

People and Communities Committee

Tuesday, 18th November, 2025

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor R. Brooks (Chairperson); and
Councillors Abernethy, Black, Bradley,
Bunting, M. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly,
Doran, Flynn, Magee and Verner.

In attendance: Ms. N. Largey, City Solicitor & Director of Legal
and Civic Services;
Mr. D. Bone, City Services Manager; and
Mr B. Flynn, Committee Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillors Bower and Cobain.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Belfast Housing Investment Plan

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Ms. G. Long (Chief Executive), Mr. L. Gunn (Regional Manager) and Ms. F. McGrath (Head of Place Shaping Belfast), who were representing the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE), and who were in attendance to provide the annual update on the Housing Investment Plan for Belfast 2023/26.

Ms. Long reported that NIHE had invested a total of £340.45 million within the Council area during the financial year 2024/25. Of that total, £38.23 million had been provided through planned maintenance and stock improvements. Regarding investment in new-build homes, she explained that 1,797 housing association units had been 'on-site' as of March, 2025, with 318 housing units having been completed during the 2024/25 financial year. However, she outlined the financial constraints which had impacted upon overall capital investment and indicated that those constraints had continued into 2025/26, with a result that fewer new-build houses would be completed than originally anticipated. She added that only one in seven of those considered to be in 'housing stress' – that being applicants who had been awarded 30 or more points under the social housing selection scheme – had been allocated a home in 2024/25, despite that figure standing at 11,203.

The Committee was informed work to support the most vulnerable in society had continued throughout 2024/25, with £24.22 million invested through the 'Supporting People Programme', which had enabled 218 services to be provided by partner organisations. Across the Belfast area during 2024/25, 3,292 people had presented as homeless and the budget provided in 2025/26 had enabled NIHE to focus on homelessness prevention and delivering support services. She reported that the total homeless population across Belfast during the 2024/25 period had stood at 5,079.

On the subject of good relations, she reported that the themes of building cohesive, thriving and supportive communities had remained a key area of focus in 2024/25. A sum of £460,000 had been allocated to support local communities through the provision of community grants and programmes. Ms. Long concluded by advising the Committee that the 2024/25 update coincided with the commencement of NIHE's three-year corporate strategy, entitled, 'Our Promise to Our Communities'. That strategy, she added, committed NIHE to invest in the health and wellbeing of its clients, build cohesive neighbourhoods, drive sustainable change and provide further growth opportunities.

In response to a Member's question, Ms. McGrath provided an update on the future plans for the demolition of existing tower blocks located in the Cregagh and Finaghy estates and undertook to provide further clarity. In addition, the representatives of NIHE undertook to provide further information to a Member in respect of the housing need figures within the Greater Shankill area.

The Committee noted that representatives of NIHE would respond formally to additional Members' questions which had been posed at the meeting and to those which had been forwarded in advance. The Chairperson thanked the representatives of NIHE for attending the meeting and the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Issues Raised in Advance

International Day for Persons with Disabilities – Chairperson to Raise

The Committee noted information which had been provided regarding the Council's plans to mark the International Day of Persons with Disabilities on 3rd December.

Archaeological Excavation at Woodvale Park

At the request of Councillor Verner, the Committee agreed to receive a presentation in respect of the recent community archaeological excavation at Woodvale Park, which had been carried out in conjunction with The Queen's University of Belfast.

Chairperson