

## NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMD/SC/

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### **Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on Monday 25 September 2017 at 6pm in the Mourne Room, Downshire Civic Centre, Downpatrick**

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**In the Chair:** Councillor W Clarke

**In attendance:**

**(Councillors)**

Councillor T Andrews	Councillor R Burgess
Councillor P Byrne	Councillor G Craig
Councillor D Curran	Councillor C Enright
Councillor G Fitzpatrick	Councillor V Harte
Councillor H Harvey	Councillor T Hearty
Councillor D Hyland	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor K Loughran	Councillor O McMahon
Councillor M Murnin	Councillor B Quinn
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor G Stokes
Councillor JJ Tinnelly	Councillor J Trainor

**(Officials)**

Mrs D Carville, Director of Corporate Services  
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Officer  
Mrs C Taylor, Democratic Services Officer

**Also in attendance:** Ms S McCauley, Northern Ireland Housing Executive  
Mr K Irvine, Northern Ireland Housing Executive  
Ms L Wilson, Northern Ireland Housing Executive

**SC/22/2017**

### **APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS**

Apologies were received from Councillors Bailie, Brown, Burns, Carr, Devlin, Doran, Hanna, Macauley, McAteer, Sharvin, Taylor and Walker.  
Apologies were also received from Mr Hannaway, Chief Executive and Mr Lipsett, Director of Active & Healthy Communities.

**SC/23/2017**

### **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**SC/24/2017**

### **NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING EXECUTIVE – HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN**

The Chairperson welcomed Siobhan McCauley, Loma Wilson and Keery Irvine and invited them to make their presentation.

Ms McCauley thanked the Chairperson for the invitation to attend the meeting and stated the Housing Investment Plan was to replace the traditional District Housing Plans and dealt with social, affordable and private housing. She outlined the proposed spend in 2017/18 which had increased to £19.70m and advised that capital improvements and planned maintenance schemes had been increased as well as response maintenance in response to customer requirements. She stated the Supporting People budget had decreased due to increasing pressure on the service. (a copy of the presentation is appended to these minutes).

The Chairperson thanked Ms McCauley for her presentation and invited questions from Members.

The following questions were asked by Members:

- Within the Saintfield area there were a lot of apartments, could these be bought off-the-shelf by NIHE?
- There were five derelict cottages on Ballygowan Road which the NIHE had up for sale, was there any movement on these?
- The lack of housing within rural areas, particularly Crossmaglen, Creggan area was very concerning with very few houses being built in the last ten years. Were there any plans to get schemes into the rural area as they were urgently required?
- Two bedroom houses were not becoming available, was there any way to speed up the turnover of houses?
- It was difficult to get maintenance work carried out on some houses in the rural area and when it was carried out, the standard was dreadful.
- Can NIHE not buy back properties that were previously sold?
- Would the current budget position have any impact on the maintenance budget?
- Would future housing schemes have to take cognisance of disability issues in order that the housing was suitable for disabled tenants?
- People had been on waiting lists for years with local people unable to get local housing – was this something that NIHE was investigating?
- There were many vacant properties over shops and offices in the District, would this be something that NIHE could investigate the possibility of a Living Over The Shop (LOTS) scheme?
- Was there any update on a site for travellers in Newry?
- The stats show that 99% of homeless applications were completed in 33 working days which is too slow, however, in extreme cases a lot more needed to be done. There were a number of vacant houses held in case people needed to be housed while upgrades were being completed however they sit vacant for long periods of time and this was something NIHE should look into especially when it could provide temporary accommodation in extreme cases rather than the use of B&Bs.
- Were there any plans in place for sheltered accommodation in the Rowallane area?
- Why has the budget for Supporting People decreased, was there less demand?

