

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 26 August 2025 at 6.00pm in Downshire Chamber

In the Chair: Councillor P Campbell

In attendance in Chamber: Councillor T Andrews Councillor C Galbraith
Councillor O Hanlon Councillor A Lewis
Councillor G Sharvin

**In attendance
via Teams:**

Councillor C Bowsie	Councillor P Byrne
Councillor C Enright	Councillor K Feehan
Councillor V Harte	Councillor M Hearty
Councillor G Kearns	Councillor M Larkin
Councillor D Lee-Surginor	Councillor O Magennis
Councillor D McAteer	Councillor S Murphy
Councillor A Quinn	Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Ruane	Councillor J Truesdale
Councillor H Young	

**In attendance in Chamber:
(Officials)**

Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Mr A Patterson, Director Active & Healthy Communities
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)
Mr C Smyth, Democratic Services Officer

**Also in attendance in
Chamber:**

NI Housing Executive

Ms Grainia Long – Chief Executive
Mr John McCartan – South Regional Manager
Ms Claire Creaney – South Down Area Manager
Ms Sinead Collins – Head of Place Shaping South

**Also in attendance via
Teams:**

NI Housing Executive

Mr Andy Kennedy – Assistant Director Asset Strategy
Mr David Palmer – Regional Programme Delivery Manager
Mr Patrick Feeney – Head of Private Grants (South)
Mr Kevin Logan – Assistant Director Corporate Procurement

SC/011/2025

APOLOGIES & CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Brennan, Mathers, McEvoy and K Murphy.

SC/012/2025

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared.

SC/013/2025

NI HOUSING EXECUTIVE

The Chairperson welcomed the delegation to the meeting and invited them to make their presentation. (Copy attached to these minutes)

The delegation provided details regarding the Housing Action Plan that focused on increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural settlements across the district. They presented an overview of the Housing Market Assessment, the supply of affordable housing, a breakdown of total homes within the district, expenditure during the 2024/25 period, waiting list trends over recent years, and the projected spend for 2025/26.

Following this, the delegation highlighted key housing challenges and opportunities and expressed concern about the level of funding received from the Department (which department) for grant programmes supporting schemes such as Disabled Facilities Grants, the Affordable Warmth Scheme, and other private sector initiatives.

Following the presentation the Chairperson invited questions and comments from Members:

- What were the current plans for delivering new housing in Downpatrick, Newcastle, and Castlewellan?
- Regarding disability grants, what steps were being taken to address the gap between the grant amount offered and the actual cost of required renovations?
- Was anything being done to tackle the challenges around emergency accommodation, particularly where local residents were being placed far from their communities?
- Members noted that response times to maintenance issues reported by residents had become less reliable in recent months.
- Concerns had been raised about grounds maintenance, especially in areas with overgrown hedges and verges.
- Did NIHE or Housing Associations actively seek development sites in Ardglass and Killough to meet local housing demand?
- Despite the 2018 announcement of 13 new general needs homes in Ballyhornan, no construction had taken place to date.
- There was currently a 5% gap between the rent NIHE collects and the level of investment required. Was this decision made with cost-of-living pressures in mind, and would a 7.7% rent increase place additional strain on tenants?
- What percentage increase in rent would NIHE consider acceptable to meet its investment needs?
- The projected spend did not include a figure for new build investment. What level of investment was expected this year?
- Did NIHE experience a high rate of tenant turnover, and what were the financial implications in terms of renovation and refurbishment costs?
- Had contractor standards improved recently, and what measures were in place to ensure consistently high-quality work?
- If a particular area did not show an established housing need, did that prevent NIHE from purchasing properties there?
- Was the target of 2,500 affordable and 1,500 social housing units over 10 years sufficient, considering it only reflected current housing stress and did not account for future demand—especially in rural areas?
- What could councillors do to help NIHE overcome the current barriers to borrowing?

- What approaches could be used to encourage Housing Associations to deliver small-scale rural schemes, given the ongoing housing crisis in the Council area?
- There was a noticeable lack of sheltered housing for older people in Rowallane and other parts of the district. Was this something NIHE could prioritise?

