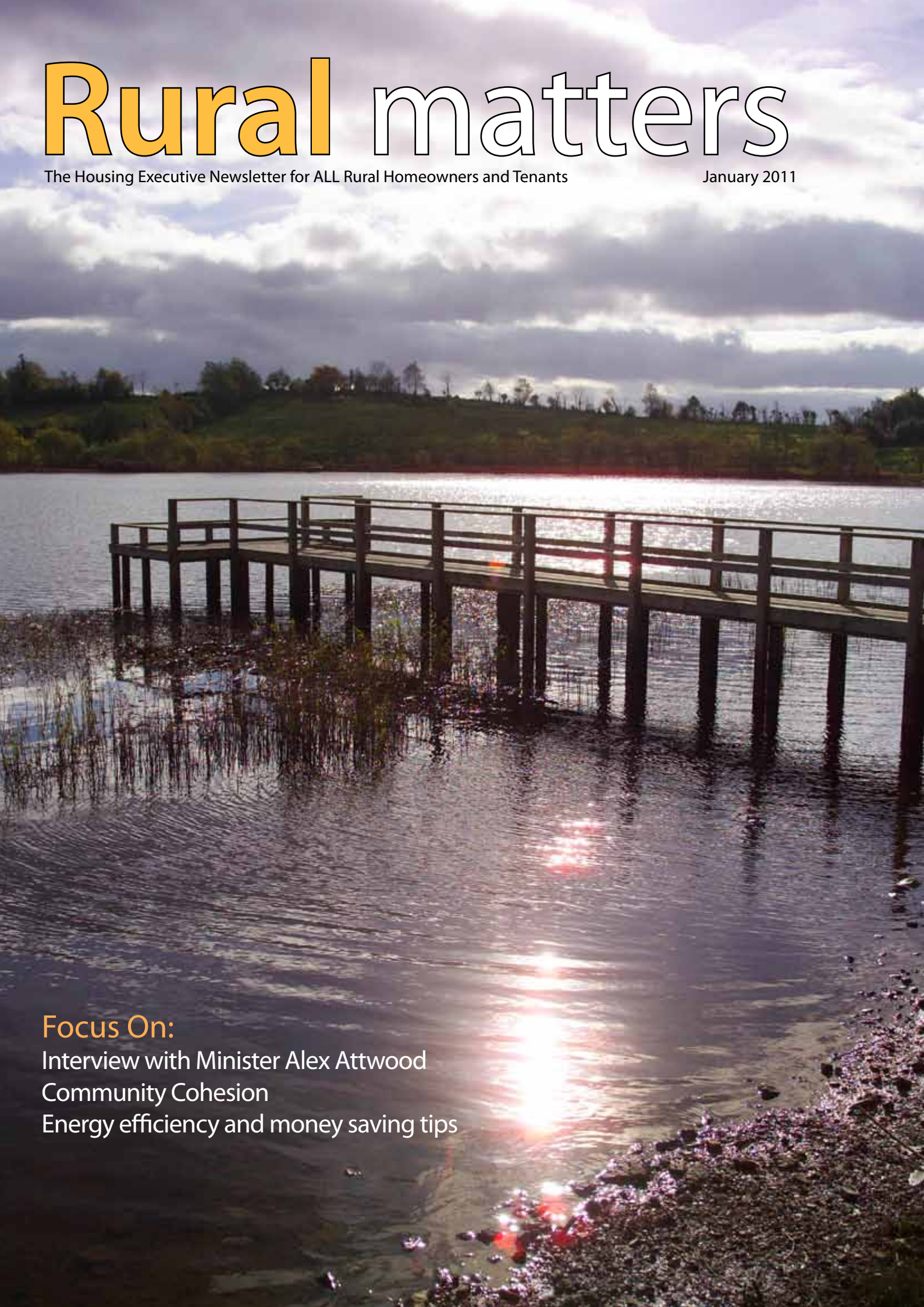


Rural matters

The Housing Executive Newsletter for ALL Rural Homeowners and Tenants

January 2011



Focus On:

Interview with Minister Alex Attwood

Community Cohesion

Energy efficiency and money saving tips

Foreword



In this edition of Rural Matters the DSD Minister Alex Attwood answers our questions and outlines his plans for his Department and how they will impact on rural communities. We are grateful to the Minister for taking time out of his schedule to talk to us about these very important issues. It is clear from the interview that there are very challenging times ahead but there remains optimism that these difficult times will nevertheless lead on to new and innovative policies which will keep not only rural but all communities vibrant and sustainable.

