

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

**Open Minutes of Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held in the Council Chamber, Guildhall on Tuesday 5 September 2017 at 4.00 pm.**

**Present:- Councillor Fleming (in the Chair), Aldermen Hussey, Kerrigan, Ramsey, and Thompson, Councillors Boyle, Cooper, Donnelly, C Kelly, McKnight, McMahan and Tierney.**

**Non-Members of Committee – Alderman M Hamilton, Councillors Carr, P Kelly and O'Reilly.**

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

**Representing Northern Ireland Housing Executive:- Mr C Bailie (Chief Executive), Mr E Doherty (Area Manager (West), Mr F O'Connor (Regional Director (North) and Mr J Cassidy (Head of Place Shaping – North).**

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### **GSP120/17 Notice and Summons for Meeting**

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

### **GSP121/17 Members Attendance and Apologies**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Robinson.

### **GSP122/17 Declarations of Members' Interests**

Councillor Tierney declared an interest in Item 13 – Community Centre Design Fees – as a member of the Shantallow/Galliagh Steering Group.

### **Open for Decision**

### **GSP123/17 Deputation – Northern Ireland Housing Executive**

The Chairperson welcomed representatives from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to the Meeting and invited Mr C Bailie, Chief Executive and Mr E Doherty, Area Manager – West to give the presentation on the Housing Investment Plan.

Members from all Parties welcomed the representatives from the Housing Executive to the Meeting. They thanked Mr Bailie and Mr Doherty for their presentation and commended them on its content. Members praised the work carried out by local staff and applauded them on their hard work and commitment.

Members then raised the following issues:

- Referred to the 92 dwellings proposed for Strabane and 15 for the rural area and queried if any plans were in place for other areas such as Ballymagorry?
- Queried plans for new Housing Executive stock in Strabane.
- Queried how many of the 690 proposed new dwellings within the Council area would be located in the Strabane area.
- Described as shameful the fact that only two of the new properties built were located in the Strabane area particularly given that housing need was the same in both areas.
- Expressed concern that the figures presented in respect of waiting lists and housing stress/homelessness did not accurately reflect the actual situation throughout the Council district.
- Concern expressed that those individuals who had secured temporary accommodation were not allocated the additional 20 points by NIHE which were allotted to individuals allocated temporary accommodation by NIHE. These additional points were essential to those customers involved in the housing selection process.
- Enquired as to the rationale regarding the non-allocation of points to those individuals on waiting lists who had secured temporary alternative accommodation which resulted in them being penalised for their efforts.
- Referred to the need for a common approach to be adopted by the Housing Executive and the Department of Communities in addressing the issue of housing stress.

- Acknowledged the significance of funding in determining the programme of works in respect of the next five years and whilst welcoming the projected figures in respect thereof expressed concern that these monies were insufficient and would have little impact on addressing the homelessness problem which exists throughout the Derry City and Strabane District Council area.
- Expressed concern at the lack of provision of bungalow type accommodation particularly given the growing ageing population and those suffering from ill health who would benefit from this type of accommodation.
- Explained that by reallocating many elderly residents currently occupying larger 3-4 bedroom dwellings to more suitable bungalow type accommodation this would ultimately free-up much needed accommodation for larger family units.
- Expressed concern that the lack of bungalow provision was mainly due to financial incentives and the fact that greater rental costs could be procured from town house type accommodation.
- Referred to those tenants with disabilities or suffering ill-health requiring bungalow type accommodation which was not available within the current housing stock and stated that this was totally unacceptable.
- Suggested that Housing Associations were opposed to the provision of bungalow type accommodation as this was not deemed cost effective in terms of land availability.
- Reinforced the need for this crisis situation to be addressed by the Department of Communities and the Housing Executive hierarchy jointly.
- Expressed concern that there appeared to have been little improvement in the situation during the past 25-30 years with possibly something of a deterioration.
- Expressed concern at the lack of provision in rural areas in Strabane and the surrounding area and queried if it would be possible to produce figures in respect of the number of properties built and housing need for specific areas.
- Referred to the fact that many of those on Housing Executive waiting lists tended to make application in respect of areas where they felt housing would be most readily available and not necessarily in preferred areas.
- Referred to the issue of critical mass which did not apply in the rural area.

