

**Housing
Executive**

2020 Update





Foreword

As we approach our 50th year, the impact of COVID-19 has reminded us, should one be needed, that the housing services provided by the Housing Executive to the citizens of Northern Ireland are just as important now as they were in 1971.

At the end of the last financial year, we began to witness the early impact of COVID-19 - this is still being felt and this summary document highlights how we continue to provide vital services to all our customers in such challenging, and unique, circumstances. We in the Housing Executive pride ourselves on the services we provide and we remain determined to ensure that these services continue however the pandemic unfolds.

Staff and customer safety have been paramount during COVID-19. Lockdown regulations and social distancing guidelines meant we had to restrict, temporarily, some of our services, including routine repairs and change of tenancy work which prevented the allocation of homes to new tenants. House sales were suspended and inspections required for the awarding of grant schemes were also delayed.

However, we made sure, as a priority, that emergency repair services were maintained throughout, ensuring the safety of those living in our properties. Following government guidance, we recommenced a phased resumption of our full maintenance service on Wednesday 8th July. As we continue to work through a significant backlog, we hope to be in a position to bring our maintenance service back to normal as soon as possible.

We have faced the difficult task of ensuring essential services continue, while equipping our staff to work from home, where possible. We've worked very hard to adapt to new ways of working and I thank colleagues for their dedication and commitment to making this possible.

While this has been a challenging time for all of us, we look forward to the future with optimism and some sense of normality returning. As the current restrictions ease, we hope to be in a position to return to business as usual with regards to our services, while continuing to ensure appropriate safety measures.

Customer engagement continues, through our website, bulk texts, and our social media channels on Twitter and Facebook. In addition, we are communicating directly with our Central Housing Forum and wider housing community network on any changes which may impact on them.

We will continue to provide excellent housing services, underpinned by practical and sensitive support and commitment, care and professionalism which will not diminish. COVID-19 has forced us to adapt our services over a remarkably short period of time and our Board is very grateful to both our staff and our external partners for all that has been done to maintain essential services and continue to offer support for our tenants and other service users.

I would like to thank you for your patience and understanding of the difficulties faced by the Housing Executive during COVID-19 and I look forward to working with you again as we navigate our way through and out of the pandemic.

A strong, strategic housing authority, acting regionally and delivering locally, is as vital now as it was in 1971. We greatly value our relationship with all our Council partners and we once again re-confirm our commitment to working in partnership with you to ensure our communities are sustainable and great places to live, work and invest.

Clark Bailie
CHIEF EXECUTIVE

CHALLENGES

- Maintaining a maintenance service for our 84,690 homes.
- Gaining access to homes to complete statutory servicing and inspections.
- Co-ordinating services from home.

SUCCESSSES

- In order to keep our staff and customers safe we have purchased over 1.6 million pieces of personal protection equipment.
- Working with our contractors, we continued to carry out 20,000 emergency repairs.
- 5 new contracts with an estimated value of £16m per annum awarded, guaranteeing jobs in the local construction sector in Mid and East Antrim, South Antrim, North Down, South Down, and Lisburn and Castlereagh.
- Our Direct Labour Organisation (DLO) completed 15,076 response maintenance jobs and 1,238 health and safety checks at local homes from 18 March to the end of July.

EMERGENCY REPAIRS



20,000

CARRIED OUT

PPE



1.6 million

ITEMS PROCURED

CHALLENGES

- Enabling our workforce to work remotely to ensure we continued to deliver a service to our customers.
- Enabling payments staff to work remotely whilst ensuring robust payments controls.
- Housing Executive staff dealt with some of the associated work with new claims for Universal Credit, which increased by 400 per cent during March 2020.

SUCCESSSES

- Some 4,000 new HB claims awarded between 20 March to 20 July and just under 10,000 awards of Discretionary Housing Payments made from April 2020.
- The majority of our staff are now enabled to work from home and we also have colleagues working in our various offices. Supplied 200+ mobile phones to ensure front line service delivered.
- New tenant portal went live on 28 May 2020. Tenants can set up a secure account to access their tenancy information, request services and contact us.
- 87.59% of supplier invoices paid within 10 days; 95.74% of supplier invoices within 30 days for the first quarter of the financial year 2020/21 totalling £750,881.49.
- Working in partnership across the Housing Executive, we successfully bid for COVID funding to support homelessness and Supporting People providers in Northern Ireland.

NEW HOUSING BENEFIT CLAIMS



4,000

AWARDED BETWEEN
20 MARCH AND 20 JULY

87.59 %

SUPPLIER INVOICES PAID WITHIN 10 DAYS



The **MAJORITY** of our staff are now enabled to work from home and we also have colleagues working in our various offices.

CHALLENGES

- Impact on the ability to secure land, planning approvals and/or construction contracts to meet our full delivery of the NewBuild programme.
- Unable to inspect and assess properties for the awarding of disability and fuel poverty grants.

