

## Executive Briefing Introduction

**“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> August 2009 at 10.00am in the Boardroom, Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast, BT2 8PB.**

Further information on any matters in this document can be obtained from:

**Mrs Imelda McGrath**

Head of Information and Secretariat  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
The Housing Centre  
2 Adelaide Street  
Belfast BT2 8PB

**Telephone:** 028 90240588 Extension 2700

**Web Site:** [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)

**Email:** [info@nihe.gov.uk](mailto:info@nihe.gov.uk)

**Members Present:** Mr Brian Rowntree (Chairman)  
Mrs Anne Henderson (Vice Chair)  
Mr Ciaran Brolly  
Cllr Brendan Curran  
Mr Alistair Joynes  
Mr Brendan Mackin  
Cllr Eamonn O’Neill  
Cllr Jenny Palmer  
Cllr Jim Speers

**Apologies:** Dr Monica Wilson

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## **GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **1.0 Business Plan Monitor**

- 1.1 The Housing Executive's Business Plan Monitor for 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009 showed that performance against the majority of targets was satisfactory. An additional allocation of £20m was awarded through the June Monitoring Round for grants and adaptations. A further bid for additional funding for improvement and maintenance programmes has been included in a bid to the September Monitoring Round.

## **STRATEGIES AND POLICIES**

### **2.0 Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009 - 2014**

The Board noted the findings from the Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment 2007/08 and approved the Housing Executive's Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009/2014.

- 2.1 Responsibility for meeting the accommodation needs of the Travelling Community transferred from Councils to the Housing executive in 2003 following which a 5 year accommodation programme was developed in line with needs identified earlier. Since then a second Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment has been carried out and this has been the basis for the development of a further 5 year Traveller Accommodation Programme (2009-2014).
- 2.2 The original programme delivered progress on a significant number of schemes resulting in new accommodation and, improvements in living conditions for Irish traveller families. These include:
- 4 new group housing schemes at Toome; Glen Road and Monagh Road Belfast and Ballyarnet in Derry/Londonderry;
  - 2 new improved transit sites in Derry/Londonderry and Strabane;
  - An emergency halting site and a serviced site in Craigavon;
  - An extensive multi-element improvement scheme at Ballinamullan, Omagh.
- 2.3 Progress has been less positive on the provision of sufficient numbers of transit sites across Council areas due to issues with

suitable site location; local acceptance of the site proposals; planning constraints and land acquisition difficulties.

- 2.4 The second Traveller Needs Assessment carried out in 2007/08 identified 531 Traveller households of which 42% live in standard social housing; 21% live on serviced sites and 20% on transit/co-operated sites. Those Travellers in social housing have indicated high levels of satisfaction with their accommodation. The majority of Travellers live in the Belfast area (22%) followed by 17% in Dungannon and 12% in Craigavon. The remainder are spread almost evenly across the Derry/Londonderry, Omagh and Armagh Council areas.
- 2.5 Of the Travellers interviewed for the Needs Assessment 29% require settled accommodation mainly in the Belfast area. 9% of these want group housing and 19% require serviced sites. A total of 27% said they did not require any accommodation.
- 2.6 Having discussed the Traveller Needs Assessment with Traveller Groups, Housing Managers and Planners the following rationale has been adopted for the development of the 5 year Traveller Accommodation Programme:
- Those Traveller families identified as most in need should be accommodated under the programme and their preferences taken into account for either Group Housing or Serviced Sites.
  - The programme will concentrate on those families living in the worst conditions i.e. in unauthorised encampments, temporary halting sites and long term residents of existing Transit Sites.
  - The ongoing requirement for Transit Sites has been confirmed by ‘unauthorised encampments’ in Craigavon, Newry and Belfast Council areas.
- 2.7 Using this rationale the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009/2014 aims to provide:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Programme</u>	
1	23 units Group Housing & Service Sites	
2	31 units Group Housing & Serviced Site	
3	26 units Group Housing & Transit Site	
4	28 units Group Housing & Transit Sites	
5	6 units Group Housing	

2.8 Site identification for Transit Sites will continue although, under current RPA proposals these will transfer to councils in 2011. Following completion of the initial 4 Group Housing schemes research will be commissioned to inform future scheme provision.

### **3.0 Equality Commission for Northern Ireland: Outlining Minimum Standards for Traveller Accommodation (March 2009)**

The Board approved the Housing Executive's response to the Equality Commission's consultation document on "Minimum Standards for Traveller Accommodation".

3.1 The Equality Commission commissioned research on the standards of accommodation to be applied to Traveller accommodation both temporary and permanent and issued a subsequent report for consultation.

3.2 The Housing Executive welcomes the research but noted that the sample of Travellers interviewed was drawn primarily from Travellers living in unauthorised encampments with no reference to the majority of Travellers living in the social housing sector.

The Housing Executive's response in the main commented on the report's findings relating to:

- Undersupply of suitable accommodation
- Standards in relation to site provision
- Delays in development of new sites
- Impact on Traveller households
- Governance issues
- Changes to legislation
- Changes to Policy
- Minimum Standards

3.3 The Board noted that many of the Report's recommendations, including those relating to design and management standards have been adopted by the Housing Executive for some time. The Housing Executive has also achieved the 2 objectives set by the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Working Group report

recommendations, referred to in the Equality Commission report which may be found at:

[www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/travguideSDSHWeb100409.pdf](http://www.equalityni.org/archive/pdf/travguideSDSHWeb100409.pdf)

#### **4.0 Ninth Annual Progress Report to the Equality Commission**

The Board approved the Housing Executive's Ninth Annual Progress Report and approved its submission to the Equality Commission.

