arrears control for our members.

EQUALITY

As voluntary bodies assisted by government funding, housing associations have always recognised that public accountability is fundamental to their credibility. The public accountability of NIFHA's members was increased by the Housing (NI) Order 2003, which added registered housing associations to the list of bodies within the ambit of the Commissioner for Complaints (better known as the Ombudsman).

For tenants, applicants and other citizens this meant that unresolved complaints about registered housing associations could be pursued in the same way as problems with statutory authorities. In the case of registered housing associations this also meant that the long-awaited designation as public bodies for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 would become a reality.

Preparation for this new obligation had already been in progress for a considerable time. During 2003-04 NIFHA organised several seminars, where staff from the Equality Commission explained what section 75 (s75) would mean in practice. A total of 73 staff and board members from 27 different associations participated in these events. The Federation's Council also

established a sub-group to lead the process on behalf of the movement. This small but dynamic team, which became the Equality Steering Group, worked closely with the Service Improvement Officer to ensure that all members were aware of their responsibilities under the equality legislation and equipped to deal with the demands of s75. The group also kept in regular touch with the Equality Commission and is grateful for the support and advice provided by their Statutory Duty team.



DELIVERING ON PUBLIC RELATIONS

Throughout the year the Federation worked hard to raise the profile of housing associations. We engaged with elected representatives at all levels, as well as having more in-depth meetings with two of the political parties. Business journalists and housing correspondents from local papers were briefed about the housing association movement, establishing a good basis for future contact. NIFHA's comments on pertinent issues were also reported in a national housing journal.

However, as the year progressed we recognised that this aspect of our work was of sufficient importance to our members to merit additional input. When Dennis Quinn retired from the part-time post of Information and Training Officer in October 2003, we took the opportunity to allocate extra resources to conveying our messages. In March this year we were pleased to welcome Gareth Colhoun in the new role of Communications Officer.

On-going activities like participating in inter-agency groups, forming alliances on key issues and making the most of our publications contributed to our efforts to promote the work of our members. In addition, the Federation submitted written responses to over 30 consultation documents.



Although responding to the wide range of consultations we receive is resource-intensive, NIFHA believes this is a worthwhile task as our replies provide the opportunity to highlight the

aims and achievements of housing associations at the same time as influencing policy.

DELIVERING IN PARTNERSHIP

That a partnership approach is central to our business is reflected in our operational framework. From NIFHA Council, to the function-centred Fora and issue-based working groups our aim is to be inclusive and reap the benefit of the joint skills, knowledge and experience of the member associations. Individually and collectively we participate in a wide variety of meetings with our colleagues in the DSD and NIHE. For the Federation the quarterly liaison meetings provide an ideal opportunity to engage on significant housing matters.



This attitude also prevails in the national arena and we have regular meetings at senior level with our counterparts in the three Federations in Great Britain. In 2003-04 the four Federations collaborated on major issues like the implications of 'the Harrow wardens case' and EU procurement. In fact, we jointly lobbied the Chancellor on the latter topic.

Throughout the year NIFHA staff were also actively involved in a range of inter-agency groups of strategic importance, including:

- Steering Group on Homelessness
- Rural Housing Strategy Steering Group
- Management Committee of the NI Tenants' Action Project
- Energy Conservation Steering Group
- NICVA's Executive Committee
- Social Economy Forum and Network
- NIHE Research Committee
- Community Safety Unit (Older People's Steering Group)

Such work enables the Federation to profile the issues or concerns from the perspective of our members and to shape the development of policies/strategies that will impact on their business.

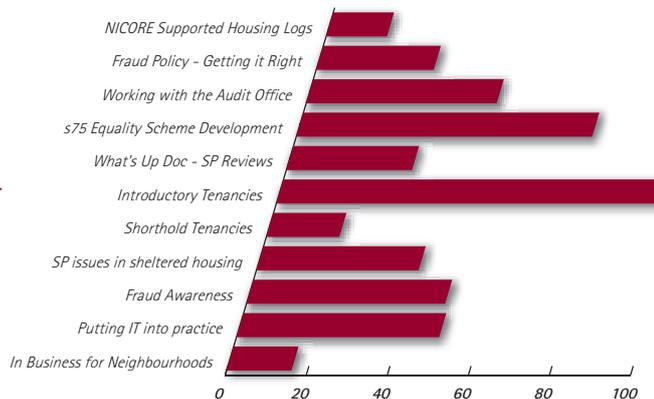
As indicated by the listings the Federation works at the strategic level to promote a wide social inclusion agenda. This is complemented by improving the quality of life in local communities through NIFHA's charitable arm - the Northern Ireland Housing Associations' Charitable Trust (NIHACT).

Although its resources have been very limited, over the years the Trust has assisted many 'grass roots' organisations and supported valuable initiatives for needy client groups.

