

## **Derry City and Strabane District Council**

**Minutes of Meeting of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee (Open) held in the Guildhall, Derry on Tuesday 4 September 2018 at 4.00 pm**

**Present:- Councillor Hastings (Chairperson), Aldermen Kerrigan, Ramsey and Thompson, Councillors Cooper, Fleming, Gallagher, Gardiner, M McHugh, McKeever, McKnight and Tierney.**

**In Non-Members of Committee – Alderman Devenney, Councillors Carr, Donnelly, P Kelly, Logue and O'Reilly.**

**In Attendance:- Chief Executive (Mr J Kelpie), Director of Environment and Regeneration (Mrs K Philips), Lead Finance Officer (Mr A Dallas), Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer (s E Cavanagh), Strategic Business Manager (Mrs R Craig) and Committee Services Assistant (Ms N Meehan).**

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### **GSP128/18 Notice and Summons of Meeting**

The Chief Executive read the notice and Summons for the Meeting.

### **GSP129/18 Member Attendance and Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Alderman Hussey.

### **GSP130/18 Declarations of Members' Interests**

There were no Declarations of Members' Interests.

### **GSP131/18 Deputation - To Receive Mr Clark Bailie, Chief Executive; Mr Frank O'Connor, Regional Manager North; Eddie Doherty, Area Manager and Ms Fiona McGrath to discuss the Derry City and Strabane Housing Investment Plan 2018**

The Chairperson welcomed Mr C Bailie, Chief Executive, Mr F O'Connor, Regional Manager North, Mr E Doherty, Area Manager and Mrs L Clarke from NIHE to the Meeting. Mr Bailie presented the Housing Executive's Housing Investment Plan 2018 to the Meeting highlighting the following areas:

## **The Purpose of a Housing Investment Plan**

New Housing Investment Plans (HIP) replace District Housing Plans. They have 2 main purposes:

1. The Housing Executive is statutorily required under the 1981 Housing Order to report to Councils on its past year's performance and next year's proposals;
2. The Housing Executive is a Community Planning partner and the HIP provides an evidence base that will inform Community Planning.

## **Overview of the Housing Investment Plan**

- After consultation with a range of stakeholders the HIP provides an overview of the housing market in the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.
- The HIP examines cross tenure housing issues and detailed social housing investment at a local level.
- It is a 4 year plan with an annual update in intervening years. This is the third and final annual update. A new 4 year Plan will be produced in 2019.
- In future years it will be reviewed to reflect Community Planning priorities.

## **Themed Approach**

The HIP contains 5 themes:

1. Identify and meet housing need and demand
2. Improving peoples' homes
3. Transforming peoples' lives
4. Enable sustainable neighbourhoods
5. Delivering quality services

10 outcomes are highlighted, each with a set of key actions to achieve each outcome.

Tables show last year's performance against plans, action for next year and a longer term outlook.

## **Housing Executive Investment**

**Key Housing Issues (1)****Key Housing Issues (2)****Next Steps**

Progress against the HIP objectives will be regularly monitored and will be reported on annually.

The Housing Investment Plan, the Community Plan and the new Local Development Plan should all align and fit together. Housing Executive colleagues will continue to work with Council as partner to provide evidence and agree outcomes.

Members thanked Mr Bailie for his presentation.

Members from all Parties commended Mr Bailie and his on the sterling work carried out by Housing Executive staff particularly during the summer months in terms of Family Fun Days in local communities.

The Chairperson expressed concern at apparent disparities between housing list figures held by elected representatives and those presented by the Housing Executive and queried how these figures were attained.

Mr Bailie advised that housing list figures were based on numbers presenting at Housing Executive offices with a housing problem. The problems were identified and assessed and the Housing Executive endeavoured to assist where possible. This was the most common method of assessing housing need. When assessing problems Officers would consider new build, the private rental sector and input from Housing Associations. This information collectively provided an effective indication of the level of housing demand. He referred to the possibility of under recording due to some of those affected not presenting their situation to the Housing Executive. He undertook, however, to take on board Members' comments and refine figures accordingly.

Mr Bailie then invited Members questions which he and Mr. Doherty, Area Manager undertook to address.

