



**Northern Ireland
Assembly**

COMMITTEE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Please use this form to submit written submissions in relation to the Housing (Amendment) Bill. Return to committee.socialdevelopment@niassembly.gov.uk by Friday 4th September 2015.

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Organisation: (if applicable) Newry Mourne and Down District Council_____

Date: _____4th September 2015_____

As a result of its on-going work dealing with anti-social behaviour and housing issues, Newry, Mourne and Down District Council does agree that appropriate information sharing between the relevant agencies should be improved and the Council therefore welcomes legislative change that facilitates this.

Clause 1 – Sharing of information in relation to empty properties

This clause provides that the Department of Finance and Personnel ('DFP') must disclose certain information about empty properties to DSD or NIHE for identifying the owners of vacant properties or for the purpose of bringing those properties back into use.

Comment

District councils have a range of statutory functions which deal with vacant and dilapidated properties which includes serving notices requiring owners to do works when buildings are dangerous or dilapidated and they can also serve Notices where the condition of the property is prejudicial to health or constitutes a statutory nuisance. The Council can also issue certificates of disrepair and prosecute landlords

who do not have a certificate of fitness for their properties.

Even though Council has these statutory functions which can help ensure that vacant properties do not become an eyesore and be brought back into use, the Bill in its current form does not permit either DFP or DSD to share information with Councils for the purposes of those functions.

It is therefore important that the proposed Bill provides for the sharing of information between DFP, DSD and Councils

Clause 2 – disclosure of information relating to anti-social behaviour

This clause provides that a person may disclose relevant information about anti-social behaviour to NIHE or a registered housing association where such information is disclosed for a relevant purpose. The Council currently has an information sharing protocol with NIHE; however registered Housing Associations were not signatories of the protocol.

Comment

The Council welcomes the introduction of a legislative basis for sharing information more effectively between housing providers. However, the Council notes that there are three relevant authorities referred to in the Anti-Social Behaviour (NI) Order 2004, which are Councils, NIHE and PSNI. Dealing effectively with anti-social behaviour requires a partnership approach and indeed in accordance with the said Order, consultation between relevant authorities must take place before applying for an anti-social behaviour order.

The Council would therefore recommend that this clause in the Bill should be amended so as to provide for the disclosure of information between NIHE, registered Housing Associations, the PSNI and Councils. This would facilitate partnership working between those agencies with statutory responsibility for dealing with anti-social behaviour.

Whilst the legislation provides a statutory basis for sharing information, the Council will expect that data sharing protocols are in place before information can be disclosed.

Clause 3 – Registration as statutory charge of certain loans

This clause provides that so long as any part of the principal of, or any interest on, a loan made by NIHE under Article 9 of the Housing (NI) Order 1981 (for certain purposes including make repairs or improvements to a house) remains outstanding, the loan is to be a charge on the house or building (s) in question, and that such charges shall be registered in the Statutory Charges Register.

Comment

This clause falls within the statutory remit of the Housing Executive.

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