

# SCENE

Supporting  
Communities  
Events  
News  
Empowering



**A publication providing updates, news and information from Supporting Communities**



## Supporting Communities Chair, Lorraine Campbell Reflects on 2016 and the year ahead

The past year has proven to be another very busy and productive time for Supporting Communities. We have continued our focus on developing the profile and position of the organisation, whilst ensuring that we continue to work towards our vision of 'creating engaged, confident, sustainable and inclusive communities'.

Supporting Communities is looking forward to strengthening our position and relationships with all our stakeholders, clients and partners, and further improving our service to the community.

### What's Next for Supporting Communities?

One of the biggest changes that Supporting Communities is working on for our future, under the guidance of the Board, is the establishment of our new Company Ltd by Shares which will be launched in Spring 2017.

We value the Housing Executive's support for this diversification of our services and we believe working with more housing associations will enrich our opportunities to encourage community empowerment. Most housing estates are multi-tenure and Supporting Communities can engage all stakeholders in community regeneration. We will also be able to benchmark tenant engagement across all housing bodies and thus drive service improvement for all social tenants.

### Meet Our Board

Supporting Communities Board continues to grow from strength to strength and over the past 3 years has appointed Directors with a wide range of expertise in the fields of housing, governance, finance, local government, business, and of course, community development.

As part of this growth, we are delighted to welcome 2 new Directors, who were appointed at our recent AGM. Joe Simpson, who has extensive experience in Human Resources and Consultancy and Steve Pollard, a Lecturer within the Ulster University's, Business School. Both bring extensive expertise in HR, Business Development, Risk Management and Social Enterprise. This enhanced skill set makes us a more confident organisation with renewed strategic direction and effective management. You can find short biographies of all of our board members on our website.

I look forward to this new year with it's new opportunities and to working with Linda Watson, our Vice Chair, as well as the rest of the Board and staff to make 2017 an even more successful and productive year.



Members of Supporting Communities Board



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## Forward Looking: Implementing the Tenant Participation Strategy

Colm McDaid,  
Chief Executive



It is one year since Supporting Communities welcomed the Tenant Participation Strategy for NI 2015-2020 which was launched by the then Minister for Social Development, Lord Morrow, in January 2016.

The Strategy sets out ways in which tenant participation services could be introduced within Northern Ireland's social housing sector and laid out 10 principles of meaningful tenant participation, i.e. what social landlords should do to give tenants the opportunity and choice to participate in the decisions that affect them. The Strategy also established a Regulatory Standard around tenant participation for all social housing providers.

This long awaited strategy is the first of its kind for NI and followed an extensive consultation process which not only engaged with social landlords but also with many tenants and community/tenant groups across Northern Ireland.

In fact, the consultation exercise produced over 200 responses – an excellent response rate for any government consultation exercise, but not surprising, given the importance of the strategy and its intention to increase tenant involvement in the delivery of social housing services thereby improving the quality of services for both tenants and landlords.

Apart from lobbying for the introduction of a Tenant Participation Strategy for NI for many years, Supporting Communities played a key role in working closely with our colleagues in the Department for Communities from as far back as 2013. This included organising and facilitating many joint workshops as well as a conference where both Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants had an input into the development and compilation of the Draft Tenant Participation Strategy, which was then used as part of the consultation process.

The introduction of the Tenant Participation Strategy for NI in January 2016 included an Action Plan which set out 6 Key Actions:

- Establish an Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO)
- Develop guidance to support the Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020
- Monitor the development of Tenant Participation

- Strategies by individual social housing providers
- Establish a Tenant Advocate Role
- Establish a Housing Policy Panel
- Develop proposals to introduce empowerment in NI

I am delighted to say that Supporting Communities has played an important role in supporting social housing providers in Northern Ireland both prior to and since the introduction of the Tenant Participation Strategy. For example, Supporting Communities, through a comprehensive Service Level Agreement, has supported the Housing Executive and their tenant engagement structure as well as assisting in the delivery of their Community Involvement Strategies for over 25 years. Indeed, the Housing Executive's engagement with their tenants and customers has been held up as 'best practice' for social landlords not only locally but further afield and this is reflected in the content of the Tenant Participation Strategy itself.

