

Executive Briefing Introduction

“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 30th June 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
6th Floor
The Housing Centre
2, Adelaide Street
Belfast BT2 8PB

Telephone: 028 90240588 Extension 2700

Web Site: www.nihe.gov.uk

Email: info@nihe.gov.uk

Members Present: Mr Brian Rowntree (Chairman)
Mrs Anne Henderson (Vice Chair)
Cllr Brendan Curran
Cllr Eamonn O’Neill
Cllr Jenny Palmer
Dr Monica Wilson
Mr Ken Millar
Mrs Edna Dunbar
Mrs Angela Coffey

Apologies: Cllr Jim Speers

INDEX

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1.0 Business Plan Monitor**
(Progress on Business Plan objectives)
- 2.0 Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10**

STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

- 3.0 Independent Commission on the Future for Housing in Northern Ireland**
(A note on the final report from the Independent Commission)
- 4.0 Budget Measures Related to Housing Benefit**
(An update on the impact of the June 2010 budget on Housing Benefit)
- 5.0 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey 2009 – Key Findings**
(A summary of key findings of the 2009 CTOS)
- 6.0 Housing (Amendment) (No 2) Bill**
(An update on the proposed content of the Bill)
- 7.0 2008/09 Arrears Performance Benchmarking Exercise**
(A note on results of the 2008/09 Benchmarking Exercise)
- 8.0 Absence Management**
(A note on the proposed revisions to the Absence Management policy)
- 9.0 Northern Ireland Housing Affordability Indicators and Research**
(A summary of findings from recent research on the housing market in Northern Ireland)
- 10.0 Consultation Paper from the Utility Regulator – Opening of Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) to Competition**
(A note on the Housing Executive’s response to the NISEP and the proposal to apply for registration as a primary bidder)

- 11.0 Next Generation of Equality Schemes**
(Details of the Equality Commission guidelines on the Housing Executive's new Equality Scheme)
- 12.0 Asset Management (Land & Property) 2009/10 Report**
(An update on progress made on the Asset Management Strategy & Plan 2009-2012)
- 13.0 Social Housing Need and Access Analysis – Proposed Changes to the Housing Selection Scheme**
(A note on proposed changes to the Housing Selection Scheme)
- 14.0 Lisburn Housing & Regeneration Strategy Progress Report**
(An update on progress of the Strategy)
- 15.0 North Belfast Strategy Progress Report (Year 9)**
(An update on progress of the Strategy)
- 16.0 Greater West Belfast Strategy (Year 7)**
(An update on progress of the Strategy)
- 17.0 Greater Shankill Strategy (Year 6)**
(An update on progress of the Strategy)
- 18.0 Upper New Lodge – Economic Appraisal**
- 19.0 Fortwilliam Parade/Queen Victoria Gardens URA – Economic Appraisal**
- 20.0 Parkside URA – Economic Appraisal**
- 21.0 Donegall Road/Village Regeneration Plan**
(An update on the Regeneration Plan)

OTHER BUSINESS

- 22.0 Scheme Design Approvals**
- 23.0 Northern Ireland Assembly Questions**
(A summary of work relating to Northern Ireland Assembly Questions)

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1.0 Business Plan Monitor

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

Performance against the majority of targets was good. However, there is considerable uncertainty and possible difficulties in relation to funding in the year ahead and performance against targets will require close monitoring.

2.0 Annual Report and Accounts 2009/10

- 2.1 The Board approved the Annual Report and Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2010. The Accounts will be laid before the Assembly following signing off by the Comptroller and Auditor General on 1st July 2010. The Housing Executive has prepared its Annual Report and Accounts in accordance with the new International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) standards announced in the 2007 budget.

STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

3.0 Independent Commission on the Future for Housing in Northern Ireland

The Board noted the recent launch of the Independent Commission Report on 28th May 2010.

- 3.1 The report has been broadly welcomed by the Minister for Social Development and the Housing Executive and contains over 100 recommendations. The key sections and recommendations affecting housing are:
- a) The significance of housing for Northern Ireland;
 - b) The institutional framework;
 - c) Towards a mixed housing economy;
 - d) Opening housing opportunities;
 - e) The role of the Housing Executive.

3.2 The Chairman and Chief Executive of the Housing Executive will now meet with the Independent Commission to discuss the report, particularly in relation to how funding for social housing may be secured in the future.

