



**Supporting™
Communities**
Empowering Society

ANNUAL OUTPUT REPORT 2017 - 2018



www.supportingcommunities.org

**Independent
Tenant
Organisation**

Group Work

We Promoted, Encouraged and Supported Meaningful Community Participation

28 New Referrals received

540 Active Groups supported

Meetings we Attended: **256** Inter-Agencies
40 Housing Forums
147 Housing Community Networks

"Without the continued support of Supporting Communities there would not be a group. From Inter-Agency Meetings to Estate Inspections we thank you for all your help"
Glenburn CA, Magherafelt

How we performed

- Of the **256** Inter-Agency Meetings held – **823** external agencies and **104** MLAs/Cllrs were in attendance
- Carried out Good Governance Health Checks on **117** Housing Executive Community Bases across N Ireland
- Prepared and carried out **195** Estate Inspections province-wide improving the wellbeing of estate residents and their environment

Provided Group Support for: 

- **107** Committee Meetings
- **72** AGMs
- **543** Group Contact Meetings
- **147** Individual Contact Meetings

160 meetings with Housing Executive Staff (including CLOs)

30 groups assisted with registering online with Charity Commission NI in addition to ongoing assistance throughout the year

"On behalf of the Polish Association I would like to thank Supporting Communities for their excellent collaboration in our work, your constructive suggestions, but mainly for your constant commitment to the Polish Community in Dungannon Area" **Polish Association, Dungannon**

TOTAL OF 1,664 ENGAGEMENTS



Funding Services

We provided an effective Funding Support Service to Staff, Communities and other Stakeholders

FUNDING ENQUIRIES

34 formal and informal enquiries completed for funding assistance

Funding Bulletin updated weekly and available on Supporting Communities website providing regular updates on Funding Opportunities

6 Funding Fairs

organised in: Ballymena, Fermanagh, Omagh and Coleraine

3 Housing Executive Area Offices have been provided with a quarterly Funding Bulletin namely; South, Lisburn & Castlereagh and Ards & North Down

FUNDING SECURED
by those groups who we helped
£1,491,524.74

One to One Funding Support
48 Groups throughout the province have been provided with one to one support from our Funding Officer/Liaison Officers

8 Funding Update Bulletins provided on a monthly basis to the **Central Housing Forum Members** highlighting the most relevant and recent funding opportunities

Lisburn £ 

Funding Opportunities - May 2017

 **Social Housing Enterprise Programme**

As part of the Housing Executive's Social Housing Enterprise Programme we have a financial investment programme. This programme aims to support social enterprise initiatives which deliver services and create employment in our housing communities. The programme also supports individuals and groups develop business ideas or increase capacity to benefit communities.

Our small awards for Business Start-up, Education & Training Awards of up to £1,000 are now open.

Applications for large awards of £10,000, £20,000 & £50,000 are currently now open. Closing date for applications is Friday 16th June 2017 at 4.00pm.

If you want further information please contact:
Paul Cattan, Connor Smith or Niall Eastwood on
03448 520 900
or email: socialinvestments@nife.gov.uk







How we performed

- Provided advice to Community Groups and Individuals around funding opportunities
- Funding information incorporated within Supporting Communities E-Zine publication which is made available to **554** Community Groups fortnightly who we support

"We are extremely grateful for all the help and guidance Supporting Communities have given us and hope to continue this working relationship in the coming future"

Currynierin Com Association, Derry

"We have been supported by Supporting Communities Funding Officer to successfully achieve a 5 year funding package which has allowed us to employ 2 members of staff and secure programme funding for the period February 2017-2021"

Carnlough Community Association



Policy/Information Services

We provided an Efficient Information, Research and Policy Support Service to Staff, Communities and other Stakeholders

Support Services/Editorial Team

Produced **22** Editions of our E-Zine publication circulated twice a month to a mail shot of **1,367** bringing Best Practice from the Community Sector; Funding and Training Updates and Policy Developments in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Republic of Ireland.

2 Editions of SCENE circulated in June 2017 and January 2018 sharing information and best practice.

28th March 2018 **E-Zine**

Welcome to Supporting Communities 50th Edition of E-Zine, bringing you Best Practice from the Community Sector: Funding and Training Updates and Policy Developments in Northern Ireland, Great Britain and Republic of Ireland.

