

EQUALITY COMMISSION FOR NORTHERN IRELAND
Public Authority 2007 - 2008
Annual Progress Report on Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 and
Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order (DDO) 2006

This report template includes a number of self assessment questions regarding implementation of the Section 75 statutory duties from **1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008**. This template also includes a number of questions regarding implementation of Section 49A of the DDO from the **1 July 2007 to 31 March 2008**. Please enter information at the relevant part of each section and ensure that it is submitted electronically (by completing this template) and in hardcopy, with a signed cover letter from the Chief Executive or, in his/her absence, the Deputy Chief Executive to the Commission by **30 September 2008**.

In completing this template it is essential to focus on the application of Section 75 and Section 49. This involves progressing the commitments in your equality scheme or disability action plan which should lead to outcomes and impacts in terms of measurable improvement for individuals from the equality categories. Such outcomes and impacts may include changes in public policy, in service provision and/or in any of the areas within your functional remit.

Name of public authority

Connswater Homes Ltd 157 Upper Newtownards Road Belfast BT4 3HX Tel 028 90656155 Fax 028 90656388 E housing@connswater.org.uk
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Equality Officer

S75 & DDO	Catherine Waterworth Connswater Homes Ltd 157 Upper Newtownards Road Belfast BT4 3 HX Tel 028 90656155 Fax 028 90656388 E catherine@connswater.org.uk
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S75 Executive Summary

- What were the key policy/service developments made by the authority during this reporting period to better promote equality of opportunity and good relations and what outcomes were achieved?

For the period 1 April 2007 – 31 March 2008 a number of policy and service developments have been ongoing to promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

Following the Association's re-structuring of staffing a Business Improvement Manager was appointed in July 2007 and part of her remit is responsibility for Section 75 as well as promotion of the Association and its work.

The Association's Annual Report was published in line with the RNIB Clear Print guidelines for the 2nd year. Tenants are also kept informed of policy changes and revisions via the tenants newsletter which was published 3 times in the past year. A report on how the Association performed against its service standards was produced for tenants information and also published on the Association's website.

Tenants and customers are made aware that all documents can be made available in alternative formats if requested and the Association has a contract with a translation service (Language Line) who provide translation and interpretation if required.

Once again this year, through the joint process in conjunction with NIFHA a pre-consultation exercise was held in order to establish some initial feedback on the year 3 EQIA's. The main reasons for carrying out this pre-consultation exercise were:

- It is recognised that pre-consultation is good practice
- Undertaking pre-consultation research had proved very useful for the Year 2 assessments of impacts
- The EQIA co-ordination group wanted to demonstrate housing associations commitment to engage with equality representative groups
- Lack of data had been highlighted as an issue during the Year 1 EQIA's and lessons had been learnt from that, and
- The data gathered from pre-consultation would enable more effective assessment of the impact of the policy area and also provide a focus for any follow up consultation work..

The rationale for outsourcing the task was:

- It would achieve a more equitable spread of work amongst housing associations participating in the joint approach, and
- It would make it easier for the equality co-ordination group to manage the EQIA process.

Unfortunately, this year the researchers experienced significant problems in getting respondents to complete the surveys by telephone. Both NIFHA and the equality co-ordination group members were disappointed with the number and quality of the returns. In fact concerns about quality prompted the equality co-ordination group to add in an Association response column before the document was released for consultation because some of the comments were misleading or inaccurate. The final report informed the early stages of the Year 3 EQIA's and was included with the Association's draft reports on the composite disc circulated by NIFHA and sent to the ECNI.

- What are the main initiatives planned in the coming year to ensure the authority improves outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity and good relations for individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75?

Connswater Homes is committed to improving outcomes from its work in connection with the nine categories and as such has been looking at a number of ways of continuing to do this.

The Association continues to review the lessons learned and feedback from Year 1 & 2 of the five year timetable issued with the original Equality Scheme.

The work is co-ordinated and the Business Improvement Manager actively promotes all aspects of equality as a core element of her role. All aspects of the Association's business adhere to and are inclusive towards all nine categories covered by Section 75.

The Business Improvement Manager attends and will continue to attend seminars and training organised by the Equality Commission for NI, as stand alone training or in conjunction with events and seminars organised with NIFHA, to keep up-to-date and aware of any changes in legislation and requirements that the Association must be aware of.