- Referred to the need for the requirements of rural dwellers to be taken on board.
- Enquired as to what impact the recent flooding would have on the Housing Executive's plans in terms of moving forward and on those who had not been impacted by the weather
- Enquired if specific funding had been guaranteed in respect of damage caused to Housing Executive properties by the recent floods which would ensure that the current limited programme of works would proceed as planned
- Referred to the huge availability of two-bedroom properties in the Council area which he acknowledged was due to an overall lack of space but expressed concern that these did not tend to offer long-term provision for growing families.
- Described the current homelessness situation as dire.
- Referred to the increasing numbers on waiting lists and expressed concern that the Housing Investment Plan offered little hope for those most affected.
- Referred to the need for a fundamental change in policy regarding the activities of the Housing Executive in terms of new builds and borrowing. The ongoing problems could not be resolved unless the situation was addressed.
- Expressed concern that tenants who were in employment were being discriminated against because landlords did not favour a joint payment system from DHSS/resident.
- Expressed concern at the challenges facing those with no dependants in terms of securing social housing having to opt instead for the private rental sector. This must not be overlooked in terms of building communities.
- Expressed concern that many tenants with serious disabilities were being allocated properties which were not suitable for their requirements.
- Referred to the fact that this housing crisis was impacting negatively on people's health and wellbeing.
- Expressed serious concern that the current housing programme would deliver only fifty percent of the required two and a half thousand dwellings required during the next five year period.
- Requested figures on the number of vacant properties throughout the City and District.
- Expressed concern that the homelessness situation would continue to worsen.

- Enquired if problems were being experienced in terms of funding in respect of properties in need of adapting for medical needs and the contractors involved.
- Referred to an appeal by the Housing Executive for new Landlords following the recent flooding and enquired if these would be retained to address future problems.
- Enquired if guarantees had been forthcoming from central government that the Housing Executive would be reimbursed any costs incurred in responding to the recent flooding incident

Mr. Bailie welcomed Members comments and their appreciation for the work carried out by his colleagues in the local offices. He referred to the excellent efforts by his colleagues particularly in the Eglinton area following the recent floods. The Housing Executive representatives responded as follows:

- Explained that the Housing Executive were committed to meeting the needs of its tenants and did not overlook the requirements of tenants residing in rural areas. Given the small number of housing developments it was basically about economies of scale and there was a rural strategy which was updated on a regular basis.
- Advised that there had been two new builds in the Strabane area during the previous twelve months and five were currently on-site. Habinteg were also working to secure an additional site and it was anticipated that this would be secured in the near future.
- Advised that efforts were being made to secure a site in the Strabane area which would have capacity for 180 dwellings.
- Undertook to provide figures relating to new build in the Strabane area in the past three years.
- Acknowledged Members concerns regarding the supply of new social housing and the enormous gap which remained. In many instances the problem was exacerbated due to the lack of availability of suitable land.
- Acknowledged Members concerns regarding the lack of bungalow type accommodation which was ongoing. However, the Department had indicated that this was not the best use of land and land could be used more effectively.
- Acknowledged that bungalows were an attractive choice for elderly residents and those with disabilities.

- Acknowledged that as residents aged their current accommodation was no longer suitable.
- Acknowledged difficulties with contractors in carrying out necessary works to adapt properties for medical requirements. Advised that the Housing Executive's Disabled Facilities Grant was still available for making adaptations to properties.
- Undertook to examine the possibility of using off-site construction to improve quality of lives.
- Acknowledged that the response to urgent calls must be addressed with a view to introducing a standardised system.
- Acknowledged that the points system did appear unfair on those individuals who had secured alternative temporary accommodation. However, it would require a legislative change to permit the Housing Executive to award points in such instances. Undertook to consider the situation.
- Undertook to provide figures in respect of development in the Faughan, Sperrins and Derg areas.
- Confirmed that Housing Executive staff had worked extremely hard following the recent flooding and advised that they were part of a multi-agency task force set up to address the problem.
- Referred to a recent conference on flood resilience which dealt with forward planning. However difficulties would arise when planning for flooding on such an unprecedented scale.
- Advised that Housing Executive staff had been working hard in those areas where the greatest damage was caused to provide temporary accommodation for those worst affected.
- Advised that figures were not available in respect of the cost of dealing with the recent flooding. However this would be budgeted from the Executive's emergency funding budget.
- Advised that the issue regarding the availability of two bedroom properties was a matter for Officers from Planning.
- Whilst acknowledging the significant number of two build properties explained that over 50% of Housing Executive waiting lists were made up of single persons which largely dictated the new building programme.
- Acknowledged comments regarding the need for fundamental change but stated that this was due to Departmental legislation surrounding the activities of the Executive.
- Explained that properties were normally allocated to individuals who had accumulated 200 points. However, there were significant

numbers who had only accumulated 90-100 points but were classified as homeless and there was no apparent solution available in such instances. Advised that the Housing Executive were currently undergoing an internal review on how to address such situations.