'Housing sector realises more than ever the importance of listening to residents.'

As Rethinking Social Housing Northern Ireland continues to get underway, steering group member Colin McLeod encourages tenants and residents to make their voices heard.

I am delighted to be involved in Rethinking Social Housing NI and to be on its steering group. Not only can I offer a personal contribution, but also I can advocate on behalf of the people that really matter in this important conversation and debate. Namely, the residents who make up our communities – be they owner occupiers, private renters or of course social housing tenants, past and present.

I grew up in 'council housing' in the 1970s and early 1980s. I can speak personally to what social housing meant for me and my family. We moved from a rural setting outside of Craigavon to a high-rise tower block in the heart of Belfast. High-rise towers were quite typical of a council housing estate at that time.

When we moved into a Housing Executive house in Craigavon in 1973, it changed our lives for the better. The house was built in a nice modern house with all the comforts – being within walking distance to the town, schools and amenities – was fantastic. But I still remember, in particular, the real sense of community that surrounded us with so many good and supportive neighbours.

For me, this is still the role of 'social housing' – creating a sense of community and support for the people who live in the homes. Social housing should be seen as a real benefit but also a source of choice, whether the homes are provided by the Housing Executive or one of our housing associations.

Rethinking Social Housing and the important questions it asks is very timely for our local context. It's raising 20 years since Building on Success – which we last engaged in a similar consultation exercise within the sector.

The Department for Communities' (DfC) Social Housing Reform Programme (SHRP) promised much in terms of changing the way social housing is delivered, but it has found that it's a cur-de-see. It's also other important and topical issues such as affordability, shared housing, etc. would provide social housing. Housing Executive investment needs and the sustainability of tenancies and communities. That this research project is not only timely but long overdue. I connect CIL Housing Ireland for co-ordinating it.



Supporting Communities
Empowering Society

ISSUE 5
January 2018

SCENE



Supporting Communities
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, Habernet 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 Allocation 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 set up and running and engaging with the Department on a wide range of issues and policies including the recent Review of Allocation Policy."

Colin McLeod, 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 the Panel to make important changes and improvements to housing services in Northern Ireland."



Above: Members of the Housing Policy Panel with Shereagh O'Leary (Housing Association Development Officer) and Laura O'Donnell (Director of Empowering Communities)

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"Excellent publications with a great deal of useful information in them"
Geraldine McAteer, WBPA

Policy Response

Community Involvement Strategy from the Housing Executive

Factsheets - 386 'Customer Friendly' factsheets circulated throughout the year. All factsheets are now on our website and available for downloading.

Our Social Media Performance



Facebook
160 new followers - a 24% increase



Twitter
598 new followers - a 34% increase



Website
9,648 unique visitors 10.7k visits 24k pages viewed

You can also follow Supporting Communities on Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube



Training Services

We provided a Tailored Training Service to Support Staff, Communities and Other Stakeholders



- **Accredited Training**
- **57** individuals graduated
- **31** groups participated
- **98%** satisfaction rate for training delivered
- **3** graduates attended university
- **Individual Group Training**
- **448** individuals participated
- **208** groups participated
- **96%** satisfaction rate for training delivered

2 new Qualifications were written and developed in-house:

Community Capacity Building Level 3 and Developing Social Enterprise Level 3 and added to the menu of qualifications

Measuring Impact Pilot

The increasing importance of community groups being able to demonstrate their impact they are having, led to the further development and delivery of our Measuring Impact Awareness training. Training was delivered in all Council Areas throughout N Ireland



"My name is Yvonne and I have completed the OCN Community Capacity Building Levels 1, 2 and 3 with Supporting Communities. I have really enjoyed learning so many different topics as it has helped me with my volunteering work at Lisburn Downtown Centre. I am a lead volunteer and I help support adults who have learning disabilities, mental health difficulties and autism to name a few. Lisburn Downtown Centre provides several weekly support groups for adults of all ages and abilities so these courses have been a great way of getting more involved by understanding how the charity is run.