Along with our ongoing support to the Housing Executive, Supporting Communities has also provided a support service to at least 13 Housing Associations over the past 10 years. This support has included facilitating mystery shopping, tenant led inspection exercises and sharing good practice in key areas of tenant participation and digital inclusion.

As a direct result of the increase in demand for support from the voluntary housing movement, we created a new post (Housing Association Development Officer) several years ago in order to provide a dedicated service to housing associations. Sheenagh McNally, in this role, has assisted housing associations in reviewing their existing engagement structures and governance arrangements. She has also facilitated consultation with their respective tenants in shaping future involvement options, one of the key requirements of the Tenant Participation Strategy for NI 2015-2020. Additional support has included capacity building and training for tenants, staff and board members on the benefits of tenant participation as well as providing independent advice and support on a range of services. (See more on pages 6 & 7)

I look forward to the Tenant Participation Strategy for NI 2015-2020 and its related Action Plan being fully implemented in the very near future, including the establishment of an Independent Tenant's Organisation, a crucial element of the action plan in ensuring that the other 5 actions are progressed.

Given the ongoing work and support that Supporting Communities already provides to the social rented sector and landlords across Northern Ireland, I believe that we are best placed to fulfil this important role. As an organisation, we are ready and able to provide continuity in the excellent work already done in promoting, developing and sustaining effective tenant participation for the social housing sector.

## Inter-Agency Working has National Appeal at Scottish Conference

Supporting Communities was pleased to play a key role at this year's TPAS Scotland's Annual Conference by promoting our approach to Inter-Agency working. The event, which hosted over 400 delegates from all over Scotland and the Isles, featured a packed programme with over 30 workshops to choose from on a diverse array of housing-related topics including scrutiny, housing for people with dementia, digital projects, the Scottish Social Housing Charter, mediation services, tenants involvement in the review of services and more.

Sheenagh McNally, Supporting Communities Housing Association Development Officer, was honoured to present the closing session of the Conference. Her presentation guided the audience through Supporting Communities involvement in Inter-Agency work over the last two decades and demonstrated the impact and value by discussing real life community stories.

Sheenagh remarked:

*"The aim of my presentation was to highlight the importance and the impact of Inter-Agency partnerships in sustaining our communities. The main thrust was to inform the audience of the very real benefits of Inter-Agency work, the impact it has and continues to have on the communities we work in, as well as to be honest and acknowledge that there are challenges involved."*

The main section of the presentation told 'real stories' in order to demonstrate the benefits, impact and challenges faced by communities in Northern Ireland. Inter-Agency working did not happen overnight, it evolved as issues came up in communities that required help beyond the scope of what their landlord could do. Gradually, it was accepted that a holistic approach was needed to address complex problems. As a result, the Housing Executive implemented Estate Based Strategies that put Inter-Agency partnerships fully at their core.

Supporting Communities has been at the centre of this work from the start. We currently maintain 46 Inter-Agency groups across NI and in 2015-16 facilitated 200 meetings addressing a range of community interests. The role our Liaison Officers play is fundamental in effectively managing the



process and bringing the right people together to accomplish positive change.

Sheenagh spoke in detail about the incredible transformation her work with an Inter-Agency group has brought about in the Brownlow/Drumellan area of Craigavon over 20 years. This estate suffered from severe anti-social behaviour in the mid 90s which drove many people to move away and left 170 properties vandalised beyond use. She credited the steadfast resolve of a group of local volunteers and the development of a strong working relationship with all of the statutory agencies for turning the estate around and creating the safe and vibrant community it is today. The presentation was very warmly received and it was a terrific opportunity to showcase the great work that is going on every day here in Northern Ireland.



