

NEWRY, MOURNE & DOWN DISTRICT COUNCIL

NMC/SC

Minutes of Special Council Meeting held on 29 August 2023 at 6.00pm in Downshire Chamber and via Microsoft Teams

In the Chair: Councillor O Hanlon

In attendance in Chamber: (Councillors)
Councillor A Lewis Councillor J Jackson

In attendance via Teams: Councillor C Bowsie Councillor P Byrne
Councillor P Campbell Councillor W Clarke
Councillor D Finn Councillor A Finnegan
Councillor R Howell Councillor G Kearns
Councillor T Kelly Councillor C King
Councillor M Larkin Councillor O Magennis
Councillor L McEvoy Councillor A McMurray
Councillor S O'Hare Councillor K Murphy
Councillor S Murphy Councillor H Reilly
Councillor M Savage Councillor D Taylor
Councillor J Truesdale

In attendance in Chamber: (Officials),
Mrs M Ward, Chief Executive
Miss S Taggart, Democratic Services Manager (Acting)

Also in attendance in Chamber:
Ms G Long, Chief Executive
Mr J McCartan, Regional Manager
Mr L Gunn, Area Manager
Ms S Collins, Head of Place Shaping South

Also in attendance via Teams:
Ms M Conway, Place Shaping South
Mr A Kennedy, Asset Management

SC/014/2023 APOLOGIES AND CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Apologies were received from Councillors Devlin, Enright, Galbraith, Hanna, Harte, Lee-Surginor and Sharvin.

As both the Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson were unavailable it was agreed on the proposal of Councillor Lewis, seconded by Councillor Jackson that Councillor Hanlon assume the Chair.

SC/015/2023 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

**PRESENTATION FROM NORTHERN IRELAND HOUSING
EXECUTIVE – HOUSING INVESTMENT PLAN**

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

The Chairperson thanked Mrs Long for her presentation and invited questions and comments from Members.

Members asked the following questions:

- NIHE need to look at unique strategies for housing homeless such as 'glamping pods' as set up by Lou Macari in Stoke. These temporary units enabled people to have an address in order to be able to apply for jobs as well as having access to statutory support such as mental health, careers and counselling supports. If it was possible, at the next housing conference, short-term measures such as these should be investigated.
- All NIHE staff should be commended for the manner in which they deal with elected representatives and the public on a daily basis.
- Was it possible to signpost people such as those in distress or those who require assistance with housing matters. If so, could the details of these be circulated?
- Was there availability of temporary accommodation in South Armagh as it was not always feasible for people in the area to be housed in Newry or Belfast?
- Was there a timeframe available as to when the boilers in some houses would be repaired as some have been on the list for over 2 years awaiting work?
- There was a lack of housing in South Armagh however 7 sites had been identified but would the officers know if private landlords had been approached?
- What plans were in place for the delivery of the affordable warmth scheme and were there any difficulties envisaged to deliver the scheme as seamlessly as Council had done previously?
- Were there any derelict Housing Executive properties that can be brought up to spec?
- What challenges were coming forward with regard to the changes to discretionary housing benefit?
- How can tenants secure tenancy as some landlords were evicting long term tenants to available of higher levels of income from the Housing Executive?
- The housing situation in Newcastle was chronic with individuals on waiting lists for years. Some had been in temporary accommodation with damp and mould on the walls but were reluctant to complain as they would end up homeless.
- Discretionary payments would have a huge impact moving forward as long-term tenants in private rentals were being asked to leave premises in order that landlords can establish Air B&Bs.
- Was there a date for refurbishment of houses in Bracken Avenue. Was there CCTV and wraparound services to be established for these apartments?
- The alleyways at the back of Burrendale and Bracken Avenue were not cleaned, NIHE along with Council need to ensure they were free from debris.
- People with severe mental health issues having to travel to other locations for temporary accommodation do not have the support systems in place therefore their mental health was being affected – there needs to be some solutions on a local basis.

