

04 November 2024

**Our Ref: FOI 540**

## **Request**

We received your request on 07 October 2024 for the following information:

*We are seeking to understand NIHE procedures and processes around 1) acquiring and 2) allocating non-standard temporary accommodation (TA).*

*1/ With regard to acquisition:*

*A. What criteria do the NIHE use in identifying hotels and B&Bs to use as non-standard TA?*

*B. Are the following criteria considered? (i) Cost of the average meal, (ii) Distance from key facilities (schools, shops, GP surgery), (iii) Nearest public transport options, and cost of travel to the nearest town/city centre, (iv) crime rate in the area.*

*C. If there is a Policy that guides those acquiring non-standard TA, please share the Policy.*

*D. What agreement does the NIHE set in place with providers of non-standard temporary accommodation? For example, if there is a standard contract/the average contract, please share the contract. If there is no standard contract, please share an example contract.*

*E. Are contracts with providers open-ended or generally taken for a set amount of time?*

*F. What factors determine payments made to providers of non-standard TA? E.g., standard rates charged by the provider, number of rooms made available, provision and quality of any meals provided.*

*2/ With regard to allocation:*

*A. Please provide us with copies of the policies, alongside any updates, used by*

*Housing Advisors/similar in the allocation of non-standard temporary accommodation.*

*B. Our assumption is that the policy/updates on allocating non-standard TA will outline the process a Housing Advisor/similar should follow in allocating a TA placement. If this is not the case, then separately, please outline the process a Housing Advisor/similar will follow in identifying a non-standard placement for a household, including the following:*

- (i) What factors are taken into account in making the placement?*
- (ii) Are the following factors considered? a) A household's need to be close to a particular facility, for example, a school, GP surgery, pharmacy. b) A household's specific food needs, e.g., having a baby, or specific health-related needs or conditions (e.g., diabetes). c) Transport options suited to activities/tasks a household needs to engage with. d) Measures of the relative safety of an area.*
- (iii) What process is followed if an applicant refuses to take a placement?*
- (iv) What are the assurance-related mechanisms through which the NIHE can measure the extent to which placements are suitable?*

Your request has been handled under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA).

## **Our response**

- 1.A) For placements in non-standard accommodation (B&B/Hotels) the Housing Executive acquires the use of accommodation in the same manner of other customer groups who avail of Hotels/B&Bs whereby the respective Hotel/B&B is subject to the relevant checks and accreditation in order to operate as a short-term accommodation. The Housing Executive is not responsible for such inspections.
- 1.B) When acquiring non-standard temporary accommodation, the Housing Executive will consider factors such as the individual circumstances and the needs of a given Applicant and will take on board any representation made on behalf of the Applicant. Availability is also a key factor.
- 1.C) Please see the response to Q.1 above. Usage of non-standard accommodation is on the same basis as other customer groups and there is therefore no policy relating to the acquisition of these premises.
- 1.D) There are no contractual arrangements in place with providers of non-standard temporary accommodation. The Housing Executive does not take over the management of non-standard accommodation and usage will be under the same terms and conditions as for any other paying guest at the property.
- 1.E) There are no contracts in place for non-standard temporary accommodation. The majority of non-standard temporary accommodation is acquired as and when required, with a small number of block-booking arrangements in place.

- 1.F) The Housing Executive will consider a range of factors in the use of any non-standard temporary accommodation with such factors including location and household size which in turn will impact on the bedroom requirements for any placements.
- 2A) Use of Non-Standard accommodation is in cases of emergency only and where no other suitable accommodation has been identified. Use will be, as outlined below in the relevant sections from Chapter 7 of the Homeless Guidance Manual, for as short as time as possible and staff are required to seek transfer to more suitable accommodation when available.

## 7.5 Use of Temporary Accommodation

As a matter of policy, temporary accommodation should be utilised based on the applicants support needs. Below is a list of the types of accommodation available for selection: -

- i. NIHE temporary accommodation
- ii. Voluntary sector hostels
- iii. Private sector – Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency Accommodation (DIME -Procured Contract)
- iv. Private sector – single lets
- v. Private sector – hotels / B&B's (Emergency Situations Only)

In exceptional circumstances, where the Designated Officer is considering using non-standard temporary accommodation they must ensure that a member of the Management Team has given their approval for its use in order to enable the Housing Executive to meet its statutory duty to a homeless applicant. This may include having to source temporary accommodation outside of the HMS Bed Bureau. Designated Officers who use non-standard temporary accommodation must actively begin an exit strategy immediately and Case Manage to avoid lengthy stays in non-standard accommodation. Where non-standard accommodation i.e. Hotels and B&B's are being selected, it is important that Designated Officers negotiate optimum rates and conditions of occupation and record the rate on HMS (Voucher Notes)

### 7.9.3 Non-Standard Temporary Accommodation (Hotels/B&Bs)

When placing an applicant in non-standard hotel/B&B accommodation the Designated Officer should advise the applicant that this is an emergency placement and that move-on will be facilitated as soon alternative more appropriate temporary accommodation becomes available. Applicants should be advised that smoking in hotel/B&B accommodation is strictly forbidden and may incur a charge. Similarly, if they cause damage in the accommodation, this may also result in a charge. Should you place an applicant in an ad-hoc hotel/B&B accommodation you MUST key the placement via External Placement folder on HMS as HMS guidance, you MUST then create and issue a voucher to enable payment to be made. If Designated Officers

have exhausted options in the standard temporary accommodation portfolio (voluntary sector hostels, single-lets, DIME) or where the applicant is refused from these providers, should a placement be made elsewhere to ad-hoc hotels/B&B accommodation.

- 2.B) The decision regarding the suitability of emergency temporary accommodation offered in the discharge of the homelessness duty is made in accordance with the '88 Order. In determining suitability, specific Designated Officers within the Housing Executive will consider factors such as the individual circumstances and the needs of a given Applicant and will take on board any representation made on behalf of the Applicant. Placements can be offered in emergency temporary accommodation that does not meet all the relevant suitability factors.

While an individual may feel the emergency temporary accommodation which has been made available is unreasonable, it should be noted that the Housing Executive can meet its homelessness duty by keeping an Applicant in accommodation that would not be suitable to occupy on a long term basis but it would not be unreasonable for the Applicant to occupy for a short period. This is while the Housing Executive continues to look for a permanent housing solution, which can be a Housing Executive or Housing Association property, within their area of choice.

If an Applicant with FDA does not agree with the Housing Executive's decision as to the suitability of the accommodation offered in the discharge of the homelessness duty, they have rights within the '88 Order to request a review as to the suitability of accommodation offered to them in discharge of the duty.

This concludes our response.