



Equality scheme for Connswater Homes Ltd

**Drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of
the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

This document is available in a range of formats on request.
Please contact us with your requirements (see page 11 for contact
details).

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1st August 2012

Foreword

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act¹.

In our equality scheme we set out how Connswater Homes Ltd proposes to fulfill the Section 75 statutory duties.

We will commit the necessary resources in terms of people, time and money to make sure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that the equality scheme is implemented effectively, and on time.

We commit to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring our effective compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our progress.

We will develop and deliver a programme of communication and training with the aim of ensuring that all our staff and board members are made fully aware of our equality scheme and understand the commitments and obligations within it. We will develop a programme of awareness raising for our consultees on the Section 75 statutory duties and our commitments in our equality scheme.

We, John Beattie, Chairman and Jacqueline Locke, Chief Executive of Connswater Homes Ltd, are fully committed to effectively fulfilling our Section 75 statutory duties across all our functions (including service provision, employment and procurement) through the effective implementation of our equality scheme.

¹ See section 1.1 of our Equality Scheme.

We realise the important role that the community and voluntary sector and the general public have to play to ensure the Section 75 statutory duties are effectively implemented. Our equality scheme demonstrates how determined we are to ensure there are opportunities, for people affected by our work, to positively influence how we carry out our functions in line with our Section 75 statutory duties. It also offers the means whereby persons directly affected by what they consider to be a failure, on our part, to comply with our equality scheme, can make complaints.

On behalf of Connswater Homes Ltd and our staff we are pleased to support and endorse this equality scheme which has been drawn up in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Equality Commission guidelines.

Signed 

John Beattie, Chairman

Signed 

Jacqueline Locke, Chief Executive

Date 1st August 2012

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Chapter 1 Introduction

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

1.1 Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires Connswater Homes Ltd to comply with two statutory duties:

Section 75 (1)

In carrying out our functions relating to Northern Ireland we are required 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
- men and women generally
- persons with a disability and persons without
- persons with dependents and persons without.

Section 75 (2)

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland we are required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

“Functions” include the “powers and duties” of a housing association². This includes our employment and procurement functions.

Please see below under “Who we are and what we do” for a detailed explanation of our functions.

How we propose to fulfill the Section 75 duties in relation to the relevant functions of Connswater Homes Ltd.

1.2 Schedule 9 4. (1) of the Act requires Connswater Homes Ltd as a designated housing association to set out in an equality scheme how it proposes to fulfil the duties imposed by Section 75 in relation to its relevant functions. This equality scheme is

² Section 98 (1) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

intended to fulfil that statutory requirement. It is both a statement of our arrangements for fulfilling the Section 75 statutory duties and our plan for their implementation.

1.3 Connswater Homes Ltd committed to the discharge of its Section 75 obligations in all parts of our organisation and we will commit the necessary available resources in terms of people, time and money to ensure that the Section 75 statutory duties are complied with and that our equality scheme can be implemented effectively.

Who we are and what we do

About housing associations

1.4 A housing association is an independent voluntary organisation dedicated to helping people obtain good, affordable housing which meets their needs. A significant proportion of the work they do assists the government in the delivery of much-needed public services but they are not public bodies.

In April 2004 the Registered Housing Associations in Northern Ireland came within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Complaints by virtue of Article 146 of The Housing (NI) Order 2003. As a result of this Registered Housing Associations were designated as public authorities for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Housing associations are regulated by the Department for Social Development (DSD). They work closely with the DSD and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive NIHE to deliver housing and related services. Some also provide care and /or support services so they work with the relevant public authorities for the health sector too. As a result of this situation, housing associations must adhere to a wide range of policies and procedures which have been developed and are owned by a public authority or government department. In such cases associations must operate the policy of another body and have little or no scope to change that policy. For example, housing associations are the main

delivery vehicle for the Social Housing Development Programme but need is determined by the NIHE and the Department for Social Housing develops the programme which is then managed by the Housing Executive. So whilst housing associations may bid to deliver part of that programme they have no powers to shape the programme or establish where new social housing should be built.

In undertaking their Audits of Inequalities and establishing their Action Plans housing associations have therefore been mindful of the need to focus on measures where they have greatest ability to effect change. Where appropriate, potential inequalities identified that are outside the remit of the housing associations will be referred to the relevant public body.

While each designated housing association has produced its own Equality Scheme they have also agreed to work collectively on this major undertaking. Their representative body the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) is taking a co-ordinating role as part of this collaborative approach to help maximise resources, promote the sharing of best practice and minimise the administrative burden for stakeholder organisations.

Connswater Homes Ltd

1.5 Connswater Homes Ltd, formerly Connswater Housing Association, was first registered in 1977. It's mission statement is:

To become the housing association of choice by exceeding customer expectations and providing excellent homes.

Core Values

- **Accountability** – through a wide ranging and transparent system of monitoring and reporting making information available to all.
- **Openness** – through ensuring honesty, integrity, respect, fairness and confidentiality in our policies, procedures and dealings with others.

- **Value for money** – through consulting, targeting and meeting the needs of our customers.
- **Customer Care** – through investing in training and providing support for employees to ensure they have the skills to meet future challenges.
- **Commitment** – through ensuring the future viability and independence of the Association.
- **Equality** – through promoting fair and equitable treatment of those we have dealings with, irrespective of religious and cultural preferences, disability, gender, age, race, marital status, family responsibility and sexual orientation.

Aims

- To build high quality housing at the most affordable rents possible;
- To ensure a mix of homes that meet the diverse needs of the community;
- To provide housing that will encourage a sustainable community and create an environment where people want to live;
- To manage and maintain homes efficiently and effectively; and
- To provide best value for money.

Connswater Homes Ltd has grown steadily over the years, and although the majority of its properties are still in east Belfast, Connswater Homes Ltd now has properties in west & south Belfast, Newtownards, Comber, Portaferry, Killyleagh, Lisburn, Newtownabbey and Antrim, and continues to seek opportunities province wide.

Chapter 2 Our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the section 75 duties

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))

2.1 Some of our arrangements for assessing our compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties are outlined in other relevant parts of this equality scheme. Consultation is detailed in chapter 3, monitoring arrangements, assessment of impact of policies and publication arrangements in chapter 4, staff training in chapter 5 and access to information in chapter 6. Connswater Homes Ltd complaints procedure is set out in chapter 8 and the publication and annual review of Connswater Homes Ltd's equality scheme can be found in chapters 9 and 10.

In addition we have the following arrangements in place for assessing our compliance:

Responsibilities and reporting

2.2 We are committed to the fulfilment of our Section 75 obligations in all parts of our work.

2.3 Responsibility for the effective implementation of our equality scheme lies with the Board of Management of Connswater Homes Ltd which is committed to the development, implementation, maintenance and review of the equality scheme in accordance with Section 75 and Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, including any good practice or guidance that has been or may be issued by the Equality Commission.

The Chief Executive has a responsibility to the Board to ensure that Connswater Homes Ltd fully complies with this Equality scheme.

Operational responsibility for the delivery of the scheme lies with the Director of Corporate Assurance who is responsible for all

issues relating to the day-to-day administrative arrangements to ensure the Equality Scheme is implemented effectively.

Progress on the implementation of the Equality Scheme will be reported upon quarterly to the Board of Management.

2.4 If you have any questions or comments regarding our equality scheme, please contact in the first instance, Catherine Waterworth, Director of Corporate Assurance at the address given below and we will respond to you as soon as possible:

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance
Connswater Homes Ltd
157 Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3HX

Tel: 028 90656155

Fax: 028 90656388

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2.5 Objectives and targets relating to the statutory duties will be integrated into our strategic and operational business plans³.

2.6 Employees' job descriptions and performance plans reflect their contributions to the discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and implementation of the equality scheme, where relevant. The personal performance plans are subject to appraisal in the annual performance review.

2.7 Connswater Homes Ltd prepares an annual report on the progress we have made on implementing the arrangements set

³ See Appendix 4 'Timetable for measures proposed' and section 2.11 of this equality scheme.

out in this equality scheme to discharge our Section 75 statutory duties (Section 75 annual progress report).

The Section 75 annual progress report will be sent to the Equality Commission by 31 August each year and will follow any guidance on annual reporting issued by the Equality Commission.

Progress on the delivery of Section 75 statutory duties will also be included in our (organisational) annual report.

2.8 The latest Section 75 annual progress report is available on our website

<http://www.connswater.org.uk/documents/equality/equality1011.pdf>

or by contacting:

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance

Using the contact details given on page 11.

2.9 Connswater Homes Ltd liaise closely with the Equality Commission to ensure that progress on the implementation of our equality scheme is maintained.

Action plan/action measures

2.10 Connswater Homes Ltd is committed to developing an action plan to promote equality of opportunity and good relations. This action plan which is referred to in Appendix 6 to equality scheme currently offers overview proposals for the housing association sector but will be refined and further developed as part of the consultation process.

2.11 The action measures that will make up our action plan will be relevant to our functions. They will be developed and prioritised

on the basis of an audit of inequalities. The audit of inequalities will gather and analyse information across the Section 75 categories⁴ to identify the inequalities that exist for our service users and those affected by our policies⁵.

2.12 Action measures will be specific, measurable, linked to achievable outcomes, realistic and time bound. Action measures will include performance indicators and timescales for their achievement.

2.13 We will develop any action plans for a period of between one and five years in order to align them with our corporate and business planning cycles. Implementation of the action measures will be incorporated into our business planning process.

2.14 We will seek input from our stakeholders and consult on our action plan before we send it to the Equality Commission and thereafter when reviewing the plan as per 2.15 below.

2.15 We will monitor our progress on the delivery of our action measures annually and update the action plan as necessary to ensure that it remains effective and relevant to our functions and work.

2.16 Connswater Homes Ltd will inform the Commission of any changes or amendments to our action plan and will also include this information in our Section 75 annual progress report to the Commission. Our Section 75 annual progress report will incorporate information on progress we have made in implementing our action plans/action measures.

2.17 Once finalised, our action plan will be available from the Association's equality contact as detailed on page 9 and the Association's website at www.connswater.org.uk

⁴ See section 1.1 of this equality scheme for a list of these categories.

⁵ See section 4.1 of this equality scheme for a definition of policies.

If you require it in an alternative format please contact us on the details provided on page 11.

