



Minutes of the 475th Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council
The Housing Centre, Belfast or Conference Call via Webex
Thursday, 10th December 2020 at 10.30 am

Present at Meeting:

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| 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

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| Anne-Marie Fitzgerald | Fermanagh & Omagh District (Vice Chair) |
| Nick Mathison | Ards & North Down Borough |
| Michelle Kelly | Belfast City |
| Allan Bresland | Derry City & Strabane District |
| Amanda Grehan | Lisburn & Castlereagh City |

In Attendance:

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| Clark Bailie | Chief Executive (NIHE) |
| Paul Price | Director of Social Housing Policy & Oversight (DfC) |
| David Polley | Director of Housing Strategy & Co-ordination (DfC) |
| Heloise Brown | Deputy Director of Social Housing Policy and Oversight (DfC) |
| Danny O'Reilly | Senior Principal Officer, PSIS (Housing Executive) |
| Kelly Cameron | Secretary (Housing Executive Secretariat) |

Apologies

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| John Finlay | Causeway Coast & Glens Borough |
| Catherine Elattar | Mid Ulster Borough |

It was agreed that the Secretary write to Alderman Finlay to send best wishes and support following his recent operation.

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| 1.0 | <u>Declarations of Interest</u> None. | |
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| 2.0 | <p><u>To adopt the 'In Committee' Minutes of the Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 12th November 2020</u></p> <p>It was proposed by Councillor Ruane, seconded by Alderman Bresland and resolved, that the 'In Committee' Minutes of the Housing Council held on Thursday 12th November 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair.</p> | |
| 3.0 | <p><u>Forward Workplan</u></p> <p>The Plan was noted.</p> | |
| 4.0 | <p><u>To adopt the Minutes of the 474th Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday 12th November 2020</u></p> <p>It was proposed by Councillor Ruane, seconded by Alderman Bresland and resolved, that the Minutes of the 474th Meeting of the Housing Council held on Thursday 12th November 2020 be approved and signed by the Chair.</p> | |
| 5.0 | <p><u>Matters Arising from the Minutes</u></p> | |
| 5.1 | <p>Building Regulations Re Lifetime Homes Standards</p> <p>Members noted the response from the Department of Finance, there were no further comments.</p> | |
| 5.2 | <p>Invitation to the Minister for Communities - Carál Ní Chuilín to attend future Housing Council meeting</p> <p>It was reported that an invitation had been sent to the Minister for Communities inviting her to attend a future meeting, a reply was awaited.</p> | |
| 6.0 | <p><u>Housing Executive's Board Bulletin Board Meeting – Wednesday, 25th November 2020</u></p> <p>Mr Bailie reported on the Housing Executive Board's deliberations under the following headings:-</p> | |
| 6.1 | <p>330A-F Lisnafin Park, Strabane – Refurbishment, Assisted Living pilot and a Local Lettings Policy</p> | |

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| 6.2 | CTO83 – Electrical Testing & Inspections Services 2020 | |
| 6.3 | HR Policy Revisions | |
| 6.4 | Social Housing Development Programme (SHDP) 2020/21 | |
| 6.5 | Delivery Update and Approval of the Draft 3-Year SHDP 2021/22 – 2023/24 and accompanying SHDP Strategic Business Case | |
| 6.6 | Alternative Options to Supporting People Standardised Regional Payment Rates Other information papers noted by the Board were as follows:- | |
| 6.7 | Performance Monitor at the end of October 2020 | |
| 6.8 | Supporting People Programme Update | |
| 6.9 | Tower Blocks Action Plan – Proposed Private Sector Disposals | |
| 6.10 | Soft Market Test Exercise | |
| 6.11 | 2nd Annual Safeguarding Report | |
| 6.12 | The Board had received a presentation on Supporting People Programme Scoping <u>Other matters arising</u> Alderman Speers referred to a new Task Force set up in relation to Town Centres, and felt that Councillors should be aware of this Group and potentially feed into their discussions. Mr Bailie stated that the Housing Executive has identified the changing nature of town centres which offers potential options for housing and he added that there may be an opportunity to purchase vacant properties and bring back into use. In response to Councillor Cooper, Mr Bailie confirmed that the Monkscoole House and Abbotscoole tower blocks is still on the 1 to 5 year schedule with a slight slippage of a couple of weeks due to Covid-19. Councillor Cooper undertook to provide Mr Bailie details on a particular case in relation to the length of time to repair a Smoke Alarm for a hearing impaired tenant (three days requiring a specialist | |
| | | CX |

