



**Minutes of the 504th Meeting
of the Northern Ireland Housing Council held on
Thursday 8th February 2024 at 11.00 am in Omagh
Council offices**

Present

Cllr Mark Cooper	Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council (Chair)
Cllr Aaron Skinner	Mid & East Antrim Borough Council (Vice Chair)
Cllr Mary O'Dowd	Armagh City, Banbridge, & Craigavon Borough Council
Cllr Niamh Archibald	Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council
Ald Keith Kerrigan	Derry & Strabane District Council
Cllr Anne-Marie Fitzgerald	Fermanagh & Omagh District Council
Ald Amanda Grehan	Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council
Cllr Cathal Mallaghan	Mid Ulster District Council
Cllr Aoife Finnegan	Newry, Mourne & Down District Council

In Attendance:

David Polley	Director, Housing Supply Policy (DfC)
Heloise Brown	Director, Housing & Sustainability (DfC)
Grainia Long	Chief Executive, NIHE
Elma Newberry	Director of Regional Services, NIHE
Jonny Blease	Head of Communications, NIHE
Sinead Collins	Place Shaper, NIHE
Fiona McGrath	Place Shaper, NIHE
Louise Clarke	Place Shaper, NIHE
Catherine Blease	Head of Strategic Regeneration, NIHE
Andrea Mills	Senior Executive Assistant, External Engagement, NIHE
Kelly Cameron	Secretary to the Housing Council, NIHE

Apologies:

Cllr Janice MacArthur Ards & North Down Borough Council

-1.	<p>Welcome</p> <p>The Chair, welcomed the Members and Officers from the Department for Communities (DfC) and Housing Executive to the Meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>Declarations of Interests</p> <p>There were no declarations.</p>	

3.	<p>Draft Minutes – Housing Council Meeting held on Thursday, 14th December 2023</p> <p>Proposed by: Councillor Mary O’Dowd Seconded by: Councillor Anne-Marie Fitzgerald</p>	
4.	<p>Matters Arising from the Minutes</p> <p>4.1 Affordable Warmth Scheme</p> <p>D Polley gave an explanation as to why the scheme was moved from local Councils to NIHE. He explained that the business case was coming to an end and the Council budget was the other factor. Also, a few Councils had withdrawn from the scheme, following a review it was decided to move to the Housing Executive and changing from a targeted scheme to a direct application scheme.</p> <p>G Long noted that the Housing Executive has worked extremely hard to make the transition as seamless as possible. In reply to Cllr Finnegan’s query, it was explained that those applicants in the system from Councils do not have to start the process of re-applying they should have been in the system.</p> <p>Members had received an update on the Affordable Warmth Scheme transition period. comparing figures from Council referrals in targeted areas against the new self-referrals presented to the Housing Executive.</p> <p>4.2 Meeting with the CEO of NIFHA</p> <p>Secretary to arrange a meeting with the Chef Executive from NIHFA as an introduction and to discuss collaborative working and shared goals.</p> <p>4.3 Housing Council Awards Committee</p> <p>The Secretary undertook to arrange an Awards Committee Meeting for 14th March in the Housing Centre to consider revitalising the Awards being presented, the format and structure of the ceremony and venues.</p> <p>4.4 Regularity of Housing Council Meetings</p> <p>At the ‘closed session’ it was proposed by Cllr Mary O’Dowd, seconded by Cllr Aoife Finnegan and agreed that the Housing Council meetings should meet monthly from April 2024 Due to circumstances and with the NI Assembly reconvened, there will be increased business to be deliberated on a monthly basis.</p> <p>Following discussion, it was agreed that the meetings will continue to have the option in person or via a Zoom link to join virtually.</p> <p>The Chair and Vice Chair will discuss the format, timings and structure of the monthly agendas with the administration support and report back thereon.</p>	<p>Secretary</p> <p>Secretary</p> <p>CH/VC/ Secretary /AM</p>

