

## Executive Briefing Introduction

**“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> July 2010 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)  
Mrs Angela Coffey  
Cllr Brendan Curran  
Mrs Edna Dunbar  
Mr Ken Millar  
Cllr Eamonn O’Neill  
Cllr Jenny Palmer  
Cllr Jim Speers  
Dr Monica Wilson

**Apologies:** None

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## **GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

### **1.0 Business Plan Monitor**

- 1.1 The Board noted the Housing Executive's Business Plan Monitor for June 2010. The Monitor shows progress against the Business Plan's six Corporate Objectives.

Performance against the majority of targets is good. However, funding for the year ahead may be reduced with consequential impacts upon the Housing Executive's programmes of work. This will require close monitoring.

### **2.0 Risk Management 2010/11**

The Board noted the current position on risks and approved the risks to be included in the 2010/11 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. A 5x5 scoring matrix was incorporated into the Risk Register for 2009/10 and all risks were re-evaluated and scored using the new scoring matrix. Risks showing a scoring of 12 or above are highlighted and reported to the Board.
- 2.2 A review of risks has been undertaken in relation to land & property issues and a new risk is included in the Corporate Risk Register.

## **STRATEGIES AND POLICIES**

### **3.0 Supporting People Service Development**

The Board approved proposals for the development of a Supporting People scheme at Ardcora, Downpatrick, subject to agreement on the appropriateness of the proposed model.,

- 3.1 Triangle Housing Association, in association with South Eastern Health & Social Care Trust (SEH&SCT) and Downe Residential Project (DRP) will provide sixteen units of supported housing across 4 dispersed dwellings, for people with autism.

## 4.0 Adaptations Performance Update

The Board noted an update on demand and performance trends up to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010, in relation to the delivery of housing adaptations for people with disabilities.

### 4.1 Occupational Therapy (OT) Referrals

	<b>June 2010</b>	<b>Mar 2010</b>	<b>June 2005</b>
Number of Housing Executive cases pending assessment	218	213	733

The overall demand for OT services indicates a downward trend. The Department of Health, Social Services & Public Safety (DHSS&PS), along with the Housing Executive is currently reviewing the reporting system for people awaiting assessment, in line with organisational changes with Health & Social Care. The review aims to ensure accurate validation of assessment and recording procedures.

### 4.2 Housing Executive Performance on Adaptations

#### a) Volumes

	<b>June 2010</b>	<b>June 2009</b>
Extension Starts	33	20
Heating Starts	58	72
Lift Installations	34	36
Urgent & Other Showers	290	202

#### b) Extensions

	<b>June 2010</b>	<b>June 2009</b>
34 week target	0%	3%
50 week target	33%	35%
60 week target	52%	52%

c) Heating

	June 2010	June 2009
Urgent installations – 12 Week target	69%	89%
Standard Plus – 35 week target	93%	93%
Standard – 52 week target	96%	90%

d) Lifts

	June 2010	June 2009
Within 12 week target	71%	82%
Within 22 week target	91%	92%

e) Shower Installation

With regard to **shower installations** performance, 67% of urgent and 100% of other cases were delivered within target. This figure does not include West Area, due to a restructuring of reporting requirements.

4.3 New Disabled Facilities Grants (DFG) Performance Measures

There were 364 DFGs approved by 30<sup>th</sup> June 2010. Figures are not currently available for service standards on DFGs as the reporting procedures are being redesigned to take account of the new Private Sector Management Systems (PSMS) for recording grant activity. The new system in all Grants offices will be “live” from July 2010 and figures will be available for the next quarter.

4.4 Other Developments

a) Inter-Departmental Review of Adaptations

The Inter-Departmental Review of Housing Adaptations, initiated by DSD and DHSS&PS, is being led out by the Housing Executive. A draft of Chapter 1, “The Underlying Need for Housing Adaptation Services in Northern Ireland” has been completed and being presented to the Core Group in July 2010. Focus groups are progressing well and findings will be presented to the Project Board by end of August 2010. Completion date for the review is October 2010.

b) PODs

A technical evaluation of PODs should be completed by the end of August 2010 and included in the Inter Department Review of Adaptations. The findings will be presented to the Board.

c) Shower Pilot Exercise

An evaluation of the shower pilot exercise has been carried out and included in the Inter Department Review of Adaptations.