- Advised that the Housing Executive were endeavouring to adopt a new approach in respect of addressing homelessness. It was anticipated that a more productive approach would be adopted.
- Acknowledged the need to improve linkages with all of the support services and advised that an intensive support programme was being undertaken. The Housing Executive were putting their resources into the City and bringing together all areas of expertise in an endeavour to provide preventative measures for those currently with an accumulated 90/100 points. It was anticipated that this process would begin post September and advised that additional information would be forthcoming in respect thereof in due course.
- Anticipated that information would be made available regarding legislation and the new approach being adopted in terms of addressing the issue of homelessness.
- Advised that there were a substantial number of investigations ongoing throughout Northern Ireland regarding vacant properties and with a Fraud Department in Belfast which had greater powers to investigate such allegations of fraud. The Housing Executive would welcome information regarding any properties which it was felt were being used illegally and would investigate accordingly and report back thereon in terms of progress.
- Explained that immediately following the recent flooding 55 families reported to the Housing Executive, 28 of whom required emergency accommodation who were initially placed in Hotels and Bed and Breakfast accommodation. Only a few private Landlords had responded to requests for accommodation in the private rental sector. In terms of providing permanent temporary accommodation 20 of the 28 families requiring accommodation had since been moved to other alternative temporary accommodation. Only 4 Landlords had been retained on the Housing Executive system.
- Difficulties had been experienced in trying to house tenants in the Cityside given that the bulk of the damage was caused in the Waterside area. However 12 apartments had been secured from the

University of Ulster at the Magee Campus and these would be considered as a possible resource in moving forward.

- Explained that the Housing Executive were conscious of ensuring that the figures presented in relation to waiting lists and homelessness were accurate and reflected the situation. Acknowledged however that there may be an issue in terms of hidden data.
- Advised that the Housing Executive were currently exploring new ways of addressing the situation such as discussing with customers their requirements and expectations. It may be necessary on occasion to advise that it was unlikely that accommodation would be made available for a considerable period of time and enquire if they could consider as an option the private rental sector. Referred to the need to consider how the private rental sector could be made a more attractive option.
- Expressed concern at suggestions that the situation had deteriorated in the past number of years and confirmed that funding had been identified in order to improve the quality of existing Housing Executive stock.
- Referred to a lack of funding due to the fact that rents had been frozen which had resulted in a significant loss to the Executive combined with the fact that central government had been unable to provide sufficient monies to enable the Executive to carry out all of the works which were required.
- Reiterated the need to examine how the structures of the Housing Executive could be changed to enable it to borrow without rendering it a Housing Association and to rebuild, when this posed the better option than trying to retain old stock.
- Confirmed that guarantees had not been forthcoming regarding the reimbursement of monies spent on addressing the flooding incident. However the Housing Executive did have a resource facility for the monies required to address the flooding which would allow them to continue with their programme of works without any adverse effects.

Members thanked the Housing Executive representatives and they withdrew from the Meeting.

### **Chairperson's Business**



### **GSP124/17 Flooding Incident**

The Chairperson referred to the devastation caused by the recent flooding incident and advised that a Special Council Meeting had been scheduled for Friday, 8 September 2017 to discuss the matter further with the relevant Statutory Agencies.

### **GSP125/17 Condemnation**

The Chairperson condemned those responsible for the recent attacks which caused a security alert in Lettershandoney and Oeghill Park which resulted in residents having had to be evacuated from their homes. However he applauded the community spirit following this attack.

### **GSP126/17 Confirmation of the Open Minutes of the Governance and Strategic Planning Committee held on Tuesday 27 June 2017**

The open Minutes of Meeting held on 27 June 2017 (GSP96/17 – GSP115/17) were confirmed and signed by the Chairperson.

### **Matter Arising from Minutes**

#### **GSP127/17 Confirmation of Members to External and Internal Bodies 2017/18 (Ref GSP103/17)**

Councillor McKnight requested that Councillor McGinley replace Councillor McCallion on the Transitional Community Planning Partnership.

Members agreed accordingly.

