

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 18th February, 2025

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Brooks (Chairperson);
Councillors Bell, Bower, Bradley, Bunting,
Canavan, Cobain, M. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly,
Flynn, Garrett, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, McKeown,
McLaughlin and Verner.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services;
Mr. D. Bone, City Services Manager;
Ms. V. Donnelly, City Protection Manager;
Ms. P. Conway, Development Manager; and
Mr. B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apology

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Abernethy.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Housing Investment Plan 2024/25 Update

The Committee was informed that Mr. L. Gunn (Regional Manager), Ms. F. McGrath (Head of Belfast Place Shaping) and Mr. B. O'Kane (Assistant Director of Housing Services) were in attendance to provide an update on behalf of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive on its Housing Investment Plan for Belfast 2024/25.

The Head of Belfast Place Shaping informed the Committee that, as of the date of the meeting, there had been 297 social housing units completed as part of the 2024/25 plan, details in respect of which were set out within the associated report. In addition, 1,503 social housing units were currently under construction, whilst 1,738 social housing units were programmed to commence by the end of the 2026/27 period. The programme for 2025/26 to 2027/28 was progressing and it was envisaged that further schemes would be added within the Council area in due course, subject to departmental/ministerial approval.

The Committee was presented with the latest figures, as of September 2024, regarding the current waiting lists for social housing within the Belfast area. These were recorded within the Westminster parliamentary constituencies and were as follows: Belfast North (4721), Belfast South (3878), Belfast East (2533) and Belfast West (4398). In respect of the aforementioned figures, the applicants therein who were deemed to be in 'housing stress', in that they had in excess of 30 waiting list points, were as follows: Belfast North (3819), Belfast South (3156), Belfast East (1904) and Belfast West (3738).

Mr. Gunn and Ms. McGrath then outlined a range of answers that had been provided to questions which had been forwarded in advance by Members, copies of which had been

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circulated prior to the meeting. In response to several further issues raised during discussion, the NIHE representatives confirmed:

- that further details would be provided in relation to the proposals contained within the Tullycarnet Place Shaping Plan, specifically in respect of the projected timescales for the demolition of the flats in Tullycarnet. In addition, further information would be provided regarding street signage issues raised regarding the Ardgreenan and Wandsworth areas;
- that the NIHE Chief Executive had recently authorised the implementation of an interim staffing structure within the Housing Solutions Team, which would see resources increase from 100 to 130 persons to address current administrative pressures within the service and that recruitment was ongoing in this regard;
- that further information would be provided on delays encountered in the provision of replacement kitchens, due to unauthorised internal structural changes having been undertaken within properties. Mr. Gunn undertook to liaise with the Director of Assets Management in this matter;
- that NIHE was investigating the provision of additional 'Category 1' housing developments across Belfast, viz., self-contained accommodation for older people, and that clarity would be provided for such plans within specific areas should Members submit enquiries to NIHE representatives;
- that, further to a previous expression of interest exercise undertaken to gauge interest in the number of applicants wishing to be considered for housing within city-centre living developments, as envisaged within the Belfast Agenda, the collation of a further waiting list would commence in the late spring. All current applicants would be contacted at that time. It was noted that such developments were subject a range of factors, including land acquisition;
- that the number of social housing units sold by NIHE in 2024/25 stood at approximately 60, and that further information regarding those sold within the inner east Belfast area would be provided in due course; and
- that the site of the former Sirocco Works remained within the current programme as a location for affordable housing development. Whilst the site had received outline planning permission for social housing, there was currently no housing association progressing that aspect of the development due to wider ongoing issues with the site as a whole.

The Chairperson thanked the NIHE representatives for attending and the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Chairperson