

Rural Matters

2024 Edition

**Housing
Executive**



Welcome

Welcome to the 2024 edition of our Rural Matters magazine. This edition highlights the projects that have benefited our rural customers and the wider rural community, as well as the other services that we offer.

An update is provided on the progress being made to deliver our Rural Strategy. This Strategy encapsulates the significant investment that the Housing Executive contributes to support tenants and customers in rural areas.

You can read about the work that we undertake to help identify hidden housing need in rural areas through an annual programme of housing need tests.

We are pleased to see a number of new houses being built in rural areas however we still face challenges and more work needs to be done, we will continue to work with our community planning partners to achieve our objectives.

A household living in a Housing Executive home in the Causeway Coast and Glens, share their experience of rural living. You will also find information on our Patch Managers, and the support that they can provide.

We recognise the impact of higher fuel prices on rural dwellers and encourage you to read the articles regarding the Oil Savings Network and Energy Saving Tips. Information is also provided on how to contact the NI Energy Advice Service, which offers advice and support on how to save energy in your home and the assistance that is available.

You will find information on the work of our Financial Inclusion Managers. This team helps to ensure that tenants claim all the benefits they are entitled to, and are empowered to make the right financial decisions. Advice and support on budgeting and managing debt through our 'Making Your Money Work' service is also detailed.

We support the delivery of community-

based support programmes that promote inclusion, cohesion and create opportunities in rural areas. You can read about a Swatragh community group that has been using a community grant from us to provide support to some of the most vulnerable members of the community.

We have included the contact details of our team, if you would like to find out how you can become more involved with your local community. The more you get involved, the more we can listen and learn to improve our services.

We recognise the benefits to rural communities from supporting and enabling new social enterprises. Information on two rural projects that we supported through our Social Enterprise Plus Awards is shared.

The deserving winners of the 2023 Rural Community Awards competition are also showcased. Our Rural Community Awards reward the efforts made both by groups and individuals who give up their time to improve their rural communities.

We are also delighted to share that we have recently been recredited with the Customer Service Excellence Standard. It recognises the dedication and commitment of our staff and our ongoing commitment to putting you, our customers at the heart of everything we do.

We hope that you find this edition of Rural Matters informative!



Nicole Lappin
Chair



Grainia Long
Chief Executive



Reaching Rural

Our 'Reaching Rural' Rural Strategy 2021 – 2025 and Action Plan (The Rural Strategy) was launched in 2021 and the second annual progress report (2022 – 2023) sets out our activities and key achievements over the reporting period.

The Rural Strategy encapsulates the significant investment which the Housing Executive contributes to support tenants and customers in rural areas. It also demonstrates our ongoing commitment to address the needs of our rural communities in line with the duty set out in the Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016.

The Rural Strategy sets out three high level outcomes and twelve priorities under the three cross cutting themes of:

- a. Supporting rural customers;
- b. Enabling the provision of affordable rural homes; and

c. Securing the future of our rural communities.

The Year 2 Rural Action Plan contained 27 high-level actions under the three key themes. At the end of 2022/23, progress was demonstrated against all actions.

In 2022/23, through the various areas of our business activity, the Housing Executive invested approximately £55.1m in rural areas. This included a wide range of housing and support services as well as funding to help to create and maintain vibrant and sustainable communities.

For example, we invested £24.5 million in the maintenance and improvement of our rural homes. A further £8 million of our Supporting People fund was provided for accommodation-based and floating support services.

Now in year four of delivering the Strategy, we will continue to work collaboratively with external bodies, agencies and partners to improve our services in rural areas across Northern Ireland.

You can read the annual report on our website **Reaching Rural - Rural Strategy & Action Plan Annual Progress Report 2022-2023** (nihe.gov.uk)

Rural Annual Progress Report



18%

of Housing Executive homes are located in rural areas



11

rural housing needs test were completed



£24.5m

was invested in the maintenance and improvement of rural housing stock



£55.1m

was invested in rural communities



28

rural projects were supported by the Community Cohesion team



£8m

of Supporting People funding was invested in rural areas

Statistics *Taken from the Rural Strategy and Action Plan Annual Progress Report 2022-2023.

Caring for rural communities

Over a third (36%) of the population in Northern Ireland live in homes in rural areas, that's around 670,000 people. The Housing Executive has around 14,500 homes designated as rural homes.

The word rural relates to the countryside and smaller settlements rather than living in a town or city.

The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 defines rural as settlements with fewer than 5,000 residents together with the open countryside.

As the strategic housing authority in Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive has a statutory duty to consider rural needs, which should deliver better outcomes for people in rural areas and help make rural communities more sustainable.

Our Rural and Regeneration team make sure a rural focus is applied to social housing needs, and those living rurally are allocated sufficient resources. They work with the Rural Residents Forum who, alongside the Rural Community Network, examine the services provided to mitigate against under representation.

Working collaboratively, they focus on engaging with rural communities and representatives to support and develop rural initiatives and building new social homes in our countryside. They also highlight the achievements of rural communities through our annual rural community awards.

Pages 12 to 15 detail last year's winners.

Our Rural Strategy, developed by the Rural team, has three main themes: supporting our rural customers, enabling the provision of affordable rural homes and securing the future of our rural communities.

To support building new social homes, the rural team regularly carry out rural housing needs tests to identify potential demand.



New social homes at Carrowdore, delivered by NB Housing.

They continually engage with local communities and their representatives to identify housing need in areas, much of which can be difficult to determine. With a challenging budget, new social housing needs are not being met, however the significance of continuing to identify the housing needs of rural settlements and communities is very important.

Page 5 has more details on the areas being considered for rural housing needs tests this year. The results of these tests inform housing associations of potential need, and they then take forward plans to secure land to build new homes.

Tim Gilpin, Acting Rural Team Manager, said:

“We recognise the continuing need to test for housing in rural areas to support families and communities already established there.

“If we can collate evidence and prove there is a need for housing in a particular area, we can progress the

interest and pursue potential sites for homes with our housing association partners. This is only possible if people respond to our rural housing needs tests, which run throughout the year across Northern Ireland.

