

Housing Executive

Please use this consultation template for submitting your responses and comments.

Alternatively, the online consultation template can be downloaded at:
<http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/corporate/consultation.htm> where you can also view the full consultation report and the associated screening documents.

If you are completing an electronic version of this form, it should be emailed to:
homelessness.strategy@nihe.gov.uk

Alternatively, you can return hard copies of the completed form to:

Richard Tanswell,
Homeless Strategy Manager
The Housing Centre
2 Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8PB

The Housing Executive welcomes any comments you wish to make on all of the proposals or just on those issues that are of particular interest to you in the consultation.

All responses should be received by 5pm on Wednesday 8th February 2017 to ensure they can be fully considered.

Freedom of Information Act 2000 Confidentiality of Consultations

The Housing Executive will publish a summary of responses following completion of the consultation process. Your response, and all other responses to the consultation, may be disclosed on request. The Housing Executive can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Before you submit your response, please read the paragraphs below on the confidentiality of consultations and they will give you guidance on the legal position about any information given by you in response to this consultation.

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Housing Executive in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a consultation. The Housing Executive cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a consultation. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this consultation, including information about your identity should be made public or treated as confidential.

This means that information provided by you in response to the consultation is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that: The Housing Executive should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Housing Executive's functions and it would not otherwise be provided.

The Housing Executive should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature.

Acceptance by the Housing Executive of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner. For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (or see the website at: <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>)

YOUR DETAILS (All answers to be provided in grey boxes)

Organisation: NIACRO

Name: Katherine McCloskey

Postal Address: Amelia House, 4 Amelia Street Belfast

Postcode: BT2 7GS

Email: katherine@niacro.co.uk

1. Vision Statement “Ending Homelessness Together”

a) Do you agree with the vision statement of this Strategy?

Yes No

Please provide any supporting comments below

NIACRO agrees with the vision of ‘Ending Homelessness Together’ and the aims of preventing homelessness namely;

- ensuring that households experiencing homelessness are supported to find suitable accommodation and support solutions as quickly as possible, and;
- ensuring a cross departmental and inter-agency approach to ending homelessness.

NIACRO feels that the vision statement for this strategy needs to go further to include a greater emphasis on cross-sectoral partnerships. Furthermore, the collective impact of the third sector is an important asset that makes life-changing contributions to the people and communities across Northern Ireland. We believe that this must be recognised within this strategy. Throughout Northern Ireland the voluntary, community and social enterprise sector workforce, both paid and voluntary, are raising issues, identifying need and stepping up to deliver services that government or other sectors can't.

b) In your view what are the key priorities required to end homelessness

NIACRO recognises the importance of early intervention, improved communication and cooperation between departments, agencies and services in the successful transition of people from prison custody to accommodation in the community. We also believe that accommodation offered to homeless people should be appropriate and reflect the cultural, health (learning disability, mental health physical health), age demographic (working age/non-working age) needs of people leaving care (including prison). The needs of people made homeless due to exclusion from their community due to lifestyle issues, alleged or proven anti-social behaviour community violence, and/or political violence need to be addressed in this strategy. Robust, flexible and appropriate support would be welcomed from the earliest point which allows the participation and input from different specialisms irrespective of funding source. At present only one provider funded through Supporting People is permitted to work with an individual who may have multiple needs and require intervention from a number of support providers.

2. Objective One: Preventing Homelessness

a) Do you agree that preventing homelessness should be the primary objective of this Strategy?

- Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below:

NIACRO has experience of supporting people in this capacity through our APAC services helping people at risk of losing their tenancy to remain in their accommodation.

Case Study One*

John, a 22 year old male, was released from custody three months prior to referral and had cases pending for theft and motoring offences. John had a formal diagnosis of Paranoid schizophrenia. John was seeing Psychiatrist every month and was also seeing CPN fortnightly.

John's main issues in the beginning were:

- o He wanted to move out of Belfast and set up home with partner and children
- o He wanted to move away from the criminal justice system, complete his community service and not go to prison due to the upcoming court case
- o He wanted to sort out his financial situation, set up bank accounts, look at benefit entitlement
- o He wanted to keep appointments with Psychiatrist CPN etc.,

Over the next 3-4 weeks, NIACRO met with John and his family. Sometimes this was at the family home, community sites and going for coffee. John had a lot of anxiety around new places and surroundings so this was managed sensitively. At the same time, a NIACRO Support Worker was making contact with John's CPN and discussed with her John's situation. Much of the support in the initial stages was supporting John to engage with available services and giving him space to talk about his needs.

