

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of Housing, Culture and Recreation SPC Meeting held in The Western Hotel on Thursday, 18th May 2017 at 11.00a.m.

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. S. Walsh, Chairperson
Cllr. E. Mannion
Cllr. M. Fahy
Cllr. T. McHugh
Cllr. D. Killilea
Ms. H. McElmeel

Oifigigh: Mr. M. Owens, A/ D.O.S
Ms. J. Brann, S.E.O. Housing
Mr. M. Sheil, S.E.E. Housing
Mr. K. Finn, S.E.E. Housing
Ms. M. Jordan, A.O. Housing
Ms. M. Donohue, S.S.O, Corporate Services
Ms. J. Gibbons, S.O. Housing
Ms. M. Flaherty, C.O. Housing

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 21st March 2017

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st March 2017 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. McHugh, seconded by Cllr. Fahy.

Matters Arising

None

2. Draft Housing Allocation Scheme

Mr. Owens circulated the draft Housing Allocation Scheme report. He advised the Committee that the making of the scheme is a reserved function, subject to Ministerial Direction and it will go before the next meeting of Plenary Council.

Mr. Owens briefed the committee on the content of the scheme which sets out the priorities and procedures for allocating dwellings. He advised that the scheme recognises the need to achieve a balance in allocating dwellings between the needs and preferences of applicants, the wellbeing of existing tenants and the community as a whole, and the need to make the best use of the council's housing stock and publicly funded resources. Mr. Owens stressed the importance of the council having regard need to (a) counteract undue segregation in housing between persons of different social backgrounds, and (b) ensure that a mixture of dwelling types, sizes and classes of tenure is provided to reasonably match the requirements of the households. Mr. Owens said that the Scheme is also aligned to all relevant housing plans and strategies, for example, it aims to promote

objectives contained in the Council's Housing Strategy, Traveller Accommodation Programme as well as its Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy.

Mr. Owens advised that the purpose of the scheme is to determine the priority to be accorded and implemented in the allocation of dwellings to (a) households or particular classes of households who have been assessed as being qualified for social housing support, and (b) households in receipt of social housing support that have applied to the council to transfer to another dwelling or to purchase a dwelling and the council consents to such transfer or purchase, as the case may be. Mr. Owens further advised that the Scheme makes provision for a proportion of dwellings to be reserved for all or any of the following purposes: (a) allocation to particular classes of households, (b) allocation to particular forms of tenure, and (c) allocation to households transferring from other forms of social housing support. He said the Scheme also sets out the requirements and procedures for transfers, including tenants of dwellings provided under the Social Housing Leasing initiatives, those accommodated under HAP, succession to tenancies and the downsizing scheme for the elderly who want to move from an under-occupied dwelling to other housing.

Mr. Owens outlined the general requirements of the scheme, i.e. Eligibility; Application and Additional Information; Change in circumstances; Personal Data; Areas of Choice (of which would be dealt with as a separate item on the Agenda); Housing Need; Type of Dwelling; Order of Priority for dwelling allocations; and RAS tenants. He made particular reference to Type of Dwelling and Order of Priority for dwelling. Mr. Owens outlined that in relation to Type of Dwelling, the scheme was being amended from 1 bed dwellings to 1 or 2 bed dwellings being offered to an individual or couple; 2 bed dwellings are offered to a couple or lone parent with one child, or two children of the same sex, or two children of the opposite sex aged under 10, or two adults not living as couple; 3 bed dwellings are offered to a couple or lone parent with 2 children not of the same sex, where one child is over 10 years old, or with three children, or any three adults where none are living as a couple; 4 bed dwellings are offered to households consisting of a couple or lone parent with four or five children or 4 adults where no two are living as a couple; 5 bed dwellings are offered to households consisting of a couple or lone parent with six or more children.

Cllr. Walsh queried the order of priority for 2 bed dwellings being offered to a couple or lone parent with two children of the same or opposite sex aged under 10 and the appropriateness, particularly if the children are of different sex. He asked if removing the under 10 requirement could be considered. Mr. Owens said that the Council are conscious of the age profile, that under 10s are considered differently and that, if this requirement was to be removed an element of discretion would also be removed. He said that the requirement is not unique to the Council. Ms. McElmeel said that families appreciate homes as opposed to size and it would be up to the family to make that judgement. She asked if the option could be added to the application form or is it standard form to which Mr. Owens advised it is standard form.. Ms. Jordan advised the committee that the Council has a practice of sensible implementation and that will be the case with this requirement. She said that in most cases children approaching the age of 10 are put into 3 beds. The requirement is there for the family's benefit and those next on list if required. Cllr. Mc Hugh said it is a better option in the short term, that it is a requirement that will safeguard in the event of a situation arising where there is only one 2 bed property available and a family, with 2 children under the age of 10, is in dire need of a house.

In relation to the Order of Priority for Dwelling Allocations, Mr. Owens advised that this is an area the Members may wish to give particular consideration to. He said that the Council will give reasonable preference to certain household groups when allocating dwellings, which he outlined. Mr. Owens explained that the priority that an application will receive will depend mainly on the priority afforded to each household group. He said that the Council may, from time to time, apply a Gaeltacht Residential Qualification in order to protect the linguistic and cultural heritage of the Gaeltacht and this application will be by way of Chief Executives Order. Mr. Owens said that there is a linkage between applying the Order of Priority and the Reservation of Dwellings whereby, to get an appropriate social mix and counteract undue social segregation, the Council may designate a particular number or proportion of dwellings for a particular category or categories of households and that the designation of dwellings for this purpose shall be by way of Chief Executive Order.

