

## Executive Briefing Introduction

“Executive Briefing” summarises the business of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive’s Board at its meeting on Wednesday 31st October 2012 at 10.00am in the Housing Centre, 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast.

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Members Present: Mrs Anne Henderson (Acting Chair)

Mrs Angela Coffey

Mrs Edna Dunbar

Mr Ken Millar

Cllr Eamonn O’Neill

Cllr Jenny Palmer

Cllr Jim Speers

Cllr Sean Begley

## INDEX

<b>GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
1.0 Business Plan Monitor .....	3
<b>STRATEGIES AND POLICIES .....</b>	<b>5</b>
2.0 Facing the Future: Northern Ireland Housing Strategy 2012-2017 .....	5
3.0 Welfare Reform: Proposed Changes to the Housing Selection Scheme	5
4.0 Current Tenant Arrears Issues and Action Plan .....	6
5.0 Health & Safety Management .....	7
6.0 Home Energy Efficiency Advice Service .....	8
7.0 Supporting People Strategy: A Strategy for Housing Related Support 2012-2015 .....	8
8.0 Supporting People Programme Update .....	9
9.0 2012 Annual HECA Progress Report.....	10
10.0 Social Functions and the consumption of alcohol on Housing Executive premises .....	10
11.0 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedures.....	11
<b>OTHER BUSINESS.....</b>	<b>12</b>
12.0 Solar PV Programme for NIHE stock.....	12
13.0 Disaster Recovery/Resilience – Corporate Infrastructure & Applications .....	12
14.0 NIHE Scheme Approvals .....	14

## GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

### 1.0 Business Plan Monitor

#### 1.1. The Board noted the Housing Executive's Business Plan Monitor for the first six months of the financial year. The Monitor shows progress against the Business Plan's four Corporate Objectives:

1.2. Overall performance is generally satisfactory. Whilst performance on planned maintenance schemes is likely to improve and meet target there are a range of KPIs including arrears, relets and HB change of circumstances which are unlikely to meet end of year target.

1.3. Performance against the four Corporate Objectives in the Housing Executive's Business Plan included:

#### Objective 1 – Delivering better homes

Decent Homes Standard (NIHE Maintenance) – 1,858 ECM starts (41%) against a target of 4,497, 1,684 kitchen replacements (67%) against a target of 2,505 and 3,222 (80%) double glazing starts against a target of 4,005. 1,795 (71%) heating replacements against a target of 2,523.

New Social and Affordable Housing – For the year to date performance is still below target with 118 units completions (43%) against a target of 273 units. The target of 1,200 completions by the year end is expected to be achieved.

Thermal Efficiency – This KPI includes heating installations, heating adaptations and some ECM work. Performance for the year to date shows 2,715 (91%) against a target of 2,973.

#### Objective 2 – Supporting Independent Living

NIHE Adaptations – Performance for heating adaptations is 27 (29%) against a target of 92. Performance has been affected by the transition to the new heating contracts along with a significant number of refusals. Contracts have now been agreed and performance improvement will be evident in the next few months.

Private Sector Adaptations – Performance for the month of September was 118 (102%) against a target of 116. The year to date is 661 (95%) against a target of 696.

#### Objective 4 – Delivering Quality Services

Rent Arrears – The overall trend of arrears is still increasing and performance of the year to date is 91% which represents arrears of £15.25m against the target of £13.99m

Manage Stock – Performance on the relet of properties shows an average of 42 days (60%) for the year to date against a target of 30.

Housing Benefit – Targets are being met with the exception of that relating to change in circumstances which has increased marginally. The year to date performance is 10.7 days (66.3%). The underperformance is partly explained by DSD's change in target from 10 to 8 days.

## STRATEGIES AND POLICIES

### 2.0 Facing the Future: Northern Ireland Housing Strategy 2012-2017

#### 2.1. The Department of Social Development published 'Facing the Future: Northern Ireland Housing Strategy 2012-17' on 15th October 2012.

This consultation paper invites responses to the proposals contained in the Strategy and the closing date for which is 7th December 2012. A final Housing Strategy will be published in early 2013.