- There were plenty of units during winter months outside of hotels and b&bs for temporary accommodation and perhaps this could be looked at with regard short-term contracts.
- The housing trust were developing a site on the Dundrum Road, had this building stopped due to the lack of an Executive?
- Was there any funding available to repair the clock at Shrigley?
- How many housing needs analysis were taking place across the District and what was the timescale to see any sizable data resulting from these? How would these be used to formulate the plan?
- Do officers know why the uptake on co-ownership scheme was so low?

The delegation responded to queries as follows:

- Mrs Long stated she was very proud of the local teams and grateful for the work done which did go above and beyond particularly given the unprecedented challenges from the pandemic to the economic shock.
- NIHE were fortunate to have been able to attain significant increases in temporary accommodation and relative to other areas use comparatively less hotels or b&bs. Officers were trying to obtain properties through partnerships if possible and wraparound support was available in a number of areas. She stated the pace of growth in demand however has been immense and more innovate solutions were required where possible.
- Signposting would be done through the local office who would work with any customer or tenant and although officers know their limitations they would always signpost.
- Mr Gunn advised there were floating support providers who specialised in mental health issues and NIHE would have strong collaborations. He stated when people come through the doors the lack of a roof would normally only be one element of their issues.
- Ms Long advised NIHE worked proactively with contractors and while understanding the challenges they may face delays sometimes do occur. She advised the double glazing programme timetable could be circulated.
- With regard to temporary accommodation there was a stock of flats and own accommodation however since the pandemic there is an increased need for temporary accommodation. NIHE acquire stock from the market however would be keen to speak to any landlord that may have property they would be interested in leasing.
- There was some activity ongoing in relation to Crossmaglen and Camlough regarding social housing.
- Ms Long advised the affordable warmth scheme was an administrative change that should mean there would be little difference to the customer. The decision was taken by the Department to transfer to NIHE who would like to make it as seamless as possible. The targeting had been removed however the eligibility rules had not changed.
- The demand for public housing had increased and change of tenancies were sometimes an issue. Requests had been made from Housing Associations to bring voids forward however the demand is still exceeding supply.
- There would be very few evictions and tenants tend to engage at the earliest stage. NIHE recognised how easy it was at times to get into hardship. Outside of their own tenants, NIHE had a statutory obligation on those becoming homeless who may lose their tenancy.
- Mr Gunn advised the voids in Burrendale in Newcastle stem from the pilot scheme where the wraparound services were put in place. A case had been made for the expansion of the scheme and funding had been secured to expand this into different parts of the area. There were a number of units not yet occupied however this should change over the coming months.

- CCTV was a source of frustration as it was caught up in current procurement and realistically it would be the early part of next year before there would be any progress.
- Mr Gunn advised he had noted the comments with regards to the alleyways and undertook to speak to the grounds manager regarding setting up a site meeting.
- Ms Collins advised there were 2 schemes on the site at the Dundrum Road and she would revert back to Council with an update. Letters of support were also given out for other schemes in the Newcastle area however it was difficult to get these on site due to physical constraints. She advised a site identification study would be carried out next year to encourage further housing schemes in the area.
- Ms Long advised she had been disappointed not to receive levelling up fund to repair the clock in Shrigly however she stated officers were continuing to look for other sources of funding.
- Ms Collins advised the housing need had risen across the District, particularly in rural areas and there may be areas without a waiting list but officers would encourage people to register on the waiting list. She stated Spa and Kilean would have a rural housing needs test completed this year.
- Ms Long advised NIHE was not involved in funding of the co-ownership model however they deliver a shared housing model in partnership with Department for Communities. She advised she would follow up with Elected Members to make sure what the issue was and whether the figures included in the report were correct.

The Chairperson thanked the delegation for their attendance and comprehensive responses to the questions. Ms Long advised any additional questions that had been submitted would be replied to via letter to the Council.

There being no further business, the meeting concluded at 7.12pm.

For adoption at next Meeting of Newry, Mourne and Down District Council.

Signed:

Chairperson

Director