



Submission

Housing Executive
Draft Corporate Plan
2022/3-2024/5

December 2022

homelessconnect.org

Homeless Connect Consultation Response to the Draft Corporate Plan 2022/3-2024/5

| Your Details | | | | | |
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| Is this submission on behalf of an: | | Organisation | X | Individual | |
| Name: | Mark Baillie | | | | |
| Organisation: | Homeless Connect | | | | |
| Postal Address: | Mallusk Road Central Park Building 14 | | | | |
| Postcode: | BT36 4FS | | | | |
| Email: | mark.baillie@homelessconnect.org | | | | |

Homeless Connect welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation on the Housing Executive’s Draft Corporate plan for 2022/3 to 2024/5.

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| 1 | <p>Our Corporate Plan outlines 6 new high level objectives with concise, clear targets and deliverables which highlight the impact we can make and the approach we adopt. These are listed below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We will work with our partners, taking the lead role as the Strategic Housing Authority, to increase social housing supply to help meet identified need. 2. We will help NI meet its emissions targets, address the impact of climate change and help sustain and protect our environment for future generations. 3. We will invest around £1,973m* (over the next 3 years) into our local economy, through our housing services, construction activity, employment opportunities and through our support for the health, voluntary and community sectors. In the same period we will process circa £1,148m in Housing Benefit payments across public and private housing tenures. 4. We will work with our partners to deliver innovative housing solutions for our customers and to help reduce poverty and improve Health & Wellbeing. 5. We will engage with our customers to ensure that they are at the heart of service improvements and our business delivery model. 6. We will be an employer of choice and deliver high quality services for all in N.I.’s increasingly diverse community. <p>For each of the six high level objectives, do you have any comments you would like us to consider and is there anything else you would like to see included?</p> |
| <p>We support five of the six high level objectives but would recommend amendment to one of them. We have some comments to make on the detail of the targets and deliverables.</p> <p>Regarding the first objective, we note the target for the Housing Executive is to see the development of 6,000 new social homes and 4,500 completions during</p> | |

the life of this plan. It is welcome to see NIHE adopt specific targets over the life of the entire corporate plan, in contrast to the previous iteration of the Corporate plan which only provided specific figures for the first year of its operation.¹ This will allow for accountability over the life of the entire strategy.

It is understood that these targets will be a reflection of the funding available to NIHE and mark a “realistic perspective of what is possible” within the funding envelope provided by the Department for Communities. However, we feel it is important to point out that it is very difficult to see how the waiting list will reduce with this level of building in the social sector. Added to this is the unfortunate reality that Right to Buy continues to erode the stock of homes owned by the Housing Executive. On 31 March 2000, the Housing Executive had a stock of 128,622 properties.² By 15 August 2022, this had fallen to 84,097 properties. This is a fall of 34.6% over that time. The number of properties owned by the Housing Executive will continue to fall as long as Right to Buy is retained. This will have consequences in other parts of the housing and homelessness system (for example, households having to stay in temporary accommodation for longer).

It is acknowledged that the size of the waiting list for social housing is the product of decisions made over several decades and that it will take time to turn things around. We will continue to engage with DfC on seeking additional funding for the building of additional social homes.

We fully support the second high level objective. It is important for NIHE to play its part in helping NI meet its emission targets. Our only comment on this is to submit that this should not be achieved by placing higher costs on those at the bottom end of the income scale. This could have the unintended effect of placing more households at risk of homelessness. We would submit that the additional phrase “equitably” should be added to the text of this objective. One way this could be achieved would be as follows: “We will help NI meet its emissions targets, address the impact of climate change equitably and help sustain and protect our environment for future generations.”

We welcome the third objective. We want to make clear our support of the Housing Executive outlining proposed increased figures for the Supporting People (SP) programme. This is a welcome contrast to the previous edition of the Corporate plan, which did not provide any specific overall figures for SP during its duration.

