



**Annual Report to Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
Progress on Implementation of Section 75 Duties
2006 - 2007**

Name of public authority

Newington Housing Association (1975) Ltd

Equality Officer

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Executive Summary

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations?

The Newington Housing Association Equality Scheme was approved by the Equality Commission in the autumn of 2005. This reporting period therefore covers its first full year of implementation of its equality duties.

All designated Housing Associations participate in a Joint Equality Exercise co-ordinated by The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) and the EQIA Co-ordination Group (ECG) (see appendix 1). As a small Community Based Housing Association with 6 staff members and limited resources, this joint exercise has proven invaluable.

EQIA Process

The first two Equality Impact Assessments on Access & Communications and Complaints policies reached stage 5 in 2007. Stage 6, the final reports of both EQIA and are awaiting ratification by the Board of Management.

Joint work on the Year 2 EQIA process, which was to focus on Governance, Housing Management and Maintenance, began in October 2006. Shortly, after commencing on this process new 'Model Rules' were issued as Guidance for housing associations. As these Rules relate to how associations are governed this process had implications for the Governance EQIA. Therefore, NIFHA on behalf of Newington Housing Association and all other designated Housing Associations wrote to the Equality Commission and subsequently to all consultees inviting their views on our proposal to treat this as a policy development matter instead of conducting the programmed impact assessment. The ECG considered it would be more appropriate to equality proof the revised policy during the development process rather than assess the impact of a policy that was likely to change. Feedback from consultees indicated that this proposed alteration was acceptable.

Stage 2 of the EQIA process in both Housing Management and Maintenance policies had commenced in March 2007.

No EQIA has yet reached stage 7 of the EQIA process.

Disability Action Plan

Work began on the preparation of a Disability Action Plan, as required under Section 49a of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (NI) Order 2006).

In the coming year Newington Housing Association will focus on:

- progressing the 4 EQIA which are currently at various stages of the process to stage 6
- screen any new or revised policies as they arise
- ensure commitments and targets in year 1 of Disability Action Plan are met

Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

Fulfilling the Association's commitments to its Equality Duties has been included in its Business Plans since it was designated as a Public Authority for the purposes of Section 75. As a small voluntary organisation no specific targets or performance indicators had been identified in this area. Now through the Joint Equality Exercise with NIFHA, ongoing work on EQIA and the development of the Disability Action Plan, Board Members and staff are now in a position to identify outcome based targets, performance indicators and strategic objectives based on Section 75 duties.

It is envisaged that reporting in this area will be more robust in future years.

Section 2: Screening

No screening activities occurred during the year.

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

EQIA Timetable – April 2006 - March 2007

Title of Policy EQIA	EQIA Stage at end March 07 (Steps 1-6)	Outline adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals, and the relevant equality & good relations categories due to be affected.
Access & Communications	5	Improved access to information and services
Complaints	5	Improved access and understanding of policy
Housing Management	2	
Maintenance	2	

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2006- March 2007

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
No EQIA has yet reached stage 7		

2007-08 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2007 March 2008	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
Housing Management (commenced Oct 06)	Existing	March 08
Maintenance (commenced Oct 06)	Existing	March 08
Care & Support (Oct 07)	Existing	March 09
Human Resources Recruitment (Oct 07)	Existing	March 09

- Where the EQIA timetable for 2006/07 (as detailed in the previous annual S75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.

The previous annual report indicated that stage 5 of Year 1 of the EQIA timetable (Access & Communications and Complaints Policies) would be completed by October 06. As part of the Joint Equality Exercise with NIFHA and other Housing Associations collation of consultee responses were received in December 06. Stage 6 of Year 1 EQIA timetable was therefore delayed and both EQIA final reports were unable to be ratified by the Board of Management before the end of the reporting period.

Other factors included increased workloads on all staff due to an extended period of sick leave of the Association's General Manager and the restructuring of Board of Management and Sub Committees.

Section 4: Training

Induction

No new Board or staff members were recruited during the reporting period.

EQIA Training

“Undertaking EQIAs” organised by NIFHA was attended by one member of staff. This training was well received the staff member felt that it provide a better understanding of the EQIA process.

Equality Awareness Training

8 Board Members and two staff members received additional Equality Awareness Training in two sessions during 2006/2007 . Feedback was positive and training gave both Board Members and staff a fuller understanding of the breadth of Section75 duties and anti-discrimination legislation. The decision to concentrate this training in smaller groups of 5 encouraged debate on equality issues.

More focused awareness training will take place for all Board and staff members in the coming year as part of Disability Action Pla n commitments.