The Association's Disability Action Plan is an integral part of the corporate governance that the Association adheres to and is there to ensure compliance and further improve outcomes in terms of equality of opportunity in all areas.

Connswater Homes recognises the need to continue to encourage its tenants to be involved in aspects of the Association's work and has in the past year held 4 meetings of tenants who are interested in forming a Tenants Forum which will make consultation with tenants more meaningful and will ensure that tenants views are taken into account. This work is progressing slowly as tenants are encouraged to take ownership of this forum, although the Association intends to continue to progress this area over the coming year.

Connswater Homes is committed to continuing its contribution towards inclusiveness in all areas of its work.

- Please give examples of changes to policies or practices which have resulted in outcomes. If the change was a result of an EQIA please tick the appropriate box in column 3:

	Outline change in policy or practice which have resulted in outcomes	Tick if result of EQIA
Persons of different religious belief	• None	
Persons of different political opinion	• None	
Persons of different racial groups	• None	
Persons of different age	• None	
Persons with different marital status	• None	
Persons of different sexual orientation	• None	
Men and women generally	• None	
Persons with and without a disability	• None	

Persons with and without dependants	• None	
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Section 1: Strategic Implementation of the Section 75 Duties

- Please outline evidence of progress made in developing and meeting equality and good relations objectives, performance indicators and targets in corporate and annual operating plans during 2007-08.

This report has been approved by the Chief Executive and ratified by the Board of Management on 17 September 2008.

EQIA's for Care & Support policies and HR Recruitment & Selection policies were the two policy areas priorities for EQIA in Year 3. Connswater Homes did not have to complete Care & Support policies as it does not have any housing provision in these categories. Details of progress in HR Recruitment & Selection policies is included in Section 3.

Connswater Homes has the equality agenda firmly fixed within its corporate plan with the five year timetable being used as a guide to maintain momentum.

Connswater Homes continues to have a member of staff available at training sessions provided through NIFHA and the ECNI in order to progress work timetabled. All staff are then updated on a regular basis through staff meetings.

Connswater Homes has completed the screening of the Year 3 policy area applicable and the EQIA report was issued for consultation from June 2008 – August 2008. To date no comments have been received directly to Connswater Homes.

NIFHA provided an EQIA workshop session for all associations involved in the joint process which was attended by the Business Improvement Officer.

As the Association goes into year 4 of the 5 year timetable the following priorities will be progressed:

- To complete EQIA's for Housing Associations Charging Policies and HR During Employment.
- To review feedback from the consultation process on HR Recruitment & Selection policies

- To enhance the Business Improvement Manager's skills and knowledge in connection with Section 75 and Disability Discrimination legislation.

Section 2: Screening

- Please provide an update of new/proposed/revised policies screened during the year.

Title of policy subject to screening	Was the <u>F</u>ull Screening Report or the <u>R</u>esult of initial screening issued for consultation? <i>Please enter <u>F</u> or <u>R</u></i>	Was initial screening decision changed following consultation? <u>Y</u>es/<u>N</u>o	Is policy being subject to EQIA? <u>Y</u>es/<u>N</u>o? If yes indicate year for assessment.
Fraud Policy	R	N	N
Disaster Recovery	R	N	N
Rent Setting	R	N	N
Risk Management	R	N	N
Childcare Voucher Policy	R	N	N
Disqualification Policy	R	N	N
Pension Policy Statement	R	N	N
Gas Safety Management	R	N	N
Maintenance Policy	R	N	N
Response Maintenance Manual	R	N	N
Asbestos Management	R	N	N
Stock Investment Policy	R	N	N
Compensation for Property Improvement	R	N	N
Common Fund	R	N	N
Health & Safety Policy	R	N	N
Board Recruitment & Succession Planning	R	N	N

Section 3: Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

- Please provide an update of policies subject to EQIA during 2007/08, stage 7 EQIA monitoring activities and an indicative EQIA timetable for 2008-09.

