

# NORTHERN IRELAND FEDERATION OF HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS

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12 October 2007

Ms Mary McDonnell  
Housing and Health Co-ordinator  
NI Housing Executive  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, The Housing Centre  
2 Adelaide Street  
BELFAST  
BT2 8PB

Dear Mary

## **Re: Review of Housing and Health – Towards a Shared Agenda**

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) represents 43 housing associations which provide over 30,000 homes for people in need, as well as additional support services and facilities for people who require additional assistance. They work closely with NIHE Supporting People Team and health trusts to ensure that tenants' health and wellbeing is addressed in terms of both provision and management.

The Federation welcomes this review, although we would like to make the following points which we feel should be taken into consideration:

1. The review does not sufficiently reflect the fact that the great majority of older people live in privately owned accommodation. In contrast, a lot of the text refers to Housing Executive tenants.
2. The review correctly advocates the need for the major players to work together to achieve joined up service delivery for older people but the neither the relevant agencies nor the relevant procedures are specified. NIHE must continue to work closely with the housing association movement, which is an important provider of accommodation and related services for older people.
3. The report correctly refers to the need for housing for wheelchair users but does not adequately reflect the commitment given in a letter from the Chairman of the NIHE on 27 April 2007. The letter states that the Housing Executive would consider whether a proportion of wheelchair housing should be provided in all new social housing schemes but that a range of planning and design issues would need to be taken forward with various stakeholders including the DSD. Secondly, it should be noted that the research report published in 2006 evaluated purpose-built wheelchair housing as well as adapted homes.
4. NIFHA considers that the proposed transfer of Supporting People administration from the NIHE to new District Councils would not be in the best interest of service users. We recommend the government to complete the present further review of this aspect of the review of Public administration and take decisions to remove the damaging uncertainty to all stakeholders.

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

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5. Over 400 vulnerable older people are enjoying maximum independence in Housing With Care schemes whose viability is under threat because of uncertainty about the continuation of Supporting People grant. The Supporting People Commissioning Body and the ASPPs should be pro-actively seeking resolution of this issue.
6. NIFHA recommends that a prompt decision be taken on whether the Housing Health and Safety Rating should be introduced to Northern Ireland.
7. A more common-sense and user-centred approach should be taken to the specification of adaptations for people with disabilities. The present system is too bureaucratic and slow.
8. The review does not seem to identify mechanisms to encourage sustainable communities, for example, liaising closer with planning authority to avoid isolation of rural communities, encouraging family support networks and accessibility to facilities and services. This would help reduce inequities in life chances across Northern Ireland.
9. Relevant personnel should look at initiatives, in Britain and elsewhere, with a view to introducing pilot schemes of equity sharing for people with support needs.
10. The learning obtained from the Healthy Living Centres in Northern Ireland should be given a higher public profile so that the population at large can benefit from positive results.
11. We would recommend that NIHE share findings of good workplace practice to promote the same ethos within other organisations

The Federation apologises for a late response in relation to this important issue, which was due to other demands and we would be grateful that our comments will still be taken into consideration in spite of missing the deadline.

NIFHA and its member housing associations would be keen to be involved and participate in any further discussions about this issue as deemed necessary.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "D. Henderson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "D".

DONALL HENDERSON  
HOUSING POLICY AND RESEARCH MANAGER