

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of Housing, Culture and Recreation SPC Meeting held on Monday, 13th November 2017 in Room G01, Aras an Chontae, at 11.00a.m.

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. S. Walsh, Chairperson
Cllr. T. McHugh
Cllr. M. Noone
Cllr. M. Fahy
Cllr. P. Hynes
Ms. H. McElmeel

Oifigigh: Mr. M. Owens, A/ Director of Services, Corporate Services & Housing
Mr. J. Kearns, Executive Engineer, Housing
Ms. M. Flaherty, Clerical Officer, Housing

Threshold: Karina Timothy, Senior Advice Worker
Diarmuid O'Sullivan, Regional Services Manager

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 20th June 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 20th June 2017 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. McHugh.

Matters Arising

Cllr. Hynes queried a case of anti-social behaviour in Loughrea. Cllr. Walsh advised that the SPC meeting is for policy formulation and that this should be raised with the Director outside of the SPC meeting.

2. Presentation by Threshold on the Tenancy Protection Service

Mr. Diarmuid O'Sullivan gave an overview of Threshold and its purpose. He advised that it is a National Housing Charity established in 1978 for the purpose of helping people to solve their housing problems, providing housing advice and advocacy, and campaigning for a better housing system. Mr. O'Sullivan outlined the Private Rented Sector advising that it is the main housing tenure for many but has many issues around availability, security of tenure, rent inflation, deposits, standards and tenancy terminations. He said that it is traditionally seen as transitional accommodation or as a stepping stone to home ownership/social housing with 1 in 5 homes being privately rented and it is relied upon to meet social housing need i.e. rent supplement and HAP.

Mr. O'Sullivan outlined details from the Residential Tenancies Board Annual Report 2016 advising that there are 235,372 registered tenancies, made up of 700,000 occupants and 175,000 landlords and that 106,075 registered in 2016. He said the challenges being faced

are shortage of supply and affordability, tenancy termination, insufficient security of tenure and homelessness. Mr. O'Sullivan said that availability in 2017 is at an extremely low level. He advised that rent inflated 16% in Galway County in the last 12 months (daft report 2017 Q2) with the national average rent being €1,159 and for Galway County €732. He said that from Daft.ie on the 11th November 2017 there were 40 properties to rent in Galway County.

Mr. O'Sullivan outlined the main causes of Tenancy Termination, them being the sale of property, use of property for own use, renovation, repossession of buy to lets, rent increases 'Economic evictions' leading to insufficient security of tenure. He outlined that there are 24,553 Buy to let mortgages in arrears (19%) and 76,442 residential mortgages in arrears (10%). Mr. O'Sullivan said that Homelessness has increased from circa 2,500 in July 2014 to just over 8,000 in July 2017. For the West alone he advised there are 193 Homeless Adults, 83 homeless in Private Emergency Accommodation, 106 supported in Temporary Accommodation, 5 others, 44 Families and 120 Dependents.

Ms. Karina Timothy advised that the Tenancy Protection Service was setup against the backdrop of the issues outlined above, an effort for Threshold to address the issues. She advised that it was initially established in Dublin in 2015, extended to Cork in 2016 and the Galway TPS was established in June 2016. Ms. Timothy said that the main aims of the TPS is to prevent tenancy breakdown and occurrence of homelessness; protect tenants at risk especially due to rent increases and invalid notices of termination; challenge invalid tenancy terminations, rent increase, illegal evictions.

Ms. Timothy advised that the TPS client group is tenants at risk of losing their home and covers Galway City & County, County Roscommon and Mayo (West Region Homeless Forum Area) and is funded through Section 10 with an Interim Tenancy Sustainment Protocol with the Department of Social Protection in Galway City only. She said the workings of the service is homeless prevention; early intervention; keeping tenants in their current tenancies; awareness of rights and supports services; challenging invalid notices of termination, addressing rent arrears and Residential Tenancies Board disputes. Ms. Timothy advised that under the TPS 2016-2017 a total of 431 households were protected and those people remained in their homes, 534 households at risk were supported, 55 households found alternative accommodation and 403 children were prevented from becoming homeless.

Ms. Timothy said that there is a growing demand for TPS within the County, as rent gets too expensive in Galway City people are moving out to the County. She stressed the importance of raising awareness of the TPS to allow for early intervention.

Cllr. McHugh welcomed the presentation from Threshold and said he appreciates their in protecting vulnerable people as it is an extremely difficult job. He said while he acknowledges their work he said it has to be dealt with on a broader/wider more national scale.

Cllr. Noone acknowledge the work of Threshold and said while he appreciates their work there is extreme pressure on people with their rent being more than a mortgage, with so many cases of illegal rent increases. He said that properties are increasing in value and demand is outweighing supply. Mr. O'Sullivan agreed that there is a change in the profile of people becoming homeless whereby now seeing people in employment in Emergency

Accommodation. He also agreed with the pressures on rent but that there are rules that the rent cannot be above market rent. Mr. O' Sullivan advised that the rent pressure zones apply to Galway City and that there is a strong argument that the rules should apply across the County. He said that it is important to prevent inflation. Cllr. Noone said that families are separating to get into schemes. Cllr. McHugh agreed and said that some landlords are conscious of keeping families together and not increasing rents. He said it is a major problem for renters as it causes anxiety stress and they decide to separate to achieve maximum from the state.

Cllr. Hynes said that Threshold provide a very good advisory service to people with housing needs. He said there is not enough public awareness surrounding this good service. Cllr. Hynes said it is imperative that more security is put in place for tenure. Cllr. Fahy said that people are finding it extremely hard to get rental accommodation in their local area. Ms. H. McElmeel queried as to what action is needed at local level or from this SPC group, incentives that could be used. Mr. O'Sullivan said in order to promote the services investment needs to go into the PR section and it has to remain there for length of time.

3. Housing Strategic Development and Management Plans

Mr. Owens outlined the Strategic Development and Management Plans for Local Authority land on foot of a land map released by the Department identifying 3 sites for Galway County Council, 2 x Coillte lands and 1 x HSE Ballinasloe. He advised 68 other sites are in the ownership of Galway County Council but their source unclear and included a range of holdings including car parks, recreation and amenity, water treatment plants, developed lands etc.

Mr. Owens said there are many constraints to developing the land bank i.e. social mix, sustainable communities, complicated traditional model to acquire land bank, phased basis, areas within the County having large concentration of social housing with a land bank adjacent to it. These all proving problematic and would have be looked at separately under an Affordable Housing Scheme due to be announced whereby the Department are considering more focused scheme tailored to certain requirements within different areas. Mr. Owens said that another option is Voluntary/AHB's building out landbank in some areas which would be viewed differently by the Department giving potential to some sites in towns. He said next year there will be an invitation to Express an Interest to build out. The benefit of this being private funding, recouping site costs and developing land with social housing mix. Mr. Owens said the preference would be to finalise certainty around affordable housing.

Cllr. Noone suggested the Council buy pieces of land and get funding from central government to build a house for persons on the housing waiting list. He said people have a certain view as to what social housing is. He said if council have land, services should be put in and the land can then be sold to locals to build on. Cllr. McHugh agreed with Cllr. Noone and said that Kildare County Council had done similar. Cllr. Hynes queried if the Council could apply to the Department for funding to purchase lands in town not necessarily zoned. Mr. Owens said that the Department does not fund land and a claim can only be put in when houses are built to recoup land costs. Ms. McElmeel queried if land swap is covered as an option. Mr. Owens advised that the Council have invited

Expressions of Interest from developers to develop lands. Next year there will be an expression of interest for Turnkeys on private lands or developers to build out on Galway County Council sites. He said because of the concentration of social housing there is a lack of interest in building out.

Cllr. Fahy queried if it would be possible for the Council to get 10 acres of land from the likes of the IDA for the provision of housing. Mr. Owens advised that the Council has a landbank in Gort however infrastructure impedes the Gort area and the main constraint is finance.

4. Minimum Standards in Rented Accommodation

Mr. Owens went through in the detail the Guidelines for Housing Authorities in the Implementation of Minimum Standards in Rented Accommodation 2017. He said the guidelines are intended to assist Local Authorities, not only in the practical implementation and effective enforcement of the requirements of the Regulation, but also in providing a high quality of service to both landlords and tenants. They are also to promote a standardised approach to inspections and enforcement across different housing authorities so that both landlords and tenants can expect similar inspection and enforcement practices. Irrespective of their location. The guidelines are to be used as a basis to facilitate authorities in implementing inspection and enforcement approach that is appropriate to their context, is consistent with what others are doing and ensures that rental properties are in compliance with the Regulations.

Cllr. Noone queried the funding allocation. Mr. Owens advised it will come from the Councils own resources within the overall revenue base. He said discussions are ongoing with the Department – Planning Preventative Maintenance Programme whereby the Department will assist with some match funding in order for the Council to do inventory/stock taking.

Ms. McElmeel queried ventilations and asked if guidance was given to tenants in the form of a handbook or notes. Mr. Owens advised that the Tenancy handbook has been updated to include this information and a template is going to be developed and roled out next year.

5. Creative Ireland Update

Mr. Owens advised this item will be on the next Agenda. He advised that the Arts Office will be issuing a 5 year cultural strategy, draft of which will be available early next year.

6. Any Other Business

This concluded the business of the meeting.