Members then raised the following issues:

- Acknowledged the many salient points addressed in the presentation in particular Welfare Reform and the subsequent increase in rent arrears. Expressed concern at assurances which had been given that the impact of Welfare Reform would be resolved through the introduction of mitigation measures which was not apparent.
- Concern expressed at the reduction in human resources to deal with Complex Needs Assessments and the fact there was currently only one Officer employed in carrying out this task. Three Officers were employed in a similar role in Belfast.
- Referred to the importance of the role of Complex Needs Officers particularly in terms of assessing and determining tenants needs.
- Expressed concern at the 220 existing and ongoing Complex Needs cases which could not be progressed due to the lack of human resources which must be addressed as a matter of urgency.
- Stated that it was totally unacceptable that one Officer was covering such a wide expansive area. Enquired if the Housing Executive was aware of this situation and how it proposed to address the problem.
- Referred to the fact that Housing Executive staff in local offices dealt with tenants requiring Complex Needs Assessments. However Housing Association tenants were required to attend Ballymena to have Assessments carried out which was causing a major problem.
- Acknowledged that the Housing Executive had indicated that they were willing to assume responsibility for all Complex Needs Assessments and agreed that this was a viable way forward.
- Suggested that Complex Needs Assessments be carried out by one individual body.
- Expressed concern that the over-arching problem was not being addressed.
- Referred to the need for a policy change in order to permit all Complex Needs Assessments to be address at district office level.
- Expressed concern that due to the difficulties in terms of the Complex Needs Assessments tenants were not being awarded the necessary additional twenty points in terms of the allocation process.

- Referred to the fact that Council was in the process of scoping out a new development plan for the Council area, one of the major aspects of which was the issue of land zoned for housing and number of properties required.
- Expressed concern that although the Department had agreed a number of properties this was insufficient to address the ongoing housing problem.
- Referred to problems being experienced in terms of the acquisition of land for social housing given that in the majority of cases private developers were more successful in acquiring land.
- Referred to the need for the Department to accept that this area required additional land to be zoned not just because of the huge numbers in housing stress but given that currently zoned land would most likely be acquired by private developers which would have not affect the social housing requirements.
- Suggested that the Housing Executive determine the extent of lands zoned for housing acquired by private developers during the past five years.
- Pointed out that those in housing stress were not in a position to purchase.

Mr Bailie and Mr Doherty responded jointly as follows:

- Pointed out that regardless of location it was vital that the same standard of care was delivered to all Housing Executive tenants to ensure that all needs were properly addressed.
- Advised that the Housing Executive had set a target to respond more effectively and efficiently to those tenants with a disability.
- Acknowledged that Complex Needs Assessment was a difficult process to manage given the requirements of the individuals concerned.
- Assured that whilst the Housing Executive endeavoured to ensure that all necessary adaptations were carried out to properties to meet the needs of those tenants with a disability, difficulties had been experienced in this regard in terms of contractors and consultants. This was most unfortunate and detracted from the work being carried out by Housing Executive staff.

- Advised that it was hoped to adopt a combined approach in terms of identifying and addressing problems established through Complex Needs Assessment.
- It was hoped to consider common solutions and carry out more in-house work.
- Recognised the need to reorganise in order to better meet the need of those tenants with disabilities.
- Acknowledged that there was a serious backlog in terms of the Complex Needs Assessment and recognised the disparities in terms of the carrying out of Assessments.
- Referred to the transition which the Housing Executive was currently undergoing and confirmed that one Complex Needs Assessment Officer was on sickness leave resulting in one Officer dealing with all assessments.
- Referred to the considerable range and extent of Complex Needs Assessments.
- Confirmed that those Complex Needs tenants who were twenty point applicant cases were addressed locally.
- Referred to a meeting of Area Managers which had taken place to consider the backlog of Complex Needs Assessments.
- Undertook to work to ensure that the matter was resolved and the existing backlog addressed as soon as possible.
- In terms of future housing need advised that consideration had been given by the Executive's Senior Management Team regarding progressing from five year projections to fifteen year projections which would inform the local development plan.

Members welcomed the Housing Executive's response and commitment to address the current situation in relation to Complex Needs Assessments.

Councillor Logue referred to an ongoing process throughout the North as part of which 2000 properties had been designated for stock transfer. She said she understood there was a moratorium on the amount of work being carried out on the properties in question which she considered to be totally unfair. She stated that the residents concerned continued to pay rent however as their properties had been

identified for stock transfer they were not eligible for maintenance/upgrading works.