37% of SP funding goes to homelessness services in NI and the failure over several years to provide any uplift has placed many providers in a highly challenging position. As recently published research (funded by NIHE) has amply attested, providers in the homelessness sector are experiencing a recruitment and retention crisis directly related to funding pressures.³ As one focus group participant succinctly put it: “until the funding is sorted out we’ll not attract people into this sector because nobody is going to work with the stress and the strain that comes with the job for the money that’s paid when you could go and stack your baked beans tins in any supermarket in the country for more money....you go home and you forget about it...this job you go home and that

stays with you until the next time you're on shift, is that person ok, will they be safe until I come back...that doesn't leave you....until the funding actually catches up with the rest of the country.”⁴

The challenges around the recruitment and retention of staff has, as NIHE know, negative impacts on service provision and on those homelessness services strive to support. The ongoing cost of living crisis is only making things worse.

With this context in mind, we do appreciate the fact that the Corporate plan makes plain that NIHE is seeking a budgetary increase for the SP programme. We note the bid for £78 million in 2022-3, £80.8 million in 2023-4 and £83.6 million in 2024/5.

We are acutely aware that NIHE is operating in a tight fiscal environment and do want to acknowledge the highly welcome shift from NIHE in publicising the urgent need for an uplift in SP funding. However, it needs to be clearly stated that these proposed increases, while they are considerably better than no increase at all, do not make up for the effective real terms cut which has been experienced due to the failure to provide an uplift to SP since 2007. They are a step in the right direction, but the base reality that even with these increases funding will not be where it would have been if inflationary increases had been granted needs to be recognised.

In future, SP funding should be benchmarked to at the very least match inflation. Failure to do that will see the situation facing providers funded by SP repeated in the future. The NI Executive collectively needs to invest in SP in a sustainable and long-term way. Otherwise, the quality of services provided will inevitably be negatively affected with detrimental impacts right across this society. We would submit that NIHE should seek to ensure at the very least that inflationary increases for the SP programme become the norm in the years ahead.

We also strongly support the bid for £112 million in homelessness services over the life of the Corporate Plan. This money is badly needed. The current annual baseline of £21.561 million outlined in the plan is simply insufficient to support the demands being placed on this budget. If NI is to shift its approach to homelessness from reacting to homelessness after it happens to a preventative approach, it is imperative that the baseline for homelessness services is increased.

There may be a temptation in some quarters to seek to supplement this budget through in-year monitoring round reallocations rather than increasing the baseline. We would submit that it is vital that this baseline is increased and not merely supplemented in this way. While this can be helpful in certain circumstances, it does not allow for the long-term planned spending which is necessary for the prevention and reduction of homelessness here.

It is noteworthy to us that none of the six high level objectives include the phrase “homelessness.” In our view, this is an omission which should be rectified in the final list of objectives. We do of course note that objective four refers to poverty: “We will work with our partners to deliver innovative housing solutions for our

customers and to help reduce poverty and improve Health & Wellbeing.” It is right for the Housing Executive to play a role in reducing poverty. However, we would strongly recommend that the wording of this objective is amended to make a direct reference to preventing and reducing homelessness as well as reducing poverty.

The CEO of the Housing Executive has indicated in a wide range of fora that preventing and reducing homelessness is a top priority for the Housing Executive as an organisation. In our view, the high-level objectives for the corporate plan should reflect this fact. Consequently, we would recommend the fourth objective is amended to directly refer to homelessness.

We have no further comment to make on the fifth and sixth high-level objectives.

2 Our 3 Year High Level Action Plan gives a broad overview of some of our main planned activities in the coming years to help deliver our six main objectives.

Please comment on how effective you feel our high level action plan will be in helping achieve our six high level objectives and is there anything else you think we should consider or include?

At the outset, we want to acknowledge the noteworthy shift in this Corporate Plan towards specific targets and goals. The previous Corporate Plan was vague in terms of the inclusion of specific targets and goals which made assessing success or failure in implementation difficult. This is a positive change and we believe it will help to generate better outcomes.

In terms of the detail provided, we would highlight five points.

