

QUESTIONS FROM CLLR .MCLAUGHLIN

- 1) As a core partner in Council's HLRG, how do NIHE intend to remove blight and dereliction from working class areas of our City, using the Belfast Agenda as a means to the construction of 31,000 additional homes in our City ?

RESPONSE: As a lead partner in Belfast Agenda's HLRG Housing Executive is working with the Council to realise the ambition of increasing the city's population. While there is not a key action to remove blight and dereliction specifically, a main priority is to assess and bring forward publicly owned land for housing, and to address barriers to development of strategic sites. Housing Executive continues to work with key partners Council and DfC to consider sites which can be developed for social housing in the first instance, subject to budget and strategic guidelines. Since the beginning of Belfast Agenda there have been over 1,000 housing completions on HLRG partners lands, with a further c900 under construction or programmed to commence in the next three years. Many of these are on vacant or redeveloped lands.

- 2) Can you provide an urgent update on the performance of Housing Solutions given the widely reported ongoing issues with clients who complain regularly of issues with lost information, change to housing advisor without notice and the undue delays to clients receiving their points allocation in a timely fashion ?

RESPONSE:

Mislaid information: We occasionally experience an issue with information/evidence emailed to a staff member who may be absent or on leave and therefore require it to be sent again to another colleague in order to process. We are not aware of either 'widely reported' or 'regular issues' with mislaid correspondence. BHSST have occasional complaints which we deal with immediately.

Changing Housing Advisors without notice: Yes, this is a confirmed issue and will unfortunately continue as it is largely outside of our control as staff leave the team regularly. Unfortunately it is not feasible to notify our 15,000+ applicants of staff changes and as soon as we are aware of a case where Advisor engagement is necessary the team make those arrangements. We receive a lot of contacts from existing customers whose circumstances are fully assessed and are waiting for housing. The team's capacity to provide that type of reassurance type support to applicants is very limited in the face of overwhelming volumes of contacts from others with an urgent need for our services and support.

Delays: Unfortunately given our chronic staffing issues an impact on our capacity to process cases is inevitable. Belfast Region and Housing Solutions have taken proactive steps to mitigate any impact, for example, by the introduction of Band 4 support roles, changes to call handling, expansion of Admin staff numbers, tightening up of Admin procedures, and an Overtime Register of experienced staff across the organisation. At 31st January 2025 those staff had been allocated 2207

cases to support and assess Belfast Region customers across Belfast and Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council areas.

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- 3) Can NIHE update members on the skills shortages across their business impacting primarily on repairs and COT's (Change of Tenancies) and the recovery plan in place to eradicate the repairs backlog as well as the extended delays to tenants taking possession of their new homes , which remain in place today ? The update on repairs backlog should include delays incurred both by D.L.O. employed directly by NIHE and also their subcontracted maintenance teams throughout the City.

Response Attracting trades staff is challenging in the current labour marketplace. Many contractors like the NIHE are competing from a limited workforce.

Engaging in a cyclical intake of apprentices across all trades grows the necessary skills from inside the organisation through the Artes programme. The intention is to employ an additional 12 apprentices per annum for the next three years. This number should facilitate adequate vacant posts for the apprentices as they qualify.

We have worked to make our posts more attractive and comparable to similar posts advertised by external contractors. This coupled with the excellent terms and conditions as an NIHE employee should help attract candidates.

The DLO is embarking on a multi skilling journey to facilitate flexibility and ensure more first-time fixes when an operative visits a property. This will involve a current skills assessment across the DLO workforce to establish a baseline. This will then be followed by a mixture of focused on the job training and off-site formal training to obtain an NVQ L2 in Multiskilling.

The DLO continues to focus on completing change of tenancy and void works to ensure re-let times are kept to a minimum. The North and West Belfast teams have weekly void meetings with District office staff to ensure we meet the needs of our tenants.

The recent influx of repairs from Storm Eowyn has proved a setback in reducing backlog numbers across all DLO areas. Almost 2500 extra jobs were raised as a result of the storm ranging from roof repairs to downed fences.

DLO only have access to one subcontractor at the moment who is also finding it difficult to attract 2nd tier subcontractors to carry out work.

