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Welcome to Supporting Communities NI's 4th Edition of E-Zine, bringing you Best Practice from the Community Sector; Housing Community Network Updates; Funding and Training Updates and Policy Developments in Northern Ireland.

POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTARY SECTOR MAKE VITAL CONTRIBUTION SAYS COMMITTEE



The contribution of the Voluntary and Community Sector is vital to delivering public services and improving society says a new report from the Assembly's Public Accounts Committee. The Committee's Report, entitled Creating Effective Partnerships between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector looked at the relationships between the Sector and Government departments. Speaking at the launch of the Report, Committee Chairperson Paul Maskey MP MLA, said,

"An effective relationship between the Sector and public bodies, built around partnership, mutual trust and respect, is essential. However, the complexity of this relationship has, in my experience, contributed to over-bureaucratic, risk-averse approaches to monitoring of funding and to a lack of focus on what is actually being delivered."

"The Committee expects to see tangible evidence of improvements, based on practical actions aimed at reducing the level of bureaucracy through the adoption of proportionate monitoring and audit. It is also important that these improvements focus on outcomes.

"It is imperative, for example, that Government look closely at how funding is provided – continuing with multiple funding streams to one organisation is simply inefficient and untenable. While highlighting the good practice guides and statements of principles which have been put in place, the Committee acknowledged that these had not always been applied consistently by public bodies or the Sector. It also noted that a recent 2011 agreement between the Sector and Government provided an opportunity to improve working arrangements and outcomes.

"On the ground, it is clear that the Sector is making a huge contribution in improving the day to day life within our communities. This should rightly be recognised and applauded. However, more still needs to be done. We believe that it is important that our recommendations are adopted not only by the Department for Social Development as a lead Department, but by all who work with the Voluntary and Community Sector."

The report can be viewed at:

[www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Reports/Public%20Accounts
Report%20on%20Creating%20Effective%20Partnerships%20between%20
Government%20and%20the%20Voluntary%20and%20Community%20Sector.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Documents/Reports/Public%20Accounts%20Report%20on%20Creating%20Effective%20Partnerships%20between%20Government%20and%20the%20Voluntary%20and%20Community%20Sector.pdf)

NI HOUSING EXECUTIVE RENT INCREASES



Social Development Minister, Nelson McCausland, has approved a rent increase for Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants which equates to around £3.64 a week.

The average weekly increase for tenants will be 6.6%. This increase will bring the average Housing Executive rent to £58.76 a week, excluding rates, and will be around £19.73 a week less than the average rent for similar local authority accommodation in England where an 8% increase will be applied.

The Housing Executive's stock is regarded as the best maintained social housing in the UK, and rental income generated needs to be sufficient to maintain accommodation at the standard expected by tenants and allow for adequate investment in the stock. Almost 80% of Housing Executive tenants will not have to pay this additional sum as they are on housing benefit.

The Minister has also asked Housing Associations to impose lower rent increases to that agreed for NIHE to bring more conformity to social housing rent levels. The average weekly rent for a housing association tenant in Northern Ireland is £69.32.

WELFARE REFORM BILL



If you'd like to find out more about the Welfare Reform Bill and engage with prominent decision makers and contributors to the Bill, join NICVA and the Law Centre (NI) at their major conference on Tuesday 6 March 2012. NICVA and the Law Centre (NI) have put together a significant programme of key contributors within Welfare Reform and Social Security for this event.

Neil Couling Director of DWP will address the conference detailing the Government's vision behind Welfare Reform. Contributions will be made from Les Allambly, Director of Law Centre (NI) and Baroness Ruth Lister, who contributed significantly to the Bill as it passed through the House of Lords. Other contributors will include Professor Eileen Evason, Chair of the Social Security Standards committee, senior members of the Social Security Agency and political representatives. Alex Maskey MLA, Chair of the NI Assembly for the Committee on Social Development and a local Member of Parliament representative will also contribute.