Chapter 3 Our arrangements for consulting

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a)) - on matters to which a duty (S75 (1) or (2)) is likely to be relevant (including details of the persons to be consulted).

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b)) on the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted by us on the promotion of equality of opportunity.

3.1 We recognise the importance of consultation in all aspects of the implementation of our statutory equality duties. We will consult on our equality scheme, action measures, equality impact assessments and other matters relevant to the Section 75 statutory duties.

3.2 We are committed to carrying out consultation in accordance with the following principles (as contained in the Equality Commission's guidance '*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)*):

3.2.1 All consultations will seek the views of those directly affected by the matter/policy, the Equality Commission, representative groups of Section 75 categories, other public authorities, voluntary and community groups, our staff and their trades unions and such other groups who have a legitimate interest in the matter, whether or not they have a direct economic or personal interest.

Initially all consultees (see Appendix 3), as a matter of course, will be notified (by email or post) of the matter/policy being consulted upon to ensure they are aware of all consultations. Thereafter, to ensure the most effective use of our and our consultees' resources, we will take a targeted approach to consultation for those consultees that may have a particular interest in the matter/policy being consulted upon and to whom the matter/policy

is of particular relevance. This may include for example regional or local consultations, sectoral or thematic consultation etc.

As the representative body for housing associations, the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) has been assisting its members in the implementation of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 by co-ordinating a joint approach to the Statutory Equality duties. NIFHA itself is not a designated body, but as part of our support for members has taken on this co-ordination role, in particular in relation to public consultation. Our aim in managing the process in this way is to minimise the impact on consultee and/or stakeholder organisations. However, throughout each formal consultation exercise the relevant documents will also be available, in a range of formats including hard copies, directly from Connswater Homes Ltd.

3.2.2 Consultation with all stakeholders will begin as early as possible. We will engage with affected individuals and representative groups to identify how best to consult or engage with them. We will ask our consultees what their preferred consultation methods are and will give consideration to these. Methods of consultation could include:

- Face-to-face meetings
- Focus groups
- Written documents with the opportunity to comment in writing
- Questionnaires
- Information/notification by email with an opportunity to opt in/opt out of the consultation
- Internet discussions or
- Telephone consultations.

This list is not exhaustive and we may develop other additional methods of consultation more appropriate to key stakeholders and the matter being consulted upon.

3.2.3 We will consider the accessibility and format of every method of consultation we use in order to remove barriers to the consultation process. Specific consideration will be given as to how best to communicate with children and young people, people with disabilities (in particular people with learning disabilities) and minority ethnic communities. We take account of existing and developing good practice, including the Equality Commission's guidance *Let's Talk Let's Listen – Guidance for public authorities on consulting and involving children and young people (2008)*.

Housing associations provide services to a wide range of people and Connswater Homes provides general needs housing to all.

Information will be made available, on request, in alternative formats⁶, in a timely manner, usually within 5 working days. We will ensure that such consultees have equal time to respond.

3.2.4 Specific training is provided to those facilitating consultations to ensure that they have the necessary skills to communicate effectively with consultees.

3.2.5 To ensure effective consultation with consultees⁷ on Section 75 matters, we will develop a programme of awareness raising on the Section 75 statutory duties and the commitments in our equality scheme by undertaking the following:

Meetings with tenants

Meetings with staff

Meetings with stakeholder groups

Public consultation exercise

Availability of information on website

3.2.6 The consultation periods will last for a minimum of twelve weeks to allow adequate time for groups to consult amongst themselves as part of the process of forming a view. However, in

⁶ See Chapter 6 of our equality scheme for further information on alternative formats of information we provide.

⁷ Please see Appendix 3 for a list of our consultees.

exceptional circumstances when this timescale is not feasible (for example implementing EU Directives or UK wide legislation, meeting Health and Safety requirements, addressing urgent public health matters or complying with Court judgements), we may shorten timescales to eight weeks or less before the policy is implemented. We may continue consultation thereafter and will review the policy as part of our monitoring commitments⁸.

Where, under these exceptional circumstances, we must implement a policy immediately, as it is beyond our authority's control, we may consult after implementation of the policy, in order to ensure that any impacts of the policy are considered.

3.2.7 If a consultation exercise is to take place over a period when consultees are less able to respond, for example, over the summer or Christmas break, or if the policy under consideration is particularly complex, we will give consideration to the feasibility of allowing a longer period for the consultation.

3.2.8 We are conscious of the fact that affected individuals and representative groups may have different needs. We will take appropriate measures to ensure full participation in any meetings that are held. We will consider for example the time of day, the appropriateness of the venue, in particular whether it can be accessed by those with disabilities, how the meeting is to be conducted, the use of appropriate language, whether a signer and/or interpreter is necessary, and whether the provision of childcare and support for other carers is required.

3.2.9 We make all relevant information available to consultees in appropriate formats to ensure meaningful consultation. This includes detailed information on the policy proposal being consulted upon and any relevant quantitative and qualitative data.

⁸ Please see below at 4.27 to 4.31 for details on monitoring.

3.2.10 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.

3.2.11 We provide feedback to consultees in a timely manner. A feedback report is prepared which includes summary information on the policy consulted upon, a summary of consultees' comments and a summary of our consideration of and response to consultees' input. The feedback is provided in formats suitable to consultees. (Please see also 6.3)

3.3 A list of our consultees is included in this equality scheme at Appendix 3. It can also be obtained from our website at

www.connswater.org.uk

or by contacting

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance
Connswater Homes Ltd
157 Upper Newtownards Road
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Tel: 028 90656155

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3.4 Our consultation list is not exhaustive and is reviewed on an annual basis to ensure it remains relevant to our functions and policies.

We welcome enquiries from any person/s or organisations wishing to be added to the list of consultees. Please contact Catherine Waterworth to provide your contact details and have your areas of

interest noted or have your name/details removed or amended. Please also inform us at this stage if you would like information sent to you in a particular format or language.

Chapter 4 Our arrangements for assessing, monitoring and publishing the impact of policies

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (b); Schedule 9 4. (2) (c); Schedule 9 4. (2) (d); Schedule 9 9. (1); Schedule 9 9.(2))

Our arrangements for assessing the likely impact of policies adopted or proposed to be adopted on the promotion of equality of opportunity (Schedule 9 4. (2) (b))

4.1 In the context of Section 75, 'policy' is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions in relation to Northern Ireland. In respect of this equality scheme, the term policy is used for any (proposed/amended/existing) strategy, policy initiative or practice and/or decision, whether written or unwritten and irrespective of the label given to it, eg, 'draft', 'pilot', 'high level' or 'sectoral'.

4.2 In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy, as required by Schedule 9 9. (2) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

4.3 Connswater Homes Ltd uses the tools of **screening** and **equality impact assessment** to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. In carrying out these assessments we will relate them to the intended outcomes of the policy in question and will also follow Equality Commission guidance:

- the guidance on screening, including the screening template, as detailed in the Commission's guidance '*Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 – A Guide for Public Authorities (April 2010)*' and
- on undertaking an equality impact assessment as detailed in the Commission's guidance '*Practical guidance on equality impact assessment (February 2005)*'.

Screening

4.4 The purpose of screening is to identify those policies that are likely to have an impact on equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

4.5 Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process. Policies which we propose to adopt will be subject to screening prior to implementation. For more detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages, we will screen at various stages during implementation.

4.6 The lead role in the screening of a policy is taken by the policy decision maker who has the authority to make changes to that policy. However, screening will also involve other relevant team members, for example, equality specialists, those who implement the policy and staff members from other relevant work areas. Where possible we will include key stakeholders in the screening process.

4.7 The following questions are applied to all our policies as part of the screening process:

- What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? (minor/major/none)
- Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equality categories?
- To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? (minor/major/none)

- Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of a different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

4.8 In order to answer the screening questions, we gather all relevant information and data, both qualitative and quantitative. In taking this evidence into account we consider the different needs, experiences and priorities for each of the Section 75 equality categories. Any screening decision will be informed by this evidence.

4.9 Completion of screening, taking into account our consideration of the answers to all four screening questions set out in 4.7 above, will lead to one of the following three outcomes:

1. the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment
2. the policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation⁹ or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted
3. the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.

4.10 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'minor' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may on occasion decide to proceed with an equality impact assessment, depending on the policy. If an EQIA is not to be conducted we will nonetheless consider measures that might mitigate the policy impact as well as alternative policies that might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

Where we mitigate we will outline in our screening template the reasons to support this decision together with the proposed changes, amendments or alternative policy.

⁹ Mitigation – Where an assessment (screening in this case) reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity and / or good relations, a housing association must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories.

This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within Connswater Homes Ltd.

4.11 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'major' in respect of one, or more, of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we will normally subject the policy to an equality impact assessment. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within Connswater Homes Ltd.

4.12 If our screening concludes that the likely impact of a policy is 'none', in respect of all of the equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, we may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, we will give details of the reasons for the decision taken. This screening decision will be 'signed off' by the appropriate policy lead within Connswater Homes Ltd.

4.13 As soon as possible following the completion of the screening process, the screening template, signed off and approved by the senior manager responsible for the policy, will be emailed to the list of consultees and made available on our website, and on request from:

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance
Connswater Homes Ltd
157 Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3HX

Tel: 028 9065 6155
Fax: 028 9065 6388
E: info@connswater.org.uk
Text: 07596 155 199

4.14 If a consultee, including the Equality Commission, raises a concern about a screening decision based on supporting evidence, we will review the screening decision.

4.15 Our screening reports will be available quarterly [see below at 4.20 - 4.22 and 4.23 for details].

Equality impact assessment

4.16 An equality impact assessment (EQIA) is a thorough and systematic analysis of a policy, whether that policy is formal or informal, and irrespective of the scope of that policy. The primary function of an EQIA is to determine the extent of any impact of a policy upon the Section 75 categories and to determine if the impact is an adverse one. It is also an opportunity to demonstrate the likely positive outcomes of a policy and to seek ways to more effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

4.17 Once a policy is screened and screening has identified that an equality impact assessment is necessary, we will carry out the EQIA in accordance with Equality Commission guidance. The equality impact assessment will be carried out as part of the policy development process, before the policy is implemented.

4.18 Any equality impact assessment will be subject to consultation at the appropriate stage(s). (For details see above Chapter 3 “Our Arrangements for Consulting”).

