**Minutes of Rural Residents’ Forum**

**Tuesday 5th January 2016**

**Present:** Patricia McQuillan, Phyllis Clarke, Anne Quinn, Clifford Wylie and Sam

Lockhart

**Apologies**: Susan Welsh, Gerry Duffy, Sinead Collins, Eoin McKinney and Deirdre

Crawford

**In attendance:** Orla McCann, Colm McQuillan, Kate Clifford and Aidan Campbell.

**Welcome, introduction and apologies**

Kate welcomed everyone to the meeting and in particular to Colm McQuillan.

Apologies were noted and non-attendance of members was discussed. Kate agreed to speak to members who haven’t been attending meetings.

**Action: RCN**

**1.0 Discussion with Colm McQuillan on RRF and Rural proofing**

Kate welcomed Colm to the meeting and he gave a wide ranging presentation that touched on the Rural Unit, rural proofing and some of the key issues in social housing in the medium to long term. After questions and answers Kate thanked Colm for speaking to the Forum. He said that he hoped he would be able to meet with the RRF at least once a year to keep the Forum informed of issues.

**2.0 Minutes of previous meeting**

Minutes of the meeting held on 1st December 2015 were approved for accuracy.

Proposed by Clifford Wylie and seconded by Patricia McQuillan

**3.0 Matters arising**

Scrutiny panel meetings

The issue of scrutiny panel review meetings in Mid Ulster is to be raised at a meeting on 14th January between RCN Mid Ulster NIHE staff, Rural Unit and Supporting Communities. Patricia McQuillan also to attend as chair of RRF.

**4.0 Promotional leaflet**

A discussion was held on potential logos and elements required on a leaflet. Three logos were preferred. It was suggested that the leaflet is designed professionally. Draft leaflet to be presented at the next RRF meeting. There was also a discussion on wording and content of the leaflet. Aidan reminded members that the leaflet is concise and text will have to be limited.

**ACTION: RCN to have a draft leaflet for next meeting**

**5.0 Practice/policy event on rural social housing**

Practice to Policy workshop will take place on Monday 22th February, in potentially Oxford Island, Craigavon as it was felt this was a central location. The venue has been provisionally booked. It was felt there should be 2-3 good examples of rural social -housing practice. The afternoon would focus on consultation on rural housing policy. Sinead is to contact NIHE board before the event can be confirmed. **Action: Rural unit.**

There may be the opportunity to do additional site visits as part of the contract. This is to be decided.

**6.0 Handyman schemes**

Kate updated members on the progress so far. Kate asked what our purpose is with this research? Where do we go from here with it? After discussion it was agreed that this had not been designed as research and was more of a feasibility study. In terms of where the work goes next the options could be:

* Could anything from handyman scheme feasibility feed into the consultation on the TRPSI review?
* Would the NIHE Social Enterprise strategy be a vehicle for funding a handyman scheme in a rural area?
* Barry suggested we produce a Factsheet for groups considering developing a handyman scheme highlighting the pros and cons of developing a scheme.
* Could Dennett/Bryson could be potential partners to develop a rural scheme.

**7.0 Social Development Committee**

Aidan gave an update on Social development committee engagement. He had contacted the Clerk of the committee who indicated that the Committee agenda was packed between now and the end of this mandate in March. The Committee (like many other Committees) are currently working to completed committee scrutiny stage on 3 bills. The clerk suggested that we draft a letter to the committee highlighting issues we would like to raise and, if appropriate, what we would specifically ask the Committee to do. He said that this might then provide the basis for engagement with the new Committee in the new mandate. All agreed to forward a letter on this basis. Discussion and feedback on draft letter Aidan had circulated with the minutes. Aidan agreed to make suggested changes and then post letter to the Committee signed by Patricia in her role as chair.

**8.0 Supporting Communities Update**

Orla handed round a brief update on Supporting Communities work. She said that SCNI had now re-branded as Supporting Communities and were asking people to come up with a new name for their twice yearly publication (previously known as SCNI News). Any suggestions can be emailed to [Karen@supportingcommunities.org](mailto:Karen@supportingcommunities.org) by Friday 8th January to be in with a chance of winning a £30 Tesco voucher. The Final report and findings of the Tenant Scrutiny training has been compiled and is available at Appendix 3 of the December Central Housing Forum minutes. Colm McDaid has been shortlisted for Best Newcomer in the CO3 Leadership Awards to take place in February 2016.

**9.0 Central Housing Forum update**

Patricia McQuillan gave an update on issues discussed at the last Central Housing Forum:

Review of house sales with Policy and DSD affordability team. Housing sales started in 1979. NIHE and Housing Association tenants had the right to buy properties at a discount. NIHE sold 119,000 properties and Housing Associations sold 2,500. Reasons for the review were the last review took place in 2012 so this was a periodic review. Is the scheme meeting its objectives and providing value for money. Views were, what motivates tenants to purchase? What would discourage or prevent a sale? Is there a positive impact on the community, or is there a negative impact?

There was a discussion regarding affordable and social housing. Central were advised that DSD were looking at options in dealing with this including the possible introduction of an affordable discount in areas with high demand.

There was a presentation on energy inefficiency in homes and fuel poverty.

The community cohesion programme will be finalised in April 2016 with the strategy being launched at the end of January.

There will be an update at the next Central meeting on the NIHE Social Enterprise Strategy.

Empty homes standard – DSD officials had met with NIHE and have agreed to undertake a review. This will require a business case which will be forwarded to NIHE’s board.

Digital inclusion – Pilot scheme in Belfast will start. Two estates will be provided with broadband for 24 months and a provision of breezies (a type of tablet) for 15 rural tenants to develop capacity, interaction and participation.

There was discussion on moving to a paperless Central Housing Forum with Ipads provided for members. Supporting Communities suggested to have some form of interface/dashboard for HCN members in terms of minutes, good practice, sharing and interaction. This could be on Supporting Communities and NIHE websites.

Scrutiny panel – final report and findings from the training. A peer review group will be established to look at the way forward in relation to scrutiny.

A presentation on ASB and homelessness will take place in the New Year.

Youth Forum – update on the positive impact that has been made through the provision of an apprentice scheme between NIHE and a young homeless person working in the Homeless department.

Future presentations – systems thinking/Interim asset management/SHRP update.

A review of Central’s terms of reference will be discussed at an away day.

The University of Birmingham is conducting research on tenant engagement and will meet with HCN members.

Patricia highlighted Watershed, a DVD made by youth on tenant responsibilities in housing properties.

**10.0 Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place at RCN on Tuesday 2nd February at 10.30am.