We are already in the middle of what has been a record breaking cold winter so this edition also includes a focus on energy efficiency and keeping warm at the lowest cost. The high levels of heating problems and burst pipes that were experienced can only reinforce the importance of good insulation and effective management of heating systems. We would urge those who qualify for any of the insulation grants or cash backs outlined in the article to avail of them to keep your home protected even in the harshest conditions.

The importance of sustaining and developing communities remains at the heart of our action plan for rural areas. In this issue you will also find many examples of communities working together to break down barriers, improve the environment and include those who feel isolated. We hope you will be inspired by what you read and perhaps find a project that could be replicated in your own community.

We hope you enjoy this edition of Rural Matters and we would encourage you to contact us if there is something you want us to include in future magazines. Simply ring Michael Conway our Rural Coordinator on 028 90 318559 or email michael.conway@nihe.gov.uk

Stewart Cuddy
Chief Executive (Acting)

Brian Rowntree
Chairman

Directing Development to where it is needed

The Housing Executive has developed a new web search facility to actively encourage housing associations and developers to focus their development resources in those areas of greatest need.

The website highlights locations throughout Northern Ireland with a current shortage of social housing schemes and specifically highlights rural areas where the Housing Executive would welcome suitable sites or proposals.

Housing Executive Strategic Development Manager, Keery Irvine, explained "Providing new housing for rural communities remains a priority for the Housing Executive. Even at this time of economic uncertainty, we are more committed than ever to addressing housing need in rural communities and hope the new web search facility will help to promote new developments in rural areas"

If you are interested in finding out about unmet need or proposed developments in your area you can access this information using the new combined search facility – just choose 'Unmet Need' or 'Proposed Development' when selecting your criteria.

Want to know more?
www.nihe.gov.uk/housing_need.



Rural Homes Underway 2010

While there are many rural areas with 'unmet need', it is also pleasing to note that the first nine months of 2010/11 has seen 161 'starts' on homes in 13 rural locations across Northern Ireland as shown in the table below

Housing Association	Council Area	Scheme Location	Number
Apex Housing	Coleraine	Portballintrae	6
Apex Housing	Ballymena	Portglenone	16
Helm Housing	Newry and Mourne	Newtowncloghogue	22
Oaklee	Armagh	Poyntzpass	5
Rural	Fermanagh	Donagh	5
Rural	Armagh	Eglis	6
Ulidia	Banbridge	Loughbrickland	24
Ark	Down	Ardglass	26
Habinteg	Down	Drumaness	12
Rural	Strabane	Newtownstewart	4
Apex	Magherafelt	Draperstown	23
Oaklee	Newry and Mourne	Meigh	10
Rural	Fermanagh	Fermanagh	2
Total			161

A new home advice clinic is now operating in Ashfield Gardens Community House on the first Wednesday of every month as a result of partnership working between Omagh District Council and the Housing Executive. The clinic offers a free advice service on a range of topics relating to the home and is open to everyone living in the Fintona area with representatives from various agencies on hand to provide professional advice.

HOMELY ADVICE FOR FINTONA



One of the advisers at the clinic is Kieran Cranny, Home Assessment Officer with Omagh District Council. Kieran can visit people in their own home and will provide advice on home safety and security, energy efficiency and benefits. Delighted that the clinic is up and running Kieran said:

"This service is free, confidential and available to anyone with young children under 5 or who is over 65. As a result of accidents in the home every year in Northern Ireland over 9,000 people

are admitted to hospital and tragically there are 70 deaths.

"I would highly recommend people from the area to come along to the clinic if they want to know more about how they can make their home safer and more secure and following the assessment, they may be supplied with equipment to reduce the possibility of accidents and increase security".

In his role as Home Assessment Officer Kieran is also a referral agent for the Warm Homes

Scheme which is aimed at reducing fuel poverty. Cavity wall insulation, loft insulation, hot water cylinder jacket, benefit entitlement and installation of oil central heating are some of the measures which may be available through the scheme. Two households have already benefitted from the scheme after contacting the clinic.

Advice on how to set up Neighbourhood Watch Schemes, how to prevent crime and environmental issues is provided by the Rural Community Safety Warden, Karen Kerr-George from Omagh District Council. Housing Executive Neighbourhood Warden, Maura Mullan, gives advice on issues such as illegal dumping, noisy neighbours and anti social behaviour.

Ryan McGuire, Community Development Officer is keen to see residents from the entire Fintona area use this service.

"This is a great opportunity for all of us in Fintona to learn how we can reduce home accidents and improve home security which could save and improve lives."

Ballyhornan does Bollywood

East met West when young people from Ballyhornan in East Down travelled west to Cookstown for the recent Housing Community Conference, organised by the Housing Executive and Supporting Communities Northern Ireland. The conference drew representatives from local Housing Community Networks and community groups from across Northern Ireland. It provided a showcase for community groups to demonstrate the range of local initiatives that are being carried out to support local communities.