Through these courses I have also got to meet so many other people from different community groups in the area. It has been a great way of finding out what they do and also gave me a chance to promote the work that we do too.

The tutors at Supporting Communities have been great! They have helped me learn and understand topics that I had no experience of before. The training was very good and very clear. I also have a learning difficulty and the tutors have been a great support. They have understood my needs and let me do my work at my own pace which is fantastic as I was a little bit nervous when starting the first course. But each week I could relax and gain more confidence. The tutors have even mentioned how much my confidence has grown from the start! I'm so proud of myself for completing all 3 courses and how I've progressed, as I can show people that also have a learning disability that if I can do it, they can too."

Yvonne Swift, Lisburn

"Our tutor was so friendly and understanding...I struggled with some parts of the course but the tutor was always willing to spend some extra time with me and help me get through. I can't thank them enough!" **Course Graduate**



Digital Inclusion

100% positive impact on the lives of participants who took part in the Digital Training

Within the Digital Champion Initiative we have achieved the following:

Universal Credit

Supporting Communities, in conjunction with the Department of Finance, have been working with the Universal Credit team in the roll out of the new Universal Credit online system. The Universal Credit Roadshow began in September 2017, visiting each Jobs and Benefits office as Universal Credit was being rolled out across Northern Ireland. By 31st March 2018, the roadshow visited 10 local offices to support claimants to use the online system.

The roadshows have involved supporting claimants to;

- Create a new claim using the Universal Credit online system
- Set up an email address which is compulsory for the online system
- Log into their new Universal Credit account, check their To-Do list, write a message to their work coach, log in jobs they have applied for and how they have been seeking employment
- Use Google to search for job websites
- Use NI Direct's CV builder to create an easy and straightforward tailored CV

Each Jobs and Benefits office are now equipped with 'Digital Zones'



Landlord Registration

12 private Landlords attended a training session in LPS to show how they register onto the Landlord Registration Scheme.

NIFHA

SC were involved with NIFHA in presenting information about UC to Housing Association Staff on 2 occasions - **10** Housing Associations attended the Belfast event and **5** the NW event.

Other Events Attended:

- Go On NI event in Moira in September 2017
- Armagh Young at Heart in September 2017
- Supported Get Online week 2nd – 6th October
- Enniskillen Young at Heart in October 2017
- Supported and promoted cyber resilience week 11th – 15th Sept 2017

"I was a confident and frequent user of internet and my smartphone before the course but have also picked up some technical information at the course. Also I enjoyed the social aspect of the course."

Course Participant

"I enjoyed all aspects of the course and am a lot more aware of various scams and pitfalls that can occur from using the internet and social media. I have also enjoyed meeting new friends."

Course Participant

'Digital 4 Communities' (D4C) Project



Phase 1 of the D4C project, established in 2016, provided Housing Executive tenants with home broadband and a tablet. Supporting Communities facilitated training sessions to enable the participants to utilise online services and bring them into the digital age and access services previously unavailable to them.

Now in April 2018 we are beginning phase 2 with some significant changes within the structure, and strategy of the project. Implementing changes based on the recommendations from phase 1, from both staff members and participants, we aim to provide an even better service and improve access to even more participants.

5 areas have been identified for this phase: Whiteabbey, Monkstown, Omagh Mens Shed, Queens Quarter Homeless Hostel and Ardoyne. One fundamental change for the next phase, is that the tablets are being distributed to the community groups themselves. The individuals can come to the sessions/workshops with their own equipment and access services but if they do not own a smartphone or tablet they can use the tablets within the centre. Another important feature of the upcoming sessions will be the presence of staff members, from the NIHE and also a community centre/hub representative at the classes. This will give participants a point of contact for their landlord and service provider should they have any issues.

The sessions begin soon and are scheduled to be fortnightly, with evening sessions being facilitated where needed. The flexibility of times and venues will mean as many participants as possible can attend.

Supporting Communities will deliver the training and empower participants to access a variety of online services such as emailing, social media, shopping, banking and the NIHE website/app. A focus of sessions will be Universal Credit and aiming to provide the participants with the necessary skills to apply for the new benefit, as well as maintain and update their personal accounts. As part of the project, a social aspect of the meetings and classes emerged from Phase 1 and we hope to continue this interacting and socialising among participants as well as staff members through a relaxed atmosphere.



