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Wilson, Joanne

From: Elaine Campbell [ECampbell@ageconcernni.org]
Sent: 15 August 2008 13:55
To: Rating Policy CFG
Subject: Empty Homes



Northern Ireland

Review of Domestic Rating The Rating of Empty Homes

Age Concern Northern Ireland (ACNI) is a major voluntary organisation committed through campaigning and service provision to promoting the rights of all older people as active, involved and equal citizens. We act as a Northern Ireland-wide campaigning body and support a network of local Age Concern groups operating throughout Northern Ireland.

ACNI welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Review of Domestic Rating consultations. We have been involved with discussions with rating policy over the past couple of years and have found these discussions quite useful.

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.

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.

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.

Elaine Campbell
Head of Policy

Age Concern Northern Ireland
3 Lower Crescent
Belfast BT7 1NR

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+ tel 028 9024 5729 + email ecampbell@ageconcernni.org + web www.ageconcernni.org

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