



Minutes of the 478th Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council held on
Thursday 11th March 2021 at 10.30 am via Webex

Present by Video Conferencing:

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| Tommy Nicholl | Mid & East Antrim Borough (Chair) |
| Anne-Marie Fitzgerald | Fermanagh & Omagh District (Vice Chair) |
| Mark Cooper | Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough |
| Jim Speers | Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough |
| Michelle Kelly | Belfast City |
| Amanda Grehan | Lisburn & Castlereagh City |
| Catherine Elattar | Mid Ulster Borough |

In Attendance:

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Paul Price | Department for Communities |
| David Polley | Department for Communities |
| David Adamson | Fire Safety Manager |
| Kelly Cameron | Secretary (Housing Executive Secretariat) |

Apologies:

| | |
|----------------|--------------------------------|
| Nick Mathison | Ards & North Down Borough |
| Allan Bresland | Derry City & Strabane District |
| John Finlay | Causeway Coast & Glens Borough |
| Mickey Ruane | Newry, Mourne & Down District |

| | | |
|-----|--|--|
| 1.0 | <p><u>Declarations of Interest</u></p> <p>None.</p> | |
| 2.0 | <p><u>To adopt the Minutes of the 477th Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 11th February 2021</u></p> <p>It was proposed by Councillor Kelly, seconded by Councillor Fitzgerald and resolved, that the Minutes of the 477th Meeting of the Housing Council held on Thursday 11th February 2021 be approved and signed by the Chair.</p> | |

| | | |
|---|---|--|
| <p>3.0</p> | <p><u>Forward Workplan</u></p> <p>AGREED: At the requested of Councillor Cooper, it was agreed to invite the Northern Ireland Youth Forum to attend a future Meeting to share their recent work carried out on homelessness in Northern Ireland.</p> | <p>Secretary</p> |
| <p>4.0</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p> | <p><u>Matters Arising from the Minutes</u></p> <p>Invitation to the Minister for Communities to attend a future Housing Council meeting</p> <p>It was noted that a reply was still awaited.</p> <p>Councillor Cooper expressed his dismay at the length of time it had taken for the Ministers office to respond to the invitation.</p> <p>Mr Price undertook obtain an explanation on the reasons behind the delayed response.</p> <p>Queries by Members responded to since the last meeting, in relation to policy issues have been included in your papers for information:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Mark Cooper – Repair of a smoke alarm for a hearing impaired tenant. <p>Councillor Cooper was not satisfied with the content of the response and stated that he would be challenging the explanation further.</p> | <p>P Price</p> <p>M Cooper</p> |
| <p>5.0</p> <p>5.1</p> | <p><u>Housing Issues, Department for Communities</u></p> <p>Mr Paul Price and Mr David Polley highlighted certain changes under the specific headings on the Department for Communities (DfC) Housing Issues:-</p> <p>Social Newbuild starts</p> <p>It was noted that progress was being made with 626 being delivered by the end of February 2021. Of these, 52 units are wheelchair accessible. The 10% New Build Wheelchair target is likely to equate to a target of around 200 units (dependant on total New Build which start by 31 March 2021). The maximum anticipated wheelchair out-turn is 168 units.</p> | |