EQIA Timetable – April 2007 - March 2008

Title of Policy EQIA	EQIA Stage at end March 08 (Steps 1-6)	Outline adjustments to policy intended to benefit individuals, and the relevant Section 75 categories due to be affected.
HR Recruitment & Selection	5	<p>Currently out to consultation however the following may be indications of the likely adjustments required as per the EQIA report.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Implementation of guidance regarding the extension of monitoring requirements ▪ Consider the use of 'Welcome' statements to redress under-representation ▪ IIP re-accreditation ▪ Highlight the fact that applications can be made available in different formats ▪ Ensure the commitments made in Disability Action Plans are mainstreamed into Recruitment and Selection practices ▪ Advertise in specific press to encourage disabled applicants ▪ Disability – keep under review accessibility issues/language/disability etc
Care & Support	5	<p>Connswater Homes did not have to complete this EQIA as it does not operate any housing in this area.</p>

- Where the EQIA timetable for 2007/08 (as detailed in the previous annual S75 progress report to the Commission) has not been met, please provide details of the factors responsible for delay and details of the timetable for re-scheduling the EQIA/s in question.

N/A

Ongoing EQIA Monitoring Activities April 2007- March 2008

Title of EQIA subject to Stage 7 monitoring	Indicate if differential impacts previously identified have reduced or increased	Indicate if adverse impacts previously identified have reduced or increased
Housing Management	Reduced	Reduced
Maintenance	Reduced	Reduced

2008-09 EQIA Time-table

Title of EQIAs due to be commenced during April 2008 – March 2009	Existing or New policy?	Please indicate expected timescale of Decision Making stage i.e. Stage 6
Housing Associations Charging Policies	New	Autumn 2009
HR During Employment	Existing	Autumn 2009

Section 4: Training

- Please outline training provision during the year associated with the Section 75 Duties/Equality Scheme requirements including types of training provision and conclusions from any training evaluations.

Connswater Homes Business Improvement Manager attends training sessions on equality and during the past year has attended the following courses in connection with the Section 75 process:

- Introduction to Equality Law held in November 2007

- Year 3 EQIA Scoping Workshop held in November 2007
- Monitoring Seminar held in January 2008

Other training on equality attended by the Business Improvement Manager were:

- Article 55 Review held in September 2007
- Work Life Balance Seminar held in February 2008

The Business Improvement Manager updates all staff on equality issues and provides in-house training as required.

All courses attended by Association staff are followed up by the completion of an evaluation sheet giving feedback in terms of training received in connection with Section 75.

In January 2008 Connswater Homes was the first organisation in Northern Ireland to complete the Face Friendly Accredited Disability Awareness training for both staff and board members and achieve the Face Friendly Kite Mark, this training was developed and delivered by Face Inclusion Matters.

Section 5: Communication

- Please outline how the authority communicated progress on delivery of the Section 75 Duties during the year and evidence of the impact/success of such activities.

The Association produces all its documents and correspondence adhering to the RNIB Clear Print Guidelines and ensures that all tenants and customers know that information can be made available in a range and variety of formats and languages on request.

The Annual Report contains an update on progress in relation to the equality duties. Tenants newsletters and the Association's website gives details of how to obtain information in other formats. The Association's newsletter gives policy updates throughout the year and reports on performance show how the Association is carrying out its business.

Section 6: Data Collection & Analysis

- Please outline any systems that were established during the year to supplement available statistical and qualitative research or any research undertaken/commissioned to obtain information on the needs and

experiences of individuals from the nine categories covered by Section 75.

The Association carried out year one of a Tenants Satisfaction Survey in Summer 2007, the results from this have been reported on to the Board of Management and to tenants. The second and final stage of this exercise is due to be completed by end of September 2008 which means 100% of Connswater Homes' tenants will have been surveyed. The Association will compare and analyse results from the complete survey and draw up an action plan to address underperformance and areas for improvement.

- Please outline any use of the Commission's Section 75 Monitoring Guide.

None

Section 7: Information Provision, Access to Information and Services

- Please provide details of any initiatives/steps taken during the year, including take up, to improve access to services including provision of information in accessible formats.

The Association continues to use Language Line to provide information in other formats as required.

The Association's office provides:

- At least one access point to the building is level access.
- The reception desk has a lowered section.
- Interview room situated on the ground floor
- Training Room/Board Room situated on the ground floor which is wheelchair accessible.
- Wheelchair accessible lift to all floors of the building.
- Disabled toilets on ground floor
- Disabled parking
- Induction loop system

The association holds contact details for the Royal National Institute for the Deaf to provide signing services and the office benefits from a loop system installed to cater for those with impaired hearing.

