

Executive Briefing Introduction

“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 29th April 2009 at 10.00am in the Boardroom, Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8PB.

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Members Present: Mr Brian Rowntree (Chairman)
Mrs Anne Henderson (Vice Chair)
Mr Ciaran Brolly
Cllr Brendan Curran
Cllr Eamonn O’Neill
Cllr Jenny Palmer
Cllr Jim Speers
Dr Monica Wilson

Apologies: Mr Alistair Joynes
Mr Brendan Mackin

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GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1.0 Business Plan Monitor

1.1 The Housing Executive's Business Plan Monitor for 2008/09 showed that the majority of targets were either fully or substantially achieved. Funding was a major challenge for during the year. Whilst succeeding in a number of bids to the in-year monitoring rounds, the overall funding shortfall was reflected in a shortfall in a number of programme targets.

2.0 Risk Management 2009/10

The Board noted the end of year position on the 2008/09 Corporate Risk Register and approved the risks to be included in the 2009/10 Risk Register.

- 2.1 The Risk Management Framework contributes to the production of an assurance by the Housing Executive's Accounting Officer on Corporate risks identified and the action planned to manage those risks. The move from a 3x3 to a 5x5 scoring matrix has been incorporated into the Risk Register for 2009/10. All risks have been re-evaluated and scored using the new scoring matrix.
- 2.2 Two new risks have been included in the 2009/10 Corporate Risk Register – Warm Homes and Managing Sickness Absence. The Board noted that 3 risks were now well controlled and had been moved from the Corporate Risk Register to Divisional Risk Registers.

STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

3.0 Commission on the Future for Housing in Northern Ireland

- 3.1 The Board noted a background briefing on the newly formed Commission on the Future of Housing in Northern Ireland. The Commission was launched on 8th April 2009 to set out a long term vision for the housing system in contributing positively to Northern Ireland's future. The Commission will sit for a period of twelve months.
- 3.2 The Commission is being facilitated by the Chartered Institute of Housing and is being supported by the Housing Executive,

Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, Co-Ownership Housing, Construction Employers Federation and the Voluntary Sector Housing Policy Forum.

3.3 The Commission's objectives are:

- a) To assess the key challenges and opportunities associated with the delivery of housing in Northern Ireland;
- b) To provide a space for housing professionals to contribute their knowledge, skills and ideas;
- c) To publish a report containing specific recommendations on a strategic direction for housing and a roadmap for a way forward.

4.0 Community Safety Performance 2008/09

The Board noted the progress made in the delivery of community safety by the Housing Executive during 2008/09 and approved the strategic and operational key themes and priorities for 2009/10.

4.1 Progress was noted in the following areas:

- a) 25 out of 26 District Councils have signed up to the Information Sharing Protocol set up with the PSNI to establish local Anti Social Behaviour (ASB) Fora (the remaining Council remains unwilling to enter into a formal partnership arrangement);
- b) An evaluation of the formal partnership arrangement with Northern Ireland Alternatives for the delivery of mediation and community support services in North Belfast was presented to the Board in March 2009 and approved for further funding;
- c) A one year pilot partnership with Community Restorative Justice Ireland (CRJI) will commence in May 2009;
- d) An "Anti Social Behaviour Policy and Procedures" booklet is now available in all Housing Executive district offices and on the Housing Executive website www.nihe.gov.uk;
- e) Consultation responses have been submitted to the Criminal Justice Inspectorate on the "Report on the Use of Anti Social Behaviour Orders" and to the Northern Ireland Office on the "Together, Stronger, Safer" consultation document;
- f) The performance of Restorative Justice partnership schemes in Belfast are monitored and reported to DSD;

- g) A fundamental review of mediation services led to the establishment in February 2009 of an external 10 person panel of professional mediators to undertake mediations on behalf of the Housing Executive's district offices;
- h) 4,390 ASB reports have been received and actioned. This represents an increase of 4% (176) on 2007/08 and an increase of 8% (351) on 2006/07;

4.2 The performance of Housing Executive district offices in addressing anti social behaviour over the past three years has improved year on year. Performance improvement areas include:

- the use of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts (ABCs);
- referrals to Assisting People and Communities (APAC) for ongoing support;
- An increase in the number of legal undertakings granted by the courts;
- An increase in the number of Notices Seeking Possession.

