

SCENE

Supporting
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Events
News
Empowering



New Housing Policy Panel Formed

As part of its role as the appointed Independent Tenant Organisation (ITO) for Northern Ireland, Supporting Communities has been tasked by the Department for Communities (DfC) to develop a Housing Policy Panel made up of tenants/residents living within the social housing sector in Northern Ireland.

The Housing Policy Panel's role is to act as a consultative body for DfC, with a focus on social housing related matters. The Panel will also represent the interests of social housing tenants in the development of Departmental policies and provide a voice to ensure that tenants' rights and concerns are represented and taken into account at a strategic level.

The Panel, which held its inaugural meeting in September 2017, is currently made up of tenant/resident representatives from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Choice Housing Association, Rural Housing Association, South Ulster Housing

Association, Habinteg Housing Association, the Rural Residents Forum and the Disability Forum. At their inaugural meeting, the members agreed their terms of reference and developed an action plan to take forward.

Since its first meeting, the Panel has been provided with presentations on the Departmental process in developing policies as well as an overview of the structure of the DfC's Housing Division. The Panel has also provided input into the consultation on the Department's Review of the Allocations Policy and will be working alongside the DfC's Regulation team to look at how best to report on the Regulatory Framework to social housing tenants, including the Consumer Standard. It is also intended that the Panel will meet with the All Party Working Group for Housing in early 2018.

Shane Clements from DfC commented; "I am very pleased to see the Housing Policy Panel up and running and engaging with the Department on a wide range of issues and policies including the recent Review of Allocations Policy."

Colm McDaid, Chief Executive of Supporting Communities said, "The Housing Policy Panel is a clear example of how tenants can influence housing related matters at a strategic level. As an organisation, we are delighted with the commitment of the Department in working alongside this Panel to make important changes and improvements to housing services in Northern Ireland."



Above: Members of the Housing Policy Panel with Sheenagh McNally (Housing Association Development Officer) and Laura O'Dowd (Director) of Empowering Communities



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Choice Tenants' Forum Lead the Digital Way Forward

This past year has seen an increase in the continued push to get everyone online and certainly one of the most urgent drivers for digital inclusion in Northern Ireland has been the introduction of Universal Credit.

As Welfare Reform changes come into effect, the need for everyone to possess digital skills has become even more acute and housing associations are on the front lines assisting their tenants get online. Having 'digitally savvy' tenants is a great bonus to the organisations as well, in terms of moving customer services online.

Choice Housing Association has been embracing all things digital and are working with Empowering Communities to ensure their tenants are benefiting. For example, they have installed Wi-Fi in the common areas of all their sheltered schemes and are developing an online tenants portal to enable users to access their account information online and communicate directly with their landlord. Empowering Communities were pleased to help by providing the basic digital skills training which goes hand in hand with improved physical access to the Internet.

In a phased roll out of training programmes, Choice has started with its leaders in the Central and Regional Tenants' Forums. These groups have just completed an 8-week course aimed at improving the workings of the Forums as well as building the digital skills of the forum members.



Anita Doonan, Digital Inclusion Officer, works with Tenant Forum Members

For a few people, it was their first time online. For other more experienced users, they said they enjoyed learning new skills and gained confidence in what they were doing already. One person even got a new job as a result!

The group now plan to use their new skills and online confidence to communicate with each other more and with Choice between meetings, share minutes and other information online and maybe even start blogging! We'll be watching with great interest to see how they get on!

We will continue working with Choice as they strive to meet their goal to get everyone online. We'll be focusing on the sheltered schemes next to skill up scheme coordinators who are often the first responders to tenants questions.



Community Conference Asks 'Are we #FITforFuture?'

This year's Community Conference was one of the biggest yet with over 300 delegates attending from all over Northern Ireland. Now in its 18th year, the annual event is a joint effort between the Central Housing Forum, Supporting Communities and the Housing Executive.

This year, the theme of the conference, "Fit for Future", focused on community development and engagement in the digital age and the increasingly virtual world in which we live.

