

Executive Briefing Introduction

“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 25th March 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
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)
Mr Ciaran Brolly
Cllr Brendan Curran
Cllr Eamonn O’Neill
Mr Brendan Mackin
Cllr Jenny Palmer
Dr Monica Wilson

Apologies: Mr Alistair Joynes
Cllr Jim Speers

INDEX

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

- 1.0 **Business Plan Monitor**
(Progress on Business Plan objectives)
- 2.0 **Corporate & Business Plans 2009/10 to 2011/12**

STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

- 3.0 **Supporting People 2009/10 Budget Allocation**
- 4.0 **Potential Leasing Models**
- 5.0 **Review of Voids**
- 6.0 **Warm Homes Scheme**
- 7.0 **Urban Regeneration Areas – Special Scheme for Owner Occupiers**
- 8.0 **House Sales – Exclusion of Bungalows**
- 9.0 **Achieving Excellence in Construction (AEC) Update**
- 10.0 **NI Housing Affordability Indicators and Research**
- 11.0 **Housing Research Programme 2009/10**
- 12.0 **Modernising Services Update**
- 13.0 **Evaluation of North and West Belfast Mediation and Community Support (MACS) Programme**
- 14.0 **Board Visit to the South Area held on 11th March 2009**
- 15.0 **Northern Ireland Assembly Questions**
(A summary of work relating to Northern Ireland Assembly Questions)
- 16.0 **NIHE Scheme Design/ Heating Scheme Approvals**

GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

1.0 Business Plan Monitor

The Housing Executive's Business Plan Monitor for February 2009 showed that the majority of targets were either fully or substantially met. However, overall performance on physical targets has been adversely affected by the level of funding.

2.0 Corporate & Business Plans 2009/10 to 2011/12

The Board noted the results of the consultation exercise on the plans and approved the Housing Executive's Corporate Plan for submission to the Minister for final approval.

- 2.1 The draft Corporate and Business Plans were approved for consultation at the Board meeting in February 2009. The Plans do not currently include details of budgets or physical programme numbers. These will be included in the Business Plan prior to publication, and will reflect the budget available for 2009/10.

STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

3.0 Supporting People 2009/10 Budget Allocation

The Board approved the Housing Executive's Supporting People budget for 2009/10.

- 3.1 The Supporting People programme has been operating for almost 6 years and provides funding for over 120 provider organisations. The programme delivers accommodation-based and floating support services through almost 1,000 schemes, providing assistance to more than 23,000 vulnerable people each year.
- 3.2 The Board noted that the planned expenditure for 2009/10 will fund existing services at current funding levels, together with the following six new schemes which are currently being developed.
- a) Enniskillen EMI (Fold) - 30 units for those with mental health issues;
 - b) Millburn, Belfast (Habinteg) – 9 units for those with mental health issues;

- c) Lerwill House, Coleraine (Triangle) – 13 units for those with a learning disability;
- d) Ballymena Road, Ballymoney – 6 units for those with a learning disability;
- e) Dunmisk, Belfast Resettlement (Trinity) – 10 units for those with a learning disability;
- f) 603 Antrim Road, Belfast Replacement – 10 units for those with mental health issues

4.0 Potential Leasing Models

The Board noted a report on potential leasing models which could be used to supplement traditional Social Housing Development Programme starts.

- 4.1 In an effort to bridge the gap between the existing high level of housing need and the level of new social housing provided for under the Social Housing Development Programme the Housing Executive is exploring the possibility of leasing property to assist in meeting housing need, evidenced by the Waiting Lists.
- 4.2 Currently in Northern Ireland “off the shelf” purchases are an accepted means of acquiring housing units, but there are issues with regard to some of these purchases and their potential to meet current social housing new build standards.

The Housing Executive has also investigated the potential for purpose built units with leasing in mind. A feasibility study, based on a possible development opportunity, has been developed and is being examined in terms of costs, roles and responsibilities. The Board will be kept advised on progress.

5.0 Review of Voids

The Board noted progress in reducing numbers of Housing Executive owned void properties, and the proposed action over the next two years.

