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**CONFERENCE: "DRUGS IN DUBLIN -
WORKING TOGETHER WILL MAKE A DIFFERENCE"
ADDRESS BY JOHN FITZGERALD, CITY MANAGER,
7TH FEBRUARY, 1997
A LOCAL AUTHORITY PERSPECTIVE**

INTRODUCTION

Misuse of drugs and related problems constitute a serious threat to stability of social and economic life in certain areas. This Conference is an expression of our concern at the implications for the City as a whole.

In this context our primary role is that of landlord and Housing Authority with direct responsibility for 24,000 homes which provide accommodation for 70,000 people.

However, as Local Authority, our responsibilities extend far beyond the role of landlord and housing provider. We have an interest in, and are concerned with, every issue that effects community life in and around the city.

Problems of social deprivation are concentrated - though not exclusively so - in local authority housing estates. We are not unique in that regard - it is a feature of all cities of similar size as is the linkage between drug abuse and other social problems which has been clearly established.

Housing Refurbishment

Most of our housing areas are in good condition, are stable and compare favourably with good quality private housing conditions. Other areas are, however, seriously run-down and require extensive refurbishment.

The background is well documented - serious imbalance in social mix: dependence on welfare: more than two-thirds of principal earners unemployed: long term unemployment which crosses generations: isolation and vulnerability of a growing number of single parent families: lack of stability due to absence of family support network in newer communities and so on. There is little evidence to suggest that the situation has improved over recent years; in fact there is growing evidence to the contrary.

The existing housing refurbishment programme - though extremely successful to the extent to which it has been implemented - is not capable of dealing with problems of this magnitude. If nothing else happens, the situation will get worse, not better. We are trying therefore, along with the Department of the Environment, to put together a refurbishment programme which can do what needs to be done within a reasonable period of time. The economic climate now lends itself towards packaging a programme which can make the necessary impact. Indeed, one of the most frustrating aspects of economic life in the city at this time is the extent to which certain parts remain stubbornly excluded from the benefits of the economic boom that goes on around them.

I am satisfied that we can organise our resources - under direction of the City Architect and his Department - to take on a major refurbishment programme with capacity to transform those areas which are seriously run-down; Additional investment is required though not at levels which cannot be met.

Estate Management

In addition to refurbishment projects we are extensively involved in estate management initiatives; our objective is to have a number of estate management agreements with tenant groups in selected estates before the end of this year. We have deployed 20 staff to work full-time on estate management and will deploy more over the next 12 months. These new Estate Managers will create the linkages necessary to build better communities through which local issues, particularly incidents of anti-social behaviour, can be addressed. This policy is clearly explained in our tenants handbook and explanatory leaflet on estate management, a copy of which is in your Conference Pack. Each of our tenants will already have received copies of these as part of a Resource Pack which was posted to all Corporation homes at the end of January. The Resource Pack contains several other items including laminated "helpline" sheets and educational material prepared by the Health Promotion Unit of the Department of Health.

We have a very strong Community department engaged in development of community facilities at local level. This year we are carrying out a refurbishment programme to upgrade all our playcentres which, in the longer run, will become community resource facilities to meet the needs of young people.

We are currently carrying out a survey of 400 of our tenants to elicit their views on our housing service. To assist this process we have prepared a "Right to Reply" comment sheet which is available in the Housing Department - a sample of this is in your Conference Pack.

I believe that effective tenant participation and community building is a pre-condition to housing estate regeneration. Local community involvement at refurbishment stage and afterwards is a vital ingredient without which - as we have experienced in the past - the outcome will not be successful.

Conclusion

In summary, given necessary resources, we will commit ourselves to comprehensive refurbishment programme which will have capacity to revive those part of the city where such action is warranted. If we can do so, and I have no doubt about our ability, the impact in those areas and throughout the city will be significant in terms of creating an environment in which long-term solutions to social problems can be considered.

This should not be regarded as a “Housing” solution in isolation from other matters - there are obvious social, economic and environmental benefits for the city as a whole.

Community participation is an essential pre-requisite; We will support this concept in every way we can through close collaboration with other agencies, particularly the Gardai and the Eastern Health Board. Local Community Associations and Area Partnership Boards are essential players in this regard. Working arrangements with the Gardai are extremely good in all areas in which we have common interface - and these are extensive. There is great determination on both sides to make things happen on the ground. We work closely with the Eastern Health Board to the extent that we are now considering provision of public offices which can provide jointly for Corporation and Health Board requirements, also possibly including the presence of other state agencies in a cluster which, in effect, becomes a one stop shop for primary local services. Provision of public infrastructure of this kind is surely more necessary in, or adjacent to, socially deprived areas than outside these areas.

A permanent solution to structural long term employment must involve investment, public and private, in all its forms. Private investment could be encouraged by means of selective local designations to encourage provision of necessary services including provision of low cost industrial units.

This longer term approach, - housing refurbishment and environmental upgrading along with community building, is an essential if we aspire to resolve rather than contain the problems which underlie the need for this conference.

The conference is not an end in itself; it is part of a process which has already begun and is gaining momentum. The deliberations and outcomes of the Conference are important learning opportunities for all of us. It is important also in terms of generating the chemistry and energy which will, I believe, lead to joint effort which can make a real contribution to the lives and living conditions of those inside and outside areas of social deprivation.

Though the approach outlined might be aspirational, it is possible and can be done; the economic climate might not be as favourable again. The scourge of social deprivation is a serious threat to the economic and social fabric of the city at the present time. To do nothing is not an option; there are solutions and, together, we can make them happen.