Councillor Logue advised that she, together with Party colleagues, had written to the Permanent Secretary at the Department for Communities who had confirmed that the situation was ongoing. She continued that those tenants affected had not been given a timescale in terms of this process which had been ongoing for a number of years with no indication of when the situation would be resolved. She referred to the need for the Housing Executive to exert pressure on the Department for Communities to have the moratorium lifted and the stock transfer completed as soon as possible.

Councillor Logue congratulated the Housing Executive on their maintenance/upgrading programme of works.

Mr Bailie thanked Councillor Logue for her comments and acknowledged the excellent work carried out by Housing Executive staff.

Mr Bailie explained that there a funding issue at ministerial level in relation to stock transfer. He stated that the Housing was endeavouring to facilitate its works programme however this was being delayed due to the current situation in relation to stock transfer. He stated that in order to allow the Housing Executive to address investment needs it would require access to additional funding over the next ten years and therefore the social housing development programme was essential as this would allow the Housing Executive to retain and upgrade its existing stock and begin a programme of new build. He agreed that this situation was putting tenants in an unfortunate position and he undertook to address the problem with the Department for Communities.

Alderman Devenney said the figures presented by the Housing Executive were a reminder of the starkness of the situation in terms of the lack of social housing provision. He referred to the Housing Executive's Five Year Plan which he felt did not present a positive outlook, particularly given that by the end of the plan the current numbers in respect of housing need/stress would have increased. He acknowledged the current situation in terms of funding and new build but expressed concern that the figures presented a dismal outlook in terms of housing allocation. He referred to the need for additional lands to be secured for social housing.

In relation to Welfare Reform, Alderman Devenney stated that there were a considerable number of tenants who wished to remain in Housing Executive properties however this was not possible due to their personal circumstance and the lack of two bedroom dwellings. He felt that the debt/rent arrears problem would continue however he acknowledged that the Housing Executive had shown empathy in dealing with tenants in this situation.

Alderman Devenney expressed concern at the length of time involved in the carrying out of adaptations for tenants with disabilities.

Alderman Ramsey referred to the figures presented which suggested that the Housing Executive would be below target by 384 dwellings at the end of its five year plan which did not address the major issue currently being faced in terms of social housing need. He agreed with the need to consider the acquisition of additional lands for social housing. He welcomed the Housing Executive's approach to address the situation in terms of Complex Needs Assessments and anticipated that inroads could be made in terms of addressing the current housing needs.

Councillor Gallagher referred to the increase in rent arrears due to Welfare Reforms and felt it was unlikely that this could be resolved without a change to the current system. He also felt there was little protection in terms of mitigation which he suggested would ultimately put increased pressure on Housing Executive staff in local offices.

Councillor Donnelly welcomed the Housing Executive's approach in dealing with tenants experiencing financial difficulties due to Welfare Reform. He referred to a much needed change in legislation which would permit the Housing Executive to borrow money based on its assets and build properties which would have a major impact on addressing the housing problem.

Councillor Donnelly acknowledged difficulties being experienced with contractors in terms of adaptations to properties for tenants with disabilities and expressed concern that the situation had not improved. He requested that this be investigated as a matter of urgency.

Councillor O'Reilly referred to waiting lists for temporary accommodation which were lengthy and did not serve all proposed tenants. He referred to the need for specific standards to be agreed in terms of temporary accommodation provision. Whilst acknowledging the work carried out by the Housing Executive he did allude to the growing pressure not least in terms of debt and austerity. He referred

to regulations surrounding temporary accommodation and referred to the need for Landlords to be adaptable in this regard particularly in relation to tenants working sixteen hours and below. He referred to the need to address delays in the application of points.

Councillor P Kelly expressed concern at the lack of planned new build for the Strabane area. He referred to increasing waiting lists which the Housing Executive's five year plan would not adequately address.

Mr Bailie explained that the Housing Executive spent the money it received in respect of new builds as effectively as possible. He stated that he had addressed with elected representatives if there was a need to discuss with central government the allocation of additional funding for social housing given that this would compete with health and education areas which were both suffering from under funding. He referred to issues pertaining to the acquisition of appropriate land for the development of social housing. He accepted that the Housing Executive must improve in terms of meeting the demands of those with complex needs and disabilities and adaptations to properties which he undertook to have addressed as a matter of urgency.