This included the work of the Ballyhornan and District Community Association.

Patricia Curran, Chairperson of the Ballyhornan and District Community Association, explained how a new Family Centre in Ballyhornan provides support for people living in this part of County Down:

"The Family Centre has been a rallying point that demonstrates that the community can take action to improve the

infrastructure of the area. We hope it will be a springboard for a new revitalized Ballyhornan Taskforce.

"The Community Association has developed a range of activities for both older people and for the youth of the area. In addition, arts and crafts, cookery, dancing and IT training provide opportunities for local people to meet together socially.

"With funding from the Down Community Safety Partnership, we were able to run drama workshops for young people between 12 and 17. The workshops helped young people to examine issues around anti-social behaviour and how it affects individuals and the whole community. The workshops culminated in a production staged in the Family Centre in front of family, friends and members of the community.

"I wish to thank Nisha Tandon and Emmanuel McStravick for their hard work in choreographing our 'Bollywood' dancers at the Community Conference".

Local Housing Executive Manager, Aidan Brannigan commented:

"It was a tremendous honour for Ballyhornan Community Association to be selected to represent Down District at this showcase event. Michelle Stewart and Jennifer Davey, along with a group of young people from the area, did a great job in highlighting the excellent work being carried out by the association in Ballyhornan".



Rural areas have a strong tradition of self help and community action to address local issues. Lower Castledawson Community Association (LCCA) have demonstrated how the efforts of local people – with a little help from agencies like the Housing Executive- can make significant improvements to their area.

In the past, the Riverside area situated within Lower Castledawson (Magherafelt) has suffered severe social problems, including sectarian and racial tensions, solvent and alcohol abuse, high unemployment and benefits dependency, low educational attainment, higher rates of illness and anti social behaviour. LCCA's

work and dedication from the association's inception in 2001 and their approach of working in partnership shows they have come a long way down that difficult road of transformation.

- The NIHE Regeneration Strategy for Riverside included refurbishing properties, environmental improvements and demolition of 16 properties;
- The Riverwalk Project did a major clean up along the Moyola River which runs adjacent to the estate which is now a picturesque tourist attraction.
- In 2007 LCCA organised their first Summer Fun Day on the Estate, which has now become an annual cross community good relations event;

- In 2008 with the help of the Housing Executive and other funders, LCCA opened a purpose built, fully furnished Community House for the use of local community;
- In conjunction with BBC2's 'Breathing Spaces' programme run by Bill Oddie, Radio Ulster and Lough Neagh Partnership, LCCA identified a derelict site previously misused for anti-social behaviour – transforming it into a nature park garden which was featured on national television;
- Last year the Riverside area was selected for the Shared Neighbourhood Programme, which is funded by the International Fund for Ireland and implemented by the NIHE Community Cohesion Unit. The programme which is community led aims to help promote and maintain existing good relations within and between communities.

Marilyn Giboney, Community Cohesion Advisor working closely with LCCA in delivering the Shared Neighbourhood Programme says, 'The estate had already started that journey of change and that's one of the criteria which brought them to the attention of the Shared Neighbourhood Programme implementation team'.

Terry West, Chair of LCCA, is very excited about the long lasting effect and impact of the work of LCCA and looks forward to the future with anticipation. Terry says, 'With continued support from local community and in partnership with statutory agencies, we as a community can effect real change and make a difference to the society we live in. Terry also takes this opportunity to thank funders and everyone who has helped them in their achievements to date.'

Riverside Regeneration





RURAL REPORT LAUNCHED

The end of August saw the launch of the 2009/10 Annual Report on the Housing Executive's Rural Strategy. The well attended event was a showcase for partnership working at its best.

The venue was Saint Colman's Primary school in Annaclone. It was made available by Kevin Donaghy, Principal who spoke at the event about the importance of new housing in keeping the community

sustainable which in turn keeps rural schools viable.

The event was hosted by Brian Rowntree, Housing Executive Chairman, who spoke about the challenges facing rural communities now and into the future and the role that the Housing Executive hoped to play helping communities to meet those challenges.

The report was launched by the Permanent Secretary of the DSD who was joined by former DSD Minister Margaret Ritchie in acknowledging the work done to date and the task ahead to ensure continued support for rural communities.

The community sector was represented by the newly elected Chair of the Rural

Residents Forum – Patricia McQuillan. A rural dweller herself, Patricia was happy to applaud the achievements in rural areas throughout the past three years of the strategy and also used the opportunity to fight the corner of rural communities – challenging the statutory agencies present to make sure that rural areas get their "fair share" and confirming her commitment to work with them via the Rural Residents Forum to achieve this.

