



Minutes of the 468th Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council
held in the Coleraine Council offices
Thursday, 13th February 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
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 Catherine Elattar	Mid Ulster Borough
Cllr Michael Ruane	Newry, Mourne & Down District
Ald Amanda Grehan	Lisburn & Castlereagh City

In Attendance:

Clark Bailie	Chief Executive (NIHE)
Andy Kennedy	Assistant Director (NIHE)
Judith Woodburn	Department for Communities
Maryann Dempsey	Department for Communities
Kelly Cameron	Secretary (NIHE, Secretariat)

Apologies:

Cllr Nick Mathison	Ards & North Down Borough
Paul Price	Department for Communities
David Polley	Department for Communities

1.0	Welcome The Chair extended a welcome to Members and Officials from the Housing Executive and the Department for Communities.	
2.0	Declarations of Interest None.	

<p>3.0</p>	<p>To adopt the Minutes of the 467th Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 9th January 2020</p> <p>It was proposed by Mr M Ruane, seconded by Ms M Kelly and resolved, that the Minutes of the 467th Meeting of the Housing Council held on Thursday 9th January 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair.</p>	
<p>4.0</p> <p>4.1</p> <p>4.2</p> <p>4.3</p>	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes</p> <p><u>Item 4.2 – 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 has been arranged for the April Meeting to revisit and monitor the Adaptation Performance and OT waiting times and assessments.</p> <p><u>Item 5.1 – Housing Executive’s Community Safety Strategy</u></p> <p>It was noted that arrangements were being made for a future Presentation.</p> <p><u>Item 6.0 - Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy</u></p> <p>Members noted the list of the proposals and timeframes from the Department for Communities in response to the Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy.</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, 29th January 2020</p> <p>Mr Bailie reported on the Housing Executive Board’s deliberations as follows:-</p> <p>Key Issues and Priorities (Open Discussion Item)</p> <p>Discussions took place on the Housing Executive’s key issues and priorities for the coming months, particularly with this being the first meeting including the new Housing Council Board Members.</p>	

