**Minutes of Rural Residents’ Meeting**

**7 March 2017**

Present: Phyllis Clarke, Susan Welsh, Patricia McQuillan, June Livingstone, Clifford Wylie, Sam Lockhart and Martin McCartney.

Apologies: Mary Watson, Noreen Rice, Anne Quinn and Orla McCann.

In attendance: Martin Quinn, Gerry Duffy, Deirdre Crawford, Eoin McKinney, Sinead Collins, Aidan Campbell, Kate Clifford and Teresa McKernan.

1. Consultation on Community Involvement Strategy

Stephanie Campbell, Verbal Arts Centre Reading Rooms Project carried out consultation on Community Involvement Strategy with members.

1. Minutes of the last meeting
   1. Reflection on February’s site visits. People were very impressed with all of the visits and there was much talk about the positive differences groups can make to their community. Concern was expressed about how little support the Castlerock group received from the local Council and Tourist Board despite the obvious need for a tourist information office in the area. RCN is to follow up to see what help and support they could give to the Castlerock group

Members decided that next year’s site visits should take place in Fivemiletown (Phyllis’s group) with visit to the local NIHE office. Potential visits to Carrosyl group in Lisnaskea, Belleek or Enniskillen were also suggested**. RCN will work with Phyllis and June on organising the visits.**

1. NIHE’s Welfare Reform /Agnes Fraser from Tar Isteach – no progress was made on this. It was agreed previously that a booklet and information on Welfare reform would be very useful to rural dwellers, but with the welfare situation ever changing it was difficult to see how a publication could be kept up to date. What might be most useful was to compile a series of case studies and how the cases were managed / supported/ argued successfully through a sanction process. We could do this across a number of welfare/advice service providers.

**Action: For decision at the next meeting a potentially for inclusion in next years’ workplan.**

1. **Proposed review of the Latent Demand Test policy and procedures** – Sinead Collins

Sinead delivered a presentation on the proposed review of the latent demand test policy and procedures. Sinead went through the main points why test is carried out in rural areas. 200 tests have been carried out resulting in 368 new builds.

Discussion followed on the two pilot tests that were carried out in Rathlin and Ballyhornan. At Rathlin, an information day with various agencies took place. An art competition took place in the local school. As a result of the day, 14 people were put on the waiting list. In Ballyhornan there were different issues relating to infrastructure. A community event was organised and a large number of people attended. Grants officer/Housing Officer were in attendance. As a result, NIHE are able to support a scheme of 10 units. The key seems to be to get Housing Associations involved at an early stage. NIHE want to replicate this process in other areas where potential housing sites are identified and where Housing Associations are involved.

Kate asked how a remote area with less connections could have a test carried out? Sinead said that contact would be made with local estate agents who would give an indicator of lack of general/social housing. After this, a community event would be organised to get public interest. Groups should contact NIHE if they felt there was a need for housing. RCN and SCNI would support these groups to come forward and identify need. Kate felt it would be useful to have a short guide that could be given to community associations to help them with the latent demand process. **She also suggested compiling a case study on the Rathlin/Ballyhornan process.**

Discussion followed on Fermanagh testing. A test was carried out in the Kesh area, not a lot of people came forward despite community representatives indicating there was a need in the area**. It was agreed that a site visit should take place in Fermanagh/West Tyrone.**

1. Private Rental Sector – proposals for change consultation – Aidan Campbell

Consultation will close on 3rd April. The main proposed changes are to restrict the number of times rent can increase within a 12 month period. Ensure all private tenants are issued with a written agreement. Introduce a fast track eviction process. Also to be considered is tenant information pack, introduce a regulatory framework for letting agents. Introduce requirements for landlords to provide smoke alarms, carbon monoxide detectors etc. The Department recognises that the private rental sector has grown by 16% of overall tenure. How tenants are treated is an issue. There is an issue of increased rural unfitness within the private sector. **Action: Aidan to circulate draft response to members for comments.**

1. Next year’s RRF Contract and Work Programme

Members agreed that meetings should continue to take place on the first Tuesday of each month. Patricia suggested that community involvement work should be kept on the agenda for each meeting.

1. Central Forum update

Central report will be circulated with minutes.

1. SCNI update

SCNI will be circulated with minutes.

1. NIHE Rural Unit update

NIHE review policy will be to the Board in May. Consultation response has been submitted by RCN.

1. Any other business

Phyllis thanked RCN for sharing/sending out useful information on events and grants.

Kate asked that if members had positive feedback that they email this to her.

Kate encouraged members to like RCN on facebook as regular updates including funding etc is posted here. She also encouraged RRF members to become members of RCN as members are entitled to two free places for the 25th celebration event in the Glenavon on Thursday 23rd March.

1. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at RCN on Tuesday 4th April 2017 at 10.30am.