“Unfortunately, people looking for a rural home make the difficult decision to move away to secure suitable housing they can afford, which impacts the family dynamic and local support networks for those who prefer or need to stay close to home.”

For example, in previous years, two separate rural housing needs tests were carried out for Rathlin Island, both of which identified the need for housing on the island.

As a result, ten new social homes were completed in 2023, and a social housing scheme is currently underway, with ten units due to be completed later this year. These schemes are possible as a result of the Rural team's rural housing needs tests previously carried out.

Rural Housing Needs Tests and what they can do for you!

Information from the Common Waiting List is recognised as demand for social housing in towns and urban areas, but when it comes to rural locations the demand for housing need is more difficult to understand.



11 new social homes at Ballygowan, delivered by Radius Housing.

Rural housing needs tests can indicate a hidden or unidentified demand for housing. Housing need can go ‘under the radar’ because local people interested in staying in a certain location decide they can’t wait any longer and move away, or they become reliant on staying with family and friends, which can cause overcrowding and create tensions within family units.

It can take some time for an identified need for housing to actually be built in a rural area. However, every rural housing needs test is necessary to capture the data needed to support building new social housing.

The information is used to liaise with other government agencies, councils and housing associations to build a picture of what is feasible and how to proceed, if possible. The outcome can be a much-needed property for applicants on the waiting list who need a home.

We completed nine housing needs tests during 2023 and we are currently analysing the results.

Housing needs tests are usually carried out over a four-week period. We use local papers and social media channels to create awareness, as well as distributing flyers and posters in local shops and post offices. Our local

Every home built in a rural location is an achievement, it’s a home someone really wants and needs.

offices will also have details, and we connect with schools, community groups, sports groups and councils to make local communities aware that we are actively looking for people to register their interest.

Please get in touch for further information. You can send an email to Rural.Housing@nihe.gov.uk or check out the details on our website by searching for rural issues.

If you would like to live in a rural area, make sure you register your interest during our Rural Housing Needs tests– we can’t progress plans for new housing if we are not aware of local demand!

Oil Savings Network

The NI Oil Savings Network (NIOSN) is open to all householders across Northern Ireland. We can usually find you a price which is lower than NI's average heating costs per litre. Please note, supplier savings can differ depending on your postcode.

How do I join?

Send an email to **oilsavings@nihe.gov.uk** with the subject 'Register' in the title. Please provide your:

- First Name
- Mobile Number
- Postcode

You become a member once we receive your details. You can take advantage of the current savings immediately.

We contact you.

You will receive a weekly request by email, text, or (in exceptional circumstances) by phone for your 'potential' order.

To gauge the current market and to offer updates to our members, the Oil Savings team check prices with our registered suppliers every day.

How do I place an order?

Joining the NIOSN means you can order your oil at a discount each week (or whenever you need a refill).

The chosen supplier(s) provides negotiated discounts on 200L, 300L and/or 400L. Members had an average weekly savings of £10 to £25 for 200ls in 2022/23.



You are sent a negotiated discount code, e.g. OIL0801, to place and pay for your own order with the chosen supplier. Discounts are valid for up to one week, starting Wednesday.

Find out more.

If you are interested in joining the NI Oil Savings Network, you can find out more from our team by emailing oilsavings@nihe.gov.uk

The NI Oil Savings Network (NIOSN) is managed by the Housing Executive's NI Energy Advice Service.



"I found the Oil Savings Network good, and I recommended it to my family and friends, it gives you a chance to stock up for the winter months".

"Savings are around £20 for 200 or 300 litre order".

"You can order in advance not waiting until you run out and get a weekly text to sign up but if you don't order there is no pressure you get a text the following week, the deadline is usually on Wednesday before 10am"

Rural Customer – Drumellan, Craigavon

JOIN NOW.

Send your first name, mobile number, and postcode by email, text 07507 301 980 or call 0800 111 4455.

Energy Saving Tips

As household bills rise, we take a look at three ways you can spend less on your home heating and energy costs.



Switch off and unplug.

Appliances like hairdryers, microwaves, televisions, PC monitors and game consoles continue to use electricity even when they're on standby. If you don't use these all the time, unplug them so you're not wasting energy.

Turn it down.

Turning down your thermostat by just one degree could cut your heating bill significantly. Work with your controls until you find a temperature that suits you. You can also save money by setting your heating and hot water to come on or go off only when you need it.



Are you getting the best deal?

Compare energy suppliers to see if you're getting the best value for money.

The Consumer Council NI website compares up to date NI electricity and gas tariffs.

Chat to your energy supplier - you may be able to get a discount if you change the way you pay your bill. Or get in touch with our Energy Advisors.

Contact our Energy Advisors

To get free independent and impartial advice:

- **Email the Housing Executive's NI Energy Advice service on nienergyadvice@nihe.gov.uk**
- **Call the NI Energy Advice Line on 0800 111 4455**
- **www.nihe.gov.uk/housing-help/ni-energy-advice/ni-energy-advice-get-in-touch**



(L-R) Area Manager Sharon Crooks with Open Doors Club Chair Margaret McFlynn, Good Relations Officer Anne Marie Convery and Treasurer Maura Quinn.

A Swatragh community group dedicated to people of all ages with a disability or complex needs is opening doors to fitness, fun and friendship for members.

Open Doors Club, which meets every Wednesday at Granaghan Resource Centre, is offering a wide range of activities and classes to its 24 members, with help from a Community Cohesion Grant worth £1,690 from the Housing Executive.

Margaret McFlynn, Chair of the Open Doors Club, said: “Our group is dedicated to providing a range of activities for our members from fitness classes, sport, dance, music, drama, ceramics, arts and crafts, mindfulness and much more.

“Activities have proved vitally important to improving members’ communication, co-ordination and leadership skills and I’ve loved seeing them flourish, make friends and gain confidence.

“We are a cross community group with members of all ages and backgrounds who travel from surrounding communities to join us. They have told us how beneficial our classes have been for their mental health and wellbeing.

