



Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

# Equality in Housing and Communities

Priorities for Action



February 2019

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There is a pressing need to secure change in relation to advancing sharing in housing while ensuring objectively assessed need is met, and addressing the longer social housing waiting list for Catholic households.”

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We also call for prompt action to ensure the provision of disability related accommodation; and to tackle the under-reporting of hate incidents and crimes and to increase outcome rates.”

## Summary: Housing and communities – priorities for action

1. The Commission considers, following engagement with stakeholders and wider analysis, that there are immediate opportunities and/or a particular pressing need to secure change in relation to:
  - improving the provision of disability related accommodation; and
  - tackling the under-reporting of hate incidents and crimes and increase outcome rates.
- advancing sharing in housing while ensuring objectively assessed need is met,
- addressing the longer social housing waiting list for Catholic households,

## Equality in housing and communities

2. Housing is a basic human need and provides a foundation for family and community life. Good quality, affordable housing in safe, sustainable communities is essential to ensuring health, well-being and a prosperous society.
3. The Commission is mindful of the complex relationships that exist between housing and other domains. Addressing key inequalities will not only require work across a range of Departments, agencies and functions of government, but also by organisations who have responsibilities for, or an interest in, housing and communities in Northern Ireland.
4. The Commission is aware of the proactive steps taken by a range of bodies, including government departments and the housing sector more broadly, to promote equality across the Section 75 grounds.
5. Whilst we both recognise and welcome progress that has been made, it is clear that challenges remain.
6. Developed from a range of research and evidence sources, and the Commission's wider work over a number of years, this short document sets out the Commission's current priorities for action.

## Wider recommendations

7. In addition to the priorities for action set out in this document, we also recommend action by government, officials and key stakeholders to advance our full range of recommendations, with a particular focus on tackling the inequalities identified in our 2017 *Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities*.
  - Develop shared, safe communities based on equality, dignity and respect.
  - Ensure that everyone has access to a sustainable, secure home and enjoys the right to independent living.
  - Address the specific housing needs of particular equality groups.
8. The Commission has identified the following overarching areas where it considers that targeted action could serve to address key inequalities, and advance equality of opportunity and good relations:
  9. We also set out two additional cross-cutting priority areas for action
    - Mitigate the long-term negative impacts of Welfare Reform.
    - Improve equality data collection and analysis.

This short guide sets out our current priorities for action. Our wider set of policy recommendations and supporting rationale can be found at: [www.equalityni.org/Housing/Policy](http://www.equalityni.org/Housing/Policy)

# Advance sharing in housing while ensuring objectively assessed need is met



## Advance sharing in housing, while ensuring that objectively assessed housing need is met.



Housing

Advance sharing in housing, while ensuring that objectively assessed housing need is met



10. The Commission restates its view on the value of shared housing and that segregated housing in Northern Ireland is not the way forward for our society. We also recognise that people need to feel safe where they live, and considers that actions are needed to encourage and incentivise integration.
11. While reiterating the importance of ensuring that housing demand is met on the basis of objectively assessed need, actions which advance sharing in housing could also serve to expand housing markets; increase opportunities to meet objectively assessed housing need; and sharing more generally in Northern Ireland.

12. We recommend actions designed to incentivise and advance safe, shared housing and communities based on equality, dignity and respect.
13. The Commission considers that actions to advance sharing should also extend beyond a narrow focus on community background. We reiterate our recommendations that the focus of actions to advance sharing should be across all Section 75 grounds; and across a range of public policy domains. Shared communities should include shared housing, as well as shared education, employment, shopping and places of leisure.
14. As set out in our 2013 Submission to the Panel of Parties (Haass)<sup>1</sup> we highlight the importance of political leadership and recommend the regulation of the display of flags, based on the principles contained in the Flags (NI) Order. We recommend a range of steps to facilitate expressions of identity in a sensitive and non-divisive manner, while also recommending consideration of the extent to which flags and emblems on private property increase community tensions and discourage the two communities from sharing public spaces.

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<sup>1</sup> ECNI (2013) [Submission to the Panel of Parties](#)



15. We recommend that the Government makes clear how progress in this area will be tracked (including for all Section 75 categories). We also continue to recommend that the Programme for Government include an additional indicator to track progress in securing increased sharing in housing.



# Address the longer social housing waiting list for Catholic households



## Address the longer waiting-list times for social housing experienced by households with a Catholic religion household reference person.