## **5.0 Benchmarking Exercise between NIHE Major Heating Contracts and Warm Homes Update**

The Board noted the outcome of the Value for Money study on the Housing Executive's major heating contracts (MHC) and the Warm Homes contract (WHC).

- 5.1 In May 2009 the Board noted a Value for Money paper detailing progress across all contract streams and incorporating results of the Savill report. It was agreed that a benchmarking exercise of the Housing Executive's heating contracts should be undertaken with the WHC.
- 5.2 While the result indicated that there is a cost difference of 4% (or £240k) in favour of the WHC, it was acknowledged that direct comparisons were not possible due to the length of time between the procurement process, different rates for the various heating installation types and the major differences in the economic climate at the time each contract was let.
- 5.3 The Board noted that, following the internal review and subsequent benchmarking report, coupled with the independent review and report of the CENI, the comparison exercise between the MHC and the WHC illustrates that both contracts did provide value for money when taking into consideration the timing of the procurements and the state of the economy.
- 5.4 Meetings are currently being set up with the main contractors on the MHC with the aim of negotiating lower costs for the various elements within those contracts.

## **6.0 NIHE Cohesion Unit “BRIC” Project entitled “Putting Good Relations at the Heart of Social Housing”**

The Board noted the implementation of the “BRIC” (Building Relationships in Communities) Programme from July 2010.

6.1 In 2009, a partnership between the Rural Development Council (RDC), the Housing Executive and TIDES Training & Consultancy applied for £3.5m PEACE III funding for a Good Relations project. The project’s working title is BRIC (Building Relationships in Communities). Over a four-year period, which started on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2010, the Project aims to strategically mainstream Good Relations into the culture and business of the Housing Executive and also to incorporate Race Relations into the Good Relations ethos.

6.2 The Project will be delivered under the following themes:

- a) Changing Minds – The Housing Executive and RDC will deliver bespoke training to over 400 key staff to help put Good Relations at the heart of the Housing Executive’s policies and service delivery functions, and to help the organisation achieve good relations outcomes in all the work the Housing Executive undertakes. Training will also be undertaken in communities in 80 estates across Northern Ireland with a bursary of £5,000 awarded on completion of the course. This should allow the community to deliver a good relations project in their area. The areas selected will include five Shared Neighbourhoods which have been involved in the Shared Neighbourhood Programme;
- b) Sharing Visions – It is hoped to provide 2 interface communities with an interactive visioning tool to help communities visualise how their neighbourhood could look without walls and barriers. Research will also be conducted into how two Urban Renewal Areas could be delivered in a way that embeds community cohesion into the redevelopment process;
- c) Crossing Borders – Research will be undertaken to help inform Housing Executive staff and partnering cross-border institutions how best to develop housing policy on a cross-



border housing market delivery model. This is aimed at promoting cross-border participation and integration in border housing market areas.

- 6.3 The Project will be administered by RDC, with the aid of staff from the Housing Executive. The project will have a governance Board and a Housing Executive officer will sit on this Board.

## **7.0 Replacement Grants**

The Board noted the current position on replacement grants and endorsed the valuable contribution which the grant makes to the provision of new housing targeted at lower income households in rural locations.

- 7.1 In 1989/90 the Housing Executive conducted an extensive review of the housing situation in rural areas and the policy tools available to address the problems of poor rural housing conditions. Following this review the Department of the Environment (DOE), which was the Housing Executive's sponsor department of the time, accepted the case for a new building grant. The grant was administered on an extra statutory basis from May 1991; however legislative arrangements were subsequently enshrined in the 1992 Housing Order.
- 7.2 This was a unique Northern Ireland based policy initiative. No other part of the UK operated a Replacement Grant as a mainstream housing policy tool. This remains the case almost 20 years after its introduction. Historically, Replacement and Renovation Grants have been the primary tools for addressing unfitness within rural areas.
- 7.3 The Department for Social Development (DSD) has commenced a strategic review of "Support for Repair and Improvement in the Private Sector". The Housing Executive is represented on the Steering Group for this initiative and the role of the Replacement Grant is being considered as part of this wider review. It is expected that DSD will consult on the proposals this autumn.
- 7.4 The Housing Executive remains confident in the benefits of Replacement Grants (and discretionary grants generally), particularly given the continued concentration of poor housing conditions in rural areas and the lack of viable alternative policy instruments to address these problems.

## **8.0 Grants Satisfaction Survey 2009**

The Board noted the findings from the Housing Executive's Grants Satisfaction Survey 2009.