Section 5: Communication

Annual Progress Report 2005-2006

The first Annual Report on the implementation of the Association’ s Equality Scheme was submitted to the Equality Commission in August 2006. A copy of this report is available on Newington Housing Association’ s website.

EQIA Consultation Documents

All EQIA that have reached stage 5 of the process were issued to all consultee organisations and made available on the Association’ s website.

Equality Scheme

A copy of the full Equality Scheme is available on the Association's website.

Newington Housing Association's Annual Report 2006

An overview of the Section 75 legislation, the Association's Equality Scheme and the implementation of equality duties to date was included in the 2006 Annual Report. This report was issued to all tenants and stakeholders and is available on the Association's website.

Internal Communications

Progress reports on s75 duties are presented to the Board of Management on a quarterly basis.

Staff receive regular updates through "E Cards" issued by NIFHA.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

The main sources of data collected were from the Association's own internal management and IT systems and included the following

- The Association's internal management information on the profile of tenants and service users
- NICORE – statistics of all lettings made by the Association
- Housing Waiting list data
- Tenant Satisfaction Surveys
- Service Reviews
- Complaints register
- Mystery Shopper exercise undertaken by NITAP (Nov 2006)

External data was collected from the following sources

- Pre-consultation research commissioned by NIFHA and undertaken by IMS Consultants during February – April 2007
- NISRA website

As part of the Joint Equality Exercise Housing Associations, a market research company was appointed by the ECG to conduct a pre-consultation exercise to help the 35 designated housing associations assess the impact of their housing management and maintenance policies on the Section 75 equality categories.

The main reasons for carrying out this pre-consultation exercise were:

- Criticisms were received during consultation on the Year 1 EQIAs about lack of data
- It is recognised that pre-consultation is good practice
- The EQIA Co-ordination Group wanted to demonstrate housing associations' commitment to engage with equality representative groups
- The data gathered from pre-consultation would enable more effective assessment of the impact of the housing management and maintenance policies and also provide a focus to any follow up consultation events

The rationale behind the decision to outsource the responsibility for carrying out the fieldwork was:

- It would achieve a more equitable spread of work amongst housing associations participating in the joint approach
- It would make it easier for the ECG to manage the EQIA process

IMS was chosen as it has a good track record in conducting research for public bodies in Northern Ireland

The policy aims and scope of the research project were agreed by the ECG. A total of 98 consultees were sent pre-consultation information and a covering letter. IMS then followed up with the planned telephone surveys. A total of 18 surveys were successfully completed.

The researchers experienced a number of problems in getting respondents to complete the surveys by telephone. In order to increase the level of response the ECG in conjunction with IMS decided to send the remaining consultees the survey by post enclosing an SAE for easy return. This approach brought the response rate up to 23%. An overview of the results

of the survey was presented to all designated associations at a joint meeting on equality prior to circulating the full report. The final IMS report was used to inform the early stages of the EQIAs on maintenance and housing management.

IMS also used the opportunity to update all consultee details where possible.

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

As part of the Associations ongoing commitment to service improvement, questions relating to the ease of access to services and the quality of the information that is provided to customers were included in the Tenant Satisfaction Survey carried out in October 2006. 95% of respondents expressed satisfaction with the ease of access to the service and information. 97% responded that staff, when contacted were at least helpful. 91% of respondents professed to being at least satisfied with the quality and quantity of the information received from the Association .

Systems are in place to provide information and publications in an alternative format upon request.

Language line is available for telephone based interpretation for service users as and when required.

No requests for information in alternative formats or interpretation services were received through the year.

Section 8: Complaints

No Section 75 related complaints were received.

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

Formal consultation with individuals and representative groups was conducted and co-ordinated by NIFHA as part of the Joint Equality Exercise (see Appendix 1). All responses to consultation are collated and referred back to the Association.

Newington Housing Association operates in an area with excellent community group networks and works with these groups intensively in matters of its core functions of Housing Management, Maintenance and Development of new properties.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

Newington Housing Association is a community based organisation mainly operating in the Newington, Newlodge and Cliftonville areas of North Belfast. The Association is acutely aware of the importance of building good relations between all sections of society. Many of the Association's tenants and properties have been affected by interface violence which has plagued North Belfast.

The Association has worked informally with local community groups, interface networks, the PSNI and political representatives to help reduce interface violence.

The Association organised a programme of Cultural Diversity events with local primary schools and residents. Representatives from the Indian and Latin American gave presentations on different aspects of their culture focusing on food, dance and how children of other cultures live. The feedback from these events was excellent both from the presenters and participants.

The Association as an employer is committed to equality of opportunity and has striven to provide a safe neutral environment for all of its employees.