#### 2.2. The Housing Strategy is organised into five themes:

Theme 1 – Ensuring access to decent, affordable, sustainable homes across all tenures;

Theme 2 – Meeting housing needs and supporting the most vulnerable;

Theme 3 – Housing and Welfare Reform;

Theme 4 – Driving regeneration and sustaining communities through housing; and

Theme 5 – Getting the structures right.

Theme 5 discusses the role and fundamental review of the Housing Executive. This considers the establishment of a new landlord function and the creation of a Regional Housing Authority responsible for the delivery of housing services such as Supporting People, the delivery of grants and tackling homelessness.

The Housing Executive will provide a consultation response to the new Housing Strategy. Divisional responses will be submitted to and collated by Corporate Planning and a proposed response will be presented at the November Board meeting.

### 3.0 Welfare Reform: Proposed Changes to the Housing Selection Scheme

#### 3.1. The Board approved a consultation paper which proposes changes to the rules and allocations policy of the Housing Selection Scheme to realign it with changes in Housing Benefit in light of Welfare Reform. Formal consultation on these proposals will be carried out between November 2012 and January 2013

#### 3.2. The following key policies have been identified as requiring amendment in order to ensure, in so far as it is reasonably practicable, that allocations make best use of housing stock and do not result in tenancies which are under-occupied;

Minimum bedroom requirements – Schedule 3 of the rules of the Housing Selection Scheme

Age criteria for children sharing bedrooms

Parents with access to children

Allocations in difficult-to-let areas

Overcrowding rules

Allocations to transfers – extending management transfer status

Policy succession and assignment

Mobility and mutual exchange schemes

Creation of joint tenancies.

3.3. In the interim, until these changes are effected it has been agreed with Housing Associations to make amendments to the applications, offers and tenancy sign-up processes to ensure that applicants and new tenants are advised of the impending Welfare Reform changes and the possible financial implications for any Housing Benefit application post April 2013. This will be implemented following Board approval.

3.4. A copy of the consultation paper will be made available on the website and staff are encouraged to consider and respond to the proposals.

## **4.0 Current Tenant Arrears Issues and Action Plan**

**4.1. The Board noted the paper and approved the action plan outlined to address current increasing arrears.**

4.2. The purpose of this paper is to update the Board with a quarterly analysis of current tenant debtors for both domestic stock by area and for levels of garage debt by area.

4.3. During the quarter up to 30th September 2012, the number of current domestic debtors decreased slightly by 123, however compared to the number of debtors at 31st March (23159) there is an increase of 2,430 to 25,589.

4.4. Garage debtors also continue to increase during this period and the number of garage tenants at 30th September 2012 is 2988 compared to 2,525 at 31st March 2012

4.5. The average current debtor arrear continues to be the highest in the Belfast Area at £605.14, with the South Area having the lowest current debtor arrear at £306.73.

4.6. It can be noted that the highest value of arrears is owed by 1,871 debtors, totalling £2.6m in the category £1,000-£1,999. During the last quarter the numbers of debtors in this category increased by 60. During the last quarter increases also occurred in the £300-£399, £500-£999 £1,000-

1,999 and £4,000-£9,999 categories, which indicates that the amount of debt owed by tenants is increasing in the higher debt bands.

- 4.7. During the quarter to September 2012 arrears continued to rise, albeit not to the same level as in the first quarter of the financial year.
- 4.8. The processing of Housing Benefit has in this quarter also continued to impact on levels of rent arrears and it is estimated that this is contributing to approx 30% of the increase in current arrears.

## **5.0 Health & Safety Management**

### **5.1. The Board noted the arrangements in place for managing Health & Safety within the Housing Executive, and approved the Review of existing arrangements.**

- 5.2. The law on Health and Safety requires that employers must:

Provide a written Health & Safety Policy

Assess the risks to employees, customers and others who could be affected by their activities

Arrange for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of preventative and protective measures

Ensure they have access to competent health and safety advice

Consult employees about their risks at work; and, current preventative and protective measures.

