

People and Communities Committee

Wednesday, 4th January, 2017

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Garrett (Chairperson);
the High Sheriff (Alderman Rodgers);
Alderman Sandford; and Councillors Austin, Heading,
Jones, Lyons, Magennis, McCusker and Nicholl.

Also attended: Councillor Magee.

In attendance: Mrs. R. Crozier, Assistant Director;
Mr. S. Leonard, Environmental Health Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman McCoubrey and McKee and Councillors Beattie, Copeland, Corr, McCabe, Newton and O'Neill.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Attendance at Special People and Communities Meetings Re Housing Issues

It was agreed, as with the previous Housing Forum Meetings, that all the Members of the Council would be invited to attend the future special meetings with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) regarding housing matters.

Presentation

Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Update Presentation

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mr I. McCrickard (Belfast Regional Manager) and Mr. R. Hawe (North Region Place Shaper), representing the NIHE.

Mr. Hawe commenced by advising that the Housing Executive wished to update the Committee on its Social Housing Development Programme and Place Shaping Role. He emphasised the important role of the Council in both these areas and stressed that an opportunity for effective joined-up working existed, particularly in respect of the Place Shaping Powers.

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Mr. Howe provided the Members with a presentation on the Social Housing Development Programme (copies of this document were circulated at the meeting). He highlighted the following key points within the presentation:

- social housing completions (407 units);
- social housing units under construction (795 units);
- social housing starts in 2016/17 (79 units);
- programmed to start in 2016/17 (Gross Programme) (445 units); and
- programmed to start in 2017/18 (Gross Programme) (1,140 units – this included 'New Bids' that were highlighted within the document).

Mr. Howe outlined the current demographic trends and the resultant social waiting list needs and he apprised the Committee with regard to the performance by the Housing Executive in relation to new build start and completion and future delivery timescales. Mr. Howe explained that one of the priorities of the organisation was to identify new development sites for social housing and that work was ongoing with the various agencies, including the Council, regarding the zoning of appropriate land.

Mr. Howe provided clarification on the operation of the Social Development Programme. He advised that there existed a shortfall between the demand and supply for social development housing and therefore the overall aim of the Programme was to increase the stock of social housing.

Mr. Howe then provided the Committee with an update on the Place Shaping Role within the Housing Executive which included consideration of housing need, land availability and development/regeneration within the context of the Community Plan, the Development Plan and the Belfast Agenda. He reiterated that the Housing Executive would be liaising closely with the Council in progressing this area of work.

Following a query regarding the housing selection scheme and the process for the transfer of tenants, Mr. McCrickard advised that the Department for Communities was in the process of reviewing the points allocation system and that a Public Consultation Exercise would be held in the near future.

During Members' questions, the Committee was also apprised regarding homelessness in the city and the various options available to rehouse people which including a more joined up approach with the private rental sector. The Committee were also updated on the work of the new Housing Solutions and Support Team

A Member welcomed the new approach and the longer term/multi-agency approach being taken to this ongoing problem.

It was agreed that, at the next quarterly meeting, the NIHE would provide the Committee with an update presentation on the work of this team in Belfast. It was agreed further that an up-to-date contact list of Housing Executive Officers would be forwarded to the Committee.

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The Members also drew the attention of the officers from the NIHE to several further matters, a number of which are set out hereunder, and the officers undertook to update Members on individual queries which they had raised:

- intimidation cases and how those were being monitored;
- change of tenancy delays/transfers and the reallocation of houses;
- the number of applicants in urgent need of housing;
- the purchase and refurbishment of properties to increase the housing stock;
- fire escape windows in older properties; and
- city centre living and regeneration;

The Chairperson thanked the officials from NIHE for attending and they left the meeting.

Chairperson