Our arrangements for publishing the results of the assessments of the likely impact of policies we have adopted or propose to adopt on the promotion of equality of opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (d); Schedule 9 9. (1))

4.19 We make publicly available the results of our assessments (screening and EQIA) of the likely impact of our policies on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations

What we publish

4.20 Screening reports

Quarterly screening reports will be available on the Association's website and will also be emailed to all consultees. Screening reports detail:

- All policies screened by Connswater Homes Ltd over the previous three month period
- A statement of the aim(s) of the policy/policies to which the assessment relates
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity;
- Screening decisions, ie:
 - whether the policy has been 'screened in' for equality impact assessment.
 - whether the policy has been 'screened out' with mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
 - whether the policy has been 'screened out' without mitigation or an alternative policy proposed to be adopted.
- Where applicable, a timetable for conducting equality impact assessments
- A link to the completed screening template(s) on our website

4.21 Screening templates

For details on the availability of our screening templates please refer to 4.13.

4.22 Equality impact assessments

EQIA reports are published once the impact assessment has been completed. These reports include:

- A statement of the aim of the policy assessed
- Information and data collected
- Details of the assessment of impact(s)
- Consideration given to measures which might mitigate any adverse impact
- Consideration given to alternative policies which might better achieve the promotion of equality of opportunity
- Consultation responses
- The decision taken
- Future monitoring plans.

How we publish the information

4.23 All information we publish is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please see 6.3 below.

Where we publish the information

4.24 The results of our assessments (screening reports, completed templates and equality impact assessments) will be made available on the Association's website and emailed to all consultees, they can also be requested from:

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance

Details on page 24 at 4.13.

4.25 In addition to the above, screening reports (electronic link or hard copy on request if more suitable for recipients) which include all policies screened over a 3 month period are also sent directly to all consultees on a quarterly basis.

4.26 We will inform the general public about the availability of this material through communications such as press releases where appropriate.

Our arrangements for monitoring any adverse impact of policies we have adopted on equality of opportunity

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (c))

4.27 Monitoring can assist us to deliver better public services and continuous improvements. Monitoring Section 75 information involves the processing of sensitive personal data (data relating to the racial or ethnic origin of individuals, sexual orientation, political opinion, religious belief, etc). In order to carry out monitoring in a confidential and effective manner, Connswater Homes Ltd follows guidance from the Office of the Information Commissioner and the Equality Commission.

4.28 We monitor any adverse impact on the promotion of equality of opportunity of policies we have adopted. We are also committed to monitoring more broadly to identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations in line with Equality Commission guidance.

4.29 The systems we have established to monitor the impact of policies and identify opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations are:

- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant primary quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis
- The collection, collation and analysis of existing relevant secondary sources of quantitative and qualitative data across all nine equality categories on an ongoing basis
- An audit of existing information systems within one year of approval of this equality scheme, to identify the extent of current monitoring and take action to address any gaps in order to have the necessary information on which to base decisions

- Undertaking or commissioning new data if necessary.

4.30 If over a two year period monitoring and evaluation show that a policy results in greater adverse impact than predicted, or if opportunities arise which would allow for greater equality of opportunity to be promoted, we will ensure that the policy is revised to achieve better outcomes for relevant equality groups.

4.31 We review our EQIA monitoring information on an annual basis.

Additional arrangements for monitoring will include the inclusion of standard equality questions on the Tenants Satisfaction Survey.

Our arrangements for publishing the results of our monitoring
(Schedule 9 4. (2) (d))

4.32 Schedule 9 4. (2) (d) requires us to publish the results of the monitoring of adverse impacts of policies we have adopted. However, we are committed to monitoring more broadly and the results of our policy monitoring are published as follows:

4.33 EQIA monitoring information is published as part of our Section 75 annual progress report [see 2.7]

4.34 All information published is accessible and can be made available in alternative formats on request. Please see below at 6.3 for details.

Chapter 5 Staff training

(Schedule 9 4.(2) (e))

Commitment to staff training

5.1 We recognise that awareness raising and training play a crucial role in the effective implementation of our Section 75 duties.

5.2 Our Chief Executive wishes to positively communicate the commitment of Connswater Homes Ltd to the Section 75 statutory duties, both internally and externally.

To this end we have introduced an effective communication and training programme for all staff and will ensure that our commitment to the Section 75 statutory duties is made clear in all relevant publications.

Training objectives

5.3 Connswater Homes Ltd will draw up a detailed training plan for its staff which will aim to achieve the following objectives:

- to raise awareness of the provisions of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, our equality scheme commitments and the particular issues likely to affect people across the range of Section 75 categories, to ensure that our staff fully understand their role in implementing the scheme
- to provide those staff involved in the assessment of policies (screening and EQIA) with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively
- to provide those staff who deal with complaints in relation to compliance with our equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to investigate and monitor complaints effectively
- to provide those staff involved in consultation processes with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively

- to provide those staff involved in the implementation and monitoring of the effective implementation of Connswater Homes Ltd equality scheme with the necessary skills and knowledge to do this work effectively.

Awareness raising and training arrangements

5.4 The following arrangements are in place to ensure all our staff and board members are aware of and understand our equality obligations.

- We will develop a summary of this equality scheme and make it available to all staff.
- We will provide access to copies of the full equality scheme for all staff; ensure that any queries or questions of clarification from staff are addressed effectively.
- Staff in Connswater Homes will receive a briefing on this equality scheme within 8 working weeks of approval of scheme.
- The Section 75 statutory duties form part of induction training for new staff.
- Focused training is provided for key staff within Connswater Homes Ltd who are directly engaged in taking forward the implementation of our equality scheme commitments (for example those involved in research and data collection, policy development, service design, conducting equality impact assessments, consultation, monitoring and evaluation).
- Where appropriate, training will be provided to ensure staff are aware of the issues experienced by the range of Section 75 groups.
- When appropriate and on an ongoing basis, arrangements will be made to ensure staff are kept up to date with Section 75 developments.

5.5 Training and awareness raising programmes will, where relevant, be developed in association with the appropriate Section 75 groups and our staff.

In order to share resources and expertise, Connswater Homes Ltd will, where possible, work closely with other bodies and agencies in the development and delivery of training.

Monitoring and evaluation

5.6 Our training programme is subject to the following monitoring and evaluation arrangements:

- We evaluate the extent to which all participants in this training programme have acquired the necessary skills and knowledge to achieve each of the above objectives.
- The extent to which training objectives have been met will be reported on as part of the Section 75 annual progress report, which will be sent to the Equality Commission.
- An annual report on the extent to which training objectives have been met will be present to Connswater Homes Ltd Board of Management.

Chapter 6 Our arrangements for ensuring and assessing public access to information and services we provide

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (f))

6.1 Connswater Homes Ltd are committed to ensuring that the information we disseminate and the services we provide are fully accessible to all parts of the community in Northern Ireland. We keep our arrangements under review to ensure that this remains the case.

6.2 We are aware that some groups will not have the same access to information as others.

In particular:

- People with sensory, learning, communication and mobility disabilities may require printed information in other formats.
- Members of ethnic minority groups, whose first language is not English, may have difficulties with information provided only in English.
- Children and young people may not be able to fully access or understand information.

Access to information

6.3 To ensure equality of opportunity in accessing information, we provide information in alternative formats on request, where reasonably practicable. Where the exact request cannot be met we will ensure a reasonable alternative is provided.

Alternative formats may include Braille, audio formats (CD or MP3), large print or minority languages to meet the needs of those for whom English is not their first language.

We will respond to requests for information in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually within ten working days. It should be

noted that some alternative formats may take longer to produce and the Association will strive to meet the quickest possible target in these instances.

With regard to providing information to children and young people, people with learning disabilities and minority ethnic communities Connswater Homes Ltd will, upon request, engage with relevant individuals and representative organisations to determine the most effective ways of disseminating information to these groups.

6.4 In disseminating information through the media we will seek to advertise in the press where appropriate.

6.5 Connswater Homes Ltd's website is fully accessible and Browsealoud enabled.

Access to services

6.6 Connswater Homes Ltd are committed to ensuring that all of our services are fully accessible to everyone in the community across the Section 75 categories.

Connswater Homes Ltd also adheres to the relevant provisions of current anti-discrimination legislation.

Assessing public access to information and services

6.8 We will monitor across all our functions on an annual basis access to information and services, to ensure equality of opportunity and good relations are promoted.

Chapter 7 Timetable for measures we propose in this equality scheme

(Schedule 9 4. (3) (b))

7.1 Appendix 4 outlines our timetable for all measures proposed within this equality scheme. The measures outlined in this timetable will be incorporated into our business planning processes.

7.2 This timetable is different from and in addition to our commitment to developing action plans/action measures to specifically address inequalities and further promote equality of opportunity and good relations. We have included in our equality scheme a commitment to develop an action plan. Accordingly, this commitment it is listed in the timetable of measures at Appendix 4. For information on these action measures please see above at 2.11 – 2.18.

Chapter 8 Our complaints procedure

(Schedule 9 10.)

8.1 Connswater Homes Ltd are responsive to the views of members of the public. We will endeavour to resolve all complaints made to us.

8.2 Schedule 9 paragraph 10 of the Act refers to complaints. A person can make a complaint to a housing association if the complainant believes he or she may have been directly affected by an alleged failure of the authority to comply with its approved equality scheme.

If the complaint has not been resolved within a reasonable timescale, the complaint can be brought to the Equality Commission.

8.3 A person wishing to make a complaint that Connswater Homes Ltd has failed to comply with its approved equality scheme should contact:

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance
Connswater Homes
157 Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3HX

Tel: 028 90656155

Fax: 028 90656388

E: info@connswater.org.uk

Text: 07596 155 199

8.4 We will in the first instance acknowledge receipt of each complaint within 5 working days.

8.5 Connswater Homes Ltd will carry out an internal investigation of the complaint and will respond substantively to the complainant within 20 working days. Under certain circumstances, if the complexity of the matter requires a longer period, the period for response to the complainant may be extended and in those circumstances, the complainant will be advised of the extended period within 20 working days of making the complaint.

8.6 During this process the complainant will be kept fully informed of the progress of the investigation into the complaint and of any outcomes.

8.7 In any subsequent investigation by the Equality Commission, Connswater Homes Ltd will co-operate fully, providing access in a timely manner to any relevant documentation that the Equality Commission may require.

