



Minutes of the 474th Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council
The Housing Centre, Belfast (Boardroom / Webex)
Thursday, 12th November 2020 at 10.30 am

The Officers joined the Meeting at 11.30 am.

Present in Boardroom:

Tommy Nicholl	Mid & East Antrim Borough (Chair)
Mark Cooper	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough
Jim Speers	Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough
Mickey Ruane	Newry, Mourne & Down District

Present by Video Conferencing:

Nick Mathison	Ards & North Down Borough
Allan Bresland	Derry City & Strabane District
Anne-Marie Fitzgerald	Fermanagh & Omagh District (Vice Chair)
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 (Housing Executive Secretariat)

Apologies:

Michelle Kelly	Belfast City
John Finlay	Causeway Coast & Glens Borough
Catherine Elattar	Mid Ulster Borough

1.0	<u>Declarations of Interest</u> None.	
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<p>2.0</p>	<p><u>To adopt the Minutes of the 473rd Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 8th October 2020</u></p> <p>It was proposed by Alderman Speers, seconded by Councillor Ruane and resolved, that the Minutes of the 473rd Meeting of the Housing Council held on Thursday 8th October 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>Meetings Structure</u></p> <p>The Secretary updated the Officers from the Department for Communities and the Housing Executive on the new proposed arrangements for the Meetings going forward, as agreed at the 'Private Session' held earlier.</p> <p><u>AGREED: that -</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Housing Executive's Chief Executive and the Officials from the Department for Communities should attend meetings separately, on alternate months, allowing more time for their respective question/answer (Q&A) sessions; • the new proposals to be implemented in the New Year. <p>Page 61 Item 6 – Building Regulations Re Lifetime Homes Standards</p> <p>It was noted that the Secretary, on behalf of the Chair, had written to the Department for Finance seeking clarification on the potential for Building Regulation on Lifetime Homes Standards to be extended to the Private Sector. A reply is awaited.</p> <p>Queries from Members responded to since the last meeting, in relation to policy issues included:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alderman Speers - interventions available for DFG applicants where the contractor's performance/standard of work is sub-standard. 	

4.0	<p><u>Housing Executive's Board Bulletin Board Meeting – Wednesday, 28th October 2020</u></p> <p>Mr Bailie reported on the Housing Executive Board's deliberations as follows:-</p> <p>Finance Report</p> <p>The Board had requested an additional supplementary report reflecting the allocated reserves and associated programme.</p> <p>Corporate Performance Monitor at the half year (September 2020)</p> <p>The Board noted the performance at the half year period against the draft one year business plan for all Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for Regional, Landlord and Support Services. The report reflected the impact of COVID-19 on programme delivery, which, unfortunately, had impacted on some targets and had required some of the maintenance contracts to be reset..</p> <p>Rent Increase Proposals 2021-22</p> <p>The Board considered a number of options in relation to next year's rent increase and agreed a proposal to be submitted to the Minister.</p> <p>DLO Evolve Business Case Approval</p> <p>The Board approved the Business Case for the DLO Evolve programme which aimed to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of DLO's maintenance service. The programme will be delivered through five workstreams - Workforce Planning, Commercial/ Financial, Business process Review, Accommodation/ Stores and Communication/ Engagement.</p> <p>2020-2021 Programme Update</p> <p>The Board approved the revised Programme deemed deliverable in the remainder of the 2020/21 financial year, following the COVID-19 lockdown and resumption of all works. It was noted that the delivery of the updated 2020/21 Programme, particularly the internal works, is heavily dependent upon lockdown restrictions not being reintroduced.</p>	
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Sprinkler Systems Installation Programme for the NIHE High Rise Tower Blocks

Approval was given by the Board for the installation of sprinklers in 31 tower blocks using the Fusion 21 Framework procurement to deliver the programme.

In response to Mr Mathison's query on the fire safety of the cladding in Housing Executive Tower Blocks, Mr Bailie provided an explanation on the testing process previously applied to cladding in line with Building Regulations, and added that the future introduction of any new standards would require compliance. He added that fire safety is taken very seriously within the Housing Executive and officers were also engaging with the University of Ulster Fire Research Laboratory in relation to further testing

AGREED: to arrange a presentation on Tower Blocks, in particular, focusing on the issue of fire safety in the cladding.

CTE01 - No Fines EWI and Associated Works

The Board approved award of the second tranche of No Fines External Wall Insulation and Associated Works Contracts under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) programme.

Community Cohesion Update for 2019-2020

The Board noted the annual update on the Community Cohesion Strategy across its five themes and approved an extension of the existing Strategy until 31 March 2022, pending direction from the Northern Ireland Executive on the future Programme For Government framework, and to analyse the outcome of an external evaluation on the effectiveness of the current Strategy over the last 5 years.

Leasehold - Lease Extension Proposal

The Board approved the implementation of a new policy enabling leaseholders to extend their leases at market value, subject to full recovery by the Housing Executive of its associated transaction costs.

The Way Home – Homelessness Response to COVID-19

It was noted that the Housing Executive had adopted a co-ordinated response to address the impacts of COVID-19 in terms of homelessness in Northern Ireland. Actions taken since early March 2020 aimed to safeguard as many homeless people as possible and ensure the continued operation of homelessness services in an effective and safe way.

To capture, key responses and progress to date as well as set out the framework to ensure we protect this progress made is protected going forward, a reset plan '*The Way Home – Homelessness Response to COVID-19*' has been developed.