<p>4.5</p> <p>4.6</p>	<p>It was agreed that the monthly meetings will recommence from April.</p> <p>Consultation - Fundamental Review Allocations (FRA) Proposal 7</p> <p>Members received a composite response to be submitted on behalf of the Housing Council. The response was approved.</p> <p>Members Queries</p> <p>Members have received responses to queries throughout the month, as follows:</p> <p>Cllr Mary O'Dowd:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on flooding in Portadown; • When a tenant is unable to remain at their home owing to an imposed judicial condition; • Criteria for the newbuild scheme at Sunningdale Gardens, Belfast. <p>Cllr O'Dowd requested further information on Sunningdale Gardens, in relation the list of sites identified & how was Belfast chosen for the pilot new build scheme. G Long, provided a detailed response on the process noting that appropriate sites across all Council areas had been considered.</p>	<p>Secretary /AM</p> <p>Secretary</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>FORWARD WORKPLAN</p> <p>Paper noted.</p>	
<p>6.</p>	<p>JOINT PRESENTATION ON SOCIAL & AFFORDABLE HOUSING – For discussion and objective setting - David Polley, Elma Newberry, Sinead Collins, Fiona McGrath, Louise Clarke & Catherine Blease were in attendance.</p> <p>D Polley gave an overview of policy development, products and delivery of affordable housing. It was noted that the definition of affordable housing is social rented housing: or intermediate housing for sale; or intermediate housing for rent, that is provided outside of the general market for those whose needs are not met by the market. Affordable housing is funded by the Government.</p> <p>D Polley explained in detail the Intermediate products on offer:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared Ownership (Co-Ownership); • Intermediate Rent; • Mixed Tenure Housing Development Grant; • New Build Shared Ownership. <p>Concern was expressed that private landlords are exploiting their tenants but serving them a 'notice to quit' in order to use the properties for emergency temporary accommodation to get a better financial return.</p>	

G Long explained that unfortunately the Housing Executive doesn't have any powers over the private landlord sector in earmarking properties etc, the Housing Executive looks at the temporary accommodation that is available, is it fit for purpose and reaches a certain standard.

D Polley noted that 'longer period for 'notice to quit' which is to be introduced next year, will give tenants more security. He added the introduction of intermediate rents will also help addressing these situations with an organisation overseeing private rental accommodation.

Cllr Grehan asked in the future could Housing Associations build and operate intermediate rents, in response D Polley explained that unfortunately due to the current legislation they would be restricted, at this point of time.

G Long explained that in Great Britain Housing Associations have adopted the model where they build a number of different products, social housing, shared ownership and a range of affordable housing and there are examples in England of good partnerships between local Housing Associations and NHS Trusts.

Cllr Grehan asked if a similar model was put in place in Northern Ireland how many would that take off the waiting list.

Members welcomed the 'rent to buy' and 'intermediate rent' to help accommodate those how have been on the waiting list for several years.

In relation to the shared housing estates, D Polley explained that no community is more than 30%, in order to maintain a balance within the shared estate.

D Polley explained that the DfC are appointing an Intermediate Operator and people would self-refer for intermediate rent and the Operator would allocate houses for people who would best fit the criteria.

Members agreed that communication is important to promote to those people who potentially who have relatively low points on the waiting list and fit the criteria and would be eligible for intermediate rents.

S Collins took Members through the Affordable Housing HOU5 policy in detail. The HOU5 policy requires all new residential developments of 5 units or more or on sites of 0.1 hectares or more to provide affordable housing, requiring a minimum of 20 per cent of units to be provided as affordable housing. as part of the overall scheme.

G Long noted the importance of this policy and how the Housing Executive is working closely with Councils and other agencies and the 70 new homes in Belfast under this policy will make an impact on the waiting list and this could be one of the primary deliveries of newbuild for the future.

Members commended the policy, but recognise it requires to be at a more advanced stage, in order for an impact on the reduction of the waiting list.