| | | |
|------------|--|--|
| | <p>The Minister's Assembly statement on 03 November 2020 outlined plans for the future of the Housing Executive and her intention to ring fence part of the social housing budget, for areas of acute housing need. Proposals have been received from Housing Executive and are currently being considered by the Department. It was noted that the Housing Executive are confident that this year's Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) target will be met.</p> | |
| 5.2 | <p>Co-ownership</p> <p>As of the end of January 2021 Co-ownership has delivered 1017 homes in the 2020/21 financial year. This bring the current total number of homes delivered to date up to 4992 homes, exceeding the target by over 1200 homes.</p> <p>It was noted that £145m FTC to fund Co-ownership for the next 4 years (36.25m per year) has been approved by Minister and DoF.</p> | |
| 5.3 | <p>Programme for Social Reform</p> <p>Mr Price highlighted that the Minister intends to bring proposals to the Executive before the end of this mandate which will include details as to how to address the investment challenge facing the Housing Executive. Work has commenced on assessing options address these issues. A Programme Board has been established, the first meeting. A co-design approach will be adopted and officials will continue to engage with Housing Council.</p> | |
| 5.4 | <p>Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy</p> | |
| 5.5 | <p>Reclassification of Northern Ireland Social Housing Providers</p> <p>In the Ministers statement commitments were made during the passage of the Housing (Amendment) Bill (Northern Ireland) 2020 which means the House Sales Scheme for Registered Housing Associations will end on 27 August 2022. A consultation document on the future of the Housing Executive's House Sales Scheme is expected to launch shortly.</p> | |
| 5.6 | <p>Supporting People Delivery Strategy</p> | |
| 5.7 | <p>Homelessness Strategy</p> | |
| 5.8 | <p>Regulation of the Private Rented Sector</p> | |
| 5.9 | <p>Increasing Housing Supply</p> | |

| | | |
|--------------------|---|--|
| <p>5.10</p> | <p>Affordable Warmth Scheme</p> <p>It was noted that referrals into the Affordable Warmth Scheme in 2020/21 and completion of work in homes has been lower than forecast due to the impact of Covid-19 lockdowns and restrictions which reduced the number of homes that could be visited. There was an associated lower level of engagement from households contacted due to health and safety concerns. This also impacted the completion of work by contractors in householders' premises.</p> <p>Councils have been asked to make 32 referrals per month from January to March 2021 to maximise the budget spend in this financial year and to prepare for spend in the next financial year. Referrals have increased but are not yet back to pre-pandemic levels due to ongoing Covid -19 concerns. Delivery in 2020/2021 to end of Jan 21: 1695 measures installed and 1077 homes assisted.</p> <p>A change to Scheme eligibility has been approved which will raise the income threshold from £20k to £23k. Regulation amendments are being drafted and subject to the legislative process the change is anticipated to be effective during April 2021.</p> | |
| <p>5.11</p> | <p>NIHE Rent Increase</p> <p>Members noted that the Minister approved a Housing Executive rent increase for 2021-22 of CPI + 1%. The Minister has postponed its introduction until 1 July 2021 to mitigate the impact of the ongoing pandemic. The Housing Council to be kept updated.</p> | |
| <p>5.12</p> | <p>ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme 2014 -2020</p> | |
| <p>5.13</p> | <p>Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework</p> | |
| <p>5.14</p> | <p>Options to remove historical debt from the NIHE and exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax</p> <p>It was reported that the Chancellor had announced in his 2021 Budget that the Housing Executive would be exempted from Corporation Tax. This will be effective from the 2020-21 tax year.</p> | |
| <p>5.15</p> | <p>Long term rent trajectory</p> | |
| <p>5.16</p> | <p>Affordability of social rents</p> | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| <p>5.17</p> <p>5.17.1</p> <p>5.17.2</p> | <p>Matters Arising</p> <p>Exemption of Corporation Tax</p> <p>Members welcomed that the Housing Executive would be exempt from Corporation Tax and would support clawing back any monies from 2013 for forward planning etc.</p> <p>In response to Councillor Elattar’s question, Mr Price confirmed that there is no timescale for retrieving the monies a reserve of £58m and the Department are hoping there is a strong case as it had been agreed that the Housing Executive should never be charged Corporation Tax.</p> <p>In relation to historical debt, Mr Price undertook to provide Members with an update of the current status of the debt etc.</p> <p>Homelessness Strategy</p> <p>Councillor Cooper enquired as to whether changes or modifications to the four homeless tests will be up for consideration. He added that whilst he appreciated that the framework is in place to determine full duty applicant (FDA) eligibility, what provisions were in place for those who don't meet the criteria and are these working.</p> <p>Councillor Cooper asked are there any barriers that prove detrimental to passing the homelessness tests and if so, what responses were being implemented to address these barriers.</p> <p>Are there support and services available for Non FDA candidates and those revered as the hidden homeless.</p> <p>AGREED: Mr Polley undertook to send a written response to Councillor Cooper in relation to the above questions.</p> | <p>P Price</p> <p>D Polley</p> |
|--|--|--|

