

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

**Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 26 February 2024 at 6.00pm in
Downshire Chamber and via Microsoft Teams**

In the Chair: Councillor G Sharvin

In attendance in Chamber: Councillor T Andrews Councillor C Bowsie
Councillor C Enright Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor O Hanlon Councillor G Kearns
Councillor D Lee-Surginor Councillor A Mathers
Councillor D McAteer Councillor K Murphy

In attendance via Teams: Councillor J Brennan Councillor P Byrne
Councillor P Campbell Councillor W Clarke
Councillor L Devlin Councillor K Feehan
Councillor D Finn Councillor A Finnegan
Councillor R Howell Councillor O Magennis
Councillor A McMurray Councillor D Murphy
Councillor A Quinn Councillor M Ruane

In attendance in Chamber: (Officials),
Mrs J Kelly, Director of Corporate Services
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Ms F Branagh, Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance in Chamber:
Mr S Leheny, Chief Executive, NIFHA
Ms A Conway, Director of Development, Radius Housing

SC/001/2024 APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

In the absence of the Chairperson, the Deputy Chairperson assumed the Chair.

Apologies were received from Councillors Kelly, Harte and McEvoy.

SC/002/2024 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

**SC/003/2024 NORTHERN IRELAND FEDERATION OF HOUSING
ASSOCIATIONS**

The Chairperson welcome Mr Seamus Leheny and Ms Anita Conway to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation.

Mr Leheny thanked the Council for their invitation to attend the meeting and gave a brief overview of how Social Housing was covered throughout Northern Ireland. He stated there are 20 housing associations in Northern Ireland and just under 60,000 homes managed by these associations. Mr Leheny advised there were 1449 new social homes completed last year however he advised the minimum that needed to be built was 2200 homes per year. He stated the funding mechanism operated in Northern Ireland was that the Department would be the majority shareholder and housing associations etc would make up the rest of the funding. (Copy of presentation attached to these minutes).

The Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

- Although there was a lot of Folds provision in Ballynahinch, there was a need to develop additional social housing in the area.
- There was no mention in the presentation of South Armagh, what was the situation with regards to social housing within the area?
- Unfortunately there were many occasions of negative impact on people having to wait years on maintenance being carried out on existing housing.
- Within the Rowallane area there were people with houses that had become too large, would it be possible to provide Fold-type accommodation in order to allow residents to downsize?
- Issue regarding demand within South Armagh, how often would the demand be reviewed by the Housing Executive?
- Welcomed work being undertaken within the Newcastle area. Regarding possible sites, how would a meeting be arranged with landowners etc to explore these?
- Regarding Ardmore development in Newry, the area had been mentioned at a recent PCSP meeting with a slight rise in anti-social behaviour, did Radius have a housing officer in place for the new developments?
- The waiting list within South Armagh was enormous, therefore the scheme recently in South Armagh that there was not much support for was staggering. It would be important that officials attend the Slieve Gullion DEA Forum and bring along the figures in order that a discussion could take place highlighting the demand that existed within the area.
- With regard latent demand, people would not put down choices in areas where there was no social housing and were afraid to use up their choices. Did the Housing Executive actively complete latent demand tests around the District?
- Serious issues existed around available land and wastewater structures, would housing associations work with other departments with regard to these issues?
- Were there any barriers obstructing development e.g. wastewater structures?
- When new builds were being developed, were renewable energy sources considered?
- Challenges with funding obviously exist, however if the funding were to stay the same today, would the number of houses being delivered increase?
- There was an amount of social housing that were sitting vacant, was there a process in place stating vacant properties should be occupied as quickly as possible?

Councillors Finnegan and D Murphy left the meeting during the above discussions – 6.48pm

The delegation responded to the queries as follows:

- Prospectus get delivered to the housing associations and the Housing Executive determine the demand for social housing. If there were any sites Members felt should be looked at, Members should contact the housing associations directly.
- Maintenance was discussed at an all-Party working group and raised with the Department with 91% success rate achieving KPI on repair work.
- There were a number of properties in South Armagh built over the last number of years. If there was a demand within the area, officials from housing associations would meet with Members to discuss the issues.
- With regard to the Fold schemes, category 2 schemes were not getting developed any longer. The category 1 model was being developed at present as the scheme was for older people with independence. A further model was being looked at with pilots for slightly bigger apartments.
- The Housing Executive assess need and it should be stressed that anyone in need should put their name on the waiting list as if the names were not on the list, then it would seem there was no demand. If there was real demand in areas that were not being reflected within the brochures sent from the Housing Executive, latent demand tests could be carried out within these areas.
- In terms of future potential sites, Members could contact the officials from the housing associations.
- There was a Radius office in Newry, there was an officer attached to each scheme with a manager also in place therefore if there was any anti-social behaviour this could be managed. Members could send through any specific details to officials in order to investigate any issues that were in place.
- Sites had been looked at in Forkhill and Crossmaglen where demand had not existed however officials were content to attend the DEA forum as requested.
- Housing Executive were commissioning a study on how to improve and get more development, when available a copy could be provided to the Council. Rural development came with a lot of issues which needed to be built into the process.
- Latent demand must be led by Housing Executive, however, Elected Members would hold more power to influence this process. Links with Departments take place on a monthly basis.
- Collaborative working occurred on a regular basis particularly with Northern Ireland Water regarding investment for infrastructure upgrades. Barriers include approval for access from DFI Roads and also with Northern Ireland Electricity with grid capacity.
- Housing Associations did try to make homes sustainable and Radius were operating above the regulations with regard to sustainable energy solutions.
- Funding levels were different across all Council areas, therefore would be difficult to complete same across all areas.
- Vacant properties could have issues that exist e.g. damp etc or kept empty to decant into same. Once allocated, the rent would begin within a week, therefore they should not remain vacant for long.
- There was a huge piece of work the Housing Associations completed through supporting people programme with the funding through Department for Communities with no increase since 2014.