	<p>Discussion followed on How could we gain more social houses in those large developments, look at other options for creative solutions and can commuted sums be used for adding to the social housing supply to meet the need identified.</p> <p>It was noted that generally there is a lack of understanding with the concept of 20% affordable and social housing within Council's and it was suggested that a presentation might be beneficial to give to Councils to demonstrate how the model works eg. Belfast City Council.</p> <p>Members noted that Northern Ireland is the only jurisdiction, where developers do not make a contribution to the development for social housing.</p> <p>Alderman Grehan suggested that If Developers only build affordable housing in a development then the commuted sum under article 76 can only be used in an identified area by the Housing Executive were there is housing need. It was noted that there where examples where commuted sums did not always add to additionality and the focus needs to remain on additionality.</p> <p>In response to a query from Cllr O'Dowd on NIHE House Sales Scheme, E Newberry confirmed that when the Housing Associations House Sales Scheme ceased, the Minister at that time said the Housing Executive House Sales Scheme would be kept under review. We are mindful that NIHE are losing approximately 500 stock per year. The Housing Executive is examining what can be done in the interim, possibly change the criteria around the discount, the eligibility of buy back etc. a review of the scheme is crucial.</p> <p>Cllr O'Dowd asked at a recent meeting it had been agreed that local Councils Head of Planners were to be invited to attend the February Meeting along with the Housing Executive's Place Shapers. It was noted that an update on Placeshaping had been provided and explained that it would be premature for Heads of Planners attendance at this stage, but it is the intention to invite them to a future meeting.</p> <p>It was noted that the DfC is working with the Council Planners and held a Seminar in December 2023 on Affordable Housing, further seminars will be arranged in the future, one on social led sites and another on private led sites. D Polley assured Members following discussions at these seminars, there will be an opportunity for the Housing Council Members to attend a seminar/workshop.</p>	
<p>7.</p>	<p>DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES – HOUSING TOP ISSUES</p> <p>Cllr Skinner referred to the additional 1500 social homes by March 2024 of which 10% will be wheelchair accessible. He expressed concern that in his area alone there are 100 persons currently waiting for wheelchair accessible homes and the figure of 150 is across of whole of Northern Ireland.</p> <p>Report noted.</p>	

8.0	<p>Any Other Business</p>	
8.1	<p>Intimidation Points</p> <p>Members had requested a report/breakdown on how many persons received intimidation points over the past few years, the circumstances in which they awarded the points for and who deems the intimidation points are warranted in each case. The report was noted.</p>	
8.2	<p>Housing Executive Rent Increase 2024/25</p> <p>A statement from DfC/NIHE was issued to Members on Friday, 25 January. A query was raised on the breakdown of how many NIHE Tenants are in receipt of full Housing Benefit and part Housing Benefit with the following response.</p> <p><i>The number of Housing Executive tenants who are in receipt of Housing Costs benefits, which is made up of Housing Benefit, Universal Credit and Social Sector Size criteria mitigation payments represents 79% of total current tenants. There are 50% of tenants who are receiving full housing costs payments and a further 29% are receiving partial housing costs payments to their rent accounts.</i></p>	
8.3	<p>Register of Interest</p> <p>The Secretary has sent out a reminder for Members to complete the Register of Interests form. The Chair asked that members complete the form and pass to K Cameron who could also provide a hard copy to complete at the end of the meeting.</p>	
8.4	<p>Invitation to the new Minister of Communities</p> <p>Are Members content to invite the new Minister for Communities, Gordon Lyons to a future meeting.</p>	
8.5	<p>Housing Executive Board Membership</p> <p>The Chair highlighted that concern had been raised during their 'closed session' on the length of time taken by Department for Communities to appoint the four Housing Council Members to the Board of the Housing Executive.</p> <p>H Browne confirmed that this is a priority for the Minister for Communities, G Long noted that NIHE need these members appointed, had raised it at every opportunity with DfC and had noted it as a risk on the NIHE Corporate Risk Register and that it was good to note that this was a priority for the Minister.</p>	

9.	<u>Date of next Meeting</u> The next Meeting will be held on Thursday, 11 th April 2024 in the Housing Centre in person or via Zoom.	
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The Meeting concluded at 1.30 pm