

# Rural Matters

MAY 2017

## Focus On

Rural Resident's Forum - A Rural Voice  
Ending Homelessness Together  
Rural Community Award winners  
Cycleback Success  
Disabled Facilities Grants  
Welfare Reform

**Housing**  
Executive



# Looking Forward

## Welcome to this special Balmoral Show edition of Rural Matters magazine.

This year our rural stand is situated at the Government stands location within the Eikon Exhibition Centre and we would be delighted to see you there. We will be promoting Housing Executive services, such as energy efficiency grants; giving homelessness advice; promoting Social Enterprise grants and rural housing need testing. The Director of Regional Services of the Housing Executive will also launch the 2017 Rural Community Awards at the show.

In this edition we highlight an opportunity for you to become a 'Rural Voice' by putting yourself forward as a member of the **Rural Residents Forum**. This is a panel consisting of members drawn from rural areas, who highlight the views and interests of the Rural Community and provide guidance to the Housing Executive on our strategies, policies and procedures.

We recognise that because there is less existing social housing in rural areas or a large proportion of our stock has been sold, people living in these areas who may be in housing need are less likely to come forward to their local office and register on the waiting list. Featured in this edition is how the Housing Executive plans to work with rural communities who wish to examine the need for **new social housing** in their area.

Energy efficiency is very important for all of us, especially for those of us on lower incomes. You can read about the **oil buying club initiative**, which may help alleviate fuel poverty in rural areas on page 10.

'Cycleback', a new business venture funded by the Housing Executive, is a perfect example of a **social enterprise initiative**. You can read about a Fermanagh man's journey to success on page 7.

May we take this opportunity to remind you that the **Disabled Facilities Grant** remains available to eligible applicants. You can find out more about this, including how to apply, in our feature on Grants on page 9.

A total of 27 applications were received for the 2016 **Housing Executive Rural Community Awards** competition, showcasing a wide range of innovative, inclusive and inspirational community projects from community groups dispersed throughout the province. The winners of the competition are shown on pages 6-7.

Finally, we hope you will enter our competition to win an **Amazon Fire**. Simply fill-in the coupon at the back of the magazine and put it in the box at our stand at the Balmoral show, or return it to the address shown. The answers to the questions can be found in the magazine. Good luck!



Professor Peter Roberts  
Interim Chair



Clark Bailie  
Chief Executive



Professor Peter Roberts



Clark Bailie



## Rural Development Programme (RDP) Match-Funding Opportunity

In May 2017, the Housing Executive will launch a match-funding initiative to support rural community groups who have applied for RDP funding.

- Have you a project under consideration for RDP funding under 'Basic Services' or 'Village Renewal'?
- Will your project benefit local social housing areas?
- Will your project meet an identified need in the area?

If you have answered 'yes' to these questions we would like to hear from you.

In order to support rural communities in their efforts to ensure that everyone has access to services and opportunities and/or to improve the environment and image of their villages, the Housing Executive can provide match-funding of 15% up to £20,000.

Further information and application forms are available from the Housing Executive website at: [www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)

or by contacting Eoin McKinney:

Email: [rural.housing@nihe.gov.uk](mailto:rural.housing@nihe.gov.uk)

TEL: (028) 9598 2502

Front cover photo: Rathlin Island by Keery Irvine.



# A Rural Voice

*The Rural Residents' Forum (RRF) provides a rural voice on issues that affect rural dwellers and provides a consultation mechanism for Housing Executive on all policy, strategic and financial decisions affecting rural dwellers.*

## Introduction

The Rural Residents' Forum was established in 2009 as part of the Housing Executive's Rural Homes and People Strategy.

The RRF meets approximately every six weeks and meetings are attended by Housing Executive staff from the Rural Unit and Community Involvement teams and is supported by Rural Community Network (RCN).

The development of the Rural Residents' Forum has encouraged the involvement of rural residents and provided a facility to allow more detailed consideration of policies and proposals affecting rural communities.

In the past the Forum has considered issues including the Social Housing Reform Programme, community planning, rural homelessness, energy efficiency and rural proofing.

## Purpose

The Rural Residents' Forum:

- Acts as a rural panel to the Housing Executive highlighting the views/interests of rural residents without distinction of age, sex, race and political, religious or other opinion.
- Explores ways of developing closer links between Housing Executive and residents in rural areas.
- Provides feedback to rural residents in areas they represent through existing community communication channels.
- Provides advice and guidance on Housing Executive publications, strategies, policies and procedures as they affect rural areas.
- Provides pre-consultation assistance to Housing Executive when strategies, policies and procedures

affecting rural areas are being developed.

