

Executive Briefing Introduction

“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 27th March 2013 at 10.00am in the Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast.

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Members Present: Mr Donald Hoodless (Chair)
 Professor Peter Roberts (Vice Chair)
 Mrs Edna Dunbar
 Mr Ken Millar
 Cllr Eamonn O’Neill
 Cllr Jenny Palmer
 Cllr Jim Speers

Apologies: Mrs Angela Coffey
 Cllr Sean Begley

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1.0 Performance Report Landlord Services at February 2013

1.1. The Board noted the performance for Landlord Services against the Corporate and Business Plan targets for month 11 of the business year up to the end of February 2013.

1.2. Five KPIs had not met the year to date targets at the end of February 2013, these are:

- Start ECM work to 9,500 dwellings - Performance was 81%, however, progress was delayed early in the year due to pricing issues which have since been resolved. ECMs will be under target with an estimate of over 8,350 (88%) at year end.
- Start 160 Heating adaptations to NIHE homes - it is likely that only 75% of the target will be achieved by the year end. Requests for this type of work have reduced.
- Adaptations - Commence 200 extensions to NIHE homes. There are currently capacity issues with a contractor and a high drop out rate by tenants. It is estimated that only 75% of the target will be achieved by the end of the financial year.
- Reduce arrears written off to 0.36% of collectable income. - Performance is currently at 78%. Further write-offs will mean that the target will not be met.
- Re-let properties (not low demand) within 30 calendar days - Performance time has improved by 8 days from last month (39 days on average) and for the year to date is an average of 42 days (60%). It is now recognised that the time allowed for contractors to carry out certain repairs and change of tenancies is much too long and effectively undermines the achievement of the target. This needs to be renegotiated and resolved and means that the target will not be met for this year.

2.0 Performance Report - Regional Services Business at February 2013

2.1. The Board noted the performance for Regional Housing Services against the Corporate and Business Plan targets for month 11 of the business year up to the end of February 2013.

2.2. Three KPIs did not meet the performance targets, these are:

- Start 1,325 new build units (including supported housing units) - Although this KPI is well below target at 45.2%, it is traditionally a back loaded programme. It is still possible to meet the target but this is dependent on Housing Associations meeting their anticipated delivery targets. It is estimated that around 200

Supported Housing unit starts will be achieved by the year end. Overall new build total is expected to be met.

- Approve 1400 Disabled Facilities Grants in the Private Sector - These are demand led grants and have been below target for most of the year. At the end of February performance was 83.5%. It is therefore unlikely that the target will be met by the end of the year.
- Process Housing Benefit changes of circumstances within an average of 8 days. The current performance average is 9.5 and although the monthly target was met, cumulatively, the year end target will not be met.

3.0 Choice Based Lettings

- 3.1. The Board noted the current allocation system in Northern Ireland, the operation of Choice Based Lettings systems elsewhere, and plans to further pilot this initiative in low demand housing areas.**
- 3.2. Research into the modernisation of the Common Selection Scheme was carried out between 2008 and 2011 in conjunction with DSD and presented to the Minister for Social Development. One recommendation of the research was for a Choice-Based Lettings model to be developed and tested on a pilot basis.
- 3.3. In 2012 the Minister launched a Fundamental Review of the Allocations Policy. The report from this review is imminent and is also expected to comment upon the issue of Choice-Based Lettings in Northern Ireland.
- 3.4. Choice-Based Lettings involves regular advertising of vacant properties, with applicants allowed to 'bid' for a number of properties each week. Applicants are then chosen according to designated criteria such as priority, waiting time, and points level.
- 3.5. The current Common Selection Scheme in Northern Ireland is based upon direct offers to applicants who are highest-ranked by a points system. This system is aimed at ensuring that dwellings are allocated on the basis of greatest housing need. Local authorities in England tend to adopt more varied approaches, some of which incorporate Choice-Based Lettings.
- 3.6. Choice-Based Lettings is regarded as improving client choice, as well as transparency and administration. However, some concerns exist around the ability of vulnerable applicants to negotiate Choice-Based Lettings systems.
- 3.7. The Housing Executive operated Choice-Based Lettings pilots in five Districts in 2011, using a multiple-offer approach to exhaust the Waiting List and Choice-Based Lettings for properties which remained un-let after this exercise. Four bedsits in Banbridge were let through this initiative.

- 3.8. It is now planned to roll out further combined multiple offer / Choice-Based Lettings initiatives in up to 12 locations in 2013/14. These will be carried out only in areas of low demand, taking into account legal advice to ensure that no actions are taken which contravene the rules of the current statutory Selection Scheme.

