

People and Communities Committee

Wednesday, 2nd August, 2017

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Sandford (Chairperson);
Aldermen Rodgers and McCoubrey; and
Councillors Austin, Corr Johnston, Garrett, Heading,
Lyons, McCabe, McReynolds, Milne and Newton.

Also attended: The High Sherriff (Alderman Haire);
Aldermen Convery, Kingston and Spence; and
Councillors Boyle, Bunting, Dudgeon and O'Donnell.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Assistant Director; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Deputy Lord Mayor Councillor Copeland and Alderman McKee.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentation

Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Housing Investment Plan for Belfast

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr. C. Bailie (Chief Executive), Mr I. McCrickard (Belfast Regional Manager) and Mr. R. Hawe (North Region Place Shaper), representing the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

Mr. Bailie introduced the members of his team and indicated that the purpose of the meeting was to notify the Council of its past year's performance and next year's proposals. He pointed out that, whilst the NIHE was required by statute to present to the Council, he recognised the important role of the Council and emphasised that an opportunity for effective joined-up working existed, particularly in respect of Community Planning powers and the Belfast Agenda.

Mr. Bailie provided the Members with a presentation on the Housing Investment Plan (HIP) for Belfast. He explained that the HIP was a four year plan with an annual update in the intervening years, this being the second update. He advised that the HIP provided an update on the progress of the Housing Executive and other agencies to achieve the intended outcomes, this included an overview of the housing market in Belfast, including details regarding social housing investment at a local level. He summarised further the five themes as contained within the presentation:

- to identify and meet housing need and demand;
- to improve people's homes;
- to transform people's lives;
- to enable sustainable neighbourhoods; and
- to deliver quality services.

He then proceeded to outline the key housing issues that had been identified as follows:

- an ageing population – 17% of the population was aged 60+ in 2005;
- 10,738 total applications on the waiting list – which was a slight decrease on last year;
- 7322 (68%) in housing stress – 2% increase on last year;
- 2361 social housing allocations – same as last year;
- 5395 households presented as homeless;
- 3289 households accepted as homeless (61%);
- 1058 temporary accommodation placements;
- 416 new social homes completed 2016/17; and
- 335 new social homes started in 2016/17.

The Committee noted the Future Housing Issues that had been identified by the NIHE as follows:

- Over 5000 new social housing units would be needed over the next five years;
- Large population increase (70,000) planned by 2035 – land availability and Local Development Plan Impact;
- Continued growth of the Private Rented Sector and Purpose Student Accommodation (PBSA) – now make up 20% of total housing stock in Belfast; and
- Stagnant owner occupied market.

He explained the HIP within the Local Belfast Context, insofar as the Local Development Plan (LDP) would impact on land availability, and also referred to the Regeneration Initiatives for Urban Renewal Areas, Building Successful Communities, Urban Villages and the Tower Block Strategy.

Mr. Bailie outlined that the HIP set out the strategic direction for housing across all tenures, both new and existing. He stated that since the publication of the HIP, the Housing Executive, as a statutory Community Planning and Local Development (LDP) partner, had welcomed the opportunity to work with the Council and stakeholders to incorporate and embed the HIP vision and outcomes within Community Planning and the LDP process and he highlighted that the Housing Executive would be continuing to liaise closely with the Council in this respect.

During Members' questions, the Committee was appraised regarding land banking, the vesting of land, the control of the private rental sector, this included discussion on housing benefit, the impact of welfare reform and the potential freezing of the local housing allowance and the role of the private rental sector and housing associations.

In light of the recent tragic fire at Grenfell, London, the officers from the NIHE answered a range of questions regarding the safety of its Tower Block buildings. The Chief Executive confirmed that rigorous testing had been undertaken on the cladding of all the NIHE buildings and they had passed the BR135 safety standard. He advised the Members that the Housing Executive would continue to monitor these buildings on a regular basis and assured the Committee that where any potential improvements had been identified the works would be carried out as a matter of urgency.

The Members also drew the attention of the officers from the NIHE to several further matters, a number of which are set out hereunder:

- the loss of open space due to the significant demand for additional housing in specific areas and the potential to consider green field sites outside the Council boundary;
- the potential inclusion of social housing as part of the redevelopment of the Sirocco site;
- the use of renewable energy solutions;
- housing demand and the subsequent waiting lists;
- the lack of one bedroom accommodation and the potential of occupants facing a bedroom tax charge;
- City Centre living and regeneration which included discussion pertaining to the potential redevelopment of derelict buildings and also the development of living accommodation above shops in the City Centre
- the standard of weed control at Housing Executive properties in the North of the City.

The Chief Executive concluded the presentation by advising that many of the HIP themes were complementary to the Council's Community Planning themes and could contribute to the achievements of the Community Planning outcomes. He stated that the Housing Executive looked forward to developing further its relationship with the Council to achieve the vision outlined in the Belfast Agenda.

The Chairperson thanked the officials from NIHE for attending and they left the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Contact NI

The Chairperson advised the Committee that the presentation from Contact NI which had been scheduled to take place at this meeting had been rescheduled and the representatives had been invited to present at the meeting of the Committee on Tuesday, 12th September.

Noted.

Chairperson