Initially John wanted to move out of Belfast due to the fact that he had been subjected to prior paramilitary attacks where he was living. John still believed that he may be under threat - this was checked out by the NIACRO BASE 2 team which returned as a negative. Much of the practicalities also had to be sorted for John such as opening a bank account and checking for any tax credit or benefits entitlement etc. NIACRO's Benefit Team were very supportive.

Underlying all of the above issues was the uncertainty of John's accommodation. Working with his family, we looked at what could be done for John and we engaged Housing Rights in the case and they supported John through the long process of getting a transfer put in. Eventually when his partner gave birth to another child, the Housing Executive classified their case as priority need and they were housed in a three bedroom family home that they are very happy with.

Case Study Two

Sarah is a single mum who has two children and has lived in Northern Ireland for eleven years. In 2010, she moved into a rented house in Belfast, got her children settled into a local

primary school and started to work towards qualifications to get a job in the care sector. She was successful in securing part time employment in a care home and sorted childcare to work around her work patterns.

The trouble started at Sarah's home when she had the windows broken at her home. Sarah did not feel safe in her house and was worried about her children and the racist names some locals were calling her and her family. Sarah was frightened for the lives of her family. Her Housing Officer made a referral to the NIACRO STEM project. NIACRO Support Workers came out to visit her and explained how they could support Sarah. They helped Sarah talk to her Housing Officer and she made the decision that she could not remain in her home. Sarah was then placed on the waiting list for social housing.

In 2015, Sarah got a new support worker from STEM. She was struggling to understand letters I received from the Housing Executive Housing Benefit team which said she owed almost £4000.00. Her support worker made numerous phone calls and over the following weeks corresponded with Housing Benefit on her behalf. Eventually the Support Worker met with the Housing Benefits Manager who acknowledged this was an error on their part. Sarah was so relieved with the outcome and told us that she could not have done this without our support.

The incidents at her home persisted and got worse. Things were so bad that Sarah's family slept in one bed as they were afraid of further attacks on the house. Her support worker spoke with her Housing Officer to help my situation. Sarah was delighted to receive an offer of alternative accommodation in the summer of 2015. Sarah spoke to a local community organisation who felt the proposed area was fairly safe and the family prepared to move house.

Her Support Worker contacted a local church and volunteers provided a van to help her move. Her Support Worker sorted her utilities and decorating and over the following weeks her family started to settle in their new home.

In late 2015, Sarah had run into considerable rent arrears as she was not getting enough shifts at work to cover rent and bills etc. She was worried she would lose her home. Her Support Worker advocated on her behalf in a meeting at her work and sent a letter seeking remedy by way of payment for outstanding shifts. Her employer paid her almost £500.00 and agreed to ensure she would work her 24 hours per week to enable her to meet her outgoings.

With the help of her Support Worker Sarah successfully applied for a new job in a care home. She has been employed there on a permanent contract for almost 6 months. Her income is steady and she has now cleared all her arrears. Sarah has recently applied for citizenship and can now see a long and happy future here for her family. Her children now have bright futures ahead and her family now has so much to give and she is so grateful for all the help STEM has provided her and her children.

Two areas not referenced in the strategy are homelessness caused by

- exclusion through community, political or racial violence and;
- homelessness due to leaving care including prison care.

*names have been changed to protect the identity of our service users

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy aimed at preventing homelessness?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

NIACRO questions why the 'Development of Homeless Awareness Training Package for Public Representatives and general public' is a long term action (Year 4/5) as opposed to a priority which requires more immediate action. We feel that the communication strategy does not contain sufficient detail about the strategy or who will be involved.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to prevent homelessness?

Measures to ensure tenancy sustainability should be built into the strategy. The development of a Homeless Awareness Training Package should be broader than housing need. A holistic approach to homelessness should be adopted which incorporates health, education, and training and employment needs, to ensure the tenant is best equipped to be able to sustain their tenancy.

We believe that Housing Solutions and Floating Support services could be better aligned – currently less than 3% of referrals to the Homeless Prevention Supporting People Forum for Greater Belfast come directly from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

3. Objective Two: Finding appropriate and sustainable housing and support solutions?

a) Do you agree with the person centred housing and support solution approach as detailed in the Strategy?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

NIACRO is concerned that the needs of the tenant is not being adequately addressed for example, in the instance when the person needing accommodation, out of necessity, accepts an offer of housing in a district where they have no established support or

connections and are assigned managers from a housing district that have had no real role in the allocation process. Not only this but, this can also lead to resentment within the community who may view people from outside a particular community getting priority over cases within that community..