Lesley Baird, Chief Executive of TPAS Scotland told us,

*"We always like to ensure delegates leave the conference having learned new skills, gained knowledge and are inspired. This year the delegates were truly inspired by the presentation from Sheenagh McNally supported by Bernie Burns (of Drumellan Community Association)."*

*"Sheenagh spoke so passionately in the final session about the challenges and the changes which had taken place that delegates were uplifted by the power of communities in action and left the conference buzzing!"*

Sheenagh's presentation concluded with a video on Inter-Agency working which can be viewed on our website.

# Tenant Participation in Governance: The Future for Northern Ireland



Peter Shanks, University of Birmingham

Supporting Communities, in partnership with the University of Birmingham and the Housing Executive, held three workshops in October 2016 to facilitate social housing tenants and other key stakeholders to explore the relevance of international models and practices of tenant involvement to our evolving social housing governance practice in Northern Ireland.

As part of the workshops, participants heard from Professor David Mullans and Peter Shanks regarding research that the University of Birmingham is carrying out, including feedback on case studies based on current practice in Northern Ireland, which included Housing Executive Scrutiny Panels and Choice Housing Association.

A total of 120 participants, including Housing Executive and Housing Association tenants, came together to discuss and 'reality check' four International Models that University of Birmingham researchers have identified as potentially filling gaps in the NI context. Attendees were then split into groups to discuss each of the four approaches led by the model's presenter.

During discussions, participants made reference to the work of Supporting Communities in developing tenant participation models in NI as well as the role of the proposed Independent Tenant Organisation for NI.

Comments from participants include:

*"It's very interesting to see how other countries had faced challenges - how they get residents involved and how they stayed engaged."*

*"Always great to hear the 'real life' experience of different models across Europe."*

*"Excellent examples that could be implemented in NI with the help of Supporting Communities."*

The Workshop Report suggests that all 4 models have potential to fill gaps in existing opportunities for NI tenants to

become involved in governance. The paper goes on to state that 'the proposed new Independent Tenant Organisation could provide a significant enabling and training role in taking these models forward in line with the empowerment remit. Political support and input from stakeholders in DfC, NI Housing Executive, NIFHA, Housing Associations and local Councils would also be important to successful adoption. Most importantly, such models will only succeed with the support and active participation of tenants and landlords. Making the models attractive to tenants will therefore be fundamental.'

## The Austrian Model

Richard Lang, an academic from Austria, showed how involvement was built into the start of new housing schemes in Vienna by ensuring that housing developers involve tenants in the design and management of the schemes. This is a funding requirement enforced by the City Council.

## The English Model

Paul Kelly and David Yates, tenant board members from Community Gateway in England, demonstrated the impact that their method has had on governance. They showed how having tenants at a board level can positively shape housing services.

## The Amsterdam Model

David Bosch, a volunteer from Amsterdam Tenants Association, highlighted how tenants in the Netherlands are involved in shaping housing at a local and city wide level.

## The Welsh Model

Nic Bliss from the Confederation of Cooperative Housing, spoke on how the Welsh Government are focusing on the development of 25 Housing Cooperatives across Wales.

*You can find more information on the research, the four models, and the workshop events on the University of Birmingham's website.*



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## Key Results and Achievements in 2016

1



**Over 500** community groups have been provided with vital support services by our Liaison Officers

2



**200** Inter-Agency meetings bringing statutory agencies and community groups together to improve services to estates and villages across Northern Ireland. This inter-agency work also involved the completion of 76 Estate Inspections.

3



**464** sets of minutes in support of inter-agency meetings, community group meetings and of Housing Community Network meetings. Other types of administrative support came in the form of payroll support to 39 community groups & independent financial examination of accounts to 118 community associations.

4



**42** groups were supported with registering online with the Charity Commission NI last year bringing a total number of 141 groups who have been assisted to obtain their charitable registration since 2014

5



**1200** Ezine publications are circulated on a fortnightly basis while almost 1400 SCENE magazines are posted twice a year. These figures illustrate the 'reach' we have as an organization.

