

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE
Minutes of Housing SPC Meeting held on Wednesday, 3rd November 2021
in the Council Chamber, Galway County Council

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. Joe Byrne, Chairperson
Cllr. James Charity
Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Eileen Mannion
Ms. Nora Corcoran (Social Inclusion)
Ms. Marcella Conneely (Clúid)

Oifigigh: Mr. Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services, Housing
Mr. Gerard Scully, Senior Executive Officer, Housing
Ms. Nuala Heffernan, Administrative Officer, Housing
Ms. Rachel Lowe, A/ Senior Engineer, Housing
Mr. Kieran Keon, Senior Social Worker, Housing
Ms. Genevieve Byrne, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing

Apologies Cllr Tim Broderick, Cllr Seamus Walsh, Mr. Enda McGuane, Ms. Tara Flynn

1. Minutes of SPC meeting held 15th September 2021

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th September 2021 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Eileen Mannion and seconded by Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

2. Housing For All – presented by Rachel Lowe, A/Senior Engineer (presentation document to be circulated to SPC Members)

Rachel Lowe provided an update on Housing For All

Discussion:

- Cllr Jimmy McClearn indicated that Rachel's presentation on Housing For All would need to be circulated and examined by the SPC members and could be discussed at the next SPC meeting
- Cllr James Charity queried if the targets were realistic particularly given that the private sector is dealing with increased costs for materials, timber, and steel – would the targets be affected? He also asked for the update with the AHB's in relation to land, and the issue that they were not targeting the County area. He also enquired in relation to the equity stake and the details involved in relation to the First Home Scheme.
- Rachel clarified that the final First Home Scheme document with the parameters involved is not available from the Department yet but that the Council would be taking the equity. Rachel indicated that Liam Hanrahan is meeting with the AHB's.
- Cllr Joe Byrne pointed out that the build targets were not achievable as there are not enough resources for delivery. This is due to the major staffing shortages and taking into account the superb work being carried out by the existing staff. He questioned how 1,300 units could be delivered with the current staffing and whether Galway County Council needs to go back to the Department regarding the required resources.
- Liam Hanrahan indicated that Rachel Lowe and Geraldine Byrne are in the process of preparing the Housing Delivery Action Plan
- 60% of the new build are to be provided by Galway County Council and 40% to be provided by the AHB's
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn asked how many stages were involved in a new build project, and if they needed to be reduced. He queried if there were more resources required because of the number of stages
- Rachel clarified that there were 4 stages for new build projects – the first being approval in principle, and the others involving planning permission, tender process etc. She pointed out that the Department introduced a single stage approval process this year for projects of a budget up to €6 Million e.g., less than 20 houses approx.

3. Galway Housing Taskforce Update – presented by Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services (build programme to be circulated to SPC members)

Liam Hanrahan provided an update on the Task Force meeting held on 27th October 2021

Discussion:

- Ms. Marcella Conneely enquired if there had been any interaction with the AHB forum by the Task Force to get the AHB's to agree criteria
- Liam Hanrahan indicated that Aideen on the Task Force is communicating with the AHB's
- Cllr Joe Byrne enquired if there were any proposed acquisitions in the plan
- Rachel Lowe indicated that it is intended to decrease the number of acquisitions – a limited number are funded across the country and each Local Authority is allocated the number of acquisitions that will be funded – the numbers are very small
- Liam Hanrahan explained that the one-off acquisitions are a minute part of what we do given that there are approximately 10 units a year versus the build figure of 200 units, but that there are often a lot of issues with the acquisitions
- The one-off acquisitions are usually to meet a specific need where a standard semi-detached house would not meet the need – specific rooms are often required for health equipment etc – HSE, Department of Environment and Sophia are often involved
- Cllr Joe Byrne enquired regarding the Tubber Road project where the Council is acquiring a large number of units
- Rachel Lowe clarified that the Tubber Road units are counted in the build figure and not as acquisitions – these builds are taking place in the first place because the Council is involved
- Liam Hanrahan outlined that there are single old cottage properties in the ownership of the Council that are being brought back into use – 6 properties have recently acquired Part 8 planning permission – there has been success in getting a couple of other properties back into use, and 2 of such properties now have A energy ratings
- Liam mentioned that it is envisaged to identify 20 – 30 Council owned sites and properties across the County, and to treat them as one project for funding with one contractor – a case will need to be made to the Department for this

4. Galway County Council Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability 2021-2026 – presented by Kieran Keon, Senior Social Worker (document circulated via email prior to the meeting)

Kieran Keon went through the policy document

Discussion:

- Ger Scully indicated that the online Disability form will clearly identify the needs – once the needs are established, the client can be moved to the offer zone with supports.