<p>5.2</p> <p>5.3</p> <p>5.4</p> <p>5.5</p>	<p>Board Business – Committee Membership / Structures</p> <p>The membership and structures of the Board Committees were reviewed and a new structure was approved for implementation at the start of the new financial year.</p> <p>Verbal Updates</p> <p>It was reported that the Board had received an update from the Chair (Professor Peter Roberts) on Board business he had conducted since the last meeting, a monthly update from the Housing Council Members, and an update on Emerging Issues from the Chief Executive.</p> <p>It was noted the Board Papers considered for approval were as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monthly Finance Report as at 31 December 2019• Proposed Changes to the Corporate Risk Register• Request to Close Two Unused Bank Accounts• Response Maintenance Procurement Strategy• Exceptional Supporting People Payment• Draft Home Energy Conservation Authority (HECA) Annual Progress Report <p>Other papers were noted by the Board, as follows:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Performance against the 2019-20 Business Plan at the end of the third quarter of the business year• Corporate Services Quarterly Update Report• Supporting People Programme – Progress Status Update• Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (SVPRS) Update• Compliance Health & Safety Assurance – Monthly Report	
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<p>5.6</p> <p>5.7</p>	<p>Presentation</p> <p>Board Members welcomed a presentation from Housing Services on the proposed Repayment Arrangements for Leaseholds for planned schemes costs (Reacquisition Policy) which would come back to the Board, for further consideration.</p> <p>In response to Mr Speers' questions, Mr Bailie confirmed that the Housing Executive would still be responsible under the lease for the external fabric of the properties and the leaseholders is required to repay the planned scheme costs for the property.</p> <p>Other Matters Arising</p> <p>'Domestic violence' victims.</p> <p>Ms Kelly sought clarity of the Housing Executive procedures for 'domestic violence' victims.</p> <p>In response, Mr Bailie stated that if someone presents themselves to the Housing Executive as a result of 'domestic violence' it is taken very serious and they are interviewed as to what are their needs, expectations and requirements and try and accommodate them with a solution. He referred to 'safe haven' schemes through supporting people which the Housing Executive offer, the Housing Executive also provides funding to women's aid groups. He added that each individuals housing circumstance would be fully assessed and would be given points, at the minute a victim of domestic abuse does not receive 'intimidation' points but this it is being reviewed, as part of the Housing Selection Scheme review.</p> <p>In response to Mr Finlay's question, Mr Bailie confirmed that if the so called 'abusers' name was on the rent book, to have them removed from the property the Housing Executive would need to go through the legal system and in the case of a joint tenancy they have equal rights to the property and the Housing Executive has no authority to insist on one or other leaving the property without the legal system.</p> <p>BBA Action Plan Report</p> <p>Mr Cooper sought clarification for the timescale of the BBA Action Plan in relation to the Cavity Wall Insulation research.</p> <p>Mr Kennedy explained that it is the intention that the Board will be receiving a presentation on the draft Action Plan at their March Meeting, followed by a paper in April and subject to Board approval this Plan will then be out for public consultation.</p>	
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	<p>Mr Kennedy confirmed that there is an internal Cavity Wall Insulation Working Group set up, which first met in September 2019 and another Group with representatives from the Community Housing Forum.</p> <p>Mr Cooper referred to an Internal Audit which was being carried out on Affordable Warmth and a report was to be produced in January 2020, he sought clarity on when this is due to be released. He expressed his concern of cavity wall insulation in properties and many people have to make a choice either 'heat or eat'.</p> <p>Mrs Woodburn confirmed that there was a delay in the report but it is expected to be completed late February/early March and then the Department will be taking forward the actions.</p> <p>Mr Bailie explained that the Housing Executive brought in the British Board of Agreement (BBA) as an independent expert voice who carried out a substantial survey and their findings was it is not just about the cavity it's about the external fabric and the render being defective or damp proof course or gaps round doors and windows. The findings 1% of the BBA's sample would require urgent action. The Housing Executive feels taking the time is essential, in order to getting the best solution.</p> <p>Mr Kennedy confirmed that European Regional Development Funding (ERDF) of approximately £42m has been allocated and the Housing Executive has to match fund, to improve the thermal efficiency of homes including cladding, new double glazing and insulation and works are underway.</p> <p>Mr Kennedy explained that the BBA report states that there is an issue of cavity wall insulation but the immediate is 1% and the while the cavity wall insulation is not up to standard it is still giving better energy efficiency than our non-traditional single skin properties. A choice has to be made were to invest for the most thermally improved comfort.</p> <p>In response to Mr Cooper's question, Mr Kennedy confirmed that ERDF funding programme has already started with 59 aluminum bungalows completed. The ERDF funding covers 2,700 dwellings in total, 2,500 no fines and 200 aluminum bungalows.</p>	
<p>6.0</p>	<p>Housing Issues, Department for Communities</p> <p>Ms Woodburn and Ms Dempsey gave a detailed monthly update on the Department for Communities Housing Issues, under the following headings:</p>	

- Social Newbuild starts
- Co-ownership
- Programme for Social Reform
- Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy
- Reclassification of Northern Ireland Social Housing Providers
- Supporting People Delivery Strategy
- Homelessness Strategy
- St Patrick's Barracks, Ballymena
- Regulation of the Private Rented Sector
- Increasing Housing Supply
- Affordable Warmth Scheme
- NIHE Rent Scheme
- Welfare Reform Mitigation payments

Mrs Woodburn confirmed that the Minister for Communities has extended the mitigation payments for the Social Sector Size Criteria (Bedroom Tax).

In response Mr Speers, Mr Bailie confirmed that the 'Welfare Supplementary Payment' is paid directly from the Department for Communities to the Housing Executive as the Landlord, in Northern Ireland the default position is the payment goes directly to the landlord, as opposed to the claimant.