“Generous funding from the Housing Executive has made this 10-week programme a reality and we are so grateful for the support in providing the best range of activities for our members.

“Our project’s success is also the result of a wonderful group of volunteers who help facilitate our wide range of activities and I’d like to thank them for their hard work and dedication.”

Sharon Crooks, the Housing Executive’s Area Manager for Mid

Ulster, added: “We are proud to fund the Open Doors Club, which has become a vitally important service for some of the most vulnerable members of the local community.

“Speaking to members and volunteers I’ve heard how big a difference it has made to their lives, encouraging more social interaction and building their confidence.

“Open Doors Club promotes better community cohesion, has a real, lasting impact and we look forward to continuing to work closely with them in future.”

Making Your Money Work

If you are struggling financially, did you know that you can use our 'Making Your Money Work' service?

If you have fallen into rent arrears, had a reduction in or lost your entitlement to Housing Benefit or Universal Credit, or have had a significant change in your circumstances, we can help. Our dedicated service could help you by providing:

- A benefits assessment to make sure you are receiving all the support you are entitled to and giving you accurate benefits advice.
- A budgeting assessment to assess your income and outgoings to help you with household budgeting.
- Referral to one of our Financial Inclusion Managers.
- Referral to Advice NI if you need specialist debt advice.
- A referral to other specialist support organisations if you require advice or assistance with other issues.

Build your own Budget.

A budget is a great way to keep track of your spending - you can put aside money for the things you need and maximise your income. It's easier than you think! Our benefits & budget calculator, on our website, can help you work out what benefits you're entitled to. You can also see how a change in earnings or the numbers of hours you work will impact your monthly income. It only takes a few minutes, so pop the kettle on, pour yourself a cuppa, and build a budget that works for you.

The 'Better Off' calculator can be found on our website at:

betteroffcalculator.co.uk/calculator/newhousehold-details

Floating Support

What is Floating Support?

Floating Support refers to the network of other organisations we work with,



who can help tenants with issues directly impacting their housing or financial situation.

How can I be referred?

If, while offering the 'Making Your Money Work' service you tell our staff that you have an issue which is covered by a Floating Support provider, and which is causing you housing or financial stress, you may be referred for further assistance.

The staff member you are dealing with can make this referral for you. Alternatively, they can provide you with the contact details so you can speak to the organisation directly if you prefer.

Advice NI is a registered charity partnered with the Housing Executive to provide free, specialist, independent, debt advice to our tenants. They are experts in debt management and solutions.

Our staff can refer you to Advice NI, or if you would like to get in contact yourself, here's how:

- **Freephone number**
0800 915 4604
- **Text 'ACTION' to**
81025 for a call
back to your mobile
number
- **E-mail** advice@adviceni.net
- **Contact the Advice**
NI online "Let's
Chat" service
between 10.00am
and 4.00pm Monday
to Friday, accessible
via their website,
www.adviceni.net



Stay connected with us

'My Housing Executive' is the Housing Executive's online service designed to enhance customer service by offering you a convenient way to contact us. It is available on our website 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

By creating your online 'My Housing Executive' account with us, you can manage your tenancy, stay in touch and get any help or advice you need.

You can report repairs online and track the progress of the repair, view your rent balance, view and print rent account statements. If you need to speak to someone and don't have time to make a phone call, you can also send a message directly to your Patch Manager, who will respond within one working day. The system also keeps a handy record of all messages on your online account that you can access any time of the day or night.

Over 23,000 tenants have already signed up to 'My Housing Executive' and we want even more of you to connect with us online.

Almost half of our tenants in the Mid Ulster area and over 40% of tenants in the South West already have a 'My Housing Executive' account.

We are continually updating the service to make your experience better. Future plans include enabling tenants to add tenancy documentation online, and messaging to keep tenants updated on information about their local area.

Your online 'My Housing Executive' account can be accessed from any digital device, and signing up is easy. All you need to do is visit the portal on our website: www.nihe.gov.uk which is at the top right of our home page.

A step-by-step video is also available to view on the website when self-registering.

Anyone having difficulties can telephone our Customer Service Unit for assistance, our staff will be happy to help you gain access – 03448 920 900.

Alternatively, you can contact your Patch Manager who can also help you.

Benefits are changing



You may have seen advertisements about Universal Credit and how benefits are changing. If you have received a 'Migration Notice' or want to know more about what this may mean for your benefits in the future, please contact our Financial Inclusion team. They are dedicated to making sure you are receiving the right benefits.

Since 2020, the Housing Executive's Financial Inclusion team have secured over £4 million in additional finances for our tenants. To date, over 11,000 tenants have been referred to our team, averaging over 300 per month.

The Financial Inclusion team make sure our tenants are claiming all the benefits they are entitled to, and support and empower them to make the right financial decisions for their household, especially during the ongoing cost of living crisis.

Our Deputy Financial Inclusion Manager, Sarah, recently helped a tenant who had suddenly lost a parent. The young woman was struggling to pay her rent and rates on sick pay alone as she thought she was only entitled to a small amount of Universal Credit. Sarah spoke to the tenant

about her circumstances and helped her to apply for other benefits that she was entitled to. As a result, her weekly benefit income has increased by over £150, and she has one less thing to worry about.

The Financial Inclusion team can help you by:

- Providing benefits checks to make sure you are receiving everything you are entitled to;
- Performing 'Better off' calculations to help you make informed decisions about your finances;
- Helping to resolve complex benefits issues;
- Providing money and budgeting advice;
- Signposting to other specialist sources of debt advice;

- Assisting with access to other sources of support (e.g. charitable organisations, discretionary support, foodbanks, etc.).

If you'd like to chat to one of the Financial Inclusion team, contact your local patch manager to ask for a referral by phoning our general enquiries line on 03448 920 900.

Rural Community Awards

Individuals and groups from across Northern Ireland have won our Rural Community Awards sharing an £5,000 prize fund to help them continue improving their local communities.

The awards are an opportunity for us to acknowledge the individuals and groups undertaking outstanding volunteering work at grassroots level in rural areas across Northern Ireland, helping maintain local neighbourhoods and boosting civic pride.