QUESTIONS FROM CLLR. MAGEE.

- I. Can the HE outline what plans they have to increase the housing supply in areas of Belfast that have the highest need – North & West Belfast
RESPONSE: Unmet housing need exists throughout Belfast. As part of the Belfast Agenda, the Housing Led Regeneration Group (HLRG) is focussing on increasing the supply of housing throughout the city and especially for social housing in areas of acute housing need. Housing Executive is also a statutory consultee in the planning process and seek to support a minimum of 20% affordable housing within relevant developments. We are benefitting from planning gain, for example in Pilot St.

- II. Can the Housing Executive provide details of what plans they have to provide housing on public land owned by Executive Departments, to provide much needed housing
RESPONSE: As noted above, as a lead partner in Belfast Agenda's continues to work with key partners Council and DfC to consider publicly owned sites which can be developed for social housing in the first instance, subject to budget and strategic guidelines. Since the beginning of Belfast Agenda there have been over 1,000 housing completions on HLRG partners lands, with a further c900 under construction or programmed to commence in the next three years. We are also beginning the process of speaking with other Government departments to consider other public owned lands which may be considered surplus and suitable for housing.

- II. Has the Housing Executive met with any private developers regarding land they have to try and see any potential for social housing
RESPONSE: Housing Executive works with housing associations to bring forward land for social housing. This sometimes involves meetings with the developers also, such as on design and build schemes to ensure an appropriate mix for example, or large schemes where there is community consultation in advance of planning applications. Housing Executive also may discuss social housing potential with planning consultants on schemes where there is a requirement for 20% affordable housing.

- III. Will the housing Executive confirm that their new City Centre Waiting List will ensure that any allocations made will be done on the basis of objective need.
RESPONSE: Housing Executive can confirm that housing within the new City Centre CLA will be allocated on a points based system within the common selection scheme, similar to all social housing allocations.

- V. How many people are deemed to be living in Housing Stress in North Belfast.
RESPONSE: There are currently 2,528 applicants in housing stress on the waiting list for North Belfast

- VI. When will the intimidation points be reviewed and when will people – mostly women who are survivors of Domestic Violence, be included
RESPONSE: We will now work with the Department and key stakeholders to take forward a review of the Primary Social Needs section of the Scheme and implement any necessary

changes. These Points are currently awarded to those who have experienced violence, harassment, abuse or trauma.

VII. When will the Right to buy scheme for Housing Executive properties ends

RESPONSE: There are currently no plans to end the Right to Buy scheme for Housing Executive tenants. Any decision to end the Right to Buy will require consultation and a time frame for ending the scheme.

VIII. What are the plans regarding continuing the Cladding on the Tower Blocks in the New Lodge

RESPONSE; At present, the blocks remain as categorised within the Tower Blocks Action Plan (e.g. Short/Medium/Long as relevant). The recent Tower Blocks Newsletter (Autumn 2024), explained that findings from feasibility studies are now informing our consideration of all options for the blocks, as part of a review of our proposals. This includes understanding the cost and delivery method for future improvement works, including cladding. Any decision which may be taken to install cladding or any other improvement remains subject to future business case approval.

IX. How many homes in North Belfast need Disability Adaptions and what are the Housing Executives plans to provide these adaptions in their homes across Belfast

RESPONSE: At present there are 32 outstanding OT requests for adaptations within North Belfast Area in total. With 5 Major adaptations and 27 Minor Adaptations. All of these jobs are still within their target dates for completion except for 2 of the ramped access jobs.

X. What are the Housing Executives Plans to provide a regeneration scheme for the maisonettes in Duncairn Parade in the New Lodge given the levels of disrepair and dampness

RESPONSE: We continue to consider options for the Duncairn Parade Maisonettes. Potential options include an improvement scheme or redevelopment. However, in the case of comprehensive improvements, these are likely to have significant cost implications for the 26 leaseholders, while delivery of a redevelopment option will be extremely challenging in the short to medium term given the very high housing need in the New Lodge and other ongoing housing strategies in the area (i.e. Upper Long Streets and the Tower Blocks strategy).”