



Minutes of the 476th Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council
Conference Call via Webex
Thursday, 14th January 2021 at 10.30 am

Present at Meeting:

Present by Video Conferencing

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
Nick Mathison	Ards & North Down Borough
Michelle Kelly	Belfast City
Allan Bresland	Derry City & Strabane District
Amanda Grehan	Lisburn & Castlereagh City

In Attendance:

Paul Price	Director of Social Housing Policy & Oversight (DfC)
David Polley	Director of Housing Strategy & Co-ordination (DfC)
Eilish O'Neill	Department for Communities
Kelly Cameron	Secretary (Housing Executive Secretariat)

Apologies

Anne-Marie Fitzgerald	Fermanagh & Omagh District (Vice Chair)
John Finlay	Causeway Coast & Glens Borough
Catherine Elattar	Mid Ulster Borough

1.0	<u>Declarations of Interest</u> None.	
2.0	<u>To adopt the Minutes of the 475th Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 12th November 2020</u> It was proposed by Councillor Nick Mathison, seconded by Councillor Michelle Kelly and resolved, that the Minutes of the 475 th Meeting of the Housing Council held on Thursday 10 th December 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair.	

<p>3.0</p> <p>3.1</p> <p>3.2</p>	<p><u>Matters Arising from the Minutes</u></p> <p>Invitation to the Minister for Communities - Carál Ní Chuilín to attend a future Housing Council meeting</p> <p>It was noted that a reply is still awaited.</p> <p>Agreed: Paul Price to check if there is any progress on this invite.</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 – Information on the Warm, Well and Connected scheme • Alderman Amanda Grehan - Successful Affordable Warmth Scheme Applications by Council area • Alderman Jim Speers - Details of the emergency processes in place in the event of a boiler breaking down 	<p>P Price</p>
<p>4.0</p>	<p><u>Housing Issues, Department for Communities</u></p> <p>Mr Paul Price and Mr David Polley highlighted the changes under the specific headings on the Department for Communities (DfC) Housing Issues:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Newbuild starts <p>Mr Price reiterated that the Department for Communities are optimistic that the 1850 target will be met by the end of March 2021.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 • Regulation of the Private Rented Sector • Increasing Housing Supply 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable Warmth Scheme <p>Alderman Grehan thanked the Department for the work they have done to deliver this scheme with Councils and welcomed the potential of the secured capital budget for £16m pending consultation for this scheme in 2021/22 and also the changes to the schemes eligibility which will be made in early 2021 (raising the income threshold).</p> <p>Mr Polley undertook to provide Mr Mathison with details on the Affordable Warmth Scheme budget figures for the last few years, compared to the projected £16 m requested for the coming year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NIHE Rent Increase • ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme 2014 -2020 • 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 	<p>D Polley</p>
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<p>6.0</p>	<p>Next Fifty Years: Working Together to Create the Future of Northern Ireland Social Housing</p> <p>Professor Peter Roberts, Chair of the Housing Executive gave a presentation on the Next Fifty Years: Working Together to Create the Future of Northern Ireland Social Housing. (Copies of the slides are appended to these minutes – Appendix A).</p> <p>The Chair, Alderman Tommy Nicholl thanked Professor Roberts for a very informative and encouraging presentation and gave an assurance that the Housing Council would continue to work together and enhance the relationship to ensure a positive future for social housing.</p> <p>Alderman Nicholl referred to the proposal to increase the number of new social homes built - from 1,900 per annum to 2,100 per annum in 2021/22 and to 2,300 per annum by the end of year 5 and how the infrastructure was to be managed as there were some areas have reached their capacity, and as a result NI Water</p>	
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will not be able to permit new connections, which may result in development at locations across Northern Ireland being constrained.

