

Reaching Rural

A wee welcome



Hello everyone, I am delighted to share 'Reaching Rural' - our new quarterly Rural e-newsletter with you, full of great stories, handy tips and more.

My name is Pamela Johnston and I am the Housing Executive's Rural & Regeneration Manager

I have been in this role for shortly over a year but have worked for the Housing Executive since 2008.

I am a rural resident, farmer's wife and have real country roots meaning I have an understanding and passion for advocating for rural communities.

Having grown up on a farm with a love for horses and cattle I stuck to my roots and married a farmer.

We now live on his grandfather's farm with our three children. We raise beef cattle and as well as a dog and a cat we love to collect eggs from our chickens.

My children have the benefits of growing up in the country like I did but I know it doesn't come without its challenges.

With the cost-of-living crisis us country folk face more challenges than ever before.

I strive to share the rural voice, listen to rural communities and ensure we are providing equitable services to customers across our organisation.

Banter on the bench



Moneydig sets a benchmark... Celebrating the installation of a new chatty bench funded by The Housing Executive are seated (left to right) Thor the dog, Mary Gibson, Chair of Moneydig Rural Network and Amy McCullough, Housing Executive Patch Manager. Back row (left to right), Chris Hogg, Housing Executive Grounds Maintenance, Patricia McQuillan MBE, Secretary, Moneydig Rural Network, George Carleton, Housing Executive DLO Grounds and Gareth Doran, Housing Executive Good Relations Officer, Causeway.

A double award-winning Northern Ireland hamlet continues to set the benchmark for lively chat in our rural areas.

Since the installation of a Chatty Bench, Moneydig in Co. Derry/Londonderry has been a hub of conversation.

Almost £5,000 was provided by the Housing Executive to Moneydig Rural Network, via a Community Cohesion grant, for workshops facilitated by David Keys Sustainable Woodworking, a Moneydig-based service, to create and install a traditionally crafted bench,

providing a focal point for the area, which sits roughly halfway between Coleraine and Maghera.

"I can assure you, we have so much to chat about in Moneydig, that the bench is being put to good use."

Patricia McQuillan MBE, Secretary of Moneydig Rural Network and resident of Moneydig for 41 years, said, "It's been wonderful having the chatty bench at the heart of our community."

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A creative collective...Members of Moneydig Rural Network, pictured during the Sustainable Woodwork Workshop where their handcrafted community Chatty Bench was assembled. The group received a £4950 Community Cohesion grant from the Housing Executive to create this beautiful wooden bench for community use.

“It has become a place where the isolated or lonely can sit knowing that someone will come up and connect with them and have a chat.

“We have welcomed people into the area from as far away as Portugal, Australia, South Africa and recently the Bahamas.

“For many years to come, I’d love to see people from all walks of life come sit on our chatty bench and discover from our friendly local people what makes Moneydig such a wonderful place to live.

“Thank you to the Housing Executive, the crafters, the tutors, the facilitators, the committee and especially the volunteers that make Moneydig the best wee place ever.”

Mark Alexander, Housing Executive Causeway Area Manager said, “Congratulations to all who worked on the creation of such a fitting addition to the picturesque village of Moneydig.”

Read the full story here: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/home/news/moneydig-lively-rural-chat>

Rural residents Forum Member

The Rural Community Network (RCN) has supported and developed the role of the Rural Residents’ Forum (RRF) in supporting rural tenants and residents to scrutinise housing issues from a rural perspective.

The Forum represents residents from rural housing estates across rural NI and membership is drawn from representatives across all six counties in Northern Ireland.

In this edition of Reaching Rural we meet Sheila McWilliams, a RRF member since 2019, who shares her thoughts on the work of the forum and the ups and downs of life as a rural resident.

What do you feel are the major challenges the rural community in Northern Ireland face at the present?

The rural community experiences quite a few challenges including:
Transport -There is limited availability of public and private transportation.
Fuel Poverty - fuel poverty is a harsh reality for many rural residents, particularly the elderly.



Sheila McWilliams, Rural Residents Forum member

Housing and Services - Rural communities often struggle to access services, face higher living costs, and experience isolation. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policies and consideration of rural perspectives.

19% of rural pensioners live in relative poverty compared to 13% in urban areas.

How can the Rural Residents Forum help provide solutions to these challenges?

The RRF reviews strategies and policies while sharing best practices and ensuring rural views are considered in developing housing strategies.

It works closely with the Housing Executive and provides information and support to rural communities.

Would you recommend other rural residents to join the Forum?

Yes, I recommend other rural residents to join the Forum.

The Forum is dedicated to rural

Hub welcomes Holly

Moneydarragh Community Hub in Newry welcomes their very first staff member thanks to Housing Executive’s Social Enterprise funding.

A total of £10, 000 was awarded to the Annalong-based project to recruit Holly Hughes as Social Enterprise Manager, a role dedicated to the development of exciting new income-generating projects.

Holly said, “I have been in post now for just over a year and am so grateful to do the job I do for such a fantastic project.

