

People and Communities Committee

Wednesday, 5th April, 2017

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Garrett (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Austin, Copeland, Heading,
Jones and McCabe.

Also attended: Councillor Walsh.

In attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Assistant Director;
Mr. S. Leonard, Environment Health Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Beattie, O'Neill and Nicholl.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentation

Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Update Presentation

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

The Committee was reminded that, at its meeting on 4th January, it had, in considering the effect of homelessness, requested an update presentation on how the NIHE addressed homelessness in Belfast.

Mr. Marley commenced by advising that the Housing Executive had a legislative duty to respond to homelessness in accordance with Housing (NI) Order 1988 and in this regard it produced a Homelessness Strategy every 5 years, a new strategy had just been published, 'Ending Homelessness Together' 2017-22.

Mr. Marley drew the Members' attention to the Belfast Region Housing and Homelessness Statistics for 2015/16 and 2016/17. He reported that the Housing Executive was currently implementing a transformation of its frontline services and he proceeded to outline the key priorities of this review as follows:

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- to fundamentally review service delivery to understand services from a customer's perspective;
- to ensure a joined up service to customers which would help to solve housing problems;
- to provide a single point of contact for housing customers;
- to remove the complexity from the service; and
- to provide skills and knowledge to staff to enable them to provide the correct service, first time.

The representative then proceeded to explain how the new case management approach would work in practice:

- customers contacting the NIHE regarding a housing problem were now provided with a Housing Advisor as their single point of contact;
- the Housing Executive Advisor would have the skills and knowledge to look in detail with the customer at their housing options and choices; and
- the Advisor would support customers to achieve their preferred housing option.

He outlined the Housing Executive's ambitions as follows:

- to reduce the incidences of housing crises and prevent homelessness;
- to ensure the customer had all the relevant information to make a choice; and
- to provide improved outcomes for the customer through tenancy sustainment, social and financial inclusion and personal wellbeing.

Mr. Marley concluded the presentation by emphasising the important role of the Housing Executive's various Partners in achieving all of its targets and stressed the need for effective joined-up working to continue, hence the longer term/multi-agency approach being adopted.

A Member highlighted the vulnerability of people who found themselves in a housing crisis situation and therefore welcomed the new measures that were being introduced. He added that he hoped that this new approach would help to deliver a more consistent approach and advice as often this differed greatly from one Housing Officer to another.

The representatives circulated a contact information booklet for Members' Information and the Democratic Services Officer advised that she would ensure this was circulated to all the Elected Members of Council.

The representatives then provided clarification in respect of a number of issues, some of which are set out hereunder, and the NIHE officers undertook to update Members on individual queries which they had raised:

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- how to encourage Housing Associations' to include more mixed tenure housing within their new build schemes;
- the depletion of Housing Executive stock, however, it was noted that this approach also helped to increase mixed tenure housing within areas;
- intimidation cases and how these were monitored;
- the discrepancies in timescales that Housing Executive tenants were given for refurbishment programmes to kitchens and bathrooms; and
- city centre living and regeneration within the context of the Local Development Plan.

Noted.

Belfast Region Programme Summary Report

The Committee noted the contents of the Belfast Region Programme Summary Report which provided information on the Housing Executive's maintenance and upgrading schemes throughout Belfast during 2016/17 and those proposed for 2017/18.

Update on the Social Development Programme 2016/17

The Committee noted the update report tabled regarding the Social Housing Development Programme 2016/17.

Date of Next Meeting

A Member suggested that it would be prudent for the Housing Executive reports to be issued in advance of the meeting and accordingly it was agreed that these would be circulated with the agenda.

The Committee noted that the next quarterly meeting was scheduled to be held at 4.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 2nd August, 2017.

Chairperson