D4C representatives meet to discuss Phase 2 of the project

'We are really looking forward to working with the team to provide essential skills to the participants. I think the training will be so beneficial to those who come along.'

D4C Staff Representative, Belfast

I'm delighted to be part of the group and learn about the internet. It's something I was not comfortable with. Everything nowadays is going online so the more I can do, the better!

West Belfast D4C Participant

There is a dedicated D4C facebook group which provides a platform for group members to communicate in between sessions and for staff to upload useful content or videos.



Administrative Services

We provided a Comprehensive, Efficient Administrative Service to Staff, Communities and Other Stakeholders

PAYE Service

31 Groups
94 Individuals

Financial Assessments

125 assessments
saving Groups ££s

Financial Management Support

- Assistance provided to various Groups with Projects under Restricted Funding eg Neighbourhood Renewal and SPOD

"Our group would like to thank all the administrative staff within Supporting Communities for supporting us with a wide range of services including the development of flyers, leaflets, also helping us with questionnaires. We have also had excellent financial support throughout the years in terms of assessing our accounts to the highest standard"

Ann O'Donnell, Windsor RA

"Very friendly staff, make you feel welcome in office. Without the services the Administrative Staff provide the groups would find it hard to do their work"

Chris Bowyer
Ballykeel 1 Moving Forward

Other Administrative Services

Keep updated database of Mailing Lists which comprise of **1,840** individuals

Analysing and compiling **13** Community Surveys with **877** respondents

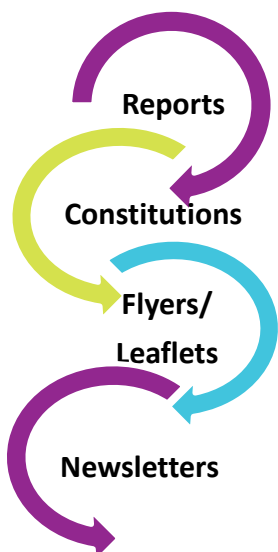


Table below shows figures per Region for Period April 2017 - March 2018

REGION	MINS		MEMOS/AGENDAS	
	Sets Typed	Mail Shot Figure	Number Typed	Mail Shot Figure
BELFAST	81	1,530	25	716
NORTH	65	1,553	37	1,007
SOUTH	152	2,335	192	3,806
GENERAL	12	188	9	151

Community Participation in Housing

We have acted as a 'Champion' for Community Participation in Housing

Service Level Agreements

- **13** Area SLAs signed with Housing Executive Area Managers
- **1** SLA signed with Housing Centre for 2017/18

Community Service Contracts

- **249** Group CSCs in place
- Supporting Communities facilitated process

Tower Block Project

In February 2017 Supporting Communities were encouraged by the Housing Executive to engage residents who live in all Housing Executive Tower Blocks to have their say on issues which affect them.

Supported the Community Chair and Vice-Chair and provided administrative support to **10** Central HF Meetings held during the year



CENTRAL housing forum

COMMUNITY CONFERENCE 2017 FEEDBACK

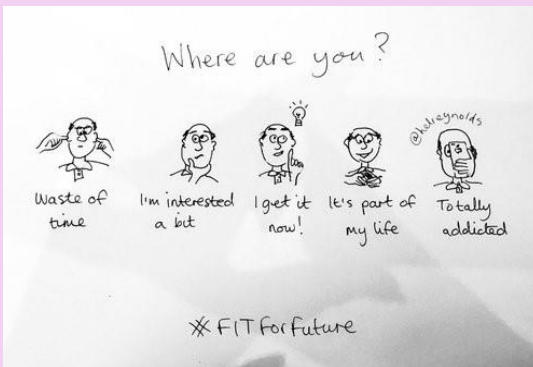
Positive comments made:

- The stalls/displays and freebies were great
- Workshop led by NIHE and SC very good
- Enjoyed the interaction with the microphone
- Icebreaker good fun
- Expert guest speakers
- Very inspirational day
- Learning the meaning of facebook and twitter
- All of it very informative
- Interactive sessions and use of technology

