

NEW LODGE HOUSING FORUM

23 NEWLODGE RD

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ANNUAL CHAIRPERSONS REPORT

NOVEMBER 2022

THE PAST YEAR HAS WITNESSED A SUBSTANTIAL INCREASE IN THE NUMBERS OF RESIDENTS WHO HAVE SOUGHT OUR ASSISTANCE IN MATTERS RELATING TO HOUSING ISSUES. WE HAVE DEALT WITH OVER 326 REQUESTS COVERING A BROAD SPECTRUM OF PROBLEMS WHICH ARE PRIMARILY BASED AROUND THE SUBJECT OF HOUSING. THESE INCLUDED

1 HOMES THAT ARE DIRECTLY IMPACTED BY THE DEMOLITION OF 287 DWELLINGS. THESE ARE TO BE REPLACED WITH THE BUILDING OF 123 QUALITY HOUSES WHICH WILL STRENGTHEN THE OVERALL SENSE OF COMMUNITY WHICH ALREADY EXISTS IN OUR AREA. THE COST OF THIS SCHEME WILL TOTAL 35\40 MILLION POUNDS WHICH IS EVIDENCE OF A MAJOR INVESTMENT BY THE HOUSING EXE AND THE STORMONT MINISTER ENCOMPASSING THE LOCAL AREA. WE ARE TYING IN DIRECTLY WITH THE UPPER LONG STREETS COMMITTEE, SENIOR HOUSING EXE STAFF AND LOCAL POLITICIANS ON A DAILY BASIS AS WE JOINTLY APPROACH ISSUES AT AN EARLY STAGE IE SALES OF HOUSES, ENSURING THE RIGHTS OF HOUSING EXE TENANTS, HOMEOWNERS AND LANDLORD TENANTS WHICH ARE ALL PROPERLY PROTECTED. WE HAVE BEEN TO THE FORE IN INFORMING TENANTS OF ANY PROGRESS THAT IS MADE.

2 WE HAVE WITNESSED A POSITIVE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF REFURBISHMENT SCHEMES WHICH HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT BY THE HOUSING EXE AND THESE INCLUDE

42 HOMES HAVE BEEN REFURBISHED IN THE CARLISLE ESTATE AREA WITH NEW WINDOWS AND EFFECTIVE EXTERNAL INSULATION WHICH WILL ENSURE THAT HOMES ARE PROPERLY HEATED WHILST ALSO BRINGING DOWN THE COST OF ENERGY BILLS.

THERE HAS BEEN MAJOR REFURBISHMENT SCHEMES IN THE TOWER BLOCKS WHICH HAVE INCLUDED, OISIN, FINN AND FIANNA BLOCKS. THESE INCLUDED NEW BATHROOMS AND KITCHENS IN EACH OF THE FLATS.

WE ARE STILL DEALING WITH THE ISSUES OF THE MASONETTES IN DUNCAIRN PDE. THESE DWELLINGS ARE 60 YEARS OLD AND HAVE FALLEN INTO SERIOUS DISREPAIR WITH PROBLEMS OF SERIOUS DAMPNES, CRUMBLING CONCRETE AND LITTLE OR NO INSULATION WHICH IS DRIVING THE ENERGY COSTS FOR EACH HOME LITERALLY THROUGH THE ROOF. A SECOND ECONOMIC EVALUATION SHOULD BE COMPLETED IN THE COMING MONTHS AND THE RESULTS OF THIS WILL DETERMINE THE PROGRESS OF EITHER DEMOLISHING THE COMPLEX OR MAJOR INVESTMENT IN BRINGING THE DWELLINGS UP TO PROPER LIVING STANDARDS.

OUR ROLE IN ENSURING THAT THE SCHEMES WILL BE SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETED INCLUDED

1 MEETING WITH THE VARIOUS CONTRACTORS ON A REGULAR BASIS TO RECEIVE UPDATES AND TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS THAT WERE ARISING IE AMOUNT OF TIME THEY WOULD BE IN RESIDENTS HOMES, ENSURING THAT SCAFFOLDING WAS UP FOR A MINIMAL AMOUNT OF TIME AND TO KEEP IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE CONTRACTORS RE THE POSITIONING OF SKIPS AND THE DISPOSAL OF DISCARDED BUILDING MATERIALS IN GENERAL..

2 MEETING WITH THE HOUSING EXECUTIVE MANAGERS, MAINTENANCE OFFICERS AND SENIOR STAFF TO JOINTLY TACKLE ISSUES WHICH WERE ARISING INCLUDING COMPLETION DATES ETC

3 TO MEET WITH THE RESIDENTS BOTH SINGULARLY AND IN GROUPS TO DISCUSS PROGRESS IN AN OVERALL SENSE. WE ALSO RECORDED ANY COMPLAINTS AND MET WITH THE REPS AND CONTRACTORS TO ENSURE THAT THE WORK WAS COMPLETED TO A HIGH STANDARD.