4.0 Budget Measures Related to Housing Benefit

The Board noted an update by the Housing Executive on the impact of the June 2010 budget on all parties involved in the Housing Benefit market.

4.1 The June 2010 budget included a number of measures relating to HB with the aim of reducing expenditure. The following changes are proposed:

- a) Local Housing Allowance rates will be set at the 30th percentile of local rents with effect from October 2011;
- b) Local Housing Allowance rates will be up-rated in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI);
- c) Housing Benefit claimants with a disability and a non-resident carer will be entitled to funding for an extra bedroom with effect from April 2011;
- d) Housing entitlements for working age people in the social sector will reflect family size with effect from April 2013;
- e) Housing benefit will be reduced to 90% of the initial award after 12 months for claimants receiving Job Seekers Allowance (JSA) with effect from April 2013;
- f) The Government contribution to Discretionary Housing Payments will be increased to £10m in 2011/12 and £40m from 2012/13;

More detailed assessments of the impact of the changes will be undertaken as further details are made available.

5.0 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey 2009 – Key Findings

The Board noted the key findings of the 2009 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS) and approved their dissemination.

5.1 The 2009 Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS) was the sixteenth comprehensive assessment of Housing Executive tenants' attitudes to service delivery to be carried out since 1994.

The key findings are set out below and where appropriate, comparisons of 2009 CTOS findings have been made with those for 2008.

5.3 HRP/Household Characteristics

- a) The average number of people per household for 2009 was 2.12 (2.10 in 2008);
- b) 17% of household reference persons (HRPs) were working (full-time, part-time or self employed) (15% in 2008);
- c) 42% of HRPs were in receipt of Income Support/Job Seekers Allowance (44% in 2008%); 30% of HRPs were retired (32% in 2008) and 16% were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit (same as 2008);
- d) 77% of households were in receipt of Housing Benefit;
- e) 56% of households were described as Protestant; 37% were described as Catholic; 2% were of mixed religion (Protestant / Catholic).

5.4 Contact with the Housing Executive

- a) 65% of respondents had telephoned a Housing Executive office (68% in 2008); 95% said the member of staff they spoke to dealt with them in a courteous manner (95% in 2008); 88% were satisfied with telephoning a Housing Executive Office;
- b) 24% of respondents had visited a Housing Executive office in the 12 months before interview (26% in 2008); 91% of callers were attended to by staff in less than 15 minutes (61% in less than 5 minutes); 85% were satisfied with their visit (81% in 2008).

5.5 Home Repairs

- a) 66% of tenants had reported a repair to the Housing Executive within the 12 months before interview (64% in 2008); 88% were satisfied with the way staff had dealt with their request (87% in 2008); 82% of respondents reporting a repair had had a repair completed; 84% who had a repair completed were satisfied;

- b) 75% of all respondents reporting a repair were satisfied with their experience of the repair service overall (73% in 2008);
- c) 81% reported that the current state of their dwelling was very good/fairly good (also 81% in 2008).

5.6 Housing Executive Services Overall

- a) Overall satisfaction with the service provided by the Housing Executive remains as the same for 2008 at 85%.

6.0 **Housing (Amendment) (No 2) Bill**

The Board noted the revised proposals for inclusion in the Housing (Amendment) (No 2) Bill, was introduced to the Northern Ireland Assembly on 22nd June 2010.

- 6.1 The Housing (Amendment) (No2) Bill aims to improve regulation of the private rented sector, including houses in multiple occupation for the benefit of both tenants and landlords. It will also provide further tools for tackling fuel poverty which include giving the Housing Executive the power to broker energy at a discounted price for its tenants. In addition, the Bill seeks to improve the operation of current housing law in respect of dealing with anti-social behaviour around exchange of tenancies and information sharing between social landlords. The Bill also seeks to recognise the legal restrictions on the Housing Executive allocating housing to a person who is not eligible for such accommodation because of immigration-related legislation.

7.0 **2008/09 Arrears Performance Benchmarking Exercise**

The Board noted the results of the 2008/09 Arrears Benchmarking Exercise.

- 7.1 Performance for 2008/09, together with the associated management costs, has been benchmarked, analysed and assessed across housing functions. The Housing Executive's results are compared against other organisations using information supplied through Housemark, Chartered Institute of Public Finance & Accountancy (CIPFA) and Rent Income Excellence Network (RIEN).