Similarly, Connswater Homes Ltd will co-operate fully with any investigation by the Equality Commission under sub-paragraph 11 (1) (b) of Schedule 9 to the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

8.8 Connswater Homes Ltd will make all efforts to implement promptly and in full any recommendations arising out of any Commission investigation.

8.9 Connswater Homes Ltd Complaints Policy and Procedure is attached at Appendix 7

Chapter 9 Publication of our equality scheme

(Schedule 9 4. (3) (c))

9.1 Connswater Homes Ltd equality scheme is available free of charge in print form and alternative formats from:

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance
Connswater Homes Ltd
157 Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3HX

Tel: 028 90656155

Fax: 028 90656388

E: info@connswater.org.uk

Text: 07596 155 199

9.2 Our equality scheme is also available on our website at:

www.connswater.org.uk

9.3 The following arrangements are in place for the publication in a timely manner of our equality scheme to ensure equality of access:

- We will make every effort to communicate widely the existence and content of our equality scheme. This may include press releases, prominent advertisements in the press, the internet and direct mail shots to groups representing the various categories in Section 75.
- We will email a link to our approved equality scheme to our consultees on our consultation lists. Other consultees without e-mail will be notified by letter that the scheme is available on request. We will respond to requests for the equality scheme in alternative formats in a timely manner, usually normally within ten working days.

- Our equality scheme is available on request in alternative formats such as, Braille, large print, audio formats (CD & MP3) and in minority languages to meet the needs of those not fluent in English.

9.4 For a list of our stakeholders and consultees please see Appendix 3 of the equality scheme, visit our website at www.connswater.org.uk or contact

Catherine Waterworth
Director of Corporate Assurance
Connswater Homes
157 Upper Newtownards Road
Belfast
BT4 3HX

Tel: 028 90656155
Fax: 028 90656388
E: info@connswater.org.uk
Text: 07596 155 199

Chapter 10 Review of our equality scheme

(Schedule 9 8. (3))

10.1 As required by Schedule 9 paragraph 8 (3) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 we will conduct a thorough review of this equality scheme. This review will take place either within five years of submission of this equality scheme to the Equality Commission or within a shorter timescale to allow alignment with the review of other planning cycles.

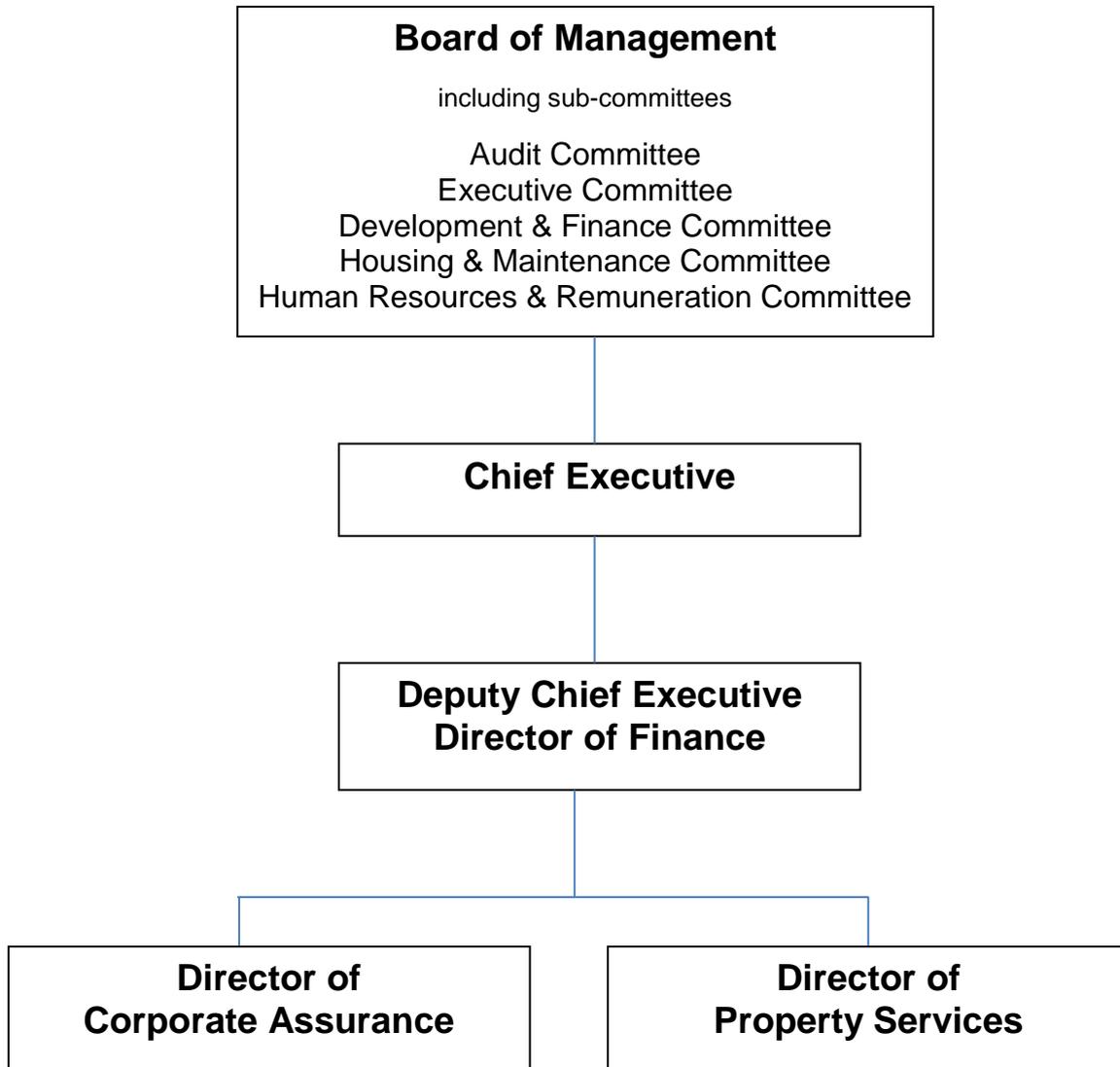
The review will evaluate the effectiveness of our scheme in relation to the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties relevant to our functions in Northern Ireland.

10.2 In undertaking this review we will follow any guidance issued by the Equality Commission.

10.3 Once the review report has been completed it shall be published on our website, emailed to consultees and made available in other formats upon request.

Appendix 1 Organisational chart

Board and Senior Management Team



Appendix 2 Example groups relevant to the Section 75 categories for Northern Ireland purposes

Please note, this list is for illustration purposes only, it is not exhaustive.

Category	Example groups
Religious belief	<p>Buddhist; Catholic; Hindu; Jewish; Muslims, people of no religious belief; Protestants; Sikh; other faiths.</p> <p>For the purposes of Section 75, the term “religious belief” is the same definition as that used in the <i>Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order</i>¹⁰. Therefore, “religious belief” also includes any <i>perceived</i> religious belief (or perceived lack of belief) and, in employment situations only, it also covers any “<i>similar philosophical belief</i>”.</p>
Political opinion ¹¹	Nationalist generally; Unionists generally; members/supporters of other political parties.
Racial group	Black people; Chinese; Indians; Pakistanis; people of mixed ethnic background; Polish; Roma; Travellers; White people.
Men and women generally	Men (including boys); Trans-gendered people; Transsexual people; women (including girls).
Marital status	Civil partners or people in civil partnerships; divorced people; married people; separated people; single people; widowed people.
Age	Children and young people; older people.
Persons with a disability	Persons with disabilities as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995.
Persons with dependants	Persons with personal responsibility for the care of a child; for the care of a person with a disability; or the care of a dependant older person.
Sexual orientation	Bisexual people; heterosexual people; gay or lesbian people.

¹⁰ See Section 98 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which states: “*In this Act... “political opinion” and “religious belief” shall be construed in accordance with Article 2(3) and (4) of the Fair Employment & Treatment (NI) Order 1998.*”

¹¹ *ibid*

Appendix 3 List of consultees

(Schedule 9 4. (2) (a))



EQUALITY CONSULTATION LIST (Revised – July 2012)

Action for Hearing Loss
Age NI
Age Sector Platform
Alliance Party for Northern Ireland
Amalgamated Engineering & Electrical Union
An Munia Tober
Antrim Borough Council
Ards Borough Council
Armagh City & District Council
Association of Independent Advice Centres
Autism NI
Bahai Council for Northern Ireland
Ballymena Borough Council
Ballymoney Borough Council
Banbridge District Council
Barnardos
Belfast & District Trade Unions Council
Belfast City Council
Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
Belfast Hebrew Congregation
Belfast Islamic Centre
Brainwaves Northern Ireland
British Deaf Association (NI)
Carafriend
Carers Northern Ireland
Carrickfergus Borough Council
Castlereagh Borough Council
Central Services Agency
Chartered Institute of Housing
Child Poverty Action Group (NI)
Children's Law Centre
Chinese Welfare Association
Citizens Advice Regional Office

CO3 Chief Officers Third Sector
Coalition on Sexual Orientation (CoSO)
Coleraine Borough Council
Committee on the Administration of Justice (CAJ)
Community Development & Health Network (NI)
Community Relations Council (CRC)
Cookstown District Council
Council for the Homeless (NI)
Craigavon Borough Council
Democratic Unionist Party
Department for Social Development
Derry City Council
Derry Well Woman
Disability Action - Belfast
Disability Action - Londonderry
Down District Council
Down's Syndrome Association
Dungannon & South Tyrone Borough Council
East Belfast Community Development Agency
Eastern Health & Social Services Board
Equality Coalition
Equality Commission for NI
Equality Forum NI
Falls Community Council
Family Planning Association (NI)
Fermanagh District Council
Gay & Lesbian Youth NI
General Consumer Council
Gingerbread Northern Ireland
Housing Rights Service
Indian Community Centre
Irish Council of Churches
Larne Borough Council
Lesbian Line
Limavady Borough Council
Lisburn City Council
Magherafelt District Council
Magherafelt Women's Group
MENCAP