Any written correspondence from the Association will be made available in large print and other formats upon request including Braille and audio.

The Association's website provides information on Association services and gives users the opportunity to download forms and documents and contact the Association to request information and book repairs etc.

Section 8: Complaints

- Please identify the number of Section 75 related complaints:
 - received and resolved by the authority (including how this was achieved);
 - which were not resolved to the satisfaction of the complainant;
 - which were referred to the Equality Commission.

During 2007 – 08 the Association received 12 formal complaints none of which were related to Section 75. All complaints received by the Association are dealt with through the Association's complaints policy and procedure.

To date the Association has not received any complaints in connection with Section 75. Any complaint that is received would be dealt with in the normal way using the Association's complaints policy and procedure to ensure consistency.

Section 9: Consultation and Engagement

- Please provide details of the measures taken to enhance the level of engagement with individuals and representative groups during the year.

Connswater Homes held four meetings this year with tenants interested in establishing a tenants forum. The Association is committed to progressing this exercise until a forum can be established that the tenants can take ownership of and then it can become a useful means for consultation with tenants and also for tenant participation within the organisation.

The Association continues to use its website to provide news updates for tenants, advertise any job opportunities and host documents and information relating to all aspects of the Association's business areas.

As previously mentioned the Association works jointly with NIFHA on formal consultation and this work has proved invaluable in terms of ensuring consistency and making consultation meaningful. The work conducted by NIFHA on behalf of housing associations is attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

Section 10: The Good Relations Duty

- Please provide details of additional steps taken to implement or progress the good relations duty during the year. Please indicate any findings or expected outcomes from this work.

The Association continues to actively promote its commitment to all aspects of Section 75 and the equality agenda in Northern Ireland.

Partnership working with other housing associations has ensured that economies of scale have been achieved in relation to maintenance and repair work which are now in Year 2 of a Measured Term Contract in conjunction with three other housing associations.

- Please outline any use of the Commission's Good Relations Guide.
N/A

Section 11: Additional Comments

- Please provide any additional information/comments

Annual Report July 2007/ March 2008
'Disability Duties' Questions

1. How many action measures for this reporting period have been?

8

Fully
Achieved

Partially
Achieved

Not
Achieved

2. Please outline the following detail on **all actions that have been fully achieved** in the reporting period.

2 (a) Please highlight what **public life measures** have been achieved to encourage disabled people to participate in public life at National, Regional and Local levels:

Level	Public Life Action Measures	Outputs ¹	Outcomes / Impact ²
National ³			
Regional ⁴			
Local ⁵	Encourage tenants to join Tenant Forum	4 public sessions with total of 14 attendees	1 prospective disabled tenant forum member felt encouraged to participate and welcomed

¹ **Outputs** – defined as act of producing, amount of something produced over a period, processes undertaken to implement the action measure e.g. Undertook 10 training sessions with 100 people at customer service level.

² **Outcome / Impact** – what specifically and tangibly has changed in making progress towards the duties? What impact can directly be attributed to taking this action? Indicate the results of undertaking this action e.g. Evaluation indicating a tangible shift in attitudes before and after training.

³ **National** : Situations where people can influence policy at a high impact level e.g. Public Appointments

⁴ **Regional**: Situations where people can influence policy decision making at a middle impact level

⁵ **Local** : Situations where people can influence policy decision making at lower impact level e.g. one off consultations, local forums.

2(b) What **training action measures** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Training Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Disability Awareness Training for all staff at induction	3 new members of staff trained in equality and diversity	Greater awareness of all areas of equality, disability and diversity
2	All staff and some Board Members undertook Face Friendly Disability Accredited Training	13 people fully trained	The Association Fully Accredited as a Face Friendly organisation, one which has staff who see the person, and not the disability, first

2(c) What Positive attitudes **action measures** in the area of **Communications** were achieved in this reporting period?

