

# Town Planning Committee

Monday, 24th June, 2013

## MEETING OF TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman M. Campbell (Chairman);  
Aldermen McCoubrey and Rodgers; and  
Councillors Austin, M. E. Campbell, Curran, Garrett,  
Haire, Lavery and McCarthy.

Also attended: Councillors Convery, Keenan and Thompson

In attendance: Mrs. P. Scarborough, Democratic Services Section; and  
Dr. J. McPeake }  
Mr. S. Graham }  
Mr. R Hawe }  
Ms. S. Beattie } Northern Ireland Housing Executive  
Ms. C. Johnstone }  
Mr. M. McKinney }  
Mrs. A. Smyth }

### Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported from the Chairman (Councillor Hanna), Aldermen R. Patterson and Smyth and Councillors Hendron, A. Newton and Webb.

### Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

### Proliferation of 'To Let' Signs

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 21st March, a report in respect of the proliferation of 'To Let' signs displayed on properties throughout Belfast was considered. Concern had been expressed by the Committee regarding the negative visual impact which the overt display of such signs caused to the amenity of many areas. Accordingly, the Committee had agreed that its concerns be conveyed to the Planning and Local Government Group.

The Committee was advised that correspondence, dated 20th June, had been received from the Planning Secretariat, which enclosed a copy of a letter which had been issued by the Acting Chief Planner to the Council on 26th April. No record existed within the Council of the receipt of such letter. The letter responded that the Department of the

Environment was aware fully of the proliferation of the 'To Let' signs which were displayed on properties throughout the City and that, under the Advertisement Regulations, signs which related to the sale or letting of property may be displayed with deemed consent on the condition that the advertisement was removed within fourteen days after the sale was completed or the tenancy was granted. However, often such signs remained on properties long after completion of the sale or let. The letter pointed out that, when a complaint was received by the Department of the Environment, it would normally issue a warning letter which sought the removal of the unauthorised signage. However, there were a number of difficulties in relation to the enforcement in that it may have been difficult to establish the precise date that the tenancy of a property had been granted or that properties may be partially let with only one room remaining available to be let.

The Acting Chief Planner reported that a letter had been issued to a number of Estate Agents within the Belfast area which had advised them of the concerns which had been expressed and the potential enforcement proceedings which could be taken on the issue and that follow up investigations would be carried out in the coming weeks which may lead to the prosecution of those who had not complied with the Regulations.

A copy of the correspondence in relation to the above-mentioned matter was made available at the meeting for the information of the Members.

A Member expressed disappointment that the response had not covered adequately the concerns which had been raised in connection with the different types of signage which had been referred to nor the possibility of the restriction of the number of signs at each property, together with the location thereof. She proposed that a further letter be issued to the Acting Chief Planner which suggested that a restriction be placed upon agents to display one sign only at each property which would be located on the inside of a window, as opposed to being placed on the outside.

The Committee noted the response which had been received and agreed that a further letter be issued to the Acting Chief Planner as outlined above.

**Northern Ireland Housing Executive**  
**Belfast District Housing Plan and Local Housing Strategy 2013/2014**

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 7th March, it had agreed to receive from representatives of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive a presentation in respect of its District Housing Plan and Local Housing Strategy 2013/2014. Accordingly, Dr. J. McPeake, Chief Executive, Mr. S. Graham, Regional Manager, Mr. R. Hawe, Belfast Regional Planner, Ms. S. Beattie, West Belfast Area Manager, Ms. C. Johnston, South and East Belfast Area Manager, Mr. M. McKinney, North Belfast Area Manager and Mrs. A. Smyth, Information Officer, were welcomed to the meeting by the Chairman.

Dr. McPeake acknowledged the changing circumstances which the Housing Executive was undergoing and he stressed the importance of district offices and the ongoing need for social housing in the future. He reminded the Committee of the Department for Social Development's proposals for the reform of social housing which included the restructuring of the Housing Executive and he emphasised the commitment

of the organisation to work with the Department on the development of the new structure. He advised the Committee that, in line with the proposed separation of functions which were specified in the Fundamental Review document, the Housing Executive had set out the local housing strategy by regional housing services and landlord services against its corporate objectives.

Mr. Graham updated the Committee in respect of the Housing Executive's performance for the 2012/2013 year and its proposals for 2013/2014. The projected investment within Belfast in 2013/2014 was £53.83m, excluding investment in new build and the Warm Homes Scheme. He reported that the housing need assessment for 2012/2017 had identified a requirement for 5,586 additional units within Belfast. Whilst 409 social housing new build properties had been completed in 2012/2013, the demand for that tenure had exceeded supply. Waiting lists had continued to increase, with the most significant increase being in relation to single applicants. Mr. Graham stated that, as at March, 2013, there were 10,534 applications on the housing waiting list, which represented an increase of 1,724 from the previous year. Six thousand one hundred and forty six had been in housing stress and 5,327 households in Belfast had presented as homeless.

Mr. Graham provided an update in relation to planned maintenance and community initiatives, urban renewal areas and estate strategies and future initiatives in respect of housing led and smaller scale regeneration. He gave an outline of the social housing development programme schemes which had been completed, or commenced during the year, together with an update in relation to the new build schemes gross programme for 2013/2014. He explained the procedure which had been put in place for meeting the demand for social housing, including the arrangements with the private sector.

Mr. Graham concluded by welcoming the continued assistance of the Council in relation to District Policing and Community Safety Partnership working, student housing and youth engagement and he thanked the Elected Members and officers for the support which had been forthcoming during the year.

Dr. McPeake and the other members of the deputation then answered a range of questions from the Members in respect of the following:

- the number of firms which had been carrying out maintenance work for the Housing Executive and which had gone into liquidation and the possible reasons therefore;
- the process and timescale for the payment of invoices to firms for maintenance and reactive contracts;
- the replacement of economy seven heating systems;
- the new build scheme for the Lower Shankill area and the relationship of those to the regeneration plan for that area;

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- the review of the housing selection scheme and the allocation of houses to residents from within localities;
- an estimated commencement date for the double glazing replacement, phase two in the Lower Woodstock area;
- the boiler replacement scheme and the possibility of uploading application packs onto the website to allow for ease of submission;
- the urban renewal of the Limestone Road/New Lodge Road areas and the resultant impact on the rehousing of residents currently located within those areas; and
- the timescale for the completion and the execution of emergency and maintenance repairs during the period of absence of the contractor who had gone into liquidation.

After discussion, the Chairman thanked the deputation for their presentation and the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Chairman