The agenda had something for everyone, and while a key message of the day was the impact of Universal Credit and accessing benefits online, the other clear take away for participants was that social media is an opportunity to communicate and engage with your community.

Feedback from the day was largely positive and we are seeing increased engagement on our social media channels as a result!

Alistair Simpson, Community Champion, The Fountain, Derry/L'Derry told us, "It was a very hi-tech conference. The majority of people there were senior citizens. Where were all the young people?"

But age is no barrier to digital engagement; Alistair is living proof!

"I would like to learn more. I'm interested in downloading the NIHE app as there wasn't time to do this at the conference. My grandson got me online with WhatsApp and mobile texting and only recently I've begun emailing too. The other conference delegates were surprised to hear I'm using apps and texts!"

Patricia McQuillan, Vice Chair of the Central Housing Forum and a member of the conference organising committee told us that this year's event was "one of the most successful ones so far, with a more diverse range of delegates attending."

She said, "Our aim was to make everyone aware of the need to be

digitally ready for the changes ahead with Welfare Reform and I think we did this.

It was an informative day with a wealth of knowledge and good practice shared."

"It empowered and inspired me by providing skills and awareness around the use of social media to make our Development Group aware of how we should use it to get our messages across."


*- Leslie Hetherington,
Brighter Ballymagorry Development
Group, Strabane*


AGENDA


9.15 am	Registration & Visit Displays	 <small>WIFI: #fitforfuture password: m1p1 #FITforFuture</small>  <small>Supporting Communities Central Housing Forum Housing Executive</small>
10.00 am	Welcome - Linda Watson, Chair, Central Housing Forum	
10.05 am	Opening Remarks - Clark Bailie, Chief Executive, Housing Executive	
10.15 am	Icebreaker Exercise - James Kerr, Verbal Arts Centre	
10.40 am	Government's Digital Strategy - Trevor Steenson, Deputy Director, Digital Shared Services, Department of Finance	
10.50 am	Coffee Break	
11.00 am	Changing the Narrative - (4 Workshops)	
	(1) ● Amanda Ashe & Aidan Kearney (Housing Executive & Supporting Communities) D4C Pilot Project - 'Connecting Tenants' (Lylehill Suite 1)	
	(2) ● Kevin Hipsley (The Hive Studio) First Steps to Social Media Success (Lylehill Suite 2)	
	(3) ● Joel Sampson (We Are Resource) Building your Social Media Brand (Castle Upton Suite 1)	
	(4) ● Helen Reynolds (Social for the People) 'How to be heard and make change happen' (Castle Upton Suite 2)	
12.00 noon	'Have Your Say' - Patricia McQuillan, Vice Chair, Central HF & James Kerr, Verbal Arts Centre	
12.30 pm	Key Note Address - Geraldine Howley, Chief Executive, Incommunities	
12.50 pm	Closing Remarks - Professor Peter Roberts Interim Chair, Housing Executive	
1.00 - 2.00 pm	Conference Networking Lunch & Visit Displays	


WiFi Password: Tweet using: #FITforFuture


You can use a variety of social platforms to stay relevant and communicate with the public not to mention take advantage of emerging opportunities. Here are explanations of the more popular social media networks that are used:

 **Facebook** is the one site where you're likely to find friends, colleagues and relatives all floating around. Although Facebook is mainly centred around sharing photos, links, and quick thoughts of a personal nature, individuals can also show their support to brands or organisations by becoming fans. It is also linked to:


 **Instagram** is a quick, convenient connection between the camera feature on your smart phone and all your social profiles. Not only does this allow you to share via Twitter, Facebook, and your Instagram accounts, you can choose from a variety of photo filters and invite friends to comment on your photos or ideas.


 **WhatsApp** enables you to send text-style messages to anyone without paying data charges.


 **Twitter** messages were limited to 140 characters, but recently increased to 280 and added use of pictures and videos. You can share an image or even trade thoughts with your favourite celebrity or influencer. Twitter's interface is easy to learn and use and setting up a new profile only takes minutes.


