**Minutes of Rural Residents’ Forum**

**Tuesday 4th April 2017**

Present: Clifford Wylie, Sam Lockhart, Susan Welsh, Martin McCartney, Anne

Quinn and Patricia McQuillan.

Apologies: Phyllis Clarke, June Livingstone, Mary Watson, Noreen Rice, Gerry

Duffy, Orla McCann, Deirdre Crawford and Sinead Collins.

In attendance: Eoin McKinney, Kate Clifford, Aidan Campbell and Teresa McKernan.

1. **Minutes of the last meeting**

Minutes of the last meeting were approved as being accurate.

Proposed by: Susan Welsh Seconded by: Sam Lockhart

1. **Matters arising**

*Representation on the Forum*

RCN will write to Noreen Rice to ask if she wishes to remain as a member of the Forum.

Representation is needed from the Newry and North West areas. Nuala Kildunne is to come back to RCN with a possible contact from the North-West area. Kate is to follow up with Newry Street Unite. Kate asked members that if they had any contacts in the Newry/Kilkeel area to pass them to RCN. Susan is to check if someone from the Ballyhornan area would be interested as well.

**Action RCN/Susan.**

*Welfare Reform case studies*

A proposal has been submitted to the Housing Executive to undertake sample

Case studies with Tar Isteach. No confirmation has been received if this can go ahead. Eoin said within the Housing Executive a Welfare Reform team has been established. It was felt that case studies needed to be rurally based and needs to include a housing element and would need to highlight the solution. Aidan suggested linking with CAB or Advice NI. Sam suggested a rural/urban case study would be beneficial.

**Action: RCN to contact Kevin Higgins from Advice NI.**

*Rathlin/Ballyhornan case studies*

Enhanced Housing Need tests have been carried out in both these areas as a result of the RRF study carried out last year. Work has been done with two Housing Associations, 10 units will be completed in both Ballyhornan and Rathlin. Members felt it would be beneficial to write up a summary of the process and results to be submitted to Deirdre and Gerry. These two examples should be used to show other rural communities how the process has worked. **Action: RRF/RCN.**

Kate highlighted social housing in the Dungiven area as being an area of potential hidden demand /need – this came from a recent meeting with some community members from the area. The local police station had been offered for sale under Community Asset Transfer, linking with DTNI. Eoin agreed to check with the Housing Executive’s director for the area to see if they had any housing demand in that region. **Action: Eoin to follow up on Housing need in Dungiven.**

1. **Consultation on Community Involvement Strategy**

No update on this.

1. **RRF workplan and contract for next year**

Members had previously received a copy of the workplan by email. Meetings will continue on the first Tuesday of each month (except August 2017). It was agreed that any additional project work will have to be separate from the submitted workplan. This has been discussed with Deirdre and Gerry. Kate felt it would be useful for an ongoing update of the action plan to show progress on each of the actions using the traffic light system to indicate change/ achievement e.g. red, amber and green. Kate asked that if members had any further comments on the action plan they should submit these by Friday 7th April. **Action: RRF.**

1. **Private Rental Sector – proposals for change consultation**

The consultation closed on Friday. An extension of one week has been granted to submit an RRF response. Aidan highlighted some of the proposed changes, in particular, the issue of affordability. It is proposed that legislation will be introduced that rent can only be increased once within a 12-month period. Aidan agreed to send link with the document and summary to members. He asked that any comments should be with him by Friday 7th April. **Action: Aidan/RRF.**

1. **Issue of increasing housing unfitness in rural areas**

An event was held at RCN on Rural Poverty and Isolation. Rural housing unfitness was highlighted as being an issue. There is no measurement of rural unfitness. Eoin said the warm homes scheme is council targeted and dependent upon postcode - determination is in line with wards identified as having fuel poverty. He said he would get figures for NI from the Housing Executive Grant’s team he would ask the GIS team to map what areas have been targeted. That might help us to determine the areas where unfitness has risen or been addressed, and see where there are gaps. **Action: Eoin**

1. **Update on Participation and the Practice of Rights/PPR and Xchange work programme**

Funding had been award to Aidan for a project to look at rural housing need in two communities in Mid Ulster; Galbally/Cappagh and Ardboe. Work has been taking place with the community groups in these areas. Both communities are interested in what they can do themselves. Potential sites have been identified which are privately owned. Both areas are growing in population with increased enrolment in their primary schools.

