

EQIA on DfC Budget for 2023-24

7 June 2023

Summary of NIFHA View

- Consultation period is very short.
- Detrimental impact of the Budget on the numbers of new social homes that can be built through the Social Housing Development Programme
- Older people and people with a disability including mental health and learning disabilities may be disproportionately impacted by a reduction in funding for the Supporting People Programme

About NIFHA

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, formed in 1977, is the representative body for Northern Ireland's 20 registered housing associations.

Our members are all not-for-profit organisations. Together, supported by the Department for Communities and the Housing Executive, they provide over 57,000 social and affordable homes.

Housing associations access private finance to effectively double the number of homes they could build with government housing association grant alone.

Housing associations also deliver high quality care and support to help people stay as independent as possible.

Working in partnership with other organisations, they also invest millions each year in community services and facilities.

Our sector employs more than 3,300 people and manages housing assets worth £4.4 bn.

NIFHA welcomes the opportunity to comment on this Consultation on EQIA on DfC Budget for 2023-24.

Setting the Context

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act The current challenges facing decision makers across the Northern Ireland public sector are recognised. In this context, when difficult decisions around reducing or cutting public services are being considered the need to comply with the Section 75 duties, while always important, is even more essential. Any decisions taken have the potential to have major adverse impacts on people in the Section 75 groups, to exacerbate existing inequalities and have long lasting impacts.

In complying with the Section 75 duties, the Department for Communities (DfC) must do so by adhering to the arrangements contained in its equality scheme, considering potential differential impacts of each proposed policy (i.e. individual budgetary decision), as well as the potential cumulative differential impacts of a range of such decisions, between those groups of people who avail of those services and who share particular Section 75 characteristics, e.g. young people, people with disabilities, people with dependents. Such assessments should be informed by relevant data and information on which inequalities would be exacerbated, with due consideration being given to taking all

possible steps to avoid or reduce any likely adverse impacts to protect people in our society most at risk of disadvantage within the Section 75 groups.

Response to consultation

Limited time to respond to consultation.

The current consultation asks consultees for their views on budget cuts which would lessen the impacts on people in the Section 75 groups and asks for responses as soon as possible, preferably within 4 weeks. The onus is therefore on consultees, rather than DfC, to analyse the data sources and to evaluate the proposals that are contained in the EQIA.

Given the limited consultation period, further consultation methods, as included in DfC equality scheme, would facilitate more effective consultation with stakeholders.

Social Housing Development Programme

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive goal that everyone has access to decent affordable housing. A reduction in the budget will impact the ability to deliver social housing and support people into independent living. Given this service provides to those in most need this is likely to impact across the section 75 groups.

The EQIA notes the detrimental impact of the Budget on the numbers of new social homes that can be built through the Social Housing Development Programme in 2023-24. NIFHA has highlighted the need to address the large number of people on the waiting-list times for social housing which as of 31 March 2023 was over 45,000 with 72% deemed to be in housing stress.

Supporting People Programme

The Supporting People programme is the policy and funding framework for housing support services. The Programme assists 19,000 vulnerable people each year to live independently and is focused on four thematic areas; working with people who are experiencing homelessness, young people, older people and people with a disability including mental health and learning disabilities. A report in 2020 identified significant shortfalls in supply of housing support particularly for the following groups:

- Older people with housing support needs (service shortfall of 9% or c. 920 units)
- Women who are at risk of domestic violence (service shortfall of 49% or c.650 units).
- People with learning disability or mental health issues (service shortfall of 15-21% or c.540 units).
- Homeless people experiencing alcohol or drug issues, homeless families, offenders and other homeless people (service shortfall of 12-24% or c. 540 units).

Therefore, a number of Section 75 groups including older people and people with a disability including mental health and learning disabilities may be disproportionately impacted by a reduction in funding.

Regarding disability and housing, NIFHA strongly advocate for independent living, ensuring that people with disabilities can live independently, enjoying an adequate standard of living and access to social protection. NIFHA supports access to adequate, sustainable and long term independent living provision for all people with disabilities for whom it is a viable housing option, in line with UNCRPD Article 19 on living independently and being included in the community and highlighted as a key issue in the Disability Strategy Expert Advisory Panel Report. In relation to age and housing, there needs to be accessible accommodation, energy efficiency, and access to a comprehensive fuel brokering scheme. Housing associations provide adaptation services to ensure older people's independence in their own home.

Tracey Ellis
Policy and Practice Manager
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
tellis@nifha.org