AIMS OF THE CONFERENCE MET

The following were the aims we had for the conference with the table showing the percentage of respondents who felt we achieved them:

- Empower and Inspire **82%**
- Networking Opportunities **91%**
- Providing skills and awareness around Social Media **92%**
- Giving relevant information and signposting **93%**



One of Helen Reynolds 'doodles' re Twitter from her talk on communications



Patricia and James with the 'Catch Box' mike



This year's event looked to the future of community engagement and the increasingly digital world in which we live

Empowering Communities

Mystery Shopping

4 Mystery Shopping Exercises developed, delivered and reports compiled

Advice and Support

12 Housing Associations provided with advice and support on Tenant and Customer Involvement

Tenant Participation Strategies

4 Housing Associations provided with response to their Draft Tenant Participation Strategies

Surveys

Completed **4** TBUC Surveys for Housing Associations

Good Practice Visit and Networking Opportunity

Organised a Good Practice Visit to Glasgow, **14** participants from Housing Associations and Housing Executive attended the 3 day trip



Other Areas of Work

- Stage 2 Complaints Panel established, **5** Stage 2 complaints investigated
- Tenant Participation Practitioners Network (TPPN) established to provide support and sharing of good practice - 3 meetings held
- **3** 'How to do it sessions' held looking at Tenant Participation Strategies, Digital Inclusion and Mystery Shopping
- New project funded by Joint Management Partner, set up a Tenants Committee within Supported Living Scheme with ongoing support 12 months
- Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council established a Housing Liaison Committee, developed Terms of Reference and facilitated inaugural meetings

8 Networking Conferences/Events

- Facilitated workshops at conferences
- Provided keynote presentations
- Chaired panel discussions
- Provided information stands

Training

- Tenant Participation & Community Development OCN Level 2 accreditation delivered to:
 - **7** Housing Associations completed x **10** Officers
- Bespoke Tenant Participation & Community Development delivered to:
 - **2** Housing Associations x **55** Staff Members
- Bespoke Good Governance & Effective Meetings designed and delivered to:
 - **4** Housing Associations to **172** Tenants and Staff Members

"I just wanted to thank everyone involved in organising the trip to Glasgow, extremely well organised and was great to witness first hand the exciting and innovative projects which are being delivered locally and in partnership. We were spoilt rotten during our stay"

Martin Hamilton, Newington HA

"The course was extremely interactive and challenged my thoughts on both Tenant Engagement and Community Development. I would highly recommend it to anyone who wants to further their learning in these areas. Empowering Communities really are best equipped to provide this and the course facilitators understand the practicalities of service delivery on the ground"

Martin Downey, Radius Housing

Partnership Working and Award Recognition

We maximised Opportunities for Partnership Working

Neighbourhood Renewal

- Continued to support and be represented on 6 Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships across Northern Ireland, including Chair of Omagh NRP
- Provided support to a number of groups in relation to SPOD Projects

Supporting Communities continued to be represented at Board Level in a number of organisations including:

Housing Rights
Community Places

Choice
NIEL

Sustainable NI
Housing Executive Forum for Equality

On Tuesday 25th April, Supporting Communities launched its new and innovative company, **Empowering Communities Enterprise Limited**, at a gathering of housing professionals and other stakeholders at the Skainos Centre in Belfast



Empowering Communities Staff and Trustees at the launch of the new company
From l-r: Laura O'Dowd, Joe Simpson, Colm McDaid, Steve Pollard, Sheenagh McNally

'Thinking Outside the Box'

A successful conference held jointly by Supporting Communities and Housing Rights on 9th May 2017



10th CommsHero event held in London in May 2017 in Phoenix Community Housing's Green Man (Community Hub) premises in South London.



Deirdre, Colm and Linda having fun



Empowering Communities nominated for a Social Enterprise award on 27th October 2017

Laura O'Dowd, Director of EC with Aidan Kearney, Senior Training Officer delighted to be finalists



Supporting Communities was delighted to be included at the CIHNI Awards on 23rd February 2018 as a partner in the work for which Choice Housing won a 'Highly Commended' award.



L-r Aidan Kearney, Healy King, Supporting Communities; Carol Ervine, Lawrence Jackson, Choice Housing

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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