Mr Bailie said the Housing Executive would endeavour to facilitate its tenants in terms of Welfare Reform and was carrying out preparatory works in this regard. He stated that there were landlords who would not rent accommodation to people in receipt of Housing Benefit or Universal Credits. He referred to the importance of the private rental sector in terms of identifying an overall solution to the housing problem.

Mr Doherty acknowledged the many significant challenges facing the Housing Executive, referring specifically to the stock transfers which he agreed had been ongoing for a considerable period of time and amidst his attempts to have this resolved little progress had been made. However, he had requested that, following the lifting of the moratorium, any works included in the Executive's planned maintenance programme which had been delayed as a result thereof be prioritized and confirmed that assurances had been given in relation thereto.

In relation to figures on waiting lists, Mr Doherty stated that the Housing Executive had been looking at providing preventative solutions for people presenting as homeless and identifying support and assistance to prevent people becoming homeless. He referred to the many vulnerable Housing Executive customers who, with the

assistance of other providers, support packages were provided and for whom hotel accommodation had been identified. He stated that the Housing Executive continued to address the needs of societies' most vulnerable.

Mr Doherty acknowledged the difficulties which had been experienced in terms of having adaptations to properties carried out to facilitate disabled tenants. Many of these had arisen due to a consultant who had gone into receivership. However three new contractors had been appointed and it was anticipated that the problems could be addressed and progressed accordingly.

In terms of Welfare Reform, Mr Doherty stated that difficulties were evident in relation to Housing Benefits with over 1,000 tenants currently in arrears. However, the Housing Executive were being sympathetic towards customers in such circumstances.

Mr Doherty stated that there were ongoing problems in relation to the former Adria site in Strabane. If fully developed, this site would satisfy the housing need in Strabane. However, unfortunately because of contractual issues which had arisen this development had been delayed. He understood that these issues were now being resolved and work would begin on the first phase of the development in the near future. It was anticipated that over the next few years this could be further developed to meet the housing demand in Strabane.

Mr Bailie concluded that in relation to adaptations to properties a need for better communication had been identified,

The Chairperson thanked the Housing Executive representatives for their attendance and they withdrew from the Meeting.

#### **GSP132/18 Chairperson's Business**

There was no Chairperson's Business.

#### **GSP133/18 Confirmation of the Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 3 July 2018**

The Open Minutes of Meeting held on 3 July 2018 (GSP110/18-GSP125/18) were confirmed.

#### **GSP134/18 Matters Arising**

Councillor Gallagher enquired if there was any update in relation to the

short-term measures for City of Derry Airport and the £2.5 M Route Development Fund.

The Chief Executive advised that a meeting had taken place between himself, the Lead Finance Officer and David Sterling, Head of the Civil Service in mid-July when they had reinforced the case for the reinstatement and release of the £2.5 Route Development Fund to be directed towards the London route as soon as possible. He stated that they had also presented the medium and long-term plans for the future of the Airport. He said Mr Sterling clearly understood the current position of the Airport and the immediate requirements and was sympathetic in trying to find a solution. The Chief Executive said Mr Sterling had suggested that Council approach Noel Lavery, Permanent Secretary at the Department for the Economy which they were currently waiting for a date to be scheduled for a joint meeting with the Department to discuss the matter further.

**GSP135/18 City of Derry Airport (CoDA) Short-Term and Medium-Term Funding Proposals (Ref GSP116/18)**

Councillor Gallagher enquired if there was any update in relation to the short-term measures for City of Derry Airport and the £2.5 M Route Development Fund.

The Chief Executive advised that a meeting had taken place between himself, the Lead Finance Officer and David Sterling, Head of the Civil Service in mid-July when they had reinforced the case for the reinstatement and release of the £2.5 Route Development Fund to be directed towards the London route as soon as possible. He stated that they had also presented the medium and long-term plans for the future of the Airport. He said Mr Sterling clearly understood the current position of the Airport and the immediate requirements and was sympathetic in trying to find a solution. The Chief Executive said Mr Sterling had suggested that Council approach Noel Lavery, Permanent Secretary at the Department for the Economy which they were currently waiting for a date to be scheduled for a joint meeting with the Department to discuss the matter further.

**GSP136/18 Three Month Financial Outturn**

The Lead Finance Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. He advised that the purpose of the report was for Members to consider and approve Council's 3 Month Financial Outturn and position at 30 June 2018.