We received a huge variety of deserving entries. From offering advice on sustainable living to health and well-being activities, to beach and village clean-ups, running community gardens to offering joinery and guitar lessons.

Two individuals and four groups won awards this year. Congratulations to all the winners. We look forward to seeing how you continue to support our rural communities across Northern Ireland.

Rouskey Community Association Cleaner and Greener Award

Rouskey Community and Development Association in Co Tyrone secured first place in the Cleaner and Greener award, landing the £1,000 prize.

Situated outside Omagh, this project promotes sustainable living through organic gardening practices and rainwater harvesting, as well as offering an array of health and well-being activities to all members of the community.

Kevin Moquin, Rouskey Community and Development Association committee member said, “Everyone was very excited to receive this award.

“A lot of work has gone into improving the grounds at our community centre, creating stunning art murals around the site, extending our community garden and building a new polytunnel.

“We have been able to encourage people of all ages, including Housing Executive tenants, to engage in our workshops which include gardening, music, crocheting, cookery, literacy and heritage.

“Gardening classes have helped people to be more self-sustaining by teaching them how to plant vegetables and flowers at home.

“We also converted a shipping container into a community garden activity centre where people can come and learn the practices of upcycling and that sort of a thing.”



From left to right) Kevin Moquin, committee member, Rouskey Community and Development Association and Bridie McCullagh, Chairperson of Rouskey Community and Development Association. Presenting the award is Eoin McKinney, Housing Executive Rural Unit.

Millisle and District Community Association scoops Community Spirit prize

Situated on the Ards peninsula in Co Down, Millisle and District Community Association scooped top prize in our Community Spirit award.

The award recognises the huge impact this group has within their local community in providing opportunities which bring residents of the village together, particularly those living in social housing, the isolated and the elderly.

Jo Scott, Chairperson for Millisle and District Community Association said, “We were absolutely delighted to have won this award. We go above and beyond to bring residents together, working in partnership

with the local schools, churches and sports clubs.

“Events we have organized have included beach and village clean ups, a holocaust Memorial Day, Burns night festivities and other intergenerational projects.

“Our men’s shed and women’s groups are thriving and our community garden continues to be a fantastic resource for all kinds of groups throughout the year.

“The Housing Executive are a great partner to work with. We have been involved with them and the Housing Community Network here in Ards and North Down for many years.

“Our supporters have helped us do renovations and funded many different projects.

“The money from this award will go into future projects to enhance the well-being of our community.”



Pictured (left to right) Tom Watterson with guide dog Pete, Eoin McKinney, Housing Executive Rural Unit, John Thompson (holding plaque), Mandy Watterson, Tony Swari and Jo Scott, Chairperson of Millisle and District Community Association.

Fox Park Residents Association Community Champion

Sally Mulholland, Chairperson of Fox Park Residents Association in Omagh, Co Tyrone won top prize and £500 as Community Champion.

Chairperson for 23 years, Sally opens up her own home for community meetings, organises a steady stream of community activities and will do what she can to help anyone in need anytime of the night or day.



Sally Mulholland, Chairperson of Fox Park Resident’s Association (front, right) is joined by (front, left) Annette McCarney, Housing Executive Assistant Area Manager Southwest area and (back row from left) Eoin McKinney, Housing Executive Rural Officer, Lorraine McPhilomey, member of Fox Park Residents Association and Julie Murphy, Treasurer of Fox Park Residents Association.

Rural Community Awards

Dungiven Men's Shed win Community Spirit Award

Dungiven Men's Shed won the £1,000 prize, winning the Community Spirit section of the awards.

Situated in the town known as the gateway to the north Sperrins, this project offers many workshops ranging from joinery to guitar lessons to encourage men to meet together and discover new skills and build lasting friendships.

Judges were impressed at how this project has had a significantly positive impact on the mental health and well-being of the men that come here.

Raymond Brady, Project Co-ordinator, Dungiven Men's Shed



(Left to right) Owen McCloskey, Dermot O'Donnell, Raymond Brady, Ryan O'Connor, Anthony McCormack, Eoin McKinney, Housing Executive Rural Unit, Cathal Hasson, Dominic McDermott, and Hilary Canning, Assistant Area Manager for Causeway Coast and Glens.

said, "We are delighted to have won such a prestigious award.

"When I got word that we had been nominated for this award I was delighted and even more so when I was told we had won. It's a great honour for me personally for the project to be recognised in this way.

"I love volunteering here and seeing the difference the men's shed makes to many men. A lot of the wives tell

me that they can see a marked difference in their partners too.

"We have made all kinds of products using the fantastic range of tools that we received via Housing Executive funding.

"One of our most popular products are our bird box kits which we take into schools for the children to assemble. They love doing this."

Margaret Reid Young at Heart

Margaret Reid, Chairperson of the Young at Heart group in Co Derry/Londonderry won a £500 prize, taking first place as Community Champion for North Region.

Situated in Ballintoy on the beautiful Causeway Coast, the Young at Heart project strives to combat isolation by socially connecting the over 55s in the surrounding areas.

Margaret said: "I'm just over the moon and a little bit emotional about winning this award.

"Any small grants that come along I try to get for the group.

"We have used these for trips away, meals out, arts and crafts workshops and to fund our extremely popular luncheon club.

"I just love the work I do for Young at Heart from taking meals to isolated people during Covid, to getting together to work on craft projects.

"The biggest of our creative programmes was when we created colourful mosaics for the flowerbeds around the village. We are very proud of these."

Cleaner and Greener Newtownstewart Centre 2000

Newtownstewart Centre 2000 in Co Derry/Londonderry has cycled off with £1,000 and first place in the Cleaner and Greener Award for North Region.

E-cycling is one of many health and well-being activities on offer at the centre which is also home to a walking group, a social café and a host of educational health programmes.

The award recognises how the activities are making a hugely positive impact on protecting the environment while also combating social isolation and improving the lifestyles of so many in the local community.

Centre Manager Irene Spratt said: “We are delighted to have received this award. The Centre is a neutral space for everyone to enjoy.