- Seeks ways to improve communication about community development in rural areas.
- Provides feedback on DSD policy affecting the delivery of social housing in rural areas.
- Assists in the organisation of and participates in seminars / events where rural housing issues are being discussed.
- Provides a forum to constructively challenge the performance of Housing Executive and government departments in respect of policies which may impact on rural residents.

## Meetings and Membership

Membership of the Forum is drawn from across Northern Ireland with two representatives from each County.

- The RRF has at least 12 community members of which no less than one third are Housing Executive tenants.
- A further three members may be co-opted.
- All members must live or work in a rural community (i.e. a settlement with a population of less than 5,000 or the open countryside).
- Members must be able to demonstrate a knowledge of and interest in social housing, community development and regeneration issues in rural communities.
- RRF meetings are facilitated by Rural Community Network.
- RCN, Supporting Communities and Housing Executive staff attend all meetings in a service/ advisory capacity.
- Minutes and the secretarial support function are undertaken by RCN.

For information on Rural Resident Forum members in your area, please contact:

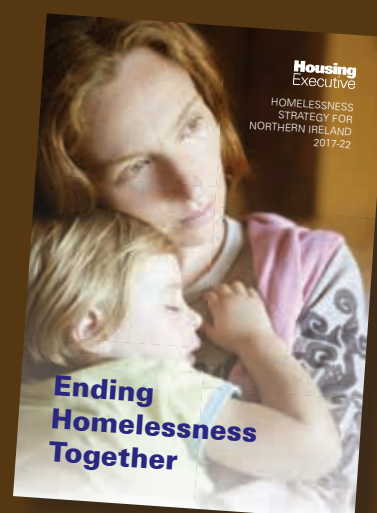
Rural Residents' Forum, Rural Community Network (NI), 38a Oldtown Street, Cookstown, Co Tyrone BT80 8EF  
Tel: 028 8676 6670 Web: [www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org](http://www.ruralcommunitynetwork.org)





# Ending Homelessness Together

The Housing Executive has recently produced the Homelessness Strategy 2017-22



Published in April 2017, and with a vision of 'Ending Homelessness Together', the new Strategy seeks to build upon the work of previous Strategies while promoting innovative responses to tackle new and innovative challenges.

The Strategy was subject to a public consultation in December 2016 and January 2017 and numerous voluntary and statutory partners, including the Rural Community Network, were involved in the development of the Strategy.

The Strategy acknowledges the unique circumstances that rural communities face in terms of homelessness and, in keeping with the vision of 'Ending Homelessness Together'; we will work with all relevant partners to address issues facing rural households. While the Strategy contains actions that are focused on accommodation based issues, it will be supported by an inter-departmental action plan that

will focus on addressing gaps in those non-accommodation services that have the potential to impact on those who are homeless or most at risk of homelessness.

Issues that are potentially more prevalent in rural areas are hidden homelessness, where households are homeless but have not asked for advice or assistance, or chronic homelessness that manifests itself in a different way to the rough sleeping that is sometimes associated with urban areas. Actions to address these specific concerns include:

- A communication strategy that will ensure households, including those in rural communities, can access the right support quickly;
- The identification of pre-crisis homeless indicators and a training package for relevant key front line workers;
- The identification of chronic homeless need outside Belfast

and Derry/Londonderry with appropriate action plans where necessary;

- The formation of Local Area Groups (based on Housing Executive areas) that will ensure the Strategy is implemented at a local level. These groups will ensure rural concerns are identified and addressed at a local level.

The Strategy contains a further 13 actions that will ensure issues facing rural communities are addressed. A copy of the Strategy can be found on the Housing Executive website or by emailing:

[homelessness.strategy@nihe.gov.uk](mailto:homelessness.strategy@nihe.gov.uk).

**If you feel you are homeless or are potentially at risk of becoming homeless please do not hesitate to contact your local Housing Executive office on 03448 920 900 for advice and assistance.**





# Identifying need for new rural housing

**The Housing Executive has long recognised that because there is less existing social housing in rural areas and much of our stock has now been sold, people living in these areas who are in need of a home are less likely to register or seek advice in their local Housing Executive office.**

In an effort to address this, every year we undertake rural housing need tests where we select villages for consultation and work with rural communities to promote our services and to encourage those in need of a home to come forward and register on our waiting list.