6



**13** Housing Executive Scrutiny Panels received scrutiny training and support for tenants and staff alike.

7



**98%** satisfaction rates across all training courses delivered by Supporting Communities staff.

8



**1,100** participants gained basic online skills since the beginning of our digital inclusion programme in 2012.

9



**Over £1 million** in funding was secured for community groups by our staff.

10



**HCN** The Housing Executive's Housing Community Network was provided with key support at Central, Regional, and Area levels.

11



**60** community and tenant representatives attended sessions on the outworking of the Savills Report. We continue to engage with the Department on aspects of the Social Housing Reform Programme including the implementation of the Tenant Participation Strategy 2015-2020.

12



**£8:£1** was determined to be our Social Return on Investment ratio, which means that for every £1, invested in our services, approximately £8 of social and economic value was returned for our stakeholders. The ratio translates to a figure of £119 million.

## Supporting Communities is now providing essential Good Governance training across all areas!

Within each area we will be running sessions during the day and in the evening to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to attend.



### Good Governance

Do you know the requirements?

The training will consist of two sessions and will cover:



- **Effective Meetings and Good Governance**
- **Managing Charity Finances**

If you have a Community Base, are a member of the Housing Community Network system or are unsure of the governance regulations expected of you by the Charity Commission NI, it is vitally important that you do your best to attend or have a representative from your charity at these important training events.

For the dates of training in your local area please contact your Liaison Officer or visit the events section of our website.

For any other queries, please do not hesitate to contact our training team.

**Housing  
Executive**

## Leading the Way with Bespoke Tenant Participation for Housing Associations



Supporting Communities is a long time champion of social housing tenants and empowering them to having a voice in the way their housing services are delivered.

We have welcomed the incoming Tenant Participation Strategy for NI 2015-2020 which reinforces that message to social landlords in Northern Ireland and we have redoubled our efforts to support Housing Associations to demonstrate their commitment to tenant participation at all levels.

Although Supporting Communities has been working with the Housing Association movement in Northern Ireland for over 10 years, it has been just 2 years since we have appointed a dedicated officer responsible for liaising with Housing Associations to offer a range of services.

*Supporting Communities sees tenant participation as an essential part of the work of a social housing organisation. It is a two way process where tenant and landlords value the engagement and recognise it as a vital component to improving services.*

In that short time, we have worked closely with most of the major housing associations in Northern Ireland to identify and begin to implement the approach to tenant participation that is right for them.

This past year has seen significant advancements in tenant participation efforts from a number of Housing Associations:

- **Choice Housing** have completed three training courses specifically designed for tenants' forums as well as two major tenant engagement reviews. With our ongoing support to their regional and central

forums, Choice has developed a range of options around governance arrangements and election processes and has established a working group to progress the actions. Supporting Communities was also successful in a proposal submitted to act as an independent representative and support tenant reps on their Complaints Panel.

- With our support, **Helm Housing** has implemented a host of new engagement structures. We have provided training to their newly established Area Panel representatives and provided scrutiny awareness sessions to tenants who are interested in getting involved. We have also just completed a 12 month mystery shopping exercise for Helm which will help identify some next steps in their tenant engagement work.



*Tenant Representatives at Helm Housing Workshop*

- We are working with **Connswater Housing Association** to explore new methods of engaging with their tenants including online. We are also continuing to work with them on developing a mystery shopping exercise.
- **Newington Housing Association** have recently completed tenant participation training with staff and board. We are also working with Newington in developing Mystery Shopping.
- **Fold Housing** undertook a complete review of tenant engagement opportunities including a survey and focus groups for tenants and staff. We have helped them come up with a number of structural options and a set of recommendations which are to be agreed with the focus groups. We will offer further support and training to help them implement the new structures when they are approved.
- **Clanmil Housing Association** has recently completed a major mystery shopping exercise which included 185 interactions. Supporting Communities

has submitted a detailed report and will help Clanmil to go through the findings.