	Communications Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Report on Disability and Equality issues in Annual Report, Newsletters and website	Ongoing communication and information with regard to the Association's business areas	Promotion of the Association's commitment to ensure equality of opportunity and service provision to all
2	Policy Screening	16 policies new / reviewed or updated throughout the year	All fully DDA and Section 75 compliant
3	Appoint staff member with responsibility for Section 75 & DDA	Business Improvement Manager appointed July 2007	One person with overall responsibility for Section 75 & DDA ensures better organisation and correlation of all work

2 (d) What action measures were achieved to ‘**encourage others**’ to promote the two duties:

	Encourage others Action Measures	Outputs	Outcome / Impact
1	Tenant Participation	2 participants who declared they had a disability out of 14 attendees	Greater understanding of the value every member of a group can make
2			
3			
4			

2 (e) Please outline **any additional action measures** that were fully achieved other than those listed in the tables above:

	Action Measures fully implemented (other than Training and specific public life measures)	Outputs	Outcomes / Impact
1	Adaptations made for tenants with disabilities	9 tenants had physical adaptations made to their homes	Ease of use or access to facilities within tenants home to make living conditions more accessible
2			

3. Please outline what action measures have been **partly achieved** as follows:

	Action Measures partly achieved	Milestones ⁶ / Outputs	Outcomes/Impacts	Reasons not fully achieved
1				
2				
3				
4				

4. Please outline what **action measures have not been achieved** and the reasons why?

	Action Measures not met	Reasons
1		
2		
3		

⁶ **Milestones** – Please outline what part progress has been made towards the particular measures; even if full output or outcomes/ impact have not been achieved.

5. What **monitoring tools** have been put in place to evaluate the degree to which actions have been effective / develop new opportunities for action?

(a) Qualitative

Survey of tenants who have had adaptation work carried out recorded for their comments on the quality of the workmanship and their satisfaction

(b) Quantitative

Number of adaptations carried out for tenants to improve facilities in their homes and give better access and ease of use recorded

6. As a result of monitoring progress against actions, has your organisation either:

- made any **revisions** to your plan during the reporting period or
- taken any **additional steps** to meet the disability duties which were **not outlined in your original** disability action plan / any other changes.

Please delete: No

If yes please outline below:

	Revised/Additional Action Measures	Performance Indicator	Timescale
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

7. Do you intend to make any further **revisions to your plan** in light of your organisations annual review of the plan? If so, please outline proposed changes?

No



Housing Associations' Joint Equality Exercise

Annual Progress Report 2007-08

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) is the umbrella body for 33 registered and 7 non-registered housing associations in Northern Ireland. Designated housing associations have participated in a joint approach co-ordinated by NIFHA during the development of Equality Schemes and when implementing their agreed EQIA timetable. This joint work is co-ordinated by the Federation's Corporate Services Manager and a representative group comprised of nominated individuals from NIFHA Council, its Professional Practice Committee and seven (service-related) Fora. This group is known as the EQIA Co-ordination Group (ECG).

General

Between April 2007 and March 2008 the Federation provided support for members participating in the Joint Equality process by:

- Issuing 'E Cards' as prompts for action and/or as information updates
- Providing updates on equality & diversity in NIFHA's twice monthly e-News
- Arranging joint events as appropriate
- Commissioning pre-consultation research and managing the contract
- Representing the housing association movement by participating in the NI Housing Executive's (NIHE) Consultative Forum on Equality
- Co-ordinating all relevant Public Consultation exercises
- Arranging joint Public Notices relating to the designated Housing Associations' equality work
- Acting as a conduit for information and consultee responses
- Managing and maintaining a Joint Consultee List
- Liaising with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland
- Acting as a liaison point for organisations representing Section 75 groups
- Providing information, advice, support and templates to aid the development of members' Disability Actions Plans

EQIA Process

Between April 2007 and March 2008 NIFHA co-ordinated joint work on the second and third years of the Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA)

timetable. During the reporting period we worked collectively to complete the Year 2 EQIAs and began those scheduled for Year 3.

Year 2 Equality Impact Assessments	Year 3 Equality Impact Assessments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Management policies • Maintenance policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care & Support policies • HR Recruitment & Selection policies

NIFHA's participation in the joint work on the Year 2 EQIA process ended at Stage 6 when the Federation placed public notices announcing the availability of the final reports. All the associations' reports were also made available on request by NIFHA in the form of a composite disc. Requests for individual reports were handled by the relevant association.

In November 2007 NIFHA facilitated a practical event in where representatives of all designated associations reviewed the policy aims and determined the scope of the Year 3 EQIA work. As a result of this training session two working groups were formed to develop housing specific templates for the Year 3 EQIA reports.