- 5.3. In keeping with its overall objectives and in accordance with the Health & Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978, and associated legislation, the Housing Executive recognises and accepts its responsibilities as an employer for providing a safe and healthy workplace for its staff in terms of Occupational Health and Safety; and as a Landlord in terms of managing the health and safety risks to tenants, customers and others affected by its activities.
- 5.4. Following a review of the management of Health & Safety in 2003/04, the overall management of Health & Safety is conducted via three Committees, the Health & Safety Management Committee; The Health & Safety Management Sub-Committee; and the Health Promotion & Training Committee. An additional Committee, the Safety Committee also meets quarterly.
- 5.5. The existing management arrangements – role of Directors, Management and Committee structures have been in place for 8/9 years. It is timely now that these arrangements are reviewed to ensure their continued effectiveness in managing Occupational health and safety risks arising in the workplace, and the health and safety risks arising from the Housing Executive's activity as a landlord.

- 5.6. The findings of the review and any proposed changes will be brought back to the Board for approval.

## **6.0 Home Energy Efficiency Advice Service**

- 6.1. **The Board approved the procurement of a home energy efficiency advice service available for all householders in Northern Ireland.**
- 6.2. The Housing Executive is the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland. The guidance to the Home Energy Conservation Act states that energy efficiency measures provided by the HECA Authority can include information, advice, education and promotional activities. In line with procurement practice, the Housing Executive is putting this service out to tender for the three year period commencing 1st April 2013.

## **7.0 Supporting People Strategy: A Strategy for Housing Related Support 2012-2015**

- 7.1. **The Board noted the key themes of the Strategy and approved its issue for consultation**
- 7.2. The first strategy for the Supporting People programme (SP), 'Supporting People, Changing Lives', covered the period 2005-2010. In developing a new strategy for future years, in 2011 SP carried out pre-consultation with key stakeholders on the main issues for the future delivery of housing support services. Comments were then sought from DSD which resulted in a number of amendments to the draft document.
- 7.3. In January 2012, DSD asked for work on the strategy to be postponed pending a review of the SP Commissioning Body. This review has now been completed and DSD have advised that the draft strategy should be updated and issued for consultation.
- 7.4. The strategy contains a review of progress over the last ten years and outlines the principles, vision and objectives identified for 2012-2015. It discusses the wider strategic context, the benefits of the programme and the policy themes shaping the work of the SP programme.
- 7.5. The strategic drivers influencing the delivery of housing related support services have also been identified and analysed in relation to each of the three main thematic client groups:-
- a. Homelessness
  - b. Older people
  - c. 'Bamford' related groups (learning disability and mental health)
- The final section of the strategy contains the range of key actions to be undertaken over the life of the strategy.
- 7.6. The strategy will be subject to a 12 week consultation process from December 2012-March 2013 and will be available on the Housing

Executive website. The aim of the consultation is to seek views on the strategic direction, key issues and actions required over the life of the strategy. A detailed action plan with SMART objectives will then be developed.

- 7.7. Following consultation a further paper will be submitted to the Board providing details of feedback and how it impacts on the final strategy.

## **8.0 Supporting People Programme Update**

### **8.1. The Board noted the business update on the delivery of the Supporting People programme for the year 2012/13 and the associated next steps.**

- 8.2. The progress on the delivery of the Supporting People (SP) programme at the mid-year point is as follows:

- 8.2.1 Service Development - work remains ongoing to deliver the supported housing development programme of 40 schemes (436 units gross). At the mid-year point 3 schemes are currently on site (15 units) and a further 150 units have been identified as low/medium risk. Taking into account the high level of risk to delivery of the remaining schemes in the gross programme it is anticipated that a net programme of 200-250 units will be delivered in year. Schemes not delivered in year will be rolled over into the 2013/14 programme.
- 8.2.2 Monitoring & Review of Services – a risk-based contract management framework is in place to ensure the strategic relevance and eligibility of services for SP funding. Targets for contract meetings are on schedule and a programme of validations are scheduled for the remainder of the year.
- 8.2.3 DSD Review of Supporting People (2010) - contained 13 recommendations, 6 of which were directly attributable to the NIHE. Five of these recommendations have now been cleared with the Department. The outstanding recommendation relates to the development of a new Supporting People Strategy, a draft of which was brought to Board this month.
- 8.2.4 DSD Review of Commissioning Body (2012) – work is underway to advance the action plan emanating from the review. This will include the development of a new Memorandum of Understanding; consideration of how budgets (DSD and DHSSPS) can best be aligned; development of a strategic commissioning/ decommissioning policy; restructuring the Commissioning Body to ensure it is representative and the consideration of an organisational change management programme.
- 8.2.5 Financial Monitoring & Review – templates have been introduced to collect information on individual services to improve financial

