

Minutes of Special Meeting of Mid Ulster District Council held on Thursday 21 September 2017 in the Council Offices, Circular Road, Dungannon

Members Present: Councillor Ashton, Chair

Councillors Bateson, Burton, Cuthbertson, Doris, Elattar, Gillespie, Glasgow, McAleer (7.07pm), McEldowney, McFlynn, S McGuigan, McKinney, Milne, Molloy (7.04pm), Mullen (7.03pm), Mulligan, J O'Neill, M Quinn, Reid, Robinson (7.04pm) and Wilson

Officers in Attendance: Mr Tohill, Chief Executive
Mr M Kelso, Director of Public Health and Infrastructure
Mr P Moffett, Head of Democratic Services
Mrs E Forde, Member Support Officer
Ms Totten, Community Planning Co-ordinator

In Attendance: Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Siobhan McCauley, Director of Regional Services
Comghal McQuillan, Regional Director South
Michael Dallat, Senior Principal Officer
Ailbhe Hickey, Head of Place Shaping
Keery Irvine, Principal Officer

The meeting commenced at 7 pm.

SC29/17 Apologies

Councillors Cuddy, Mallaghan McGinley, B McGuigan McLean, McNamee Monteith and G Shiels

SC30/17 Declarations of Interest

The Chair reminded Members of their responsibility with regard to declarations of interest.

Councillor Elattar declared an interest as Council's representative on the Housing Council for N Ireland

SC31/17 Chair's Business

Councillor J O'Neill advised that the Tyrone under 17s had won the All Ireland Championship stating that they were the first team to win the title and asked if consideration could be given for a civic reception to mark the achievement. He advised that three of the players were from the O'Rahilly's GAA Club in Coalisland.

The Chair Councillor Ashton advised that the request should be submitted to Democratic Services.

Councillor S McGuigan concurred with Councillor O'Neill advising that five members of the team were from Killeeshil which was a third division club and it was good to see younger talent coming through. He further advised that the Tyrone ladies team were in the final at the weekend.

The Chair Councillor Ashton advised that together with Councillor Burton she had attended the Ulster in Bloom Awards at which Castlecaulfield Horticultural Society had secured first place and Donaghmore Horticultural Society had secured second place. The Chair further advised that Mr Bob McClure Joint Chair of Castlecaulfield Horticultural Society had been awarded the Community Champion Award and conveyed congratulations to all.

SC32/17 Northern Ireland Housing Executive

The Chair, Councillor Ashton welcomed representatives from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to the meeting. Ms McCauley introduced the team from NIHE and delivered a presentation (appendix 1) detailing the Mid Ulster Housing Investment Plan.

Councillor Molloy, Mullen and Robinson entered the meeting at 7.04pm
Councillor McAleer entered the meeting at 7.07 pm

The Chair, Councillor Ashton thanked the representative for the presentation and acknowledged their work in the local area emphasising the necessity of local contacts together with a local base. The Chair invited questions from Members.

Councillor Cuthbertson expressed his thanks to the Senior Principal Officer and his team and sought clarification regarding the 230 properties scheduled for a double glazing scheme in 2017/18. Mr Dallat advised that the windows being replaced were double glazed timber windows which were more than 15 years old. He advised that replacement is determined on age and condition. Ms McCauley advised that some people actually prefer wooden window frames as opposed to PVC and it was noted that the wood was more expensive.

Councillor Wilson put on record his thanks to staff in the Cookstown Housing Executive office and commended them on their involvement with the Burn Road, Cookstown housing scheme. Councillor Wilson asked:

- (i) Could empty properties be brought back in to use;
- (ii) Welcomed the increase in grant allocation as he was very supportive of helping people where they were and asked if the current cuts would impact grants as this could lead to future bed blocking in hospitals;
- (iii) Welcomed the increase in small grants but asked if they could be better publicised.

Ms McCauley in response to question two advised that in relation to supporting people there had been much media interest and emphasised that all of the money received by NIHE was issued and none of it was ring fenced or retained. In relation to cuts she advised that budgets had been cut by 5% in real terms. Ms McCauley

advised that the sector had experienced pressures but the special needs management allowance had stayed in place. She emphasised money received by NIHE for the sector was issued in its entirety but emphasised the need for greater efficiencies.