“We work closely in partnership with our GP Practice Social Worker,



Pictured are (back row from left) Albert Law, Cycle Group, Kerry McLaughlin, Cycle Group, Gillian Craig, Social Worker and Cycle Group lead, Grahame McCormick, Chairperson of Newtownstewart Centre 2000 and Tommy McConnell, Cycle Group. (Front row left to right) Rachel Crawford, staff member of Newtownstewart Centre 2000 and Irene Spratt, Newtownstewart Centre 2000 Manager.

Gillian Craig and recently completed a successful family engagement programme on the benefits of cycling.

“Gillian also supported us to form our cycle hub and walking group which are volunteer/peer led. Both are going from strength to strength.

“The cyclists meet every Wednesday and the walkers meet every Thursday for a cycle or walk around the town

before coming back to our social café where they have a chat, healthy snacks and a cup of tea.

“We hope to use the prize money from this award to expand the activities we deliver and improve our cycle and walking groups even further possibly developing additional routes, and training more volunteers.”



Ballintoy's champion...Margaret Reid, Chairperson of Ballintoy Young at Heart (back row, second from the left), is joined by Noeleen Connolly, Housing Executive Team Leader Ballymoney and Ballycastle (far left) and Eoin McKinney, Housing Executive Rural Officer (back row far right). Celebrating with Margaret are members of the Ballintoy Young at Heart group (back row, third from left) Vera McMullan and (front row, from left) Rachel McDougall, Eileen McMullan, Treasurer and Geraldine Hill.

A floral facelift for trees planted by Housing Executive

Little green fingers have made big efforts to ensure there is a burst of colour around their Greenisland school this year.

Primary 7 pupils from Silverstream Primary School put dozens of bulbs into the soil around three thriving young trees which had been planted to mark the Queen's Jubilee using a Housing Executive community grant awarded to Greenisland Community Council.

Lorraine Wilson, Housing Executive Housing Manager, Mid and East Antrim said, "Representatives from the school approached us to suggest planting the bulbs so that when they blossomed in spring, the trees would have a beautiful floral border.

"We are always delighted to support any educational project that involves children feeling connected with nature.

"Daffodils will be the perfect way to compliment this very successful school community garden project."

Miss Crawford, Primary 7 teacher in Silverstream Primary School said, "Our pupils thoroughly enjoyed planting the daffodils - they were covered in mud and loved every second of it!

"Sharing their experience afterwards they told their peers all about the best way to plant daffodils and other fun facts about the flowers.

"Planting the bulbs outside in the fresh air and contributing to their local community really boosted the children's morale."

Lisa Morris, Greenisland Community Council said, "We were delighted to be able to plant these bulbs around the trees.

"We worked with the Primary 7 children when the trees were originally



Spring is on its way at Silverstream... Pictured before planting daffodil bulbs with children from Silverstream Primary School are, Louis Richmond, Housing Executive Patch Manager, Mid and East Antrim, Lorraine Wilson, Housing Executive Team Leader, Carrick and Larne and Greenisland Community Council members, Maggie Watson, Lisa Morris and Bobby Hadden.



Teamwork takes root... Members of Greenisland Community Council, Lisa Morris and Bobby Hadden pictured with children from Silverstream Primary School before planting daffodil bulbs around trees beside their school.

planted so we involved the new Primary 7 class in the daffodil planting.

"I think it is so important to make the area where children are growing up look nice and give them a sense of pride in where they live."



Mud glorious mud... Digging deep in her efforts to improve the look of her school environment in Greenisland is 11-year-old Ava.

Addressing rural homelessness

Homelessness can affect anyone at any time for a variety of reasons. It can have an impact on any individual, family or household.

The Housing Executive is responsible for addressing and preventing homelessness across Northern Ireland. This means that we can offer anyone advice and support.

For example if you are concerned about losing your home for any reason, whether you own or rent, or if you are experiencing homelessness, contact one of our local offices and we will help you.

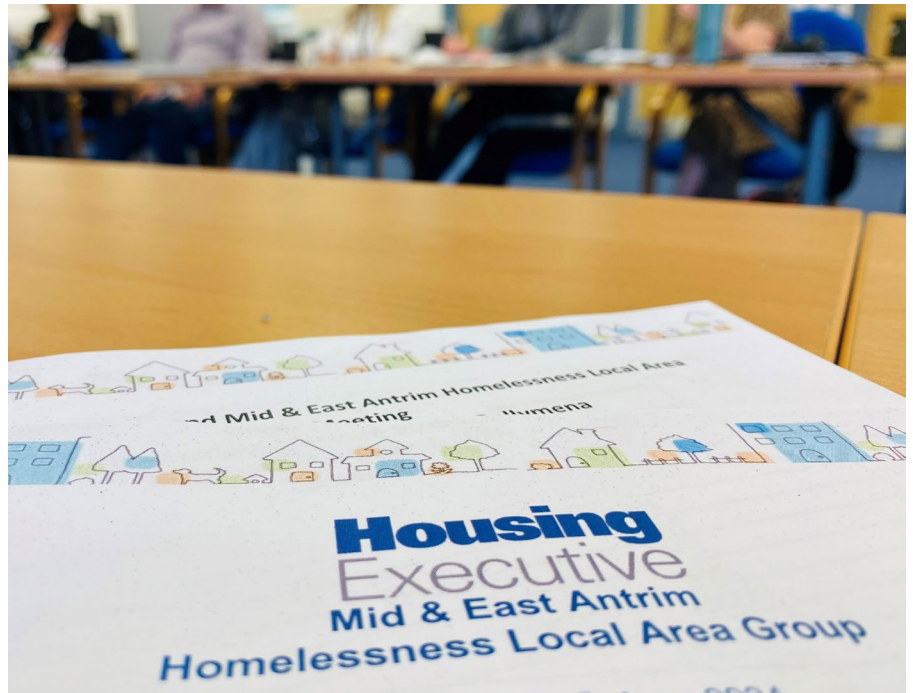
We can offer help from financial advice to arranging temporary accommodation. We also work with a wide range of partners who can help no matter what the circumstances are.