8.1 This research followed up on the last Grants Satisfaction Survey carried out by the Housing Executive in 2004. The main objectives of the survey were to evaluate customers' satisfaction in relation to:

- a) The overall scheme
- b) Each stage of the grants process
- c) Aspects of grants forms and associated literature

8.2 The findings of the survey in relation to the grants scheme overall showed that:

- a) The vast majority respondents (92%) were satisfied with the Grants Scheme overall, an increase of 5% on the 2004 survey findings (87%).
- b) The vast majority (90%) of respondents said they found letters and documentation received from the Housing Executive easy to understand (79% in 2004). More detailed responses were sought in relation to initial information provided; the various stages of the grants process; test of resources; payments and provider / workman satisfaction.
- c) 42% of applicants received help to complete the necessary forms required by the Grants Office. The main sources of help were Housing Executive staff, the Home Improvement Agencies (FOLD/Gable) and Citizens Advice Bureau.

8.3 Overall the survey indicated very high levels of satisfaction across all areas of the grants process. The project has drawn attention to areas where action may be required to improve levels of customer satisfaction and an analysis is now being undertaken to identify ways of raising satisfaction levels further. Copies of the report will be distributed to the public representatives and to stakeholders such as the Home Improvement Agencies (FOLD/Gable), the Warranted Builders Schemes, and the Health Trusts. Copies will also be available in

Housing Executive Grants Offices. It is expected that Grants Offices will discuss the findings at their next Customer Focus Groups meeting. The report will be available on the Housing Executive's website at [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk).

## **9.0 Budgeting for Housing in Northern Ireland: A Human Rights Analysis (2010) – QUB School of Law**

The Board noted the study carried out by Queen's University, Belfast entitled "Budgeting for Housing in Northern Ireland: A Human Rights Analysis".

9.1 The analysis is the first of a series of reports which aims to examine public expenditure in Northern Ireland by using economic and social rights-based budget analysis. The report compares social housing spending with Government's obligations relating to social housing as set out in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR). The report concludes that Government's spending on social housing does not comply with an international legal obligation to use the maximum available resources to ensure progressive realisation of the right to adequate housing.

9.2 The key points from the analysis by QUB are:

- a) The UK is bound to ensure that everyone has an adequate standard of living and to progressively achieve the right to adequate housing. It must use all the resources it can to gradually and continually improve this right and must not tolerate retrogression;
- b) It must ensure that those likely to be affected by decision-making in housing have the ability to participate meaningfully in decisions;
- c) Using housing associations for raising finance off-balance is highly questionable from a human rights perspective. If borrowing is required DFP should urge HM Treasury to equip the appropriate public body with a borrowing capacity;
- d) DSD, NIHE and housing associations should give serious thought to the idea of a single regional housing provider, as a multi-provider system in a small region like Northern Ireland has proved problematic;

- e) The UK Ministry of Justice should add housing associations to the list of bodies subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000;
- f) Much greater financial support has to be provided to the social housing programme, this responsibility resides with DSD and DFP;
- g) DFP and NIHE should together ensure that action is taken to prevent land banking and socially harmful forms of speculation;
- h) DFP should decouple the SHDP budget from house and land sales;
- i) In addition to increasing regulation DSD should progressively reduce its reliance on the PRS by investing more in social housing stock.

The full report can be accessed at:

<http://www.law.qub.ac.uk/schools/SchoolofLaw/Research/HumanRightsCentre/ResearchProjects/BudgetAnalysis/>

## **10.0 Transfer of Skeoge House to Leafair Community Association**

The Board approved the transfer of Skeoge House to Leafair Community Association.

- 10.1 Leafair Community Association has leased two garages from the Housing Executive since 1994. The Association carried out a number of improvements to the premises at no cost to the Housing Executive and in accordance with all statutory requirements.
- 10.2 The Association is a well established community group providing a wide range of services within the Outer North Neighbourhood Regeneration Area, an area of high deprivation
- 10.3 The transfer of the property to the Association will be by way of a 99 year lease.

## **OTHER BUSINESS**

### **11.0 Northern Ireland Assembly Questions**

The Board noted details of recent housing related Assembly Questions.

- 11.1 During the period 31<sup>st</sup> May to 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2010, 106 Assembly Questions were tabled for response by the Minister for Social Development. Of these 68 were housing related.

The Northern Ireland Assembly is in recess until 5<sup>th</sup> September 2010.