

IPH response to the Department for Social Development Draft Regeneration and Housing Bill

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IPH recognise that housing and regeneration initiatives are key determinants of health and have responded to the Department for Social Development (DSD), Draft Regeneration and Housing Bill.

Access the original consultation here <http://www.dsdni.gov.uk/index/consultations/consultation-draft-regenerat...>

Below is the full IPH response

Introduction

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland

The Institute of Public Health in Ireland (IPH) aims to improve health on the island of Ireland by working to combat health inequalities and influence public policies in favour of health. The Institute promotes cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in public health research, training and policy advice.

IPH acknowledge that health is influenced by a wide range of social determinants, including economic, environmental, social and biological factors. Housing and regeneration initiatives are identified as key determinants of health and IPH welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Department for Social Development (DSD), Draft Regeneration and Housing Bill. This presents a real opportunity to improve the lives of citizens through local government work.

Key points

- The power of well-being for local councils has the ability to address health and health inequalities at a local level and should be taken to cover the wider determinants of health.
- There needs to be policy integration amongst councils to ensure health inequalities are not further exacerbated possibly inadvertently.
- The transfer of planning powers to local councils is welcomed but requires an intense period of capacity building which should include an understanding of how planning and the built environment impacts on health.
- New powers can act as an additional driving force to address fuel poverty. Schemes should be based on best practice projects which are already evident in local councils in Northern Ireland.

Integration with Community Planning and Power of Well-Being. Responsibility for these powers at a local level allows for improved local governance and decision making involving those whose lives the decisions affect. The ability to integrate the delivery of the powers in this Bill with the powers of Well-Being and Community Planning, which are also being enacted for the new councils, is significant. IPH emphasizes that the new 'power of wellbeing' needs to include the wider determinants of health i.e. transport, social interaction, employment etc and therefore local councils have to truly engage in the wider health agenda.

Integration across Councils. Ensuring full integration of policy across Northern Ireland is however also very important; people should not be disadvantaged through living in one council area rather than another on some of the major aspects of this Bill. This is particularly important with regard to dealing with the energy efficiency of homes as well as the unfitness of homes. Health inequalities are differences in health outcomes between different population groups. These inequalities follow a marked social gradient, i.e. those in lower socioeconomic groups have poorer health and this goes right the way through society. In Northern Ireland there are different health outcomes depending on where you live e.g. males in Strabane have the lowest life expectancy levels in Northern Ireland at 74 years compared to 76 years. However there are also variations within council areas and these areas of deprivation also need to be addressed. IPH has developed an All-Ireland interactive health map which clearly shows these differences at <http://www.publichealth.ie/map/ireland.htm>

Involvement of Voluntary and Community Groups. Working with the voluntary and community sector will give improved outcomes within a number of areas of the proposed devolved powers, including both the practical delivery of programmes (for example energy efficiency programmes) and working with such groups to develop consensus around proposals (e.g. for proposed schemes). Powers to fund NGOs to deliver work on behalf of the council is therefore vital (pt 10) but so is promoting the understanding within councils on why, and how, working with NGOs is of significant benefit to the council, delivering stronger and more supported economic, social and environmental outcomes.

Capacity Building for Planning Functions. IPH welcomes the transfer of local planning powers to local councils for local accountability but serious consideration needs to be given as to how this can happen to ensure that initial decisions made are based on rigorous systems in place from the start of the transfer. Capacity building for all those to be involved in the planning process is required, and should begin as soon as practical to ensure that the skills and understanding of all relevant issues including health are in place for both council officers and councillors. Ensuring that the community has strong roles in the process, for example through the Pre-Application Consultation, is an essential element if the public is to have confidence that their concerns will be taken into account.

Energy Efficiency in Housing. Fuel poverty is still a major health concern in Northern Ireland and IPH supports these proposed powers which can provide a welcome additional driver to address

the issue of fuel poverty and inefficient and expensive use of energy. Schemes should be developed based on best practice and copied throughout Northern Ireland to ensure that we do not develop a spatially unfair system. Mechanisms need to be in place to ensure that funding for this important work is not diverted to other areas. There is significant opportunity for involving NGOs in delivery and promotion aspects of this work, ensuring both full local support and understanding and delivering the work in an economically efficient manner.

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