4.1 The annual report to the Equality Commission is a requirement under the Housing Executive's Equality Scheme and is submitted in relation to the implementation of the Equality and Good Relations duties under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

4.2 The Ninth Annual Report details the progress made during 2008/09 and provides a comprehensive record of progress in a number of areas including:

- The Equality Impact Assessment of the Strategic Guidelines for Newbuild which provided the opportunity to test our equality monitoring systems.
- An analysis of how policy decisions are made, to improve compliance and policy making procedures
- Ongoing work on Migrant Workers, Travellers and the Black and Minority Ethnic community including the development of a Race Relations Charter for Community Groups and Shared Future Housing Schemes.
- Consultation on a Policy statement on Children and Young People addressing issues of how we provided services to and communicate with young people.

The Housing Executive is fully committed to the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations for all its tenants, staff and customers. In implementing its Equality Scheme the Housing Executive recognises the value of mainstreaming equality and ensuring its place at the centre of policy making and the delivery of housing services.

## **5.0 Lower Shankill Estate Economic Appraisal Update**

The Board noted DSD approval of revised proposals for the regeneration of the Lower Shankill Estate, Belfast.

- 5.1 The Board approved an economic appraisal for the Lower Shankill Estate in June 2007. Following submission to DSD the Housing Executive was asked by the Department to re-examine the extent of restructuring to be undertaken within the estate.
- 5.2 Agreement has now been reached with the Department on the way forward for the area in the short to medium term. The proposals involve the demolition of 24 flats at Malvern Way and a further 28 residential properties and 1 commercial property. It is considered that these demolitions will allow the development potential of the estate to be realised by removing the blighting effect of vacant and derelict properties. Sufficient social housing is available within the area to minimise displacements.
- 5.3 Consultation in the area has continued throughout the last year and the revised proposals enjoy community support.

## **6.0 Draft Strategic Energy Framework for Northern Ireland 2009**

The Board approved the Housing Executive's response to the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Investment (DETI) consultation document on "A Strategic Energy Framework for Northern Ireland 2009".

- 6.1 The Framework document sets out DETI's vision for a more sustainable energy future; where energy is used efficiently; where more energy comes from renewable sources and is priced as competitively as possible.
- 6.2 In its response the Housing Executive welcomed the opportunity to respond to the consultation document and supported the main goals of government in seeking to create a sustainable energy framework. Several issues of relevance to housing were highlighted for further discussion and engagement.

The consultation document made be found at:  
[www.detini.gov.uk/cgi-bin/downutildoc?id=2470](http://www.detini.gov.uk/cgi-bin/downutildoc?id=2470)

## **7.0 Housing Executive Statutory Functions**

The Board noted a paper setting out the full range of statutory/mandatory functions relating to the services it provides and in particular those impacting on funding.

## **8.0 Emergency Planning**

- 8.1 The Board noted the Housing Executive's Emergency Plan which covers a range of potential emergency situations including flu pandemic.
- 8.2 The Housing Executive sits on the DSD Emergency Management Steering Group which reports to OFM/DFM through the Civil Contingencies Group. This group provides the guidance on emergency planning across government departments and agencies.
- 8.3 The Housing Executive's emergency plan has been updated in light of the outbreak of swine flu, in line with guidance provided. The plan aims to ensure that all main services and systems are maintained in the event of a major incident.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **9.0 Housing Commission**

Board Members were joined by Lord Best, Chairman and Grainne Long, Chartered Institute of Housing from 'The Commission for the Future for Housing in Northern Ireland'.

- 9.1 The Commission was launched on 8<sup>th</sup> April 2009 to set out a long term vision for the housing system and how it might contribute positively to Northern Ireland's future. The Commission will sit for a period of twelve months and is being facilitated by the Chartered Institute of Housing. It 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.



9.2 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.

9.3 The Board and Commissioners discussed a range of housing issues together with the challenges facing housing providers in the future. Further details of the Commission and its work may be found at: [www.nihousingcommission.cih.co.uk](http://www.nihousingcommission.cih.co.uk)

## 10.0 Board Visit to Belfast Area on 12<sup>th</sup> August 2009

10.1 The Board visited the Belfast Area office in Great Victoria Street and began with a tour of the Customer Services Unit.

The Belfast Customer Service Unit (CSU) was established in October 2006 as a key element of the Modernising Services Project Plan for Belfast. The unit opened on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006 initially to take repair calls for Belfast Area. Since then there have been significant changes in how the unit provides its services, not least in the reception area on the ground floor which now provides a 'one stop shop' for all our customers.

10.2 The new reception deals with all enquiries for North, South, East and West Belfast, Private Housing benefit and Homelessness Services. 88% of all calls are dealt with at the first point of contact without being referred to another department. The Customer Service Unit has also expanded the range of services provided to customers who prefer to contact us by telephone. As well as dealing with all repair requests, they are now processing more than 70% of all new housing applications and transfer requests for the Belfast District Offices. They also now manage direct debit mandates for Housing Benefit Overpayments.

10.3 Around 1,350 customers call into the counter each week and 75% are attended to within 10 minutes. In 2008/09 there were 124,403 calls placed to the Telephony Customer Services Unit.

Calls are answered within an average time of 4 seconds.  
Services provided by the CSU Telephony include:

- All repair reporting
- Arranging maintenance inspections
- New housing applications and transfers
- Setting up direct debits for Housing Benefit overpayments.

Members then toured housing areas in the wider Belfast area focusing on current housing issues in the Village; Titanic Quarter; Connswater; Lower Newtownards Road; Ormeau Road; Annandale Flats and Donegall Pass.