

## Submission in relation to the HMO Bill

**Padraig Walsh**

6<sup>th</sup> October 2015

In relation to

### **PART 5 SUPPLEMENTARY 62. HMO register**

Currently the HMO public Register serves no useful purpose.

In 2004, NIHE produced a downloadable pdf of the register, sorted into Districts, Wards, with Streets in Alphabetic order and properties in numeric order. It also included a contact number, but not the identity of the owner or manager of the HMO.

It was still a useful resource for the general public, especially to easily check whether a HMO property was a licensed HMO.

In 2015 the HMO register (supplied by NIHE in reply to FOI request) is an Excel Spreadsheet, with the information in an unsorted format, making it difficult to read, and rendering it virtually useless as a public resource.

In the rest of the UK, HMO registers are readily downloadable for almost any City or Council, with all the information clearly displayed including the name of the owner and manager of the HMO. This standard was enshrined in law through the UK Parliament.

In N.I a challenge was made to NIHE by LANI to remove the identities of HMO landlords, invoking Human Rights principles. This challenge appears to have been made by those with vested interests in HMOs namely LANI, which appears to serve the interests of several key players in HMO enterprises i.e those with large portfolios (referred to also by NIHE in the South Belfast Sector study 2006, mentioning several landlords with large portfolios, being a feature of the South Belfast HMO landscape). This challenge to the register appears to have been made without properly discussing the issue with key players in relation to HMO issues, specifically those most affected by them i.e. Owner Occupiers.

There is no valid reason, in my view for the identities of HMO landlords to be protected, in any open society, as demonstrated everywhere else in the UK. Such secrecy, as is the current position in NI, absolves HMO landlords of responsibilities, by presenting them as faceless business persons who make, in many cases, huge profits in large portfolio enterprises, but who have little regard for the people who live in these areas, who have been disadvantaged by these HMO enterprises.

NIHE, in my view have a responsibility to comply with the spirit and law of DPA and FOI in relation to HMO Registers and not pander to HMO landlords who flag up safety issues as an excuse. This issue needs to be looked at again, as the real reason for the secrecy of the HMO Register appears to be to conceal the huge portfolios of those with conflicts of interest, which is definitely a matter of public interest. Those who have called for and obtained secrecy of the HMO Register have in my view, vested interests, and possible and probable conflicts of interest that were never fully made public when the ruling was made.

The Register must contain the name of the individual or company owning and managing the HMO. Anything less than this, is tantamount to concealing the conflicts of interest of those who have profited from HMOs at the expense of those who have been damaged by them.

HMO landlords include well known politicians, Councillors and even judges on NIVT panels. There are clear conflicts of interest here that need to be fully addressed, by making the HMO register a proper, open, public resource, rather than a cloak of anonymity for those who exploit and profit from large areas of South Belfast.

All of the policies relating to HMOs, including Rates, Car Parking issues, achieving balanced communities, regeneration for those disadvantaged etc, must be made to be seen, to have been formulated and made policy, by persons with no vested interests or conflicts of interest, rather than by HMO landlords, (who may be politicians, councillors, NIHE or Planning Service staff, judges etc), lobbying for and making policies to maximise return on their own private enterprises, and formulating policies to prevent Balanced Communities being achieved, whilst protected by the anonymity of the HMO Register.

Therefore this issue requires urgent consideration.

P Walsh  
6<sup>th</sup> October 2015