- **Apex Housing** have completed bespoke training sessions on tenant participation and community development as well as a mystery shopping exercise which they hope to expand in the coming year.
- **South Ulster Housing** have completed training to understand the roles and responsibilities of a Tenants Forum and are hoping to invest in digital engagement with tenants soon with training and advice from Supporting Communities.
- **Rural Housing Association** staff have completed OCN Level 2 accredited courses in Tenant Participation and Community Development. With guidance from Supporting Communities, staff have looked at the potential to update their Tenant Participation Strategy and Menu of Involvement.



*Rural Housing Association Training*

- Supporting Communities developed and delivered a one-day tenant participation training session to twelve members of **NB Housing's** staff from a variety of disciplines and representing all levels within the company. The staff focused on their strategy, their menu of involvement, and how to attract new Community Champions.
- **Habinteg Housing** was the first Housing Association in Northern Ireland to undertake our OCN Level 2 accredited Tenant Participation and Community Development Course. Twenty eight staff members including Community Assistants, Housing Officers, Housing Managers and Quality Performance Manager participated in lively discussions focusing on their own experiences and new and innovative approaches.

*"I found the Tenant Participation and Community Development course to be an excellent, invaluable source of information. Not only did the course inform and educate me on Tenant Participation it opened my eyes to the fact that tenants have the power to make a real difference in their own communities and lives, to work with landlords to improve the standard of housing conditions and services.*

*I think it's wonderful that Supporting Communities champions to educate and empower tenants and service providers alike".*

- Mandy Scullion, Community Assistant  
Habinteg Housing Association Ltd.

- Supporting Communities provided a response to **Ark Housing's** draft Tenant Participation Strategy.
- Over the past number of months, we have presented information on the benefits of Tenant Participation at the **Oaklee Housing Trust's** Tenant Forum AGM. We hope to follow up with training and mystery shopping.
- **Triangle Housing** also completed a Mystery Shopping exercise with us this year.

Our dedicated Housing Association Development Officer is advancing the process of tenant participation by working closely with each organisation to develop and implement practices that will yield meaningful results for both the business and the tenants.

*Keep an eye on our website for more detailed stories of housing associations developing their tenant participation practice.*

**Empowering  
Society**

## Digital Inclusion: A Partnership Success



Digital Inclusion continues to be a growing area of work for Supporting Communities which has largely been made possible by our ongoing collaboration with the Department of Finance's (DoF) Digital Inclusion Unit.



As more and more government services become 'digital by default', offline citizens are increasingly disadvantaged and cut off from basic information, assistance, and communication. Go ON NI is the programme within the DoF tasked with encouraging 'off-liners to become Internet beginners' and in partnership with Supporting Communities has sought new ways to target and engage with their toughest customers. We have worked in partnership with the Department since 2012, playing an integral role in the achievements of NI Direct's Digital Transformation Programme. We expect our work around digital inclusion will prove even more crucial as legislation surrounding Welfare Reform comes into effect.

Mark Bennett, from DoF's Digital Transformation Service remarked:

*"Supporting Communities have been incredibly successful at providing training, help and support to those who need it. They continue to show that Digital Inclusion isn't about technology. It's about local people; people helping other people to see how the internet can transform their lives. Local, face to face, friendly and supportive - they really do put people at the centre of Digital Inclusion."*

During the past year we achieved several notable successes in our digital inclusion work. First, we reached a major milestone - we have now delivered basic digital skills training (both accredited and non-accredited) to over 1100 participants across Northern Ireland.

These 'digital champions' gained basic online skills starting with setting up email accounts all the way to banking online. Participants also learn to use essential online government



service sites such as, NI Direct, the Housing Executive, Housing Association as well as Council websites.

In conjunction with Supporting Communities, the Open College Network NI made an informative video featuring some of these learners talking first hand about their experience and the benefits of going online. The video can be seen in the accredited training section of our website.