Mr Cooper welcomed the Housing Executive rents for 2020/21 will be increased by 2.7% and added that the Housing Executive rents still continue to remain much lower than local housing associations in Northern Ireland.

Several Members reiterated the need for powers to be brought back to the Housing Executive to start building again and would fully support this recommendation.

Mrs Woodburn explained that it is not legislation that is not permitting the Housing Executive to build, in 1996 it was a policy decision to move newbuild to Housing Associations, as they can borrow private finance. She added that the Department would welcome the Housing Executive being innovative and ways to provide properties, however it does need to be 'value for money' basis and they would have to put forward a business case for approval by the Department of Finance. At present, they are not in a position to borrow it would score against the Northern Ireland block grant. It was noted that if the Housing Executive was 'reformed' this would allow them to obtain private finance and would have the liberty to build.

Mr Bailie said that Housing Executive would welcome the opportunity to build, not to compete with the Housing Associations but to enhance a solution.

	<p>Mrs Grehan added that the Housing Executive Board also fully supports the newbuild issue and a Board Member she has been nominated to sit on a new group named 'Newbuild Task and Finish' which is tasked to help drive new build forward and fully demonstrate the possibilities.</p>	
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PRESENTATION

<p>7.0</p>	<p>Presentation by representatives from the Executive Office on Flags, Emblems and Sectional Symbols</p> <p>Members noted that the presentation was cancelled by the Executive Office due the reinstatement of the Assembly, the Executive Officers felt that with the return of Ministers, it would not be appropriate to provide the presentation at this time, as the responsibility for these matters would be returning to the Minister.</p>	
<p>8.0</p>	<p>Presentation by Judith Woodburn, DfC and Andy Kennedy from the Housing Executive on Stock Transfers</p> <p>Members received a joint presentation by Judith Woodburn and Andy Kennedy on the Housing Executive's Stock Transfer of the ownership and management of public sector homes to housing associations. (Copies of the Presentation are appended to these minutes – Appendix A).</p> <p>Several Members reiterated the need to retain Housing Executive stock, in particular as it is proposed to borrow private finance in the future, they felt the Housing Executive assets should be protected as opposed to the stock being diminished.</p> <p>Mr Kennedy confirmed that currently the stock transfer programme has been stopped and the only two schemes have been transferred to Housing Associations were Rinmore, Derry/Londonderry and Bloomfield, Bangor in total of 120 properties.</p> <p>He explained that an argument would be, if the Housing Executive transfers the stock which has the greatest investment liability and retain the 'better' stock which is that you are able to maintain and support with the investment and that is the rationale of stock transfer.</p> <p>Mrs Grehan referred to the rent arrears increasing year on year, partly attributed to mitigation payments.</p>	

	<p>Mr Bailie explained that the rent increase will not necessarily increase rent arrears, but it is particularly those tenants moving out of the mitigation arrangements and who increasingly get into debt very quickly and this is could attribute to the increase in rent arrears.</p> <p>Members noted that ‘low’ rent deprives the Housing Executive of the funding that is required to invest in their properties. The Housing Executive does not receive subsidies from Government to invest in their stock. The landlord services side of the Housing Executive is a self- funding model and the regional services is totally funded by Government.</p> <p>Several Members reiterated their concern that Universal Credit is putting tenant into debt, particularly those who are most vulnerable in our society.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Mrs Woodburn and Mr Kennedy for a very informative presentation.</p>	
9.0	<p>Response letter from Northern Ireland Water</p> <p>Members noted the letter from NI Water in relation to Members concerns to wastewater capacity issues.</p> <p>It was agreed to accept the offer for representatives to attend to give a more detailed presentation at a future meeting.</p>	Secretary
10.0	<p>Social Housing Development Programme - Progress Report January 2020</p> <p>Members noted the report.</p>	
11.0	<p>The Housing Executive’s Scheme Starts January 2020</p> <p>Members noted the reports.</p>	
12.0	<p>Date and Venue of Next Meeting – 12th March 2020 in the Omagh Council offices</p>	

The Meeting concluded at 12.35 pm.