1. “Transform the model of homelessness provision towards prevention.” We warmly welcome this action. It is right for NIHE to “provide a baseline for homelessness prevention” by the end of 2022/3 year. For understandable reasons, the plan does not include details of what this process will involve, but Homeless Connect would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.
2. “Develop and increase the Housing First model in Northern Ireland.” As an organisation, Homeless Connect believes in the expansion of Housing First to provide support for the cohort of people experiencing chronic homelessness in NI. We warmly welcome the proposal to increase the number of units by 15% in Year 1, 25% in Year 2 and 35% in Year 3. One comment we would make is that it would be helpful to state the current number of units provided during 2021/2 in the final document.
3. “End the use of bed and breakfast and hotel accommodation as temporary housing for children for more than two weeks.” We fully support this action and the rationale behind it. However, we would point out that an 80% reduction from the 2021/2 baseline by 2024/5 would not mark the end of the use of this accommodation for children. Either this action should be reworded or the target should be increased to a 100% reduction.

4. “Achieve a 5% increase in the number of people benefiting from Supporting People funding with greater coherence between housing support and permanent accommodation solutions. The percentage translates to 1,000 additional clients over the period of the Supporting People Strategy.” It should be noted that at the time of writing the final Supporting People Strategy has yet to be published. In our response to the draft strategy, we highlighted the fact that the gap identified in the 2020 Strategic Needs Assessment between demand and supply was greater than 5%. Representatives of SP informed us that they were aware that this was the case, but the 5% figure was determined as realistic within the budget envelope provided. Our question would be whether this 5% increase relies on the budgetary increase sought by NIHE being provided, or whether it would be delivered regardless of what level of financial support is provided to SP. If it is the latter, we would ask whether the figure here could be increased to try and meet the gap in supply on a similar basis to other actions (i.e. the inclusion of the phrase “budget permitting”).
5. “Lived Experience: Develop and deliver a customer engagement programme for homelessness which will ensure we listen and respond to people with lived experiences of homelessness recognising their views are integral to the development of priorities and services.” We want to commend the Housing Executive for including this action. We at Homeless Connect strongly believe in the importance of including the voice of people who have experienced homelessness in service design and policy development. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Housing Executive to see this action become a reality.

In terms of anything additional to add to the plan, we note that there is no reference in the document to the Complex Lives project in Belfast. Our understanding from our members who are directly involved in the project is that it has helped improve co-ordination between statutory agencies and homelessness services in Belfast. In our estimation, a direct commitment to continuing the project over the life of this Corporate plan would be welcome. This would probably fall under the fourth high level objective which we believe should be amended to include reference to preventing and reducing homelessness.

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| 3 | <p>Each year we develop a new Annual Business Plan to help achieve high level objectives. The draft Corporate Plan includes the Annual Business Plan for Year 1 – 2022/23.</p> <p>Are there any other activities or actions you would like to see more of in the Annual Business Plans in the coming years?</p> |
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In terms of the Annual Business Plan, we would highlight two omissions which we believe should be included in the final plan.

1. There is no mention of the implementation of Year One of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-2027 Action Plan. Several other action plans are referred to in the Annual Business Plan (e.g. the Community Safety

Strategy Action Plan). We would submit this should be added to the final version.

2. There is no mention of the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan for Temporary Accommodation in the Annual Business Plan. We would submit it should be included in the final plan.

4 Having considered questions 1-3 above, please provide any other comments or suggestions which you feel should be considered in the development and delivery of our draft Corporate Plan?

We have no further comments to make.

¹ Housing Executive, "Corporate Plan 2017/18-2020/21", 2018,

<https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Documents/Corporate/Corporate-plan-2017-18-2020-21.aspx> 30

² <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200304/cmhansrd/vo040302/text/40302w21.htm>

³ Dr Karen Orr and Dr Leeanne O'Hara, "Staffing Challenges within the Northern Ireland Homelessness Sector," September 2022, <https://homelessconnect.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Final-Report-Staffing-Challenges-within-the-NI-Homelessness-Sector.pdf>

⁴ Orr and O'Hara, "Staffing Challenges," 82.



Homeless Connect

Units 2-4 | Building 14 |

Central Park | Mallusk | BT36 4FS

homelessconnect.org