Our innovative 'Bridging the Digital Divide' project, a partnership with Clanmil Housing Association, Breezie Tablets, and the Dept of Finance was recognised as a successful model for engaging with people who need extra help to get online such as older people with health issues and people living with dementia. This pilot project was runner up in the Digital Leaders 100 award for 'Best Cross Sector Partnership 2016' and went on to win the IUT Award 2016 for services to social housing tenants.

We are pleased to report that these projects have not gone unnoticed and we have expanded our digital programme to work in collaboration with more housing associations and the Housing Executive in their D4C project.

Another valuable achievement during 2015/16 was Supporting Communities inclusion on the Government's Digital Training & Support Services Framework, an accomplishment made even more significant given that of the 54 suppliers included on the list, Supporting Communities is the only supplier from Northern Ireland selected in relation to the delivery of digital inclusion and basic digital skills training. We hope this makes us the 'go-to' provider for digital inclusion in Northern Ireland!





## Belfast's Scrutiny Panels: A Case Study



### Scrutiny

'skru:tɪni/  
noun

1. critical observation or examination.

*"every aspect of local government was placed under scrutiny"*

Tenant scrutiny is more than just another tenant participation activity. It is a way of giving tenants greater influence and the ability to hold their landlord to account by exercising more power over the business in relation to decisions, governance and performance. It is based on the principle that the priorities and views of tenants should be at the heart of a housing organisation's work.

Sounds good, doesn't it? But of course, there is a lot more to it than meets the eye and a great deal of work goes into the creation and support of scrutiny panels. In this case study, we will look briefly at the creation and initial work of three Area Scrutiny Panels in Belfast.

### Community Involvement

In November 2013, the Housing Executive published a Draft Community Involvement Strategy for consultation, a central element of which was the intention to establish a tenant scrutiny panel in each of the landlord's outlet areas.

In January 2014, Supporting Communities met with the Housing Executive's Belfast Regional Manager, to discuss how scrutiny panels could be established in 3 Area Offices in Belfast. As it had been decided to retain the Housing Community Networks and a citywide Belfast Housing Forum (at the request of community reps), it made sense to develop Area-based scrutiny panels drawn directly from the old District HCNs.

In the **West Belfast and Shankill Area**, a seminar and workshop was convened by the Housing Executive in February 2014 at Crumlin Road Gaol, attended by representatives from the community groups in the two Districts. Tides Training facilitated a workshop and subsequently presented a report to the Housing Community Networks. A residential was held over two days in June 2014 where community representatives identified the following main areas of work:

- The housing services to be considered as part of tenant scrutiny
- Tenants expectations and aspirations from these housing services
- Key questions to be asked of each service area
- How scrutiny might be supported and facilitated

Following a training session on tenant scrutiny provided by Supporting Communities, the panel decided to look at the response maintenance service for their Area and following a number of meetings, including visits to the Customer Service Unit and the Direct Labour organisation offices, the panel made over 20 recommendations for improving and enhancing the Maintenance Service.

In **South and East Belfast Area**, an initial scrutiny exercise was held on 7<sup>th</sup> May 2014 in the local Area Office and an outline consideration of 'Access to Housing' was held. Members had agreed to proceed with caution as the South and East Office was undergoing various reviews of service delivery under the Journey to Excellence Programme.

A follow up meeting with the Scrutiny Panel was held on 7<sup>th</sup> August 2014, and after a training session on Tenant Scrutiny with Supporting Communities, members agreed to consider 'Paying for Your Home' as the priority for scrutiny. Following a series of meetings, which included engagement with housing accounts staff, housing benefit staff, and a consideration of the Financial Inclusion Strategy, the Panel made 20 recommendations for consideration and action.

To enable the **North Belfast Area** Scrutiny Panel to effectively complete a scrutiny exercise on their chosen area, three information and awareness building sessions were facilitated by individuals who were involved in schemes or community consultation.

Following training sessions delivered by Supporting Communities, the panel agreed that the first area to scrutinise would be current consultation standards for planned maintenance and improvement schemes and ways in which these could be enhanced to improve the experience of tenants. The panel completed its consideration making 13 key recommendations and reported to the Area and Belfast Regional Managers in autumn 2016.