7.2 Summary of Findings

The Housing Executive performance was better than average for 14 of the 22 performance measures and compares favourably against large organisations in the benchmarking exercise. Much work has been done in recent years resulting in consistent arrears reductions over the last four years. The Housing Executive appears to have a comparatively smaller number of tenants in arrears although these tenants may have significant rent debt.

The Housing Executive also has relatively low costs for rent collection and arrears management, demonstrating value for money in this area.

7.3 Initiatives to further improve rent collection and arrears performance include:

- a) Visits to organisations of best practice;
- b) Implementation of a new e-benefits system which will streamline the housing benefit claim application process;
- c) Quarterly performance reviews undertaken by senior policy and operational managers;
- d) Monthly reviews on Debt by Debt Bands;
- e) Completion of training for all accounts staff on basic money advice;
- f) Setting new and more comprehensive corporate targets for rent arrears against which future performance can be measured;
- g) Carrying out twice yearly inspections.

8.0 **Absence Management**

The Board noted the analysis of staff absence, and approved the proposed revisions to its Absence Management policy.

8.1 In February 2009 the Board approved a Managing Attendance Strategy which set out the Housing Executive's approach to managing attendance by:

- a) promoting and facilitating attendance at work;
- b) policies aimed at dealing with workplace issues;
- c) promoting health and well being;
- d) managing non attendance at work

8.2 Despite achieving reductions in absence up to March 2009, the level of absence rose slightly during the past year. Against this background, a review of the Managing Attendance Strategy has been undertaken, and a number of actions aimed at reducing the level of absence have been proposed.

9.0 Northern Ireland Housing Affordability Indicators and Research

The Board noted an update on the latest housing trends and policy developments in Northern Ireland for late 2009 and early 2010.

9.1 Information is presented twice yearly to the Board on average house price trends and broader issues in the housing market, drawn from a number of sources including the Northern Ireland Quarterly House Price Index (QHPI).

9.2 According to the QHPI, average house prices in Northern Ireland have remained relatively stable in recent quarters, varying around just over £160,000. At £169,497, the average price of houses sold during the first quarter 2010 was slightly higher than the previous quarter and also around five per cent higher than the equivalent quarter in 2009.

9.3 Although this was the first annual increase recorded since the first quarter 2008, it is unlikely to herald any significant upward trend in average prices for a number of reasons:

- a) Findings suggest that the resale market remains sluggish;
- b) There are significant variations at local level; price growth in the east of the region has been counter-balanced by falling average prices in the north and west;
- c) Wider macro-economic factors will have important implications for households' ability/inclination to access, move within and remain in the owner occupied sector;
- d) The report's findings suggest that economic recovery in Northern Ireland therefore looks set to remain slow at best, unemployment is expected to rise later this year, and the coalition Government's fiscal austerity measures are likely to impact on household spending power.

9.4 Other house price indices produced by CLG, Nationwide and Halifax have broadly supported the findings of the QHPI, and

suggest that after a period in 2008 when house prices in Northern Ireland were unusually (and unsustainably) aligned with those in England, they have now returned to being more closely in line with those in Scotland and Wales.

9.5 In combination, the low level of transactions in Northern Ireland, variations in market performance at local level and an uncertain economic context mean that the housing market here remains in a fragile state. As some commentators have pointed out, however, constrained wage growth means a period of house price stagnation would not be unwelcome in terms of affordability.

10.0 Consultation Paper from the Utility Regulator – Opening of Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP) to Competition

The Board approved the Housing Executive's response to the NISEP and approved the Housing Executive's proposal to apply for registration as a primary bidder.

10.1 Further to the reform of the Northern Ireland Sustainable Energy Programme (NISEP), formerly known as the Energy Efficiency Levy fund, organisations other than licensed energy suppliers are now permitted to bid for funding for 2011/12.

10.2 The minimum amount for funding bids in the first year is £50,000, with a maximum bid of £300,000. In its response, the Housing Executive recommended that the £300k limit on bids should be reviewed. In addition, 80% of funding is ring-fenced for vulnerable households and 50% of this is for households where no contribution is required.

10.3 Bids for funding must be made by 1st December 2010 for the 2011/12 financial year. Incentive payments for exceeding targets will be given to encourage participation. However, any payments in excess of 8% of the total project funds must be recycled into fuel poverty or energy efficiency schemes.

11.0 Next Generation of Equality Schemes

The Board noted the Equality Commission guidance on changes on Equality Schemes and the work required for a new scheme for the Housing Executive.