Copies of the Rural Annual Report are available from Michael Conway, Rural Coordinator, by ringing on 028 90 318559 or online on the Housing Executive's website www.nihe.gov.uk



Michael Conway, the Housing Executive's Rural Coordinator, recently met up with DSD Minister Alex Attwood who kindly agreed to discuss his vision for his department and how that might affect rural areas and communities.

MC: You have taken on the Ministerial job at one of the most difficult financial times in recent history - are you daunted by the challenge?

AA: I am not daunted by the challenge – but the impact of budget and welfare cuts on people in need will be daunting. That is why I have argued with London that Northern Ireland has particular circumstances that need to be recognised and argued in Belfast that our budget must have protection of those in need at its heart.

MC: What are your key objectives at the Department for Social Development?

AA: My priorities are:

- investing in housing and addressing housing need, particularly in times of stress;
- building communities, tackling disadvantage and encouraging social responsibility; and

MEET THE MINISTER

- creating vibrant cities and towns.

My vision is also for rural areas to have a vibrant and sustainable civic society. In order to achieve this my department promotes and supports the role of voluntary and community organisations in rural areas across the public sector through the provision of funding for regional and sub regional network organisations in order to support local organisations and good community development.

MC: How can you ensure that the comprehensive spending review won't impact disproportionately on rural areas?

AA: The draft budget 2011-15 was presented to the Assembly on 15 December. I support the draft Budget now going out for consultation. I await the results of that process and hope it will help reform the budget in a better image. However, we do know that we are facing very challenging times.

The budget reductions across the Northern Ireland block will impact on all areas of society but my aim will always be to protect the most vulnerable households, in both urban and rural areas, by protecting

budgets such as Social Housing Development Programme, Disabled Adaptation Grants, Warm Homes / Fuel Poverty and the Supporting People programme.

MC: DARD is currently preparing a Rural White Paper – what are your views on rural proofing and inter departmental co-operation?

AA: I am in support of rural proofing aims to ensure that the needs and special considerations of rural communities and areas are routinely and objectively considered as part of the policy development process. I met the DARD Minister, Michelle Gildernew, on this issue recently.

It is widely recognised that rural proofing should be an underlying part of the policy formation cycle, with clear identification of evidence used, decisions made and monitoring of the impact of the various policies.

It is also imperative that Government departments and organisations such as Rural Community Network, Rural Development Council and the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations work together.



MC: Research shows that fuel poverty and other types of poverty are a big problem in many rural areas – how is your department responding to this challenge?

AA: Fuel poverty is a particular feature of poverty and its alleviation is an important priority of a responsible and compassionate society.

To date Warm Homes is my department’s main tool in tackling fuel poverty with the scheme providing a range of insulation and heating installations to the most vulnerable groups.

The overall target is for at least 9,000 Warm Homes interventions per year, and this is regularly exceeded.

From a rural perspective, in light of the rural poverty figures, my department has a target that 40% of all Warm Homes interventions must be in rural areas and again this target was achieved last year and is on track for achievement this year.

I will launch ‘Fuel Poverty in Times of Stress’ shortly and will attempt to tackle the issue of fuel costs for the first time, along with low incomes; the two biggest drivers of fuel poverty.

MC: Do you have a vision for rural Northern Ireland and will social housing have a role to play?

AA: The Northern Ireland Housing Executive already takes a very proactive role in the delivery of housing in rural areas.

I am committed to continuing a programme to identify rural housing need and to ensuring that such need is addressed through the Social Housing Development Programme, as funding permits. This latter point is crucial - last year there were 1,800 new-build starts, this year 2,000 and on the basis of the draft budget it could collapse to below 1,000. This is a further reason why the draft budget needs reworked.

To achieve this, rural housing need is reflected in the Social Housing Development Plan by

including over 80 rural sites in the three year programme.

Housing in rural areas is frequently best approached through small clusters or ‘clachan’ style developments of up to six houses, and of a high quality design appropriate to rural setting and have regard to local distinctiveness.

It is also important that appropriate economic development enterprises, including schemes for tourist development, and new social or community facilities should be accommodated.

Last year 185 new rural homes were started, the second successive year with an increase in delivery of rural social housing.





MC: Can your department provide any additional support for those with the added challenge of having a disability in rural areas?

AA: I am committed to making sure that people across Northern Ireland receive the benefits to which they are entitled. A range of initiatives have been delivered by the Social Security Agency since 2005, such as targeted exercises, mailshots and outreach. Some of the most successful of these exercises have focussed on pensioners living in rural areas. By June 2010, the agency's Benefit Uptake Programme has generated total additional annual benefits and arrears of £33m.

