

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 22nd November, 2022

SPECIAL HYBRID MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor Bunting (Deputy Chairperson) (in the Chair);
Alderman McCoubrey;
Councillors Bower, Corr,
Donnelly, de Faoite,
Flynn, Garrett, Murray, McAteer, McCusker,
McMullan, Newton, O'Hara and Verner.

In attendance: Mr. D. Bone, City Services Manager;
Ms. V. Donnelly, City Protection Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were recorded from Councillors Cobain and Maghie.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Update from NIHE on New Build Programme

The Deputy Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. F. McGrath, Head of Place Shaping Belfast, and joining remotely, Mr. A. Hannaway, Interim Regional Manager, and Ms. H. Russell, Housing Solutions Manager, representing the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE).

The Head of Place Shaping Belfast advised the Members that the update report on the Social Housing Development Programme for the period 2022/23 (figures as at, 17th November 2022), had been circulated with the agenda and she drew their attention to the following key points:

- social housing completions – 180;
- social housing units under construction currently 1619; and
- 1,409 units programmed to start through the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP).

She outlined the current demographic trends and the resultant social waiting list needs, and apprised the Committee regarding the performance by the Housing Executive in relation to new build start and completion and future delivery timescales.

In response to a Member's question in regard to the energy efficiency ratings for new builds, the NIHE Representative advised that, where possible, Housing Associations were including solar panels and heat pumps amongst other efficiency measures.

The Member stated that he would like to see the NIHE activity encouraging the Housing Associations to increase such measures to ensure that all new builds had above average energy ratings.

A further Member welcomed the Community Planning linkages between the Council and Housing Executive and encouraged the Housing Executive to also liaise with the Housing Associations regarding the future Place Shaping of areas, along with the Department for Communities (DfC). He emphasised that when Place Shaping were considering housing schemes it was not just about addressing housing need but also building communities.

Discussion also ensued regarding the requirement for developers to provide at least a 20% allocation of social and affordable housing as part of planning requirements, several Members reiterated the need for more mixed tenure housing and expressed the opinion that the 20% target should be viewed as a minimum requirement.

Following a query from a Member regarding mixed tenure housing, the Head of Place Shaping confirmed that the NIHE was committed to supporting the 20% social and affordable housing policy as it viewed that it would help bring forward a balanced community for all developments.

In response to several issues which had been raised during discussion, the representatives confirmed that:

- a demand existed for smaller units as well as family homes;
- the Housing Executive favoured a mix of social and private housing in the city centre and advised that a scoping exercise of Belfast was being undertaken currently with both the Council and DfC to try and identify suitable land for future social and private housing schemes;
- the NIHE was committed 100% to mixed tenure and shared housing in the city centre as they considered that there was a latent demand for this and were looking forward to the first site emerging;
- the NIHE were watching from a waiting list perspective any new developments as they progressed through the planning system and confirmed that it was also liaising with the Planners to ensure that schemes would be brought forward for both social and affordable elements; and
- the Housing Executive recognised the need to keep tenants updated regarding the Tower Block Strategy and rehoming and noted that the schemes could not progress until the residents had all been rehomed. They also noted the desire for many of the residents to be rehoused within the same area and stated that they would be keen to accommodate as many people as possible.

A Member raised the need for land to be released for new build social housing in the Shankill area, which would include some properties with four bedrooms. The Interim Regional Manager advised that four bedrooms properties were usually only built if a specific need had been identified and he undertook to liaise with the Member further in this regard.

A further Member highlighted the need for additional social housing to be built in the Highfield Area, stating that the existing housing was now over 75 years old and that there was significant demand and housing stress in the area.

The Head of Place Shaping advised that a new Housing Needs Assessment had recently been completed for Belfast and she undertook to forward this to the Members.

The update concluded with the Interim Regional Manager encouraging any Members who were aware of issues with mould in social housing to contact the Housing Executive with their concerns, this was in light of the recent coroner's outcome in regard to the death of a toddler in 2020 which had been as a result of prolonged exposure to black mould.

The Deputy Chairperson, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the NIHE representatives for the update.

Noted.

Chairperson