

People and Communities Committee

Monday, 13th November, 2017

SPECIAL MEETING OF PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES COMMITTEE

Members present: Alderman Sandford (Chairperson);
Alderman Rodgers; and
Councillors Armitage, Corr, Copeland, Heading and Lyons.

Also attended: The High Sherriff (Alderman Haire);
Alderman Kingston; and
Councillors Johnston and McAteer.

In attendance: Mr. G. Millar, Director of Property and Projects;
Mrs. R. Crozier, Assistant Director;
Mr. S. Leonard, Environmental Health Manager; and
Mrs. S. Steele, Democratic Services Officer.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Councillor Newton, Nicholl and McReynolds.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Presentation

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Chairperson welcomed to the meeting Mrs. J. Hawthorne (Belfast Regional Manager), Mr. R. Hawe (North Region Place Shaper) and Mr. C. Smyth (Team Leader, Housing Solutions) representing the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE). He commenced by congratulating Mrs. Hawthorne on her recent promotion to Regional Manager for Belfast.

Mrs. Hawthorne thanked the Chairman and stated that she looked forward to working with the Council in her new role.

Mr. Smyth provided the Members with a presentation on the Social Housing Enterprise Programme. He commenced by outlining the programme strategy as follows:

- to develop and support social enterprises and entrepreneurs to access funding and business support;
- to create opportunities for social enterprises to deliver key outcomes that would impact positively on Housing Executive communities; and
- to encourage Partnership arrangements with other organisations in the social enterprise sector.

He proceeded to highlight the tiered financial awards that were available and also explained the application process:

- Small Awards -education, training and business awards up to £1000.00 (open all year round);
- Large Awards -emerging social enterprises up to £10,000;
-embryonic social enterprises up to £20,000; and
-established social enterprises up to £50,000.

The representative advised that, in terms of Belfast Investment during the current Programme, thirteen new social enterprises had been established, seventeen existing social enterprises had been supported and forty-five new jobs had been created.

Mr. Smyth concluded by advising that a review of the Social Housing Enterprise Programme was currently ongoing and scheduled to be completed in November 2017. At this stage, NIHE Board approval would be sought to commence with the next three-year strategy, 2019-2022. He stated that it was anticipated that this new Programme would see stronger partnership arrangements with statutory agencies, including the Council.

The representative addressed a number of questions regarding the Programme following which he left the meeting.

Update Report on the New Build Programme

The Members were presented with an update report on the Social Housing Development Programme for the period 2017/2018 which included the following details:

- social housing competitions (226 units);
- social housing units under construction (812 units);
- social housing starts in 2017/18 (14 units); and
- programmed to starts in 2017/18 (gross programme) (543 units).

During Members' questions, the Committee was appraised regarding the availability of land, the housing of tenants with disabilities, the difficulties experienced in South Belfast due to the affordability of housing and the role of the private rental sector and housing associations.

Arising from discussion in respect of new programmes and housing need, Mr. Hawe advised that the NIHE endeavoured to target areas with the greatest housing need, however, in reality this was often dictated by land availability and affordability.

Following a query regarding Minnowburn House, a vacant property which was currently owned by the local Health Trust, the Housing Executive undertook to explore if the Health Trust would be willing to transfer the asset to the NIHE to enable it to be used for social housing and to report back to the Member directly.

The Members also drew the attention of the officers from the NIHE to several further matters, a number of which are set out hereunder:

- the loss of open space in Twinbrook and other areas due to the significant demand for additional housing in specific areas;
- the potential to consider green field sites outside the Council boundary considering it on balance with the promotion of City Centre living and regeneration;
- the lack of green open spaces within housing developments in the City;
- the severe shortage of social housing in West Belfast;
- an update in respect of the Visteon site and Glen 10 Development; and
- noted that an economic appraisal was currently being undertaken in respect of derelict flats on Belvoir Drive (Belvoir bedsits) with a view to the building being demolished and replaced with new social housing.

The NIHE representative advised that many of the Housing Executive's plans were complementary to the Council's Community Planning themes and could contribute to the achievements of the Community Planning outcomes. She recognised the important role of the Housing Executive working in partnership with the Council to achieve the vision outlined in the Belfast Agenda.

The Chairperson thanked the officials from NIHE for attending and they left the meeting.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Chairperson