SUCCESSES

- The Supporting People Programme continued to support and protect 19,000 vulnerable clients during lockdown.
- Additional £10m of funding secured to help those most in need provided by Department for Communities.
This included 133 Affordable Warmth, 128 Boiler Replacement and 12 Disabled Facility Grants supporting customers and contractors. From April to June 2020, 122 Affordable Warmth, 57 Boiler Replacement, and 99 Disabled Facilities Grant approvals were made.
- The following activities have also been undertaken to support new social housing delivery in 2020/21:
 - Development of new processes and technical support to enable staff involved in SHDP delivery to fulfil duties on a remote basis;
 - Monitoring of progress and capacity within key delivery stakeholders, including Land Registry and Council Planning departments;
 - Agreement with Department for Communities on how to process housing association claims for additional funding for new construction works contracts, related to addressing the impacts of the pandemic and enabling starts on-site;
 - Continued support for housing associations to deliver adaptations to properties for people with disabilities.
- £3.5m secured for Supporting People providers Personal Protective Equipment funded by Department for Communities.

19,000



**VULNERABLE CLIENTS
CONTINUED TO BE SUPPORTED
AND PROTECTED**

ADDITIONAL

£10m

**FUNDING SECURED
TO HELP THOSE
MOST IN NEED**



PROVIDED BY DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES

133 Affordable Warmth 128 Boiler Replacement 12 Disabled Facility Grants

**PAYMENTS FOR COMPLETED
GRANT AIDED WORKS MADE**



CHALLENGES

- Continuing to provide a contact service with our customers as public offices closed and staff went to home working.
- Ensure accommodation provision for those most in need.
- Maintaining and looking after our 84,690 homes during lockdown.

SUCCESSES

- During lockdown there were NO recorded cases of anyone rough sleeping on the streets of Northern Ireland. All were provided with accommodation.
- We set up the £290k emergency COVID Fund, supporting 204 community groups to deliver help to their communities.
- Patch Managers made 800 calls to elderly and vulnerable customers every week across 13 regional offices. Additional assistance calls were made. 73,000 text messages sent to tenants keeping them up to date.
- 150 void properties were brought back into use as furnished hostel accommodation.
- By 29 May, 2,884 households were in temporary accommodation placements across NI.
- £7.3 million additional homelessness funding provided by the Department for Communities and the Department of Health.
- Our Customer Services Team dealt with 81,784 calls from 29 March to 4 July.

NO



ROUGH SLEEPER
CASES RECORDED DURING LOCKDOWN

£290k

EMERGENCY COVID FUND
SET UP SUPPORTING

204 COMMUNITY
GROUPS



800

**CALLS BY PATCH
MANAGERS TO ELDERLY
AND VULNERABLE
TENANTS EVERY WEEK**

73,000

**TEXT MESSAGES
SENT TO TENANTS**

CHALLENGES

- Ensuring that our workplaces were safe for both customers and staff.
- Ensuring that customers and staff were kept fully informed in what was a rapidly changing situation.
- Ensuring staff were supported throughout the pandemic.

SUCCESSSES

- Developed specific COVID-19 risk assessments for all our buildings and for staff interacting with tenants. Implemented measures such as Perspex screens, one way systems, floor signage and provision of PPE and hand sanitisers.
- Communicated with our 85k tenants through media, website and social media platforms. Issued almost 400 social media posts across all platforms and provided regularly updated FAQs for all our customers on our website.
- Provided comprehensive updates to almost 500 public representatives keeping them informed on service delivery and changes.
- Staff continuously updated with the latest NI and UK Government advice and information.

400

SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS
ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS



REGULARLY UPDATED

FAQs

FOR ALL CUSTOMERS
ON OUR WEBSITE



COMPREHENSIVE UPDATES FOR

500

PUBLIC REPRESENTATIVES
KEEPING THEM INFORMED





What they said

For the second weekend in a row, I am advised that to the best of our knowledge there was no-one sleeping rough on the streets of Belfast and Derry. This is very welcome news. This is in huge part down to the extraordinary efforts of the Housing Executive and homeless charities and organisations.

Deirdre Hargey, Minister for Communities (April 2020)

Thank you to the lovely lady at the Housing Executive who called my 84 year old grandmother this morning to check if she had someone to go to the shop for her and told her just to give them a call if she needs anything. So kind at this stressful time for vulnerable people.

Grand-daughter of a tenant who received a Good Morning call (March 2020)

Big shout out to the Housing Executive's Belfast Housing Solutions Team, who are working closely with us to find emergency accommodation for women fleeing domestic violence.

Kelly Andrews, Chief Executive, Belfast & Lisburn Women's Aid (April 2020)

The Patch Manager in the Movilla area in North Down and Ards has been inspirational in working alongside the residents group, identifying those in need. She deserves the praise as she is working tirelessly through this pandemic. We are putting out over 100 food parcels a week with our Patch Manager's help. Thank you to the Housing Executive for your continued support.

East End Residents Association, Ards and North Down (April 2020)

The community response to COVID-19 has been overwhelming and I commend the Housing Executive for being so supportive and responsive.

Together we can ensure that no one in our community gets left behind and that we all emerge from this crisis together as a united community.

Linda Watson, Chair of the Central Housing Forum (May 2020)



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