We currently chair seven Homelessness Local Area Groups across Northern Ireland which coordinate our response locally to ensure we address matters relevant to rural homelessness.

Rural homelessness has unique challenges, so these groups play a vital role. During our quarterly meetings, representatives from statutory, community and voluntary services identify and discuss local issues and most importantly, how we can work together to address these issues and prevent homelessness.

If you contact us with concerns about homelessness, you can expect the following service:

- We will carry out an assessment to establish if you are eligible for homeless assistance, determine if you are homeless, at risk of or about to become homeless.



- We will also check if you are in priority need and if you are intentionally homeless.
- Once we have all the relevant information we will be able to offer you support depending on your personal circumstances.

Help Available

If you are homeless or would like to speak to someone about your housing situation call our Homelessness Line on 03448 920 908. If you have hearing difficulties, you can communicate using the Next Generation Text service on 18001 03448 920908. During normal working hours you will be referred to one of our Housing Advisors who will assess your needs and discuss your options with you.

We also provide an emergency out-of-hours service after 5pm, at the weekend and on bank holidays, for those who have nowhere safe to stay and require emergency accommodation.

Our out-of-hours service can be accessed by phoning the Homelessness Line 03448 920 908.

A giant leap for learning in Drumsurn

Storytelling has reached new heights in a rural Primary School thanks to the handiwork of local craftsmen and our funding.

A giant storytelling chair and six story stools handcrafted by Dungiven Men's Shed sits proudly at the heart of St Matthew's Primary School's outdoor learning space just outside the village of Drumsurn.

Nearby are buddy benches, bird boxes and a storage shed also designed and built using tools purchased for the shed via a Housing Executive Community Involvement grant.

Delighted Principal of the school Mrs Ann-Marie Kealey explains, "We just love all of the equipment that Raymond and the members of the men's shed have so kindly made for us.

"They enable us to take the children outside for learning into the fresh air and into nature, an activity that boosts everyone's health and wellbeing.

"We are so blessed that our school, which was voted Best Small School in Northern Ireland, is located in such a picturesque location at the foot of St Donald's Hill.

"All the wellies belonging to the youngest children are stored inside our lovely waterproof and secure

"The shed is a lifeline for isolated, lonely, or simply retired men who live rurally and are at a loose end. Since opening our doors a few years ago I have been hugged many times by delighted members of these men's families and have received heart-breaking letters of thanks from others.



DUNGIVEN MENS SHED CHAIR

A tall tale... Raymond Brady, Project Coordinator of Dungiven Men's Shed puts the giant story telling chair and stools handcrafted by members of the shed to good use as he reads to pupils from St Matthews Primary School in Drumsurn.

wooden shed. Hanging above these are our children's gorgeous new red waterproof bodysuits which are perfect for keeping the children dry and protecting their uniforms."

Raymond Brady, Project Coordinator, Dungiven Men's Shed said: "Watching the children make use of our designs makes me so proud of our members and the new skills they have put to such good use in the wider community.

"Housing Executive funding has allowed us to purchase 27 new tools to date which include a bench saw, a planer, and a router.

"This has been a huge boost to our members' creativity and everyone has enjoyed training in how to use the tools in accordance with health and safety regulations.

"We have 32 men signed up as members and sadly two members passed away this year. One of whom was our oldest member at 93 years old. We miss them dearly because we learnt so much from them."

Hilary Canning, Assistant Area Manager, Causeway said; "The work being produced in this project is inspirational especially when you see local children benefiting hugely from their efforts.

"These men should take great pride in their work which is making such a difference in this rural community.

"I know that it is Raymond's vision to extend the project further and I wish him every success with that."

Next stop...Toome

A small South Antrim village is making a big impact on the travel and tourism industry thanks to The Housing Executive's support.

On discovering the bright green train permanently stationed in the village, visitors to Toome today are being transported back in time.

Talented members of Toome Men's Shed were the creative minds behind the project and approached the Housing Executive for support to replace the old wooden locomotive that stood in disrepair at the heart of the community.

Funding for the new landmark was via a Housing Executive community involvement grant totalling £3,220.

It was designed and built by John Duffin, D Engineering, who also covered the cost of erection and spraying of the structure by Mawhinney's shot-blasting and respraying. Signage was by Kerr Signs.

Terry Agnew, Toome Men's Shed Chairperson said, "Full credit to the Housing Executive for this extra special project.

"We are ecstatic to see it finished.

"Working on this project enhanced our participants' physical and mental wellbeing, created new friendships and benefited everyone in Toome by restoring a local focal point in the village.

"We are so delighted to see this much anticipated rural project reach completion.

"It is the perfect nod to the rich rural transport history also celebrating the skills and craftsmanship of men in the local community.

Breige Mullaghan, Housing Executive South Antrim Area Manager



All aboard for Toome: from left to right: Colum Bradley, Treasurer, Toome Men's Shed, Stephen Gamble, Housing Executive Good Relations Officer, South Antrim and Paul McFall, Vice-Chairman, Toome Men's Shed.

"It stands just outside our building on Main Street, the exact spot where a train used to pass through the village on its way to Castledawson so it is a vital part of the village's cultural legacy.

"This eye-catching instalment will be decorated according to the seasons, with lights for Christmas and plants and flowers in the Spring and Summer.

"The response in the local community has been terrific and we are so pleased that it will provide a fun space for families to enjoy for many generations to come.

"I would like to thank everyone who supported this project. Many have given out of their own pockets because they felt so strongly about the impact it will have on the community.

"We would love to see more people get involved with the Men's Shed and we wouldn't rule out female members too.

"You don't need to be highly skilled.

"If you are feeling isolated or lonely and just want to sit and chat and drink tea all day that is fine with us."

Building better communities with Social Enterprises



Our priority is working closely within our estates to foster vibrant, stable and sustainable communities.

(L-R) Adele Paton, Catherine McManus, Leonie Moss, Sophina Whitley.

That's why we are a huge supporter of Social Enterprises - businesses which return their profits to the communities within which they operate.