- 5.1 A review of void properties has been carried out by the Housing Executive under the Minister for Social Development’s Empty Homes Strategy. The Review highlighted that since 2000/01 voids in Housing Executive stock have reduced significantly.

- 5.2 However in an effort to reduce waiting lists and to reflect the current funding allocation the Housing Executive has developed an action plan to reinstate void stock back to lettability to meet housing need. It is anticipated that voids can be further reduced by 1500 units over the next two years.
- 5.3 At the end of January 2009 the Housing Executive had 2,697 void dwellings out of a total of 90,445 housing stock.

Area	No of Stock	No of Voids	% of Stock
Belfast	22,560	636	3%
South East	19,177	603	3%
South	15,061	338	2%
North East	18,532	806	5%
West	15,115	313	2%
Totals	90,445	2,697	3%

Table 1: Current Number of Voids per Area at January 2009

- 5.4 The numbers of void dwellings fall into four main categories:

Category	Nature of Void Dwelling	No of void dwellings
Lettable	COT Repairs	94
	Awaiting Re-let	56
Operational	Major Repairs	558
	Improvements	497
	Decanting	378
	Sale Pending	146
	Temporary Closed	43
Long Term	No Tenant	240
	Civil Unrest	195
	Major Scheme Blocked	40
Pending Demolition	Demolition Pending	450
Total		2,697

6.0 Warm Homes Scheme

The Board noted progress on the proposal to transfer the Warm Homes Scheme from the DSD to the Housing Executive, with effect from May 2009.

6.1 The Warm Homes scheme was established in 2001 by the Department for Social Development (DSD) as a means of tackling fuel poverty. The current scheme is now coming to an end and a new scheme is due to begin in May 2009. Under the new scheme the DSD will have overall responsibility for the Fuel

Poverty Strategy but the Housing Executive has been invited to manage the scheme and the budget on DSD's behalf.

6.2 The new scheme will reflect changes on a number of issues which were highlighted by the Northern Ireland Audit Office to the DSD in their evaluation of the current scheme.

6.3 In terms of assistance available under the new scheme the following changes have been made:

- a) The scheme will be targeted at those most in need, particularly in rural areas;
- b) Applicants will be offered a Benefit Health Check to ensure they are claiming all relevant benefits;
- c) Renewable technologies will be considered for "hard to treat" properties;
- d) Energy Performance Certificates will be required for each property.
- e) Repairs to existing systems will no longer be available ;
- f) Draught proofing and compact fluorescent lamps will no longer be provided;

6.4 Management and reporting arrangements have been developed between the Housing Executive and the DSD. The contract will be issued for tender this month with an anticipated contract start date towards the end of May 2009.

7.0 Urban Regeneration Areas – Special Scheme for Owner Occupiers

The Board noted the introduction of a special scheme for owner-occupiers in urban housing regeneration areas.

- 7.1 The new scheme allows owner-occupiers in regeneration areas to purchase their new properties without having to meet the usual 5 year tenancy rule under the current House Sales scheme. Owner-occupiers can also purchase equity on the property if they have insufficient funds to purchase the whole dwelling.
- 7.2 The scheme took effect in January 2009, and will apply to approximately 200 owner-occupiers, mainly in Belfast.

8.0 House Sales – Exclusion of Bungalows

The Board noted the outcome of the Housing Executive’s review of the house sales policy in relation to the exclusion of one and two bedroom bungalows from the House Sales Scheme.

- 8.1 The Housing Executive Review noted the trend in other regions in the UK to limit eligibility to purchase bungalows under the “Right to Buy” scheme. The Housing Executive review concluded that there is a compelling case to exclude bungalows from the House Sales scheme due to the increasing waiting list for bungalow type accommodation.

9.0 Achieving Excellence in Construction (AEC) Update

The Board noted the Housing Executive’s progress to date in implementing the Achieving Excellence in Construction (AEC) principles.

- 9.1 Problems created by divisions within the construction industry were identified in the mid 1990’s by Sir John Egan. His report in 1998 highlighted the need to streamline procedures and to improve the management of contracts between the various partners. “Egan” principles are determined by European legislation and promote early contractor involvement in the design process.