Methodist Church in Ireland
Mind Yourself
Moyle District Council
Multi-Cultural Resource Centre
Newtownabbey Borough Council
NI Committee for Refugees & Asylum Seekers
NIGRA (Northern Ireland Gay Rights Association)
NIPSA
North Down Borough Council
North West Community Network
North West Forum of People with Disabilities
Northern Health & Social Services Board
Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Network
Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health
Northern Ireland Committee, Irish Congress of Trade Unions (NIC-ICTU)
Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities (NICEM)
Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
Northern Ireland Housing Council
Northern Ireland Housing Executive
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)
Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association
Northern Ireland Office
Northern Ireland Women's Aid Federation
Northern Ireland Women's European Platform (NIWEP)
Northern Ireland Youth Forum
NUS USI
Office of the First Minister & Deputy First Minister
Omagh District Council
Omagh Women's Area Network
POBAL
Polish Welfare Association
PRAXIS
Press for Change
Probation Board for Northern Ireland
Progressive Unionist Party
Royal National Institute for the Blind (NI)
Rural Community Network
SEEDS

Sense NI
Simon Community
Sinn Fein
Social Democratic & Labour Party
Southern Health & Social Care Trust
Staff Commission for Education & Library Boards
Strabane District Council
Supporting Communities NI
The Cedar Foundation
The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association
The Rainbow Project
The Women's Centre
Traveller Movement Northern Ireland
UCATT
Ulster Unionist Party
Western Health & Social Care Trust
Women's Forum Northern Ireland
Women's Information Group
Women's Resource & Development Agency (WRDA)
Women's Support Network
Workers Party
Youth Action
Youth Council for NI

Appendix 4 Timetable for measures proposed (Schedule 9 4.(3) (b))

Measure	Lead responsibility	Timetable
Have in place appropriate structures and reporting mechanisms	Chief Executive / Senior Management Team	Ongoing
Ensure S75 duties are mainstreamed within the Association in the strategic plan, business plan and operational plans	Chief Executive / Senior Management Team	Ongoing / annual reviews
Section 75 Annual Progress Report	Board	31 August (annually)
<u>Action plan</u>		
Consultation on draft model scheme and action plan	Director of Corporate Assurance	May to July 2012
Finalised action plan published and issued to ECNI	Chief Executive	August 2012
Arrangements for monitoring progress in place	Director of Corporate Assurance	August 2012
Consultation list reviewed and updated	Director of Corporate Assurance	September (annually)
Assessment of Policies		
Policy review timetable	Senior Management Team	April (annually)
Screening reports & templates	Director of Corporate Assurance	Published Quarterly
Consultees informed of quarterly reviews	Director of Corporate Assurance	Emailed quarterly

Monitoring		
Review EQIA monitoring information	Director of Corporate Assurance	Annually
Collate and review equality related complaints	Director of Corporate Assurance	Quarterly report to Board
Equality questions included in Tenant Satisfaction Surveys	Director of Corporate Assurance	Collected annually & monitored for variances & reported to all stakeholders in published Newsletter
Training		
Revise training strategy	Director of Corporate Assurance	December 2012
Assessing access to information and services	Director of Corporate Assurance	Annual review by 31 March
Communication of equality scheme to staff	Director of Corporate Assurance	By end October 2012
Notification of consultees	Director of Corporate Assurance / NIFHA	April 2012 and ongoing
Review of equality scheme and production of Annual Progress Reports – scheme will be reviewed within 5 years in line with ECNI recommendations	Director of Corporate Assurance	August annually
Liaise with ECNI to ensure progress of the scheme	Director of Corporate Assurance	Ongoing

Appendix 5 Glossary of terms

Action plan

A plan which sets out actions a public authority will take to implement its Section 75 statutory duties. It is a mechanism for the realisation of measures to achieve equality outcomes for the Section 75 equality and good relations categories.

Action measures and outcomes

Specific measures to promote equality and good relations for the relevant Section 75 and good relations categories, linked to achievable outcomes, which should be realistic and timely.

Adverse impact

Where a Section 75 category has been affected differently by a policy and the effect is less favourable, it is known as adverse impact. If a policy has an adverse impact on a Section 75 category, a public authority must consider whether or not the adverse impact is unlawfully discriminatory. In either case a public authority must take measures to redress the adverse impact, by considering mitigating measures and/or alternative ways of delivering the policy.

Affirmative action

In general terms, affirmative action can be defined as being anything consistent with the legislation which is necessary to bring about positive change. It is a phrase used in the Fair Employment and Treatment Order (NI) 1998 to describe lawful action that is aimed at promoting equality of opportunity and fair participation in employment between members of the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities in Northern Ireland.

Audit of inequalities

An audit of inequalities is a systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority's policies. An audit can be used by a public authority to inform its work in relation to the Section 75 equality

and good relations duties. It can also enable public authorities to assess progress on the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties, as it provides the baseline information on existing inequalities relevant to a public authority's functions.

Consultation

In the context of Section 75, consultation is the process of asking those affected by a policy (ie, service users, staff, the general public) for their views on how the policy could be implemented more effectively to promote equality of opportunity across the 9 categories. Different circumstances will call for different types of consultation. Consultations could, for example, include meetings, focus groups, surveys and questionnaires.

Differential impact

Differential impact occurs where a Section 75 group has been affected differently by a policy. This effect could either be positive, neutral or negative. A public authority must make a judgement as to whether a policy has a differential impact and then it must determine whether the impact is adverse, based on a systematic appraisal of the accumulated information.

Discrimination

The anti-discrimination laws prohibit the following forms of discrimination:

- Direct discrimination
- Indirect Discrimination
- Disability Discrimination
- Victimisation
- Harassment

Brief descriptions of these above terms follow:

Direct discrimination

This generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, on one or more of the statutory non-discrimination grounds. A

decision or action that is directly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless: (a) in an age discrimination case, the decision can be objectively justified, or (b) in any other case, the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it – such as a genuine occupational requirement exception; or, a positive action exception which permits an employer to use “welcoming statements” or to take other lawful positive action to encourage participation by under-represented or otherwise disadvantaged groups.

Indirect discrimination

The definition of this term varies across some of the anti-discrimination laws, but indirect discrimination generally occurs where a public authority applies to all persons a particular provision, criterion or practice, but which is one that has the effect of placing people who share a particular equality characteristic (e.g. the same sex, or religious belief, or race) at a particular disadvantage compared to other people. A provision, criterion or practice that is indirectly discriminatory will normally be unlawful unless (a) it can be objectively justified, or (b) the public authority can rely on a statutory exception that permits it.

Disability discrimination

In addition to direct discrimination and victimisation and harassment, discrimination against disabled people may also occur in two other ways: namely, (a) disability-related discrimination, and (b) failure to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments.

(a) Disability-related discrimination generally occurs where a public authority, without lawful justification, and for a reason which relates to a disabled person’s disability, treats that person less favourably

that it treats (or, would treat) other people to whom that reason does not (or, would not) apply.

(b) Failure to comply with a duty to make reasonable adjustments: One of the most notable features of the disability discrimination legislation is that in prescribed circumstances it imposes a duty on employers, service providers and public authorities to take such steps as are reasonable to remove or

reduce particular disadvantages experienced by disabled people in those circumstances.

Victimisation

This form of discrimination generally occurs where a public authority treats a person less favourably than it treats (or, would treat) another person, in the same or similar circumstances, because the person has previously exercised his/her rights under the anti-discrimination laws, or has assisted another person to do so. Victimisation cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

Harassment

Harassment generally occurs where a person is subjected to unwanted conduct that is related to a non-discrimination ground with the purpose, or which has the effect, of violating their dignity or of creating for them an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment. Harassment cannot be justified and is always unlawful.

Equality impact assessment

The mechanism underpinning Section 75, where existing and proposed policies are assessed in order to determine whether they have an adverse impact on equality of opportunity for the relevant Section 75 categories. Equality impact assessments require the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Equality of opportunity

The prevention, elimination or regulation of discrimination between people on grounds of characteristics including sex, marital status, age, disability, religious belief, political opinion, dependants, race and sexual orientation.

The promotion of equality of opportunity entails more than the elimination of discrimination. It requires proactive measures to be taken to secure equality of opportunity between the categories identified under Section 75.

Equality scheme

A document which outlines a public authority's arrangements for complying with its Section 75 obligations. An equality scheme must include an outline of the public authority's arrangements for carrying out consultations, screening, equality impact assessments, monitoring, training and arrangements for ensuring access to information and services.

Good relations

Although not defined in the legislation, the Commission has agreed the following working definition of good relations: 'the growth of relations and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms'.

Mainstreaming equality

The integration of equal opportunities principles, strategies and practices into the every day work of public authorities from the outset. In other words, mainstreaming is the process of ensuring that equality considerations are built into the policy development process from the beginning, rather than being bolted on at the end. Mainstreaming can help improve methods of working by increasing a public authority's accountability, responsiveness to need and relations with the public. It can bring added value at many levels.

Mitigation of adverse impact

Where an equality impact assessment reveals that a particular policy has an adverse impact on equality of opportunity, a public authority must consider ways of delivering the policy outcomes which have a less adverse effect on the relevant Section 75 categories; this is known as mitigating adverse impact.

Monitoring

Monitoring consists of continuously scrutinising and evaluating a policy to assess its impact on the Section 75 categories.

Monitoring must be sensitive to the issues associated with human rights and privacy. Public authorities should seek advice from consultees and Section 75 representative groups when setting up monitoring systems. Monitoring consists of the collection of relevant information and evaluation of policies. It is not solely about the collection of data, it can also take the form of regular meetings and reporting of research undertaken. Monitoring is not an end in itself but provides the data for the next cycle of policy screening.

Northern Ireland Act

The Northern Ireland Act, implementing the Good Friday Agreement, received Royal Assent on 19 November 1998. Section 75 of the Act created the statutory equality duties.

Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA)

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is an Executive Agency within the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP). They provide statistical and research information regarding Northern Ireland issues and provide registration services to the public in the most effective and efficient way.

OFMDFM

The Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister is responsible for providing advice, guidance, challenge and support to other NI Civil Service Departments on Section 75 issues.

Policy

The formal and informal decisions a public authority makes in relation to carrying out its duties. Defined in the New Oxford English Dictionary as 'a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government party, business or individual'. In the context of Section 75, the term policies covers all the ways in which a public authority carries out or proposes to carry out its functions relating to Northern Ireland. Policies include unwritten as well as written policies.

Positive action

This phrase is not defined in any statute, but the Equality Commission understands it to mean any lawful action that a public authority might take for the purpose of promoting equality of opportunity for all persons in relation to employment or in accessing goods, facilities or services (such as health services, housing, education, justice, policing). It may involve adopting new policies, practices, or procedures; or changing or abandoning old ones. Positive action is not the same as positive discrimination.

Positive discrimination differs from positive action in that positive action involves the taking of lawful actions whereas positive discrimination involves the taking of unlawful actions.