- There were serious gaps in the provision of social housing in the Ballyhorgan area with three separate latent demand tests having already been carried out, something needs to be done in the area to address the housing crisis.
- A scheme in Strangford had been assessed without seeking planning permission and was now rendered useless as a housing estate. A site exists which was in close proximity to the shops, school and playing fields however NIHE were not taking it under their consideration.
- The demand for social housing in Newry is huge, therefore why was the North Street flats demolished and what was being done on the site?
- NIHE need to examine where they place vulnerable people in terms of temporary accommodation and ensure the accommodation was suitable for the needs of that person. One case of a vulnerable young woman who sleeps in her car as she was too afraid to stay in the flat she had been allocated.
- Were the new build units identified in 2015 when the HIP was brought forward or was that the total required from this point?
- Private developers were creating poverty traps for people being placed in private rented accommodation by housing associations. Could something be done to stop this procedure?
- The boiler replacement scheme seemed to be slow to be implemented, could this be investigated?
- The Community grants that were available at £19k in the last year, will the same amount be available going forward?
- Ongoing issue with wood pellet boilers, could this be investigated?
- The shortage of housing was well documented in the Newcastle area and hopefully the 10 units in Bracken Avenue and the development at Donard Street would assist to alleviate the pressures.
- How was NIHE as an organisation preparing for Universal Credit?

The delegation responded to the queries as follows:

- NIHE would be tied in terms of the amount of money they would be able to pay for off-the-shelf properties however this could be looked at.
- The cottages in Ballygowan had been on the open market for a while with the feasibility of social housing being looked at however there were access issues at the site that needed to be investigated.
- In terms of rural housing, people were staying in properties for longer therefore there was a shortage of available housing. A land acquisition programme was being looked at to try to alleviate this issue.
- If maintenance programmes were not carried out properly, damages can be levied on the contractor. Willing to look at the issue if the Councillor provided the information on specific cases.
- NIHE were a public body therefore when previously owned properties were being sold the NIHE were not able to buy-back any of these. They were currently looking at the right to sell in order to retain existing housing.
- Disability adaptation was a very high priority and the process of this was being investigated with health care systems and occupational therapists to ensure the adaptations were carried out as quickly as possible.
- The waiting list process was currently under review and it may change going forward.

- There was a scheme in place for 5 units in Cullaville and the land was currently being transferred with the scheme being started this year.
- Heritage Lottery were currently providing 75% funding for renovation of some historic buildings and a small pilot scheme was underway by NIHE to provide 25% funding to provide additional housing. A LOTS scheme could be investigated.
- Site investigation studies had been carried out in Newry for a suitable site for travellers however this was still ongoing with no site being identified as yet.
- In terms of temporary housing, there were 33 days allocated to have applications processed however it was too long.
- There were 110 units of temporary accommodation however due to the lack of good new build programmes it was difficult to get people moved out of the temporary accommodation as quickly as NIHE would like. Decant housing, while could logically be used as temporary accommodation, was usually required for people who needed adaptation to their properties. The matter of decanted properties and the timelag between procurement and knowing when people would move into these would be investigated.
- The projected housing need in the Rowallane area was 125 units over the next five years and there does not seem to be significant need for supported housing in the area. Generally older people prefer to remain in their own home and can be facilitated in this manner rather than moving to sheltered accommodation.
- The Supporting People received £72.8m which was all spent. There were consistent demands on this money and NIHE need to look at reconfiguring and doing business more efficiently.
- A Housing Association was still interested in the scheme at Ballyhornan and NIHE were working hard with them to ensure fruition of the scheme.
- The landowner involved in Strangford was still in negotiations with NIHE.
- Happy to investigate the ongoing issues at Ballyhornan and Strangford especially since schemes had been passed from one housing association to another.
- There were major structural and anti-social behaviour issues at the North Street flats in Newry. NIHE would be happy to work in partnership with Council who own the land to discuss a way forward on the site.
- Happy to discuss separately outside of the meeting the specifics regarding the temporary accommodation in Sandy Street, Newry as no one should be living in their car.
- The new builds were identified for 2016-2021 over the next 5 year period.
- Top up payments were aligned to affordability and this was being investigated currently. A rental policy was not in place for the private sector across Northern Ireland however some small pilot schemes were being carried out at present to address this issue.
- Happy to look at specific cases as it should not take so long for a boiler replacement.
- The community grant was allocated £15k each year however last year NIHE were able to access an additional £4k for community groups to carry out schemes.
- Wood pellet boilers were used when oil or gas was not appropriate. Initially a technical inspection would be carried out and if gas were available the

property could be changed over. Happy to look at specifics of the case separately.

- A dedicated welfare reform team had been established with updates being provided through the many changes. The universal credit would be launched in Limavady initially therefore staff will be talking to colleagues there to try to be ahead of the game.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and praised the work of the staff in the local offices who were very helpful to Elected Representatives.

**There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.05pm.**

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

**Signed:**

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**Chairperson**

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**Chief Executive**