Section 11: Additional Comments

As a small voluntary organisation, with 6 members of staff, increasing legislative and regulatory requirements has placed extra demands on already limited resources. The work of NIFHA and the ECG as part of the Joint Equality Exercise is essential in enabling Newington Housing Association to fulfil its Section 75 duties.

Work that began in the area of Section 75 is now being replicated throughout the organisation in its Business and Corporate planning activities. Board and staff members are becoming increasingly confident in setting outcome based targets for all areas of its operations.

It is hoped that increasing awareness of equality issues is reflected throughout the organisation and demonstrated in this report.

Appendix 1



HOUSING ASSOCIATIONS JOINT EQUALITY EXERCISE Annual Progress Report 2006-07

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) is the umbrella body for the 36 registered and 7 non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland. All designated housing associations have participated in a joint approach co-ordinated by NIFHA during the development of Equality Schemes and throughout the EQIA process. This joint work is co-ordinated by the Federation's Corporate Services Manager and a representative group comprised of nominated individuals from NIFHA Council, the Professional Practice Committee and seven (service-related) Fora. This group is known as the EQIA Co-ordination Group (ECG).

General

Between April 2006 and March 2007 the Federation provided support for members participating in the Joint Equality process by:

- Producing a 'How to carry out an EQIA' Guide for members
- Issuing 4 'E Cards' as prompts for action and/or as information updates
- Providing regular updates on Equality & Diversity in NIFHA's E-News
- Representing the housing association movement by participating in the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's (NIHE) Consultative Forum on Equality
- Acting as a conduit for information and consultee responses
- Managing and maintaining a Joint Consultee List (c 150-200 organisations)
- Acting as a liaison with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Providing information, support and templates in relation to the development of Disability Actions Plans

EQIA Process

April 2006 – March 2007 was the first full year of the EQIA process for designated housing associations so there is not a significant amount of ongoing activity upon which to report.

Between April 2006 and March 2007 NIFHA co-ordinated joint work on the first two Equality Impact Assessments which were on Access & Communications and Complaints policies. The ECG assisted members by developing housing specific response templates for use by the designated associations when conducting their Year 1 EQIA's. These templates were also intended to make cross-sector comparison easier for consultees. The Federation worked with its members up to the end of the consultation stage and provided a report for the associations which gave the overall feedback from consultee organisations.

Joint work on the Year 2 EQIA process, which was to focus on Governance, Housing Management and Maintenance, began in October 2007. Shortly, after commencing on this process new 'Model Rules' were issued as Guidance for housing associations. As these Rules relate to how associations are governed this process had implications for the Governance EQIA. Therefore, the Federation wrote to the Equality Commission and subsequently to all consultees inviting their views on our proposal to treat this as a policy development matter instead of conducting the programmed impact assessment. The Co-ordination Group considered it would be more appropriate to equality proof the revised policy during the development process rather than assess the impact of a policy that was likely to change. Feedback from consultees indicated that this proposed alteration was acceptable.

To assist members with conducting Year 2 EQIAs NIFHA organised training for staff and Board Members who would be involved in the process. The Federation also commissioned IMS Consultants to undertake pre-consultation research associations' Maintenance and Housing Management policies to inform the early stages of these impact assessments.

From October this year members are due commence Year 3 of the Joint EQIA process looking at Housing Association's Care & Support and Human Resources (Recruitment & Selection) policies.

Training

During 2006, NIFHA organised training sessions on Undertaking EQIAs for those Board Members or staff who would be involved in conducting the assessments of the Housing Management and Maintenance policies. These sessions were aimed at those who had not undertaken this type of work before; therefore participation by all associations was not essential.

The Federation also engaged Animate to facilitate a seminar about issues facing Migrant Workers; this was held on 19 September 06. Again participation from member associations was on a voluntary basis.

Communications

In regard to Communications the Federation continued to liaise with the Equality Commission and the designated housing associations as well as acting as a key link between members and bodies with an interest in promoting equality of opportunity, such as consultee organisations or other statutory bodies.

The Federation answered queries, provided general information about associations and used it's publications like POSH magazine or Annual Reports, as well as it's website to demonstrate the work that members have done to implement equality of opportunity and promote good relations. These publications are circulated to a wide range of individuals and organisations including all those on the joint NIFHA list of Consultees.

In addition, Federation staff regularly accept speaking roles or participate in the events of other organisations as part of our work on promoting housing associations. The following are a few examples from 2006-07:

- Corporate Services Manager, DisabledGo event in City Hall, Belfast (September 2006)
- Chief Executive, Community Relations Council event in Moygashel (October 2006)
- Corporate Services Manager, NIHE Consultative Forum on Equality in Belfast (October 2006)
- Corporate Services Manager, Animate Conference, Moygashel (January 2007)

- Corporate Services Manager, NIHE's Modernising Services Presentation -giving equality perspective on new customer service system (February 2007)
- Corporate Services Manager, NIHE joint public consultation on Disability Action Plans at Housing Centre, Belfast (March 2007)

Data Collection & Analysis

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IMS also used the opportunity to update all consultee details where possible.