Consequently, positive action is by definition lawful whereas positive discrimination is unlawful.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data refers to the experiences of individuals from their perspective, most often with less emphasis on numbers or

statistical analysis. Consultations are more likely to yield qualitative than quantitative data.

Quantitative data

Quantitative data refers to numbers, typically derived from either a population in general or samples of that population. This information is often analysed by either using descriptive statistics, which consider general profiles, distributions and trends in the data, or inferential statistics, which are used to determine 'significance' either in relationships or differences in the data.

Screening

The procedure for identifying which policies will be subject to equality impact assessment, and how these equality impact assessments will be prioritised. The purpose of screening is to identify the policies which are likely to have a minor/major impact on equality of opportunity so that greatest resources can be devoted to improving these policies. Screening requires a systematic review of existing and proposed policies.

Schedule 9

Schedule 9 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 sets out detailed provisions for the enforcement of the Section 75 statutory duties, including an outline of what should be included in an equality scheme.

Section 75

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act provides that each public authority is required, in carrying out its 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 and sexual orientation;

men and women generally;
persons with a disability and persons without; and
persons with dependants and persons without.

Without prejudice to these obligations, each public authority in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland must also have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

Section 75 investigation

An investigation carried out by the Equality Commission, under Schedule 9 of the NI Act 1998, arising from the failure of a public authority to comply with the commitments set out in its approved equality scheme. There are two types of Commission investigation, these are as follows:

1. An investigation of a complaint by an individual who claims to have been directly affected by the failure of a public authority to comply with its approved equality scheme;
2. An investigation initiated by the Commission, where it believes that a public authority may have failed to comply with its approved equality scheme.

Appendix 6 Action plan/action measures



Housing Associations' Equality Schemes **Audit of Inequalities & Action Plan 2012 – 2017**

Introduction

In April 2004 the Registered Housing Associations in Northern Ireland came within the jurisdiction of the Commissioner for Complaints by virtue of Article 146 of The Housing (NI) Order 2003. As a result of this Registered Housing Associations were designated as public authorities for the purposes of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

A housing association is an independent voluntary organisation dedicated to helping people obtain good quality, affordable housing which meets their needs. Although a significant proportion of the work they do assists the government in the delivery of much-needed public services, they are not public bodies. All designated housing associations are members of the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA).

NIFHA is the umbrella body for the voluntary housing movement in Northern Ireland. Its main role is to promote member housing associations and to provide representation and support for those members in the work that they do. NIFHA itself is not a designated body, but has taken on a co-ordination role as part of its support for members. As a result, the Federation assists its members in the implementation of Section 75 through a joint approach to the statutory equality duties.

Throughout the implementation of the equality process the Federation and its members have taken the view that by working jointly we can maximise our resources – in terms of time, knowledge, expertise, staffing or finances – and at the same time minimise the administrative impact on consultee and/or stakeholder organisations. This belief has also underpinned our

work during the first phase of equality schemes and was commended by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI) so we took a decision to maintain this collaborative approach for the second phase of equality schemes which commenced in 2010.

However, it should be noted responsibility for discharging the Statutory Equality and Good Relations Duties in the individual organisation **remains** with each designated housing association. NIFHA's role is purely a supportive one.

Background

In 2010 the ECNI published new guidance on the implementation of Section 75¹². This guidance includes the recommendation that designated bodies:

- “include in their equality scheme a commitment to developing action plans detailing measures to promote equality of opportunity and good relations”.

As part of the process for developing Action Plans the guidance also recommended designated bodies should:

- “undertake an Audit of Inequalities to identify the range of key inequalities which the discharge of the public authority's functions is intended to or is likely to address;
- “develop action measures based on functions and key inequalities”.

The ECNI wrote to all designated housing associations on 1 November 2011 indicating that a formal call for a new Equality Scheme would be issued on 1 February 2012. The Commission also advised that the three month period from November to February would provide an opportunity to undertake the recommended Audit of Inequalities.

¹² Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, A Guide for Public Authorities, April 2010

Audits of Inequalities: What the Commission says

An audit of inequalities is intended to set the framework for a public authority to address inequalities relevant to their functions. It should enable a public authority to identify potential functional areas for further or better discharge of the Section 75 statutory duties and can therefore inform key strategic actions.

The audit of inequalities is “a systematic review and analysis of inequalities which exist for service users and those affected by a public authority’s policies”. It can be used by a public authority to inform its work in relation to the promotion of the Section 75 equality and good relations duties. It can also enable public authorities to assess progress on the implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties, as it should provide baseline information on existing inequalities relevant to a public authority’s functions.

According to the ECNI “an audit of inequalities entails an analysis of information gathered to inform the development of action plans”.

The Commission recognises that this is a developing process and public authorities should focus on priorities and outcomes improving over time. On the basis of this information the designated housing associations have therefore been mindful of the need to focus on measures where they have greatest ability to effect change.

Housing associations are regulated by the Department for Social Development (DSD). They work closely with the DSD and the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to deliver housing and related services. Some also provide care and /or support services so they work with the relevant public authorities for the health sector too. As a result of this situation, housing associations must adhere to a wide range of policies and procedures which have been developed and are owned by a public authority or government department. In such cases associations must operate

the policy of another body and have little or no scope to change that policy.

For example, associations are the main delivery vehicle for the Social Housing Development Programme but need is determined by the NIHE and the Department for Social Housing develops the programme which is then managed by the Housing Executive. So whilst housing associations may bid to deliver part of that programme they have no powers to shape the programme or establish where new social housing should be built. Similarly housing associations allocate their homes to the public but must do so using the NIHE's Housing Selection Scheme and on the basis of the points awarded by the Housing Executive. Moreover, though associations provide a range of housing and care services they cannot determine the level of public funding available for that purpose.

Where appropriate, potential inequalities identified by housing associations which are outside their remit will be highlighted to the relevant public body.

The functions of each designated housing association will be detailed in its respective equality scheme. Taken collectively however, the main responsibilities of housing associations fall broadly into the following areas:

- provision of housing and related services to those in housing need;
- management and maintenance of its own stock; and,
- development of new stock, if appropriate.

As indicated previously even within these categories the housing associations often have to operate policies or adhere to strategies which are within the development and control of other organisations.

Overview of Housing Association Operations in Northern Ireland

Collectively, housing associations provide around 36,000 good quality, affordable homes for renting or equity sharing as well as providing a range of community services. In 2010-11 registered housing associations developed a record number of houses, with 2,418 starts, enabled almost 500 households to part-buy a home and let almost 4,000 high quality affordable homes to people in housing need. Further information about housing associations is available at www.nifha.org.

Housing associations vary greatly in size and in the scale of their operations. Some are fairly small organisations which operate in a particular community or to address a specific need whilst others conduct their business across Northern Ireland or in some cases throughout Ireland. The stock size of the individual associations can differ greatly too from large organisations with around 5,000 properties to those that manage fewer than 50 homes. Staff numbers also vary considerably from one association to another but across the sector there are around 2,500 people who work in the voluntary housing movement. Their contribution is complemented by the input of the 400 individuals who serve on housing associations Boards.

Housing associations provide a wide range of services throughout Northern Ireland including the following types of homes and support:

- General family housing
- Older people's accommodation
- Shared housing and houses in multiple occupation
- Shared equity homes
- Supported accommodation for those with specific needs e.g. learning disabilities, addictions, mental health
- Residential care homes
- Day care provision
- Supported employment projects

- Community development activities

Collective Work to Date

In 2010 NIFHA Council agreed the designated housing associations should continue to be supported by the Federation during the development and implementation of the second phase of equality schemes. In 2011 NIFHA established a small task group comprised of representatives of the following housing associations:

- | | | |
|-----------|--------------|-----------|
| • Alpha | • Connswater | • Oaklee |
| • Apex | • Habinteg | • SHAC |
| • Clanmil | • Helm | • Trinity |

NIFHA's Corporate Services Manager worked with this Equality Task Group to steer and co-ordinate the collaborative elements of member associations' production of new equality schemes, undertaking Audits of Inequality and developing associated Action Plans. In addition, individual members of the group took responsibility for sourcing key information relevant to the equality categories.

Members of the group also contributed to training events and practical workshop sessions held for member associations. These included:

- Workshops to identify potential inequalities by functional area, September 2011 – facilitated by Dorothy McKee
- Developing S75 Actions and revised Equality Schemes: What Social Housing Providers Need to Know, October 2011 – facilitated by ECNI representatives, Tony Steed, NIHE and Lucinda McMurrin, NIFHA
- Challenge Workshop to assess potential impacts by equality category, January 2012 – facilitated by John Kremer

These preparation and planning sessions, which helped inform our collaborative approach, were held over several months to allow time for gathering member feedback. Details of housing association participation in these sessions is shown at Annex A.

The information gathered through this work informed the decisions of the Equality Task Group which agreed that the audit should be based on a combination of the inequalities identified which related certain functions and the inequalities identified according to the nine equality categories. This enabled the incorporation of information about particular groups that we already know require positive action to address inequalities. The Group also agreed the need to include a cross-category section as some of the potential inequalities identified affected more than one equality grouping.

Material from the Commission's Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland (October 2007) proved to be a useful starting point when assessing potential inequalities within housing generally. In terms of social housing the main sources of information used in undertaking the audits of inequalities are shown at Annex B.

Equality Action Plan 2012 – 2017

The following section sets out the actions the housing associations propose to take to address potential inequalities identified. As this is part of an ongoing process to improve equality and good relations outcomes some of the Proposed Actions will relate to measures which were already planned or are currently in place. However, we would stress the actions listed are offered as sector-wide proposals which will need to be refined (including timeframes) following the consultation process. We believe this approach will better enable the final Action Plan of each individual association to be reflective of their business as well as being informed by the feedback received during consultation.

At this stage we consider the proposed measures which are most likely to deliver tangible equality outcomes are:

- A joint project to gather comprehensive tenant profile information
- Review of communications
- Review of governance and Board renewal processes
- Our campaigns of lobbying through NIFHA such as on welfare reform or funding for support services

Please note, notwithstanding our overall commitment to implementing the statutory duties all of the proposed actions are reliant on sufficient resources being available.