monitoring and provided assurance on the regularity of SP grant expenditure. Discussions are currently being held with DSD on future financial monitoring arrangements and clarification of how their guidance on the recovery of surpluses should be implemented.

#### 8.2.6 Other business –

- Work is ongoing to development of a regulatory framework for SP services.
- Communication and support for the sector continues through a number of means e.g. fora and information events training and the publication of the SP newsletter ‘Spotlight’.
- Research undertaken includes: the Future Role of Sheltered Housing (launched September 2012); the Effectiveness of Floating Support (initial draft produced September 2012) and an Evaluation of the Home Improvement Agency Services (due November 2012).
- Work has commenced on the development of a procurement or selection process in respect of funding of housing support services under the SP programme as requested by DSD.
- Work has also commenced to develop a Health, Wellbeing and Inequalities Outcomes approach to service delivery, with a phased implementation proposed for the provider sector during 2013.

## **9.0 2012 Annual HECA Progress Report**

### **9.1. The Board noted the 2012 annual HECA Progress Report and approved its publication.**

9.2. The Housing Executive has produced its annual progress report on home energy conservation. One of the key points of the 2012 report is that the energy efficiency of all of Northern Ireland’s housing stock improved by 22.5% between 1996 and 2011.

9.3. Fuel Poverty also declined slightly from 44% of households in 2009 to 42% in 2011. This is despite the fact that fuel prices increased during that period and demonstrates the positive impact that energy efficiency programmes has on mitigating the impact of price rises.

9.4. The report also outlines the key programmes of work undertaken by the Housing Executive across all tenures which have contributed to energy efficiency improvements.

## **10.0 Social Functions and the consumption of alcohol on Housing Executive premises**

### **10.1. The Board approved the Policy on Social Functions in Housing Executive premises**

- 10.2. There are occasions when social functions (e.g. seasonal events, Retirement events) are held on Housing Executive premises which raise the question as to whether the consumption of alcohol is permitted.
- 10.3. In preparing this policy the Housing Executive has considered the practices of other public sector organisations.
- 10.4. The policy approved allows the modest consumption of alcohol on special occasions, with the prior approval of the appropriate Manager.

## **11.0 Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedures**

### **11.1. The Board approved the Safeguarding Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedures and noted the consultation report.**

11.2. The policy will be merged with the Child Safeguarding policy for management and reporting purposes and an annual report will be made to the Board. This policy will be reviewed along with the Child Safeguarding policy in 2015.

11.3. The policy and procedure sets out;

- The scope and principles of the policy
- Management and Staff Roles
- Training requirements
- The role of third parties
- How the policy applies to the provision of services?
- What is abuse?
- How to deal with Concerns and Disclosures?
- How to Report concerns?
- Code of behaviour
- Guidance on sharing information.

11.4. The introduction of this policy will ensure that the Housing Executive makes a full but pragmatic contribution to the Safeguarding agenda. Combined, the Children and Young people safeguarding policy and Vulnerable Adults policy provides full policy and procedural cover for all functions of the organisation in relation to all vulnerable groups, from children to older people.

11.5. The policy will be made available to all staff and training will be implemented in the near future.

## OTHER BUSINESS

### 12.0 Solar PV Programme for NIHE stock

#### 12.1. **The Board approved the Housing Executive to initiate a privately financed Solar PV programme for NIHE stock**

12.2. The Housing Executive has recently been approached by a number of companies regarding a privately financed solar electricity scheme for Housing Executive dwellings. Solar panel electricity systems, also known as solar photovoltaic's (PV), capture the sun's energy using photovoltaic cells. The cells don't need direct sunlight to work - they can still generate some electricity on a cloudy day. The cells convert the sunlight into electricity, which can be used to run household appliances and lighting.