| | | |
|-------------------|---|--|
| <p>6.0</p> | <p><u>NIHE Cladding of Tower Blocks</u></p> <p>David Adamson gave Members a in-depth presentation of the NIHE Cladding of Tower Blocks (Copies of the Slides are appended to these Minutes – Appendix A).</p> <p>It was noted that the Housing Executive have robust fire safety regimes and carry out regular inspections in all 32 tower blocks.</p> | |
|-------------------|---|--|

| | | |
|-----|---|--|
| | <p>In light of the fire in London, the Housing Executive have undertaken health and safety inspections of each block. The Housing Executive reassured their tenants that any cladding systems which have been installed or are being installed are required to comply with the relevant fire safety regulations.</p> <p>Mr Adamson reported that subject to the outcome of the Independent Review of Building Regulations and Fire Safety undertaken by Dame Judith Hackett and the development of a new European fire safety test, the Independent Reference Group recommends that the cladding systems on the four NIHE tower blocks are subject to any new regulatory standards or fire safety test. The Independent Reference Group also recommends that the Housing Executive consider installing sprinkler systems within its high-rise accommodation.</p> <p>The Secretary undertook to circulate the Presentation, for Members information.</p> <p>Mr Adamson explained that the Housing Executive will currently only be installing sprinklers systems in high rise tower blocks, in the future medium rise maybe included in the programme, he added that it is currently recommended 18m or above properties with combustible cladding.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Mr Adamson for a very comprehensive Presentation and look forward to being kept updated on the short, medium and long-term Strategy for Tower Blocks.</p> | |
| 7.0 | <p><u>Social Housing Development Programme Housing Starts and Completions</u></p> <p>Members noted the report as circulated.</p> <p>Councillor Anne-Marie Fitzgerald referred to the low and disappointing numbers of Social Housing, in the area she represents (Fermanagh and Omagh District Council) completed to date 9, under construction 0, started to date 2020/21 and gross programme to start 0. She added the low numbers generally in rural areas.</p> <p>Mr Price explained the programme is scheduled due to housing need in an area, he also added there are issues or land supply and costs in certain areas.</p> | |

| | | |
|------------|---|---|
| | <p>Mr Price undertook to provide further information on the performance of the programme over an extended period across all parliamentary constituencies (starts and completions) and also information on what the Housing Executive are doing to boost development in rural areas.</p> <p>The Chair supported the need for rural areas, as the locals want to stay in their local areas and would urge the Housing Executive to address these issues in rural areas.</p> <p>Councillor Cooper said that the Central Housing Forum undertook specific work to address rural needs and suggested it would be beneficial to invite representatives from the Forum to attend a future meeting.</p> | <p>P Price</p> <p>Secretary</p> |
| 8.0 | <p><u>Housing Executive’s Scheme Starts February 2021</u></p> <p>Members noted the report as circulated.</p> | |
| 9.0 | <p><u>Date and Venue of Next Meeting – Thursday 11th March 2021 at 10.30 am via Webex</u></p> <p>It was noted that the April Housing Council was scheduled for Thursday, 8th April which is the Easter week, it had been agreed to postpone the Meeting until Thursday 15th April 2021 via Webex. This meeting will also incorporate the Annual General Meeting (AGM).</p> <p>It was also noted that the above monthly meeting would encompass attendance from the Housing Executive, with the Department of Communities returning to the May Monthly Meeting.</p> | |

The Meeting concluded at 12.20 pm.