Councillor Gallagher welcomed the surplus. He raised a legacy issue in that a number of employees who were carrying out similar tasks were paid at different rates. He suggested that Council set aside funding to pay for the buy-out of legacy contracts and these be realigned in order to ensure consistency in relation to terms and conditions and pay scales across the board. He further suggested that the surplus be used for this purpose.

The Chief Executive acknowledged this issue which existed regardless of whether or not a surplus had been generated. He advised that there was a programme in place to rationalise this. He continued that initially following the merger a programme was put in place to address structural alliance. He referred to the fact that Derry City and Strabane District Council consisted of 1,000 employees and it would take a considerable period of time to address all of the outstanding issues. He stated that the previous day Senior Management Team, at its bi-monthly meeting with the Union had discussed this issue. He reiterated that a programme was in place to have this issue resolved but could prove a lengthy process. He stated that this approach was similar to that adopted by all other Councils and had been agreed with the Unions. He stated that he was satisfied with the process and undertook to present a detailed report thereon to a future Meeting of Committee.

Subsequently the Committee

**Recommended that approval be granted to the Three Monthly Financial position and note the surplus of £375k generated for the first three months of the 2018/19 financial year.**

### **GSP137/18 Annual Performance Report 2017/18**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to invite Members' consideration and approval of the Annual Performance Report 2017/18 attached as Appendix 1.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members approve for publication, the Annual Performance Report 2017/18 as Appendix 1.**

### **GSP138/18 Local Democracy Week 2018**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to inform Members of Local Democracy Week 2018 and to encourage participation of all Members and to seek approval on budget allocation and the draft programme (Appendix 1).

Councillor Tierney undertook to become involved as much as possible. He stated that in the past this had always proved most informative for those students taking part. He referred to issues which had arisen the previous year in terms of attracting schools from Strabane to participate in the event, possibly because of transport issues and welcomed the fact that transport would be provided during this forthcoming event.

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer advised that Officers were endeavouring to encourage as many schools as possible to participate. She stated that consideration would be given to those cases where support was required to enable schools to become involved and Council would strive to address these difficulties as far as possible.

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer concluded that Council was keen to broaden participation and address any barriers which might arise.

The Committee

**Recommended that all elected Members (where practicable) get involved in Local Democracy Week 2018 and that Members adopt the proposed Programme and budget allocation of £2,500 from the Members' Training and Development budget.**

### **GSP139/18 Nomination for NISMP/NILGA Working Group**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to confirm an elected Member nomination onto the Sustainable Communities and Demographics Working Group.

Councillor Tierney nominated Councillor Hastings.

Councillor McKnight nominated Councillor M McHugh.

Following a brief discussion Councillor M McHugh undertook to withdraw his nomination.

Subsequently the Committee

**Recommended that Councillor Hastings is nominated onto the Sustainable Communities and Demographics Working Group and this representative to be reconsidered following the Local Government Elections in 2019.**

#### **GSP140/18 Scheme of Allowances Payable to Elected Members 2018/19**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to advise elected Members of Local Government Circular LG12/2018 and to seek approval for an updated Scheme of Allowances as set out in Appendix 1.

Councillor Gallagher enquired if it would be necessary for Members to declare an interest item. He queried if Members had authority to approve a personal pay rise.

The Lead Democratic and Improvement Officer advised Members that this was the procedure adopted by Council each time a Local government Circular was issued.

The Chairperson suggested replacing the word "approve" contained in the recommendation to "adopt".

Members agreed accordingly.

Subsequently the Committee

**Recommended (a) that Members adopt the updated Scheme of Allowances set out in Appendix 1; and**

**(b) that Members note the contents of the Local Government Circular LG12/2018.**

**GSP141/18 NILGA Consultation: Devolution within Northern Ireland**

The Strategic Business Manager presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to advise Members of the NILGA Consultation on Devolution within Northern Ireland (NI).

Members noted and welcomed the content of the report.

**GSP142/18 Strategic Growth Plan - Update on Carnegie Trust Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland Project**

The Strategic Business Manager presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated. She advised that the purpose of the report was to update the Committee on progress of the Strategic Growth Partnership's participation in the Carnegie UK Trusts 'Embedding Wellbeing in Northern Ireland' Project.

Members noted the content of the report and welcomed the progress made to date.

**The meeting terminated at Time Not Specified**