**Minutes of Rural Residents Meeting**

**Tuesday 5th September 2017**

**Present:** Susan Welsh, Anne Quinn, Phyllis Clarke, Clifford Wylie, June Livingstone, Patricia McQuillan and Mary Watson.

**Apologies:** Sam Lockhart, Gordon Speer, Martin McCartney, Noreen Rice, David Quinney Mee, Deirdre Crawford and Kate Clifford.

**In attendance:** Orla McCann, Eoin McKinney, Sinead Collins, Ciara McGivern and Mark Lunn (Graduate Trainees, NIHE).

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

Aidan welcomed everyone to the meeting. Introductions were made. Ciara McGivern and Mark Lunn who are Graduate Trainees with NIHE explained their roles. Ciara is based in the Cookstown office and she will be looking at vulnerability of the elderly in rural areas. Mark is based in Dungannon NIHE and is looking at Community Cohesion.

1. Matters arising

*Presentation from NIFHA*

Presentation had been emailed to members who could not attend the July meeting.

*Taster Session with Empowering Communities*

Kate has been in touch with Sheenagh McNally from Empowering Communities. The session won’t happen until the December meeting. Sheenagh and Conor from RCN have made contact also.

*Rural Housing Unfitness update*

No word back from CAB. Aidan had spoken to Gerard Tracey from DAERA about the MARA project which they funded. People were surveyed on fuel poverty, 50% referral assessment for fuel poverty. One third of the 50% were eligible, 16% overall received improvement measures. Gerard Tracey suggested contacting the Affordable Warmth Officers at the local councils.

Sinead suggested that the Affordable Warm team at NIHE also be contacted as they may have an idea of rural unfitness based on applications for rural replacement/renovation grants. She also suggested contacting the Environmental Health departments at the Councils as well.

**Action: Aidan to contact Affordable Warmth Officer at Mid Ulster Council, NIHE’s Affordable Warmth team and Environmental Health departments at the Councils.**

*Housing in Fivemiletown*

Phyllis reported that work is ongoing on the housing on the Main Street in

Fivemiletown.

1. Minutes of the previous meeting

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as being accurate.

Proposed by: Phyllis Clarke Seconded by: Clifford Wylie

1. Missing the rural new build target update

Briefing paper has been circulated. Meetings with political parties need to be organised. Aidan is looking at potential dates but this is proving difficult with the suspension of the Assembly. Members of RRF will also be at these meetings as it is important that MLAs hear from people on the ground.

Patricia said that she had updated the Housing Council meeting on this issue. The next meeting will be held on 21st September in Antrim. The CEO of NIHE is usually in attendance and meetings are chaired by John Finlay. Kelly Cameron is the contact for organising the meetings and Patricia said that a presentation would be required. It was agreed that our presentation would focus on latent demand and the missing rural target. Aidan is unable to attend the meeting. **Action: Aidan to contact Kelly Cameron regarding the presentation and time and to check with Kate if she can attend.**

Eoin reported that this year’s target for new build social housing in rural communities has increased to 13% as rural need has gone up.

1. Just Us/Gaslight opportunity

Kate has been contacted by Gaslight Media Trust regarding educational work involving Citizenship/Education programme with young people. Work is already happening in Belfast and Derry looking at issues of sectarianism and racism. The programme involves training Teachers and Youth workers to work with young people in rural areas. Feedback from urban areas is positive. The aim is to train 16 people to address conflict issues and they deliver the programme to young people they work with. Kate has contacted Deirdre regarding funding for the project. RRF members felt that this would be a worthwhile project for rural areas. Members were asked to think about issues in their own areas. **Action: RCN to email link from Gaslight Media trust to RRF members for further information.**

1. Site visits

The Broughshane visit was postponed as some of the members of the Castlederg delegation were unable to attend. No date yet has been confirmed for the visit.