The Federation's Corporate Services Manager and members of the two working groups met regularly between January and May 2008 to draft the template documents. All designated associations were given the opportunity to comment on the drafts before the templates were issued for completion. These templates were intended to make cross-sector comparison easier for consultees.

At the request of the Equality Co-ordination Group NIFHA again commissioned IMS Consultants to undertake pre-consultation research. The IMS report on the associations' Care & Support and Recruitment & Selection policies helped inform the early stages of the two impact assessments.

From October 2008 NIFHA's members are due commence Year 4 of the planned EQIA timetable. The housing association's Charging and Human Resources (During Employment) policies are scheduled for review.

Training

During 2007, NIFHA organised a series of seminars to outline the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Order and prepare

associations for the implementation of Disability Action Plans. All sessions were administered by Disability Action trainers. Every association was given the opportunity to participate in these events.

NIFHA arranged the practical workshop detailed above and facilitated occasional sessions for individual associations to raise awareness of their equality obligations.

Communications

Throughout 2007-08 NIFHA's Corporate Services Manager continued to liaise with Equality Commission staff and the designated housing associations. In addition, the Federation acted as the main link between members and those with an interest in promoting equality of opportunity, such as consultee organisations, voluntary groups or statutory bodies.

NIFHA staff answered queries, provided general information about associations and co-ordinated the public engagement aspects of the joint exercise. The Federation also used regular publications like POSH magazine or Annual Reports and its revamped website to showcase the work members have done to implement equality of opportunity and promote good relations. These publications are circulated to a wide range of individuals and organisations including all those on the NIFHA's list of consultee organisations and every elected representative in Northern Ireland.

Federation staff accepted speaking roles or actively participated in the events of other organisations as part of our work to promote member associations. The following are examples from 2007-08:

- Corporate Services Manager, Diversity Works event at Science Park, Belfast (September 2007)
- Corporate Services Manager, Human Rights Consortium Conference (September 2007)
- Corporate Services Manager, NIHE Annual Consultative Forum on Equality in Belfast (October 2007)
- Corporate Services Manager, Housing Association equality training session, (November 2007)
- Housing Policy & Research Manager, Community Relations Council event, Belfast (March 2008)
- Corporate Services Manager, NIHE public consultation on New Build Strategic Guidelines, Belfast (March 2008)

Data Collection & Analysis

As in the previous reporting year IMS (NI) Ltd, a market research company was appointed by the ECG to conduct a pre-consultation exercise to help the 34 designated housing associations assess the impact of their policies. Care & Support policies and HR Recruitment & Selection policies had been timetabled for review during 2007-08 so the research focused on these service areas.

The main reasons for carrying out this pre-consultation exercise were:

- It is recognised that pre-consultation is good practice
- Undertaking pre-consultation research had proved useful for the Year 2 assessments of impacts
- The EQIA Co-ordination Group wanted to demonstrate housing associations' commitment to engage with equality representative groups
- Lack of data had been highlighted as an issue during the Year 1 EQIAs
- The data gathered from pre-consultation would enable more effective assessment of the impact of the two policy areas and also provide a focus for any follow up consultation work

The rationale for outsourcing the task was the same as last year, that is:

- It would achieve a more equitable spread of work amongst housing associations participating in the joint approach
- It would make it easier for the ECG to manage the EQIA process

IMS was chosen as it has a good track record in conducting research for public bodies in Northern Ireland and had previously undertaken a similar work for the ECG.

The policy aims and scope of the research project were agreed by the ECG. A total of 150 consultees were sent pre-consultation information and a covering letter. IMS then followed up with the planned telephone surveys making 465 calls in total. A total of 25 surveys were successfully completed.

Unfortunately, the researchers experienced significant problems in getting respondents to complete the surveys by telephone. Both NIFHA and the ECG members were disappointed with the number and quality of the returns. In fact concerns about quality prompted the ECG to add in an Association response column before the document was released for consultation because some of the comments were misleading or inaccurate. The final IMS report informed the early stages of the Year 3

EQIAs and was included with the associations draft reports on the composite disc circulated by NIFHA. This report is available at www.nifha.org.

Information Provision; Access to Information and Services

Although NIFHA is not designated under Section 75 the Federation has made a commitment to producing information and publications like our magazine, POSH, in formats that use accessible fonts and type styles. This commitment was taken into account during the revamping of NIFHA's website in early 2007 and when the Federation re-branded later in the year. Corporate guidelines were developed to reinforce this decision, to help staff understand what standards are required and demonstrate why they are necessary.