In 2016/17 we reviewed our process for rural housing need tests and found that previous tests have been most successful where we had first identified a housing site so the community were encouraged that there was a realistic chance that a housing scheme would be developed.

With this in mind we have decided to focus on working in partnership with housing associations to undertake tests and on holding housing information events where the community can come along and speak to housing



advisors and view plans of what could be developed in their area.

Based on this approach, this year we have held housing information events on Rathlin Island and in Bishopscourt/Ballyhornan, Co Down. In both of these locations, before the test there was not enough evidence of housing need for us to support a new housing development.

However, the community representatives (Rathlin Community Development Association and Ballyhornan Realm Interagency Group) were committed to identifying need and worked with us to publicise our events and to encourage people to come forward.

Both of these tests have generated a very positive response and at this early stage we are hopeful that the housing associations (Rural HA and Ark HA) will be successful in getting some new housing on the ground.

**If you would like the Housing Executive to examine the potential for new social housing in your rural area, please contact Sinead Collins at (028) 9598 2559 or email [rural.housing@nihe.gov.uk](mailto:rural.housing@nihe.gov.uk).**





We are delighted to have won the Cleaner & Greener Award and especially pleased that Housing Executive introduced such awards for the Rural Communities, giving local rural dwellers a chance to showcase the work they do throughout the year on a voluntary basis. We would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Housing Executive and to wish you well with future community initiatives

**Valerie Blake,**  
Broughshane Improvement Committee



## Broughshane Improvement Committee

WINNER

Cleaner & Greener Award, Large Village

[broughshane@nacn.org](mailto:broughshane@nacn.org)



# Rural Community



[cladycrosscommunity@gmail.com](mailto:cladycrosscommunity@gmail.com)

## Clady Cross Community

WINNER

Cleaner & Greener Award, Small Village

We are delighted to win the Cleaner and Greener Small Village Award at this year's Housing Executive Rural Awards. Clady Community Development Association plays an important role in the local area in helping Clady become a great place to live and visit. This award is for our volunteers and I would like to thank the Housing Executive for highlighting the excellent work by local community associations through the Cleaner and Greener Small Village Award.

**Barry Lavery, Clady Cross Community Development Association**



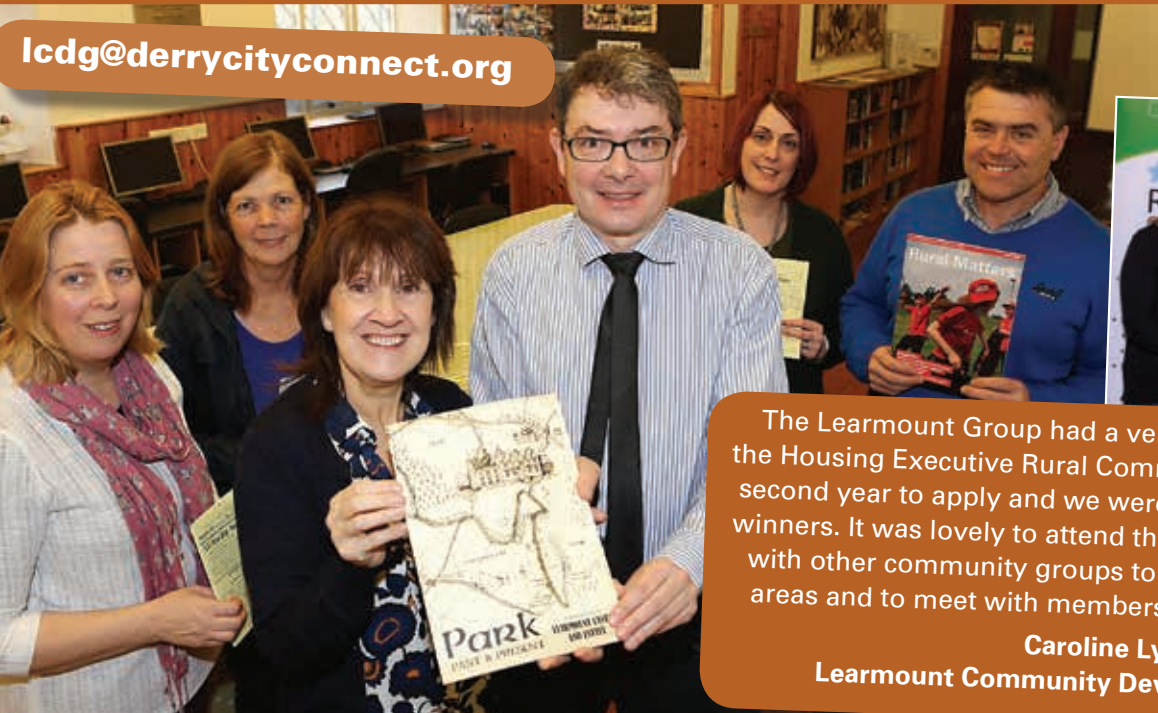


## Learmount Community Development Group

WINNER

Community Spirit Award, Small Village

[lcdg@derrycityconnect.org](mailto:lcdg@derrycityconnect.org)