The delegation responded as follows:

- A fundamental review of allocations was currently being delivered, which allowed a broader area of choice and provided more accurate data on the nature of housing needs.
- NIHE was acutely aware that the amount offered often did not cover the full cost of required works. Several reviews were underway across various grant programmes however it was the Department that determined the level of grant funding.
- Efforts were made to place individuals as close to their locality as possible, with placements in other areas only when no alternative existed. The number of people requiring emergency accommodation had risen from 3,500 pre-pandemic to between 9,000 and 10,000. NIHE was proactively expanding its temporary accommodation portfolio, though securing local leases remained challenging.
- It remained extremely difficult for housing associations to finalise deals in Newcastle due to strong competition from the private sector. Work at the Downe Hospital main building (Clanmil) was stalled temporarily but had now recommenced. New properties in Castlewellan remained a priority, and proposals for Annsborough were currently under consideration.
- Over 10,000 calls were received daily and were tightly managed in terms of response. There may have been some delays due to the impact of the January storm.
- Staff regularly inspected areas and contractors were held accountable for their performance and the condition of maintained areas.
- NIHE, as the Strategic Housing Authority, acts as an enabler and did not directly build homes. It assessed housing need across all 11 councils, using a well-established model for this purpose.
- The five-year projected social housing need in Ardglass and Killough stood at 42 and 19 units respectively. This data informed Council (as the planning authority) in developing its draft plan strategy. Despite clear housing need and guidance provided by NIHE, there were currently no housing association schemes on the programme for these areas.
- With regard to Blyhornan, progress had been delayed due to ongoing engagement and negotiation with affected landowners. The programme was scheduled to commence in 2025/26.
- NIHE rents were currently too low and had not kept pace with investment requirements. Rent had been frozen for several years, widening the gap. Affordability data indicates there was headroom to support a rent increase.
- If properties were available for purchase and met the criteria for temporary accommodation, NIHE could acquire them in limited instances. Meeting demand for temporary accommodation was demand-led and decisions on new build properties rested with the planning authority.
- In relation to the 10-year target, the model was used to assess housing need and projected population growth, household formation, and new market builds. It assumed delivery of both affordable and social housing; if either falls short, it created a knock-on effect.
- It was a positive development that NIHE would now be included in negotiations on the fiscal framework.
- A significant amount of work was underway in relation to rural housing, Although funding had not yet been received for the Housing Executive Land Acquisition (HELA)

programme, initial work had commenced. This programme enabled NIHE to purchase and acquire land for direct transfer to Housing Associations.

- NIHE had several levers available through development planning and management regarding sheltered accommodation and it worked closely with Housing Associations and the Department of Health. A housing and health strategy was being progressed, focusing on solutions for older people and those with specific health needs.
- A total of 377 allocations were made across NIHE and Housing Associations and significant investment had been made through tenancy sustainment programmes, which had proven effective. The cost of tenancy changes varied depending on the condition of the property and where possible, NIHE sought to recover costs from tenants. The total budget spend on tenancy repairs was £518,000, reflecting a downward trend.
- Rigorous inspection processes were in place for maintenance, including random sampling and internal audits and two key performance indicators (KPIs) were used to monitor cost and quality. If trends emerged such as issues with a particular trade or contractor, NIHE adjusted its inspection profile accordingly.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their presentation and time.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at **7.09pm**

For adoption at the Council Meeting to be held on Monday 1 September 2025.