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
Age	Few play spaces for young people / children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with appropriate local authority to encourage the inclusion of play areas in new developments • Gather more comprehensive tenant profile information during 2012-13 to clarify the potential impact
	<p>Electronic forms of communication can cause problems for older people</p> <p>Digital divide as older people may not be able to use / access services which are available electronically for example through internet</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake review of preferred methods of communication for tenants • Continue to facilitate training on electronic communications where appropriate – e.g. silver surfers sessions in sheltered housing schemes • Explore the use of broad band on new developments • Review digital forms of communication used by association to ensure maximum inclusivity
	Growing older population but accommodation to meet need not increasing therefore there is potentially less choice for older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor demand for housing for older people at association level – overall need determined by NIHE • Continue to highlight need to the Department for Social Development, Northern Ireland Housing Executive and Planning departments

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
	Social isolation of older people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather information to inform the development of suitable activities • Liaise with relevant authorities as necessary
	Welfare Reform	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to lobby government on the impact of Welfare Reform • Monitor situation as Welfare Reform changes are introduced to determine impacts on tenants, in particular those between 25 and 35 who may be affected by the Shared Room Rate
Dependents	Welfare Reform – single room rate will have adverse impact on single parents under 35; especially males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to lobby government on the impact of Welfare Reform • Monitor situation as Welfare Reform changes are introduced to determine impacts on tenants, in particular those between 25 and 35 who may be affected by the Shared Room Rate
	Lack of play space for children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with appropriate local authority to encourage the inclusion of play areas in new developments • Gather more comprehensive tenant profile information during 2012-13 to clarify potential impact

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
	Lack of 2 bed accommodation for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single parents • Elderly/disabled people needing carers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor demand – highlight issue to Department for Social Development and Northern Ireland Housing Executive as appropriate
Disability	Lack of suitable (Lifetime homes) accommodation highlighted in ECNI statement of Key Inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All new social housing is built to Lifetime Homes standard • Continue work with NIHE in development of comprehensive property database to enable better matching of stock to individual need.
	Communications which do not meet differing needs of services users	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake review of forms of communication used by association to ensure maximum inclusivity • Gather more comprehensive tenant profile information during 2012-13 to improve identification of preferred methods of communication
	Electronic communications / digital divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake review of digital forms of communication used by association to ensure maximum inclusivity
	People with mental ill-health may experience difficulty in accessing services and in relation to employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to ensure compliance with legislation and keep abreast of best practice • Engage with representative groups identify / mitigate potential barriers

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
Disability	Funding for adaptations is only available once which may cause difficulties if needs change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather baseline information to clarify the number of times where this situation arises in 2012-13 • Lobby DSD on this issue • Explore options for alternative funding • Through NIFHA maintain involvement in and raise relevant issues with Joint Housing Adaptations Group
	People with a learning disability may have to remain in long stay hospitals due to lack of suitable services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to liaise with relevant authorities as necessary • Gather baseline information to clarify the number of instances where association is not in position to assist
Gender	Activities at (sheltered) schemes can be geared towards one gender only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more comprehensive tenant profile information during 2012-13 to improve development of customer services • Gather baseline information on uptake of activities, if relevant • Use tenant feedback to inform the development of activities in sheltered housing schemes • Cross-sectoral sharing of case studies / good practice

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
	Gender imbalances in staff at all levels across the sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more comprehensive cross-sectoral data during 2012-13 to clarify actual situation. • Consider options for mitigation of impacts identified • During 2013-14 develop strategy based on research
Marital Status	Couples in residential homes not always housed together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record all instances during 2012-13 to inform action • Highlight problem to relevant authorities • Identify options for mitigating impact which are available to housing associations
Political Opinion	Possible inequalities due to perceptions of potential employees who have 'political convictions'.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore adoption of new guidelines from OFM/DFM on employment of individuals with conflict related convictions
Race	Communications and accessibility may be difficult for those whose first language is not English or who are unfamiliar with system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more comprehensive tenant profile information during 2012-13 to help tailor services to customer needs • Undertake review of preferred methods of communication for tenants • Continue to use translation and interpretation services as appropriate

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaise with relevant stakeholder bodies to identify best practice • Cross-sectoral sharing of case studies / good practice
	Electronic communications / digital divide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review digital forms of communication used by association to ensure maximum inclusivity
	Lack of adequate housing and accommodation for Travellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Through the Social Housing Development Programme work with NIHE to deliver housing schemes which meet the needs of Travellers
	Literacy of Travellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore alternative options for engaging with Travellers • Share learning across sector
	People from Black and Minority Ethnic communities are vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop improved cross-sectoral liaison with representatives of relevant stakeholder groups • Establish liaison with specific stakeholder groups as required
Religion	People of one community taking longer to get housed than another	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This situation is outside of the control of housing associations as offers are based on tenant preference and points allocated • Where practical take action to minimise potential chill factors – for example develop / implement strategies

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
		<p>relating to flags, emblems and/or sectional symbols</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training programmes as appropriate
	<p>Imbalances due to housing schemes being (or perceived as) largely made up of those from a specific religion</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where practical take action to minimise potential chill factors – for example develop / implement strategies relating to flags, emblems and/or sectional symbols • Maintain use of Good Neighbour Agreements for all housing stock • Training programmes as appropriate
	<p>Lack of ‘shared neighbourhoods’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue development of Shared Future housing schemes as opportunities arise • Maintain use of Good Neighbour Agreements for all housing stock • Develop introduction of shared neighbourhood schemes as suitable
<p>Sexual Orientation</p>	<p>Attitudes to those of differing sexual orientation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further develop programmes of training • Work with staff to identify potential chill factors • Cross-sectoral sharing of case studies / good practice
	<p>Access to services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training and better links with LGBT community • Explore use of Advocacy service

Equality Category	Potential Inequalities	Proposed Actions
Cross Category	Make up of Housing Association Boards – potentially relates to age, disability, gender religion/political opinion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more comprehensive baseline information • Review governance processes and make of Board by April 2013 • Make use of NIFHA Board Member Register as appropriate during Board renewal • Work with NIFHA to develop the
	Impact of Anti-social behaviour (ASB) policies may be greater for certain groups – e.g. young males	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor cases of ASB to identify trends – in particular where they may affect a specific group such as young men or people from a different racial background • Work with NIFHA to develop Good Practice Guide
	Accessibility of information and services has the potential to vary for different equality categories – whilst this has been subject to EQIA it continues to merit ongoing consideration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gather more comprehensive tenant profile information during 2012-13 to help tailor services to customer needs • Continue to review and monitor association approach to provision of information and services • Use information from previous EQIA and subsequent monitoring to inform the introduction of improvements

Annex A – Participation in workshops

Association	Sept 2011	Nov 2011	Jan 2012
Abbeyfield (UK) NI	✓		✓
Alpha			✓
Apex	✓	✓	✓
Ark		✓	✓
Broadway	✓		✓
Clanmil	✓	✓	✓
Connswater	✓	✓	✓
Co-Ownership	✓	✓	✓
Covenanter		✓	
Filor	✓	✓	✓
Flax	✓	✓	✓
FOLD	✓	✓	✓
Gosford			
Grove	✓		✓
Habinteg	✓	✓	✓
Harmony	✓		
Hearth			✓
Helm	✓		✓
Newington	✓	✓	✓
Oaklee	✓	✓	✓
Open Door	✓	✓	✓
Rural			✓
SHAC	✓	✓	✓
South Ulster	✓	✓	✓
St Matthew's	✓	✓	✓
Triangle	✓	✓	✓
Trinity	✓	✓	✓
Ulidia	✓	✓	✓
Wesley	✓	✓	

Annex B

Research / Data considered

- ECNI Statement on Key Inequalities in Northern Ireland
- A Picture of Caring, ECNI
- Draft Older Peoples Health and Well Being Strategy 2005-2015, EHSSB
- Equality Impact Assessments conducted by Housing Associations 2005-10
- Equality Impact Assessments conducted by the Department
- Improving sexual orientation monitoring, Equality and Human Rights Commission
- Internal association information (e.g. Art 55 reviews, Tenant Profile data)
- Next Generation Equality Scheme Information Overview, NIHE
- NICORE Overview Data as at 31 March 2005 and 31 March 2010
- NI Peace Monitoring Report, Community Relations Council
- Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)
- The Northern Ireland Housing Market: Review and Perspectives 2007 – 2010
- Through Our Eyes: Experiences of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People in the Workplace
- Towards an Ageing Society, HACT
- Travellers' Accommodation Needs Assessment in Northern Ireland

Please Note: Further statistical information may also be used / provided by the individual housing association.

Appendix 7 Connswater Homes Ltd Complaints Policy

 CORPORATE SECTION		DOCUMENT NO COR – 04		
		Prepared by	JL	
		Board Approval	22/09/10	
		Version No	10 – 02	
Title Complaints Policy		Active From	01/10/10	
		Review Date	30/09/13	
No	Change	Approved by	Date	Effective
	Reviewed and updated in line with the Association's Policy Review timetable and in line with current legislation and best practice	Board	24/03/10	Immediately
	Reviewed and updated in line with revised DSD guidance	Board	15/9/10	1/10/10

Contents

- 1.0 Scope
- 2.0 Objective
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- 7.0 Appendices
 - 7.1 Complaints Record Sheet
 - 7.2 Tenant Information Leaflet

Data Protection Statement

Your personal information will be held and used in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. Connswater Homes will not disclose such information to any unauthorised person or body but where appropriate will use such information in carrying out its various functions and services. Connswater Homes may also use this data in connection with the prevention or detection of fraud or other crime.

1.0 Scope

In its work as a housing developer and social landlord, the Association recognises that a situation may arise where a person is dissatisfied with the service, actions or inactions of the Association or its officers and as a result may wish to make a complaint. We consider a complaint to be any expression of dissatisfaction expressed orally or in writing, which requires a response.

Requests for a service and information requests are not considered to be complaints. General comments made through feedback during customer service surveys or information gathering activities will be used to improve service but are not considered to be formal complaints unless a complainant expressly asks for their comment to be dealt with in such a manner, the procedures in this policy would then apply.

2.0 Objective

This complaints policy outlines the avenues open to those wishing to make a complaint. It aims to provide a means of redress to complainants wherever possible, provide a system that can deal with complaints as quickly and efficiently as possible and improve service delivery through actively addressing the concerns that others may have. All targets for responding as listed below are a minimum and will be improved upon whenever possible.