The 2010/11 Benefit Uptake Programme includes offering benefit assessments, through the Citizens Advice Bureau to 19,000 people. Almost 6,500 invitations have been sent to people who live in rural areas. I would encourage anyone who has received an invitation for a benefit assessment to check if they are missing out. It does work and produces new monies.

The programme also includes extending the agency's outreach provision for older



people (60 years and over) across twelve council areas with a high proportion of rural dwellers – Antrim, Armagh, Ballymoney, Banbridge, Coleraine, Down, Dungannon, Fermanagh, Larne, Magherafelt, Newry & Mourne and Omagh. I urge older





people to check they are getting everything they are entitled to by calling 0800 232 1271. You may be aware that my department also provides additional financial help in the form of Winter Fuel Payments and Cold Weather Payments to those individuals who meet the respective qualifying conditions.

We have undertaken extensive publicity over recent months to encourage uptake of Winter Fuel Payments and further publicity will issue in the coming months.

Cold Weather Payments will be made when the average temperature drops to or is forecast to be zero degrees or below for 7 consecutive days at any of the Met Office's 7 weather stations located throughout Northern Ireland. My department will announce when these payments are applicable and the relevant postcode areas affected. However, this system was not designed for the recent arctic weather. That is why I have written to and spoken with the London Government to urge payment of an Emergency Weather Payment (£250-£400) together with positive changes to the Cold Weather and Winter Fuel Payments.

MC: With higher levels of rural unfitness, can your department do anything to support rural owner occupiers?

AA: Some private housing, particularly in rural areas, is in poor condition and the owners of these properties need help in putting this right. Grant aid alone cannot address this problem, particularly as all budgets in the public sector are coming under increasing pressure.



My officials are working to identify new ways to supplement shrinking public budgets to ensure home owners have access to good information and advice and access to private funding through things like equity release.

In addition we continue to work with housing associations to bring forward new affordable housing opportunities to complement the work of Co-Ownership Housing

Association. A number of project proposals, both urban and rural, are currently under consideration.

Preliminary work to scope new policy proposals to support housing repair and improvement in the private sector is underway. Initial discussions have involved DARD and rural stakeholders as well as other relevant departments across Government.

In another innovative step my department has recently requested that the Housing Executive prepare a list of sites on which it may be suitable to bring forward for new affordable/intermediate housing projects, rather than purely social housing. Possibilities are currently being identified.

MC: Do you have a personal rural connection?

AA: My MLA colleagues give me a very full sense of rural issues, though I be born and bred in Belfast. My own parents are Cork City, but my mother-in-law was reared on a farm at Stradone, Co Cavan, which is still farmed by her brother.

MC: Thank you Minister.

Caring, Sharing and Chocolate!

Pupils from Killyleagh Primary School and St. Mary's Primary School in Killyleagh, County Down have helped to promote the Killyleagh Chocolate Festival and the Shared Neighbourhood Programme.

Last September the children took time out from their classes to present a colourful frieze, depicting children holding hands, to Professor Bob Elwood, Chairman of the Celebrating Sloane 350 Committee.

The frieze was prepared by the children as part of the Shared Neighbourhood Programme in Killyleagh that was launched at the Bridge Centre earlier in the year.

Prof Elwood thanked the children for their work and said:

"Sloane 350 is delighted to receive the children's frieze. It epitomises the Killyleagh community's ethos of caring

and sharing whilst incorporating all that we have tried to achieve at the Chocolate Festival Family Fun Day which was held here in September".

The Shared Neighbourhood Programme is a 3-year pilot programme aimed at supporting and encouraging shared neighbourhoods across Northern Ireland. It is funded by the International Fund for Ireland and delivered by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Raj Thompson, the Housing Executive's Community Cohesion Advisor in the South East Area, commented:

"The launch of the Shared Neighbourhood Programme in Killyleagh was celebrated by the community and the local primary school children who have produced this frieze of children holding hands. The Shared Neighbourhood Programme will provide the Killyleagh community with access to grants to celebrate diversity and bring together people from all backgrounds."





LISCOLMAN COMMEMORATE VC QUIGG

Residents and guests gathered in Liscolman village in Moyle District on Saturday, November 20th for the unveiling of a new mural to commemorate the Battle of the Somme.

The mural was designed by artist Ross Wilson and Liscolman Community Association through their participation on the 'Building Brighter Futures' programme led by Business in the Community. This programme is funded under the European Union's PEACE III programme managed for the Special EU Programmes Body by the North East PEACE III Partnership.

The mural has three panels with a remembrance theme. The first panel commemorates the seven men of the village who died in the Great War, who served in both the 36th Ulster Division and 16th Irish Division. The central panel shows an iconic image of the Battle of the Somme. It is the first to honour VC Robert

Quigg who was awarded a Victoria Cross for bravery in 1916, while attempting to find and rescue his Platoon Officer Harry MacNaghten. The third image is taken from local landmark Liscolman Mill, the chimney is depicted with the flax flower.