Signed:

Chairperson

Chief Executive

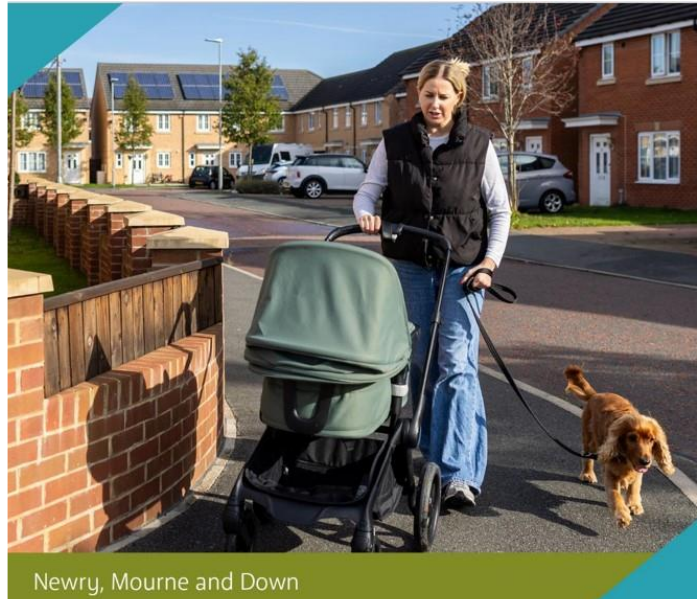


**Newry, Mourne & Down
District Council**

**NIHE Housing
Investment Plan 2023-26**

Annual Update 2025

26th August 2025



Newry, Mourne and Down

nihe.gov.uk



Community Planning Update

The Housing Executive takes a lead role on the Community Planning priority 'Access to Quality Housing' and chair the Housing Needs Working Group.

During 2024/25, the Working Group published an updated Housing Action Plan which notes the achievements to date and highlights emerging housing issues and priorities. The updated plan has a focus on increasing the supply of affordable housing in rural settlements in the district where the need for new social housing represents almost 40% of all housing need for the district.

Aligned to this action, during 2025/26 the Working Group plan to engage with representatives from the 7 District Electoral Areas to highlight rural housing need and encourage a partnership approach to identifying development opportunities.

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Tenure Breakdown & Total Homes

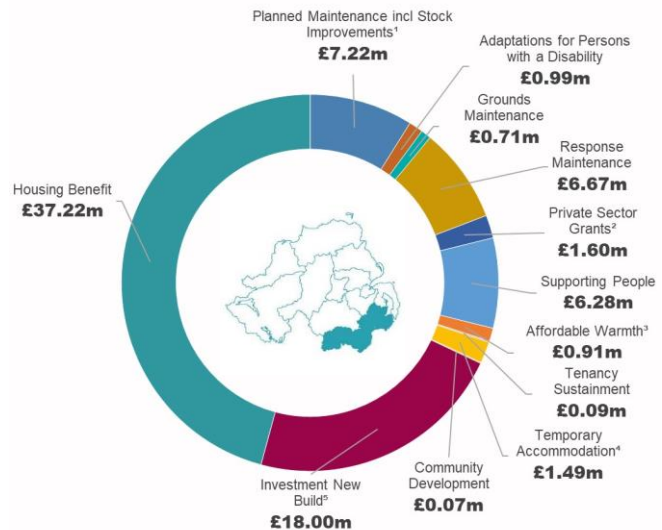



68,398
households

 **Managed
5,161**
social homes

Housing Executive Spend 2024/25

£81.25m



New homes on site in the last year...

In 2024/25:

£18m was invested in new social housing stock

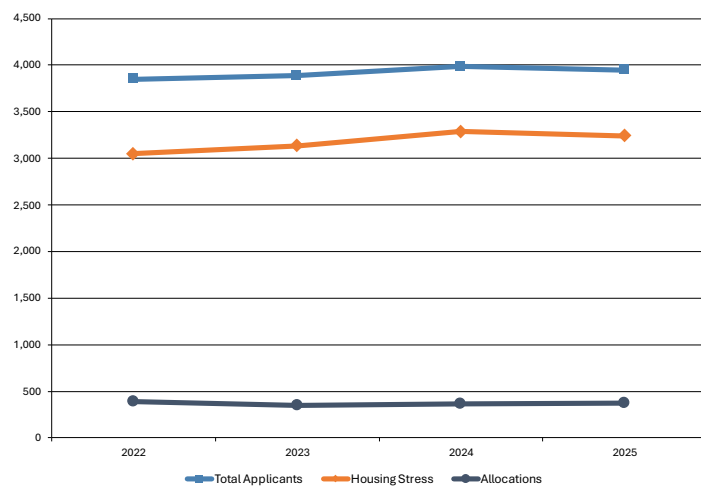
164 new social homes completed; and

447 new social homes under construction at end of March 2025.