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy aimed at finding person centred solutions and ensuring the right support services are in place to support this?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

NIACRO believes that it is important that the housing solutions model collaborates with Supporting People services to ensure that the correct and adequate support is available in cases where issues affecting sustainability are identified. This includes appropriate referral mechanisms such as the use of a common referral tool directed at Floating Support services as developed by the Homeless Prevention Supporting People Forum .

c) Do you agree that a multi-agency approach is required to find appropriate housing and support solutions for homeless clients?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

Homelessness has multiple and complex causes and thus, a multi-agency approach is required in order to tackle homelessness effectively. Issues such as mental ill health, exclusion through racial, community or political violence, leaving institutional care/prison are just some of the examples that require individual, tailored responses at the earliest point of intervention..

d) Which agencies, in your view, have a key role to play in finding sustainable solutions for homeless households?

NIACRO believes that at a Governmental level the Department of Justice, the Department for Communities, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the Department for the Economy, have a collective role to play in addressing issues leading to homelessness, in particular finding sustainable solutions for homeless households.

At statutory agency level, we believe that the Northern Ireland Housing Executive has a pivotal coordinating role to harness resources from Health & Social Care Trusts, the education sector, and the Department for Communities.

Providers in the voluntary and community sector, representing criminal justice, mental health, and housing perspectives, have a range of experience, expertise and delivery experience working with vulnerable people who are homeless or are facing homelessness. This strategy should engage these third sector actors to work towards finding sustainable solutions for homeless households..

- e) In your view, what further actions could be taken to find sustainable housing solutions for homeless clients?

NIACRO would like to see the range of options available for temporary accommodation provision re-examined and broadened. Hostels must be used as a short term measure for people leaving prison custody. This can have a significant impact on residents with children as they cannot for example, share a family meal or watch a DVD together on the premises. In addition, we have concerns for those people who for example, 'sofa surf' as we find that they miss out on Floating Support services..

4. Objective Three: Understanding and addressing the complexities of chronic homelessness and rough sleeping?

- a) Do you agree that further work is required to understand and address chronic homelessness and rough sleeping?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

We feel that further work is required as this strategy does not adequately address the legislative or structural causes of chronic long-term homelessness and rough sleeping. Rather than penalising and excluding people from housing support services for lengthy periods, often by labelling a person guilty of anti-social behaviour or being intentionally homeless, the individual could be incentivised by agreeing to review their application in 3 months time on condition that they address lifestyle issues, agree to attend training and so forth..

- b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy to address chronic homelessness?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

NIACRO feels that Northern Ireland Housing Executive Community Mediation Team should be mentioned in relation to this. In addition, there is no mention of key community issues such as hate crime, paramilitarism within communities, and the perception of 'no-go areas'.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to address chronic homelessness?

This strategy needs to place a greater emphasis on the connectivity and cooperation between departments at Government level, between statutory agencies and in particular with the voluntary and community sector in seeking solutions to homelessness..

5. Objective Four: Overseeing and delivering the Homelessness Strategy

a) Do you agree with the inter-departmental and local approaches to overseeing and delivering the Strategy as outlined in the document?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

NIACRO supports the view that responsibility for ending homelessness does not rest solely with the Department for Communities but requires the participation of a range of departments, statutory bodies, and third sector organisations. NIACRO would like to see more cross-departmental co-operation and communication with an emphasis on improved communication, understanding, and partnership between the statutory agencies and the third sector .

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined to oversee and deliver the Strategy?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below

See previous answers.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to oversee and deliver this Strategy?

See previous answers.

6. Objective Five: measuring and monitoring existing and emerging need

a) Do you agree that improved cooperation/data sharing between agencies and better quality data will improve service planning and provision?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below:

In theory we feel that this could be beneficial to improve service planning and provision. However, we would like to see further details on how this could be implemented practically and in accordance with the correct and appropriate data sharing legislation and practice.

b) Do you agree with the actions outlined in the Strategy aimed at ensuring adequate analysis of existing and emerging need?

Yes No

Please provide supporting comments below:

See previous answers.

c) In your view, what further actions could be taken to ensure adequate analysis of existing and emerging need?

See previous answers.

7. Below, please provide any further comments you may have on the Strategy

None.