Professor Roberts explained currently if the Housing Associations deliver homes by using an existing footprint that is already serving water supply and sewage that minimises the problem, he added it is recognised that there are capacity issues, but in some situations the local service systems is not at capacity, therefore if the Housing Executive can re-provision the increase of the number of properties on certain land, then there is provision for supply without having to provide additional sewage capacity.

Professor Roberts added the Housing Executive are exploring innovative ways, looking at affordable renewable energy in some areas of under supply of electricity, the Housing Executive can use renewables and also examining package plants to deal with sewage issues.

It was acknowledged at a recent presentation by a representative from NI Water Service highlighted that there is significant investment needed for wastewater and water infrastructure within the Province and If under investment continues, there will be significant constraints on economic growth and damage to the environment.

Professor Roberts explained that Package Plants are ideal for rural areas, deliver of factory constructed housing which has huge thermal insulation properties which reduces energy supply for these houses and you install a package plant, which deals with its own waste and the only service the property requires is electricity and water supply. Professor Roberts highlighted that there are several examples within the United Kingdom and the infrastructure needs supporting to enable the social housing programme to be delivered without obstruction.

In response to Councillor Mathison question, Professor Roberts explained that Affordable Housing needs to be 'affordable' in order for people to be able to pay. Mr Polley assured Members that it is not the intention to following the UK model of affordable housing. Mr Polley also assured Members that the recommendations of the Fundamental Review of Allocations will reflect those in need of social housing and not being directed into the private rented sector.

	<p>Referring to Community Cohesion, it was agreed that social housing should not be a single identity, shared future housing should continue to be promoted for the future in Northern Ireland and the different tenures within a scheme should not be segregated.</p> <p>The Chair, Alderman Nicholl reiterated the need to working collaboratively together for the future of communities.</p>	
<p>7.0</p>	<p>Private Rented Sector Proposals</p> <p>Eilish O’Neill gave a presentation on the Review of the role and regulation of the Private Rented Sector (Copies of the Slides are appended to these minutes – Appendix B).</p> <p>Members welcomed recommendations which will include measures to improve the safety, security and quality of the Private Rented Sector and would like to see these changes implemented as soon as possible.</p> <p>In response to Councillor Mathison’s question in relation to the proposed extension to the notice period given to tenants to vacate the private rented accommodation, Ms O’Neill explained that following the Consultation period in 2016, it was proposed an extension from the period of four weeks should be extended to eight weeks for landlords to give notice to quit. The Minister feels that this should be extended further and this issue is currently being addressed with the Departments Legal department.</p> <p>Mr Speers referred to the transfer the Landlords Registration Scheme to Local Councils and hoped that sufficient funds would be made available to Councils to support the scheme.</p> <p>Members recognised that there was significant work to be carried out within the private rented sector and in particular, Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMO’s).</p> <p>The Chair thanked Ms O’Neill for a very informative and welcoming presentation.</p>	
<p>7.0</p>	<p><u>Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations – Consultation Outcome Report</u></p> <p>Members noted the Report, which will be subject to a presentation at the February Meeting.</p>	

	<p>AGREED:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In order to give sufficient time for debate and discussion for this item, this would be the only item presented at the February agenda; • Members to submit any questions prior to the Presentation to the Secretary in order to be passed to the Department for Communities. 	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 December 2020</u></p> <p>Members noted the report.</p>	
10.0	<p><u>Date and Venue of Next Meeting – Thursday 11th February 2021 at 10.30 am via Webex</u></p>	

The Meeting concluded at 12.30 pm.

