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| Subject: | Update on the Retrofit Delivery Hub |
| Date: | 13 th March 2025 |
| Reporting Officer: | John Tully, Director Organisational and City Strategy |
| Contact Officer: | Debbie Caldwell, Belfast Climate Commissioner Brenda Roddy, Project Support Officer (Climate) |

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| Restricted Reports | |
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| Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted. | |
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| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Information relating to any individual2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime | |
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| After Committee Decision | <input type="checkbox"/> |
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| Call-in | |
| Is the decision eligible for Call-in? | Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> |

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| 1.0 | Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues |
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| 1.1 | To provide an update on progress by the Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub. |
| 2.0 | Recommendation |
| 2.1 | <p>The Committee is asked to note:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Progress made in delivering retrofit training and information sharing including a Galway City Retrofit Twinning Visit to Belfast. ii. Efforts to progress an area based cross tenure retrofit project, exploring procurement mechanisms to attain economies of scale and optimising access to funding and community support. iii. That two significant retrofit programmes are under development including a NIHE £14M programme of deep retrofit to 400 homes in NI with 120 in the Belfast City Council area by NIHE and a proposed NIFHA scheme for the shallow retrofit programme of around 4,000 homes. iv. The findings from a survey of two properties in Belfast that estimates significant costs associated with retrofitting solid wall properties. v. The challenges posed to retrofit in terms of the supply chain of construction materials and skills gaps in the required sectors. vi. The challenges and opportunities around a proposed low carbon heating grant and potential implications of a future Minimum Energy Efficiency Scheme. |
| 3.0 | <p>Hub Update</p> <p>Progress on the work of Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub was last reported to this committee in August 2024. Since then, a significant amount of collaborative work has taken place under the Hub's remit to share information, and work to engender action and progress. Work over the last five months can be divided into 5 themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skills gaps and supply chains • Partnership retrofit programmes • Data building • Information sharing • Cross tenure area based retrofit pilot project |
| 3.1 | <p>Skills gaps and supply chains</p> <p>Discussions through Belfast's retrofit twinning project (Euro Cities programme) between Belfast and Galway City Councils highlighted that large scale, government funding packages for home retrofit on their own do not deliver progress, noting lengthy backlogs in delivery of funded works. This has been caused by shortages in skilled workers and materials, partly due to major retrofit programmes in GB competing and effectively 'poaching' resources from each other and from Ireland. A round table on-line event was held with Retrofit Hub members and stakeholders from Galway to explore the issues and hear of research into the construction skills gap in the Republic of Ireland. One of the Hub's co-chairs (from CITB) recently convened a Green Skills Working Group of behalf of Department for Energy with a report due for publication shortly.</p> |
| 3.2 | <p>Delivery of the priority projects from the LAEP such as low carbon district heating, solar PV installations and retrofit will generate significant demand for construction and specialist skills and materials. This has prompted work by the Climate Team to work with Economic Development to assess market readiness in terms of skills and supply chains in order to identify any gaps and capacity building required.</p> |
| 3.3 | <p>Retrofit Programmes currently under development</p> <p>The NI Housing Executive (NIHE) and the NI Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) collectively represent all social housing in NI with both working on large scale retrofit programmes and keeping Hub partners involved and updated. Two significant retrofit</p> |