Social enterprises can play a vital role in sustainable job creation, in facilitating social integration, in providing local services that meet many social needs and mobilise community resources to develop innovative local solutions.

These community-owned, community-led, enterprises deliver local solutions and work collectively to build better, safer and more cohesive areas.

Behind the Stable Door

In County Down, Behind the Stable Door is an innovative social enterprise born out of passion to support those most in need through work-based activity and learning in a farm setting.

Of the young people that are supported by Behind the Stable, 80% come from Housing Executive communities.

Andy Spiller, from Behind the Stable Door, said: "Since 2018 we have operated as a social farm helping young people with disabilities or those facing mental health challenges.

"We realised that we needed to develop a social venture to support this work and so Ecoshred Bed, which makes pet bedding from recycled cardboard, was born.

"Thanks to funding of £10,000 from the Housing Executive we were able to employ someone to generate sales which in turn allows us to grow our capacity to offer more young people support placements.

"Our work aims to reduce social isolation through farm-based work, including animal care and horticulture activities.



(L-R) Brenda McFadden – Chef at ARC Healthy Living Centre, Christopher Spence GRO, Terry Magee – Chair of ARC Healthy Living Centre.

“It also tackles the lack of rural work opportunities and gives our young people the chance to gain valuable skills and experience.

“Finally, our work teaches young people the importance of sustainability through carbon reduction and our partnerships with local businesses help reduce waste in our community.”

ARC Healthy Living Centre

The ARC Healthy Living Centre in Irvinestown, Enniskillen, aims to address health inequalities and improve the wellbeing of local people through health activities and services.

Funding of £10,000 from the Housing Executive helped the centre establish a community café, of which the profits help support its activities.

Jenny Irvine, from ARC Healthy Living Centre, explains: “We deliver a range of services to reduce poverty and address inequality.

“These include child and family support services, low threshold addiction services and services for older people.

“Funding from the Housing Executive allowed us to fit a commercial kitchen with the necessary equipment and market our community café as a social enterprise.

“We’ve created a safe space for the community which hosts social engagement activities and offers a warm welcome to all.

“Our vibrant kitchen also provides healthy, low cost, meals to further support the community in addition to offering the opportunity of employment and training to people living in the area.”

How we can support your Social Enterprise

Do you live or work in a Housing Executive Community?

Are you involved in, or thinking of starting a social enterprise?

We have been supporting social enterprises and community investment since 1971 through advice, support, networking peer mentoring and providing accessible pathways to employment supporting our communities.

Since 2015, our Social Enterprise Programme has supported a range of social enterprises that have delivered services from recycling and catering to graphic design and childcare.

An important part of the Social Enterprise Plus Strategy includes an investment programme with funding available to support social enterprises just like Behind the Stable Door and ARC Healthy Living, Centre.

We are also interested in hearing from social enterprises who are just beginning their journey.

So, if you have an idea or are interested in finding out more about funding, please email our Social Enterprise Team at socialinvestments@nihe.gov.uk for more information.



One of the young people making pet bedding at Behind the Stable Door.

Your patch matters

As a tenant did you know you have your own dedicated Patch Manager?

Working across Northern Ireland, each of our Patch Managers cover a geographical location and are responsible for managing the properties in their area.

Our Patch Managers are here to support you, so get in touch if you have any concerns around your tenancy.

Our Patch Managers will:

- Provide advice to help you maintain your tenancy
- Connect you to support and wellbeing services and other projects in your area
- Liaise with our contractors when you are getting planned maintenance works carried out in your home
- Try to resolve any issues you may have with your neighbours
- Help your money go further by carrying out benefit and budgeting checks. If needed, they can refer you for specialist advice on money management and debt. This can include our in-house Financial Inclusion Service.
- Assist you with queries about your rent account

Getting positive results for tenants

We caught up with Peter McVey, a Patch Manager in Cookstown who is responsible for around 600 houses in the area.

Having previously worked as a Patch Manager in the Dungannon area and a Neighbourhood Warden, he brings a wealth of experience and knowledge to the role.

He spoke to us about life as a Patch Manager in a rural area.

“It’s so rewarding to work with our tenants and get positive results that help them feel happy and comfortable in their homes,” Peter said.



Cookstown Patch Manager Peter McVey.

“As a Patch Manager, you are the face of the Housing Executive and it’s important to build trust and develop good relationships with the people living in your area.

“I can help make enquiries about repairs, make sure tenants are benefiting from schemes and resolve issues around anti-social behaviour.

“Another important part of my job is helping sustain tenancies and that can include anything from providing advice on rent and access to support services.

“Recently, I worked with a tenant who was very happy in their property but had reluctantly requested a transfer for health reasons. I helped put the tenant in touch with an Occupational Therapist and as a result we can make adaptations to the property which will allow them to continue living in their home.

“Resolving issues like these is what this job is all about and we will always try our best to achieve a good outcome for our tenants.”

Meet your Patch Manager

Our Patch Managers regularly visit their local area to meet tenants and attend community group meetings.

If you would prefer to discuss your housing needs in person, your Patch Manager will be more than happy to meet you in your home.

Not sure who your Patch Manager is?

You can find out by contacting our general enquiries line on 03448 920 900 or sending them a message through our tenant portal My Housing Executive.

Happy in the hinterlands

A very content mum of three living along the healthy Causeway Coast is in no hurry to swap tranquil green fields and beaches for the hustle and bustle of city life.

Nicole, mum to Ava (11), Archie (4) and Fletcher (3) credits the services of the Housing Executive for giving her family the opportunity to live life to the full in an ideal location just outside Bushmills.

Nicole explains, “This is the first Housing Executive property I have lived in. We have been here five years and I can’t imagine living anywhere else.

“Before this I lived in an apartment in Belfast with my first child Ava, who was a baby at the time. It was not a good place to live. Ava was getting woken up every night by noise in a nearby alley way and people smoking outside her window.

“I ended up moving into my mum and dads for a while and it was my mum that suggested I put my name down for a Housing Executive property. I hadn’t even thought of that. It took a bit of time but getting this house was well worth the wait.