9.2 The Egan or AEC principles have now been incorporated into the Housing Executive's Business Plan through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). These relate to performance management measurements, eg client satisfaction, cost predictability and tenant satisfaction. AEC contracts have delivered considerable benefits to Housing Executive tenants, reflected through KPIs, in terms of:

- a) Better service
- b) Better quality product
- c) Clearly identified contractor's staff
- d) Familiar contractor presence
- e) Better trained and skilled tradesmen
- f) Better customer-focused contractor
- g) A freephone contact facility

9.3 Reporting arrangements and a comprehensive risk register for each contract have been established. To date a total of 67 AEC contracts have been awarded, a number of which are now due for renewal. Typical contracts include heating, grounds maintenance and response maintenance.

9.4 The Project Team will continue to review contract progress, benchmark performance and provide details on lessons learned to staff.

10.0 NI Housing Affordability Indicators and Research

The Board noted the recent update on the findings of the latest housing affordability research and indicators in Northern Ireland for the period from October to December 2008.

10.1 The affordability indicators and research are based on evidence from relevant sources including the Housing Executive, University of Ulster and the Bank of Ireland Quarterly House Price Index.

House Price Index

10.2 The Housing Executive publishes a quarterly report on the performance of the Northern Ireland housing market. The report for October to December 2008 revealed that the average NI

house price fell from £203,775 to £168,185. The average NI house price at September 2003 was £105,779.

Year	Average NI House Price	Annual % Change
Qtr 4 2003	£105,863	6.8
Qtr 4 2004	£118,313	13.4
Qtr 4 2005	£145,987	22.5
Qtr 4 2006	£195,751	37.0
Qtr 4 2007	£231,168	26.4
Qtr 4 2008	£168,185	-28.2

Table 1: NI Average House Price and Annual Price Change by Quarter, 2003-2008 (NI Quarterly House Price Index)

Repossessions

- 10.3 The Ulster Bank’s Quarterly Economic Review in February 2009, highlighted a rising trend in mortgage repossessions in Northern Ireland and suggested that this is likely to continue. While the number of actions for repossession by the Northern Ireland Court Service decreased from 1,106 to 939 from the third to the fourth quarters of 2008, the general trend remains relatively high.

RICS Housing Market Survey

- 10.4 The Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) carries out a UK wide monthly survey among its members on the perception of housing market trends. The latest report for January 2009 has indicated that in Northern Ireland affordable prices have resulted in an increase in first time buyers but that better mortgage products would further increase demand.
- 10.5 A number of other initiatives are being developed: developments in the mortgage market; Co-Ownership funding; changes to the house sales scheme and government initiatives to assist struggling home owners.

11.0 Housing Research Programme 2009/10

The Board approved the Housing Executive’s proposed research programme and associated budget for 2009/10.

- 11.1 Under the 1981 Housing Order the Housing Executive has a statutory responsibility to regularly examine housing conditions

and housing need. The main report from the 2006 House Condition Survey was launched in September 2008.

11.2 The importance of research is also reflected in the role the Housing Executive plays in meeting its strategic objectives:

- 1) Delivering the Decent Homes standard
Findings from the 2006 House Condition Survey indicate a significant improvement on the number of dwellings achieving the Decent Homes standard - [House Condition Survey 2006](#)
- 2) Promoting Independent Living
2 reports were launched in September 2008 on Retirement Villages - [Retirement Villages](#) and on the Information Needs of Older People - [Information Needs of Older People](#)
- 3) Urban and Rural Regeneration
Research on the private rented sector, Neighbourhood Renewal surveys and rural research is ongoing.
- 4) Promoting Affordable Housing
The Affordability Index for Northern Ireland was updated for 2008 - [Housing Market Review and Perspectives 2008 - 2011](#)
- 5) Building a Stronger Community
The first mixed community baseline analysis based on the 2001 Census has been completed for Northern Ireland and is helping to guide the Housing Executive's "Shared Future" agenda.
- 6) Providing Better Public Services
Ongoing research includes the Continuous Tenant Omnibus Survey (CTOS), Public Attitudes Survey, Neighbourhood Renewal Surveys and Grants Customer Surveys.