Appendix A



Northern Ireland Housing Council Meeting
14 January 2021

THE NEXT FIFTY YEARS:
Working Together to Create the Future of
Northern Ireland Social Housing

Professor Peter Roberts
Chair of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive

www.nihc.gov.uk



THE BIG ISSUES

- The undersupply of social and affordable homes: this is evident in the continuing crisis of housing stress and homelessness; the inability of some people to afford even a basic home; the inadequacy of some properties - a lack of essential services and space within and outwith the home; the capacity of the sector to meet demand for housing; and the permanent use of temporary measures.
- The condition of NIHE stock and the funding challenge - the stock is old, in some cases near to end-of-life, below modern standards and environmentally inefficient.

www.nihe.gov.uk

AND THE CONSEQUENCES

- Without action on a number of fronts our communities face:
 - growing housing stress;
 - continuing and growing homelessness;
 - increasing real costs of housing and services;
 - falling quality of Housing Executive homes;
 - a loss of Housing Executive homes;
 - and other consequences that may weaken community cohesion.

www.nihc.gov.uk

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE

- The Minister's Statement offers a comprehensive programme for the much needed revitalisation of the Housing Executive and the supply of social and other homes.
- But the Housing Executive needs the tools and strong partners to tackle the issues, for example:
 - the ability to borrow;
 - the write-off of historic debt and exemption from Corporation Tax;

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WHAT MIGHT GOOD LOOK LIKE?

- An increase in the number of new social homes built - from 1,900 per annum to 2,100 per annum in 2021/22 and to 2,300 per annum by the end of year 5.
- The introduction of more cost-effective and environmentally-sound construction methods that also allow for more rapid delivery.
- An increase in the conversion of appropriate commercial, office and other buildings, including the creation of extracare and specialised supported housing units.

www.nihc.gov.uk

FINALLY

- Within this view of the future there are choices to be made about the scale, speed and sustainability of the future supply of social and other housing, and these relate to a number of factors, such as:
 - land availability and planning status;
 - infrastructure provision - social and economic;
 - construction sector capacity and methods of supply.
- Equally, it is likely that local circumstances will vary, even within the area of a Council, and this means that a '*one size fits all*' approach is not appropriate - in order to create the future housing stock it is vital for Councils to be the principal partner of the Housing Executive - together we need to engage in comprehensive conversations about how our communities can be developed and managed.

www.nihc.gov.uk

Appendix B



NIHE Landlord – The Challenge

- NIHE owns and needs to maintain its 85,000 homes
- These homes need investment (using 2018 figures):
 - £7.1billion over 30 years
 - £3 billion over the first 11 years
- Currently NIHE can only afford c.£160million/year

How did this happen?

- Low rents
 - Insufficient increases in rents over last 15-20 years; and
 - A HMT-imposed rent freeze (welfare reform)
- Aging stock
- Liabilities
 - Corporation Tax
 - Historic Debt
- Inability to borrow without scoring in terms of public expenditure



The proposed solutions

- **A comprehensive rental review**
- Ensure rents are at a level affordable for social tenants and sufficient to provide a sustainable future for the Housing Executive
- **Revitalisation of the Housing Executive Landlord**
- Changing the Landlord so that it may borrow to fund investment without this scoring against public expenditure



Cost of ‘doing nothing’

- Significant loss of NIHE homes over 5-10 years;
- Cycle of decline for entire NIHE;
- Acute territorial difficulties – how to make decline neutral in its impact?
- Negation of new social housing development;
- Negative curve on housing stress and housing supply



Minister’s Commitment

- Revitalisation of the Housing Executive Landlord so that it may borrow to fund investment with a preference for a co-operative or mutual model,
- Ensure rents are at a level affordable for tenants and able to provide a sustainable future for the Housing Executive
- Exempting NIHE liabilities from Corporation Tax and finding options for removal of legacy debts
- Get the Housing Executive building again
- Consultation on Housing Executive’s House Sales scheme



Benefits

- Turning the curve on "housing Stress";
- More good, sustainable social homes;
- Investment in Housing Executive homes
- Change but continuity for tenants



How long would reform take, once agreement is reached?

- **Years 1-3 – Implementation:**
 - Rent agreement
 - Political agreement
 - Primary legislation;
 - Tenant consultation;
 - Set up new organisation
 - Secure borrowing
 - Stock and employee transfers
- **Years 4-9: £350m of investment per year**