12.3. In recent years in GB, where landlords or home owners cannot finance their installation, privately financed "rent a roof" schemes have developed rapidly. Essentially they are schemes where a private company pays for the installation and maintenance of solar PV panels in social housing. There are no costs for the landlord. The tenants benefit from free electricity during daylight hours but the private company recoups its investment and makes a profit on the money generated from the Feed in Tariff (ROCs in NI) and energy export tariff. The revenues from ROCs are guaranteed for 20 years by DETI.

12.4. Following examination of a number of options, the Board has agreed to simultaneously explore the funding of a scheme by the Housing Executive itself and to proceed to procurement stage for a privately financed Solar PV scheme for up to 1000 Housing Executive dwellings. The next steps will be subject to further financial analysis and further Board approval.

### 13.0 Disaster Recovery/Resilience – Corporate Infrastructure & Applications

13.1. **The Board noted the IT Strategy that has been adopted for the provision of a highly resilient IT infrastructure. The approach for the prioritised recovery of services in the event of a major disaster was also noted.**

13.2. As part of the BT Strategic Partner contract, all Housing Executive IT systems are hosted in the main BT Data Centre in Belfast which is accredited to the ISO 27001 standard and has been a key telecommunications hub for BT in Northern Ireland for many years. It is a highly secure building with dual power supplies. It also has a high capacity standby generator in the event of electricity failure. A dedicated network link to the BT disaster recovery site is also in place.

- 13.3. It was initially planned to have a duplicate IT infrastructure in place for all key systems at that site which could be used in a restricted manner in a disaster recovery scenario.
- 13.4. Housing Executive IT systems are now much more highly integrated and there is a much higher dependency on reliable and accessible IT applications. There is therefore a much greater importance on building resilience into the core infrastructure. In balancing cost against risk, it has been agreed with our Technology Partner (BT), that the main investment should be made in enhancing resilience within the core infrastructure to ensure maximum availability and minimum disruption.
- 13.5. As part of an ongoing service improvement programme a number of enhancements have been implemented to increase resilience within the overall IT infrastructure. The key objective is to have, where possible, no "Single Points of Failure" at the BT Data Centre. Since telephony has been identified as the key supporting service, a highly resilient distributed telephony system has been put in place.
- 13.6. A Business Continuity Strategy Group has been setup and has identified those areas of the Housing Executive's business (i.e. key services) that would be most affected in the event of a major disaster. As a result it has been identified that the 'customer facing' key services (e.g. HB/ Repairs / Homelessness) have the highest priority in this scenario.
- 13.7. Given the resilience enhancements it is likely that any outage will be for a relatively short period (i.e. up to 1-2 days). In the unlikely event of a major disaster such as a significant incident at the BT data centre then this would require services to be relocated / rebuilt at the Disaster Recovery site.
- 13.8. The recovery of the key services is regarded as the top priority and the plan is to have these made available initially for a restricted number of key Users within 2-4 weeks. The return to a full normal service of all systems would then take place incrementally on a prioritised basis over a 4-8 week period.
- 13.9. As telephony has been identified as the key supporting service, given the highly distributed nature of the service this means that if there is a major disaster at the main BT Data Centre (or at NIHE HQ / any Area Office), calls can be redirected through telephony switches at alternative Housing Executive Area Offices. This could typically be setup within 4-24 hours of a major disaster depending on the specific nature of the incident.

**14.0 NIHE Scheme Approvals**

<b>Scheme</b>	<b>Work Content</b>	<b>Start Date</b>
Ballykeel 2 Phase 2 Kitchens 07.370.0081	Kitchen replacement to 194 dwellings	September 2012
Glanroy Terrace, Oakwood Place & Donard Walk, Portadown 14.88.0059	Kitchen Improvement/ Replacement to 44 dwellings	August 2012
Lurgan Rurals window Replacement Laps 14.78.0174	Replacement of Windows to 313 dwellings	November 2012
Carrigart/Comb, Belfast 26.70.0667	Kitchen replacement to 148 dwellings	November 2012
Whitehill Laps, Bangor 23.76.0051	Window Replacement to 257 dwellings	November 2012