

NIHE Supporting People Three Year Draft Strategic Plan and Covid 19 Recovery Plan 2022-2025

Mid Ulster District Council welcomes NIHE's commitment to the Supporting People Programme. A vital programme supporting the most vulnerable to live independently, achieving better quality outcomes for both tenant and society.

The impact of growing gap between housing support service provision and demand is being felt at a local level in Mid Ulster. Elected members and council services are increasingly dealing with the social impact of vulnerable people, living in inappropriate accommodation with little or no support. It is critical that this Plan addresses this and Council supports all efforts in closing the service need gap.

The Mid Ulster Community Plan, also aims to improve the lives of the people of Mid Ulster, through the provisions of good quality housing and services. The Mid Ulster Community Plan and Mid Ulster Anti-Poverty Plan has a number of actions and programmes targeted at the client groups of the Supporting People Programme such as older people, victims of domestic violence, those with poor mental health and people experiencing acute poverty.

Older people

Mid Ulster district is projected to have the highest percentage change of over 65 plus of all 11 council areas (87%). Therefore, planning for an aging population is a priority for Mid Ulster and this is reflected in the Mid Ulster Community Plan.

Ageing Well is one of the first actions to emerge from the Mid Ulster Community Plan, which brings voluntary, community and public sector partners together to plan and deliver better services for older people. The Agewell programme provides two important services to approximately 1000 individual older or vulnerable people living in the Mid Ulster area, The Good Morning Service and the Home Maintenance Service. The programme aims to reduce isolation, improve the safety, security and health and well-being of older and vulnerable people in the District. The second phase of the

Community Plan's Ageing Well action is to explore the possibility of Mid Ulster district becoming an 'Age Friendly Society', working towards the World Health Organisation's (WHO) age friendly status. This process includes a comprehensive strategy and action plan to help cater for the ageing population and will require the commitment of all Community Planning Partners, including NIHE.

In line with NIHE's commitments to older people within this Strategic Plan and as a Community Planning statutory partner, Mid Ulster would seek continued and future commitment from the NIHE to the Agewell programme and the development of an Age Friendly Society status for Mid Ulster.

In the Department for Health's Reform of Adult Social Care Consultation paper (January 2022), under their Priority 6 "Primacy of Home" (the purpose of adult social care, is to support citizens to live well in their own home in connection to their families, social networks and communities), it proposes that *"the Department of Health and the HSC works more closely with the Department for Communities and NI Housing Executive around future strategies for specialist and supported housing to ensure more effective alignment between housing and social care."* Council supports this as a priority for our older people and believes that a final Supporting People Strategic Plan should also commit to this regional priority and make reference to the DoH's Reform of Adult Social Care Plan.

Victims of Domestic Violence

Mid Ulster concurs with the Plan's identification of women at risk of domestic abuse as a priority group. The Pandemic has led to a significant increase in instances of domestic violence, causing many women and their children to seek alternative accommodation.

As a result, whilst there is inevitably be an increased demand on the Supporting People's services, there is also an increase demand for appropriate housing for these vulnerable women and children. In recent years, a significant number of women and children at considerable risk have been unable to secure accommodation in Mid Ulster Women's Aid Refuge because of lack of capacity. Council is currently working with Causeway and Mid Ulster Women's Aid and Apex Housing Association on the delivery

of much needed Move On accommodation for their clients in Cookstown as the next step back to normal housing situations. Such developments address the specific needs of those affected by violence and release other properties to address the wider social housing need in the area. This scheme will require the provision of Supporting People Programme to assist the vulnerable tenants and Council trusts that NIHE will successfully support the scheme in Cookstown. Council would also advocate for the extended provision of such schemes across the region.

Homelessness

Even though Mid Ulster has a low level of rough sleeping, it does have a significant level of hidden homelessness with many homeless people 'sofa surfing', relying on friends and families to provide accommodation in houses that are already at full capacity, causing further stress to other family units.