The Learmount Group had a very positive experience with the Housing Executive Rural Community Awards. This was our second year to apply and we were delighted to be selected as winners. It was lovely to attend the award ceremony and meet with other community groups to hear what they do for their areas and to meet with members of the Housing Executive.

**Caroline Lynch,**  
Learmount Community Development Group Ltd

# Award winners



The awards were brilliant as we won it and it was a real boost for this community and was well received locally. It actually put Strathfoyle on the map for the right reasons and recognised the values and achievements of partnership working.

**Eamonn O'Donnell,**  
Enagh Youth Forum

[enagh.youthforum@yahoo.ie](mailto:enagh.youthforum@yahoo.ie)

## Enagh Youth Forum

WINNER

Community Spirit Award, Large Village







# Cycleback success

**A new business venture is set to ride into pole position in County Fermanagh thanks to the Housing Executive.**

Cycleback repairs and sells second hand bicycles. The business has a strong focus on people from the local community and those who live in social housing areas in County Fermanagh. The business offers volunteering opportunities to help retrain and upskill those people in long-term unemployment in the area.

A grant of £1,000 was provided by the Housing Executive's Social Housing Enterprise Investment Scheme to Neil McLoughlin to help provide essential tools and equipment at his workshop located close to the Skea Arney and Mallard Heights areas.

The business which is located in Arney, Bellanaleck offers affordable bicycles to all customers and helps encourage alternative modes of travel and exercise. The business also provides a bicycle refurbishment service to encourage more people to cycle.

Cycleback owner, Neil McLoughlin, believes the enterprise will have a lasting legacy for residents.

"Cycleback is beneficial on various levels in providing a positive impact on the local community. Not only will Cycleback make bicycles affordable, it aims to tackle physical and mental health issues through exercise.

I have identified the importance of potential partnership working by linking up with local care groups to make bicycles available on hire at a low rate and liaising with the local Jobs & Benefits office to target people from social housing areas, who are out of work with no means of transport.

In repairing second hand bicycles, Cycleback aims at reducing landfill waste. By working closely with statutory bodies, I hope to be able to retrieve disused bicycles from



skip sites and then turn into affordable bicycles for the local community. There is potential to offer employment to residents in the area, as well as providing training to those who wish to retrain or improve their existing skillset.

This funding will help establish Cycleback as an integral part of community life in County Fermanagh."

Connor Smith from the Housing Executive added: "Cycleback is a perfect example of a social enterprise initiative and how it improves lives in a local community. Neil has gained essential qualifications and has set out a clear plan as to how he hopes to achieve success.

This is a very exciting scheme which certainly has long-term aspirations and one we are delighted to be involved with."



The Housing Executive may be able to help you with a Disabled Facilities Grant. These grants help make the home of a person with a disability more suitable for their needs. Some of the works which may be grant aided include:

- downstairs bathroom/bedroom facilities
- replacing a bath with a level access shower
- access ramps and addition of handrails
- improved access to rooms in the home

**Do you need help to adapt your home to suit your family's needs?**



**A grant of up to £25,000 is available to owner occupiers, landlords or private tenants.**

The amount of grant approved normally depends on the personal and financial circumstances of the person with disabilities. However if the adaptations recommended are for a child there is no assessment of these financial circumstances. Contact your local Health and Social Services Trust and an Occupational Therapist will assess your needs and make recommendations.

More information is available at our grants offices.

**03448 920 900**

or visit our website  
**[www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)**

# Disabled Facilities Grants

**In 2016/2017 the Housing Executive approved 1,070 Disabled Facilities Grants worth over £11m.**

Disabled Facilities Grants are available to make the home of a person with disabilities more suitable for their needs. Grant aid may be available for adaptation works recommended by an Occupational Therapist and the amount of grant based on the personal and financial circumstances of the person with disabilities.