The re-imagining project has been further enhanced with additional panels taken from old photographs of Liscolman, kindly supplied by local residents and funded by the Housing Executive. Through Business in the Community – Carers Challenge, volunteers from the Old Bushmills Distillery have also helped create a new area for planting along the main road.

Nicola Neill, Programme Manager of Business in the Community commented 'This project has been a fantastic achievement thanks to the dedication from the residents of Liscolman and the Community Association. I would like to thank the North East PEACE III Partnership, TIDES, Moyle District Council, NI Housing Executive, Diageo

and local landowners for their commitment and co-operation.'

'The aim of this North East PEACE III programme was to increase the confidence, knowledge and skills of the community group representatives and to explore community engagement principles. The Building Brighter Futures Programme took them through an exploration and learning programme where they used the shared history of World War 1 to explore culture and identity' said Patricia McCallion, NE PEACE III Manager.

Ross Wilson added that "It has been a privilege and an honour to work with the Liscolman group who have shown such an interest in historical events and wanted to openly celebrate the memory of those who made the ultimate sacrifice, and also to commemorate VC Quigg."

For further information on the North East PEACE III Programme 'Building Brighter Futures' contact nicola.neill@bitcni.org.uk or call (028) 71 86 1550.

stay warm and save money



Housing
Executive

HOME ENERGY
CONSERVATION AUTHORITY

In a winter that has already seen plummeting temperatures, it is even more essential to make sure we keep ourselves and our homes warm and dry. As the price of energy continues to rise we need to do this as efficiently as possible to make sure the bills stay as low as possible. Keep reading to find out how.

Energy efficiency means maximising the value we get from the energy we use. It means getting the greatest heat and comfort in our homes while using the minimum amount of energy. Keep your home

adequately heated by setting thermostats properly. The ideal living room temperature is 21°C and for non-living rooms 18°C. Make sure your cylinder thermostat is set between 60 °C and 65°C any higher is a waste of energy.

One of the most cost effective ways to save energy is to insulate your home. Up to 25% of heat is lost through uninsulated loft spaces. The Energy Saving Trust recommends 270mm depth of loft insulation. If you have insulation already in your loft you may want to think about topping up your loft insulation.

Up to 35% of heat is lost through uninsulated walls. There are two types of wall insulation:

Cavity wall insulation

Material is pumped in to the cavity which effectively insulates the inside of the house.

Solid wall insulation

Solid wall insulation comprises of a layer of insulation mounted directly on the wall.



Energy grant information for Northern Ireland

Insulation Cashback	Up to £100 for cavity wall insulation. Up to £100 for loft insulation.
Snug Plus	£1,000 towards a highly efficient natural gas heating system. Up to £800 for cavity wall insulation and loft insulation
Warm Homes	A range of energy saving measures.
Warm Homes Plus	Free benefit entitlement check to ensure applicants are receiving all the benefits they are entitled to - contact Warm Homes on 0800 988 0559 or www.warm-homes.com .
Energy Efficiency Homes Scheme	One-off reduction in rates.

To find out if you are eligible for the above grants contact Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre
Freephone 0800 512 012

Get a free Home Energy Check to assess which measures are most suitable for your home. Complete one at www.energysavingtrust.org.uk/northernireland or call your local Energy Saving Trust Advice Centre on freephone 0800 512012.

Easy ways to save energy and money

- Use low energy lightbulbs
- When replacing electrical appliances choose the most energy efficient (A or A+ rated) rather than the least energy efficient (G rated). It will save you money over time
- Insulate your hot water cylinder and lag pipes
- Draught proof doors and windows
- Avoid blocking radiators
- Close your curtains at night to keep the heat in
- Wait until you have a full load before you use your washing machine and avoid using high temperature washes
- If possible, use a shower instead of a bath
- Turning your room thermostat down by 1°C can save up to 10% on heating bills

- Turn lights off that are not needed
- Do not leave appliances on STANDBY

Protecting your home from frost damage

During spells of severely cold weather the water pipes in your home may freeze. This sometimes leads to a burst pipe when the weather warms up.

- If your home will be empty during the cold weather, ask a friend or neighbour to go in and turn the heating on for a short time and check for frozen pipes.
- If you discover a frozen pipe, it is best to thaw it out slowly by putting hot-water bottles or a towel soaked in warm water on the frozen area.
- If you discover a burst pipe, you should immediately turn off the water supply at the stopcock. The stopcock is usually found in the kitchen, often below the sink unit.