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| | <p>contractor, as opposed to two hours when a smoke alarm is reported faulty as an emergency response).</p> <p>At the request by Alderman Grehan, Mr Bailie undertook to provide a breakdown of how many Affordable Warmth scheme applications that have been successful by Council area.</p> <p>Councillor Mathison referred to the Councils targets for the numbers of referrals for the Affordable Warmth scheme has been reduced, with a potential of a reduction of income to Council's for the operation of the scheme and in-turn could result the payments of staff, he asked was there a possibility of this decision being reversed.</p> <p>Mr O'Reilly explained that the referral targets were set at 44 per month to off-set against the allocated budget, realistically approximately 30 referrals per month are manageable for the Housing Executive process.</p> <p>Councillor Mathison expressed his disappointment and dissatisfaction of the scheme and the challenge for Councils with this inconsistency of targets and staff models based on these targets.</p> <p>Councillor Kelly commended the Housing Executive's response to Homelessness during COVID-19. She referred to temporary accommodation being obtain for all homeless during the lockdown with several agencies working collaboratively and hoped that in the long-term this could be the case.</p> <p>In response Mr Bailie confirmed that the current arrangements are still in place and there are a significant number of people in temporary accommodation. The Housing Executive are keen to continue to build on the success and there is a Plan, which will require additional funding. He added that in the future it is important to provide support were it is required.</p> <p>In response to Councillor Kelly's question, Mr Bailie gave an update on a recent incident regarding a shower unit which overheated and went on fire.</p> <p>Mr Bailie assured that all tenants have been issued with guidances, and the Housing Executive are visiting all properties and inspecting the properties who have these showers installed.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Mr Bailie for his comprehensive Report.</p> | CX |
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| 7.0 | <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> | |
| 7.1 | Social Newbuild starts | |
| 7.2 | Co-ownership | |
| 7.3 | Programme for Social Reform | |
| 7.4 | Fundamental Review of Social Housing Allocations Policy | |
| 7.5 | Reclassification of Northern Ireland Social Housing Providers | |
| 7.6 | Supporting People Delivery Strategy | |
| 7.7 | Homelessness Strategy | |
| 7.8 | Regulation of the Private Rented Sector | |
| | The Department for Communities will provide a Presentation at the January Meeting. | DfC |
| 7.9 | Increasing Housing Supply | |
| 7.10 | Affordable Warmth Scheme | |
| 7.11 | NIHE Rent Increase | |
| 7.12 | ERDF Investment for Growth and Jobs Programme 2014 -2020 | |
| 7.13 | Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework | |
| 7.14 | Options to remove historical debt from the NIHE and exclude it from having to pay Corporation Tax | |
| 7.15 | Long term rent trajectory | |
| 7.16 | Affordability of social rents | |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. <p>In relation to the setting and regulating of Housing Executive rents, Mr Price confirmed that the Minister for Communities has indicated that rents is an area, she wants to address across the whole social housing sector.</p> <p>Ms Brown confirmed that following the split of the Landlord side of the Housing Executive this side of the business will be accountable by the Department.</p> <p>Councillor Cooper referred to higher rents for Housing Associations properties were justified due to the quality of their homes, as Housing Executive have faced the lack of investment in their stock for many years and he felt that bringing the rents in line with Housing Associations would be unwarranted.</p> <p>The Chair thanked Ms Brown for a very informative presentation.</p> | |
| 8.0 | <p><u>Update on the Housing Executive’s Disability Facilities Grants (DfG)</u></p> <p>Members received an update by Danny O’Reilly on the Housing Executive’s Disability Facilities Grants. (Copies of the slides are appended to these minutes – Appendix B).</p> <p>Members welcomed a presentation in the future, on the impact of the changes following the review of services of the DfC systems.</p> <p>In response to Alderman Speers question, Mr O’Reilly confirmed that the Housing Executive have emergency processes in place in the event of a boiler breaking down, he added that if the tenant replaces the boiler themselves the Housing Executive cannot provide a grant retrospectively. Mr O’Reilly undertook to provide Mr Speers with a written explanation of the Housing Executive’s emergency process in relation to the boiler replacement scheme.</p> <p>Members supported Alderman Grehan suggestion that properties that have had major disabled facilities grant works invested in the property, when the occupier moves on, the property should be offered to either Housing Associations or Housing Executive to purchase those properties,</p> | <p>D O’Reilly</p> <p>D O’Reilly</p> |