“My role involves generating income by publicising rental opportunities and room hire packages.

“I also help to generate income via our honesty café, social activities room and a through the sale of a collection of products manufactured in-house by our Knit and Natter and Youth Ceramics groups.”

Hugh Cox, Vice Chair, Moneydarragh Community Hub said, “I would like to express our thanks to the Housing Executive for providing the funding that enabled us to employ Holly who has brought a wealth of experience and innovative ideas to her post.



Holly Hughes, Social Enterprise Manager alongside Hugh Cox, vice chair, Moneydarragh Community hub

communities and focuses on housing from a rural perspective, making it an excellent way to connect and improve living conditions.

The Forum is a great platform for sharing experiences, tackling common issues, and seeking advice.

Have your say...

The Housing Executive and Rural Community Network are working together to try to rejuvenate the Rural Residents Forum. We would be very grateful if you could take a couple of minutes to fill in the attached questionnaire to allow us to gather vital information on what our rural communities want.



Rural Community Awards

Humbled, privileged and inspired were the takeaway feelings of those in attendance at our heart-warming 10th annual Rural Community Awards ceremony.

Held in The Seamus Heaney Homeplace in Bellaghy, Co Derry/ Londonderry, and co-hosted by Rural Community Network, the event celebrated the dedication of rural groups and individuals whose efforts to improve community spirit within rural neighbourhoods is outstanding.

Elma Newberry, of Strategic Housing Authority said, “Congratulations to everyone who attended the awards.

“It was heart-warming and humbling to hear inspirational stories of leadership, commitment and ambition to improve rural areas.”

“I hope that the awards help provide the recognition that is thoroughly deserved.”

The awards are divided into three categories; Cleaner and Greener, Community Champion and Community Spirit. Read all about the winning groups here: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/home/news/celebrating-rural-champions>



Chris is our Champion... Chris Hagan (far right), Shrigley Community Group is the winner of the Housing Executive’s Rural Community Champion Award, south region. He is joined by Kathleen Stockton, chairperson of Shrigley Community Group, and Eoin McKinney, Housing Executive Rural Unit.

A New Rural Strategy for 2026–2031

We are currently developing a new Rural Strategy (2026-31). A draft will be released for public consultation in early 2026, giving rural communities

and stakeholders the opportunity to share their views.

We encourage you to review the draft when it becomes available and share

your feedback with us.
Rural Housing Team:
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Energy Advice Quiz



Put your home energy know-how to the test. Small changes can save you money this winter. Tick one answer for each question.

1. What is the ideal safe and comfortable indoor temperature range?

- ☐ A 14–16°C
☐ B 18–21°C
☐ C 23–25°C

2. Reducing your thermostat by 1°C can save around:

- ☐ A 10% heating cost per year
☐ B 1% heating cost per year
☐ C 50% heating cost per year

3. What boiler flow temperature helps a modern condensing boiler run efficiently?

- ☐ A 45 °C
☐ B 60 °C
☐ C 80 °C

4. Which is more expensive to run per hour?

- ☐ A Whole-home gas central heating
☐ B Electric room heater

5. A simple way to save energy when making hot drinks:

- ☐ A Boil a full kettle every time
☐ B Boil only the water you need
☐ C Re-boil yesterday's water

6. Radiator cold at the top, warm at the bottom. What does this mean?

- ☐ A Normal — leave it
☐ B Needs bleeding
☐ C Turn boiler up to max

7. Why keep furniture away from radiators?

- ☐ A Furniture overheats otherwise
☐ B It blocks heat circulation and wastes energy
☐ C For tidy presentation only

8. Which type of tumble dryer is usually the cheapest to run?

- ☐ A Heat-pump dryer
☐ B Condenser dryer
☐ C Vented dryer

9. Typical comfortable setting for a TRV (thermostatic radiator valve):

- ☐ A 0
☐ B 3
☐ C 6

10. When should you contact your Patch Manager/Energy Advice Service? (Tick all that apply)

- ☐ A Boiler over ~15 years old
☐ B Heating isn't working properly
☐ C You think insulation could help
☐ D You fancy a new look

YOUR QUICK WINTER WINS:

NI ENERGY ADVICE

Reduce thermostat by 1°C = save around 10% per year

Flow temperature set around 60°C helps boilers run efficiently

Keep radiators clear and bleed when needed

Heat-pump tumble dryers = lowest running cost

Boil only what you need — kettles are energy hungry

Need help? Free advice available for heating, bills, damp & ventilation.

The smallest changes can make a significant savings (and help our planet). Speak to an Energy Advisor – free advice is available to help you understand your bills and find ways to save.

Call 0800 111 4455 or use our online form and we will contact you. Here's the link: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk/Energy/Energy-Query>

Live where you want to

According to our 2025 continuous tenant omnibus survey only 34% of people in rural areas knew that the Housing Executive has a role in enabling new social housing where it is needed.

We conduct housing need tests to assess the demand for social housing in rural areas.

Find out more here:
[The Housing Executive - New Homes in Rural Areas](#)



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