



Minutes of the 470th Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council
Conference Call via Webex
Thursday, 11th June 2020 at 10.30 am

The Officers joined the Meeting at 10.45 am

Present:

Ald Tommy Nicholl	Mid & East Antrim Borough (Chair)
Cllr Anne Marie Fitzgerald	Fermanagh & Omagh District (Vice Chair)
Cllr Mark Cooper	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough
Cllr Nick Mathison	Ards & North Down Borough
Ald Jim Speers	Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough
Cllr Michelle Kelly	Belfast City
Ald John Finlay	Causeway Coast & Glens Borough
Ald Allan Bresland	Derry City & Strabane District
Cllr Michael Ruane	Newry, Mourne & Down District
Ald Amanda Grehan	Lisburn & Castlereagh 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)
Kelly Cameron	Secretary (NIHE, Secretariat)

Apologies:

Cllr Catherine Elattar Mid Ulster Borough

1.0	<p>Declarations of Interest</p> <p>None.</p>	
3.0	<p>To adopt the Minutes of the 469th Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 12th March 2020</p> <p>It was proposed by Alderman J Speers, seconded by Councillor N Mathison and resolved, that the Minutes of the 469th Meeting of the Housing Council held on Thursday 12th March 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair.</p>	

<p>4.0</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p>	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes</p> <p><u>Item 4.2 – Adaptation Performance and OT waiting times and assessments</u></p> <p>A joint presentation by representatives from the Department of Health & Social Services and the Housing Executive would be re-arranged for a future meeting, to revisit and monitor the Adaptation Performance and OT waiting times and assessments.</p> <p><u>Item 9.0 – NI Water</u></p> <p>A presentation by representatives from NI Water to be re-arranged for a future meeting in relation to wastewater capacity issues.</p>	<p>Secretary</p> <p>Secretary</p>
<p>5.0</p> <p>5.1</p>	<p>The Housing Executive’s Board Bulletin Board Meeting – Wednesday, 27th May 2020</p> <p>Mr Bailie reported on the Housing Executive Board’ deliberations as follows:-</p> <p>Update on COVID-19</p> <p>Mr Bailie gave Members an update on the current situation within the Housing Executive and the impact on its services, due to COVID-19. He overviewed the undernoted items:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Grounds Maintenance; 2. Community Funding Approach; 3. Housing Benefit (HB); 4. Housing Management Activity; 5. Phased Return to Work; 6. £3.3m Funding Availability for COVID-19 pressures; 7. PPE supply and provision; 8. NIHE Rent Increase 2020/21 – Until October 2020. <p>All Members highly commended the ongoing work of the Housing Executive during these unprecedented times, and asked Mr Bailie to convey their appreciation of the fantastic efforts made by Housing Executive staff during the COVID-19 emergency. Several Members quoted many examples of how Housing Executive staff has provided caring and practical support for residents in their own particular local areas.</p>	<p>C Bailie</p>

In response to the question in relation to contractors being back on-site, Mr Bailie explained that outside work is able to be carried out adhering to social distancing that will be the first to resume. In terms of interior works this will be a more slower process as there are risk assessments to be carried out, additional costs incurred due to social distancing and tenants are still reluctant to let people into their homes. He added at present works in vacant properties were being undertaken to get the property back into use.

Referring to the question on allocations of houses, Mr Bailie explained that the Housing Executive awaits the directive from the Northern Ireland Executive to allow the re-opening of the housing market.

Referring to the 'new normal' Mr Mathison felt that discussions should take place; how to conduct future meetings in relation to public expenses ie: (venue costs; refreshments; travel costs and the environmental issues).

Board Papers considered for approval were as follows:-

5.2 Corporate Risk Register (COVID-19)

5.3 Finance Report as at 30 April 2020

5.4 Housing Benefit Systems – Hosting Management Development Budgets 2020-21

5.5 CT045- Fence Painting Tender

The Board had approved contracts for fence painting works in Housing Executive Properties for a period of 18 months subject to the government guidance on COVID-19 at point of award.

5.6 Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025

It was noted that the Board had approved the Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2020-25, which sets out how the Housing Executive plans to provide the Travelling community with access to good quality, culturally appropriate housing accommodation which fosters sustainable, vibrant Travelling communities and promotes inclusion, a sense of belonging and security over the next 5 years.

The Strategy would be subject to a 12 week period of public consultation before being resubmitted to Board for final approval and implementation.

