

Minutes of Rural Residents' Meeting

Tuesday 4th October 2016

Present: Patricia McQuillan, Sam Lockhart, Clifford Wylie, Mary Watson, and Martin McCartney.

Apologies: Phyllis Clarke, June Livingstone, Barry Boyle, Susan Welsh, Noreen Rice, Orla McCann, Aidan Campbell, Deirdre Crawford and Gerry Duffy.

In attendance: Sinead Collins, Eoin McKinney, Kate Clifford and Teresa McKernan

1.0 Presentations

Presentations were delivered on Homeless Strategy Consultation by Richard Tanswell, Homeless Strategy Manager with NIHE on Housing Options Pilot by Mark Alexander, Area Manager in Causeway.

Key dates for the Homelessness strategy are:

- November 2016 report to go to NIHE Board.
- Dec/January 2017 Consultation to be undertaken
- April 2017 Publication of a 5 year Strategy.

A record of the discussion:

Sam explained that they were aware of very successful tenancy support and management in the Newry office with Loma Wilson. He described a support service that wrapped around the individual in a proactive way. He said that they helped people to be tenancy ready and undertook regular follow up and support for tenants. They worked to help people to budget and manage their tenancy to ensure they stayed ahead of their rent and the upkeep of their homes.

There was a discussion about rural homelessness

- Hidden – people living in unsuitable, unfit and overcrowded conditions – but don't know to ask for support or are not registered as needing housing support.
- We need to be aware that some people will not present as homeless or they cannot find a solution in sheltered homes as their mental health issue would prevent them from taking up a place/tenancy or support service.
- Some people with health issues or caring responsibilities cannot go where temporary homes are offered as they may be too distant from their responsibilities or the support mechanism they have in place (day opportunities or day centre)
- People living in caravans on the side of others homes maybe hidden homelessness.
- Need a clearer communication strategy on helping people to understand about waiting lists, tenancy options and

homelessness. It was felt advice leaflets should be placed in public places such as doctors surgery's advice centres etc.

- Latent demand testing is key to knowing there is a need in an area but people need to be registered on a list to prove the need in the community. It can be hard to achieve this list of people in need of homes. People need to come forward and say where they come from and where they would most like to find a house – this should be kept on a live database.
- The NIHE communications strategy about rural homelessness (recognition of the problem and potential solutions for the target audience) is key to the success of this project
- Is it more difficult to maintain a tenancy in a situation where a person has difficulties when they are a HA tenant or a private landlord tenant – are they more likely to be evicted from this type of accommodation than from an NIHE tenancy?
- A question was asked if those in need of temporary accommodation are most likely to be placed in the first available housing option – i.e. with private landlord – is this the least secure type of tenancy./ NIHE offers long term tenancy and support services private rented accommodation offers none of that . is it fair to put vulnerable people in the most vulnerable tenancy arrangements?
 - There is a real need to strengthen the regulation on private landlords especially if tenants are being discharged from NIHE to private rented sector– these people are very vulnerable.
- Potential conflict in current policy drivers SHRP is about creating a home for life for people in rented accommodation but there is now under 'welfare reform' an ambition to move people to different types of homes as their life circumstances change, now the homelessness strategy makes mention of a 'lifelong sustained tenancy'. NIHE is not sending out a consistent message.
- There was concern among the group of the impact of significant external circumstances which lead to uncertainty about how the future might look: these include SHRP, Welfare reform and Brexit.

Mary mentioned local experience of dealing with single people in their late 40s/50s who are housed in substandard private rentals who receive little or no support. They are often evicted to hostels which are located in cities or towns far from social support networks – they appear to be missing from the strategy. She said the biggest reason for people not sustaining a tenancy.

Richard said that DfC will be setting up a working group of Permanent secretaries to buy into the concept of health and homelessness being complex issues. Hostels and 'wet' hostels in particular should be available for those with alcohol issues – Patricia said on a recent visit to a major city she was shocked at the levels of street drinking and homelessness.

Other Rural specific comments included:

- Large families in many homes - no bed available in the home or the house for other members of the family – family sleeping on top of one another due to overcrowding.
- Improvement grants for homes to help people stay in their homes should be reintroduced – unfitness is on the rise.
- Affordable warmth scheme are working especially in tackling issues of fuel poverty.
- Discretionary grants are seldom publicised but many people would potentially qualify for them and would prevent people falling into rent arrears.
- Latent demand: people need to come forward and register where they come from, where they would prefer to live (first choice of location) and where they would be prepared to travel to and from and where they are eventually located – so when housing is proposed we have capacity to go back to them to see would they consider moving back to the area they came from. (potential for the IT system to be configured in such a way as to highlight the desired first choice of tenants – it enables a more successful latent demand test – make use of the technology to help uncover demand)
- Welfare reform: how will single tenancies be accommodated in the future – planning laws in some areas are so restrictive there will be no opportunity for single dwellings for individuals – we need better forward planning to help accommodate those who are alone. Be aware that if a single person and a couple are on a waiting list and a two bed accommodation becomes available then even if the single person has higher points the couple will get priority – this creates huge discrimination against those who are alone.