With regard to small grants Ms McCauley advised that in relation to the 'Warm Homes' scheme that the budget was being drawn upon and if it was publicised further, demand would be difficult to meet. Ms McCauley spoke of grants in relation to unfit properties and stated that whilst some applications were being received more could be encouraged. She further advised that statutory grant funding could not be reallocated to other budgets.

Mr Dallat advised that the private housing grant spend in Mid Ulster had gone up from £1.5 million to £1.54 million in the current year. He advised that he did not have a figure for empty homes in the private sector but confirmed that NIHE had currently 35 empty properties. He stated they would anticipate a 6% turnover and advised that 40% of housing turnover was in relation to transferring people to more suitable accommodation as family circumstances change. He advised that the Mid Ulster region was in the top of the public vacant stock turnover.

Councillor Doris stated that victims of domestic abuse did not receive 'intimidation' housing points and asked if there were any plans to change this. Ms McCauley advised that the Department for Communities was currently consulting on this matter. Ms McCauley advised that all points were issued within the recommended guidelines and that viewpoints expressed in the consultation would be taken into consideration.

Councillor Reid expressed his thanks for both the report presented and ongoing work, particularly repair work. In relation to vacant houses he asked if the reallocation process could be sped up and he sought clarity in relation to emergency callouts relating to an incident in another region where someone had apparently been called out to undertake something as minor as change a lightbulb.

In response Mr Dallat advised that the target for reallocating properties was 22 days but within Mid Ulster the current turnaround was 15 days. He advised that people were 'on call' 24/7 but advised that calls were triaged and that the NIHE would not send someone out to change a lightbulb, unless it was a communal light in for example a block of flats which would pose a hazard if the area was in darkness.

Ms McCauley stated that perhaps the conversation in relation to the light bulb was somewhat anecdotal as it would not be standard practise but emphasised that she was keen to follow up what appeared to be an irregularity. Councillor Reid re-emphasised that it had been in another area but would pass the information to Mr Dallat.

Councillor Bateson advised he had previously raised the issue of accommodation for travellers at Toomebridge and stated it would appear there was nothing being done to address the problems and if this was the case, why and whom was responsible.

Councillor Cuthbertson left the meeting at 7.27pm

In response Mr Dallat clarified that the issue was raised at the special council meeting in 2016 and since then he had met with the Councillor and Head of Planning. He advised that the situation was somewhat difficult as the families were reluctant to engage but progress had been made and seven families had now agreed to engage, and two have indicated they would be moving on. He further advised, with the support of the Council, that they were endeavouring to establish if any statutory agencies had land available for a potential site and clarified that a feasibility study had been carried out on access sites in Magherafelt but none had proved suitable. He added that it was unclear as to exactly what the families wanted, for example a group housing scheme, a permanent halting site or a temporary halting site.

Councillor Bateson asked if the terms of the assessment procedure was the same for the travelling community as that of the settled community or was it an adhoc process. He also sought clarity as to who made the determination as to the suitability of a site.

Mr Dallat advised that professional Planners review the design guide for traveller sites and make the determination. He emphasised that guidelines were rigorous highlighting, for example, the flatness of the site, the need for screening, and its location i.e. not to be adjacent to an industrial site. He further stated that the needs for each group of travellers is quite different and that 96% of travellers do not want to live in caravans. Mr Dallat clarified that if travellers were seeking social housing they were treated the same as everyone else and advised that if a group of families sought a group housing scheme they have to apply for this and emphasised that NIHE would not specifically undertake a building scheme for this. He added that in most cases families move on.

Councillor Bateson stated that he was happy to engage with the NIHE and the Travellers in resolving the matter. In response Mr Dallat stated that he would welcome the involvement.

Councillor Gillespie highlighted the lack of access to properties at Ivy Bank Park, Donaghmore stating that residents have to store bins to the front of the properties and carry lawnmowers through the house. He advised that residents were willing to relinquish part of their gardens to attain an access path. Councillor Gillespie stressed that there were health and safety issues in relation to the lack of access at the back of the properties.

In response Mr Dallat stated that he would discuss the matter with the Councillor at the conclusion of the meeting recalling that there had been a proposed scheme in the past.

SC33/17 CMIS – Committee Management System

It was noted that the CMIS committee system had been introduced and that meeting packs were now being issued through the system. Anyone requiring support should contact the Democratic Services team.

SC34/17 Duration of Meeting

The meeting was called for 7.00pm and ended at 7.37 pm

Chair _____

Date _____