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| | <p>to retain for individual who needs adaptations, as opposed to the properties being put on the open market.</p> <p>The Department and Housing Executive Officers took on board the suggestion and recognised the benefits of the proposal.</p> | |
| 9.0 | <p><u>Social Housing Development Programme Housing Starts and Completions</u></p> <p>Members noted the report.</p> | |
| 10.0 | <p><u>Housing Executive's Scheme Starts November 2020</u></p> <p>Members noted the report.</p> | |
| 11.0 | <p><u>Date and Venue of Next Meeting – Thursday 14th January 2021 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 12.30 pm.



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**



Appendix B



What we Do...

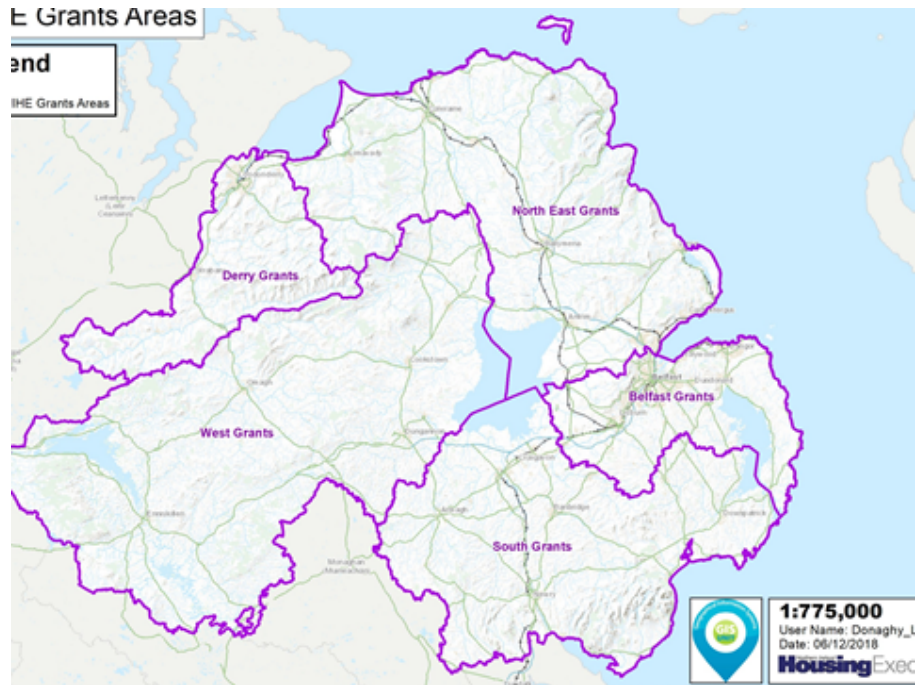
- Provide funding for adaptations to enable people to remain in their own homes
 - Critical Service
 - Helps to prevent Homelessness
 - Provides a better quality of life
- Assist people who are living in a property which poses a risk to their health and safety
- Provide financial assistance to people who are living in fuel poverty to make their home more comfortable and energy efficient

How we Help

- Mandatory
 - Disabled Facilities Grants
 - Repair Grants
- Discretionary Grants
 - Renovation
 - Replacement
 - Home Repairs Assistance
 - Group Repair
- Energy Efficiency Schemes
 - Affordable Warmth Scheme
 - Boiler Replacement Allowance

Delivery Model

- 5 x Grants Offices (+1 sub office)
- 4 x Management Teams
- Central PSIS Policy Department
- Approximately 155 FTE posts



Gervase's Story...

- Gervase is 68 Years old
- Has serious health issues
- His wife is still dealing with serious illness
- Home is 140 years old

How we helped Gervase

By offering a 'whole house' solution, to ensure all of his needs were met in relation to accessibility, safety, and thermal comfort.

