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BANBRIDGE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

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LIAM HANNAWAY - CHIEF EXECUTIVE

8 January 2008

Mr Brian McClure
Department of Finance and Personnel
Rating Policy Division
Room D12, Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor BT19 7NA

Dear Sir

LONE PENSIONER ALLOWANCE CONSULTATION

This Council welcomes the proposed Lone Pensioner Allowance scheme scheduled to come into operation from 1 April 2008. In relation to the specific issues raised in the Department's consultation website referenced in your letter dated December 2007 the Council would comment as follows.

1. Application Form

Question

Views are sought on the application form that should be used in relation to the proposed Lone Pensioner Allowance.

Answer

The Council agrees with the Ministers view that in order to encourage and facilitate widespread take-up a separate simplified form should be designed in relation to the Lone Pensioner Allowance.

2. Administering Authority

Question

The Department is seeking to hear views on what the best approach would be for administering the proposed allowance.

Answer

The Council has no fixed view on whether there should be a single administering authority or the existing separate LPS/NIHE remain in place. We suggest the Department further explore the possibility for simplifying the process for housing benefit/rate relief to facilitate both ease of take-up and administration and to eliminate the need for separate systems.

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3. Authentication

Question (a)

What means of identification, if any, should the Department use in relation to establishing the age and status of those applying for the allowance?

Answer

In order to encourage take up and minimise complexity in the scheme the Council would favour a simple declaration without supporting documentation with a provision that the applicant authorises the Department to carry out cross referencing checks.

Question (b)

What steps should the Department implement in order to minimise fraud in relation to the proposed allowance?

Answer

Local Authorities in NI do not have access to information available on households in Great Britain, particularly not in relation to dates of birth. In order to minimise fraud we would urge the Department to determine a methodology for referencing application information to state pension records.

4. Other Considerations

Question

Are there any other issues which the Department should be aware of in relation to the administration of the allowance?

Answer

The Council are of the view that where a lone pensioner owns more than one property that the allowance is payable once only on the property with the lowest rateable value.

Further the Department should make all reasonable attempts to facilitate the application process for those with particular needs including physical, mental or language problems.

5. Disregards

Question

The Department is seeking views on which groups of ratepayers, if any, should be disregarded in relation to this proposed allowance.

Answer

The Council is of the view that under the eligibility criteria for this discount that it is appropriate for some groups who might occupy the same dwelling to be 'disregarded'. These might include full time students, patients in hospital and those living in care homes.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this new allowance and we trust our views will be reflected in the new arrangements due to come into force.

Yours faithfully



P J CUMISKEY
Director of Corporate Services