Information Provision; Access to Information and Services

Although NIFHA is not designated under Section 75 the Federation has made a commitment to producing information and publications like our magazine, POSH, in formats that use accessible fonts and type styles.

The Federation regularly provides information and advice for members in relation to translation, interpretation services and producing material in alternative formats. NIFHA also shares any information received on suppliers of these services. Such guidance is aimed at equipping the housing associations to respond promptly to any requests where accessibility may be a factor. Moreover, NIFHA has set up a Service Agreement with Language Line giving members the opportunity to obtain telephone interpretation for their clients as and when necessary.

Consultation and Engagement

During 2006-07 NIFHA undertook the following consultation and engagement activities as part of our member support work under the Housing Associations' Joint Equality Exercise:

- Conducted a pre-consultation exercise to ensure that the joint consultee list was accurate, up-to-date and valid (May/June 2006)
- Co-ordinated the Formal Consultation on Year 1 of the EQIA programme on behalf of the designated association by publicising the 12 week consultation period in the three main Northern Ireland daily papers (June 2006)
- Issued a composite disc containing the draft EQIA Reports of the 36 designated housing associations to 160 consultee organisations on 23 June 2006 (additional discs were also issued on request)
- Participated in face-to-face meetings with 6 consultee organisations as part of the Formal Consultation process (August – October 2006)
- Circulated all general consultee responses to designated associations (October/November 2006)
- Made a brief presentation at the NIHE' s Equality Consultative Forum, explaining the associations' approach to EQIAs and the focus of the Year 1 Reports (October 2006)
- Produced a Report summarising the overall feedback from meetings with consultee organisations and circulated it to all designated housing associations for their information (December 2006)

- Conducted a consultation exercise on behalf of members to determine consultee views on the proposal to remove Governance policies from the EQIA timetable as updated policy guidance had brought changes that meant Governance would be dealt with more effectively through inclusive policy development (January 2007)
- Presented the Housing Associations' plans for managing the production of Disability Action Plans at the NIHE's Joint Public Consultation Event (March 2007)
- Throughout the year NIFHA staff regularly participated in a range of Inter-Agency Groups which enable engagement with 'equalities' organisations – this is in addition to electronic networking and consultation with relevant groups
- Between January and March 2007 NIFHA staff attended and participated in recent Equality Commission consultation events on:
 - Section 75 Monitoring Guidance
 - Promoting Good Relations
 - Procurement
 - Racial Equality in the Provision of Housing & Accommodation
- Where appropriate NIFHA has also consulted with members and provided detailed written responses on consultation exercises related to equality issues, such as those undertaken by the ECNI which are listed above

Good Relations Duty

The Federation is an active participant in the Shared Future Housing Advisory Panel, chaired by the NIHE, which comprises 15 different organisations engaged in developing a workable strategy for supporting mixed community housing in Northern Ireland. NIFHA is involved in this group in its role as an umbrella organisation however it is the individual member associations that will roll out the strategy. The Federation is also involved in a smaller Implementation Group which deals specifically with the practicalities of this work once the actual scheme development has commenced.

In 2006, the first Shared Future Housing scheme became a reality with the Carran Crescent development, in Fermanagh and further schemes are planned over the next year(s). Another tangible outcome of the work by the Advisory Panel has been the introduction of a Neighbourhood Charter based on the principles of Shared Future; all tenants of such mixed housing

schemes sign up to this Charter. In furtherance of the good community relations aim NIFHA is also exploring and encouraging the use of the Shared Future Housing 'brand' in existing housing areas.

As mentioned above, on behalf of its members NIFHA has also engaged with the ECNI on this matter, both through participation at Focus Groups and in written consultation responses.

The Federation interacts with a variety of Groups working to foster good relations, such as the Community Relations Council. Other examples include:

- Membership in the Executive Committee of NICVA - a key organisation in the 'One Small Step' campaign (also supported by NIFHA)
- Membership of the N I Tenants Action Project Committee - a group which developed and produced a booklet to encourage good relations entitled 'Understanding your Neighbour'
- Participation in the Diversity Works project facilitated by Disability Action

All of this inter -agency work informs our engagement with our membership and consequently influences how the associations approach equality matters.

LUCINDA McMURRAN

Corporate Services Manager

NIFHA

1 August 2007