THERE CONTINUES TO BE A STEADY FLOW OF RESIDENTS WHO CALL TO OUR OFFICE ON A DAILY BASIS TO REPORT ISSUES WHICH ARE DIRECTLY IMPACTING ON THEIR LIVES AND THESE INCLUDE PLUMBING, ELECTRICAL, PLASTERING AND HEATING PROBLEMS. WE HAVE A GOOD CONTACT WITH BOTH THE DLO GROUP AND THE EMERGENCY SERVICE SECTION WITHIN THE HOUSING EXEC. THIS ENSURES THAT URGENT REPAIRS CAN BE DEALT WITH IN A TWO TO FOUR HOUR PERIOD.

WE ARE IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH THE MAINTENANCE OFFICERS AND THROUGH THIS RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE BEEN ABLE TO INSTALL NINE ENTRY GATES AND PROVIDE A LARGE NUMBER OF REPLACEMENT LOCKS BECAUSE OF A SMALL GROUP OF YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE INVOLVED WITH SUSTAINED INCIDENTS OF ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR AND THEY AIM TO HAVE A FREE RUN OF THE ENTRIES.

WE HAVE ALSO BEEN WORKING WITH THE HOUSING SOLUTIONS TEAM WHO ARE BASED IN THE HOUSING EXECUTIVES MAIN OFFICE. THERE HAD BEEN ISSUES WHICH HAD ARISEN OVER A PERIOD OF TIME AND THESE HAD SLOWED THE GROWTH OF DELIVERING AN APPROACH TO HOMELESSNESS WHICH WOULD WITNESS MEANINGFUL PROGRESS. THERE WAS A SIGNIFICANT TURNOVER OF PERSONNEL IN THIS DEPARTMENT AND AT TIMES THIS LED TO A BREAKDOWN WHEN DEALING WITH SOME COMPLAINTS. THE NORTH BELFAST MANAGER OF THE H E ARRANGED A MEETING FOR US TO ATTEND AND THOSE INCLUDED WERE SENIOR MEMBERS OF STAFF WITHIN HOUSING SOLUTIONS. THERE WAS AN IMPROVEMENT RIGHT AWAY AND WE NOW HAVE A NUMBER OF PHONE NUMBERS AND EMAIL CONTACTS WHICH ENSURES THAT THERE IS LITTLE CHANCE OF THE BREAKDOWNS WHICH HAD HAPPENED PREVIOUSLY.

WE HAVE A SOUND WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LOCAL MANAGER OF THE BELFAST CITY COUNCIL. THERE HAS BEEN AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF INCIDENTS CONCERNING THE ILEGAL DUMPING OF RUBBISH IN THE GENERAL AREA. THERE HAVE BEEN A NUMBER OF FINES ISSUED TO THOSE RESIDENTS WHO HAVE BEEN INVOLVED WITH THIS NEGATIVE ACTIVITY

THERE HAS BEEN A RISE IN THE NUMBER OF ANTI SOCIAL INCIDENTS IN RECENT MONTHS. THESE INCLUDE, DRUG DEALING, VANDALISM AND ATTACKS BETWEEN YOUNG PEOPLE. WE WORK CLOSELY WITH THE PSNI, THE SAFER STREETS COMMITTEE AND COMMUNITY RESTORATIVE JUSTICE IRELAND. WE ALSO WORK WITH THE LOCAL YOUTH LEADERS WHO CAN OFFER YOUNG PEOPLE ALTERNATIVE THINGS TO DO AND THIS LITERALLY TAKES THEM OFF THE STREET.

OVER THREE YEARS AGO OUR COMMITTEE MET AND MADE THE DECISION TO OFFER THE PEOPLE OF THE AREA THE OPPORTUNITY TO AVAIL OF THE SERVICES OF OUR NEW WELFARE RIGHTS CLINIC. WE HAD BEEN HELPING PEOPLE WHO WERE IN FINANCIAL STRESS WHICH HAD WITNESSED THEM FACING EXTREME HARDSHIP. THIS INCLUDED ADVISING THEM ON THE GROWING ISSUE OF DEBT INCLUDING RENT ARREARS, LOANS AND CREDIT CARDS ETC. WE ARE FORTUNATE TO HAVE A DEBT ADVISOR WHO WORKS ON A VOLUNTARY BASIS IN THE CLINIC ONE NIGHT PER WEEK AND ALSO TAKES QUERIES ETC THROUGH OUR OFFICE. WE HAVE FOUND THAT AS WE DELIVER THIS PROJECT WE ARE CREATING A MEANINGFUL WORKING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HOUSING BENEFITS SECTION OF THE H E.