Housing

Address the longer waiting-list times for social housing experienced by households with a Catholic household reference person



Waiting list time data for social housing for the period 2004 to 2009 and for 2013/14 shows that Catholic household reference person applicants experienced the longest median waiting times for social housing at the point of allocation in NI as a whole.

16. We reiterate the importance of ensuring that housing need is met on the basis of objectively assessed need. Where stock availability (supply-side factors) differs from individual housing needs and preferences (demand-side factors),

longer waiting lists can ensue. In Northern Ireland, this has a particular impact on households with a Catholic religion household reference person<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Wallace, A. (2015) [Housing and Communities Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#).

17. Analysis of access to social housing in Northern Ireland should take into account a range of factors which shape supply and demand. For example, generally applicable issues of residential preferences, personal safety, particular housing needs, and the availability of appropriate housing stock and/or development land in specific areas must also be considered in the context of segregated residential patterns in Northern Ireland.

18. On the supply-side, we recommend action to consider for example, how appropriate stock and land for development can be made available to ensure that objectively assessed housing need is more effectively met in areas of high demand. On the demand-side, steps which might both widen areas of

preference for those in housing need and sharing more generally could serve to expand housing markets and increase opportunities to both meet objectively assessed housing need and advance increased sharing. We also recommend joint working, including with those working and living within communities, so as to further build trust and confidence between divided communities.

# Improve the provision of disability-related accommodation

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## Ensure application of accessible housing standards to all new builds.



Housing

Ensure access to adequate, sustainable and long-term independent living provision for all disabled people for who it is a viable housing option.



**Many people with disabilities in Northern Ireland lack the choice, control and freedom to determine where and with whom they live.**

19. We consider that more needs to be done to ensure that all new builds in private tenures comply with accessible standards, so as to better facilitate individuals to secure a home and remain in it. We note recognition within proposed government policy of the

need to increase the provision of accessible homes<sup>3</sup>. Over time, the universal application of accessible standards would significantly reduce the need for formal care services and costly home adaptations in the future<sup>4</sup>.

3 NI Executive (2017) Byrne et al (2014) UNCRPD: Shortfalls in Public Policy and Programme Delivery in Northern Ireland

4 Wallace, A. (2015) [Housing and Communities Inequalities in Northern Ireland](#) at page 141

## 20. The Lifetime Homes

Standard uses a set of 16 design criteria to build homes that are inclusive, accessible and adaptable. It is complemented by wheelchair standard housing *'the designs of which have been evolving to meet the needs of assisted wheelchair users and carers'*<sup>5</sup>. The 2013 Interdepartmental Review of Housing Adaptations Services<sup>6</sup> states that *'Lifetime homes standards have limitations when needs become more complex and therefore some people may require the use of purpose designed wheelchair dwellings'*.

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5 NIHE (2013) [Interdepartmental Review of Housing Adaptation Services](#)

6 NIHE (2013) [Interdepartmental Review of Housing Adaptation Services](#)

## Provide information regarding the availability of accessible accommodation.

21. Accessible housing is most likely to be found within social housing<sup>7</sup>. However, NIHE's 2012 Audit of Inequalities<sup>8</sup> *notes 'anecdotal evidence suggests that demand may be rising [within the private rented sector] as more people find themselves in inaccessible private rented property, either because of the shortage of social housing, or because they cannot afford / get a mortgage to purchase a property'*.
22. We note and welcome that an interim accessible housing register for social housing is live and that a rolling programme is planned to increase its coverage including to housing association stock and private accommodation<sup>9</sup>.

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7 NISRA (2013) [Census 2011, Table DC4413NI](#)

8 NIHE (2012) [Audit of Inequalities](#)

9 Letter correspondence (20 July 2018), NIHE to ECNI



## Ensure the provision of easy to access and affordable adaptation services across all tenures - including by streamlining existing processes and reducing waiting times.

23. A person with disabilities may require adaptations to their existing or prospective home. We note recognition within the draft departmental plans of the need to streamline the adaptations and disabled grants process to reduce waiting times<sup>10</sup>. We consider that ensuring the availability of housing adaptations is essential, not least given the emphasis within government policy - particularly Transforming Your Care - on the delivery of social care within the home.
24. We recommend that support for adaptations should be available across tenures, and easy to access - in terms of using the service, speed of delivery, and cost. We welcome the NIHE's 2018 commitment to *'streamline the adaptations and disabled grants processes to reduce waiting times for housing adaptations...'*<sup>11</sup>.
25. We also recommend that action is taken to reduce waiting times for occupational therapy assessments in support of requests for housing adaptations.