The site visit to Fermanagh is proposed for 7th November. June said that the new building will be officially opened at the end of September. Sinead felt that visiting Trillick would also be beneficial. Sinead had met with the area manager about a test in Trillick as local Councillors felt that there was a need in the area. There are potential sites in the area with housing approval. Marilyn Giboney of NIHE is in contact with the Trillick group. **Action: Sinead is to contact Marilyn so she can check with the group if the RRF can visit.** Eoin felt that Carn Court could also be a potential visit.Other suggestion was the Arc Healthy Living Centre in Irvinestown. **Action: Eoin to contact Carn Court.**

1. Rural Unit update

Annual report has been completed and should be published by the end of September.  Expenditure figures for spend in rural communities is contained within the report as it is a requirement of the Rural Needs Act which comes into effect next year.  Rural Unit is working with Corporate Services department on measures which need to be introduced around training and governance before the Act takes full effect in June 2018. The first monitoring report is due in summer 2019.

Community awards – assessment is ongoing.  The presentation event is being organised, it is hoped to have more community representatives at the event which will hopefully take place at a community venue. It is hoped this will take place in November. Patricia suggested the event should link with a community group event which may increase community group representation.  **Action: Patricia to suggest this at the next Central and Housing Council meeting.**

Latent demand – there are lots of areas where NIHE are working to identify sites for housing development before undertaking a rural housing need test.  In Dromara the old PSNI station has been identified by Choice HA and NIHE are promoting the site and inviting people onto the local waiting list. In Trillick it looks on paper that there is no need in the area, however, local Councillors and Council has asked that a test be carried out.   Sinead is to meet with Michael Dallat and local planners today to discuss a latent demand test in Swatragh which local Councillors have asked for.  Discussion arose on eligibility for social housing.  Aidan used the example of survey of people in Ardboe area, many felt they were not eligible for social housing as they were not receiving benefits. Members felt the term social housing should be replaced with the term affordable housing.

Local development plans – meetings with planners in local councils will take place to highlight rural social housing, pushing for a development management approach which is important for rural areas where it is felt there is no need now (e.g. Fermanagh and Omagh). With the full impact of Welfare Reform not known yet there needs to be a policy in place and a more sustainable approach to address long term need.  Planners are coming around to the idea and are taking on board NIHE evidence.  NIHE will be consulted on any planning applications, 20% will be set aside for social housing.

1. Supporting communities update

Update will be circulated to members. **Action: Orla/Teresa**

1. Central update

Patricia gave verbal update at the meeting. Copy of the update will be emailed to members for information. **Action: Teresa.** Next Central meeting will take place on 14th September. Patricia spoke about presentation from Pat Hutchinson from Citizens Advice on the impact of Welfare Reform. Patricia said that the implications are going to be huge and she is gravely concerned about the impact it will have on vulnerable people especially.

1. Scrutiny panel update

Susan said that scrutiny panel meetings have been cancelled until the draft strategy has gone out for consultation. Orla said that that there will now be three regional scrutiny panels.

Mary reported that in the East area they have been given a date for the next meeting (21st September) and she has not received information that the meetings will not be taking place. Draft business plans were discussed. **Action:** Aidan to check with Deirdre what the position is and when it is going out to consultation.

The Southern area scrutiny panel will take place on 19th September.

Garvagh inspection – Patricia said a lot of work has been done as a result e.g. weed spraying etc which has had a positive effect on the area.

1. Any other business

Advice NI in conjunction with RCN is holding a Universal Credit Information Session at RCN on Tuesday 12th September. There are a few places remaining.

Knowing Your Rural Social Value project, a 12-month pilot project helping rural groups measure the wider economic, social, and environmental outcomes of their work in their local area is being organised by RCN.

Raising the Standards of Fundraising in Northern Ireland Workshop will take place at RCN on Thursday 28th September 2017 from 2-4pm. This workshop will provide guidance and support to charities to understand implications of fundraising self regulation and grow best practiceThis workshop will provide guidance and support to charities to understand implications of fundraising self regulation and grow best practiceThe workshop will provide guidance and support to charities to help them develop best practice.

Good impact awareness session will take place at RCN on 11th October from 10.30am to 12.30pm. The session will look at Good Impact Practice and the Public Benefit Requirement. **Action: RRF members to contact RCN if they are interested in any of the events.**

Community conference – the conference will take place on 2nd November in the Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick. The conference will have a new format and RRF members will have an input. Patricia will keep members updated on developments. **Action: Patricia.**

1. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at RCN on Tuesday 3rd October 2017 at 10.30am.