

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

**Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 27 September 2021 at 6.00pm via
Microsoft Teams**

In the Chair: Councillor C Mason (via Teams)

In attendance in Chamber: (Councillors)
Councillor T Andrews
Councillor D Curran
Councillor W Walker

In Attendance via Teams: Councillor R Burgess
Councillor P Byrne
Councillor W Clarke
Councillor C Enright
Councillor A Finnegan
Councillor O Hanlon
Councillor R Howell
Councillor M Larkin
Councillor O Magennis
Councillor L McEvoy
Councillor H McKee
Councillor A McMurray
Councillor R Mulgrew
Councillor D Murphy
Councillor M Ruane
Councillor G Sharvin
Councillor D Taylor
Councillor J Tinnelly

(Officials)

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive (via Teams)
Mr C Mallon, Director of Enterprise Regeneration and Tourism
(via Teams)
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager
Ms L Cummins, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance: Mrs G Long, Chief Executive, NIHE
Mr J McCartan, Regional Manager South Region, NIHE
Mrs A Hickey, Head of Placeshaping, NIHE
Mr L Gunn, Area Manager, NIHE
Mrs A Brannigan, Land & Housing Analytics Team, NIHE

SC/23/2021

APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Brown, McAteer, Ó Muirí, Owen, Savage and Stokes.

SC/24/2021

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

SC/25/2021

PRESENTATION FROM DFI ROADS

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

Mrs Long thanked Council for the opportunity to meet and then delivered a presentation on the Housing Investment Plan Annual Update 2021 and Housing Executive Revitalisation Programme, copies of which had been circulated with the agenda (copy of which is appended to these minutes).

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

- Thanks to all staff in the Downpatrick and Newry NIHE offices for the extra support provided during the current circumstances.
- Were there plans to address the frightening figures with regard to homeless people contained within the report?
- Was the Housing Executive working with Housing Associations in helping, in particular, older people who may wish to downsize their current homes and were there any plans to provide more sheltered housing?
- Were there any plans to investigate the points system to make it more robust and implement new legislation to be passed as the current system was open to abuse with outdated criteria, in particular in relation to intimidation points.
- What plans had the Housing Executive in place to identify land for new builds and perhaps Councillors could assist in identifying land in their local areas?
- Gaps seemed to be widening in particular regards to single lets?
- There had been an increase during covid in the number of private rental properties being sold and given that it can take up to 12 weeks before those affected were awarded homeless points, could this be identified as a housing need?
- People seeking housing in rural housing villages tend not to be put these down as a choice due to a perceived lack of available properties available, this is causing families being forced to move away from their local area with family and friends.
- The recent development of houses in Newcastle was welcomed, could an update be provided on a timescale on the planned restoration programme, CCTV in the communal areas and gas installation in the Burrendale estate flats.
- Dunwellan Park in Newcastle had become very run down, when were the next planned works to be carried out?
- Concerns raised over the lack of single lets in the Newcastle area. People sleeping in cars and sofas, there could be an opportunity to work with the voluntary sector, YMCA etc and perhaps utilise holiday accommodation as short term lets.

- Concerns were raised at the lack of social and affordable housing across the District.
- Could a breakdown of figures be provided for each area across the District?
- What work was being done to spread awareness about land shortages and to give land owners the opportunity to come forward?

The delegation responded to queries as follows:

- Agreed the homeless figures were alarming, work would be ongoing but the organisation was faced with challenges and complex issues.
- Slow progress being made on sheltered accommodation and there was a need to identify new sites.
- Review of allocations had been done by the Department in relation to the points system and robust checks and balances in place. It was still currently with the Minister but anticipate change in the future.
- NIHE were working closely with Housing Associations to ensure a range of properties were available in new developments, in particular 1 bedroom properties due to an ageing population.
- A lot of work had been undertaken to identify land through site identification studies, however, it would probably be 2025 before a business case was completed. Housing perspective published every year, looking at private sector acquisitions business case and long-term leasing particularly in relation to single lets.
- Rural Housing – recognise some households choose not to apply in their local area as they were aware of the housing needs in that area, however NIHE would encourage people to take part in the latent demand testing. The Rural Housing Strategy was currently being developed and out for consultation at present. Localised market testing had been carried out to identify areas that were not currently on the rural housing list, a scheme had been delivered in Darragh Cross recently where the housing needs had not been met in Saintfield and Crossgar area to try and identify and link other areas not currently on a list.
- Emerging Development Plan – lobbying for a 20% hybrid policy in relation to all new build which would hopefully result in a pipeline of housing supply, making less reliant on sites coming through on a ad-hoc basis.
- Primary mechanism in communicating with Housing Associations and potential landowners in terms of where gaps and types of housing needs required was by reviewing the Commissioning prospectus every year.
- Working closely with voluntary sectors and NIHE had made use of those partnerships where they could throughout the District, especially during the Covid crisis.
- Burrendale Estate – bathroom, kitchen and gas scheme would be onsite before end of financial year. CCTV business case had been accepted and would now progress through the procurement process.
- Dunwellan Park – would investigate when the next external update scheme was planned and update Councillor Clarke outside of the meeting.
- NIHE agreed to follow up in writing and send breakdown figures for last couple of years across the district to see the most local detail.

- NIHE keen to make sure right land is identified and brought forward at the right time for development and keen to work with Councillors to increase the pace in terms of planning and moving applications through the system.
- Place shaping team complete site identification studies, set up meetings with DEA councillors to help identify lands and housing needs, liaise with land registry, planning and Local Development Plan team. Further conference planned in November will be world focused to identify house need and identify land to be addressed through policy going forward.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and the comprehensive answers to the queries on behalf of the Council. She placed on record her thanks to the NIHE team in Downpatrick, in particular housing officers and maintenance team.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 19.07pm.

For adoption at Meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council to be held on Monday 1st November 2021.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive