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Dear Kevin,

Northern Ireland Housing Executive Homelessness Strategy briefing for the Social Development Committee

As part of its Forward Work Programme the Social Development Committee has asked for briefing on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive's recently launched Homelessness Strategy. The briefing is scheduled for 7th June. Heather Cousins, Deputy Secretary will represent the Department at the briefing and Gerry Flynn, Director of Housing & Regeneration, Dolores Ferran, Assistant Director Housing Policy & Services and Michael Graham, Principal Officer Housing Policy and Services will represent the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

The Housing (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland 2010) act placed a duty on the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to formulate and publish a homelessness strategy and the NIHE Homelessness Strategy 2011-2017 was launched on the 1st May 2012 following extensive consultation across Statutory and Voluntary Agencies. In addition the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Homelessness Partnership which is both cross-Departmental and Cross-Sectoral and is chaired by DSD at Deputy Secretary level, has assisted in the development of the strategy.

In November 2011, as part of the consultation process the Housing Executive and officials from the Department for Social Development delivered a presentation to the Social Development Committee on the new strategy. The committee responded favourably to the draft strategy and made some suggestions for inclusion. These responses were duly incorporated in the redrafting process and although they didn't alter the direction of travel of the strategy they did provide for a fresh focus and realignment of the some of the text.

The key points that are to be discussed will be

- How the Housing Executive will deliver on each of the four strategic objectives within the timescales that have been set for the actions to be carried out;
- How the Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) Homelessness Partnership will be the enabler to assist the Housing Executive in meeting the objectives within the draft action plan.
- How the three sub groups that have recently been set up will take forward many of the actions that cannot be achieved by the Housing Executive in isolation that will require other departments, agencies, public bodies and the voluntary & community sector to contribute. The three sub groups will look at three specific issues based on the strategic objectives in the strategy:

Sub Group 1: Prevention & Improved Services

Sub Group 2: Access to Affordable Housing

Sub Group 3: Rough Sleeping and Hidden Homeless

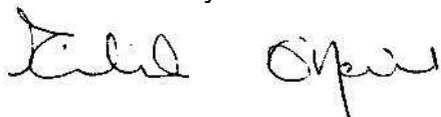
I attach for your information;

Annex A – Briefing Paper from NIHE

Annex B - NIHE's Homelessness Strategy

Annex C – Homelessness Strategy Draft Action Plan

Yours sincerely



Eilish O'Neill

NIHE Briefing Paper for the Social Development Committee 7 June 2012

The Housing Executive launched the Homelessness Strategy for Northern Ireland on 1 May 2012. This followed an extensive consultation and redrafting process throughout 2011, to establish agreement among the Statutory and Voluntary Agencies who would be delivering the strategy.

In November 2011, as part of the consultation process the Housing Executive and officials from the Department for Social Development delivered a presentation to the Social Development Committee on the new strategy. The committee responded favourably to the draft strategy and made some suggestions for inclusion. These responses were duly incorporated in the redrafting process and although they didn't alter the direction of travel of the strategy they did provide for a fresh focus and realignment of the some of the text.

Executive Summary

The Homelessness Strategy 2012-17 sets out our strategy for tackling homelessness over the next five years and establishes the guiding principles for the development and delivery of homelessness services. At this time of economic uncertainty and financial constraints it is more important than ever that homelessness services are appropriate, timely and effective.

Vision

The aim of this homelessness strategy is that long term homelessness and rough sleeping is eliminated across Northern Ireland by 2020.

The strategy aims to ensure:

- The risk of a person becoming homeless will be minimised through effective preventative measures.
- Through enhanced inter agency co-operation, services to the most vulnerable homeless households will be improved.

Strategic objectives

The strategy has four strategic objectives;

1. To place homelessness prevention at the forefront of service delivery
2. To reduce the length of time households and individuals experience homelessness by improving access to affordable housing
3. To remove the need to sleep rough
4. To improve services to vulnerable homeless households and individuals

An Integrated Strategy

Although the Housing Executive has statutory responsibility for the assessment of homelessness and the delivery of homelessness services an effective response to homelessness requires an integrated strategy. Housing providers will have a central role to play, however tackling homelessness in all its dimensions will require the collaboration of a wide range of partners from the statutory, voluntary and community sectors. For the vision to ‘eliminate long term homelessness and rough sleeping’ to be realised it will be necessary for relevant organisations to work together to deliver housing, employment, health, financial support and welfare services to those who experience homelessness.

The Department for Social Development, through the Promoting Social Inclusion Partnership, will be the vehicle by which the strategy will be progressed and monitored so that an integrated response to homelessness is delivered. The current terms of reference of the “Promoting Social Inclusion Partnership; are:

“ To consider how government departments, agencies, and non departmental public bodies can best work together to firstly ensure that the risk of homelessness is reduced

and, secondly, that the full range of appropriate services is available to those who find themselves homeless so that they can make the choices required to play a full part in society”

Promoting Social Inclusion Partnership (PSIP)

Given the current economic situation it is likely that serious pressure will be brought to bear on the ability to maintain the current level of investment. In addition, impending Housing Benefit cuts and difficulties in the employment market are likely to place more households at risk of homelessness. It is therefore, all the more important that all organisations involved in tackling homelessness work together to achieve the best possible outcomes for those who are homeless. The Promoting Social Inclusion Partnership is best placed to coordinate homeless services.

