



Minutes of the 472nd Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council
Ardeevin, Ballymena or by Conference Call via Webex
Thursday, 10th September 2020 at 10.30 am

The Officers joined the Meeting at 10.50 am

Present at Meeting:

Tommy Nicholl	Mid & East Antrim Borough (Chair)
Jim Speers	Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough
John Finlay	Causeway Coast & Glens Borough
Allan Bresland	Derry City & Strabane District
Amanda Grehan	Lisburn & Castlereagh City
Catherine Elattar	Mid Ulster Borough
Micky Ruane	Newry, Mourne & Down District

Present by Conference Call

Nick Mathison	Ards & North Down Borough
Michelle Kelly	Belfast City

In Attendance:

Clark Bailie	Chief Executive (NIHE)
Paul Price	Director of Social Housing Policy & Oversight (DfC)
David Polley	Director of Housing Strategy & Co-ordination (DfC)
Dr Steve Blockwell	Northern Ireland Water
Kelly Cameron	Secretary (Housing Executive Secretariat)
Kim Smyth	Housing Executive Secretariat Manager)

Apologies:

Anne-Marie Fitzgerald	Fermanagh & Omagh District (Vice Chair)
Mark Cooper	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough

1.0	<u>Declarations of Interest</u>	
	None.	

<p>2.0</p>	<p><u>To adopt the Minutes of the 470th Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 11th June 2020</u></p> <p>It was proposed by Councillor N Mathison, seconded by Alderman A Bresland and resolved, that the Minutes of the 470th Meeting of the Housing Council held on Thursday 11th June 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair.</p>	
<p>3.0</p> <p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p> <p>3.3</p>	<p><u>Matters Arising from the Minutes</u></p> <p><u>Item 4.1 – Adaptation Performance and OT waiting times and assessments</u></p> <p>It was reported that a joint presentation by representatives from the Department of Health & Social Services and the Housing Executive on Adaptation Performance and OT waiting times and assessments had been arranged for the October Meeting.</p> <p><u>Item 5.17 – Homelessness</u></p> <p>In relation to Councillor Elattar’s query regarding homeless placements in Maghera and the need for wrap round services etc. Councillor Elattar had met with the Chief Executive and the Director of Housing Services to discuss the issue further.</p> <p><u>Members Queries</u></p> <p>The following queries have been responded to since the last meeting.</p> <p><u>Councillor Elattar</u> – Homelessness_query regarding homeless placements in Maghera and the need for wrap round services etc. Councillor Elattar had met with the Chief Executive and the Director of Housing Services to discuss the issue further.</p> <p><u>Councillor Fitzgerald</u> - received a phone call to discuss further better engagement with Trust Mental Health Services can be improved to provide a more seamless service.</p> <p><u>Councillor Mathison</u> - Mr Mathison received the consultation document January 2017 titled ‘Private Rented Sector in Northern Ireland Proposed for Change, for his information</p>	<p>Secretary</p> <p>Secretary</p>

