

CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Private Rented Sector Consultation Network NI	<p>Understands the reasons to invoke the necessary measures to promote efficiency savings. Offers encouragement and support.</p>	<p>Acknowledged.</p>
Coleraine Borough Council	<p>Concerns at the potential for concentrating jobs at the Centre.</p> <p>Concerns that Coleraine HMO Office is to have a reduced staff.</p> <p>Consideration to be given to protect jobs located outside Belfast.</p>	<p>Review proposal 6 Grants Offices and a sub-office plus 2 HMO Units and a sub-office in Craigavon. Geographical spread of work is assured.</p> <p>The number and location of staff is proportioned to anticipated workload.</p>
Craigavon Borough Council	<p>Concerns that the level of grants has been drastically cut with only mandatory grants (Disabled Facilities Grants) assisted. Loss of discretionary grants.</p>	<p>Funding level is outside the control of the Housing Executive.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Craigavon Borough Council (continued)	Concerns as to whether 8 staff in the new HMO sub-office is sufficient.	Currently 8 staff is deemed sufficient though this will be kept under review.
Disability Action	<p>Recommends that this policy be subject to a full EQIA because of adverse impact on disabled people in rural and urban areas.</p> <p>The Housing Executive should have concessions to broader issues of access e.g. compliance with DDA 1995.</p> <p>Assessment for reasonable adjustment for staff members' redeployment that may highlight an adjustment that was not previously known.</p>	<p>Equality screening by the Housing Executive's Equality Unit has not recommended a full EQIA. There are equality issues associated with the review of grants outlets; however these issues have been debated, consulted on and suitably mitigated in relation to our Modernising Services Policy and Redeployment Policy EQIAs. These EQIAs effectively set the new standard for dealing with staff and customers affected by office moves.</p> <p>In relation to the three specific points raised please note the following:</p> <p>Point 1: The potential impact on customers and potential customers is negligible and not significant. Only a very small proportion of customers visit Grants Offices and therefore the location of the office is not a significant accessibility issue.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
<p>Disability Action (continued)</p>		<p>Point 2: We accept all the points made by Disability Action. We note however that we continue to develop our approaches to access to information and services as we develop new systems and amend existing systems. The Housing Executive would consider the impacts on customers with regard to the Outlet Review to be minimal.</p> <p>Point 3: We accept all the points made in point three. Staff affected by the Review will be interviewed individually to ensure that all needs are met including those associated with a staff member's disability. As an organisation we also recognise the challenges faced by carers and will take these issues on board with regard to individual circumstances. On a general level we also operate a range of flexible working practices to help staff members balance their working life with other challenges.</p>
<p>Omagh District Council</p>	<p>Council concurs with the proposal to amalgamate the Omagh and Fermanagh grants offices in Omagh.</p>	<p>Acknowledged</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Omagh District Council (continued)	<p>Council concurs with the proposal to retain the Fermanagh Office as a sub-office of Omagh.</p> <p>Pleased that the proposals will be subject to equality screening and equality principles applied to redeployment.</p>	<p>Equality screening by the Housing Executive Equality Unit has not recommended a full EQIA assessment – see above response to Disability Action.</p>
Newry & Mourne District Council	<p>Support the proposed amalgamation of Newry and Craigavon Grants Offices in a single Management Team located in Newry.</p>	<p>Acknowledged</p>
Landlords Association of Northern Ireland	<p>Acknowledges that the workload of PSIS has been reduced through budget reductions and modernising.</p> <p>Reduced performance is linked to restricted access to finance to carry out grant works.</p>	<p>Acknowledged</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
<p>Landlords Association of Northern Ireland (continued)</p>	<p>Appropriate that staff be reduced.</p> <p>Question the necessity and effectiveness of the HMO Registration Scheme.</p> <p>Additional staff required because Registrations are running behind.</p> <p>High levels of landlord/tenant satisfaction seriously questions the appropriateness of HMO Legislation and bureaucratic procedures.</p> <p>Encourages the elimination of bureaucracy on the provision of private and public housing.</p>	<p>Legislative and policy basis for Registration Scheme rests with the DSD. HMO Strategy and Registration Scheme were subject to separate consultation exercises.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Jim Shannon MP	<p>Concerns regarding delays in processing grants as a result of the amalgamation of Lisburn and Dundonald Grants Offices.</p> <p>Concern over staff losses.</p> <p>Concerns over contact with the office.</p>	<p>Acknowledged and assured MP that no delays will occur and access will be maintained following amalgamation.</p>
Newtownabbey Borough Council	<p>Supports in principle every effort to introduce efficiency savings</p> <p>Concerns about the loss of “across the counter” service in Ballyclare for Newtownabbey Borough and if a part time service could be made available at either of the Newtownabbey District Offices on a weekly or fortnightly basis</p> <p>No objection to streamlining and trying to provide services in a more efficient and cost effective manner</p>	<p>The Grants Office does not have a large “across the counter” service as most people contact the Grants Office by phone and submit documentation by post. The increased travel time for customers to visit the Ballymena Grants Office will be mitigated by staff visiting grants applicants where necessary.</p> <p>It is not considered an effective use of staff resources to set up a service weekly or fortnightly in either of the Newtownabbey District Offices.</p>