Replacing a 15 year old boiler could save you as much as 20% off your fuel bills. It is important

to have an energy efficient boiler because they burn less fuel. If you are replacing a boiler it is now a Building Control requirement that you install a condensing boiler. Boilers should be serviced once a year by a qualified installer to ensure they continue to operate efficiently.

Winter Fuel Payments

If you are over 60 years you may get a Winter Fuel Payment to help pay for keeping warm in winter. This can be between £125 and £400. If you would like to find out more contact the Winter Fuel Payment Helpline on 08459 151515.

If you are worried about paying your energy bills contact your energy supplier to find out the best payment method for you. Some payment methods, for example, direct debit may attract a lower tariff and reduce your costs.

Energy Efficiency for Young Farmers

YFCU have joined forces with the Housing Executive and Action Renewables to give their members the opportunity to learn first hand about all things energy. An information night has been arranged for the 7 April 2011 at 7.30pm at Loughrey College and staff from both the Housing Executive and Action Renewables will be on hand to answer questions and demonstrate some of the technologies. Arrangements are currently being finalised and details will soon be available on www.nihe.



Generate your own energy...

Perhaps you might even consider *Renewable Energy* which is generated from natural resources - no pollution, no CO² emissions. If you are a home owner living in Northern Ireland you may be entitled to NIE Renewable Grants (NI) for micro generation technologies for your home. For further information please visit www.nie-yourenergy.co.uk

stay warm and save money

Continued



If you belong to a community group and would like us to deliver a presentation on energy efficiency in the home please telephone the Energy Conservation Unit at the NI Housing Executive on 02890 318522 and we will be happy to assist.



RCN Chief Executive

RESPONSE TO NIFHA VISION ARTICLE



Rural Community Network
SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES

In the last edition of Rural Matters, Chris Williamson set out the Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations vision for rural housing in 2010. Here, we publish a response from Michael Hughes, Chief Executive Officer of Rural Community Network. Both this and the previous Rural Matters article reflect the range of views on housing in the countryside.

I read Chris Williamson's article in the last edition of Rural Matters with a roll of the eyes as rural communities are reminded of their status as supposed environmental pariahs. The 'Rawhide' (i.e. "round them up and bring them in") approach envisaged by NIFHA does little to recognise the legitimacy of rural people being able to make choices on where they want to live, a choice which is inevitably based on having the full facts around impacts and how such impacts can be addressed. The dispersed settlement patterns seen in rural NI have developed as a result of historical factors around land ownership and tenure.

I would agree with Chris that there is an issue with rural people having a high dependency on cars, thus adding to the "greenhouse gas" emissions,

but surely in the 21st century we can come up with creative and environmentally sound alternative approaches to rural planning and development that reduces dependency on cars but sustains vibrant rural communities. Such alternatives include an integrated and relevant public transport service as well as the development of employment opportunities for people living in rural areas. When one considers the amount of public sector jobs concentrated in the Belfast metropolitan area and the many rural dwellers having to travel to these jobs on a daily basis as a result of a transport policy which fails to make the necessary connections, surely it makes as much economic and environmental sense to bring the jobs to the people, rather than the other way round.

A one size fits all solution where "housing, land-use planning and transport policy should be much more closely integrated on grounds of environmental sustainability" fails to contribute to a much wider debate which looks at the huge contribution rural communities have made and are continuing to make to environmental protection in the face of an ever increasing movement to make it more unattractive to live in a rural setting. Rather than chastising people for the audacity to live in rural communities, NIFHA would

do well to engage with rural dwellers on how best we could all work together to enhance the sustainability of all regions within Northern Ireland. Where will the local food and the renewable energy of the 21st century be produced? Who will care for older people and the sick and disabled?

Fundamentally PPS21 determines the type of people who live in rural communities not the type of housing that they will live in. Whilst RCN continues to advocate that unchecked development within any rural community is not desirable or sustainable it will continue to re-emphasise that rural needs to be a space where people are born, live, work, recreate, play, worship, rest and indeed die in. Unfortunately NIFHA's contribution through this article seems to suggest that this is not a future that many rural dwellers should aspire to.

NIFHA and RCN have arranged to meet in the weeks ahead to further discuss their thinking on rural housing issues; both organisations are members of the Housing Executive Rural Policy Implementation Panel which oversees the implementation of the 'Rural Homes and People' Action Plan.

Two new initiatives were recently introduced to help address division in our society – both will provide an opportunity to assist rural areas where divisions may exist but are sometimes not as apparent as in urban areas. Both the 'BRIC' Programme and Rural Community Network's 'Rural Enabler' Programme are aimed at promoting good relations as explained below.

A new initiative designed to encourage greater levels of social integration within Northern Ireland's housing sector been launched with assistance from the EU's PEACE III Programme.