<p>4.0</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p> <p>4.3</p> <p>4.4</p> <p>4.5</p>	<p><u>Housing Executive's Board Bulletin Board Meeting – Wednesday, 24th June 2020</u></p> <p>Mr Bailie reported on the Housing Executive Board's deliberations as follows:-</p> <p><u>CT055 Planned Maintenance Procurement Strategy</u></p> <p>It was noted that the Board had approved the Procurement Strategy for delivering Planned Maintenance and Improvement schemes from April 2021 for a period of up to seven years.</p> <p><u>Supporting People Programme Update</u></p> <p>The Board had noted the update on the impact of Covid-19 on the Supporting People Sector, on the progress in implementing the Housing Executive-led recommendations from the Ministerial review, and on business as usual activities. The Board also approved the re-baselined timeline for the development of the 3 year strategy and the new implementation period for the strategy of 2021-2024.</p> <p><u>Supporting People Services greater than £500k for approval</u></p> <p>The Board approved the Supporting People services that exceed £500k per annum further to the 2020/21 budget allocation.</p> <p><u>Homelessness Strategy 2017/2022 - Year 3 Annual Report</u></p> <p>It was reported that the Board noted a summary of the actions completed to deliver the activities associated with Year 3 of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-2022. The Year 3 Implementation Plan was due to be completed by 31st March 2020. The Board also noted the intended publication of the Annual Progress Report 2019/20 which will be launched in October 2020.</p> <p>The Board approved Year 3 Annual Report of the Homelessness Strategy 2017/2022.</p> <p><u>Other papers were noted by the Board, as follows:-</u></p> <p><u>Tenancy Fraud Update</u></p> <p>The Board noted the progress made in implementing the Housing Executive's Tenancy Fraud/Misuse Action Plan for 2019/20 and outlined the work planned for the year ahead.</p>	
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<p>4.6</p>	<p><u>Community Safety Strategy Action Plan Update August 2020</u></p> <p>The Housing Executive’s Community Safety Strategy ‘Safer Together’ and Action Plan was approved by the Board and published in February 2015. As part of this Strategy the associated action plan identified key tasks to ensure we further the work of the community safety agenda.</p> <p>The Board noted the contents of this paper.</p> <p>Mr Bailie offered Members a future presentation on this Strategy.</p>	<p>Secretary</p>
<p>4.7</p>	<p><u>Land Acquisitions & Disposals Quarterly Update - August 2020</u></p> <p>As good practice on land transactions the Board receives a quarterly update of land disposals and acquisitions, including assurance that disposals and acquisitions have been carried out in accordance with approved policy & procedures and are compliant with previous land audit recommendations and Managing Public Money (NI). The Board noted the contents of the paper.</p>	
<p>4.8</p>	<p><u>Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings Annual Report 2019-2020</u></p> <p>The Scheme for the Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings is a statutory scheme under Article 29 of the Housing (NI) Order 1988, and assists owner occupiers forced to leave their homes because of acts of violence, threats to commit such acts or other intimidation. The Housing Executive may acquire such homes by agreement where their owners are unwilling or unable to occupy them in consequence of these circumstances. The Board noted the contents of the paper.</p>	
<p>4.9</p>	<p><u>Complaints Annual Performance 2019/20</u></p> <p>The Board noted the paper aimed to advise the Board on the Housing Executive’s complaints performance over the last year and that from the 1st April 2020, delivery of corporate complaints management has transferred from Corporate Services to the Customer Excellence Unit within Housing Services.</p>	
<p>5.0</p>	<p><u>Housing Issues, Department for Communities</u></p> <p>Mr Paul Price and Mr David Polley gave Members an update on the Department for Communities (DfC) Housing Issues:-</p>	

<p>5.1</p>	<p><u>Social Newbuild starts</u></p> <p>It was noted that the aim to provide an additional 1,850 social homes by March 2021 of which 200 will be shared housing and 10% will be wheelchair accessible. Progress towards the commitment is progressing as would be expected at this time with a small number of schemes (13) on site delivering 128 units. The Housing Executive continues to engage with the developing housing associations in bringing forward planned schemes.</p> <p>The COVID 19 social distancing measures have somewhat paused the delivery of the shared schemes' Good Relations Plans. As the Plans are delivered over a 5 year period it is anticipated that there will be scope to enact a recovery plan and fully deliver the Plans once lockdown measures are eased.</p>	
<p>5.2</p>	<p><u>Co-ownership</u></p> <p>The Programme for Government target is to support 3,750 first-time buyers to purchase a new home through Co-ownership or similar schemes by March 2021. Target of 1091 in 2019/20 exceeded with 1102 Households supported at 31 March 2020. An Economic Appraisal for £145m FTC to fund Co-ownership for the next 4 years has been approved by Minister and the Department of Finance. While work to reverse ONS decision is underway, the Minister has approved an interim capital budget allocation of £10m to deliver at least 287 homes, which has enabled Co-ownership to reopen to new applications from 22 June 2020.</p>	
<p>5.3</p>	<p><u>Programme for Social Reform</u></p> <p>Aims to complete preparations to implement Ministerial decisions to take forward a Programme of Social Housing Reform by September 2018 and to tackle the maintenance backlog for the Housing Executive properties.</p> <p>Options for structural reform have been developed in order to address the investment challenge in the Housing Executive and the maintenance backlog.</p>	
<p>5.4</p>	<p><u>Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy</u></p> <p>Aims to develop way forward policy options and legislative proposals in response to the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy.</p> <p>The Department has completed analysis of respondents' views in relation to the review and a consultation report has been drafted for publication.</p>	