nlhe.gov.uk

Waiting List Trends 2022 - 2025



nlhe.gov.uk

Fifteen Year Housing Market Assessment

- **Housing Supply Strategy 2024-2039** published December 2024 - preparation of associated Action Plan ongoing.
- Systems approach to housing supply to ensure access to secure, affordable and sustainable accommodation.
- NIHE duty to provide housing evidence across tenures.
- **Fifteen Year Housing Market Assessment 2020-2035:**

Local Government District	Market	Intermediate	Social	All Tenures
Newry, Mourne and Down	6,540	1,570	2,520	10,630
Northern Ireland Total	54,890	15,450	25,280	95,620

nihe.gov.uk

Affordable Housing Supply

Social

2025/28 SHDP – 294 (gross) new social housing units programmed

Includes 105 urban units and 189 rural units.

5 Year SHDP Performance

1,080 starts (626 urban and 454 rural) was the SG target for NMD during the 5-year period

702 starts (660 urban and 42 rural) were achieved against the target

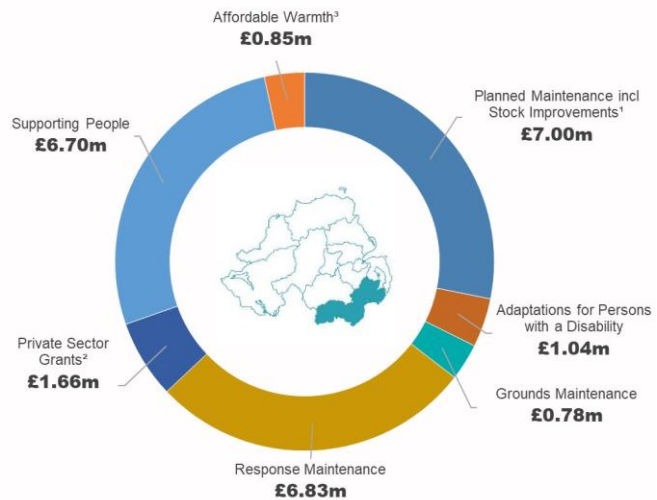
Resulting in 378 fewer starts (+34 urban and -412 rural) against the SG target.

Intermediate

Co-ownership Housing Association had an active stock of 606 dwellings at March 2025, 45 of which were purchased during 2024/25.

nihe.gov.uk

**Projected spend
2025/26
£24.86m**



Key Housing Challenges

- The shortage of social and affordable housing
- Rising homelessness and continued need for temporary and emergency accommodation
- Shortfall in capital funding impacting directly on new social homes delivery, Housing for All and Affordable Warmth scheme
- Uncertainty regarding the long-term funding stream for the maintenance and modernisation of NIHE stock - rental income did not cover our planned investment last year - linked to historic low levels of NIHE rents (£74.35 per week)
- Wider impact of housing issues on health and wellbeing of households
- Growing number of incidents and displays of race hate in NIHE neighbourhoods.

Key Housing Opportunities

- Programme for Government priority and targets for housing
- Ambition of the Housing Supply Strategy and its cross departmental focus
- Support for Revitalisation of NIHE and possibility of stable long-term investment in NIHE homes and new build
- Survey of NIHE stock to set the investment requirement going forward
- Funding for homelessness prevention and especially the New Foundations Programme to help young people leaving care avoid homelessness
- Acquisition of 600 new properties across NI for use as temporary accommodation
- Potential of new additional pilot projects similar to the construction of six new homes to PassivHaus standard in North Belfast and retro fit programme.

Thank you



Q&A