Siobhan McCauley, Housing Executive Director of Regional Services said: "Disabled Facilities Grants, up to a maximum of £25,000, are paid to make the home of a person with a disability more suitable to their needs.

The grants are for owner occupiers, landlords and private tenants providing there is a person with disability living in the house. Having an adaptation

made to your home could really change your life for the better.

You could have your bedroom or bathroom built downstairs, or having a ramp installed at the front of your house would help you get in and out with ease."

## **How Can People Apply?**

All grant aided work is based on the recommendations of an occupational therapist from the Health and Social Services Trust. Siobhan continued:

"We have arrangements with some independent agencies which help elderly people or those with special needs through the grants process. The amount of grant payable will depend on the approved cost of the work and the grant applicant's financial circumstances. If the adaptations are for a child there is no financial assessment carried out."



# Welfare Changes

## Benefits have been changing

If you are a 'working-age' claimant, changes to the welfare system made since December 2015 may be affecting how your housing benefit is assessed and you financially.

## Social Sector Size Criteria (SSSC)

Also referred to as 'bedroom tax', Social Sector Size Criteria was introduced on 20 February 2017 and has changed the way Housing Benefit is now calculated for those living in social housing.

It means the amount of Housing Benefit paid is now based on the number of people in a household and the number of bedrooms the household needs. It affects Housing Executive and housing association tenants aged from 16 years up until the qualifying age for State Pension credit and receiving Housing Benefit.

We contacted 5,653 households in rural areas at the start of the year with details of the impact and the financial help available to address the financial shortfall in Housing Benefit experienced as a result. The Department for Communities (DfC) is administering this payment and they will contact you directly if you're affected. We are working with them to ensure it runs smoothly.

## Benefit Cap

The Benefit Cap is an upper limit on the amount of benefit income a household can receive. For Benefit Cap to apply, someone in the household must be in receipt of Housing Benefit.

The limits are:

	Cap Per Year	Amount Per Week
Families	£20,000	£384.62
Singles	£13,400	£257.69

'Families': the household is made up of a couple (with or without children) or a lone parent whose children live with them or 'Single' person and has no children living with them.

Households whose income is in excess of these amounts will have their Housing Benefit reduced to meet these limits. There is financial help available to address the shortfall in Housing Benefit experienced and again DfC is administering this payment and they make contact.

## Universal Credit

This new payment for working age people aged 18 to 64, who are on a low income or out of work, will be introduced later this year in Northern Ireland on a phased geographical basis.

The new system aims to give working-age households the help needed to prepare for work, start work or earn more money as well as introduce greater fairness to the welfare system by ensuring it is better to work. Under Universal Credit starting work should be easier as benefits will not suddenly be removed.

From September 2017 new claimants will make a claim to Universal Credit as it's phased into their area. There are six benefits which will be replaced by Universal Credit and if you currently receive any of these you will start to be transferred to Universal Credit from July 2019. The Department for Communities will contact you to guide you through the steps you need to take in advance.

## Are there others?

These are not all of the changes. Much more detail can be read online at the NI Government's website 'nidirect':

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/welfare-changes>

## Is there financial help?

A Welfare Supplementary Payment (WSP) is in place to help address financial shortfall experienced as a result of the changes to the welfare system. Payment is administered by Department for Communities (DfC) and the current WSP policy will be reviewed in 2018/19 by DfC.

## What if I need advice?

An independent Welfare Changes Helpline operated by the Welfare Reform Advice Services Consortium (Citizens Advice, Advice NI and the Law Centre NI) is available 9am-5pm Monday to Friday: 0808 802 0020.

**If you have any questions or queries regarding your housing benefit payments, you can call us directly on: 03448 920 902 our team is here to help.**

**Alternatively, you can visit any Citizens Advice or Advice NI Office to receive face-to-face advice.**





# BUYING OIL? SAVE £££

## Join the club... the oil club!

With world oil prices increasing it is making good sense to join an oil club. According to the Consumer Council NI the average price of 500 litres of oil in NI has increased by nearly £30 since the first week of March 2016.

The oil clubs, funded by the Housing Executive and managed by Bryson Energy, have on average saved members 12% per 500 litre fill.

Membership is free and open to anyone - Housing Executive tenants, owner-occupiers, housing association tenants and those who privately rent. Oil clubs are simple but effective; the more people who buy oil together the more the cost can be reduced. Even better, households can buy as little as 200 litres of oil. When all orders are put together a better price can be obtained and

the saving made is passed on equally to all. More rural households are wanted to 'join their local oil club'! So contact our partner:

**Bryson Energy**  
T: 0800 142 867  
TEXT: 079 3984 3716  
E: [oilclubs@brysonenergy.org](mailto:oilclubs@brysonenergy.org)

to see if there is a club near you and start saving!