- 11.1 The Equality Commission has recently launched a revised Guide to the Section 75 Statutory Duties. The Guide changes the focus of equality schemes from one of compliance with Section 75 to using Section 75 to actively reduce inequalities. The Equality Commission will be calling for new Equality Schemes from July 2010 beginning with Government Departments. The current timetable requires a new scheme for the Housing Executive to be approved by the Board and submitted to the Equality Commission by April 2012.
- 11.2 The Board noted that there have been no legislative changes to Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and that the substance of the changes relate to recommendations from the Review of Section 75 and the work conducted by the Equality Commission on a “Statement of Inequalities in Northern Ireland”. The Equality Commission is recommending that public bodies follow this approach as best practice in aligning the addressing of inequalities with the core business of the organisation.
- 11.3 The new guide asks each public body to outline where inequalities exist within its range of functions by conducting an audit and consulting stakeholders on that audit. The Housing Executive’s Equality Unit is leading in preparing the new Equality Scheme and is working jointly with the Department for Social Development’s Equality Unit to ensure consistency of approach and alignment in identifying the inequalities that will inform our action plan.

12.0 Asset Management (Land & Property) 2009/10 Report

The Board noted the 2009/10 update on the value of the Housing Executive’s land and property assets and the progress made on the Asset Management Strategy & Plan (Land & Property) 2009-2012.

- 12.1 At the end of 2009/10 the Housing Executive’s land and property assets were valued at £3.88 billion, an increase on the 2008/09 valuation.
- 12.2 The Asset Management Strategy and Plan (Land and Property) 2009-12 was approved by the Board in July 2009, and aims “to ensure that the Housing Executive continues to acquire, develop and maintain a land and property asset base which is both commensurate with our business needs and fit-for-purpose”. The

Action Plan is structured around the Strategy's five objectives and the Board was provided with an update on the actions therein.

13.0 Social Housing Need and Access Analysis – Proposed Changes to the Housing Selection Scheme

The Board noted information regarding proposed changes to the Housing Selection Scheme and a high level preliminary action plan for the development of robustly tested proposals to issue for formal consultation.

13.1 In 2008 a comprehensive report entitled "Social Housing Need and Access Analysis" reviewed how the housing needs of applicants are assessed and how that assessment is reflected in the selection and allocation system.

13.2 The report made a number of carefully thought out recommendations for change, some of which involved relatively minor fine-tuning of the Scheme, while others were more radical and could, if implemented, result in lasting and significant changes to the Common Selection Scheme.

13.3 The Minister has now asked the Housing Executive to proceed with nine of the recommendations in the report and to draft proposals for consultation. Further clarification on the specific aspects of the proposals is currently being sought.

14.0 Lisburn Housing & Regeneration Strategy Progress Report

The Board noted progress to date on the Lisburn Strategy.

14.1 The strategy was launched in the autumn of 2007 and the main objectives are:

- a) To maximise supply of social and affordable housing
- b) To enhance the role of social housing in supporting strong, sustainable communities and neighbourhoods
- c) To promote the social housing sector's contribution to wider regeneration and development initiatives.

14.2 To date 125 units of accommodation have been provided through two "off the shelf" purchase schemes and the acquisition of a former MOD surplus site in 2009/10. Three new build projects are on site and will deliver 131 units.

- 14.3 During 2009/10 schemes were carried out to install 128 kitchens, upgrade heating in 31 properties and carry out ECM work to 198 properties. Smoke detectors were installed in 159 properties and 32 properties benefited from capital improvement work. A five year programme of health and safety work to 5 multi storey blocks has commenced. In addition Community Development workers have been funded in two areas for a third year and significant progress has been made on the Shared Neighbourhood Programme with three communities in Lisburn participating. A second phase of a community self build programme has been planned.
- 14.4 The Housing Executive has also participated in the consultation exercise for the Lisburn City Centre Masterplan.
- 14.5 Public Relations issues on the strategy have been managed by regular meetings with Lisburn City Council’s Housing Liaison Committee and regular updates are provided to community groups.

15.0 North Belfast Strategy Progress Report (Year 9)

The Board noted progress during the ninth year of the North Belfast Housing Strategy.

- 15.1 The North Belfast Housing Strategy was launched in 2001 and has 5 key themes:
- a) Increasing Housing Supply
 - b) Making better use of stock
 - c) Sustaining and Improving Private Housing Areas
 - d) Promoting Regeneration and Social Inclusion
 - e) Improving the Housing Executives Housing Stock
- 15.2 During 2009/10 113 new social housing units were started on site, bringing the total over the nine years of the strategy to 1,893.
- 15.3 Despite the budgetary pressures during the year 11 Revenue Schemes were commenced on-site affecting 960 Housing Executive homes, involving a total investment of just under £5m.