 **YouTube** is a video sharing service that has become so popular that its catalogue of billions and billions of videos has become known as 'the world's second-largest search engine'. The site has everything from personal product reviews to promotional clips and 'how-to' instruction on virtually any topic or discipline. Users have the ability to share, rate and comment on what they see.

 **Google+**. By combining the best of Facebook and Twitter into one site - and backing it by the power of the world's largest search engine, Google has given users a social site that has a little something for everyone. You can add new content, highlight topics with hashtags and even separate contacts into circles. A G+ profile only takes a few minutes to get set up.

 **Pinterest** serves as a giant virtual idea and inspiration board and is popular with the do-it-yourself crowd. It lets you share pictures, creative thoughts or before-and-after pictures of projects that others can pin, save or duplicate.

 **Snapchat** gives you the ability to take a picture, add art and text if you'd like, and then send it to recipients for a set amount of time (after which the photo will delete itself and be removed from the company's servers). Lots of fun, and a good way to stay in touch with friends.

 **LinkedIn** is geared towards businesses and job seekers. LinkedIn is to cyberspace what networking groups once were to local business communities. Great for meeting customers, getting in touch with vendors, recruiting new employees and keeping up with the latest in business or industry news.

 **Tumblr** is a platform which hosts microblogs for its users. Individuals and companies, in turn, can fill their blogs with multimedia (like images and short video clips).

And many more! There is a social media network for almost anything you can think of!

Using the hashtag #FitforFuture, the attendees, staff and speakers tweeted, instagramed, and facebooked their way through the conference encouraging others to give it a go.

Connect with Supporting Communities on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn now!

Empowering Communities Heads to Scotland

by *Laura O'Dowd*

In September 2017, Empowering Communities had the pleasure of organising a study visit to Glasgow in conjunction with our TPAS Scotland colleagues. The trip, which consisted of 14 staff from the Housing Executive and Housing Associations across Northern Ireland, focused on how we could learn from others to improve on tenant participation and community development here at home.



During the 3 day visit, we received a very warm welcome from all the organisations we met, from breakfast baps on the morning of our arrival to being treated to lunches and treats throughout. The best treat though, was the wealth of knowledge, information and best practice we obtained from all our hosts.

On day one, we had the opportunity to spend time with Clydebank Housing Association where we got to see and hear all about the fantastic work of the organisation including the 'housing plus' support they provide via funding support, the establishment of community gardens, a communal heating scheme and local community centres. We also reached a literal high, when we were taken up to the top of the Titan Clydebank, a 150-foot-high (46 m) cantilever crane, to see a beautiful view of Glasgow. This was definitely not for the faint hearted!



On the second day, we had the pleasure of hearing from Martin Armstrong, CEO of the Wheatley Group who reinforced the importance of tenant participation in governance and outlined how the organisation effectively engages with their tenants at every level.

From Wheatley, we were then brought to NG Homes where we heard from the Scottish Government on how successful the Scottish Charter has been in improving tenant participation and developing opportunities for Scrutiny.



We then heard from NG's own CEO who overwhelmed us with their commitment to tenant and community engagement. We learnt about the great work they do in promoting cohesion, particularly with the Chinese Community, engaging young people, developing apprenticeships and creating employment.

On day three, we were warmly greeted by Tollcross Housing Association, where we received presentations from some of their tenants on how they are involved in improving services, as well as from Caledonia Housing Association on their methods of scrutiny.



*Participants arriving at
Clydebank Housing Association*

The day ended with an eye-opening presentation from Blackwood Housing, where we were shown how they are looking at different ways of engaging their tenants through the gamification of their new tool 'the Huburbs'.

It was a very busy, yet incredibly informative three days and I would like to thank Tony, Elaine and Lesley from TPAS Scotland for hosting us. I would also like to extend a thanks to all the organisations who gave up their time to meet us and finally thank all our NI colleagues for coming on the visit.

