

**Special Programmes Branch
Regional Development Office**

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Your reference:
Our reference:
Date: March 2003

Dear Sir

**EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT ON THE DEPARTMENT'S POLICY ON
TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION**

I enclose a copy of the Equality Impact Assessment on the policy on accommodation for Travellers.

The Department for Social Development identified the policy on Traveller Accommodation as an area on which an impact assessment within the terms of section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 should be carried out.

The Department's policy on Traveller Accommodation was published in August 1999 after extensive consultation with relevant bodies.

The four main proposals of the Policy are set out in paragraph 3.6 of the Assessment. The Department would welcome your comments on any likely equality implications taking into account the present position on the policies.

This Equality Impact Assessment complies with the statutory duties contained in section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Formal consultation is an integral part of the Equality Impact Assessment process and the responses will be considered by the Department.

The Department recognises that the Policy on Accommodation has already been subject to consultation. Some of the recommendations have been or are being implemented and you may feel that further comment is unnecessary. Nevertheless the Department welcomes any comments you may wish to make.

A copy of the Equality Impact Assessment is also available on the Department's web site:

www.dsdni.gov.uk

When preparing your response you may find it useful to consider the following questions:

1. Do you consider that any aspect of the policy impacts adversely on Section 75 groups?
2. If the answer to Question 1 is "Yes" please advise:
 - (a) Which groups do you think the policy affects? and
 - (b) How do you think these groups would be adversely affected?
3. What alternative action might mitigate or lessen any adverse impact on these groups?
4. What changes to the policy might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations?
5. Do you agree or disagree with the overall conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment? (If you disagree please say why)

Any comments on the Equality Impact Assessment should be sent by 25 April 2003 to:

Andy Hall
Special Programmes Branch
3rd Floor
Brookmount Buildings
Fountain Street
Belfast
BT1 5EE

Thank you for assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely

LIAM QUINN

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**DEPARTMENT FOR
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

POLICY ON TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION



March 2003

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Policy on Traveller Accommodation

1.0 **Introduction**

1.1. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity:-

- between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- between men and women generally;
- between persons with a disability and persons without; and
- between persons with dependants and persons without.

- 1.2. In addition, without prejudice to the above obligation, public authorities should also, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.
- 1.3. Schedule 9 of the Act requires public authorities to prepare equality schemes which should state, inter alia, arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by the authority on the promotion of equality of opportunity. Schedule 9 also requires that a public authority, in publishing the results of an assessment, should give details of any consideration given to measures which might mitigate the adverse impact of that policy on the promotion of opportunity and alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity.
- 1.4. The Department for Social Development (DSD) is whole-heartedly committed to complying with the statutory equality obligations. The Department has set out in its Equality Scheme how it proposes to fulfil its obligations. The Department's Mission "Together, tackling disadvantage, building communities" highlights our commitment to work together with organisations both within and outside the Department in order to implement our statutory obligations.
- 1.5. A copy of the Equality Scheme is available at www.dsdni.gov.uk Hard copies are also available from the Department's Equality & Corporate Planning Unit, 5th Floor, Churchill House, Victoria Square, Belfast, BT1 4SD (telephone: 9056 9188 – Miss M Graham).

2.0 **Background**

- 2.1. Travellers are amongst the most disadvantaged groups in Northern Ireland. Their poor living conditions have led to poor health, low educational achievement, high mortality rates and difficulties in accessing the full range of statutory services. Examples of multiple disadvantage are:-
 - Only 11% are in paid employment, and of those who are economically active 70% said that they had no paid work in the last 10 years.

- 92% have no GCSEs or their equivalent and there is a high drop-out rate after primary education.
- The mortality rate of Traveller children up to 10 years of age has been found to be 10 times that for the population as a whole, and only 1% of Travellers are over 65 years of age whereas the figure for the whole Northern Ireland population is 13%.

2.2. The purpose of this Equality Impact Assessment is to assess the equality implications of the policy set out in paragraph 3.6 for dealing with Traveller accommodation in the future.

