

Appendix One

Draft Council Response

The Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the NIHE Regional Services Draft Corporate Plan 2015-16/2017-18. The Council notes that the Draft Corporate Plan contains five specific objectives and proposes a number of projects under each of these objectives. The objectives include

- Identification of Housing Requirements across Northern Ireland
- Investment in Homes and neighbourhoods,
- Improving People's homes,
- Helping transform people's lives;
- Enabling sustainable neighbourhoods.

The Council also notes the following specific projects and initiatives in the plan;

- Develop a Housing Investment plan for each of the 11 new Councils and presenting them to them;
- Administer grant-aid to Housing Associations in NI to start 1500 new social homes and complete 1,200 new social homes;
- Targets for the registration and inspection of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO)
- Implementation of the Affordable Warmth Scheme and a boiler replacement programme;
- Deliver the Homeless Strategy;
- Delivery of the DSD 'Small Pockets of Deprivation' and 'Building Successful Communities' programmes;
- Develop a programme to acquire development lands for social and affordable housing;
- Implement the DSD's Empty Homes Strategy.

There are many areas contained within this draft Corporate Plan that are strategically relevant to the functions of this Council. The draft plan makes specific reference to linking to the Council in relation to community planning and Development control. The draft plan also includes measures relating to HMO Regulation and neighbourhood Regeneration. Members are aware that these latter functions are due to transfer to Councils.

The draft plan makes specific reference to linking to the council in relation to community planning and Development control. The draft plan also includes measures relating to HMO Regulation and Neighbourhood Regeneration. These functions are due to transfer to Councils however there is no specific mention of liaising with the Councils in relation to this.

Objectives 1 & 2 - Identification of housing requirements

As statutory bodies it will be important to have a shared vision on outcomes for the city and it will be important that our assessments do not conflict. The document refers to the development by the NIHE of an Intelligence Capacity that will be used to inform an assessment of housing need and also to provide housing and regeneration knowledge to Councils under their statutory role in the Community Planning Process. The document

does not make reference however to how this work might also be aligned with the local development planning process.

Objective 2 - Investing in homes and neighbourhoods

The document also refers to the role of housing-led regeneration and it would be important to understand if NIHE have considered the need to align physical redevelopment with broader regeneration policy.

One of the examples of housing-led regeneration cited is the re-development of the Village area. Neighbourhoods often have complex needs and therefore require a broader approach than purely physical redevelopment. The Corporate Plan does not provide further insight as to how housing-led regeneration will align with broader regeneration outcomes in neighbourhoods in Belfast and also the city centre. It is understood that more detail in relation to this will be provided in the Local Housing Plan for the Belfast City Council area.

Objective 3 – Improving People Lives

The plan reports a rise in the number of properties unfit for human habitation (17,500 to 35,000). The plan reports on proposed performance measures for HMO regulation. The HMO bill published on Wednesday proposes new powers for Councils including a new HMO definition, licensing scheme, new enforcement powers etc.

The Draft plan provides no indication of the reason for this significant rise. The Council would also like to have seen more information provided in the plan of the resource the NIHE currently attribute to the dealing with unfitness. Also, as this function will transfer to Councils, will NIHE ensure that a resource that reflects this increase transfers to councils?

The recent HMO Bill sets out the powers Councils will be given to deliver the new HMO licensing regime. Given the HMO FUNCTION will transfer to Councils during the life of this plan, there is no reference in it to working with Councils to prepare for the transfer and to consider what arrangements and funding will be required to deliver what will be a new regulatory regime. The Council would request that this is acknowledged and reflected in the plan.

Affordable Warmth

The plan gives details and targets for the Affordable Warmth and Boiler Replacement Schemes currently operating across Belfast. The Council are involved as a key partner in this scheme, carrying out the initial surveys, and as a stakeholder we are keen to see it succeed. There are concerns with the scheme in relation to the percentage take up of works in comparison to the number of surveys carried out. Whilst it is recognised it is a customer driven scheme, it is also process heavy. The Councils are keen to work more closely with the NIHE to identify any areas that are preventing successful take up and see where we could improve that process.

Objective 5 – enabling sustainable neighbourhoods

The document references the potential role of NIHE's land bank in stimulating regeneration through a strategic asset management approach.

The council also has a significant asset base and will also acquire further assets and land from DSD in April 2016. The Council would like the plan to include provision for work to be undertaken in conjunction with other public sector bodies, including council, to map land ownership and to explore the collective potential for regeneration.

The Council would request that the plan includes more information on NIHE support in respect of the DSD small pockets of deprivation programme and whether they envisage a similar role when urban regeneration powers transfer to council.

Please note that this response has been considered and endorsed by the Council's Strategic Policy & Resources Committee. It is subject to full ratification at the October Council meeting. Should any matters be raised at full council that require the amendment of this response we will notify you as soon as possible.