WE HAVE ALSO OFFERED A SERVICE OF DELIVERING FOOD PARCELS TO H E TENANTS AND OTHER INDIVIDUALS WHO LIVE IN OUR AREA.WE CONTINUE TO TAKE REFERALS FROM THE LOCAL PATCH MANAGERS AND THIS ENSURES THAT PEOPLE WILL AVOID THE NEGATIVE SITUATION OF GOING WITHOUT FOOD.THERE HAS BEEN A MARKED INCREASE IN REQUESTS BEING MADE TO OUR OFFICE REGARDING FOOD PARCELS AND GIVEN THE MAMOOOTH MISTAKES MADE BY GOVERNMENT THIS WILL BE OUR REALITY FOR SOME TIME TO COME.WE HAVE RESPONDED TO THIS INCREASE BY SEEKING THE ASSISTANCE OF TWO FURTHER FOODBANKS IN NORTH BELFAST AND THEY HAVE COME TO THE FORE IN HELPING US,EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE UNDER EXTREME PRESSURE REGARDING THE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE THEY ALREADY TEND TO.

WE ARE WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NEWINGTON HOUSING ASSOCIATION WHO HAVE BEEN AWARDED THE SCHEME WHICH WILL WITNESS THE REMOVAL OF THE OLD HOUSING STOCK IN THE UPPER LONG STREETS,TO BE REPLACED WITH 123 QUALITY NEW HOMES.THIS WILL ADD TO THEIR ALREADY SUBSTANTIAL PRESENCE IN THE LOCAL AREA WHERE THEY ARE VIEWED AS AN ORGANISATION WHO HAVE THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE COMMUNITY AT HEART.THEY REGULARLY ASSIST MANY COMMUNITY GROUPS IN THE AREA,INCLUDING OUR OWN.THEY HAVE ASSISTED US WITH RESOURCES REGARDING OUR RUNNING COSTS.

WE CONTINUE TO SEEK ADVICE AND PRACTICAL HELP FROM THE SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES ORGANISATION.THEIR REPRESENTATIVE (LISA) IS INSTUMENTAL IN HELPING US IN MANY PRACTICAL WAYS.THESE INCLUDE ARRANGING MEETINGS,PROVIDING AGENDAS AND MINUTES AND ASSISTING US IN PREPARING APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDING.WE REGARD THE GROUP AS A POSITIVE PARTNER IN PROVIDING RESOURCES WHERE THEY ARE MOST NEEDED.LISA IS ALSO TO THE FORE IN PREPARING OUR CHARITY COMMISION RETURNS.THEY ALSO ASSIST US WITH WAGES BEING PAID AND PAYMENTS TO H M R C BEING PAID ON A REGULAR BASIS.

FINANCES.OUR FINANCIAL SITUATION IS STABLE.THE WORKERS SALARY IS FUNDED BY THE H E AND IS APPLIED FOR ON AN ANNUAL BASIS.IN THE PAST TWO YEARS TWO ORGANISATIONS HAVE ASSISTED US WITH RUNNING COSTS.THEY ARE NEWINGTON HOUSING ASSOC AND THE JOHN MOORE FOUNDATION.IN RECENT DAYS WE HAVE SUCCESSFUL WITH OUR APPLICATION TO THE H E RE A GRANT FOR A MUCH NEEDED PHOTO COPIER AND A PHONE FOR THE HOUSING WORKER.OUR ACCOUNTS ARE PREPARED EACH YEAR BY THE SENIOR FINANCE PERSON IN THE STAR NEIGHBOURHOOD CENTRE AND WE ARE GRATEFUL FOR THEIR DUE DILIGENCE AND PROFESSIONALISM .

FINALLY,I MUST MENTION OUR COMMITTEE WHO ARE HARDWORKING AND KEEN TO DELIVER A SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY WHICH WILL ENHANCE THE LIVES OF ALL WHO LIVE HERE.THEY ARE VERY PRACTICAL IN OFFERING HELP TO THE HOUSING WORKER WHO HAS COMMENTED THEIR DAILY CONTACT WITH HIM GOES SOME WAY TO EASE THE OVERALL WORK LOAD OF THE ISSUES WHICH IS REPORTED TO OUR OFFICE ON A REGULR BASIS.WE INTEND NOT ONLY TO DELIVER OUR EXISTING SERVICES,INDEED WE NEED TO EXPAND THEM IN THE COMING MONTHS AND YEARS.

LIAM WIGGINS,CHAIRPERSON OF THE NEW LODGE HOUSING FORUM, 24TH NOVEMBER 2022

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