The project, called 'Putting Good Relations at the Heart of Social Housing', has received a total of £3,522,000 worth of assistance under PEACE III and is being delivered through an innovative partnership approach involving the Rural Development Council (RDC), the Housing Executive and the training consultancy TIDES.

Approximately 90% of social housing in Northern Ireland is still segregated into single identity communities. This has created further barriers to effective and long-term social integration and has served to further polarize many communities across the region.

The primary objective for the four year project is to help reverse the history of that trend for segregated social housing, by promoting the idea of good relations and greater levels of community cohesion. The project will achieve this by helping our staff develop new approaches founded on the principles of integration, tolerance and mutual respect.

Pat Colgan, Chief Executive of the Special EU Programmes Body welcomed the initiative, saying: "The creation of a truly shared society, which embraces diversity and opposes sectarianism, is one of the core objectives of the EU's PEACE III Programme. The 'Putting Good Relations at the Heart of Social Housing' project will help to tackle one of the main obstacles to full integration within our society which has resulted from historic residential segregation. In creating new opportunities to support the development of cross-community housing it will

address some of the underlying problems of sectarianism, prejudice and intolerance that exist across the region".

Over a four year period the programme will be delivered through three distinct and complementary themes. It will deliver a bespoke good relations training programme to 80 residents groups from 80 housing estates across Northern Ireland under the theme 'Changing Minds'.

Under the 'Sharing Visions' theme, it will create opportunities that will provide us with the skills to influence the removal and re-imagining of up to two physical interfaces.

Finally, as part of a 'Crossing Borders' theme, it will also use a cross-border approach to the analysis of the housing market with a view to facilitate better planning in the border areas. It will explore housing policy on a cross-border housing market delivery model and promote joint government action on cross-border housing issues.

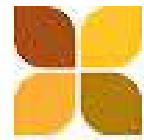
The Rural Enabler Programme is aimed at assisting rural communities to develop ways to deal with the things that still divide us in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of Ireland.

Each county will have an enabler who will support groups and individuals to take a step in a new direction in challenging sectarianism and racism and how things have been done in the past. The enablers will work with local people to develop an action plan to meet the needs of their community and if resources are needed, development grants of

up to £1,500 may be available. The objectives of the scheme are:

- To increase awareness and understanding of conflict related issues within a rural context through dialogue.
- To increase the capacity and skills of groups and individuals in rural society to address conflict and its legacy.
- To increase the potential of sharing of residential, social, environmental spaces and services for the benefit of all in rural society.

If you want to find out more or contact any of the rural enabler staff, please visit www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org



Rural Enabler Programme
Building Peace Locally



Rural Community Network
SUPPORTING RURAL COMMUNITIES



European Union
European Regional
Development Fund
Investing in your future

The Rural Enabler Programme



Patsy Smyth, Housing Executive Antrim District Manager, congratulated residents of Trea Gardens, Toome on the estate's success in the 2010 SuperValu Best Kept Awards in October.

Organised by the Northern Ireland Amenity Council and sponsored by SuperValu, the annual awards attract entries, in a range of categories, from across Northern Ireland, including Best Kept Small Medium and Large Housing Areas.



Trea Gardens Triumphs!

Trea Gardens estate won the Ellen McGowan Trophy for the highest marked Housing Executive entry. Toome residents Brendan Craig and Ronan Johnston were joined by Housing Executive Grounds Maintenance Supervisor and Grounds Maintenance DLO contractor Robert McClean and Ross Mathieson to collect the trophy at the awards event in October.

Commenting on the achievement, Patsy Smyth said:

"This award is really good news for the Trea Gardens estate and for Toome. I'm delighted that the trophy has come to one of our villages in Antrim District. Our Grounds staff and District Office staff have worked with the local community on a project to improve the environment in the estate and the judges have clearly been impressed with the standard of this work and the commitment of local residents to looking after their neighbourhood.

Working with local communities is at the heart of the District's activities and I am pleased that Toome Initiative Group is now an active member of the District's Housing Community Network, a forum for sharing ideas and initiatives with community representatives from rural and urban communities across the District. I am sure this award will be an encouragement to all those working in partnership for the benefit of the Toome community."

HOUSING AND VILLAGE RENEWAL

A number of community groups have recently applied to the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (NIRDP) for funding to develop Village Plans for their village. If your group is drawing up a Village Plan, you may wish to examine local housing issues as part of your planning. If this is the case and you wish to discuss further, please contact the Housing Executive's Rural Unit on 02890318559.

Contacts

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Energy Saving Trust
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This document is available in other formats; please contact the Rural Housing Co-ordination Unit.



Housing Executive

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