3.0 **Policy Review**

- 3.1. A Working Group was established in 1996 to review the provision of Traveller accommodation and see if there could be a more co-ordinated approach to its delivery. Before the review commenced accommodation for Travellers in Northern Ireland was being provided in 2 main ways. Firstly, serviced sites could be provided by District Councils with 100% grant-aid from Central Government for capital works. Alternatively, Travellers who wished to avail of social housing could do so through either the Northern Ireland Housing Executive or Housing Associations. At that time, there were 10 authorised serviced sites in Northern Ireland, and some Travellers had moved into settled accommodation.
- 3.2. In 1998 the Working Group produced a consultation paper entitled “Working Party on Accommodation for Travellers”. Copies of the consultation document and the subsequent New Policy on Accommodation for Travellers are available from:-

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 3rd Floor
 Brookmount Buildings
 42 Fountain Street
 BELFAST BT1 5EE

or by contacting Maria Doherty (telephone 90 251910)

- 3.3. The consultation paper proposed that in future Travellers should be fully consulted on the type of accommodation that they wished to have. For the first time the concept of group housing was introduced as an alternative to the serviced sites and social housing which already existed. Grouped housing is residential housing development with additional facilities and amenities specifically designed to accommodate extended families of Travellers on a permanent basis.
- 3.4. The consultation paper asked for views on which organisation should in future be involved in taking forward accommodation provision. It was sent to 386 consultees including all Northern Ireland Assembly Members, all District Councils, Traveller Support Groups and Statutory Agencies dealing with minority ethnic groups, the Commission for Racial Equality and the Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights as well as the Advisory Committee on Travellers. There were also site meetings with many of the Travellers throughout Northern Ireland.
- 3.5. Over 40 responses were received from the consultation exercise. While these were being considered the then Minister, Lord Dubs, announced 4 pilot schemes to develop grouped housing. The schemes at Tattykeel Cottages, Omagh and Hillhead Road, Castledawson have been completed. Glen Road, Belfast is due to commence in March 2003 with plans for the Monagh Road scheme still being finalised. An additional £2.2m has been made available for the pilot schemes.
- 3.6. The Department, in August 1999, published its New Policy on Accommodation for Travellers. Among the proposals were:-
- that one central strategic agency should deal with Traveller accommodation, and that agency should be the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
 - that the former toleration policy should be replaced by a revised co-operation policy and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive should be in the lead in activating it.
 - that the existing publicly owned serviced sites should, once the appropriate legislation is in place, transfer to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
 - to ensure that Travellers who wished to retain their nomadic lifestyle could do so, that the provision of transit sites should remain with the District Councils.

- 3.7. Copies of the New Policy were sent to all consultees and Travellers were informed through their support groups and the Traveller Movement (NI).
- 3.8. Whilst the Policy was generally welcomed concern was expressed concerning the proposal that transit sites should remain with District Councils. This matter was revisited in the consultation document “Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Working Group on Travellers” issued by OFMDFM in early 2001. *(See Section 4 below)*

4.0 Policy Context

- 4.1. Action to alleviate the needs of Travellers was one of the first PSI priorities to be announced by Mr John McFall MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary on 16 June 1999. A PSI Working Group was established to examine the issues and as well as statutory agencies, the group included Travellers and their support groups as well as groups representing Travellers.
- 4.2. Accommodation for Travellers and issues relating to health, education, training, social services and policing were considered by the group. The PSI Working Group report endorsed the approach that one strategic agency should deal with Traveller accommodation and that it should be the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). The report recommended that the NIHE should undertake a comprehensive assessment of Traveller needs which would include the options of transit sites through to grouped housing or housing within the settled community. The assessment would also reflect the accommodation needs of those Travellers who wished to retain their nomadic lifestyle. Other recommendations concerned funding, site planning, design and management of sites. The assessment of Traveller needs has now been completed and the report was launched earlier this year.
- 4.3. However, the PSI Working Group was divided on the issue of who should provide transit sites (paragraph 3.6). It was agreed that consultation on the Working Group’s report should be used to determine if the provision of transit sites should remain with District Councils.
- 4.4. Following widespread consultation on the PSI report OFMDFM published the response of Government at the end of February 2003.
- 4.5. The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 was made on 27 February 2003 and it transfers responsibility for Traveller accommodation to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Accordingly existing publicly owned serviced sites transfer to the NIHE along with responsibility for providing appropriate sites to ensure that Travellers who wished to retain their nomadic lifestyle can do so. The Executive also has a lead role in activating the revised co-operation policy that replaced the former toleration policy.

