



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Northern Ireland Housing Executive – Consultation on the establishment of a Belfast City Centre waiting list
Date:	4 November 2011
Reporting Officer:	Peter McNaney, Chief Executive
Contact Officer:	Sharon McNicholl, Strategic Policy and Planning Manager (Ext. 6009)
1.0	<u>Relevant Background Information</u>
1.1	To bring to the attention of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee a draft response to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) consultation document 'Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List attached at Appendix one. The closing date for consultation responses is Monday 7 th November 2011. A copy of the consultation document is attached at Appendix two.
1.2	A report summarising the consultation document for Members and outlining some of the key issues that the Council may wish to consider in relation to the consultation document, was presented to the Strategic Policy & Resources Committee on Friday 23 rd September. Members agreed to defer consideration of a response to enable Political Party briefings to be undertaken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.
1.3	Following communication with Party Leaders, offering all parties briefing sessions, the following party briefings were organised: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Monday 31st October at 10.30am – Ulster Unionist PartyThursday 3rd November at 2.00pm – Sinn Fein
2.0	<u>Summary of the Consultation Document</u>
2.1	<u>Introduction</u> <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">1. To take advantage of development opportunities for social housing to address housing need2. To contribute to Planning Services and DSD policies and strategies aimed at regenerating the city centre3. To support the wider Good Relations agenda4. To ensure that city centre living is an option for everyone in the wider Belfast area. 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.

2.2 **Current Situation**

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.

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:

- Cromac/Markets, South Belfast
- Sandy Row, South Belfast
- 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.

2.3 **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

2.4 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.

3.0 Resource Implications

N/A

4.0 Equality Implications

EQIA Screening

The Northern Ireland Housing Executive equality screened the consultation document with the following findings:

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.

5.0 Recommendations

To consider the draft consultation response and to approve the response to the consultation document and its submission to NIHE

6.0 Documents attached

Appendix One – Draft consultation response – NIHE “Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List”

Appendix Two – Consultation document – NIHE “Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List”



Northern Ireland Housing Executive - Consultation on the 'Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List'

Belfast City Council Draft Response

<p>Belfast City Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NIHE consultation on the Establishment of a Belfast City Centre Waiting List.</p> <p>The Council welcomes the recommendation in the consultation document to promote shared housing in the city centre and this is in line with current council policy objectives in creating a vibrant, inclusive, safe and accessible city centre. We acknowledge reference in the document that the establishment of a city centre waiting list will assist Belfast City Council in its strategy to secure shared city centre living.</p> <p>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 the economic regeneration and city development agenda. In order to attract talent, sustain inward investment, generate tourism and tackle poverty, it is critical that we maximise the potential of the city centre as a shared space in which everyone can participate. 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.</p> <p>The Council recognises that the NIHE's preferred option, Option 3 - to create a Belfast city centre waiting list excluding single identity communities, would encourage more people to live in the city centre and would be a significant step forward for the city in terms of creating shared space.</p> <p>We support the option of a Common Landlord Area in the city centre, which does not preclude the choice of those citizens wishing to reside in single identity areas. We welcome this new proposal to be an additional choice designed to meet the needs of those people who have expressed a preference to reside in a shared housing area. Combined with other developments that are planned for the city, we believe that there would be benefit in developing an enhanced and integrated strategy for housing in Belfast, which supports a positive mix of tenure as well as ensuring that the appropriate facilities and infrastructure are in place to support city centre living.</p> <p>The Council recognises 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.</p> <p>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</p>
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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. Previous initiatives that the Council has worked in partnership with NIHE, include the 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, it is anticipated that the proposed approach will deliver similar outcomes such as increased perceptions of safety and increased footfall after dark in the city centre.

The Council is in ongoing negotiations with NIHE and the Department of Social Development (DSD) about a Housing Renewal approach in the Holyland area of the city, which could involve the conversion of some properties to make them suitable for single occupancy use and then making them available to those on the social housing list. This development should be considered in respect of the creation of a city centre waiting list.

Belfast City Council welcomes the focus on creating a shared city centre space in Belfast and promoting shared living and good relations in the city. The Council recognises that the recommendation in the document would widen the opportunity for city centre living to the greater Belfast area as well as supporting existing city centre regeneration strategies.