The Promoting Social Inclusion Partnership is an inter-departmental, cross-sectoral working group and was established by the Department for Social Development in 2004 to promote the social inclusion of homeless people. In July 2007 the PSI working group published a, “strategy to promote the social inclusion of homeless people, and those at risk of becoming homeless in Northern Ireland”. Following this, inter agency sub-groups were formed to promote the improvement of services and access to existing services including health and employment. The interagency groups have now been restructured to support the four objectives of the homelessness strategy.

It is anticipated that under the auspices of the DSD, the Promoting Social Inclusion Partnership will become the vehicle by which inter-agency co-operation in relation to homelessness will be discharged.

The European Dimension

In March 2010 the European Union Council of Ministers issued a directive to member states to develop integrated homelessness strategies. Following this, the jury of the International Conference on Homelessness in December 2010 issued guidelines to assist in the development of homelessness strategies. In September 2011 the European Parliament adopted the resolution calling for an EU Homelessness Strategy. In essence it directed that national strategies should concentrate on the following areas;

- The prevention of homelessness;
- A reduction in its duration;
- A reduction in the most severe forms of homelessness;
- Improvement in the quality of services for homeless people;
- Access to affordable housing.

The European model for tackling homelessness is distinctive from that used in most parts of UK. It recommends a shift from using shelters as the predominant solution to homelessness towards increasing access to permanent housing and increasing the capacity for both prevention and the provision of adequate floating support to people in their homes on the basis of need. Research is available which provides strong evidence that a 'housing led' approach which places homeless persons directly into permanent accommodation with 'wrap around services' is successful in reducing homelessness and promoting social inclusion. This European model will have strategic relevance in the way homelessness services are delivered in Northern Ireland.

Broadening the definition of homelessness

The statutory definition of homelessness is rather narrow and does not capture the various forms of homelessness or its complex nature. The statutory definition throws little light on the different entry routes into homelessness or exits (pathways). FEANTSA, the European Federation of National Organisations working with the homeless has provided a 'European Typology of Homelessness' known by the acronym ETHOS and calls for it to be used as a common framework definition of homelessness at EU level. The ETHOS definition classifies people who are homeless according to their living or 'home' situation. The four categories or concepts of homelessness are:

- Rooflessness
- Houselessness
- Insecure housing

The Housing Executive and its partners will undertake research into these categories to establish a baseline of the number of homeless and potentially homeless in all its forms.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES / ACTION PLAN

To accompany the Homelessness Strategy a draft action plan with 38 recommendations across the 4 strategic objectives has been produced.

The PSIP, the vehicle which will assist in the delivery of the cross departmental aspects of the strategy, has established 3 working groups to oversee implementation.

Sub Group 1 will focus on the actions / recommendations in respect of objectives 1 & 4

1. To place homelessness prevention at the forefront of service delivery

- Collect and analyse data for all the ETHOS homeless categories by 2012/13;
- Measure the extent of hidden homelessness by 2012/13;
- Prevent repeat homelessness through Multi Agency Intervention. To be initiated by 2012/13 and fully operational by 2014/15;
- Produce an assessment framework to provide holistic assessment services outside of Belfast by Health & Social Services, to be in place and rolled out across all areas by 2014/15.
- Provide comprehensive housing and homelessness advice services to all who require it, free of charge, to be fully in place by 2013/14.
- Provide pre-release housing advice, including tenancy sustainment to all prisoners, to be fully available by 2013/14 at all prisons/ detention centres.

- Enhance partnership working amongst the core agencies in relation to young people leaving the juvenile justice system, to be in place by 2013/14.
- Introduce Tenancy Support Assessments to help Housing Executive tenants to sustain their tenancies, to be in place by 2013/14.
- Develop peer support networks that can provide support to Housing Executive tenants to help them sustain their tenancies, to be in place by 2013/14.
- Develop a referral mechanism to enable the provision of floating support services to vulnerable individuals in the private rented sector, to be in place by 2013/14.
- Examine family mediation / family intervention programmes as a means to help young people sustain Housing Executive tenancies, to be completed by 2014/15.

Sub group 2, will centre on the actions / recommendations in respect of objective 2

2. To reduce the length of time households and individuals experience homelessness by improving access to affordable housing

- Develop “Pathway Models” to enable appropriate homeless households to move from temporary accommodation to longer term housing, to be in place by 2013/14.
- Undertake a fundamental review of the current temporary accommodation portfolio with regard to its strategic relevance, financial viability and access criteria, to be completed by 2014/15.
- Examine the “Housing Led” model to consider its applicability to Northern Ireland, to be completed by 2015/16.
- Reduce the average length of time in temporary accommodation from 46 weeks to 40 weeks over the life span of the strategy.
- Examine how Welfare Reform impacts on homelessness, to be undertaken by 2012/13.
- Introduce a Northern Ireland wide Private Rented Sector Access Scheme, to be in place by 2014/15.

Sub group 3, will centre on the actions / recommendations in respect of objective 3

3. To remove the need to sleep rough

- Evaluate existing services and information sharing arrangements in relation to the needs of those with alcohol addictions, to be completed by 2013/14.
- Agree service changes to ensure effective interventions, to be in place by 2013/14.
- Consider a “Housing led” model as an alternative to one providing a continuum of services, to be undertaken by 2013/14.
- Produce a new Belfast Rough Sleepers Strategy to be available by 2014/15.
- Develop a mechanism which will enable all agencies to refer their clients to addiction services, to be introduced by 2014/2015.

NIHE HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY 2012 - 2017



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HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY DRAFT ACTION PLAN



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