Draft Community Involvement and Cohesion Strategy 2024 -2029

5 July 2024

Summary of NIFHA View

We agree with and support the Community Involvement and Cohesion Strategy

About NIFHA

The Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations, formed in 1977, is the representative body for Northern Ireland's 20 registered housing associations.

Our members are all not-for-profit organisations. Together, supported by the Department for Communities and the Housing Executive, they provide nearly 60,000 social and affordable homes.

Housing associations access private finance to effectively double the number of homes they could build with government housing association grant alone.

Housing associations also deliver high quality care and support to help people stay as independent as possible.

Working in partnership with other organisations, they also invest millions each year in community services and facilities.

Our sector employs more than 3,300 people and manages housing assets worth £4.75 bn.

NIFHA welcomes the opportunity to comment on this Consultation on the Draft Community Involvement and Cohesion Strategy 2024 -2029.

Response to consultation

The strategic vision to "Enable and engage communities to interact and work together to co-design Housing Executive services and support a more cohesive society" is admirable.

The overall vision for community involvement and cohesion is agreeable; continuing strategies that work well, recognising and building on the strengths of our communities and finding new ways to improve services through co-design and delivery.

Encouraging communities to interact and work together can strengthen relationships and enhance community bonds. This not only benefits organisations, but also provides numerous advantages to individuals, including the acquisition of new skills, expanding social networks, and collaborating to effect positive changes in their local areas.

We agree with Aim 1**: ENABLE our communities to promote and strengthen involvement** and feel the supporting principles *1.1: Strengthening local engagement* and *1.2: Developing and maintaining a support infrastructure to sustain community organisations* would validate the overall aim.

There are numerous community groups that are doing fantastic work, but they often have limited resources. Empowering these groups by providing them with necessary skills and connecting them with other organisations to share resources can help strengthen their engagement within the local community.

We agree with Aim 2: **ENGAGE our communities to influence, shape and improve our services.** The relevant Principles that will guide the delivery of the Strategy being 2.1 *Strengthening strategic engagement*, *2.2: Providing opportunities for communities to shape and influence the development and delivery of quality services and 2.3:*

Engaging and educating our communities in terms of climate change and net zero ambitions and contribute to the delivery of the Corporate Sustainable Development Strategy

We agree with Aim 3: **EMBRACE community cohesion within and between our communities** and feel the supporting principles 3.*1: Working in partnership with others to address the complex housing needs of a divided society*, *3.2: Encouraging improved Race Relations* and *3.3: Encouraging cohesion at a community level* along with *3.4: Contributing to the creation of more stable, safer and cohesive neighbourhoods.*

We believe that priorities for the Year 1 Action Plan include improving community cohesion and ensuring more stable, safer neighbourhoods. We need to reduce barriers between communities and enhance race relations as new residents try to integrate into our area.

The definition of Community Involvement and Cohesion is agreeable.

Community Involvement includes:

- actively participating in community activities, projects, and initiatives.
- sharing your voice, time, skills, and resources to contribute positively to your local community.
- getting involved by addressing community needs, promoting social well-being, and creating a sense of belonging.

Community Cohesion:

- focuses on building positive relationships among people from diverse backgrounds.
- aims to strengthen social bonds, reduce inequalities, and foster a climate of acceptance and understanding.

Tracey Ellis
Policy and Practice Manager
Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations
tellis@nifha.org