Work is ongoing with the X-change work programme. PPR are engaged with this and are keen to attend a future RRF meeting. The organisation has carried out significant work in estates in Belfast, their ethos is for tenants to empower themselves. Kate thought this would be of relevance to the Ballyhornan area. Members felt that it would be useful to hear of the work of PPR. **Action: RCN to contact PPR about presentation at the September meeting.**

Kate informed members that Supporting Communities offered accredited OCN level 2 training in Tenants Participation and Community Development

It would be beneficial for members to attend this training. This would be a two-day course (with residential). Members felt that this would be beneficial. **Action: Kate will draft proposal and send to Deirdre.**

1. **Central update**

Central meeting took place on 8th March 2017. Discussion took place on:

Additional Welfare training – information and signposting of relevant services continues to be highlighted through e-zine and Supporting Communities website. A focus group has been formed with the Central forum to look at how information can be brought to HCN.

Conference working group – meetings are ongoing

Forum updates:

Youth Forum – engagement with the Verbal Arts Centre. Invitation has been extended to youth members to attend Central meetings.

Disability Forum – meeting with Verbal Arts Centre has taken place. Accessibility audit is continuing towards its conclusion.

Strategic Cohesion Forum – no progress at present

Scrutiny Panel updates:

West area/South Antrim area – new response from maintenance contractor.

South West area – housing solutions approach

Mid Ulster – tenancy management issues

South Down – completed report on COT

North Belfast – completed report on consultation on planned schemes

West Belfast – response maintenance

South & East Belfast – NIHE complaints and ASB.

Heating Service Contract:

* Presentation on the heating service contract will take place at the next Central meeting on 12th April 2017.
* Contracts will be awarded in six lots (two per region)
* Services will apply for 24 hours per day, seven days per week to cover all heating services.
* Appointments will include slots and timings
* Customer liaison and access arrangements for servicing, emergency call outs and other response maintenance of heating
* Joint training programme for staff and contractors will take place
* Invitation was made to Central to be represented on the planned schemes working group.

A discussion followed on how the positive outcomes of the work of forum members at their scrutiny panels could be captured and shared. It was felt there was not enough sharing of information across all of the scrutiny panel groups beyond the central Housing forum. Aidan suggested at the Community Conference it would be a good opportunity to have workshop format/slot so scrutiny panel groups could highlight an aspect of this work.

1. **Supporting Communities update**

*Strategic Plan –* Supporting Communities is currently reviewing its Strategic Plan for the forthcoming 3 years.

*Scottish Study Visit –* Following a request by TPAS Scotland,Supporting Communities played host to twelve Housing Professionals from across Scotland who were on a good practice study visit. The visit included a variety of projects from a Housing with Care facility, to allotments, to a Community Association and to a social enterprise.

*Social Enterprise Conference* – Supporting Communities representatives attended and provided an information stand at the Housing Executive’s Start it Up NI conference on 28th March 2017 in the Tullyglass Hotel, Ballymena. Social enterprise funding is opening again on 24 April. Information is available via NIHE website on http://www.nihe.gov.uk/index/community/community\_social\_housing\_investment\_scheme.htm  **Action: RCN will also promote this.**

*Good Governance Training* - Supporting Communities is continuing to roll out Good Governance training sessions across all areas in the coming months. There are two sessions covering two subjects – Effective Meetings & Good Governance and Managing Charity Finances.

For the dates of when training will be taking place in your local area please contact your Liaison Officer or visit: <http://supportingcommunities.org/latest-events>.

*Impact Pilot* – Reports are being finalised with 3 pilot groups (Greater Linenhall Community Association, Newry, Coleraine Inter-agency and South & East Belfast Scrutiny Panel) in terms of capturing the impact of their services, projects. Training has been completed and work is underway to complete reports.

*Thinking outside the Box Conference* – Supporting Communities, along with Housing Rights, have organised a one-day conference on the area and challenges of welfare reform. The event is taking place on Tuesday 9th May 2017 at the Skainos Centre, Belfast. The day will focus on equipping staff and empowering tenants through digital and financial inclusion with a range of speakers and workshops.

This event will be particularly important for all those involved in social housing as well as advice agencies and local government. Social housing tenants and residents’ groups are particularly welcome to attend.

*Support Services* - Funding advice, digital support and training are ongoing as well as support provided to Housing Associations in terms of Tenant Participation. Details of these services are available on Supporting Communities website.

Kate told members she had received a request form Stephanie of Supporting Communities to deliver a session with members on digital training. Members felt that this would be beneficial. **Action: Kate to arrange date with Stephanie.**

1. **Housing Executive Update**

The Housing Executive will have at stand at this year’s Balmoral Show which will take place from 13-17 May 2017. The RRF leaflet will be made available at the stand, this will be a good opportunity to promote the work of the RRF. The Community Awards will be launched here. There will be an extra award this time – Youth Involvement Champion. Kate suggested that Eoin speak to the NI Youth Forum. **Action: Kate will send Eoin the link to the organisation.**

Article for Rural Matters

Article will be submitted in the next Rural Matters on the work of the Rural Residents’ Forum detailing the key achievements of the group over the past year.

1. **Date of next meeting**

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