

## Challenges and Opportunities of New Councils - Claire O'Neill

### Regional arrangements for Delivery of Housing Functions

- Chief Environmental Health Officers Group (CEHOG) represents the profession regionally
- Public Health and Regulatory Services (PHARS), a CEHOG sub-group, considers the delivery of public health and housing issues across the province
- PHARS has representatives from the 11 Councils and the University of Ulster
- Responds to consultations, identifies training needs, provides advice, etc.

### Purpose of Local Government Review (LGR)

- Greater efficiency
- Deliver new functions

### Community Planning

- Local communities will have an input to planning
- BCC Community Plan is the Belfast Agenda
- Belfast Agenda looking to the next 10 – 15 years

### Housing

- New powers will help councils to shape future housing developments
- Transfer of HMO function (due 2017)
- Regulation of HMOs is a complex area

### Future of the Private Rented Sector

- Councils need a positive collaborative approach
- DSD review

### Challenges for Councils

- All Councils will need a Masterplan e.g. Belfast Agenda
- Need to involve communities
- Deliver private sector regulation

### Opportunities

- Greater powers
- Larger Councils will have more influence and broader knowledge base
- Better regulation
- There will be one clear, visible regulator – people will know where to go

Feedback from the group

## **Funding and resourcing**

- Licensing should be self financing.
- Fixed penalties should help to contribute to the costs of enforcement but will not cover the costs

## **Data sharing**

- Data obtained from landlord registration cannot be used for other Council enforcement options, such as dealing with public health nuisances under the Environmental Protection Act.
- Landlords remain concerned about the potential sharing of data.

## **Fines and penalties**

- Councils are often reluctant to enforce as fines are often less than fixed penalties. It can therefore be more expedient for landlords to ignore the fixed penalty.
- Enforcement will only be considered where councils are sure of success.
- Good landlords are also unhappy and want to see larger fines.
- DSD is engaging with the Department of Justice regarding above.

## **Review of the PRS**

- Will be very difficult to please everyone i.e. landlords and tenants
- Some concern expressed about the reduction in social housing as many tenants who would normally be in social housing are in the PRS and don't have the same protection.

## **Housing supply and affordability**

- Need to build new social housing
- When interest rates eventually go up it will impact on mortgage payers creating a significant impact on affordability

## **Development plans**

- District Council development plans will impact on all of the housing sector
- Councils will have lead role in shaping development