"Thank you for organising the trip to Glasgow, really useful and informative. Good to get to know so many Housing Association colleagues from here."

Jacqui Gilmore, Apex Housing Association

"Thank you for organising the study trip. It was so well organised and the hospitality from the Scottish Housing Associations was brilliant. Seeing the projects in practice and hearing people's experiences really hits home and makes it easier to understand how tenant participation can fit into an organisation on a number of levels."

Bridgeen McCormick



Tenant Participation: Doing Things Differently in Wales

by Aidan Kearney

I was very fortunate to attend this year's TPAS Cymru conference in Llandridnod Wells on behalf of Supporting Communities. 'Doing things differently' was the theme and the event looked at ways we can change preconceptions around tenant participation, for both tenants and staff members. The comfortable, relaxed atmosphere of the conference provided ample opportunities for information sharing and communication among delegates.

The opening session set the scene with inspirational stories of personal experiences. Samantha Shaw from Taff Housing Associations' Resident Association gave a powerful talk about her own journey from abusive relationships and rent arrears, to joining a residents committee, participating on scrutiny panels, founding groups and attending training. She's now on Radio Cardiff 3 times a week if you'd like to keep up with her!

Up next was Luke Takeuchi from Rhondda Housing Association discussing a new performance management system his organisation is using called Neighbour Hub. It analyses data from all their stock and distributes it monthly to the whole organisation allowing for greater transparency, better action plans, and an improved monitoring system for certain areas.

Rounding off the first session was Ken Perry, Director of Do-Well (UK) Ltd who explained that due to his own personal experiences, he was working to decrease the gap in health inequalities in Wales. "Where you live impacts on your health," he told us, and the fact that certain people are still disadvantaged due to their geographical location is completely unacceptable and avoidable.





their tenant association requested a DIY or handyman service, one member came forward and offered their services as they came from a building profession. This group now have regular meetings and communicate with the handyman to arrange any small work to be done in the area.

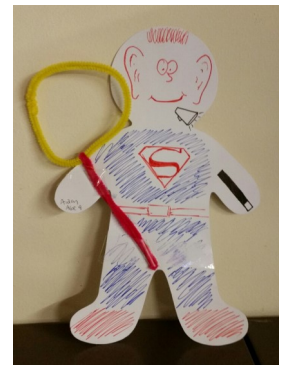
The second workshop I attended centred around the benefits of arts and crafts when involving tenants or service users. Phoenix Averies from St. Giles Trust explained that crafts appeal to a wide audience and is the most inclusive and cost-effective method to engage 'hard to reach' people. Throughout the session, all the delegates had colouring pens and stencils to doodle and design their own masterpiece. Of course, the quality did not matter, but, as Phoenix described, the fact that we had something to pre-occupy us during her workshop made us all more relaxed and encouraged better concentration. A few notable projects she mentioned included 'The Creative Prison' project where prisoners worked with Will Alsop Architects to redesign a prison from the ground up, involving the inmates from the very beginning. Another was the art exhibitions run by the Koeshler Trust, where prisoners' works are showcased in museums and galleries each year, building their confidence and self-worth. Sadly, I'm sure my own 'work of art' would not make it to an exhibition, but did make its way back to Northern Ireland!

I attended four workshops over the two-day conference, all of which delved into practical examples of doing things differently.

First up, I was interested to attend Ross William's workshop to discover exactly what 'Asset Based Community Development' actually is and how his organisation, Coastal Housing, is using it in the communities that they serve. Ross explained how Coastal Housing has adopted a restorative practice model that asserts problems within a community should be solved by the community. "If you take my problems away, that's stealing!" he joked.



Ross went on to talk about challenges and barriers to this theory and the need for 'buy-in' from the community itself to fundamentally and realistically develop self-sufficiency. An excellent example of this was given by a member of the audience (completely unscripted, I've been assured), who explained that when members of



It did!

