



Housing Ministerial, Belfast, February 2011

Communiqué

The British-Irish Council Housing workstream held its second Ministerial meeting at St Mary's University College in Belfast on 16 February 2011.

The meeting was hosted by Alex Attwood MLA, Minister for Social Development who chaired the meeting. Minister Attwood was accompanied by Junior Minister Robin Newton both representing the Northern Ireland Executive.

The UK Government was represented by Neil McDonald, Director of Housing Standards, Homelessness and Support, Department for Communities and Local Government and the Irish Government was represented by Michael Finneran TD, Minister for Housing and Local Services. The Scottish Government was represented by Alex Neil MSP, Minister for Housing and Communities. The Welsh Assembly Government was represented by Judith Askew (Senior Official); the Jersey Government was represented by Carl Mavity (Director of Strategic Development). The Guernsey Government was represented by Deputy Graham Guille, Deputy Minister for Housing and the Isle of Man Government was represented by the Hon Martyn Quayle MHK Minister for the Department of Social Care.

The Progress Report, prepared by workstream officials, was discussed. Ministers agreed that much work has been undertaken by the group and agreed that it was important to continue to share and exchange information and best practice as Administrations continue their work in this area. The Ministers agreed that a directory detailing good practice across Administrations should be collated and made available to highlight the good work being taken forward. This would be completed in the next three months. Ministers also agreed that there should be ongoing assessment of interventions to see if they can be applied across other Administrations.

The Ministers considered papers in relation to three specific areas of work and received two short presentations from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive (NIHE) which is the strategic regional housing authority for Northern Ireland.

Jim Carlin from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive delivered a short presentation on 'Housing – A West Belfast Context'. This presentation showed what housing was like in the past in this area, what advances have been made and what remains to be done.

The first paper which was presented by Alex Neil MSP, Minister for Housing and Communities, looked at the issue of attracting new forms of investment into affordable housing such as bond finance, pension funding investment and equity investment. Ministers agreed this was an important issue particularly in light of budgetary constraints in each of the Administrations.

The second paper was presented by Neil McDonald from the UK Department of Communities and Local Government. He spoke about new ways of addressing mobility within social housing and considered the new national home swap scheme designed to promote greater mobility within the sector. Ministers recognised that there could be regulatory issues in each of the Administrations which would need to be overcome in order to deliver greater mobility. Ministers agreed in principle that this was an area which should be explored further to consider how landlords might be encouraged to support

this initiative and to consider ways of assisting social landlords to take advantage of the improved home-swap services to ensure they are available for tenants to use.

A short presentation on Retrofitting and Energy Efficiency was delivered by Noel Rice from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. The presentation looked at the challenges of adapting existing homes to achieve a high level of energy efficiency. The presentation also showcased a Passive House Project currently being undertaken by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive in Newry, Co Down. Ministers agreed this was an important issue and looked forward to receiving the project evaluation when complete.

The final paper which Minister Alex Attwood presented, considered the introduction of social clauses for social houses. It outlined how he had already introduced this into all Housing contracts in his Department, from the start of the year. Ministers agreed this was an important issue that had potential to lever significant social benefits for local communities as a direct result of public spend. Ministers agreed to consider ways of incorporating meaningful social clauses into public contracts in a procurement compliant manner.

Ministers agreed that these issues discussed presented both challenges and opportunities for their respective Administrations, particularly in the current economic climate. Minister Attwood agreed that updates would be provided on each of the issues as work progressed.

BIC Secretariat

16 February 2011