It is now a well established fact that chronic homelessness is associated with people who suffer a range of complex issues such as poor mental health, drug and alcohol addiction. However, there are further associated issues, including in Mid Ulster the inability of tenants to pay rents that are beyond reasonable levels. Homelessness caused by affordability of rental properties is becoming a major issue, particularly in the Dungannon town area and as a result many tenants are experiencing recurring homelessness. As a result, many individuals and families are leading unstable and chaotic lifestyles by living in unsuitable B&B, hostel, emergency and temporary accommodation. Furthermore, social housing providers are making housing allocations without consideration of support needs for the individual/families. This often worsens their situation and exacerbates their dependencies resulting in recurring temporary placements and serial housing failure.

Council are of the opinion that the delivering upon the objectives of this Strategic Plan for people suffering homelessness and its contributing factors, changes must be made to housing allocations that take account of family togetherness, community cohesion, and access to transport services, education and employment with the view of providing an integrated holistic approach to long-term housing sustainability. It is fundamental that homelessness is addressed through a multifaceted approach involving statutory, voluntary and community sectors to ensure that people experiencing chronic

homelessness are provided with appropriate permanent housing in their areas of choice along with tailored support to meet their individual needs. It is imperative that the NIHE, Housing Associations and partner agencies are committed to eradicating the homeless problem by investing the necessary resources.

People with Disabilities

Mid Ulster District Council is acutely aware of the lack of support services for people with disabilities, including housing support. The Council's Community Development Officer for Disability works with all disability groups throughout the district who continually highlight the lack of supported housing for their members.

In addition, Mid Ulster District Council is a member of the NHCCT's ASD Independence Choice & Control Working Group. This group are currently looking at the support services available to adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in order for them to have choice over their living arrangements and ultimately able to live independently. Currently, housing support services are only available to adults diagnosed with a Learning Disability. Council would support the view of this group that Adults with ASD should also be eligible to access these services. Adults with ASD have considerable difficulties in carrying out many day to day activities and struggle greatly with life skills such as cooking, cleaning, managing their finances etc, which impacts greatly on their ability live independently in their own home. Access to housing support services would ensure these adults are supported to develop the necessary skills to maintain an independent life and improve their overall quality of life.

Supported Housing

Mid Ulster Council is of the view that the adequate provision of supported housing has a significant impact in the ability to provide high quality housing support services. The 2021 annual update of the Housing Investment Plan for Mid Ulster states that "the gross, three year (2021/24) SHDP contains no supported housing schemes for Mid Ulster as there is currently no identified or known requirement for supported housing in the district". However, Mid Ulster Community Plan has identified a need for supported housing across the District for people with physical disabilities, older people and vulnerable women who are victims of domestic violence. A specific need has also been identified in Dungannon for people with learning disabilities which was been

brought to the attention of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust who recognised the need but stated that there is no current funding. There has been no supported housing provision in the last number of years, which would call into question the suggestion that there is a lack of need whilst other plans and engagements with the sectors have identified a real need. There is confusion around whether Need or lack of resource is driving the agenda.

It is appreciated that resources to implement supported living models over the last number of years has been reduced. However, Mid Ulster Community Planning would request that the issue is given prioritisation. Council would seek a review of supported housing needs for people, through a Community Planning process with all key partners and identify potential housing partnerships that could take this forward.

Social & Affordable Housing Supply

Mid Ulster has one of the highest levels of social housing need and this is reflected in the level of housing stress. At March 2021, there were 2,158 applicants on the waiting list for Mid Ulster with 1,267 in housing stress and only 283 allocations over the year. A significant proportion of the housing stress stems from the affordability of other rented options; both private and some housing association provision. NIHE has identified a social housing need of 718 units required for the 2020/2025 period. There were 30 units completed and 93 units onsite at March 2021; and 217 units programmed for the 2021/2024 period, falling well short of what is required by 2025.

Mid Ulster District Council supports the NIHE's Supporting People's Programmes and its commitment to the priority groups. However, Council is of the strong opinion that the fulfilment of this Strategic Plan and its ability to support the most vulnerable to live independently will be significantly hindered by the chronic lack of social and affordable housing. The provision of a secure, quality standard home is fundamental to supporting our citizen's in living independent good quality lives. Without it, this Plan and the Supporting People's services will only be able to address the symptoms and not the root causes of housing breakdown and failures. Mid Ulster Council is working closely with the NIHE to address the issue of social housing provision in the district and would like to take this opportunity to reinforce its commitment to finding solutions to this issue.