



**DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND
PERSONNEL REVIEW OF DOMESTIC
RATING – RATES DEFERMENT
SCHEME FOR HOME OWNING
PENSIONERS PUBLIC CONSULTATION
PAPER**

SEPTEMBER 2008

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INTRODUCTION

- 1** Disability Action is a pioneering Northern Ireland charity working with and for people with disabilities. We work with our members to provide information, training, transport awareness programmes and representation for people regardless of their disability; whether that is physical, mental, sensory, hidden or learning disability.
- 2** More than one in five (300,000) people in Northern Ireland has a disability and over one quarter of all families here are directly affected by disability issues.
- 3** As a campaigning body, we work to bring about positive change to the social, economic and cultural life of people with disabilities and consequently our entire community. In pursuit of our aims we serve 45,000 people each year.
- 4** Our network of services is provided via our Headquarters in Belfast and in three regional offices in Carrickfergus, Derry and Dungannon.
- 5** Disability Action welcomes the opportunity to respond to this draft and to aid our response has put the relevant page/paragraph of the draft in brackets at the end of our comments.

SPECIFIC COMMENTARY

- 6** Disability Action believes that the contact details in this consultation document should include a textphone number to enable deaf people the same access as those who are hearing. (Covering Letter)
- 7** Disability Action welcomes that the Department are allocating the 12 week consultation period. (Item 21)
- 8** Disability Action welcomes the offer of alternative formats, however requests the Department of Finance and Personnel to list the range available e.g. large print, audio cassette, Braille, computer disc etc. (Item 23)
- 9** Disability Action would ask the Department to provide us with details of the level of accessibility of its website and whether or not it meets current European Standards. (Item 24)

10 Additionally, the Department should state that it will accept comment/feedback in the format preferred by the consultee. Consultation is a core tenet of the duties and the Department must promote open, inclusive and meaningful consultation with those affected to obtain the widest view. This is a fundamental requirement of the statutory duties and is a question of the rights of individuals to access information already accessible to others. This needs to be urgently addressed as anything that narrows a participatory consultation process should be approached with caution. (Item 24)

DEFERMENT

11 Disability Action believes that:-

- There should not be a need for a deferment scheme if there was an effective relief scheme currently in place.
- Disability Action would be opposed to the introduction of a deferment scheme without adequate safeguards.
- Disability Action would be in favour however of effective relief schemes which would protect low income households.
- Disability Action would remind the Department that following the St Andrew's Agreement in April a rates cap was set at properties valued at £500,000 which is equivalent to the highest Council tax bill in England.
- Disability Action has concerns that the rates cap has been introduced that could be of an advantage to those on higher incomes rather than protect those on low incomes.
- Disability Action strongly believes that the rates system should be assessed on "income" and "ability" to pay.

CONCLUSION

- 12** Disability Action recognises the time and effort that have gone into producing this document for consultation and thanks the Department for the opportunity to respond and looks forward to continued dialogue.