11.3 Proposed Programme for 2009/10

The 2009 House Condition Survey will absorb the majority of the 2009/10 research programme. Other research includes:

strategic research - Housing Needs of Older People/ Supporting People; customer research - Continuous Omnibus Survey and Neighbourhood Renewal and technical research - Sustainable Development and Energy Efficiency.

12.0 Modernising Services Update

The Board noted significant progress on the Housing Executive's Modernising Services programme and the key milestones for the coming months.

12.1 Information & Communications Technology (ICT) Services

- The new Housing Executive website was launched in 2008;
- A new computerised private sector grants system has been implemented in Ballyclare and the rollout elsewhere is due to be completed in September 2009;

12.2 Telephony Services

- The new telephony system has been implemented. New telephone numbers for repairs and housing benefit have been introduced;
- The results from its telephony customer survey will be available in April;
- Service numbers at low cost local rates are now available for most callers;
- Low rate calls for mobile phone users will apply in the coming weeks;

12.3 New Structures and Office Accommodation

- The new Area Service Units (HB and Accounts) and Customer Service Units have now been implemented, except in North East Area, where the remaining offices to transfer should be completed by September 2009;
- Over 500 staff have been relocated with the exception of a small number in Fermanagh and Newry offices;

12.4 Learning and Development

- 927 employees have completed one or more functional competence areas and 47 functional training units have been developed. Accreditation for competencies is now being piloted.

13.0 Evaluation of North and West Belfast Mediation and Community Support (MACS) Programme

The Board noted the recommendations of the MACS Programme Evaluation Report and endorsed the development by the Housing Executive of a two year Service Level Agreement with Northern Ireland Alternatives (NIA).

- 13.1 In November 2007 the Board approved a pilot for a one year partnership arrangement with NIA for the provision of mediation and support services in the Greater Shankill and Ballysillan areas of North and West Belfast.
- 13.2 The partnership was jointly funded by the Housing Executive, Atlantic Philanthropies and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. In November 2008 CTC Associates was commissioned to carry out an evaluation of the partnership.
- 13.3 The evaluation showed that the MACS programme has been innovative and has demonstrated the potential for achieving sustainable outcomes in community safety and community cohesion.

14.0 Board Visit to the South Area on 11th March 2009

The Board visit to the South Area focused on neighbourhood renewal in the Newry area, in particular in the North Street, Canal Street, Ardcarne and Quayside areas.

15.0 Northern Ireland Assembly Questions

The Board noted details of recent housing related Assembly Questions.

- 15.1 During the period 2nd to 28th February 2009, 125 Assembly Questions were tabled for response by the Minister for Social Development. Of these 77 were housing related.

16.0 NIHE Scheme Design/Heating Scheme Approvals

Scheme	Work Content	Start Date
<u>South East Area</u> Newtownards Mop Up	Multi Element Improvements to 5 dwellings and 1 commercial unit	Oct 2009
Hillhall Bungalows	Multi Element Improvements and External Works to 36 bungalows including 1 sold dwelling	Oct 2009
<u>Belfast Area</u> South & West Belfast Phase 2 Heat Replacement	Heat replacement to 28 dwellings (22 S/F to gas conversion and 6 E7 to gas conversion)	Mar 2009
Belfast One Offs Phase 9 Heat Replacement	Heat replacement to 100 dwellings (45 S/F to gas conversion, 35 E7 to gas conversion, 10 E7 to gas full heating, 5 S/F to oil conversion & 5 S/F to oil full heating)	Apr 2009
<u>West Area</u> Sperrin Park Caw Heat Replacement	Heating replacement to 96 dwellings (46 OFBB or SFRH to gas wall hung, 1 full OFBB or SFRH to gas combi, 13 full OFBB to oil, 12 full E7 to gas wall hung & 24 full E7 to gas combi)	Apr 2009