

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 2 September 2020 at 6.00pm via Microsoft Teams

In the Chair: Councillor L Devlin

In attendance:

(Councillors)

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor R Burgess
Councillor P Byrne	Councillor C Casey
Councillor W Clarke	Councillor D Curran
Councillor S Doran	Councillor C Enright
Councillor A Finnegan	Councillor H Gallagher
Councillor R Howell	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor O Magennis	Councillor C Mason
Councillor L McEvoy	Councillor A McMurray
Councillor D Murphy	Councillor K Owen
Councillor G O'Hare	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor M Savage
Councillor G Sharvin	Councillor D Taylor
Councillor W Walker	

(Officials)

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mrs D Carville, Director of Corporate Services
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms L O'Hare, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance: Mr D Moore, Director Corporate Services, NIHE
Mr J Blease, Regional Manager, South Area, NIHE
Mrs L Wilson, Area Manager, South Down, NIHE
Mrs A Hickey, Head of Placeshaping, South Region, NIHE

SC/08/2020

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Gibbons, Hanlon, Harte, McKee and Stokes.

The Chairperson asked that a card be sent to the Deputy Chair of Council Councillor McKee and his wife wishing them best wishes following a recent illness.

The Chairperson thanked Loma Wilson and her local team for their support and assistance during the recent flooding in Newcastle. The multi-agency approach was very effective in what was a very difficult day for the town and its residents

SC/09/2020

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

SC/10/2020

**PRESENTATION FROM NORTHERN IRELAND
HOUSING EXECUTIVE**

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation from Northern Ireland Housing Executive and invited them to make their presentation.

Mr Moore thanked Council for the opportunity to meet and referred to the NIHE Housing Investment Plan Annual Update 2020, copies of which had been circulated with the agenda.

Mr Moore then delivered a presentation on the Housing Investment Plan Annual Update 2020 (copy of which is appended to these minutes).

Following the presentation, the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members as follows:

- Could an updated list of relevant contact numbers be circulated to all Councillors.
- Thanks to all staff in the Downpatrick and Newry NIHE offices for the extra support provided during the current circumstances.
- Were there any plans to work with Housing Associations in helping, in particular, older people who may wish to downsize their current homes?
- What plans were in place to help those affected due to the recent economic downturn with rent arrears.
- Were there any plans to investigate the points system criteria as local people are being housed out of their local area away from family and friends and the system was open to abuse by some please in particular relating to discrimination and intimidation points.
- The housing needs identified within the Newry area identified only 24 units within a particular project, however whereas the building potential was 70 units. Could the need be looked at on phased or annual basis?
- Was there potential for the use of modular housing to meet temporary and emergency accommodation needs, especially for those with mental health and addiction issues?
- Was there potential to speak with developers regarding affordability with Housing Associations?
- A further Housing Conference should be arranged, perhaps even on a virtual basis, as the previous conference proved to be very successful.
- Could a update on the timescale for maintenance being carried out in the Slieve Croob, area and any upcoming schemes be provided?
- There were concerns raised about no control over housing association rents and tenant affordability.
- Some members raised concerns regarding single tenants being placed in 1 bedroom houses and not having space for their children to stay with them.

- Concerns raised about the lack of proper maintenance in entry ways and relevant authorities accepting ownership, also the collection of grass after cuts & maintenance of overhanging trees especially in the Ballynahinch and Saintfield area.
- Concerns raised in relation to the lack of 1 bedroom properties particularly in Killyleagh for single and young people leaving home for the first time.
- Concerns raised at the amount of broken pavements and roads that were being cracked due to tree roots in housing estates. These were causing trip hazards especially in the Shrigley area and concerns had also been raised by Transport NI officials.
- A request for an update on the current homeless situation?
- More information on any upcoming schemes in the Rowallane area.
- Lack of temporary housing in Newcastle, vulnerable people having to move away from their family support.
- More needed to be done with regard to support packages especially for vulnerable with the potential of providing a warden to some of the estates within Newcastle

The delegation responded to queries as follows:

- Relevant contact numbers would be forwarded onto Democratic Services for distribution.
- NIHE would look at the older people's strategy and tenant exchange programme again and focus more on the older people.
- NIHE would assist people seeking the benefits they were entitled too, providing advice and signposting. There was a surge plan in place especially as they were expecting a spike in homelessness. Housing Executive working closely with the Confederation of Community groups who were currently operating pilots around financial capability.
- Review of allocations had been done by the Department in relation to the points system and was currently with the Minister.
- A lot of work had been completed over the last few years that had highlighted the gaps and where accommodation was required. The challenge was in making sure there was a mix of housing options especially in the city centre.
- Housing Associations were being asked to set aside a portion of houses as affordable housing and NIHE were working with Co-Ownership and other associations to encourage this.
- Representations had been made in relation to an affordable housing policy as part of the new Local Development Plan.
- A strategic review of temporary accommodation was being carried out by the NIHE and one of the options was to look at progressing modular housing as a viable option.
- Support packages had been put in place and NIHE were content to participate in meetings working in collaboration with community and other groups.
- Due to Covid-19 a lot of maintenance schemes had been paused, these were now operational again, however there was a backlog which was being addressed. If there were any tenants that had urgent repairs or priorities, Members should forward the details onto NIHE for them to be assessed.
- A list of planned schemes would be circulated in relation to Slieve Croob.

- Issue with one beds was the bedroom tax issue and ensuring affordability.
- Increase in new build of 2 bed units in the next 2 years and more flexible housing. Within the Craigmore scheme there was 100 2 bed houses included with at least 10% accessible housing units included.
- NIHE prepare a programme every year to identify housing needs and sizes in areas working closely with the housing associations.
- Housing needs conference would be arranged before early January with each of the DEA's to be given the opportunity to see what had been delivered and what was planned through the 3 year programme.
- NIHE would liaise with the grounds maintenance teams to identify the issues raised and address any dangers.
- NIHE board gave approval to house rough sleepers in temporary accommodation, at present 12 have been rehoused, 6 have been repatriated and found employment in Prague. At present there were still 4 in temporary accommodation.
- NIHE had nominated the newly refurbished flats in Burrendale estate which will be completed at the end of September for a 'Housing First Programme' which would bring intense support for the new tenants through a provider which had already been nominated. A further update would be provided to Members following an upcoming meeting.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.11pm.

For adoption at Meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to be held on Monday 5th October 2020.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive