

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of Housing, Culture and Recreation SPC Meeting held in the Council Chamber on Tuesday, 20th June 2017 at 2.00p.m.

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. S. Walsh, Chairperson
Cllr. E. Mannion
Cllr. M. Fahy
Cllr. D. Killilea
Cllr. P. Hynes
Cllr. M. Fahy
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

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 18th May 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2017 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. Hynes.

Matters Arising

None

2. Draft Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability

Mr. Owens outlined the Draft Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability to the Members. He said that housing choice for most people with disabilities is severely limited due to their particular accommodation needs and that according to the 2016 Census 12.6% of the population of County Galway had disabilities. Mr. Owens said that Galway County Council is committed to putting people with disabilities at the centre of housing policy and that the Plan was developed by a number of partners, the Council's Allocations, Capital and Assessments Department; Health Service Executive (HSE), Mental Health, Physical and Intellectual Disability Services; Disability-Specific and general Housing Associations, and Disability Service Providers.

Mr. Owens advised the Members that the Strategy identifies the routes to suitable homes for people with disabilities, including social housing tenancy, securing suitable rental housing in the private sector and adapting new owner's home to meet their needs. Mr. Owens said that the Strategy details Galway County Council's commitment to reserve a number of units for people with disabilities in accordance with the National Housing Strategy for people with a disability. He said that the Steering Group responsible for compiling the Strategy has identified a number of key Actions which will serve as both targets and areas for review over the course of the implementation of the Strategy. These

key actions will identify what the Council and its partners aim to do in order to enable people with disabilities to live independently. Mr. Owens outlined the numerous objectives of the Plan which included establishing and mapping the housing needs of people with disabilities; ensuring the supply of housing solutions is adequate to meet the needs of people with disabilities; facilitating the delivery of a wide range of housing solutions using existing and innovative supply mechanisms; ensuring the housing needs of people with disabilities are prioritised in the planning stages of proposed housing projects in terms of design, allocation and management e.g. Part V arrangements and other proposals; ensuring person centred plans are in place for those moving from congregated settings into the community; ensuring support services are in place; engaging with all statutory and voluntary agencies to enhance networking and develop better communication; prepare an Implementation Plan detailing how the actions will be achieved and timescales anticipated; carry out regular reviews of the Strategic Plan to assess its overall progress and outcomes.

Mr. Owens also briefed the Members under the following headings as outlined in the Strategy:

- Obstacles which need to be addressed in order to achieve the objectives
- Roles and Responsibilities within the Disability Sector
- Level of Demand – identified and emerging
- Grant funding to address needs in Owner Occupied Housing
- Delivery and Supply Mechanisms
- Actions for Implementation
- Timelines and Review Mechanisms

Mr. Owens advised that the Housing Disability Steering Group would guide and lead out on the implementation of the Policy meeting quarterly and annually to review its progress and the SPC would be informed on same.

Cllr. Killilea queried how this document will benefit the process and if it would speed it up. He also queried if the Steering Group is just the County or a combination of both City and County and if there are Non-Statutory Representatives on the Group e.g. Irish Wheelchair Association. He also queried if the Members have input as to what they would like to see involved in the Steering Group and he also expressed his shock at the figure of 25% having a disability, it being a serious issue.

Mr. Owens advised that as this is the first Strategy, overtime its benefit will be determined. He said that the Steering Group is Galway County Council alone and that there are Non-Statutory Representatives in the Group e.g. Cluid and Ability West. He advised that if the Irish Wheelchair Association express an interest in participating in the Steering Group he would be open to facilitating their participation. Mr. Owens agreed that the figure of 25% of people having a disability is high. He advised that Galway County Council is looking at the capital works construction programme and Part V's to meet the need. Mr. Owens explained that Department funding is available for specific build for specific individuals, but that it is considered in the context of the requirements for the individual on a case by case basis with various reports required to support the application.

The Draft Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability was proposed, with amendment to the Steering Group, by Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. Killilea.

3. Draft Framework for the County of Galway Homelessness Action Plan 2017-2018

Mr. Owens presented the Draft Framework for the County of Galway Homelessness Action Plan 2017-2018 to the Members and advised that it would guide the actions of Galway County Council in playing a lead and pivotal role in ensuring a multi-agency and collaborative approach in the development and implementation of actions that are designed to prevent homelessness in the County and to ensure that when homelessness is presented to the Council that there is an adequate response available, in conjunction with partner agencies. Mr. Owens said that the Framework outlines a range of supports, services and education provisions to prevent homelessness, to support independent living and end the reliance upon temporary accommodation to eliminate the need to sleep rough and provide long term solutions to homelessness. He outlined the main objectives and themes of the Action Plan which included some the following:

- To adopt a “housing first” policy in trying to end homelessness, working in conjunction with ‘Rebuilding Ireland’ to provide long-term solutions to both homelessness and meet housing needs.
- Tenancy Sustainment – supporting tenants in order to prevent a relapse into homelessness
- Protocols for those discharged from the Health Service whereby a planned approach is needed.
- Protocols to guide the allocation of accommodation that is available on the basis of need.
- Requirement to eliminate long-term homelessness by way of inter-agency response by the Housing Section, HSE, Department of Social Protection, Probation Service, An Garda Síochána Task Force, Voluntary Housing Bodies and other Voluntary Agencies.
- The need for additional transitional accommodation for those moving from homelessness to long-term tenancy and supports being available to them in this regard.
- The Council intends to enter into a Service Level Agreement with Galway Simon to provide supports to those moving from homeless services to long-term tenancy.
- The requirement to meet long-term housing needs is recognised in the Action Plan and the homeless people should be enabled to avail of housing.
- Engagement with Approved Housing Bodies to nominate a number of units to allow people to move from homelessness into full time accommodation.

Mr. Owens said that the implementation of the Homeless Action Plan will be led by the establishment of a Homeless Action Team comprising of the Council and State Agencies and other Agencies involved in homeless services, in terms of oversight and monitoring of the implementation of the Plan. He said that the adoption of the Plan is a Reserved Function and will proceed to Plenary Council.

Cllr. Killilea said that a big issue is tenants being evicted from houses whereby when they receive notice of eviction the Council cannot step in until a person is actually homeless. He said that these people are not getting the advice and help that they need in the early stages. He asked if something can be put into this document that a member of the Homeless Action team can engage with these people in advance of them becoming

homeless. Mr. Owens advised that this is not the role of the Council and would be duplicating services. He explained that there are other agencies to assist and support sustaining a tenancy. In relation to eviction notices the RTB and Threshold are there to assist. Cllr. Killilea queried illegal occupation of houses, due to separation a person is being evicted, he queried if this could be addressed within the Plan. Mr. Owens advised that the Council must observe due process in responding to the illegal occupation of a Council property and cannot condone such illegal activity and must act to ensure the integrity of the allocation scheme. He advised that the Council does not have the resources to offer direct assistance in sourcing alternative accommodation and other agencies are best placed to offer such guidance. Mr. Owens said that a related action could be included in the Plan at the direction of the Members, however the Council would not be in a position to resource it, therefore he advised that the change would result in something that could not be delivered.

The Draft Framework for the County of Galway Homelessness Action Plan 2018-2018 was proposed, without amendment, by Cllr. Mannion, seconded by Ms. McElmeel.

4. Review of Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

Mr. Owens advised the Members that the current Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy runs from 2015 to 2017 and is on the SPC Work Programme for 2017. He said that as it is national legislation it is developed on the basis of national policy and consists of three main categories (A) Drugs, (B) Anti-Social Behaviour and (C) Nuisance. Mr. Owens drew attention to the fact that Galway County Council may apply to the Courts for an eviction order but that there needs to be a strong basis to support the application. He advised that it was essential that complaints in relation to incidents of anti-social behaviour were submitted to An Garda Síochána and the Council to allow for action. He stressed that the Council could only act on the basis of complaints and evidence to enable an application to the Courts. He advised that applications have been made where appropriate with evidence to support them and they have been successful before the courts. Mr. Owens said where incidents arise under Category A and B the initial response is the Policing Authority with it being Galway County Councils duty to ensure that they do not say or do anything to prejudice the investigation or related actions. He noted that the Council's role was secondary to that of An Garda Síochána in such cases and that any action is taken based on the outcome of the Garda investigation.

Mr. Owens advised that the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy runs till 2017 and will be back before the SPC in the Autumn.

5. Any Other Business

Cllr. Hynes queried the HAP scheme and the arrangements in place for works to be carried out on houses that were inspected. He highlighted that landlords are refusing to carry out works from snag lists. Mr. Owens advised that the improvement works are the responsibility of the landlord and that Galway County Council issues improvement works notices which is then followed up by an inspection. Mr. Owens said that tenants can liaise with Threshold/RTB in relation to their rights.

Cllr. Mannion queried the fire safety precautions in place by Galway County Council in light of Grenfell Tower tragedy in London. Mr. Owens advised that correspondence on guidance from the Department has been received, stock is being listed for the inspection programme and quantification of cost is currently underway. He said that from the 1st July new minimum standards will apply.

Ms. McElmeel asked if there has been any clarification on the issue of shared treatment plants which was raised at the last SPC meeting. Cllr. Walsh said that his understanding is that due to the potential for environmental issues associated with private treatment plants the Director of Services for Planning cannot accept private plants as a permanent solution. Ms. McElmeel said while she appreciates that she would like to fully understand the implications. Mr. Owens advised that a special meeting had taken place on this issue and that a report was to go before the next Council meeting possibly at the June meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