4.3 The good overall performance in services in district offices is due to a number of factors, including

- a) Additional training for all front line staff in district offices;
- b) A review and simplification of anti social behaviour procedures;
- c) The impact of the Housing Executive's Modernising Services Programme on district office structures;
- d) A greater confidence within communities in reporting anti social behaviour.

4.4 During 2009/10 the Housing Executive will continue with the following key themes and priorities:

- a) To develop a Community Safety Communication Plan;
- b) To respond to recommendations in the Northern Ireland Community Safety Strategy;
- c) To respond to new DSD and NIO statutes on anti social behaviour;
- d) The introduction of the electronic reporting of anti social behaviour;
- e) To review anti social behaviour processing procedures;

- f) To expand the use of NIACRO Assisting People and Communities programme;
- g) To evaluate the use of the Mediation Panel and Restorative Justice partnerships (as discussed at Item 1.1 (g));
- h) To introduce a “Good Neighbourhood Agreement”;
- i) To fund and evaluate a range of community safety partnership initiatives;
- j) To revise and update the “Hate Crime Initiative” in partnership with the PSNI;
- k) To consider the expansion of the night time warden provision.

5.0 Revised Social Housing Development Programme (SDHP)

Housing noted procurement issues relating to Design & Build and “Off the Shelf” (OTS) schemes and their impact on the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP), the Board approved the revised Year 1 of the Social Housing Development Programme.

- 5.1 In January 2009 the Board approved the Draft 5 year Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP), which was submitted for approval by the Minister. Following discussions the 5 year programme was revised to increase the number of schemes involving the transfer of the land from the Housing Executive. The revised programme for Year 1 includes 40 transfer schemes, comprising 561 units, which represents 32% of the target of 1,750 units. This is the highest level of transfer potential in the last five years. The amendments have been made, as far as possible, in line with Strategic Guidelines.

6.0 Housing and Health Review Action Plan 2008 – 2011 Progress Report

The Board noted progress to date on the Housing Executive’s Housing & Health Review Action Plan 2008-2011.

- 6.1 The Housing & Health Action Plan is structured and assessed against the Housing Executive’s six corporate objectives. Progress has been recorded against each objective as follows:

- a) Achieving a Decent Homes Standard

Although the 2006 House Condition Survey (HCS) showed a significant improvement in housing conditions, there is an

ongoing demand for investment in new social housing and in measures to alleviate fuel poverty. Results from the HCS show that just under 25% of homes do not meet the Decent Homes standard.

The Housing Executive continues to address fuel poverty and thermal efficiency through Heating Replacement Schemes in the public sector and Warm Homes scheme in the private sector. Fuel Savings Stamp Schemes have been launched in all “Investing in Health Partnership” areas and the Housing Executive has agreed to carry out a feasibility study into an Energy Brokering scheme in partnership with Bryson House and the Consumer Council.

The Housing Executive funded 3,902 private sector grant applications up to 31st March 2009. In addition, 530 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) were registered during 2008/09, exceeding the registrations target.

b) Promoting Independent Living

The Northern Ireland Anti Poverty Strategy “Lifetime Opportunities” aims to improve the quality of life and independence of people in need so that those people can be supported in their own homes.

During 2008/09 the Housing Executive's Supporting People Programme introduced 16 new schemes which provided 119 units of supported accommodation across a range of client groups. In light of the Review of Public Administration, the Housing Executive has issued proposals for revised Supporting People commissioning for consultation by 12th May 2009.

The Housing Executive has submitted responses to a number of consultation documents including the “Northern Ireland Personality Disorder Strategy (2008) and “Delivering the Bamford Vision”.