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| | <p>programmes are currently under development by NIHE (includes approximately 120 homes in the Belfast City Council area) and NIFHA which represents 20 housing associations with almost 19K homes in the Belfast area.</p> |
| 3.4 | <p>Data building</p> <p>Domestic retrofit programmes depend on high quality data about housing stock. Belfast's Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) has collated high quality data about the energy performance of homes and any existing retrofit measures, allowing the identification of the properties and areas at greatest risk of fuel poverty and that could benefit most from retrofit. These data are in the process of being mapped into Electoral District Areas and city-wide reports, which will allow the Council and its retrofit partners to work strategically to identify areas for potential retrofit projects.</p> |
| 3.5 | <p>LAEP data currently capture financial and carbon data, helping to inform the financial case for projects but doesn't yet capture the full benefits such as health issues avoided and wider societal impacts. The Climate Team is exploring a number of tools used by other UK and EU cities to carry out wider cost benefit analysis which could demonstrate the full value of projects such as domestic retrofit and district heating.</p> |
| 3.6 | <p>High quality data is available for most of the city's domestic building types but one significant gap has been the private rental sector which contains substantial numbers of older, city centre type homes with solid walls. These can be challenging to retrofit as walls are one of the greatest areas of energy loss and insulating solid walls can be expensive and disruptive for tenants. The Hub was keen to get accurate data specific to Belfast's common housing stock, up to date locally based costings with detailed measures for both simple or shallow interventions as well as more complex or deep retrofit. Detailed surveys of two typical solid wall rental properties were commissioned, with the main finding being that in solid wall, older properties, even the use of a deep retrofit approach could fail to attain an A level of EPC rating for properties. The two properties studied attained no higher than a move from an E or a D rating to attain a rating of C even with over £80K of retrofit measures.</p> |
| | <p>Training and Information sharing</p> |
| 3.7 | <p>Sharing information and capacity building is central to the Retrofit Hub and in October of 2024, the Climate Team facilitated a series of retrofit events to share information with Hub partners and external agencies:</p> |
| 3.8 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Introduction to Retrofit' training for Elected Members - following a request by members of the Climate and City Resilience Committee in June 2024, an Introduction to Retrofit Course was run by the Climate and City Regeneration teams in October 2024. Eight elected members attended the interactive session with excellent feedback from attendees. The course was based on a similar course aimed at the general public that was delivered in partnership with SERC in April 2024. With both courses now designed and tested, there are opportunities for delivery at a wider scale. |
| 3.9 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community led net zero and retrofit programmes meeting – convened groups and organisations that are working on fuel poverty and net zero retrofit across the city, including UP2030, Mount Vernon Sustainable Energy Community and the Dept for Communities. Groups shared information on community led retrofit/fuel poverty programmes and highlighted that significant community-led work is taking place across the city but is often done in isolation. |
| 3.10 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public sector low carbon retrofit programmes meeting – Hub programme leaders from QUB, the Belfast Trust, Belfast City Council and Mott MacDonald outlined major low carbon retrofit programmes being developed and successfully rolled out on public estate, sharing methodologies and data to encourage replication. |
| 3.11 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Galway City Retrofit Twinning Visit to Belfast – Belfast City Council hosted a three day visit from Galway City Council and their community based energy team. Retrofit Hub members were particularly keen to learn about the Galway Warm Home Hub who |

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| <p>3.12</p> <p>3.13</p> <p>3.14</p> <p>3.15</p> <p>3.16</p> | <p>outlined their community embedded one stop shop approach. This was very well attended by community energy/ fuel poverty groups and Dept for Communities. Galway visitors met with Belfast social housing providers to explore how they rolled retrofit out at scale across their stock.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation on low carbon heating grants - lack of government retrofit funding is recognised by the Hub as the single biggest barrier to rolling out retrofit at scale. In light of this it welcomed a consultation by the Dept for Communities in November 2024 on a potential grant scheme for householders around low carbon heating, with an indicative timescale of 2027 for launch. Hub members took part in the consultation with key responses including: a fabric first approach is critical with a call for a precursor fabric first grant scheme; rather than focusing almost exclusively on ASHPs, it should support the roll out of low carbon district heating and hybrid heating technology; additional funding support is required for workforce development; and the need to build consumer awareness and confidence with support for public awareness campaigns. • Potential Minimum Energy Efficiency Scheme – Hub members have highlighted that the NI Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2029 includes setting standards for EPC ratings for lettable accommodation, with an outline timescale of 3 years for legislation to come into force. This could mean that only domestic properties of a (to be determined) EPC level could be let, which would put pressure on landlords to raise the energy performance of their stock. The Hub agreed the need for clarity of commitment by The Executive along with early notice and clear lead in times to allow landlords to prepare and avoid any large scale rapid divestment of housing stock. <p>Cross Tenure Area Based Retrofit Pilot Project</p> <p>A key output from the Hub’s work to date has been support for the establishment of a cross tenure, area based retrofit pilot. Retrofit programmes typically take a ‘worst first’ approach, targeting homes with the poorest thermal efficiency and greatest risk of fuel poverty and these are frequently areas with a combination of social housing, private rental and owner occupiers. Whilst building types in a given area tend to be similar, ownership and funding can be complex and challenging. The Retrofit Hub Steering Group has reviewed cross tenure case studies from the UK and Republic of Ireland to explore critical components, with funding emerging as the single biggest challenge. Whilst some grant programmes may emerge in 2027, current funding pots for home-owners and landlords are very limited with many not eligible for financial support.</p> <p>The Steering Group is focusing on identifying how the limited funds available might be optimised to minimise any shortfall in areas of greatest fuel poverty need and retrofit potential. Work is focusing on procuring works to attain economies of scale, optimising access to and uptake of available funding and community support to optimise engagement by householders.</p> <p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a task and finish group to explore existing and potential funding sources as well as mechanisms for an area wide, cross tenure domestic pilot project. • Work with partners’ procurement experts to develop an approach to cross tenure procurement for a pilot project establishing roles, risk and process. • Explore how the current grant funding could better support retrofit in the private rental sector and identify any changes that may be required to allow landlords to access funding. |
| <p>3.1</p> | <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None at this point</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>None known</p> |

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| 4.0 | Appendices - None |
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