The Federation regularly provides information and advice for members in relation to translation, interpretation services and producing material in alternative formats. NIFHA also shares any information received about suppliers of these services. This information sharing is aimed at equipping the housing associations to respond promptly to any requests where accessibility may be a factor. How these services are implemented remains the responsibility of the individual association.

Consultation and Engagement

During 2007-08 NIFHA undertook the following consultation and engagement activities as part of our member support work under the Housing Associations' Joint Equality Exercise:

- Co-ordinated the Formal Consultation the associations' Disability Action Plans by publicising the eight week consultation period in the three main Northern Ireland daily papers (April 2007)
- Conducted two pre-consultation exercises to ensure that the joint consultee list was accurate, up-to-date and valid (July & December 2007). These were in addition to an update based on the feedback received from IMS.
- Co-ordinated the formal consultation on Year 2 of the EQIA programme on behalf of the designated associations by publicising the 12 week consultation period in the three main Northern Ireland daily papers (August 2007)
- Issued a composite disc containing the draft EQIA Reports of the 35 designated housing associations to 160 consultee organisations in August 2007 (additional discs were also issued on request and to each member)
- Circulated all general consultee responses to designated associations (November 2007)

- Facilitated a joint meeting with all designated associations and representatives of the Department for Social Development where members of the ECNI's Statutory Duty Team outlined their views on implementation of the new Monitoring Guidelines. (January 2008)
- Collated final reports of Year 2 EQIAs and publicised their availability in the three main Northern Ireland daily papers (February 2008)
- Throughout the year NIFHA staff regularly participated in a range of Inter-Agency Groups which enable engagement with 'equalities' organisations – this is in addition to electronic networking and consultation with relevant groups. For example, engaged with the Coalition on Sexual Orientation on the issue of developing procedural guidelines for housing staff.
- Where appropriate NIFHA has also consulted with members and provided detailed written responses on relevant consultation exercises by other organisations.

Good Relations Duty

The Federation continued to be an active participant in the Shared Future Housing Advisory Panel, chaired by the NIHE, which comprises 15 different organisations engaged in the development of a workable strategy for supporting mixed community housing across Northern Ireland. NIFHA is involved in this group in its role as an umbrella organisation while individual member associations implement the strategy in the community. During the reporting period the Federation also explored and encouraged the use of the Shared Housing 'brand' in existing housing association developments.

The above-mentioned Advisory Panel had another productive year. Significant outcomes for 2007-08 included:

- Developing a three year Shared Neighbourhoods Programme
- Obtaining International Fund for Ireland Federation funding for that programme
- The second shared housing scheme being built in Sion Mills by Habinteg (Ulster) HA

The Federation's Chief Executive is on the Business Committee overseeing the work of the Shared Neighbourhoods Programme. In addition, NIFHA maintained its involvement with a variety of Inter-agency Groups working to foster good relations, such as:

- Community Relations Council

- Supporting Communities Northern Ireland – NIFHA has a place on the Executive Committee of this organisation
- NICVA

Initiating and maintaining such strategic alliances are integral to our work on behalf our membership. The experience gained through these activities enables NIFHA to offer members useful assistance and share best practice thus enhancing the associations approach to the good relations duty.

Disability Duties

Between January and June 2007 NIFHA undertook a range of activities to assist designated members in producing Disability Action Plans. The Federation's early work in this area was covered in the 2006-07 report.

Subsequent NIFHA support included:

- Providing regular information, advice and support in relation to the development of the associations' Disability Actions Plans
- Responding to members' queries about the Disability Duties
- Developing and sharing template Disability Action Plans that could be used by designated associations
- Arranging training sessions facilitated by Disability Action to ensure members were prepared for this new duty
- Co-ordinating and publicising the associated public consultation exercise as mentioned previously
- Issuing prompts for action to ensure members met the ECNI's time targets for implementing Disability Actions Plans
- Liaison with Disability Action and ECNI as necessary

Once NIFHA's initial work to help members produce Disability Action Plans had been completed responsibility for their implementation was handed over to the individual association.

Lucinda McMurrin

Corporate Services Manager

NIFHA

29 August 2008