



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Research and Library Service Briefing Note

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The Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study: carers and the domestic rating system

1 Background

The Committee for Finance and Personnel has been considering the issue of providing support to carers through the domestic rating system. The Department for Finance and Personnel's Rating Policy Division provided the Committee an Options Paper in February 2010. This set out three options:

- 1. Enhance an existing premium within the Rate Relief scheme (the Carer Premium seems the most appropriate);*
- 2. Enhance the earnings disregard within the Rate Relief scheme; and*
- 3. Introduce a new relief scheme, specifically targeted at carers.¹*

Of these, option 3 looks beyond the confines of the rate relief system. The Department's paper identified that:

¹ Ratings Policy Division (2010) 'Additional Rate Relief for Carers – Options Paper'

If the provision of further support for carers through the rating system is considered to have merit and to be a priority, further research would be required around the economic status of those who are carers to help inform decisions as to whether any relief for carers should be targeted at those on low incomes (if the majority of carers were found to be in this circumstance) or whether it should be independent of income.

This briefing note is to bring to the attention of Members an option for pursuing that further research which has been identified by the Research and Library Service.

2. The Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study

The Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) is a large-scale data linkage study which has been created by linking individual level administrative and statistical data. Information is linked over time on people from Census, vital events (births, deaths and marriages) and health registration datasets.

The NILS consists of an approximate 28% (c. 500,000) sample of people in Northern Ireland. Sample members are chosen on having one of 104 birth dates.

To date, information held on sample members includes:

- 2001 Census information on the sample members and people living with them;
- General Register Office (GRO) information on the death of a NILS member;
- GRO information on the birth of NILS members from 1997 onwards;
- GRO information on birth events to NILS members;
- GRO information on stillbirth and infant deaths to NILS members;
- Widow/erhood events to NILS members;
- Marriage event information from 2004 onwards;
- Immigration, emigration, re-entry and internal migration events using health registration data downloaded every six months.²

In addition, data such as what was the Valuation and Lands Agency (now part of LPS) on capital valuations for properties used in the 2005 Rating reform.

3. What use may these data be in the context of support for carers?

The NILS Research Support Unit has confirmed that it can provide information on the economic/demographic/household background status of individuals who identified themselves in census responses as givers of care. This can be broken down by their estimation of the amount of care that they provide.

² For further information see the NILS webpage at: http://census.ac.uk/guides/Longitudinal_NI.aspx

The capital valuations data would allow a measurement of 'lifetime accumulation or affluence' for older people, for example. Additionally, it would be possible to match these data with, for example, community background data.

In practical terms, this means that it may be possible to generate a sound evidence base to inform future policy on supporting care through the rating system. It may be possible to show, for example, a profile of carers in relation to capital value of home, community background and socio-economic status – through assessment of housing tenure and car availability, for example. Educational attainment is another potential indicator. From this, it would be possible to build a fuller picture of the potential impact of different rating policies on sub-sets of the population.

Members may also wish to note that the NILS data has already been used in research into caring; in 2008 a study into whether caring is associated with increased risk of mortality was published in *Social Science and Medicine*.³

4. Next steps

The Committee may wish to encourage the Department's Rating Reform Division to explore the potential use of the NILS resource in order to fill the information gap identified in its Options Paper. This could help to inform policy development on this issue in the future.

³ O'Reilly, D et al (2008) 'Is caring associated with an increased risk of mortality? A longitudinal study' in Social Science and Medicine vol.67: 1282-1290