During 2003-04 the Federation revitalised NIHACT by appointing new Committee members through an open recruitment process. We look forward to NIHACT continuing to make a positive contribution to the community.

DELIVERING ON THE BUSINESS PLAN

Seminar Attendance 2003-2004



While our members worked to achieve the development targets, we had our own successes in relation to meeting the needs of the affiliated housing associations. We are pleased to report that 1,100 copies of the Federation's Our Place magazine were circulated, emphasizing the value and diversity of the housing and support services provided by our members.

Seven briefings were issued to help associations keep up-to-date with policy changes, new legislation, the national housing picture as well as NIFHA's regular events and meetings. Once again we exceeded our target for training with over 500 people attending our seminars

during the year.

Delegates from 38 of the registered housing associations, one unregistered association, the Department for Social Development and nine voluntary sector organisations took the opportunity to increase their skills or knowledge in relation to a wide range of topics. The sixteen training events covered everything from the Social Economy and Equality to Supporting People Scheme Reviews, Introductory Tenancies and Countering Fraud. That's a lot of tea, coffee, biscuits, scones and lunches - next year we may have to add fitness or weight loss training to the programme!

DELIVERING THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

NIFHA's Annual Conference also took delivery to a new level, stretching both our logistical and linguistic skills as we travelled to Brussels to explore the European social housing situation. Obviously, the expansion of the European Union and the increasing impact of EU policies on the work we do in Northern Ireland influenced the decision to visit Belgium in October 2003. However, it was the chance to see practical examples of social housing in a country that has also experienced major community divisions that prompted NIFHA Council to pick Brussels for this annual event.



As Hallowe'en 2003 approached 127 delegates from 29 housing associations, the DSD, the NIHE and the Northern Ireland Housing Council joined staff from the Federation at the Hilton Brussels City for our 27th Annual Conference. Over three days the attendees learned of Belgian housing policy, toured the European Parliament and were briefed on the role and operation of this EU body, visited housing developments in Charleroi, Leuven and the Brussels region, acquired a better understanding of the work of CECODHAS (the European Liaison Committee for Social Housing) and participated in various presentations, discussions and debates. Despite some wintry weather, including unseasonal snow, during the trip this continental version of the conference enabled us to widen our horizons and gain some new perspectives on social housing.



DELIVERY CONTINUES...

The focus for NIFHA in 2003-04 was the implementation of a whole raft of legislative changes. Nevertheless, influencing future policy remained and will continue to be a significant component of work the Federation undertakes on its members' behalf. As we move into the new financial year our joint priorities will be Introductory Tenancies, the Statutory Equality Duty and the Department's proposals for a House Sales Scheme.

Associations will again concentrate on the essential task of providing housing development at levels that meet or exceed the Department's targets. One early priority for the Federation will be to consider the findings of an evaluation undertaken by the government's Business Development Service. Their report, which assesses the value that the Department for Social Development derives from its 'grant in aid' to NIFHA, may permit the Federation to enhance its services.

We trust this Annual Report confirms the range and importance of the service that we provide not only for our members but also for the benefit of our partners in the DSD and the NIHE. Delivering high quality social housing is the objective for all of us this year and every year.

SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Income and Expenditure Account For The Year Ended 31st March 2003

	2004	2003
	£	£
TURNOVER	227,015	227,577
Net operating expenses	<u>(213,538)</u>	<u>(199,546)</u>
OPERATING SURPLUS	13,477	28,031
Other interest receivable and similar income	6,675	6,301
Interest payable and similar charges	<u>(763)</u>	<u>(665)</u>
 SURPLUS ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	 19,389	 33,667
Tax on ordinary activities	-	-
 SURPLUS ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES AFTER TAXATION	 19,389	 33,667
 Transfer to designated reserve for office replacement	 <u>(6,000)</u>	 <u>(6,000)</u>
 Retained surplus for the year	 <u><u>13,389</u></u>	 <u><u>27,667</u></u>

The Federation has no recognised gains and losses other than those included above.
The turnover and expenses all relate to continuing operations.
Summary of Financial Information

Balance Sheet at 31st March 2004

	2004	2003
	£	£
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible Assets	<u>19,351</u>	<u>23,844</u>
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors: due within one year	10,403	11,184
Investments - short term deposits	206,533	187,686
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>9,587</u>	<u>7,570</u>
	226,523	206,440
CREDITORS: DUE WITHIN ONE YEAR	<u>(8,634)</u>	<u>(12,433)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS	<u>217,889</u>	<u>194,007</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	<u><u>237,240</u></u>	<u><u>217,851</u></u>
CAPITAL AND RESERVES		
Accumulated fund	225,240	211,851
Office replacement reserve	<u>12,000</u>	<u>6,000</u>
	<u><u>237,240</u></u>	<u><u>217,851</u></u>

Note: The full accounts are available on request.
Audited by: CRAWFORD SEDGWICK & CO., Chartered Accountants

DIRECTOR'S POST SCRIPT

Having read the 2003-04 NIFHA Annual Report, I hope that you have learned more about the housing association movement within Northern Ireland and gained an insight into the work of both the Federation and the 45 Housing Associations. If you would like to receive further information on anything mentioned in the report, please do not hesitate to contact the Federation.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge both the Department for Social Development and the NIHE for the Grant in Aid that they have provided, in respect of the Federation's representative role and its work in helping its members implement the Supporting People Framework.