On the second day of the conference, I heard the story of how Caerphilly Council developed their tenant participation practice. Two representatives (Anna, a staff member and Sandra, a member of Caerphilly Council tenant's groups) when describing the core aim of the organisation they summed it up by the catchphrase 'doing different things, and doing things differently'. Anna described her dogged persistence as a community activist in campaigning for a greater tenant voice (in some cases camping outside the office doors until she was heard). Because of her unrelenting pressure and desire to make a change, she set up a tenants group (Caerphilly Homes Task Group) and from there a number of other groups were established. Anna went on to become a staff



member with Caerphilly Homes and now, as part of their tenant participation strategy, tenants are involved to a degree she only dreamed about before. They are part of, and have influence over, the Service Improvements Monitoring Group making changes in the way things are done, for example, instead of satisfaction surveys being posted, tenants on the task group will contact other tenants and ask how satisfied they were with the service. An emphasis has been placed on involving tenants at all levels (including strategic) and partnership working.



The final workshop I attended was a case study from Gwalia Housing Association (part of Pob! Group) on how they went about planning and creating a co-operative housing development in Carmarthen which involved prospective tenants in all aspects of the building process. Their project ensured that everyone who was being allocated a property in the development was willing and keen to actively manage the tenancies and activities within the area.



Beginning in September 2014, the founding members (prospective tenants) were part of the co-operative liaising with contractors and housing staff members

along the way to ensure the delivery of outcomes that suited them. They helped chose the specification and colour schemes of the properties, as well as how they would manage maintenance and repairs. In January 2017, 27 families moved into their brand-new homes and are developing a thriving sense of community there. The development is called Old Oak Housing Co-Operative, Carmarthen and the tenants even designed a logo for the development which can be found on their website.



At the end of the day in his final remarks, David Wilton (TPAS Cymru CEO) reiterated the importance of attending these events not just for networking, but for information sharing and learning from others within the sector. The changing nature of participation was evident throughout the conference: the theme 'Doing things differently' was encapsulated in each workshop and provided practical lessons for professionals and tenants alike.

My own takeaway thoughts were to always be mindful that different customers or service users prefer different types of interactions and communications. Digital correspondence and exchanges are becoming more and more accessible so providing that option in our training would be very beneficial, while also ensuring that my face to face provisions are as efficient and as bespoke to the customer as they can be.

Universal Credit Roll Out

Supporting Communities, in conjunction with the Department of Finance, has been working with local Jobs and Benefits offices throughout Northern Ireland in the roll out of the new Universal Credit system by supporting people to get online.

The new benefit is administered completely online which means new and existing claimants will need to apply and manage their claim via an online system. This will be challenging to anyone lacking the basic digital skills and confidence to go online, and indeed will be a struggle for those who have no physical access to a computer or the Internet in their home.

Working with the Department of Finance, we are taking part in 'Universal Credit Roadshows' being held in local Jobs and Benefits offices as the new system is phased in over 2017/2018. The Roadshows aim to support claimants to navigate the new system, set up email addresses for the first time, use a search engine to seek employment, find CV templates, etc.

Each Jobs and Benefits office is now equipped with 'Digital Zones' that have computers and internet access available to anyone who needs them. These zones also have a member of staff at hand should

anyone need additional support.

Community groups and housing associations are also preparing for this benefit change that will affect many of people that they serve.



Supporting Communities is offering a new course called 'Basic Digital Skills for Universal Credit' which aims to raise awareness of what the new system entails and we have also incorporated this topic into our existing digital training courses to increase understanding of the new system.

We have already experienced a significant increase in demand for basic skills training in preparation for the roll out of Universal Credit across Northern Ireland.

Don't let Welfare Reform take you by surprise

Universal Credit is being phased in over the coming months and will be administered entirely online. Do what you can to get ready now! Make sure you have the following in place:



- working email address
- valid ID
- bank account



The new system will be phased in over the coming year. See the chart below to find out when you can expect it to affect your area.