Mark Alexander – causeway Coast and Glens NIHE office:

6700 properties in the area and a waiting list of 2500. He works on addressing housing needs across causeway and allocation around causeway. Key to their service is an ability to respond to need through the provision of temporary accommodation. He stated that 54% of people with complex housing needs are moved outside of causeway to access accommodation. This compares with on 15% in Carnlough (Mid and East Antrim) he asked that we would support him to lobby for access to temporary accommodation.

He gave an overview of the housing support project he is running.

The service is shaped around the client and starts before someone becomes a tenant and runs while they are a tenant providing good aftercare and support to sustain a tenancy.

There is recognition that moving to an 'online system' fails to take account of the customers' needs and ability to communicate the circumstances they find themselves in – there is a belief that it drives failure into a system...so tenants resist getting in touch or coming forward until they reach a crises point – for others on-line

is too hard a concept for them to contemplate – they fall through the system and they could be caught much earlier.

Mark says the target is to reduce homelessness but he has seen little change made to waiting lists (not a key target) 100 people have been prevented from becoming homeless through this support system and 90 people are now supported and housed within the private rented sector.,
He warned that unfitness in properties is on the increase.

Action point:
Mark has asked RRF to come to Coleraine to see the services they have to offer

2.0 Matters arising

Welfare Reform

Welfare Reform group has been established. Representatives from the group will be invited to attend a future Rural Residents' meeting. **Action: RCN.**

Homelessness Strategy

A copy of the homelessness strategy presentation had been emailed to members prior to today's meeting. A hard copy of Mark's presentation was circulated to members at today's meeting. Mark extended an invite to the RRF to visit Coleraine to showcase what is being done in the area.

3.0 Minutes of meeting

Minutes of last meeting of 6th September were approved as being accurate.

Proposed by: Patricia McQuillan Seconded by Mary Watson

4.0 Community conference planning

Eoin requested information as to what area each RRF member represents.
Action: Teresa to send this to Eoin.

Martin asked who from the RRF sits on the North West Scrutiny Panel.
Action: Kate will speak to Linda Watson.

The RRF has been allocated a 10minute slot at the conference. At present the video is being edited. Kate asked that members forward to her details of activities within their local area. **Action: RRF members.** A map will show

each person's area with their name and organisation they represent. Members will then have a short sentence prepared on 'what they get from being a member of the RRF'. A list of key achievements of the Forum will also be shown.

5.0 Supporting Communities update

In Orla's absence, Kate read out the Supporting Communities update:

Tenant Involvement in Governance – “Where Next for NI?” Workshops – there are 3 half day workshops coming up on
Wed 19.10.16 – Twickenham House, Ballymena 1pm – 4pm
Thurs 20.10.16 – Belfast Castle 1pm – 4pm
Fri 21.10.16 – Marlborough House, Craigavon 10am – 1pm
These have been organised by NIHE and University of Birmingham to enable tenants of Housing Executive and Housing Associations in NO to discuss tenant involvement in governance and hear about other models e.g. in Amsterdam, Austria, Wales and England. Anyone interested, please contact laura@supportingcommunities.org to reserve your place. Travel expenses and attendance is payable to HCN members only.

Charity Commission – there are a number of workshops coming up across NI on good governance focussing on new accounting and reporting rules and regulations. Details of workshops can be found on Supporting Communities Ezine.

“Successful Funding Applications” workshop – a half day training session will be held on Friday 14th October from 10.30am to 1pm in Supporting Communities HQ, 34-36 Henry St, Ballymena. Contact roisin@supportingcommunities.org or karla@supportingcommunities.org to book your place.

Staff Update – New Liaison Officers will be commencing this week – Siobhan O'Neill for the South Area and Darragh O'Neill for South West. A new Senior Training Officer, Aidan Kearney, has also started and is based in HQ.

6.0 Central update

At the meeting on 7th September, there was a presentation on the impact of Welfare Reform. The presentation focused on changes to availability and qualification for benefits.

There was also a presentation on Welfare Reform and Housing Benefit changes. Issues were contact with tenants and claimants and how best to ensure that claims don't fall through the net, the use of IT and role of patch management, introduction of Universal credit and increased arrears when housing benefit are included in universal credit were discussed.

At meeting on 14th September meeting:

Digital inclusion project – progress to be reported. Central to receive tablets and training.

Central members presented to Housing Council on 15th September on the work of the Forums.

Intercommunity Network has been renamed. New name is Non Strategic Cohesion Forum.

Big Lottery Fund gave a presentation on their three main programmes; Awards For All, People and Communities and Empowering Youth.

NIHE Continuous Omnibus survey – presentation on tenant satisfaction level. Commented on new maintenance contracts that might have an impact.

Different forms of communication was discussed. Funding information leaflet was circulated at the meeting.

7.0 Scrutiny panel update

Mary – next meeting is Tuesday 11th September.

Sam /Clifford– provided notes of the meeting (copy enclosed with minutes)

Martin – Community planning events will take place in the Derry/Strabane Council area next week.

ECN – (Interagency Meeting) Patricia – as a result of the state inspection, painting has now been done. Check this with Kate

8.0 Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place at RCN on Tuesday **8th November 2016 at 10.30am.**