COMMENTS MADE – NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS

	Publication	Comments	
1	Ulster Gazette 2/9/2010 – William Irwin, DUP MLA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slammed the move by DSD to close the Craigavon Grants Office. • Staff told they would relocate to Newry in a cost cutting exercise. • The move will inconvenience those requiring grants assistance and staff. • Concerned that such a large area will not be covered by its own regional office, the move will leave too great an area without a local grants office facility. • Grants Scheme has had severe cuts in recent months and constituents waiting on urgent repairs. Grateful that it hasn't affected the DFG process. • Staff will have further to travel, it is imperative that all staff are retained. • Craigavon is a much more central location and he is at a loss as to why the decision has been taken, especially as Co. Armagh is without a Grants Department. 	

	Publication	Comments	
2.	Portadown Times 3/9/2010 William Irwin, DUP MLA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Same comments as above • Official comments from the Housing Executive about the budget cuts and the need to reduce the number of outlets. 	
3	Newtownards Chronicle 16/9/2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General narrative about the outlet proposals and the reasoning behind the decision. No comments from Representatives. 	
4	Lurgan and Portadown Examiner 16/9/2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns from William Irwin DUP MLA that Co Armagh would be left without a Grants Office. • Official comments from the Housing Executive about the budget cuts and the need to reduce the number of outlets. 	