## Case Study continued:

Following the work of the North Belfast panel, the Regional Housing Forum has established a scrutiny panel to report on consultation standards which should apply in all planned scheme work across Belfast going forward.

### Results so Far

Of the recommendations made in each of the processes, some have been adopted by the Area offices or have been taken on board and developed within the Transformation processes; others are ongoing as pieces of work and in one other case a recommendation has been adopted as policy by the Housing Executive and extends to all Area offices.

Supporting Communities staff have been involved in each of these scrutiny processes providing a range of facilitation, support and training roles. We are currently looking at how we can measure the impact of our work with the scrutiny panels and the outcomes of their work - that comes next.

# Housing Executive

## Consultation Events: Community Involvement Strategy 2017-2022



In late January 2017, Supporting Communities assisted our colleagues in the Housing Executive to conduct an important series of consultation workshops in five locations across Northern Ireland. These consultation workshops were held to provide attendees with the opportunity to reflect on the outgoing Community Involvement Strategy and to help shape the new strategy which will run for the next 5 years.

Over 150 people attended the five public workshops with representation coming from HCN members, Housing Executive tenants, residents, Community Partnerships and various other stakeholders including Council officers, HealthTrust workers and other statutory employees. Consultees were invited to give their feedback under 3 key headings:

- 'What worked well in the outgoing Strategy?'
- 'What could be improved?'
- 'Where Next for the new Community Involvement Strategy?'

With Supporting Communities staff helping to independently facilitate the 5 Workshops, there was excellent interaction and feedback from those attending.

Speaking on behalf of Supporting Communities, Colm McDaid, Chief Executive, commented; *"We were delighted to support the Housing Executive in this very important consultation exercise particularly as the contributions will assist in the development/compilation of this key Strategy for the Housing Executive"*.

Speaking after the final Workshop in the Girdwood Community Hub in Belfast, Deirdre Crawford, the Housing Executive's Communities & Cohesion Manager remarked; *"We were delighted with the turnout at all 5 Consultation Workshops and the feedback from attendees will prove essential for us in preparing the draft Community Involvement Strategy for the next 5 years."* Deirdre continued; *"We will be carrying out further consultation with key forums we engage with including the Youth, Rural and Disability Forums as well as the Strategic Cohesion Forum and this exercise will be facilitated through the Visual Arts Centre and Hive Studios over the coming weeks."*



Consultation groups discuss the way forward for new Community Involvement Strategy

The Housing Executive would welcome any additional comments or contributions from tenants, residents or stakeholders who may not have been able to attend the Regional Workshops and would invite feedback based on the 3 Key Questions identified above.

*Please email any comments you may have to Karen Marks;  
karen@supportingcommunities.org*

## ‘University Challenge’ for Community Volunteers

It’s back to school for two volunteers of Killynure Community Association. Chairman Aaron Thompson and Vice-Chair David McPhillips started their University ‘challenge’ in January 2017 by enrolling on the Advanced Diploma Social Enterprise course at Ulster University, Jordanstown.



Aaron and David started their educational journey in Community Development and Social Enterprise in 2009 when they completed Supporting Communities’ OCN Level 1 Community Capacity Building course. They went on to complete the full suite of accredited programmes including Community Capacity Building Level 2, Community Development Level 3, and Understanding Social Enterprise Level 2.

*“The programme of training that we completed through Supporting Communities has enhanced our education and provided us with the opportunity to attend University. It will be a challenge, but we welcome it and are looking forward to using our new skills and knowledge to develop the community of Killynure and Carryduff as a whole.*

*Through Supporting Communities we’ve gained more qualifications than we ever did at school! We enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of adult learning and the networking opportunities we had with other groups we met through the courses and would recommend everyone to consider this as a way of developing themselves and their community group.”*

- Aaron Thompson



Stephen Marks, Supporting Communities’ Training and Social Enterprise Officer said, “We are very proud of Aaron and David and I am personally delighted at their progression. The quality of the portfolios they submitted during our training programmes was excellent and I have every confidence that they will thrive on the Advanced Diploma course and will go on to use their new knowledge and skills for the benefit of their community.”