	<p>In December 2019, the Housing Executive presented to the DfC preliminary plans and potential costings to implement all 20 proposals for change, The plan is subject to DfC's approval and funding and further consideration of modelling. The Minister is currently considering way forward options for implementation and recently wrote to Executive colleagues and the Communities Committee, stating her intention to publish a consultation report that details stakeholder views and provides a clear way forward, with implementation plans. It is anticipated that this report will be published in the autumn.</p> <p>5.5 <u>Reclassification of Northern Ireland Social Housing Providers</u></p> <p>Working with the Northern Ireland Office to ensure the passage of legislation to maintain the classification of Northern Ireland's Registered Housing Associations to the private sector.</p> <p>Responsibility for this legislation reverted to the NI Assembly once the institutions were restored. The final stage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2020 took place on 30 June and the bill has been shared with the Attorney General and Advocate General. Royal Assent has been granted and The Housing (Amendment) Act (NI) 2020 became law on 28 August 2020 This timeframe should allow the Office for National Statistics' to review its classification of Housing Associations as Non-Financial Public Corporations by 30 September 2020. The ONS decision will be back dated to the date of Royal Assent.</p> <p>5.6 <u>Supporting People Delivery Strategy</u></p> <p>To oversee both the delivery of the Supporting People (SP) Programme and the implementation of the 2015 Review Recommendations.</p> <p>The Housing Executive intended to bring about substantial change to the existing SP Programme in the form of the 2020-23 Strategy. The first draft of this was issued for public engagement in January 2020. However, a full public consultation is required meaning inevitable delays and the inability to complete this within the given timeframe. Further delay is expected with the challenges of Covid-19, Departmental colleagues have formally raised their concerns and a further update was provided at Programme Board on 29 June and updated Strategy has since been formally shared with the Department for further comment with comments being provided to NIHE on 26th August. Strategic Needs Assessment is on schedule with plans to publish in September 2020.</p>	
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<p>5.7</p> <p>5.8</p> <p>5.9</p> <p>5.10</p> <p>5.11</p>	<p><u>Homelessness Strategy</u></p> <p>To work with the Housing Executive and across Government to implement the Homelessness Strategy (PFG target) to tackle homelessness.</p> <p>An Implementation Plan for year 4 (2020/21) of the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 has been drafted and is due to be submitted to the Housing Executive Board for approval. The Plan includes provision for a Temporary Accommodation Action Plan. Initial work on the development of the Homelessness Strategy 2022-27 has begun.</p> <p><u>Regulation of the Private Rented Sector</u></p> <p>The Minister has indicated that progressing reform of the Private Rented Sector is a priority. The Department are working with the Minister to develop specific proposals for this mandate.</p> <p><u>Increasing Housing Supply</u></p> <p>New areas of housing policy by developing initial policy proposals for increasing housing supply, including in the private sector, in support of a potential new draft Programme for Government Outcome 13.</p> <p>Housing Division had commenced work on a draft Housing Supply Strategy, with the specific aim of turning the curve on housing stress and housing supply.</p> <p><u>Affordable Warmth Scheme</u></p> <p>The Affordable Warmth Scheme aims to deliver 4,500 affordable warmth measures to 3,000 homes by 31 March 2021. The Scheme is on track to meet this target subject to Covid 19 recovery which will allow visits to households.</p> <p><u>NIHE Rent Scheme</u></p> <p>The Minister approved the increase of NIHE rents at CPI + 1% on 6 February 2020. The increase was to come into effect from 1 April 2020. However in light of the current public health crisis resulting from COVID-19 the Minister decided to temporarily suspend the introduction of the NIHE's approved rent increase of CPI +1% for 2020-21. The delay will be for a period of 6 months, with the rental increase coming into effect on 1 October.</p>	
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<p>5.12</p>	<p><u>European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Investment</u></p> <p>To support the Housing Executive in their bid to the ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme 2014 -2020 to secure funding to improve energy efficiency within its stock.</p> <p>Funding of €22.951 million has now been secured from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) through its Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme for Northern Ireland 2014-2020 and a further €22 million in funding is being invested by the Housing Executive. The six year €45 million programme is expected to be completed by the end of 2023. The Housing Executive issued a press release on 12 September to publicise the funding and investment which will improve the thermal efficiency of homes including cladding, new double glazing and insulation. The Housing Executive works on the schemes has started with some already completed.</p> <p>Due to the restrictions put in place as a result of COVID-19 the NIHE had to halt works and as such will be behind on the programme, unfortunately the full impact of this will not be clear until normal working practices return.</p>	
<p>5.13</p>	<p><u>Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework</u></p> <p>PfG Outcomes Framework to be augmented with a new outcome and indicators to provide specific focus on ensuring every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs.</p> <p>The proposal to include a new outcome and indicators will form part of the consultation on a new PfG. Timescales for this activity are unknown as plans have been impacted by COVID-19.</p>	
<p>5.14</p>	<p><u>Options to remove historical debt from the NIHE and exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax</u></p> <p>The Executive will examine options to remove £307m historical debt from the NIHE (£185m of this is capital, £122m is interest) and exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax.</p> <p>A range of options to revitalise the Housing Executive are being developed for consideration by the Minister.</p>	
<p>5.15</p>	<p><u>Long term rent trajectory</u></p> <p>The Executive will agree a long-term trajectory for the rental charges of the Housing Executive. This must be sufficient to support the long-term future of Housing Executive's social housing stock and provide demonstrably affordable rents to tenants.</p>	