4.0 Complaints & Contact Centres Benchmarking Exercises 2012/2013

4.1. The Board noted the benchmarking results for the services provided by the Social Housing Contact Centres and the Complaints System in 2012-13.

- 4.2. Two benchmarking reports were prepared comparing Housing Executive complaints procedures against other UK Housing organisations and Housing Executive Customer Service Units against other UK Social Housing Contact Centres.

- 4.3. In relation to complaints, the Housing Executive's performance in fully responding to second and third stage complaints within target times was consistently better than the median. The number of complaints resulting in compensatory payments was low in comparison to the other organisations involved in the benchmarking exercise and achieved 1st quartile performance. Customer satisfaction with case handling and outcomes was low for the Housing Executive and this issue together with others will be addressed in the current review of the complaints process.

- 4.4. In the Contact Centre benchmarking survey, when the 5 Housing Executive CSU's and Emergency Services Unit were aggregated, it showed that the Housing Executive received the 2nd highest number of incoming calls overall, and the highest number of incoming Repairs & Maintenance related calls of all the participating organisations. The Housing Executive is in the upper performance quartile for speed of answering calls; numbers of lost calls and resolving calls at 1st point of contact. Housing Executive results also compare favourably for a number of cost measures. Recruitment delays and a need for ongoing staff training were highlighted as issues to be addressed. Call recording to support learning and development for staff and, the promotion of online avenues of communication were proposed as the way forward to improve the overall customer experience.

5.0 Stock Transfer & No Fines Programmes

- ### **5.1. The Board noted the next steps regarding the Stock Transfer Programme and the development of thermal insulation programmes to "No Fines" dwellings.**

- ### **5.2. Stock Transfer Programme**

There are approximately 2500 properties in the current stock transfer programme.

The Stock Transfer Process to be applied to each scheme was approved by the Board in February 2013 and comprises four stages - Feasibility, Procurement, Consultation and Implementation

A business case has been prepared for DSD and DFP formal approval for Economic appraisals to be carried out by consultants and it is anticipated that procurement will be in place by June 2013

5.3. No Fines Stock

“No Fines” is a system of construction where the walls were constructed by pouring in situ cement, water and single size aggregate mix. ‘No Fines dwellings are of similar size, shape and layout as traditional stock but their thermal insulation performance is poor and would require more heat than traditional stock to achieve normal comfort levels.

There are approximately 5290 No Fines dwellings currently in Housing Executive stock which were built between 1950 and 1979.

In order to improve the thermal performance of these dwellings, some type of insulation will be provided through a programme under current development.

The next step in taking forward this programme is the appointment of consultants to develop proposals to be able to make the decision to proceed with the development of programmes or alternatively that they are included in the Stock Transfer Programme.

A No Fines Working Group has also been set up to investigate options and identify recent innovation.

6.0 Supporting People Additional In Year Support Funding

6.1. The Board approved additional in year funding allocations to 3 service providers under the Supporting People Programme.

6.2. The Supporting People budget of up to £66.4 million for 2012/13 included contingency funding to support strategically relevant services in light of the implications of the 5 year base lining of funding.

6.3. Additional in-year funding of up to £140,000, based on evidenced bids, was approved to a further 3 provider organisations:

a)	Mainstay DRP	£90,000
b)	Mulholland After Care	£30,000
c)	Action for Children	£20,000
	TOTAL:	£140,000

This funding will be used to provide deficit funding as a result of cost pressures and to fund Supporting People eligible start-up costs associated with new service developments.

7.0 Draft Corporate & Business Plan 2013/2014 -2015/16

- 7.1. The Board approved the draft Corporate and Business Plan for 2013/14 – 2015/16 for consultation.**
- 7.2. The Plan has been divided to reflect the regional housing services and landlord roles. This split between landlord and non-landlord roles is in line with the Minister's recent announcement on the Social Housing Reform Programme.
- 7.3. Whilst this is an important issue for the organisation, the plans also reflect other major influences, including DSD's new draft Housing Strategy, the on-going Welfare Reform Programme, and the continued impact of the economic recession.
- 7.4. As 2013/14 is a transitional year for the Housing Executive's Corporate & Business Plans. In the future the landlord and regional services strands will have separate Plans, however, the broad Plan structure of previous years will be maintained with the four Corporate Objectives. The way in which achievement of the objectives will be assessed is shown against the separate landlord and regional services.
- 7.5. The Plan will be published for a short period of consultation following which it will be submitted to the Board for approval and forwarded to the Minister for Social Development for endorsement.