The plan will form the basis of the Housing Executive's funding submission to the Department for Communities for continued funding beyond the current financial year. The priorities and measures outlined in the reset plan were shared at a high level with the Minister for Communities recently. The Minister was fully supportive of the existing and ongoing need for the measures outlined in the document.

The Board approved the Plan.

Queens Quarter Housing Funding

The Board approved an increase in Supporting People funding rate for Queens Quarter Housing from 1st November 2020. Queens Quarter Housing provides support services for vulnerable clients with complex support needs.

Supporting People Strategy 2021-2024

The Board received a presentation on the three year Supporting People Strategy 2021-2024 and approved the Strategy for onward submission to the Department and for public consultation in December 2020.

Other information papers noted by the Board included:-

Homelessness Strategy 2017-22 Year 4 (Q1) Update

SP Programme Monthly Progress Update

Land Acquisitions and Disposals Update

Annual Compliance Health & Safety Annual Report

Plans for 50th Anniversary Celebrations during 2021

Other issues during discussion included:

Change of Tenancy

Mr Cooper reiterated his concern associated with timescales for change of tenancies associated with response contracts. New tenants were being advised that it could possibly be 6 to 8 weeks before receiving their keys, and he enquired if set dates could be determined.

Maintenance of Smoke Alarms

Mr Bailie undertook to respond to Mr Cooper in relation to the length of time to repair a Smoke Alarm for a hearing impaired tenant (three days requiring a specialist contractor, as opposed to two hours when a smoke alarm is reported faulty as an emergency response).

Affordable Warmth Scheme

Mr Bailie reported briefly on difficulties being experienced with the Affordable Warmth scheme and undertook to provide Mrs Grehan with a list of referral issues arising from Councils.

Military Barracks site in Omagh

In response to Ms Fitzgerald, Mr Bailie undertook to check the possibility of the Omagh military barracks site being utilised for social housing.

Available Land Sites for Social Housing

Responding further to Ms Fitzgerald, Mr Bailie confirmed he would welcome the identification of any further lands/sites with potential for social housing and, in particular, in areas where there is housing need.

	<p>Latharna Tower Block, Larne</p> <p>The Chair asked for clarification on the timescale for demolishing the Latharna Tower Block and also the intention for the site when demolished.</p> <p>Mr Bailie confirmed at present there is no decision on the future use of the site.</p>	
<p>5.0</p>	<p><u>Housing Issues, Department for Communities</u></p> <p>Mr Price referred to the Minister for Communities Carál Ní Chuilín recent announcement about the future of social housing in Northern Ireland on 3rd November 2020. He reported that the Minister had given a clear direction of travel in the terms of the future of the landlord and regional sides of the Housing Executive. The landlord side will be reclassified so that it may borrow, invest in its homes and ultimately build again. The regional side will remain as a public authority and will continue to focus on delivering strategic housing services and programmes.</p> <p>Members noted other keys areas, which the Minister undertook to address, as follows:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Comprehensive rental review of the Housing Executive rents; b. Consultation on the Housing Executive’s House Sales Scheme; c. Consultation on the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy - Proceed with 18 of the 20 proposals for change; d. Reintroduction ring-fencing of the new build Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) to prioritise certain areas of highest housing need; e. Private rented sector – to introduce legislation to the Assembly to improve the safety, security and quality of the Private Rented sector. Key areas of reform include extending the notice to quit period, ensuring rent is fair and considering an enhanced role for councils in registration and enforcement. <p>Members also noted updates in the circulated report under the following headings:-</p>	

AGREED: following the publication of the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy, the Department for Communities will give a presentation at a future Meeting.

- Reclassification of Northern Ireland Social Housing Providers
- Supporting People Delivery Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- Regulation of the Private Rented Sector

AGREED:

- (a) the Department to give an overview of the Private Rented Sector to discuss the proposals to be introduced in this mandate and those with longer term changes;
- (b) Mr Polley undertook to provide Mr Mathison with a link on the Reform of the Private Rented Sector.

- **Increasing Housing Supply**
- **Affordable Warmth Scheme – A detailed discussion took place on this issue**

AGREED: Mr Polley to send a letter to the 11 Councils informing them of the proposed changes in raising the income threshold within the Affordable Warmth schemes, which could result in several applicants now being eligible to avail of the scheme, expected to be implemented in the New Year.

- **Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework**
- **Options to remove historical debt from the NIHE and exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax**
- **Long term rent trajectory**
- **Affordability of social rents**
- **Review of the Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in Northern Ireland**

It was noted that this item is now completed and will be removed from the monthly update.

	<p><u>AGREED:</u> following the Ministerial announcement, the Department for Communities to give a presentation at a future Meeting on revitalisation of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.</p>	
6.0	<p>Social Housing Development Programme Housing Starts and Completions – October 2020</p> <p>The report was noted.</p>	
7.0	<p>Housing Starts October 2020</p> <p>The report was noted.</p>	
8.0	<p><u>Date and Venue of Next Meeting – Thursday 10th December 2020 at 10.30 am</u></p> <p>It was agreed that the monthly meetings would be held in the Boardroom, the Housing Centre, for the foreseeable future. Members would liaise with the Secretary on preference(s) to attend in person or participate remotely, depending on personal circumstances and attendance numbers.</p>	

The Meeting concluded at 12.35 pm.