<p>5.16</p> <p>5.17</p> <p>5.18</p>	<p>The long term rent trajectory is being considered as a vital aspect in the range of options being developed for the minister for the revitalisation of the Housing Executive.</p> <p><u>Affordability of social rents</u></p> <p>Measures will be introduced, including legislation where necessary, to provide for controls to ensure affordability. Options to ensure affordability of social rents will be presented for consideration by the Minister in due course</p> <p><u>Review of the Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in Northern Ireland</u></p> <p>Aims to complete a review and publish the Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Whilst the NI Housing Executive (NIHE) has the strategic role in provision of accommodation for Travellers, the Department for Communities has responsibility for producing and updating the <i>Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in NI</i>. The Guide is a technical guidance document to support the provision of appropriate, cost effective facilities for Travellers living in NI. It seeks to outline the key issues to be considered and identify the main design and management principles necessary to create high quality and sustainable Traveller sites which meet residents' traditional and cultural needs.</p> <p>The Department has reviewed the current Design Guide and is finalising an updated Guide. In reviewing the Guide the Department has engaged with local council officials, the Fire Service for Northern Ireland, the Department for Infrastructure (DfI), the Department of Finance (DoF) Housing Advisory Unit and the NIHE. The Department has also completed a targeted consultation with the Traveller communities and their representatives.</p> <p>Matters Arising from the Departments report</p> <p>Mr Mathison referred to the referral system and stated that Councils would want grant funding particularly in the current climate and additional pressures COVID-19 has posed and asked for clarification if the Housing Executive system work by the referral system.</p> <p>Mr Polley stated that the Department understood that payment by referral required Councils to take on risk in supporting the scheme. It was understood that this was a difficult time for Councils which were facing income shortfalls, due to loss of income due to the pandemic.</p>	
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This had been made clear during consultation and the Department had understood that when designing the Scheme. Payment by referral was however a key part of the scheme approval, and it was very unlikely that it would change. He added that Councils need to decide if they were still supportive of the Affordable Warmth Scheme and wanted to remain involved in its delivery on the basis that this aspect of it would not change.

Mr Polley highlighted that he knew that Councils felt the targeting algorithm had not worked well. Work was being forward to make improvements in this regard which should assist Councils.

Mr Polley confirmed that the Housing Executive did not work on a payment by referral basis, as an arms-length body this would not result in any transfer of risk, and the Department had a very close control over the performance of the Housing Executive under existing sponsorship controls.

In response to Michael Ruane question, in relation to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), he asked why it can't be changed and why should Council have to take this risk.

Mr Polley stated that it would not be acceptable for any Scheme of this type to continue without both parties signing of on an agreed MOU. The MOU had to reflect the Scheme as it was, and it could not be changed outwith the Scheme approval. There were of course other elements of the MOU which could be usefully improved with the consent of all parties.

The Department strongly desired that Councils would continue to deliver the Affordable Warmth Scheme locally, but this would be on the basis of the Scheme as it was currently designed, and the MOU had to reflect that. It was not acceptable to delay signing MOUs because a Council wished the Scheme to change.

Mrs Grehan asked if certain Councils didn't meet their targets of 44 referrals, can they be transferred to other Councils, as opposed to losing the money and having to return it to Treasury at the end of the year.

Mr Polley shared the Members concern that the current level of engagement in some Councils would mean that vulnerable citizens would lose out on home improvements, and also that the Scheme was at risk of an under-spend with the risk this would be lost to Northern Ireland. He undertook to consider if it was possible that Councils able to deliver more than 44 referrals could do so, to make up for those councils who had said they were not able to deliver the required number to use all available budget.

