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1 Introduction

1.1 NIACRO, the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders, is a voluntary organisation and charity, which has been working for 35 years to reduce crime and its impact on individuals and communities. NIACRO provides services under the headings of: promoting safer communities; working with children and young people who offend; providing services to families and children of offenders; supporting offenders and ex-prisoners in the community; and working with prisoners.

1.2 NIACRO has links with all the main criminal justice agencies in Northern Ireland and connects with other bodies / organisations in the voluntary, community and private sectors.

1.3 Many prisoners have experienced a life of social exclusion and will face barriers to reintegration upon release. Prisoners are:

- 13 times more likely to have been in care as a child
- 20 times more likely to have been excluded from school
- 13 times more likely to be unemployed
- 1/3 lose their house whilst in prison
- 2/3 lose their job
- Over 1/5 face increased financial problems
- Over 2/5 lose contact with family during a sentence

1.4 NIACRO's work with offenders and their families is informed and supported by research. Through our work we know that the basic resettlement needs of prisoners include accommodation; money; training and employment support; supportive family relationships and social networks; and access to programmes to address behavioural issues. Significantly, having stable accommodation can reduce the risk of a person re-offending by 20%¹.

2. General Comments on Proposals in Consultation Document

2.1 Given the particular focus of our work NIACRO strongly advocates the approach stated in the consultation document that the empty homes of **prison detainees** should be excluded from rating. This will ensure the small but significant number of sentenced prisoners who own their home will not be faced with potentially sizeable demands for arrears which accrue during their time in custody.

2.2 We support the preferred approach adopted in the document in relation to the level of liability; phasing the rating of empty homes; the £20,000 minimum capital value is appropriate; the 12 month exemption period for new property developments; the use of completion notices to determine when rates liability begins for new empty homes; and the introduction of powers to address anti-avoidance measures.

¹ Social Exclusion Unit, Reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners, 2002

3. CONCLUSION

3.1 NIACRO welcomes this opportunity to comment on the public consultation document **Review of Domestic Rating – the Rating of Empty Homes**. We hope our comments, while brief, will support the Department in its task of formulating a policy for the rating of empty homes which helps it achieve its wider policy objective of improving housing affordability and availability for the homeless.



NIACRO works to reduce crime and its impact on people and communities

with compliments

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