A new Healthy Ageing Strategic Partnership was established in December 2008 between Belfast Healthy Cities, Belfast City Council, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust, Age Concern/ Help the Aged, Housing Executive and the Department for Regional Development.

The Housing Executive is awaiting DSD approval to new build wheelchair housing design standards, following a mapping exercise of Northern Ireland's wheelchair population.

c) Fostering Urban and Rural Regeneration

The Housing Executive continues to support the DSD's Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy and participates in local partnerships. The Housing Executive has made considerable progress working with Housing Associations, as part of the review of the Rural Housing Strategy. Rural Homeless Advice leaflets have been launched for all rural districts and latent need testing has been completed in ten locations across the province.

d) Promoting Affordable Housing

During the year the Housing Executive has facilitated the delivery of 1,136 social housing units against a target of 1,500. The shortfall has been due to funding constraints.

The Housing Executive continues to contribute to the DSD's Private Rented Sector Strategy, which is due to be issued for consultation in May 2009. The Housing Executive is also examining initiatives to deliver home ownership to those with a learning disability.

e) Building a Stronger Community

The Housing Executive, in conjunction with the Housing Community Network, has developed a new Community Involvement Strategy, on the community services available over the next three years.

The Community Cohesion Unit continues to work to build a strong and more harmonious community. The Shared and Better Housing Neighbourhood programme has received funding for a three year period and 5 new build Shared Future schemes have been approved.

The Housing Executive has contributed to tackling anti social behaviour and improving communities (see Item 10).

The new Public Health Agency came into effect on 1st April 2009. The Agency is responsible for the work of all Investing for Health Partnerships and Health Action Zones. The Housing Executive has established links with the Agency and the organisation is a partner in Belfast Healthy Cities.

f) Delivering Better Public Services

The Housing Executive Workplace Health Promotion Strategy aims to create a workplace culture that protects, promotes and supports health and wellbeing for employees - a key concern for the Housing Executive. The Health Screening Programme was completed in March 2009. Appropriate research is undertaken to inform housing policy and services delivery, including customer satisfaction.

7.0 Rough Sleepers/ Street Drinkers Strategy for Derry/ Londonderry City

The Board approved the Housing Executive's Rough Sleepers/ Street Drinkers Strategy for Derry/Londonderry City.

- 7.1 In recent years, there has been an increase in the number of rough sleepers and street drinkers in Derry/ Londonderry city. Accordingly, existing service provision was reviewed, with a view to developing a strategy.
- 7.2 The current homeless service in Derry/Londonderry city provides accommodation through 35 schemes providing:
- a) Supported temporary accommodation schemes;
 - b) Single let bed bureau properties;
 - c) Floating support services;
 - d) A Drop-In centre.
- 7.3 During the review, gaps in service provision were identified. These included:
- 1) Underutilisation of a number of services;
 - 2) A lack of effective pathways between services;
 - 3) The difficulties experienced by specialist services in delivering effective interventions to rough sleepers and street drinkers;
 - 4) Lack of effective channels between services

7.4 The Review concluded that although there are sufficient bed spaces in the area to accommodate rough sleepers and street drinkers, the provision needs to be aligned with other services. The new Strategy aims to provide appropriate preventative and responsive housing support and care for rough sleepers and street drinkers in the Derry/Londonderry city area. This should be achieved by repositioning some services along the service continuum to ensure adequate provision to meet identified need. Greater interagency working will be examined and a Strategic Group comprising of key agencies will be required to develop an action plan for the delivery of the strategy.

8.0 Homelessness - Voluntary Sector Funding 2009/10

The Board approved actual funding paid to voluntary groups during 2008/09, and gave interim approval for funding for 2009/10.

8.1 Since the introduction of Homelessness legislation in April 1989, the Housing Executive has provided funding on an annual basis for a range of voluntary agencies providing services that assist the Executive in fulfilling its homelessness duties.

