



A2B Access to Benefits for Older People

Response to The Rating of Empty Homes

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A2B: Access to Benefits for Older People is a not for profit company limited by guarantee, number NI61324, registered in Northern Ireland.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 A2B is a not-for-profit organisation with a four year, fixed term life-span. Its vision is to empower and enable the older people of Northern Ireland to maximise their take-up of benefit entitlements.

1.2 A2B is developing online resources, available to older people, their carers, and Voluntary Sector and Governmental advisers to screen older people for benefit eligibility, prepare their claims applications, and submit their data for claims processing.

1.3 A2B welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. We have worked closely with the Rating Policy Division over the past few months and look forward to continuing this relationship. Over all, we welcome the content of the consultation. Some specific comments are laid out below.

2.0 General comments

2.1 We agree that allowances such as Lone Pensioner Allowance, Housing Benefit, Rate Relief or Disabled Person's Allowance should not continue when a property is empty as these benefits are based on the circumstances of the occupier.

2.2 As noted in our response to the initial '2007 Executive Review of Domestic Rating Reform', rates should not be charged if a property is unoccupied due to the normal resident needing hospital or residential care. We welcome the suggestion that this will be the case but would like some further clarification on whether there will be any time restriction in these circumstances.

2.3 If rates will not be charged on homes which are empty for the above reason, this needs to be made clear in any publicity about the new arrangements. Going into hospital or residential care can be a very stressful time for an older person and their family and they should be reassured that they will not have the additional worry of paying rates for an empty home.