

**Belfast City Council**

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| <b>Report to:</b>         | Strategic Policy & Resources Committee  |
| <b>Subject:</b>           | <b>Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Consultation on the establishment of a Belfast City Centre waiting list</b> |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 23 September 2011   |
| <b>Reporting Officer:</b> | Peter McNaney, Chief Executive  |
| <b>Contact Officer:</b>   | Peter McNaney, Chief Executive  |

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| <b>1.0</b> | <b><u>Relevant Background Information</u></b>  |
| 1.1        | <p>To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy &amp; Resources Committee details of a consultation document issued by Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) “The establishment of a Belfast city centre waiting list”. The closing date for responses is Friday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2011. This report summarises the consultation document for Members and outlines some key issues which Members may wish to consider.</p> <p>Members should note that the council Housing Forum received a presentation from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in June 2011 on a “Proposed new city centre waiting list”.</p> <p>Members are advised that Maurice Johnston, Belfast Area Manager, NIHE, has offered briefings to the political parties should they find this helpful.</p>   |
| 1.2        | <p><b><i>Summary of the Consultation Document</i></b></p> <p><b><u>Introduction</u></b></p> <p>Documentation issued by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive recommends the establishment of a new Common Landlord Area (CLA), which would be used to manage a waiting list of applicants seeking housing in the Belfast city centre area. The document states that the four main objectives of a city centre waiting list would be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. To take advantage of development opportunities for social housing to address housing need</li><li>2. To contribute to Planning Services and DSD policies and strategies aimed at regenerating the city centre</li><li>3. To support the wider Good Relations agenda</li><li>4. To ensure that city centre living is an option for everyone in the wider Belfast area</li></ol> <p>The document outlines that the establishment of a city centre waiting list would allow the option of city centre living to be accessible to everyone on the waiting list for Belfast and the wider urban area.</p> <p><b><u>Current Situation</u></b></p> <p>The Housing Executive administers and maintains a Common Waiting List which is the ‘gateway’ into all social housing in Northern Ireland. Applicants applying for housing or requesting a transfer normally select two locations, known as Common Landlord Areas (CLAs), where they wish to be housed.</p> <p>The area which includes Belfast city centre is currently covered by eight district CLAs which were created in 2001 and are based on inner city single identity communities. These eight CLAs are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Cromac/Markets, South Belfast</li><li>▪ Sandy Row, South Belfast</li></ul> |

- Donegall Pass, South Belfast
- Carlisle New Lodge, North Belfast
- Carrick Hill, North Belfast
- Brown Square, Shankill
- Hamill/John Street, West Belfast
- Bridge End, East Belfast.

### **Housing Market Context**

The document advises that recent research by the Housing Executive has identified potential for 11,500 apartments to be located in the city centre of which 3,900 are completed (3,000 private and 900 social), and 1,048 are under construction with a further 6,400 apartments with planning approval or planning applications pending. The document highlights that this has now created new opportunities for social housing.

A number of potential social schemes have been identified by the Housing Executive which will be delivered as either stand alone social housing schemes or as part of a larger comprehensive development site. The document highlights the following examples:

Stand Alone schemes identified

- 93 Great Victoria Street (57 apartments)
- The annex adjoining the Obel building (49 apartments)

Potential development sites identified

- Titanic Quarter
- Former Sirocco Works.

### **Options and their consideration**

Three options were assessed in terms of meeting the objectives (outlined above):

#### **Option 1 – Do Nothing**

Does not address objectives 2, 3 or 4 and only partly addresses objective 1. For example in relation to the potential acquisition of accommodation for social housing in the Obel complex, with the current boundary arrangements allocations would be made solely to applicants on the Carlisle/New Lodge waiting list. Similarly, 93 Great Victoria Street (57 apartments) is currently located within Sandy Row (CLA).

#### **Option 2 – Belfast City Centre including existing single identity communities**

The boundary of the new Common Landlord Area (CLA) in this option mirrors the boundary of Belfast city centre as defined by Planning Service in the Belfast Metropolitan Plan (BMAP). The document states that this option only partially meets the objectives. It would assist in contributing to regeneration strategies and promoting shared space. However, it stresses that this option may be unacceptable to a large number of applicants who would wish to be housed in a particular single identity estate.

#### **Option 3 – Belfast City Centre excluding single identity communities**

This option is similar to option 2 but excludes the established single identity social housing estates outlined above.

The document considers that this option best meets all the objectives in terms of making the best use of development opportunities, assisting regeneration strategies and promoting shared space and widening the opportunity of living in the city centre. Applicants requesting rehousing in the city centre CLA would be considered for all new social housing and future relets for

schemes completed after 2011. The Housing Executive believes that this option would give applicants a definitive choice and clearly demarcates the city centre from the single identity CLAs surrounding the city centre.

The document recommends that a Belfast city centre waiting list is created on the basis outlined in Option 3.

## **2.0 Key Issues**

### **2.1 Points to consider**

The recommendation in the consultation to promote shared housing in the city centre is in line with current council policy objectives in creating a vibrant, inclusive and accessible city centre. As the elected body for Belfast, we provide leadership and strategic direction to shape, develop and manage the city. The promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations have been key objectives of the Council over the past few years, working in partnership to improve the overall city centre experience and its attractiveness.

Should Members wish to submit a corporate response they may wish to consider the points below:

- The Council has revised its Good Relations Plan for the next three years. The plan highlights that the Council believes that equality and good relations are central to economic regeneration; in order to attract talent, sustain inward investment, generate tourism and tackle poverty. One of the key principles of the plan is that the Council will work with other partners across the city to support initiatives that will consolidate existing shared spaces and create new shared spaces within the city.
- The Council has a very positive working relationship with the NIHE on a range of areas, including the promotion of good relations. We currently support the Housing Executive's Local Area Networks Programme, which seeks to link neighbouring communities across interface areas. This is supported through the council's Peace III funding programme. This proposal for city centre work would be a fruitful extension of this partnership.
- Members have highlighted the importance of a shared, welcoming and accessible city centre to economic growth and the success of the city. By encouraging and enabling people to live in the city centre, this will have implications for infrastructure and broader regeneration for residents to ensure the 'live-ability' in terms of access to appropriate facilities and services, e.g. playgrounds.
- Previously, the Council co-operated with the NIHE on the pilot Town Centre Living Initiative (also known as 'Living over the Shops') on arterial routes. Through this, we sought to animate arterial routes to put life back into the street and re-establish a community presence in the area, particularly after shop opening hours. On this rationale, the proposed approach will deliver similar outcomes such as increased perceptions of safety and increased footfall after dark in the city centre.

A fuller consideration of these issues, and any others highlighted by Members, would be given in the final response to the NIHE.

## **3.0 Resource Implications**

N/A

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| <b>4.0</b>  | <b>Equality Implications</b> |
| <b>EQIA Screening</b>   |                              |
| <p>The Northern Ireland Housing Executive equality screened the consultation document with the following findings:</p> <p>The Equality screening concluded that there were some minor impacts identified but that these were addressed in Option 3. On that basis it was decided that an Equality Impact Assessment was not required.</p> |                              |

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| <b>5.0</b>  | <b>Recommendations</b> |
| <p>The Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is asked to consider the consultation document attached at appendix 1 and to consider if it wishes to either:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Authorise council officers to compile a full response to the consultation document based on the key issues highlighted in this report</li> </ol> <p>or</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Refer to the Party Groupings on the Council for individual consideration and comment.</li> </ol> |                        |

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| <b>6.0 Documents Attached</b> |  |
| <b>Appendix 1</b>             | Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Consultation on the establishment of a Belfast City Centre waiting list |