8.2 Direct funding by the Housing Executive for 2009/10 will continue to be in relation to projects which support the Homelessness Strategy but are not covered by Housing Benefit or Supporting People. All groups in receipt of funding will continue to be monitored and will be required to provide the Housing Executive with progress reports and management and audited accounts.

9.0 Homelessness - DIME Accommodation Funding 2009/10

The Board approved funding for Dispersed Intensively Managed Emergency (DIME) Accommodation for 2009/10.

9.1 DIME accommodation provides for those individuals who suffer from complex issues of chronic addiction, mental health and behavioural problems, and who are generally excluded from other hostels providing accommodation for homeless applicants. In January 2008 the Board approved the introduction of the DIME accommodation scheme for one year, with the option to extend the agreement for a further three years. It was agreed that the scheme would be evaluated after the first year of operation. Plans for the evaluation are now being finalised.

9.2 It was also agreed that an evaluation of the quality of the accommodation and the support services offered should be undertaken. The evaluation has shown that the scheme has been successful. Between April 2008 and March 2009, 70 units were funded and a total of 218 individuals have availed of the service. Of these, 40 individuals have successfully moved to private rented/social housing and a further 7 have been placed in care managed/ specialist accommodation. A robust referral procedure is now in place to allow the Housing Executive to fulfil its statutory duty of securing accommodation for the most vulnerable, most complex and most challenging homeless cases.

10.0 ICT Services Budget Plan 2009/10

The Board approved the 2009/10 Budget Plan for Information & Communications Technology (ICT) Services.

10.1 In March 2004 the Board approved British Telecom as the preferred ICT Strategic Partner for the development, implementation and support of current and future ICT systems and services. Accordingly details of expenditure for spend in 2008/09 and projected expenditure for 2009/10 were presented to the Board for approval. Given the overall budget constraints within the Housing Executive, the funding position will be reviewed as part of the organisations mid year review.

11.0 Areas of Open Space - Arrangements with District Councils

The Board approved the amendment of leases for open space on land transferred to District Councils. This will allow Multi Use Game Areas (MUGAs) to be provided at no extra cost, subject to Department for Social Development approval.

11.1 Since 1971 there has been an agreement between the Housing Executive and the Department for Social Development that areas of land which District Councils use for open space, including children's play areas, are transferred to Councils for a nominal amount. As Councils are now using these open spaces to facilitate more sports activities for local communities, Councils have proposed that the leases are amended to reflect this change in the use of open space.

12.0 Home Loans Scheme - Mortgage Interest Rate

The Board approved the current rates of interest on the Housing Executive's Home Loans Scheme.

- 12.1 In January 1982 the Department of the Environment, now the Department for Social Development, stipulated that the rate of interest to be applied to new and existing loans under the Housing Executive's Home Loans Scheme would be the higher of either the Standard National Rate or the Local Average Rate. It was further stipulated that the Executive should vary its rate of interest on mortgages whenever a change in either or both of these rates requires it.
- 12.2 The Board approved that, for the purpose of the Home Loans Scheme, the Local Average Rate should be declared at 9.70% for the half year to 31st March 2009 and the Mortgage Interest Rate charged for loans issued in respect of applications received prior 1 October 1987 remains at 9.70%. With the exception of Homesteading cases, the "True Rate" of interest charged for loans issued in respect of applications received on or after 1 October 1987 remains capped at 14%.

13.0 Northern Ireland Assembly Questions

The Board noted details of recent housing related Assembly Questions.

- 13.1 During the period 2nd March to 3rd April 2009, 141 Assembly Questions were tabled for response by the Minister for Social Development. Of these 89 were housing related.

14.0 NIHE Scheme Design/Heating Scheme Approvals

| Scheme | Work Content | Start Date |
|--|--|--------------|
| South Area Elliott Place, Windmill Road and Old Rossary Church Road, Enniskillen | Health and safety works and kitchen replacements, electrical and heating upgrade to 10 dwellings | January 2010 |