	<p>Mrs Grehan also referred to a flat rate which was provided on the first quarter and was this not possible to be offered to the end of the financial year.</p> <p>Mr Polley explained that given the lockdown, and as much of the required activity was not possible, the Department had made an upfront payment to Councils in the first quarter to ensure capacity to deliver the Affordable Warmth Scheme was not lost. This was to allow a quick restart to the scheme when lockdown ended in June/ July and to continue to provide an emergency referral process. Given that lockdown had ended and activity had become possible again, the rationale for this (and the departure from the Scheme approval) ended at the end of the first quarter. He added that given the need to deliver referrals and ensure the budget was fully used, it was important to restart work to deliver referrals quickly, and it was not clear at all that the upfront payment made to Councils had in many cases actually enabled a rapid restart to activity.</p> <p>In concluding, the Chair reiterated several Members concerns and disappointment that if the allocated money for the Affordable Warmth Scheme is not utilized will be lost and required to be sent back to the Treasury.</p>	
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<p>6.0</p>	<p><u>Presentation by Paul Isherwood, the Housing Executive's Director of Asset Management (NIHE) on ARTES Project.</u></p> <p>Mr Isherwood gave a presentation on the ARTES project. (Copies of the slides are appended to these minutes – Appendix A)</p> <p>Mr Isherwood delivered a comprehensive and detailed presentation on plans for the ARTES Project (ARTES being defined as 'Latin for Skills'). The initiative was described as the Housing Executive's contribution to improving the skills shortage within the wider construction industry.</p> <p>Since the Housing Executive is a significant employer within the construction industry with a large volume of work to be delivered to the stock well into the future, for which it will require a significant number of skilled resources and contractors.</p>	
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	<p>Mr Isherwood highlighted background information, strategic drivers, a multi-skilled approach, actions plans for years 1-3, sustainability and social value clauses, KPIs (associated with contractor sustainability; directly employed trade apprentices; community sustainability partnership programme), reporting/monitoring, collaboration/partnership working, staffing, estimated costs and benefits.</p> <p>The shortage of available skilled workers across the construction industry has been well documented. The Housing Executive will work in partnership with contractors, tenants, schools, colleges and universities to develop skills, create employment and provide learning and development opportunities within Housing Executive Maintenance Contracts.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Mr Isherwood for a very informative presentation.</p>	
<p>7.0</p>	<p><u>Presentation by Dr Steve Blockwell, Northern Ireland Water on Waste Water Capacity Issues</u></p> <p>Dr Blockwell gave Members a presentation on Waste Water Capacity Issues (Copies of the slides are appended to these Minutes – Appendix B).</p> <p>Members noted that Northern Ireland Water is a Government owned Company and Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) within Department for Infrastructure. NDPB status means NI Water can only spend within its Public Expenditure (PE) budgetary envelope – this is an important difference verses GB Water Companies.</p> <p>The Business Plan intends to increase the number of sewerage systems which will reach their capacity during the PC15 period, as a result NI Water will not be able to permit new connections, which may result in development at locations across N Ireland being constrained.</p> <p>Significant investment is needed for wastewater and water infrastructure. This alongside NI Water’s funding model not functioning effectively, to date it hasn’t delivered the investment that Northern Ireland needs. NI Water knows Northern Ireland’s growth ambitions and what it needs.</p> <p>It was noted that the Water Service has the plan and the skills to deliver it however if under investment continues, there will be significant constraints on economic growth, damage to the environment and risk to people’s health.</p>	

	<p>NOTED: Members had received written responses to their questions in advance of the meeting. Members were asked to submit any further questions to the Secretary on the current waste water capacity issues within their areas, in order to be forwarded to Dr Blockwell.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Dr Blockwell for attending the meeting and giving a comprehensive presentation.</p>	All Members
8.0	<p><u>Social Housing Development Programme Housing Starts and Completions</u></p> <p>Members noted the report.</p>	
9.0	<p><u>Housing Executive's Scheme Starts August 2020</u></p> <p>Members noted the report.</p>	
10.0 10.1	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p>	
11.0	<p><u>Date and Venue of Next Meeting – Thursday 8th October 2020 at 10.30 am</u></p> <p>It was agreed that the meeting could possibly be held in the Boardroom, the Housing Centre for those who wish to attend the meeting in person. It was recognised that other Members may prefer to continue to participate through the video/conference call facility.</p>	Secretary

The Meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.