16.0 Greater West Belfast Strategy (Year 7)

The Board noted progress during the seventh year of the Regeneration Strategy for West Belfast.

16.1 The Greater West Belfast Housing Strategy was launched in April 2003 and has 3 main themes:

- a) Maximising Housing Supply within Sustainable Neighbourhoods
- b) Improving Housing Conditions
- c) Regeneration Through Partnership

16.2 Of particular note was the commencement on-site of 316 new social homes during the year, bringing the total over the seven year period to 1,709 against a target of 1,920.

16.3 Work continues to provide major development opportunities in Hannahstown and Glen Road.

17.0 Greater Shankill Strategy (Year 6)

The Board noted progress during the sixth year of the Regeneration Strategy for the Greater Shankill.

17.1 The Greater Shankill Housing & Regeneration Strategy was launched in April 2004 and has 3 key themes:

- a) To develop plans and programmes for the physical / social renewal of neighbourhoods.
- b) To assist in creating a stable and balanced population in the Greater Shankill.
- c) To work with and assist other partners in the economic regeneration of the Greater Shankill.

17.2 Lawnbrook Redevelopment Area was declared in May 2009 which will lead to the replacement of the existing poor housing and their replacement with approximately 120 new social and private homes.

17.3 The District Office staff continue to work hard in partnership with the community and other statutory agencies to promote the physical and economic regeneration of the area.

18.0 Upper New Lodge – Economic Appraisal

The Board approved the action recommended as a result of an Economic Appraisal carried out in the Upper New Lodge area of Belfast.

18.1 The Housing Executive commissioned an Economic Appraisal to consider options in the Upper New Lodge area of North Belfast to determine the most cost effective means of addressing future housing need in the area.

18.2 The North Belfast Strategy was launched by the Housing Executive in October 2000, which incorporated the Upper New Lodge area. The strategy recognised North Belfast as an area of acute shortage of social housing. The economic appraisal considered a number of options and recommended the following:

- a) Acquisition of 78 dwellings and 7 commercial premises;
- b) Demolition of 178 dwellings;
- c) Demolition of 7 commercial units;
- d) Construction of 98 units;
- e) Retention of 33 dwellings, including 15 owner occupied properties for grant aid.

19.0 Fortwilliam Parade/Queen Victoria Gardens URA – Economic Appraisal

The Board approved the revised Regeneration Plan for the Fortwilliam /Queen Victoria Gardens Urban Renewal Area (URA).

19.1 In March 2005 the Board approved an economic appraisal for the area, which was revised following lengthy discussion with the Department for Social Development. The Board noted the revised proposals which include:

- a) Acquisition of 47 properties for demolition;
- b) Demolition of two Housing Executive properties;
- c) Construction of 21 new social housing units.

20.0 Parkside URA – Economic Appraisal

The Board approved the revised Regeneration Plan for the Parkside Urban Renewal Area (URA).

20.1 In May 2005 the Board approved the Parkside URA economic appraisal which was revised and approved following discussions with the Department for Social Development. The revised approach recommends a regeneration strategy which combines partial redevelopment with the retention of housing and the original boundary of the URA has also been divided into 5 separate zones.

21.0 Donegall Road/Village Regeneration Plan

The Board noted the updated position in relation to the Donegall Road/Village area.

21.1 In April 2008 the Board approved a Regeneration Plan for the Donegall Road/Village area. Due to an objection to vesting of the area and subsequent legal proceedings, this challenge has now been withdrawn and the Vesting Order will take effect immediately. The first phase of new housing will commence on site in early 2012.

OTHER BUSINESS

22.0 NIHE Scheme Design Approvals

Scheme	Work Content	Start Date
<u>North East Area</u> Twickenham House, Ballymena	Replacement of existing stand-by generator	October 2010
<u>South Area</u> Windmill Road and Old Rossary Church Road, Enniskillen	Health and safety works to 10 dwellings	November 2010

23.0 Northern Ireland Assembly Questions

The Board noted details of recent housing related Assembly Questions.

23.1 During the period 3rd to 28th May 2010, 27 Assembly Questions were tabled for response by the Minister for Social Development. Of these 15 were housing related.