10 NI Executive (2017) [PfG Delivery Plan indicators 8 and 48](#)

11 NIHE (2018) [Corporate Plan 2017/18 - 2020/21](#)

## Extend the Disability Discrimination Act to include reasonable adjustments to communal areas in residential properties.

26. Currently under the disability discrimination legislation, landlords and managers of rented residential premises must make reasonable adjustments to the disabled person's home. In addition, they cannot unreasonably refuse permission for disability-related alterations to be carried out. Landlords however are not required to make disability-related alterations to the physical features of the common parts of let residential premises, such as stairs and hallways; even if they are reasonable to make and paid for by a disabled tenant.
27. We recommend<sup>12</sup> that the disability discrimination legislation is extended to require landlords to make disability-related alterations to the physical features of the common parts of residential properties, such as stairs and hallways.

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12 ECNI (2012) [Strengthening Protection for Disabled People](#)

## Ensure access to adequate, sustainable and long-term independent living provision for all people with disabilities for whom it is a viable housing option.

28. Article 19 (the right to live independently) of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities<sup>13</sup> makes clear that disabled people have the right to determining how to live their own lives, particularly with respect to personal decisions regarding their living arrangements, including with respect to personal care and support. We welcomed the 2017 draft PfG delivery plan<sup>14</sup> acknowledgement of the need for cross cutting actions, including improving independent living and the provision of suitable homes for people with disabilities.
29. We recognise the importance of the Supporting People programme in supporting individuals to live independently. A 2016 action plan<sup>15</sup> identified 13 recommendations following a review of the programme<sup>16</sup>. We encourage their urgent implementation, particularly as regards how they address the barriers to independent living as set out above.

13 [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

14 NI Executive (2017) [PfG Delivery Plan indicator 42](#)

15 DSD (2016) [Action plan for the implementation of the Supporting People review](#)

16 The Supporting People Programme aims 'to establish a strategic, integrated policy and funding framework to... enable vulnerable people to live independently in the community, in all types of accommodation and tenure' [Department for Communities website, accessed 15.06.16](#)

30. We note that proposals for changes to the adult social care system are still awaited<sup>17</sup>. We reiterate our recommendation<sup>18</sup> to the 2013 consultation on the future of adult social care, that *'any new social care model must ensure that disabled people are free to choose the type of assistance they require to support a good quality of life and prevent isolation and social hardship.'* We also reiterate the importance of ensuring that any transition to the mixed economy

model of private and community / voluntary care providers will not result in a diminution of health and social care services in particular for marginalised and excluded groups such as disabled people, older people and carers.

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<sup>17</sup> [Department of Health website, accessed 25.01.19](#)

<sup>18</sup> ECNI (2013) [Response to Who Cares? The future of adult social care and support in Northern Ireland](#)

# Further tackle the under- reporting of hate incidents and crimes and increase outcome rates



## Further tackle the under-reporting of hate incidents and crimes (against persons and dwellings), and increase outcome rates.



Housing

Further tackle the under-reporting of hate incidents and crimes (against persons and dwellings), and increase outcome rates



**Hate incidents are greatly under-reported so the rate of incidents perpetrated against people because they are perceived to be different in some way is much higher.**

31. We welcome the Northern Ireland Policing Board's thematic reviews in relation to transphobic<sup>19</sup> and homophobic<sup>20</sup>, and racist<sup>21</sup> hate crime and recommend

that actions are taken by the PSNI to ensure the full implementation of outstanding recommendations.

19 NIPB (2012) [Thematic Review Policing with and for LGB and Trans people](#)

20 NIPB (2012) [Thematic Review Policing with and for LGB and Trans people](#)

21 NIPB (2017) [Thematic Review of Policing Race Hate Crime](#)

32. We recommend detailed follow-up work to track the effectiveness of these actions, including to report on positive progress and/or identify key lessons.
  
33. In relation to detection, we repeat our recommendation, as per the 2010 Criminal Justice Inspectorate report, that there should be joined up data to track the progress of hate crimes through the criminal justice system. This would allow for better analysis of how such cases are dealt with and identify areas where remedial action is required.



**For further information on these priorities for action, or our wider policy recommendations and supporting rationale, please visit: [www.equalityni.org/HousingPolicy](http://www.equalityni.org/HousingPolicy)**

**February 2019**