

From: The Minister

Gerry Carroll MLA
Northern Ireland Assembly
Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont

Dear Gerry,

AQW 46118/22-27 – INFORMATION TO BE PLACED IN THE ASSEMBLY LIBRARY

Due to the volume of details required to answer AQW 46118/22-27, the information has been placed in the Assembly Library.

Yours sincerely,



**Gordon Lyons MLA
Minister for Communities**

This issue is an operational matter for Northern Ireland Housing Executive; they have advised me as follows:

“As set out in Chapter 6 of the Housing Executive’s Equality Scheme, the Housing Executive is committed to ensuring that the information it disseminates and the services it provides are fully accessible to all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. This includes people with sensory, learning, communication and mobility disabilities.

These commitments are further emphasised in its Disability Action Plan. As per Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA1995) (as amended by the Disability Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 2006), the Housing Executive is required to carry out its functions to have due regard to the need to:

- promote positive attitudes towards disabled people; and*
- encourage participation by disabled people in public life (i.e. ‘the disability duties’)*

The Housing Executive also adheres to duties placed on public bodies as set out in the Sign Language (Northern Ireland) Bill.

We recognise that a significant proportion of our tenants and customers may have invisible disabilities or communication needs that are not immediately apparent, including people who are Deaf/deaf or have a hearing impairment, and that this can create barriers when accessing services.

To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing services and information about us, the Housing Executive provides British (BSL) and Irish Sign Language (ISL) interpreters to our Deaf customers and staff upon request.

In addition, the Housing Executive also provides a Video Relay Service as a method of remote communication for Deaf customers. This Relay Service is currently being provided by SignVideo and operates similarly to a standard phone call. Using this service, Housing Executive staff are able to speak directly to the Deaf individual via a Sign Language interpreter who will sign the staff member's words to the customer and vice versa. The BSL and ISL telephone interpreting calls are available 24/7 and further information can be found at www.nihe.gov.uk/about-us/contact-us/lets-connect-using-signvideo

Relay UK, formerly known as Next Generation Text (NGT), can also be used to contact the Housing Executive. A textphone or telephone is required to use this service, which can be used by both callers and staff. The Housing Executive also has a hearing loop system in place at all its outlets to ensure those customers with a hearing impairment are considered while visiting our offices. We also offer home visits to tenants on request (and will provide BSL/ISL sign language interpreters where appropriate) to help remove barriers to service and ensure we are communicating information in a way that is appropriate to the individual needs of the customer.

Housing Executive services are also accessible via email and online channels, reducing reliance on telephone or verbal communication. Furthermore, the housing management system enables staff to record hearing impairments, ensuring tenants are contacted through appropriate and accessible communication methods.

In January 2024, the Housing Executive became a JAM Card friendly business, demonstrating our commitment to delivering accessible, inclusive services for all of our customers. The JAM Card is a simple tool that provides a cue for staff to take a more proactive and person-centred approach, and

training has been delivered to colleagues across all our regional offices. We also deliver regular Disability Awareness Training to staff, including Deaf/deaf and hearing loss awareness training, and regularly engage with our colleagues and customers through our Disability Forum and internal Disability Workstream.

The Housing Executive uses the tools of screening and equality impact assessment with the purpose of identifying those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations. Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process and all relevant data, both qualitative and quantitative, is gathered. In taking this evidence into account, the Housing Executive considers the different needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 equality categories including Deaf individuals and persons with hearing impairment. Any screening decision will be informed by this evidence.

On the Housing Executive website in the Housing Help Section, we have a page which is dedicated to available help for people with disabilities accessing our services: www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-help/help-with-disabilities. Information on the Disability Forum and Communication Support Services is also available on our website www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-help/help-with-disabilities/useful-resources

We would also highlight that we report in more detail on our work related to disabilities and other statutory equality and good relations duties in our Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland; the latest report is available on our website – www.nihe.gov.uk/getattachment/ce387cd4-a324-443b-805c-90a12599a1c4/Annual-Progress-Report-to-the-ECNI-2024-2025