“The lifestyle in the countryside is much healthier. It’s a lot slower paced and family-orientated. We spend more time together as a family than we would have in a town or city. We go on a lot of trips to the beach and enjoy long walks.”

Nicole continues, “Our garden is brilliant. We are outside all the time. In a built-up area I imagine it would be very hard to get a house with a garden of this size.

“I would definitely advise other Housing Executive tenants to go for it if they are considering living rurally.

“Before doing this interview I didn’t know that the Housing Executive had a rural strategy and action plan or that they carry out rural housing needs tests.



Ava, Archie and Fletcher outside their Causeway home.

“It’s fantastic that they do all this but I think they need to raise more awareness about it.

“Maybe if there were more Housing Executive houses available in the countryside there might be improvements to the current bus system. That is the only drawback to living here. You really need to have a car because the bus service isn’t great.”

Asked what the overall benefits are of being a Housing Executive tenant and Nicole doesn’t hesitate, “It’s reassuring to know I have a Patch Manager and a local office in Ballycastle that I can contact any time if I need them.

“I also use the Housing Executive customer portal to log repairs and make queries which provides that added bit of security.

“The Housing Executive helped me find a safe and stable family home that we all love. So, thank you very much.”

A rural advocate in the making

Eleven-year-old Ava takes a little time out from playing in her beloved big garden to answer some questions about living in the countryside.

Q. What do you like most about living in the countryside?

A. I love that our garden is really big and I can have lots of toys in it and I love that we live near the beach.

Q. Have you ever heard of the Housing Executive?

A. Yes I know that we live in a Housing Executive house and that they come and help us get stuff around the house fixed.

Q. What sort of things do you like doing?

A. I like drawing going on walks and playing outside with my brothers. We also go to the beach a lot and I love going in the sea and building sandcastles.

Q. Where will you be going to high school?

A. I’m going to be going to high school in Bushmills next year which is a mile away. Sometimes my mum is going to drop me off and sometimes I am going to get a bus. I am really excited about getting the bus because I have never gone to school on a bus before.

Q. What do you think you might like to do when you grow up?

A. I would really like to be an artist because drawing calms me down.

Get in touch

You can contact your patch manager and other members of our housing team in the following ways:

Tenant Portal

Send us a message on our tenant portal My Housing Executive at a time that suits you.

Register at www.nihe.gov.uk

Phone

General enquiries

03448 920 900

(lines are open 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday)

Report a repair

03448 920 901

(lines are open 8.30am to 5pm for normal repairs and 24 hours for emergencies).

You can also report a repair by texting **07507 301 011** (starting your message with the word 'REPAIR' and remembering to include your address).

Email

For general enquiries email **information@nihe.gov.uk**

Social Media

Social media is a great way to keep up to date with everything happening in your area and you can also report anything you need help with.

f HousingExecutive

✂ @nihecommunity

@ nihecommunity

Face-To-Face

We understand that you may prefer to speak to someone in person. You can call into any of our offices to talk to our staff or even arrange for someone to call out to your home.

Visit **www.nihe.gov.uk** to find your nearest office and opening hours.

EMBRACING ALL OUR NEIGHBOURS

ARABIC

اكتب غل يه فيزيلى جال غللا نكت مل اذا
يف قدع اسمل الى لوصح الح اجاتحتو مل الى
خيطتستف ، عيطخل او فيفشل قمجرتل
هذه ريفوت فيفنتل نالسال امدخ
لكنم يجرى ، بلطل دن ع فيناجل امدخل
نم ليصرفتل اب رمال اذه لوح راسفتسال
يلجل اكتبككم

CANTONESE

如果英語不是你的母語，並且你需要幫助來進行口譯和文字翻譯，那麼 Housing Executive 可以根據請求而提供免費的服務，請在你當地的辦公室詢問進一步的詳情。

LITHUANIAN

Je anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba ir jums reikia pagalbos dėl vertimo žodžių ir raštu, jums pageidaujant Housing Executive gali suteikti nemokamas vertimo paslaugas; dėl išsamesnės informacijos prašome kreiptis į vietinį skyrių.

MANDARIN

如果英语不是你的母语，并且你需要帮助来进行口译和文字翻译，那么 Housing Executive 可以根据请求而提供免费的服务，请在你当地的办公室询问进一步的详情。

If English is not your first language and you need help with interpreting & translation the Housing Executive can provide free services on request, please ask for further details at your local office.

POLISH

Jeśli język angielski nie jest Państwa językiem ojczystym i potrzebują Państwo pomocy w zakresie tłumaczeń ustnych i pisemnych, Housing Executive oferuje bezpłatne usługi tłumaczeniowe na życzenie. O szczegóły prosimy pytać biuro lokalne.

PORTUGUESE

Se o Inglês não for a sua língua materna e precisar de ajuda com tradução e interpretação, o Executivo de Habitação pode providenciar serviços gratuitos mediante solicitação, pode obter mais informações no seu escritório local.

RUSSIAN

Если английский не является вашим родным языком и вам требуется помощь с устным и письменным переводом, Жилищное управление может предоставить по запросу бесплатные услуги переводчика. За более подробной информацией обратитесь в ваш местный офис.

SLOVAK

Ak angličtina nie je váš materský jazyk a vyžadujete si pomoc s prekladom a tlmočením, kancelária úradu pre otázky bývania (Housing Executive) vám ochotne poskytne tieto služby bezplatne. Prosím, požiadajte svoju miestnu kanceláriu o viac informácií.

SOMALI

Haddii af Ingiriisigu uusan ahayn luqaddaada hooyo oo aad u baahan tahay in lagaa caawiyo turjumaadda oraahda ah iyo midda qoran Agaasinka Guraynta (Housing Executive) ayaa adeegyo bilaash ah bixin kara marka laga codsado, fadlan faahfaahin dheeraad ah weydii xafiiska xaafaddaada.

For customers with sensory disabilities, information can be provided in alternative formats like large print, Braille or audio. Sign language interpreters can also be provided, but please give as much notice as possible to allow us to meet your request.

**Housing
Executive**