In response to a query from a Member of the UUP grouping, the Chief Executive confirmed that representatives from the Education Authority would address the October Meeting of the Committee.

#### **GSP128/17 Three Month Financial Out-Turn**

The Lead Finance Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated to Members. 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 2017.

The Lead Finance Officer added that despite the positive position, Quarter 2 has been very challenging for Council with the recent flooding events. Council properties have been damaged, some of which due to their nature would not have been covered by insurance. Officers are currently scoping the total financial impact and liaising with insurers and a report would be brought back to Members in due course.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members approve the 3 month financial position and note the surplus of £411k generated for the first 3 months of the 2017/18 financial year.**

#### **GSP129/17 Annual Performance Report**

The Lead Democratic Services and Improvement Officer presented the above report, a copy of which had previously been circulated to Members. She advised that the purpose of the report was to invite Members' consideration and approval of the Annual Performance Report 2016/17.

The Committee

**Recommended that subject to Members' comments, to approve for publication, the Annual Performance Report 2016/17, attached at Appendix 1.**

#### **GSP130/17 Association of Public Service Excellence - Pilot Executive Board**

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 update Members on the

outcomes of the APSE NI Region AGM and to seek an Elected Member nomination on the Pilot Executive Board for APSE NI Region.

Councillor McMahon Proposed, Councillor McKnight Seconded

**That Councillor C Kelly be nominated to sit on the pilot APSE Executive Board.**

Subsequently Alderman Thompson Proposed, Alderman Ramsey Seconded

**That Alderman Hussey be nominated to sit on the pilot APSE Executive Board.**

A lengthy discussion ensued on the most appropriate system of voting in such instances, during which a short adjournment took place.

Subsequently the Committee

**Recommended that Councillor P Kelly be nominated to sit on the pilot APSE Executive Board and Alderman Hussey be nominated as a reserve if required.**

### **GSP131/17 Policy on Producing Information**

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 present for Members' consideration and approval Derry City and Strabane District Council's revised Policy on Producing Information.

The Committee

**Recommended that Members approve the draft of Derry City and Strabane District Council's Policy of Practice on Producing Information.**

### **GSP132/17 Local Democracy Week**

The Lead Democratic and Improvement Services 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 2017, to encourage the participation of all Members and to seek Members' approval on budget allocation and the draft programme.

Members from all Parties welcomed the forthcoming Local Democracy Week which was described as a worthwhile and interactive event.

An Independent Member of Council who was a non-Member of the Committee welcomed Local Democracy Week. He stated that it was encouraging to receive young people into the Council Chamber. He expressed concern that some of the events had to be cancelled the previous year because logistically it had not been possible to proceed. He encouraged Members' attendance at this event.

A Member of the UUP grouping expressed concern that the three key events had been scheduled to take place in the Guildhall. He said he would have welcomed the staging of one of the events in a venue in the Strabane area given that it represented one third of the electorate.

A Member of the SDLP grouping stated that whilst he would encourage greater participation throughout the City and district he was aware of difficulties in attracting young people from across the wider area and in particular the rural area. He welcomed the use of the Guildhall for staging the events given its historic relevance and the centre of Council's decision making process.

A Member of the Sinn Fein grouping said it would be remiss of Members not to get involved in this event and engage with young people to determine their views.

The Committee

**Recommended that all elected Members (where practical), get involved in Local Democracy Week 2017 and that Members adopt the proposed programme and budget allocation of**

**£2,500 from the Members' Training and Development budget.**

## **Open for Information**

### **GSP133/17 Community Centre Design Fees**

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 to advise Members of approval given by the Chief Executive under delegated authority during summer recess in the sum of £54,875 for the extension of design fees required to complete RIBA Stage 4 for the Top of the Hill, Shantallow, Galliagh and Lincoln Courts community centres. The approval was provided following a briefing to the Capital Projects and Corporate Programme Planning Group held on 25 July 2017 in advance of the summer recess.

In response to a query from a Member of the DUP grouping, the Lead Finance Officer confirmed that the figure of £54,875 contained in the second column of the final row of the report should read £54,375.

The Committee

**Recommended**      **that Members note the approval given by the Chief Executive under delegated authority during summer recess in the sum of £54,375 for the extension of design fees required to complete RIBA Stage 4 for the Top of the Hill, Shantallow, Galliagh and Lincoln Courts community centres.**

**The Meeting terminated at 5.50 pm**