Councillor Enright suggested that himself and Mr Leheny would meet up to discuss the policy that had been developed by Council around social and affordable housing within rural areas. The Chairperson suggested that Johnathon McGilly, Assistant Director in charge of Planning would be best placed to meet to discuss same.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their attendance.

AGREED:

On the proposal of Councillor Byrne, seconded by Councillor Finnegan, it was agreed for NIFHA and Housing Association representatives attend a meeting of the Slieve Gullion DEA to discuss the demand that existed within the area for social housing.

It was also agreed on the proposal of Councillor McAteer, seconded by Councillor Finn, that Council write to the Department for Communities Minister asking to protect and enhance the funding for social housing delivery in order to service the growing demand.

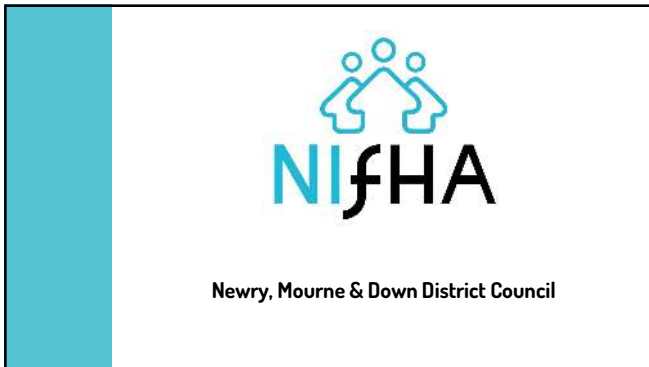
There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.15pm.

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 8 April 2024.

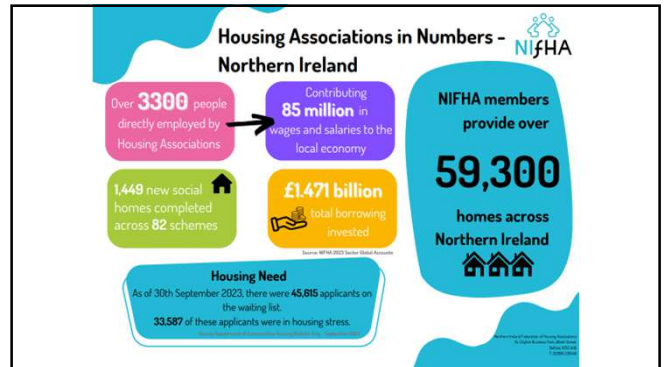
Signed:

Chairperson

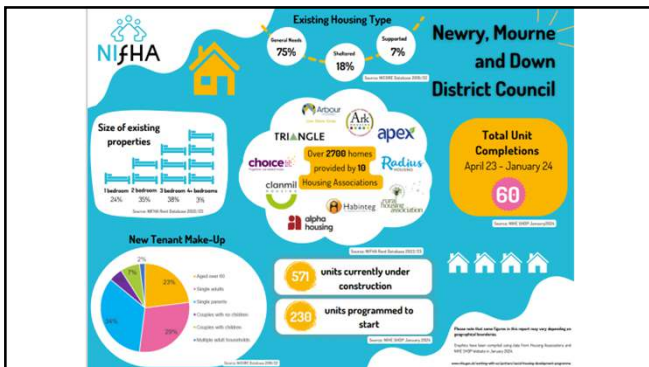
Director



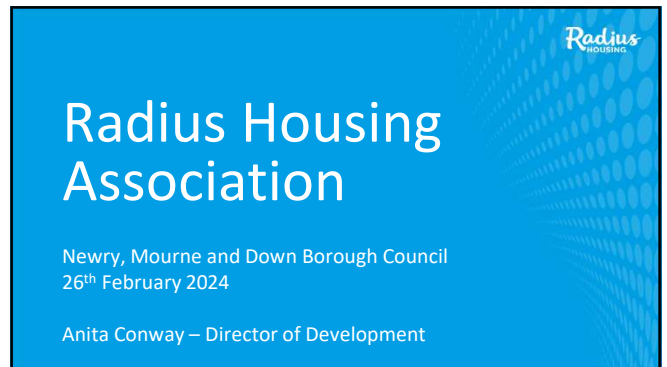
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Investment in the Borough

Scheme	Scope of Works	Contract Sum / Cost Estimate (inc. VAT)	Status
Glen Fold	Communal Heating Upgrade	£ 480,000.00	COMPLETE
Glen Fold	Rodecoration	£ 120,000.00	COMPLETE
Merchants Court	Domestic Heating Upgrade (E7 to Gas)	£ 200,000.00	DESIGN
Donard Fold	New kitchens, windows, fire stopping and redecoration	£ 630,000.00	COMPLETE
TOTAL		£ 1,430,000.00	

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Recently Completed - Lock Keepers Quay, Newry

Radius HOUSING

Apartments

Split Level House

Semi Detached



7

Recently Completed Ardmore, Belfast Road, Newry

Radius HOUSING



8

On Site
Newcastle CAT 1 –
19 units

Radius HOUSING

COMING SOON – SUMMER 2024



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Thank you

Any questions?

Radius HOUSING

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