The Welfare Reform Bill currently progressing through Westminster has been widely described as the most radical shake up of the social security system in over 40 years. A recent report by the Institute of Fiscal Studies, found that after London, Northern Ireland will be hardest hit by tax and benefit cuts announced and to be implemented under the Bill between January 2011 and April 2014/15. The report can be viewed at: www.ifs.org.uk/bns/bn114.pdf

Corresponding provisions will be incorporated into a Northern Ireland Welfare Reform Bill, to be introduced into the Northern Ireland Assembly early in 2012. How and when the various strands of the Welfare Reform Bill will be applied to Northern Ireland will ultimately be a matter for the DSD Minister, with approval from the NI Executive, and the Department for Social Development.

In light of the imminent changes and potential negative consequences for quite a substantial proportion of citizens in Northern Ireland, NICVA and the Law Centre (NI) invite you to come along and have your opportunity to hear from, and directly engage with prominent decision makers, policy makers, and eminent contributors to the Welfare Reform both here in Northern Ireland and within the UK.

To book a place

More details, and booking information, for the event are listed at: www.nicva.org/events/conference-welfare-reform or contact Lorraine Boyd at lorraine.boyd@nicva.org.uk.

CENTRAL HCN REPORT



BRIC PROJECT UPDATE

At the December meeting of the HCN, a presentation was given on the 'Building Relationships in Communities' (BRIC) Programme which, in partnership involving NIHE, Rural Community Network and TIDES Training, aims to deliver good relations training, estate based work and community research. In addition to the presentation, members were given an update on a range of issues including community lettings and the usage of community premises, adverse weather action plan and the evaluation of the pilot choice based lettings project.

Important Changes to Rent and Rates!

The January meeting considered the changes to the payment and collection of rent and rates for NIHE tenants which are due to come into effect from 1 April 2012. It was noted that after 31 March, tenants will no longer be able to pay their rent through the Payzone and Post Offices; this method of rent collection will be replaced by PayPoint.

All tenants and the wider public will be advised of these changes in the coming weeks. For a list of local PayPoint outlets in your area contact your SCNI Liaison Officer. Advice on paying rent is available from your District Office, Citizens Advice Bureau, Housing Rights Service and Independent Advice Providers.

A PayPoint outlet locator can be found at: www.paypoint.co.uk/locator.aspx

Community Participation

The January meeting also considered customer service areas and optimising community involvement in the delivery of those housing and related services. This work has been going on for a number of months and had been considered at each of the respective Area meetings.

A final report will be produced subsequently and it will provide the basis for future Community Participation following any announcement from the Minister concerning a re-structuring of the Housing Executive.



GLORIA HELPS OLDER AND DISABLED PEOPLE SWITCH TO DIGITAL

Television presenter Gloria Hunniford launched the BBC-run Switchover Help Scheme this month at an event in the Ulster Hall in Belfast. The Help Scheme offers older and disabled people practical help to switch one of their TVs to digital before switchover in October.

People are eligible if they are:

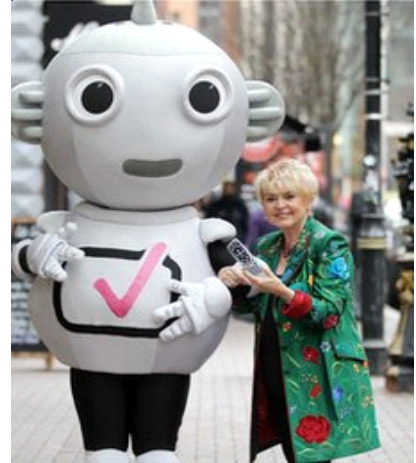
- Aged 75 or over, or
- Have lived in a care home for six months or more, or
- Get (or could get) certain disability benefits, or
- Are registered blind or partially sighted

Every eligible person in Northern Ireland will get a letter from the Help Scheme in the run up to switchover. The scheme costs £40 but is free for those eligible and also on certain income-related benefits. The Help Scheme provides:

Easy to use equipment to convert one set

An approved installer to supply and install the necessary equipment, and a 12-month aftercare service including a free helpline.

For more information about the Switchover Help Scheme, please visit www.helpscheme.co.uk



COMMISSION PUBLISHES REPORT ON OMNIBUS RESEARCH FINDINGS



The Charity Commission for Northern Ireland has published the results of an Omnibus Research survey commissioned in February 2011.

The report provides a baseline for the future work of the Commission, looking at themes and attitudes towards charities and charitable regulation within Northern Ireland.