Finally, I wish to pay tribute to the friendly guidance of our Chairman and record my appreciation of the excellent support from my colleagues in the office. Each plays a vital role and I thank them one and all.

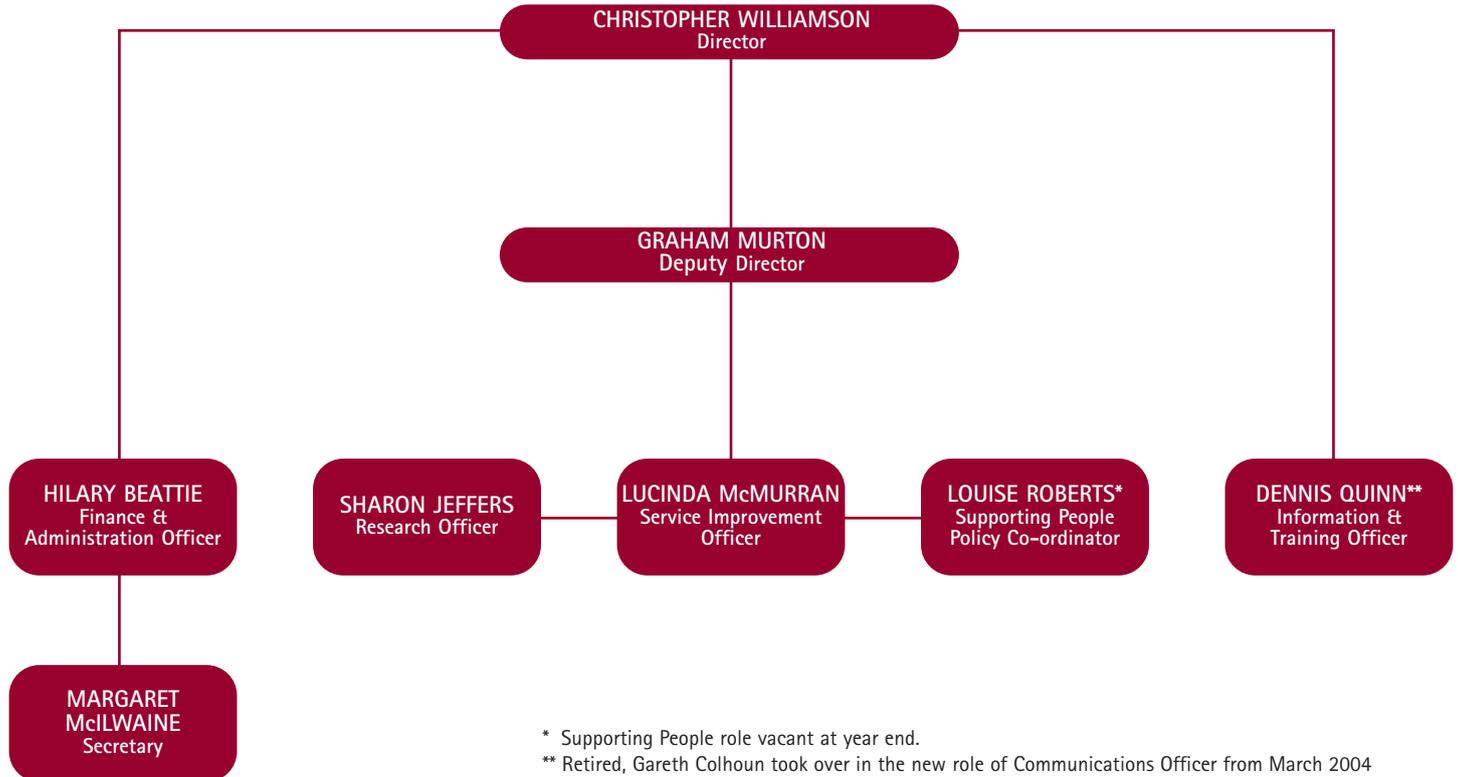


Chris Williamson, Director, NIFHA



NIFHA ORGANISATIONAL CHART

STAFF



* Supporting People role vacant at year end.

** Retired, Gareth Colhoun took over in the new role of Communications Officer from March 2004



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