5. **Further Policy Changes**

- 5.1. Following the consultation exercise on the PSI Working Party Report the Department has decided that the responsibility for all Traveller accommodation (including Transit sites) should lie with the NIHE. In coming to this decision the Department recognised that the overwhelming number of consultees who responded on the issue were in favour of responsibility moving to the NIHE. The majority of the Travellers also wished responsibility to transfer to the NIHE. The Housing Bill that proceeded through Westminster as an Order in Council makes provision for the NIHE to provide appropriate sites for Travellers.

6. **Consideration of Available Data & Assessment of Impact**

- 6.1. The latest detailed data on Travellers in Northern Ireland was established by a Census on Travellers carried out in 1993. To access more recent data on the number of Travellers in Northern Ireland, the 2001 Census asked people to indicate whether they considered themselves to be Travellers. Just under 1,700 people advised that they considered themselves to be Travellers.

Religious Belief

- 6.2. This has not been statistically measured. However, it is understood that most if not all Travellers are Roman Catholic. As this policy is targeting a social need while it will have a positive impact in relation to Roman Catholics there would not be an adverse impact in respect of Protestants.

Marital Status

- 6.3. A detailed breakdown of statistics from the 2001 Census will be available in October of this year. However in consultations no issues have been raised to indicate that the policy impacts disproportionately in respect of a person's marital status.

Political Opinion

- 6.4. This has not been statistically measured. However in consultations no issues have been raised to indicate that the policy will impact disproportionately in respect of a persons political opinion.

Sexual Orientation

- 6.5. This has not been statistically measured. However in consultations concerns were highlighted regarding confidentiality and sensitivity of treatment in general service provision. This issue will be addressed in the Equality Impact Assessment of the Housing Executive's external information policy and general training on equality issues.

Gender

- 6.6. Male Travellers constitute almost 49% of the Traveller population which is exactly the same as for the male population of Northern Ireland as a whole. In consultations no issues have been raised to indicate that the policy will impact disproportionately in respect of a persons gender

Disability

- 6.7. The only data held shows that 13% of the families have a member with a disability sufficient to prevent them from doing "everyday things", and 56% of families reported having seen a Doctor in the last month. There are no comparable statistics for Northern Ireland as a whole. Consultations did not identify any issues to indicate that the policy impacts disproportionately in respect of a persons disability.

Race

6.8. Travellers are recognised as a racial group as defined by the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997. In consultations no issues have been raised to indicate that the policy impacts disproportionately in respect of a persons race

Age

6.9. 53% of the Traveller population is aged under 17, as compared with 28% of the population as a whole. Only 1% is aged over 65 as against 13% of the population as a whole. Consultations did not raise any issues to indicate that the policy impacts disproportionately in respect of a persons age.

Dependants

6.10. 73% of Traveller households had 3 or more people while the equivalent figure for Northern Ireland was 52%. Consultations did not raise any issues to indicate that the policy impacts disproportionately in respect of a persons dependents.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1. The Department has concluded that the proposals as set out in paragraph 3.6 do not have any adverse impact on any section 75 group. The proposals in paragraph 3.6 should address the specific needs of Travellers and their implementation should have a positive effect on Traveller's health, education, access to statutory benefits and training, whilst at the same time accommodating their preferred lifestyle.

8.0 Future Data Collection

8.1. The Department foresees that future data collection will occur at an operational level, ie, by the NIHE, since it is now the strategic agency for the provision of Traveller accommodation – a position endorsed by the PSI Working Group report. In common with many other aspects of the Housing Executive's responsibilities and performance, the Department in its sponsor/ oversight role, will seek agreement as to

- the extent of data collection required;
- a timetable for establishing a revised data collection system; and

- a reporting mechanism designed to inform the Department as to progress against the timetable.

March 2003