The report throws up a number of key findings and points for discussion. Some of the key findings include that:

- Almost 25% of respondents indicated that they do not trust charities which operate in Northern Ireland;
- 15% of respondents perceived that the general public know enough about how charities are operating in Northern Ireland;
- Just a third of respondents believe that charity donors, volunteers and beneficiaries are well enough informed.

To read the Omnibus Survey report in full visit: www.charitycommissionni.org.uk/RSS/omnibusresearchfindings.aspx

For more information on the Omnibus Research findings or the Commission's policy and research work please contact Aoife Morrison, CCNI's Policy and Research Officer on 028 3832 0220 or email aoife.morrison@charitycommissionni.org.uk

OTHER HOUSING AND POLICY DEVELOPMENTS IN UK

THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TENURE REFORM



This briefing covers the practical implications of tenure reform as it applies in England and will be of use to anyone who is likely to work with fixed term tenancies. It can help you to understand the day-to-day implications of these reforms and to implement them in your organisation. Areas covered include the nature of fixed term tenancies for both local authorities and housing associations, the relationship between fixed term tenancies and affordable rent, the rights of tenants with a fixed term tenancy and the processes for ending a fixed term tenancy. It will be of interest to any housing practitioner and contains a useful overview of some current policy thinking.

It was updated in January 2012 to reflect amendments to the Localism Act, made since this document was originally published, and the publishing of the Tenant Services Authority's proposed regulatory framework.

The full report can be viewed at: www.cih.org/publication-free/display/vpathDCR/templatedata/cih/publication-free/data/Practical_implications_of_tenure_reform

UK HOUSING AWARDS 2012

The CIH's UK Housing Awards were established in 1997 to recognise excellence across the housing sector. For 2012, awards are being launched with 16 entirely new categories:

- S**mall Housing Association of the Year
- L**ocal Authority Landlord of the Year
- A**rms Length Management Organisation of the Year
- L**arge Housing Association of the Year
- S**pecialist Housing Provider of the Year
- I**nnovation of the Year
- B**usiness Transformation of the Year
- P**artnership of the Year
- C**ommunity Initiative of the Year
- M**ost Efficient Landlord of the Year
- S**ustainable Landlord of the Year
- D**evelopment of the Year - Small Schemes
- D**evelopment of the Year - Large Schemes
- S**trategic Local Authority of the Year
- L**andlord of the Year
- L**ifetime Achievement



Online entries opened on 16 January and will close on 24 February.

The awards ceremony is to be held on 27 June - earlier than in previous years.

More information on the Awards is available at: www.cih.org/UKHousingAwards



DIGITAL INCLUSION UPDATE

Coming Soon, the NEW SCNI Digital Champion Initiative!

Did you know that the average person can save up to £560 per year from shopping and paying bills online?

Government and public information is moving online – you will increasingly need to access the web to do everything from influencing decisions that affect your area to collecting benefits!

Our NEW Initiative will support you and members of your local community to develop the new skills needed to reap the benefit of the Internet. More details coming soon!

FUNDING NEWS



This year Supporting Communities NI have successfully assisted groups to access a total of £970,859.48 in funding!

S.C.N.I.'s Funding Service aims to inform Community Groups of the most up to date and relevant sources of funding available and to provide guidance on the overall fundraising process.

The Funding Service includes:

- Two publications for Housing Community Network members including our fortnightly E-Biz highlighting the latest funding news and grants available to Community Groups from a variety of sources and our monthly Community Funding Bulletin which provides details of Charitable Trusts, Foundations, Statutory Organisations and European Sources and their regular funding programmes.
- A range of funding Factsheets including 'Preparation for Fundraising' and 'Local Fundraising Ideas' and a series of specialist Factsheets providing information on Accessing Business, Council, Trust and Lottery Support.
- Our Funding Enquiry Service enables groups to access information on a variety of funding sources for specific costs or projects and our enquiry form can be downloaded from our website.
- S.C.N.I. has also tailored a number of training courses to address the needs of groups and individuals so that they can plan their fundraising strategy and achieve success from Funders, including 'Successful Fundraising' and our two-day course 'Let's Fundraise Successfully'.

For further information, please contact Roisin Hamilton on (028) 777 67722 or email roisin.hamilton@supportingcommunitiesni.org.

If you require any more information please contact:

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