Nearly 3,000 households have benefited from cheaper oil thanks to 27 oil clubs established across Northern Ireland.

## Embracing all our neighbours



If English is not your first language and you need help with interpreting & translation the Housing Executive can provide free services on request, please ask for further details at your local office.

### MANDARIN

如果英语不是你的母语，并且你需要帮助来进行口译和文字翻译，那么Housing Executive可以根据请求而提供免费的服务，请在你当地的办公室询问进一步的详情。

### CANTONESE

如果英語不是你的母語，並且你需要幫助來進行口譯和文字翻譯，那麼Housing Executive可以根據請求而提供免費的服務，請在你當地的辦公室詢問進一步的詳情。

### POLISH

Jeśli język angielski nie jest Państwa językiem ojczystym i potrzebują Państwo pomocy w zakresie tłumaczeń ustnych i pisemnych, Housing Executive oferuje bezpłatne usługi tłumaczeniowe na życzenie. O szczegóły prosimy pytać biuro lokalne.

### PORTUGUESE

Se o Inglês não for a sua língua materna e precisar de ajuda com tradução e interpretação, o Executivo de Habitação pode providenciar serviços gratuitos mediante solicitação, pode obter mais informações no seu escritório local.

### LITHUANIAN

Jei anglų kalba nėra jūsų gimtoji kalba ir jums reikia pagalbos dėl vertimo žodžių ir raštu, jums pageidaujant Housing Executive gali suteikti nemokamas vertimo paslaugas; dėl išsamesnės informacijos prašome kreiptis į vietinį skyrių.

### RUSSIAN

Если английский не является вашим родным языком и вам требуется помощь с устным и письменным переводом, Жилищное управление

может предоставить по запросу бесплатные услуги переводчика. За более подробной информацией обратитесь в ваш местный офис.

### SLOVAK

Ak angličtina nie je váš materský jazyk a vyžadujete si pomoc s prekladom a tlmočením, kancelária úradu pre otázky bývania (Housing Executive) vám ochotne poskytne tieto služby bezplatne. Prosím, požiadať svoju miestnu kanceláriu o viac informácií.

For customers with sensory disabilities, information can be provided in alternative formats like large print, Braille or audio. Sign language interpreters can also be provided, but please give as much notice as possible to allow us to meet your request.





# WIN!

## Amazon Fire

We are giving the chance of one of our readers to win an Amazon Fire!  
The winner will be announced in the next edition of the magazine. Closing date 31 May 2017.

Enter at our stand at the Balmoral Show or simply return the tear off slip to:

**Eoin McKinney, Rural Unit, Housing Executive 2 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8PB.**

1. Where have the Housing Executive held information events this year?

2. What is the maximum amount payable on a Disabled Facilities Grant?

Name

Tel

Email

## Useful Contacts

### Housing Executive

Enquiries: 03448 920 900

Textphone: 18001 03448 920 900

Repairs: 03448 920 901- 24 hours

Housing Benefit: 03448 920 902

### Benefits

Advice line: 0800 232 1271

Textphone: 0800 232 1715

### Crime

Emergency Calls: 999/

Textphone 18000

PSNI non emergency: 101

Crimestoppers: 0800 555 111

### NI Water

Waterline: 0345 744 0088

(interruption)

Leakline: 0800 028 2011

Flooding incident: 0300 2000 100

### Gas

Emergency: 0800 002 001

Minicom: 0800 731 4710

### Electricity

Power cut: 03457 643 643

Minicom: 03457 147 128

### Health & Social Care Trusts

Belfast Area HQ: 028 9504 0100

Northern Area HQ: 028 9442 4000

South Eastern Area HQ: 028 9055 3100

Southern Area HQ: 028 3833 4444

Western Area HQ: 028 7134 5171

Citizen's Advice NI: 0300 1 233 233

Advice NI: 0800 028 1881

Housing Rights Service: 028 9024 5640

Women's Aid Helpline: 0808 802 1414

# Housing Executive

[www.nihe.gov.uk](http://www.nihe.gov.uk)

[facebook.com/housingexecutive](https://www.facebook.com/housingexecutive)

[@nihecommunity](https://twitter.com/nihecommunity)

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