Aaron and David’s university course fees were paid for through bursaries obtained from Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council and The Flax Trust.

If you are a Housing Executive tenant or are a member of a community group that represents Housing Executive tenants you may be able to avail of a £1,000 Education Grant through the Housing Executive’s Social Housing Enterprise Investment Scheme.

*“This is an excellent example of what community based adult learning can offer. We show learners at level one a pathway to Higher Education and I am delighted that Aaron and David have completed that journey. I wish them well in their future studies.”*

- Laura O’Dowd,  
Supporting Communities

For more information on the scheme, check out ‘Community Social Investments’ on the Housing Executive’s website or email; [socialinvestments@nihe.gov.uk](mailto:socialinvestments@nihe.gov.uk)

# Supporting Communities Staff Contact Numbers

## SENIOR MANAGEMENT

Colm McDaid, Chief Executive  
(028) 25645676  
colm@supportingcommunities.org

Conor Flanagan  
Operational Services Manager  
(028) 25645676  
conor@supportingcommunities.org

Laura O'Dowd  
Support Services Manager  
(028) 25645676  
laura@supportingcommunities.org

Theresa Patton  
Administration Manager  
(028) 25645676  
theresa@supportingcommunities.org

## ADMINISTRATION TEAM

Laureen Cuckson, Senior Administrator  
(028) 25645676  
laureen@supportingcommunities.org

Karen Marks / Elizabeth Steede / Patricia Bibby  
(028) 25645676  
info@supportingcommunities.org

## TRAINING & SUPPORT SERVICES

Healy King, Senior Support Services Officer  
(028) 95430899  
healy@supportingcommunities.org

Stephanie McKillop, Digital Inclusion Officer  
(028) 77740722  
stef@supportingcommunities.org

Stephen Marks, Training and Social Enterprise  
(028) 25645676  
stephen@supportingcommunities.org

Aidan Kearney, Senior Training Officer  
(028) 25645676  
aidan@supportingcommunities.org

Karla Turner, Training Officer  
(028) 95430899  
karla@supportingcommunities.org

Roisin Hamilton, Funding Officer  
(028) 77740722  
roisin@supportingcommunities.org

Sheenagh McNally, Housing Association Dev Officer  
(028) 38342792  
sheenagh@supportingcommunities.org

## SENIOR LIAISON OFFICERS:

Martin Quinn  
Magherafelt, Cookstown, Dungannon  
(028) 86767040  
martin@supportingcommunities.org

Sarah Harkness-Robinson  
Bangor, Newtownards, Lisburn, Castlereagh  
(028) 91454289  
sarah@supportingcommunities.org

## LIAISON OFFICERS:

Gerard Lewsley  
N'abbey I & II, North Belfast, Antrim  
(028) 90749609  
gerard@supportingcommunities.org

Murray Watt  
South and East Belfast, Shankill, West Belfast,  
Dairyfarm / Information and Policy Officer  
(028) 90482956  
murray@supportingcommunities.org

Orla McCann  
Downpatrick, Newry  
(028) 38342792  
orla@supportingcommunities.org

Siobhan O'Neill  
Brownlow, Portadown, Armagh, Banbridge  
(028) 38342792  
siobhan@supportingcommunities.org

Sharleen Wray  
Ballymoney, Coleraine, Limavady, Moyle  
(028) 77740722  
sharleen@supportingcommunities.org

Gillian Forrest  
Ballymena, Carrickfergus, Larne  
(028) 25645676  
gillian@supportingcommunities.org

Nuala Kildunne  
Collon Terrace, Strabane, Waterloo, Waterside  
(028) 66329677  
nuala@supportingcommunities.org

Darragh O'Neill  
Fermanagh and Omagh  
(028) 66329677  
darragh@supportingcommunities.org