Prior to this, the needs could not be identified. For example - clients with physical and sensory disabilities require modifications for bathrooms and bedrooms. The number of wheelchair users will be established – Occupational Therapists will also be involved. Ger also indicated that a test survey of 10 clients with disabilities will be carried out firstly. The aim is to survey the 700 people on the list with disability issues

- Liam Hanrahan mentioned the contribution of Lorraine Kelly in the HSE. Following his attendance at some meetings, he stated that the understanding within the sector is clear that it is very much individual delivery basis. Having the Strategic Plan means that the individual service user can be identified and taken through steps towards allocation of a property. The processes have been tailored for the person with the disability. The HSE is also involved in the formation of this document, and they have agreed a number of actions. The client has a support package. It is now presented to the SPC.
- Cllr Joe Byrne stated that it is a superb document consisting of joined up thinking, with the aim being the delivery of a unit
- Cllr James Charity welcomed the completed report and the concept of proportional representation in the preparation of the report. He pointed out that it would be difficult to meet the needs with the existing stock, and queried if proportional representation is going to play a part in the new builds over the next years
- Liam Hanrahan provided an example of a housing project in Claregalway consisting of social and affordable units – the specific needs of people with disabilities are being catered for within the design. He indicated that Rachel Lowe is working with the Irish Wheelchair Association in relation to a housing project at Bermingham Road, Tuam – the units can be built to specification
- Cllr Eileen Mannion stated that it is a good document – she pointed out that there are other disabilities in addition to the physical, and that a number of people have issues with mental health. Cllr Mannion indicated that it was good that people were being looked after and wished Kieran Keon luck with the process
- Cllr Joe Byrne asked for clarification on the definition of a disability. Cllr Byrne has experience of housing applicants submitting letters from consultants with their application – he welcomed the new form which will give clarity to the applications. He enquired if major illnesses would be classed as a disability e.g., cancer or another life changing illness.
- Cllr Joe Byrne also mentioned Housing Adaptation Grants where the household income has become a major issue in relation to the threshold limits
- Liam Hanrahan indicated that the Department has been contacted regarding the income thresholds causing concern
- Ger Scully clarified that persons with long term medical needs are treated as a different category. The definition of illness category needs more clarity and needs to be streamlined at national level. There are currently varied definitions within each Local Authority, and between the different Local Authorities – this is being reviewed at national level
- Cllr James Charity queried the fact that autism is not currently a pillar under the Disability Strategy – the pillars are Sensory, Mental Health, Physical and Intellectual but

Autism is not a pillar itself although recognised – he enquired if the Allocations scheme had recognised it and if it was not going to be a pillar until it was done nationally

- Kieran Keon confirmed that Autism is always included under the Intellectual Disability. He stated that Autism is so broad that the services need to be tailored to the needs. Each case is going to be looked at under its own merit
- The Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability 2021-2026 was adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Joe Byrne and seconded by Cllr. James Charity

5. Any Other Business

- Cllr Joe Byrne indicated that he wanted to compile a list of the items for discussion in the next year and update the schedule – e.g., Rent Differential Scheme, Traveller Programme, Planned Maintenance, Vacant Homes, Inspectorate unit update Control of Horse bye laws etc.
- Cllr Joe Byrne also mentioned that he had been receiving calls from Council tenants in relation to logging their Maintenance requests – some of them could not log the request online – Nuala Heffernan indicated that she would re-circulate the link to the website where the calls could be logged directly from the Councillor’s office
- Ger Scully indicated that the Area of Choice review has been carried out electronically – 2,900 text messages were sent out and to date 2,000 replies had been received. He explained that there had been previously no emphasis placed on keeping email addresses and mobile numbers up to date on the housing applications - 500 applicants had new mobile phone details. Choice based letting will take place again next year – our ability to interact digitally is vital – it makes communication quicker and easier and enhancing the service to the customer. There has been a 62% response rate where they had only expected a 40% return. It transpires that people are willing to respond electronically – perhaps younger people are helping those that are not confident using the digital methods.
- Cllr Joe Byrne pointed out that people were cautious when they received the text messages due to the recent increase in scam text messages

The next Housing SPC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 2nd February 2022 at 10am in the Council Chamber