Gervase received Renovation, Disabled Facilities, and Affordable Warmth Grants

Making a Difference



5 -Year Spend

| Expenditure | Energy Efficiency | | Private sector Grants |
|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| | Affordable Warm | Boiler Replacements | PSG |
| Year | Actual spend | Actual spend | Actual spend |
| 2015 / 16 | £11,555,851 | £3,523,600 | £12,040,307 |
| 2016 / 17 | £21,812,027 | £2,103,500 | £12,990,626 |
| 2017 / 18 | £18,245,758 | £1,950,250 | £13,968,850 |
| 2018 / 19 | £14,542,409 | £1,863,118 | £14,508,529 |
| 2019 / 20 | £12,331,383 | £1,424,536 | £15,611,329 |
| Grand Total | £78,487,428 | £10,865,004 | £69,119,641 |

Challenges Driving Review

- Time taken to process DFG's
- Replacing our IT System with a more flexible bespoke system
- Complying with new Regulations
- Ongoing pressure on Revenue budget

Service Delivery

A number of changes have been implemented following the review of services completed in 2018

- Policy
- Processes and procedures
- New IT system
- Roles and Responsibilities reviewed

Policy & Procedures

Test of Resources

A Test of resources is completed to assess the contribution which will be made by the Grants applicant towards the cost of the works

Changes: - Now completed at beginning of application process.
Use of Renovator software not imbedded in system to allow flexibility

Impact: -

- Customer makes informed decision to proceed or cancel application before making any major financial commitment.
- NIHE focuses resources on viable cases.
- More accurate financial forecasting possible.

Verification of Benefits

Verification of entitlement to particular benefits are required in relation to assessing the need for a Test of Resources.

Changes: - Data Sharing Agreement established with Pensions and Benefits Agency to provide formal notification of Benefits in payment - directly to Grants office staff.

Impact: -

- Significantly reduced response times
- Ensures accuracy of information.
- Simplifies process for customer.
- Partnership working with other agencies enhanced.

Verification of ownership

Verification of ownership of the dwelling is a legal requirement for the grant application to proceed

Changes: Policy regarding verification amended to include alternative acceptable documentation for DFG's.

Impact: -

- Reduced time taken for submission of documentation ensures applications are processed more quickly.
- Simplified option assists customer with completion of documentation.

Revised Application forms

Applicants must submit formal application forms to apply for grant aid

Changes: Clear and concise form of language used throughout documentation with one form for all.

Impact: -

- Ease of understanding for customer
- Fewer forms to complete
- Efficiency of printing creates savings.

Roles and Responsibilities

Technical Officer

Changes: Technical Officer to progress case from start to finish without need to transfer to another Tech. Officer mid – process.

Impact: -

- Increase in Customer confidence due to Tech. Officers knowledge of case and having a consistent link throughout process.
- More consistent approach to liaison with other agencies.
- Improve processing times due to decreased hand-offs.
- Increased job satisfaction in managing a job from start to finish.

Case Officer

All approvals and completions are currently signed of by a Senior Officer

Changes: Level of requirement for authorisation by Senior Officer to be reduced to a percentage check, following analysis of previous data.

Impact: -

- Improvement to processing times through fewer 'hand offs'
- Improved job satisfaction
- Improvement in ability to manage case and move it through process.

IT System

July 2019- Implementation of a new bespoke IT system developed 'in-house' specifically for Grants.

Changes: System has more flexibility to provide staff with the ability to move cases forward as required without unnecessary steps.

Impact: -

- Ability to add enhancement where required
- Ability to amend where/if required
- System built to our specification
- Retention of knowledge
- Adaptable to provide focused reporting opportunities

Customer Satisfaction Survey 2020

- Monitor impact of our service and impact of improvements
- Previous survey 2017- overall satisfaction with service 92%
- 2020 Survey underway – target 95%
- Specific area of questioning around difference works have made to day-to-day living; service provision and where/if difficulties arose; timeliness of service
- Areas identified for improvement present opportunities for continued development

Current Challenges

- Covid-19 Restrictions
 - Enabling Staff to work Remotely
 - Emergency procedures during lockdown
 - Ongoing cautious approach
- Implementing new Case Officer role
- Recruitment of Technical Staff
- Identifying further improvements