<p>5.7</p> <p>5.8</p> <p>5.9</p> <p>5.10</p> <p>5.11</p> <p>5.12</p> <p>5.13</p>	<p>Undeveloped Land Schedule 2019/20</p> <p>The Board had approved the Undeveloped Land Schedule 2019/20 and the classification of sites to be transferred to Housing Associations, retained for future use, declared surplus to requirements for disposal and reclassified as existing open space.</p> <p>Hope Street Development Proposal Update</p> <p>The Board had approved the Draft conditions of contract for the disposal of the Hope Street site.</p> <p>Other papers were noted by the Board, as follows:-</p> <p>Business Performance Monitor as at end of April 2020</p> <p>Land Acquisitions and Disposals Quarterly Update</p> <p>Supporting People Monthly update</p> <p>Department for Communities (DfC) Inspection Reports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• NIHE Transformation Programme• NIHE Community Safety Strategy• NIHE Tenancy Fraud Strategy• Health & Safety on NIHE Construction Sites <p>Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) Performance 2019/20 and Delivery Risk Assessment 2020/21</p> <p>The Board had noted the Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) performance against targets for the 2019/20 year and was provided a Delivery Risk Assessment for the 2020/21 year.</p>	
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	<p>This is a requirement under Financial Regulation 4 of 'Standing Orders', for the Board to be updated twice yearly on progress with the delivery of the SHDP against the Annual Budget Plan.</p>	
6.0	<p>Housing Issues, Department for Communities</p> <p>Mr Price thanked the Housing Executive for maintaining services under these extraordinary circumstances and gave an update on the current position of the work the Department and their continuity plan during COVID-19.</p> <p>He added that at present policy work is delayed and the focus is maintaining core services through the Housing Executive; obtaining extra funding for homelessness; supporting people and PPE.</p> <p>Mr Price also informed Members that the Minister for Communities agreed that COVID related rent arrears would not result in evictions during this pandemic, and the Department will support social landlords during these unprecedented times.</p> <p>Mr Price and Mr Polley gave a detailed monthly update on the Department for Communities Housing Issues, under the following headings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social Newbuild starts <p>Social housing scheme to be delivered over a 5 year period at which an additional 1,850 social homes are to be started by March 2020 (200 of which will be shared housing and 8.5% will be wheelchair accessible).</p> <p>Members noted that due to COVID-19 the delivery of the social newbuild starts was critically affected in March 2020, a total of 761 starts in 2020 compared to the target of 1,850.</p> <p>Mr Price highlighted the impact on the budget for 2020/21, he explained that there will be capital money that will exceed the capacity of industries that are currently struggling to spend the funding ie: construction industry, but in terms of resource there is likely to be strained budgets across all sectors including the impact on key services provided by the Housing Executive.</p>	

- **Co-ownership**

To support 1091 first-time buyers to purchase a new home through Co-ownership or similar schemes by March 2020 The PfG target is to support 3,750 first-time buyers to purchase a new home through Co-ownership or similar schemes by March 2021.

Mr Polley added that Co-ownership is currently not open for applications but hopefully will resume services in the near future.

- **Programme for Social Reform**

Options for structural reform have been developed in order to address the investment challenge in the NIHE. Complete preparations to implement Ministerial decisions to take forward a Programme of Social Housing Reform by September 2018.

- **Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy**

Aims to develop way forward policy options and legislative proposals in response to the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy. The Department has completed analysis of respondents' views in relation to the review and a consultation report has been drafted for publication. In December 2019 NIHE presented to the Department preliminary plans and potential costings to implement all 20 proposals for change, The plan is subject to Department approvals and funding and further consideration of modelling.

- **Reclassification of Northern Ireland Social Housing Providers**

By 31 March 2020 work with the NIO to ensure the passage of legislation to maintain the classification of Northern Ireland's Registered Housing Associations to the private sector. The draft Housing (Amendment) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2020 was introduced to the Assembly on 26 May 2020.

- **Supporting People Delivery Strategy**

The Strategy aimed to oversee both the delivery of the Supporting People Programme and the implementation of the 2015 Review Recommendations.

- **Homelessness Strategy**

The inter-departmental Homeless Action Plan with NIHE and across Government to implement Homelessness Strategy to tackle homelessness.

- **St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena**

To develop St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena as a mixed-tenure, mixed-use site underpinned by a shared ethos (PfG target by March 2021). Currently facing some delays owing to high levels of Asbestos

- **Regulation of the Private Rented Sector**

To implement agreed recommendations arising from Review of the Role and Regulation of the Private Rented Sector (PRS) and prepare legislative proposals accordingly (PfG target). Progress to date includes a Landlord Helpline underway as of 01/09/18 and a pilot mediation service provided by Housing Rights Service has been operational since November 19 and will run for a period of 2 years.

- **Increasing Housing Supply**

Aims to move into 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 PfG Outcome 13.