You can also keep an eye on our social media channels to find out when the Roadshow will be coming to your local Jobs & Benefits Office.

For more information on help in your area, contact our Digital Inclusion Officer, Anita Doonan by email at anita@supportingcommunities.org or phone 02866329677 / 02825645676.

Welcome Lisa McKim, New Liaison Officer for North Belfast and South Antrim



Lisa comes to us from the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland where she worked as a Grants and Donor Care Officer. She has a background in Community Development having previously worked for Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council as their Community Development Officer and for Helm Housing (now Radius Housing) as a Supported Housing Officer.

Lisa is looking forward to using her experience to supporting the communities in North Belfast and South Antrim Areas.

UC Start Date	Jobs & Benefits / Social Security Office
27-Sep-17	Limavady
15-Nov-17	Ballymoney
13-Dec-17	Magherafelt & Coleraine
17-Jan-18	Strabane & Linagelvin
7-Feb-18	Foyle & Armagh
21-Feb-18	Omagh & Enniskillen
7-Mar-18	Dungannon & Portadown
18-Apr-18	Banbridge & Lurgan
2-May-18	Kilkeel, Downpatrick & Newry
16-May-18	Bangor, Newtownards & Holywood Road
30-May-18	Knockbreda, Newtownabbey & Shankhill
13-Jun-18	Corporation St, Falls & Andersontown
27-Jun-18	Shaftsbury Square, Lisburn & Larne
4-Jul-18	Carrickfergus, Antrim & Ballymena
July—September 2018	Cookstown, Ballynahinch & Newcastle

New Facilities Help Make Communities Fit for Future

Towards the end of 2017, Supporting Communities were delighted to be invited to the opening of two new community facilities, one in Lagmore on the outskirts of West Belfast, and the other in Annadale close to the city centre. Annadale and Haywood Residents Association and Lagmore Community Forum have both lobbied and worked for many years to secure their new community premises. Both new buildings show great innovation and creativity and are a credit to the groups, their funders and their developers.



Annadale and Haywood Residents Association had previously been delivering a range of educational, cultural and social programmes from a small flat in the Annadale complex. Their local community has experienced significant changes over the years and is now home to people from many backgrounds with up to eight different languages being spoken in the area.

The new centre, funded by Space and Place and Belfast City Council, will now provide a space where people can come together to enjoy a range of activities in a modern and fit for purpose building including job training, a youth club, older people's projects, counselling support for residents, a housing advice service, and a range of celebrations including Chinese New Year.



Speaking about the opening of the much needed new Centre, Jeanette McMillan, Project Manager from Annadale and Heywood Residents Association, said, "Annadale Flats never had its own community facility until now. There is a diverse make-up which is clearly visible in the group of children and

young people that attend our after-schools and youth club. Also the new community garden and landscaped surroundings will boost our cultural community celebrations throughout the calendar year."



In Lagmore, a community in outer West Belfast, the Community Forum has also opened a new community facility based in the grounds of the Church of Christ the Redeemer after many years lobbying and fundraising. Funding for the centre was secured through the Urban Villages Initiative and delivered through Belfast City Council. The Community Forum held an official opening to coincide with their hosting a meeting of the West Belfast Partnership, which was followed by a community Open Day in December.

While the Centre has only been open for a short time, Lagmore Community Forum is already hosting a wide range of activities that directly benefit local people including the Sure Start Parents Forum, the Area Project Youth Forum, a women's boot camp, foundation maths classes, and Slimming World with Louise!

Supporting Communities congratulates both these groups on their fantastic achievements and we acknowledge the many years of hard work and commitment that the committee members and volunteers of both associations have given to their local communities. We wish them every success in the future!



Need a hand?

For over 38 years, Supporting Communities has been an independent champion for community development and active citizenship in Northern Ireland.

We can help your group make positive change to address the needs of your community through training, information and hands-on support.

Get in touch to find out how we can help you empower your community!



www.supportingcommunities.org



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