COMMENTS FROM GRANTS OFFICES

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Belfast Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Significant potential for discretionary grants and Group Repair in Village URA, especially complex Test of Resources work for students and self-employed cases. • Request to keep existing staff complement or reduce by 1 LV4 and 1 TL2. 	<p>Additional work in relation to Village URA work merits additional LV4 staff.</p>
Dundonald Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledge the need for the review to provide proper staffing structure. • Staff expectation that Dundonald office would be retained as better accommodation, car-parking and location. • Proposed staff number is correct for amalgamated Lisburn and Dundonald offices. • Disagrees with balance between LV4 and LV3s requests to maintain 2 LV4s rather than proposed 1 LV4 to retain expertise in the office. 	<p>Decision to relocate Grants Office to Lisburn was based on more central location within the area, better travel links for staff and customers. There are more staff located in the Lisburn Grants Office than in the Dundonald office, therefore less disruption of staff by relocating to the Lisburn office.</p> <p>Further consideration of workload has not identified justification for additional LV4 staff.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
<p>Dundonald Grants (continued)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer to manage office staff within an agreed budget rather than the proposed staff structure. • Increased travel time for customers should be mitigated by staff visiting grants applicants. • Customers views should be sought. • Important to keep staff informed particularly those affected. • Outlet Review should be implemented as soon as possible. 	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Extensive consultation exercise carried out with public representatives to gain views of customers.</p> <p>Communication channels set up to inform staff of developments.</p> <p>PSIS Review to be implemented by end of March 2011.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Ballyclare Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff believed that staff in Ballyclare and Ballymena would be amalgamating rather than the Ballyclare office was to close. Staff in Ballyclare will only move to Ballymena if vacancies exist. • Full consideration of building costs, travel cost for staff and customers should be taken into account. • Staff have developed an expertise on PSMS as the pilot office which would be best if grants staff are transferred to other departments. Staff wish to remain in grants service. • Volume of work involving complex Test of Resources for self-employed farm-owners and land owners required more than 1 LV4. 	<p>Personnel Relocation Policy applies which provides opportunities in the area for relocation of staff.</p> <p>Accommodation strategy considered. Relocation of staff mitigates travel costs.</p> <p>Further consideration of workload has not identified a justification for additional LV4 staff.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Ballyclare Grants (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reallocation of work to Ballymena will mean loss of staff rapport with existing customers. • Imperative that one to one interviews with Personnel and vacancies are identified for staff to relocate to at the earliest opportunity. • Training to be provided for staff moving to new posts in other Divisions. • Clarification on when and how additional Level 3 will be recruited. • LV4 staff to be retained as personal to holder case officer posts. 	<p>Good customer relations will be built up over time in the Ballymena office for grants applications that transfer.</p> <p>Where required interviews with Personnel will be held and relocation opportunities will be identified as soon as possible.</p> <p>Training will be provided for staff in new location.</p> <p>As soon as practicably possible.</p> <p>Personal to holder grades is not permitted in personnel policy.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
<p>Derry Grants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review office structure effects LV2,LV3,LV4, TL2 and LV6. • Increase in Level 3 Case Officer posts is welcomed, but if appointed from outside Grants Section will lack expertise. • Anticipate increased demands on Senior Technical Officers (STO) than in other western Grants Offices. Request through flexible retirement plans to keep 1.6 Senior Technical Officers rather than the proposed one included in the new structure. • Request consideration being given to number of enquiries/cases as opposed to standard output per post to calculate the number of TL2 (Technical Officers) particularly in relation to the type of grants processed. 	<p>Further consideration of workload has not justified additional Senior Technical Officer staff. The other western Grants Office has retained two Senior Technical Officers because of the retention of a sub-office in Fermanagh.</p> <p>Further consideration has been given to the workload in the office and has not increased the level of TL2 staff.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
HMO East	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requirement for higher levels of HMO Registrations, together with the reluctance of landlords to register their HMO properties places greater demands on administrative staff. Proposed reduction of 2 LV3 officers should not take place. 	<p>Further consideration of HMO Registration workload has justified retention of 2 LV3 staff and additional 2 TL2 staff.</p>
Fermanagh Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff relieved that Fermanagh Grants Office is to be retained albeit as a sub-office. • Review office structure affects LV7 Grants Manager, LV4 and LV2s. • Limited opportunities to relocate staff identified as surplus. • Request to retain 2 LV4s as one is part-time rather than the proposed 1 LV4 to retain expertise. 	<p>Further consideration of workload has not identified a justification for additional LV4 staff.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Fermanagh Grants (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request to continue with existing staff grades. • Implement the LV3 recruitment exercise as soon as possible. 	<p>Proposed staff structure meets the long- term needs of the office to efficiently process grant applications. As soon as practicably possible.</p>
Craigavon Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Craigavon staff will be relocating to Newry provided vacancies exist in Newry, and staff wish to move to fill the vacancies. • Staff have worked a long time in grants and feel that they are being hung out to dry. • Craigavon still feel that their office should be retained based on projected workloads. 	<p>Personnel Relocation Policy applies which provides opportunities in the area for relocation of staff.</p> <p>The aim of the review is to place suitably graded staff in appropriate locations to effectively process a much reduced workload.</p> <p>Further consideration of workloads does not support the retention of the Craigavon office over the Newry office. The creation of a HMO sub-office in Craigavon provides for staff relocation opportunities and is ideally situated in the most central position.</p>

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
Craigavon Grants (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff requested one to one interviews and to be told about opportunities for relocation as soon as possible. 	Where required interviews with Personnel will be held and relocation opportunities will be identified as soon as possible.

COMMENT FROM UNION

Respondent	Comments	Action Taken
NIPSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation has been ongoing and NIPSA's position has been provided and discussed at various forums. Comments have been submitted. 	<p>We have held a consultation meeting with NIPSA and discussed the Review at the Organisation Development Committee and Divisional Council meetings.</p> <p>In relation to the comments submitted there will be further consultation at a meeting this week. Consultation will continue to be held throughout the implementation process.</p>