- **Affordable Warmth Scheme**

The Affordable Warmth Scheme aims to deliver 3,900 affordable warmth measures to 2,600 homes by 31 March 2020. The Scheme is on track to meet this target.

Mr Polley added that during Covid-19, Councils are continuing to process emergency referrals for the scheme.

- **NIHE Rent Scheme**

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.

- **Welfare Reform Mitigation payments**

The "New Decade, New Approach" commits the Executive to continuing to mitigate for the Social Sector Size Criteria (also referred to as the Bedroom Tax).

	<p>The Department will work with the NIHE to ensure a joined up approach to communicating with tenants on the approach to continuing mitigation for SSSC and on decisions regarding other mitigation measures.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Investment <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 NIHE. The six year €45 million programme is expected to be completed by the end of 2023.</p> <p>The Chair commended the Department and the Housing Executive staff and the team work approach through these exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Members raised their concerns at the budget constraints for this financial year and reiterated their support for the Housing Executive to be allowed to borrow money.</p> <p>In response Mr Price explained that due to COVID-19, these discussions have currently been suspended and he referred to the 'New Decade, New Approach', which will be considered by the Minister of Communities to present to the Northern Ireland Executive on the options for structural reform, later in the year.</p> <p>Alderman Grehan asked for a breakdown the social newbuild programme that was impacted by COVID-19 and those prohibited by planning and infrastructure. She also asked those impacted by the COVID-19 situation are they ready to be started when the construction industry has resumed works.</p> <p>Mr Price undertook to provide details on the social housing units for 2019/2020. He added that approvals had been obtained to deliver the target and unfortunately mid-March is when all normality was shut down placing a hold on the process. COVID-19 impacted site acquisitions due to the closure of Land Registry, planning approvals due to cancelled meetings and contracts not being signed following legal advice.</p> <p>Mr Price explained that there is a bank of approximately 1100 units capable of being delivered when processes are restarted, giving a head-start on new starts for next year, which will include the 1,850 starts in the programme, but explained that there will be added difficulties, ie. on-site social distancing which will increase cost, time etc. Members noted that the funding pressure will be a challenge.</p>	<p>P Price</p>
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	<p>Members were in agreement that the backlogs in March for meeting the targets at the last minute should be addressed.</p> <p>Mr Bailie responded to the question, in relation to the reopening of housing allocations and the related challenges this will pose. He explained that there was a reserve of tenants ready to move prior to COVID-19, so following the directive of the re-opening of the housing market the move can proceed quickly, although the Housing Executive is mindful of other services needing to be operative for those tenants.</p>	
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7.0	<p><u>New Decade. New Approach</u></p> <p>Members noted that options for structural reform have been developed in order to address the investment challenge in the Housing Executive. 'New Decade, New Approach' commits the Northern Ireland Executive to tackling this challenge. The Minister for Communities is aware of the challenge facing the Housing Executive and has indicated the priority to protect NIHE stock.</p> <p>Mr Price and Mr Polley highlighted the main issues relating to the Housing, as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Enhanced investment from Executive for new social and affordable home starts.• Tackling the maintenance backlog for NI Housing Executive properties.• Augmentation of PfG Outcomes Framework to ensure new outcome. Specific focus on ensuring every household has access to a good quality, affordable and sustainable home that is appropriate for its needs.• Executive plans to bring forwards reclassification legislation to mark Housing Associations as external to public sector, this in turn will ensure the continuation of new social house building and the Co-ownership Housing Scheme.• The Executive's examination of options to potentially remove £307m of historical debt from the NIHE (£185m of this is capital, £122m is interest) and exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax. <p>Members expressed concern that the Housing Executive are obliged to pay Corporation Tax and would welcome a change in the legislation to exempt the payment.</p>	
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Executive’s plans to agree on a long-term trajectory for the rental charges of the NIHE that will support the long-term future of NIHE’s social housing stock and provide demonstrably affordable rents to tenants. • Measures that will be introduced, including legislation where necessary, to provide for controls to ensure affordability, and these options to ensure affordability of social rents will be presented for consideration by the Minister in due course. 	
8.0	<p>Social Housing Development Programme Housing Starts and Completions:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report Year End 2019-2020 • Report end of May 2020 <p>Members noted the reports.</p>	
9.0	<p>The Housing Executive’s Scheme Starts May 2020</p> <p>Members noted the report.</p>	
10.0	<p>Date and Venue of Next Meeting – 13th August 2020 at 10.30 am in the Housing Centre, Belfast.</p> <p>It was agreed that the meeting would be held in the Boardroom of 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 pm.