

aiac

**Association of Independent Advice
Centres (NI)**

Social Policy Briefing

1 October 2001

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Replacement Windows

AIAC first became aware of this issue when the following question was asked in the Assembly:

“NIHE Property : Replacements Windows

Mr Roy Beggs asked the Minister for Social Development to detail the criteria used by the Housing Executive to determine whether replacement windows are wooden or uPVC. (AQW 3507/00)

Mr Morrow: The Housing Executive’s Chief Executive has advised that softwood, hardwood and UPVC materials are currently used in the manufacture of window frames for Housing Executive contracts. The Executive’s approved standard material for window frames is softwood. There are, however, certain circumstances where softwood is inappropriate, such as:

- the material used for the windows in an existing phase or phases of a scheme:***
- sound insulation requirements,***
- climate exposure,***
- medium/high rise construction or***
- location eg maritime environment.***

In these circumstances, either uPVC or hardwood may be used. In addition, if there is no conflict in the choice of materials with adjacent Housing Executive housing, the Executive may apply an approved financial formula to establish which material represents best value for money.”

AIAC contacted the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) to clarify which grants scheme allowed for UPVC double glazed windows. A copy of the above question and answer was also forwarded to NIHE. The response was as follows:

“The Ministerial Answer to which you refer in your message appeared to relate to public sector housing. Grants are, however, currently made available to private sector properties.

Grant aid may include provision of replacement windows though the specification will be for standard wooden type window frames and double glazing is not specifically grant aided. Many grants applicants chose, however, to opt for double glazing when requested by us to replace windows as part of a grant schedule for grant aided works and add the extra funds required.”

AIAC responded to the NIHE by asking if there would be a larger 'allowance' made in view of the fact that UPVC double glazed windows are more expensive. Or would the grant just allow for soft wood, single glazed windows, and the applicant would have to find the difference.

The NIHE response did not move the issue forward:

“Our grant applicants are requested to install double glazing when windows are being replaced within an existing dwelling or being provided for the first time as part of a new build scheme, and the vast majority of applicants do opt for a double glazing solution which would qualify for grant aid.

The relevant grants are Renovation, Replacement, Disabled Facilities, Repairs Grant and Minor Works Assistance.”

We did not feel that this response dealt adequately with the issue, so we wrote to the Minister for Social Development. We argued that in certain circumstances softwood is inappropriate (as pointed out in the written Assembly response), and as such it should be possible for people in either the public or private sector to seek appropriate assistance with the installation of UPVC double glazing.

The Minister replied stating that this issue was an operational matter for the NIHE and as such the issue was passed to Mr Paddy McIntyre, Chief Executive of the NIHE. His response was as follows:

“The Housing Executive can provide grant aid for unfit private properties under the Home Improvement Grants Scheme. If a property is unfit for human habitation grant aid will include the provision of windows if it is appropriate. The Housing Executive’s window replacement cost under Schedule of Rates allows for UPVC double glazed installation which is opted for by the vast majority of applicants.

However, if a grant applicant decides to install single glazing, a deduction would be made from the rates to reflect the cost saving.

If an applicant uses timber frames rather than UPVC no adjustment is made to the rates as there is no significant difference in costs when painting etc. is taken into account.

The Housing Executive specification for windows includes double glazing when all the windows are being replaced in an existing dwelling or being provided for the first time in a new dwelling. However, there may be occasions where this would not be appropriate for a particular dwelling eg. Historic Monuments and Buildings Branch listed property.”

Therefore, as a result of AIAC following up this issue, the Housing Executive have at the very least clarified their policy on replacement windows, and indeed may have now changed their policy from:

- Grant aid may include provision of replacement windows though the specification will be for standard wooden type window frames and double glazing is not specifically grant aided.

To:

- The Housing Executive’s window replacement cost under Schedule of Rates allows for UPVC double glazed installation which is opted for by the vast majority of applicants.

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AIAC Mission Statement

AIAC is a voluntary organisation for the independent advice sector in Northern Ireland, representing and giving voice to it's members aspirations to deliver effective and holistic, community or issue-based advice through the provision of services, support and development opportunities.

Values

As a membership organisation, our values are embedded in promoting the application of creative community development approaches to advice giving, which place people and communities at the centre of the process and involves them in finding solutions and making informed choices.

AIAC believes in

Quality advice which is delivered free.

Advice services which are impartial and non-judgemental and respect the individuals dignity.

Advice which is wholly confidential, and accountable to the public.

Independent advice, which is free from statutory or private control and is both non-party political and non-sectarian in nature.

Advice services which are aimed specifically towards overcoming social exclusion.

Offering people choice through the provision of flexible, accessible advice services.

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