3.0 Definitions & Abbreviations

None

4.0 Responsibilities

Chairman	Receive complaints at stage 3
Chief Executive	Receive complaints at stage 2
Complaints Handling Manager	Receive initial complaint

5.0 Related Documents

Governance and Accountability Policy COR – 01
Workplace Policy HR – 03
Anti-Social Behaviour Policy HM – 02

6.0 Policy Statement

6.1 Making a Complaint

Stage one

A complainant is welcome to contact the Association by telephone, by calling into the office or via the online form on the Association's website, www.connswater.org.uk. In the first instance complaints should be addressed to the Complaints Handling Manager. Matters do not have to be put in writing; this can be done on the complainant's behalf. The complainant will receive a copy which must be verified and signed to ensure accuracy. All complaints will be recorded in a register and acknowledged within 5 working days. This also includes complaints received by email.

Complaints received from an anonymous source may be dealt with where the issue is deemed to be one which identifies systemic issues of concern.

All complaints will be investigated thoroughly and it is anticipated that the complainant will receive a full written response within 20 working days. If information is required from a third party the response may be delayed whilst this is being sought. In this instance the complainant will be advised of the reason for the delay, be kept fully informed and will be provided with an anticipated date for resolution.

Stage two

If the matter is not resolved and there is cause to make a further complaint, the matter can be referred to the Chief Executive. The Chief Executive shall liaise with the relevant staff to obtain all of the information. The Chief Executive will make a written response within 20 working days. If information is required from a third party the response may be delayed whilst this is being sought. In this instance the complainant will be advised of the reason for the delay, be kept fully informed and will be provided with an anticipated date for resolution.

Complainants should not report complaints directly to Board members, complainants approaching Board members will be directed to stage one of the procedures.

Northern Ireland Ombudsman

If the complainant is unhappy with the resolution offered by the Association, he/she may take their complaint to the Northern Ireland Ombudsman. His offices can be contacted for advice on **Freephone 0800 343424** or by writing to:

The Ombudsman, Freepost BEL 1478, Belfast BT1 6BR

It should be noted that the Ombudsman normally expects that a complainant will have used the Association's internal complaints procedure before bringing a complaint to him.

6.2 Recording, Monitoring and Reporting

A Comments, Compliments & Complaints Register will be maintained. This will record the progress of a complaint at each stage including length of time taken and date of resolution.

All documentation relating to a complaint, which should include notes of any verbal communication will be kept on a separate file for each individual complaint.

Staff will respect privacy and adhere to Data Protection legislation.

Complaints are regarded as a service management tool and as a source of learning. We will let our service users know when the outcome of a complaint had led directly to an improvement in service.

Complaints in relation to service and decisions will be reported regularly at Senior Management Team Meetings to allow for early identification of any trends or systematic flaws in service delivery and the monitoring of the time taken to reach a resolution.

The Board will receive an end of year report on all complaints.

7.0 Appendices

1. Complaints Record Sheet

Name of complainant			
Address of complainant			
Telephone No.			
By office, phone, email or writing			
Date received			
Received by			
Passed to			
Brief Details of Complaint (<i>attach letter or Complaint Form</i>)			
Acknowledgement sent		5 day target met ?	Yes / No
Solution offered and details of any delay			
Acknowledgement sent		20 day target met?	Yes / No
Staff signature			

Complaint received by Chief Executive			
Brief Outline of Response			
Response sent		20 day target met?	Yes / No

Additional information

Case Closed	
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Referred to Ombudsman	
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2. How to Make a Complaint (Complainant Leaflet)

In its work as a housing developer and social landlord, the Association recognises that a situation may arise where you are dissatisfied with the service, actions or inactions of the Association or its officers and as a result may wish to make a complaint. We consider a complaint to be any expression of dissatisfaction expressed orally or in writing, which requires a response.

Requests for a service and information requests are not considered to be complaints. General comments made through feedback during customer service surveys or information gathering activities will be used to improve service but are not considered to be formal complaints unless you expressly ask for the comment to be dealt with in such a manner, the following procedures would then apply.

Making a Complaint

If you have a complaint you can complete a Complaint Form, you are also welcome to contact us by telephone or by calling into the office and we will try to resolve the matter immediately. You can also contact us directly via our website www.connswater.org.uk You do not have to put matters in writing, we can do this on your behalf, and you will receive a copy which you must verify to ensure accuracy. We will acknowledge receipt of your complaint within 5 days. Complaints received from an anonymous source may be dealt with if the complaint is of a general nature.

At this stage please contact the **Complaints Handling Manager**

You should receive a full written response within 20 working days. If a delay is likely you will be advised of the reason for the delay, be kept fully informed and be provided with an anticipated date for resolution.

If you are unhappy with the outcome you can contact the **Chief Executive**. The Chief Executive will make a written response within 20 working days.

Complainants should not report complaints directly to Board members, complainants approaching Board members will be directed to the Director of Corporate Assurance.

If you are unhappy with the resolution offered by the Association you may take your complaint to the **Northern Ireland Ombudsman**. His offices can be contacted for advice on Freephone 0800 343424 or by writing to:

The Ombudsman, Freepost BEL 1478, Belfast BT1 6BR

The Ombudsman normally expects a complainant to have used the Association's internal complaints procedure before bringing a complaint to him.

Connswater Homes Ltd

Complaint Form

Contact Details

Name	
Address	
Telephone	
Signature	
Date	
Do you want the Association to deal with someone acting on your behalf? Yes / No	
If yes, please ask your helper / advisor to complete the section below:	
Name	
Address	
Telephone	
Relationship to complainant	
Signature	
Date	

Please read the accompanying guidance note to see who you should send your complaint to.

Complaints forms can also be sent direct from our website

**Connswater Homes Ltd 157 upper Newtownards Road,
Belfast, BT4 3HX**

T: 028 90656155

F: 028 90656388

E: info@connswater.org.uk

www.connswater.org.uk

Details of Complaint

Please give details of your complaint below; please include dates, times, names and any other relevant information. You may attach an additional sheet if necessary.

Supporting documentation

Please list any supporting documentation which you are including with your complaint

Resolution of Complaint

What action would you like the Association to take to help you resolve your complaint?

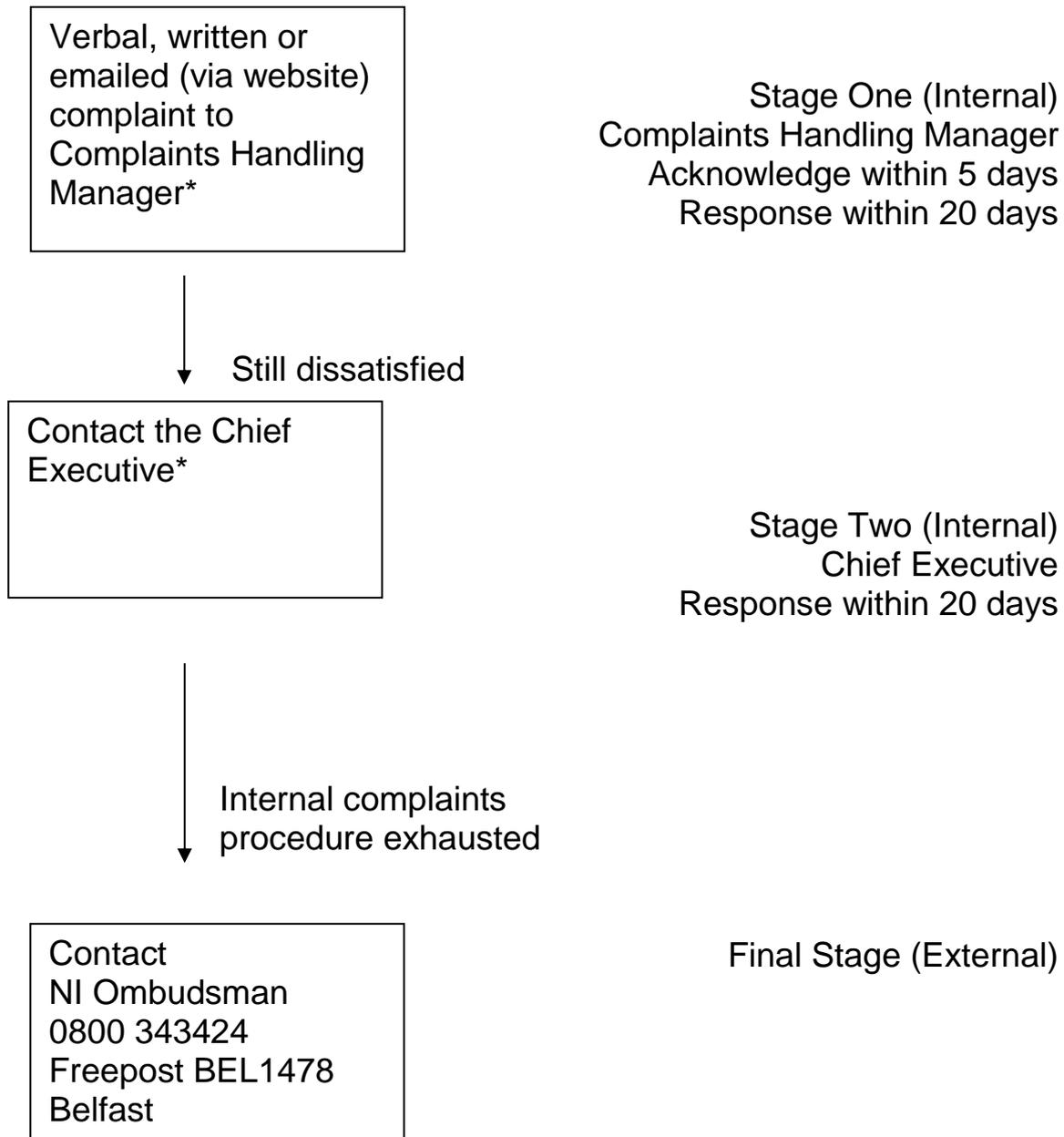
Data Protection

In order to investigate your complaint and help us deliver efficient services, we need to collect relevant personal details. We comply with the Data Protection Act 1998 when dealing with personal data. This means that your personal data will be processed in accordance with the law. Please note that we may share personal data with other organisations where appropriate.

Please tick the box to confirm that you have read the information above and are consenting to Connswater Homes processing your personal data

Flow chart

Making a Complaint



* Connswater Homes Ltd 157 Upper Newtownards Road Belfast
BT4 3HX
02890 656155
www.connswater.org.uk