Mr. Owens highlighted for the members consideration point 7.4 under Refusal by Applicants of Offers for Social Housing and recommended it to the SPC as a reasonable approach, i.e. where a qualified household, deemed to be homeless, refuses a reasonable offer of a dwelling that meets the accommodation needs of the household, the household may not, for the period of one year commencing on the date of such refusal, be entitled to be included on the record of qualified households on the basis of being homeless within the meaning of Section 2 of the Housing Act 1988. In such circumstances the offer does not have to be in any of their areas of choice for it to be considered a reasonable offer. A refusal by a qualified household of an offer of a dwelling not within their areas of choice shall not constitute a refusal.

Mr. Owens outlined the details on the Choice Based Letting (CBL) Scheme i.e. eligibility/ineligibility, bidding/decision process and refusals. He explained that the Scheme will be operated to enable households qualified for the full range of Social Housing Supports on the housing waiting list to exercise greater choice and involvement in selecting a new home. Mr. Owens said that initially only dwellings owned by the Council will be allocated through CBL but that not all such dwellings which become available for letting will be offered through CBL.

Mr. Owens went on to outline the rest of the scheme to include the Priorities for Transfers for Local Authority Tenants; Succession of Tenancies; Succession in Other Circumstances; Permission to Reside as an Occupant in Council Dwellings; and Joint Tenancy Applications. He highlighted under the interests of good Estate Management that, as a pre-condition of the grant of a tenancy, tenants would be required to attend and participate in a pre-tenancy course.

Mr. Owens gave detail on the introduction of a Downsizing Scheme for the Elderly whereby Senior Citizens, aged 60 years of over, who are owners of private dwellings which have become too large for their housing needs may now apply to the Council for senior citizen tenancy accommodation subject to the payment of a financial contribution which is set at a percentage of the net proceeds of the sale of their private dwelling. He said that the council may set aside a particular number or proportion of dwellings becoming available for allocation to persons under this category. Cllr. Killilea questioned if the Council would take on a property in the event that it was unfit to which to which Mr. Owens replied that it was not the intention.

The Housing Allocation Scheme was proposed without amendment by Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. Killilea.

3. Review of Area of Choice

Mr. Owens circulated the proposal for changes to the Social Housing Areas of Choice outlining that there currently are 56 areas of choice, 54 county and 2 city. He said that currently applicants are selecting areas of choice without the knowledge or profile of units, the availability of units and the numbers on the housing waiting list for that area, thus creating complexity and it being a disadvantage to applicants. Mr. Owens advised when Capital Appraisal Proposals are being assessed by the Department they look at demand within that area based on the areas of choice. For Galway County Council this is 2700 households divided by 54 areas of choice. This dissolution of housing need may place the council at a disadvantage when looking for funds from the Department.

Mr. Owens advised that the new proposal to amend areas of choice grouped by Municipal District will support smaller rural towns as a case can be made for development. He gave the example of the Ballinasloe area and a housing need proposal for Clonfert whereby when Clonfert is taken on its own there is no housing need, however when grouping the areas together there is a stronger case to attract funding to provide housing in the area. Mr. Owens said that reducing the areas of choice will better support proposals. He advised the Committee that in order to maintain and provide social housing in smaller/rural areas in the County, the areas of choice have to change and this in turn will benefit the Council and applicants. He advised the committee that the Areas of Choice is not a reserved function however because of its significant regard would be given to SPC Member's views.

Cllr. Killilea queried the Tuam area with regard to Dunmore, specifically as to whether its position on the Areas of Choice should be moved higher on the list so as to increase numbers, not for the purpose of the application form, more so to make a stronger case for funding for that area. Cllr. McHugh was of the opinion that it may not make much of a difference and that area already has houses in places that people do not wish to live. Cllr. Killilea asked for Mr. Owens's opinion. Mr. Owens said that moving Dunmore would strengthen the district geographically. He advised that all suggestions are to be considered and guided by the Members. Cllr. Mannion acknowledged that the amendment to the areas of choice is a big change.

Cllr. McHugh asked how long an applicant has to consider an offer. Ms. Jordan advised that they have 2 weeks to which Cllr. McHugh suggested shortening. Mr. Owens advised that the changes to the Areas of Choice will mean moving from a system of 2 stages i.e. (1) Place on the housing waiting list (2) Offer, to a 3 stage process i.e. (1) Place on the housing waiting list (2) Offer zone, a period of 6 to 9 months engaging with applicants preparing them for tenancy and (3) Offer. Cllr. McHugh asked if this will impact on the allocating of properties and housing laying empty. Mr. Owens advised that the offer zone will greatly reduce delays in allocating properties whereby there will be a line of people in place having got advance notice.

The changes in the Social Housing Areas of Choices was proposed, upon review of the Dunmore area, by Cllr. Killilea, seconded by Cllr. Hynes.

4. Draft Amended Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018

Mr. Owens advised the Committee that during 2016 the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government directed that a review of the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 be carried out. The review noted that the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 had to be amended and will be going before the Council at a meeting of Plenary Council in July and is for the Committees information only. Mr. Owens explained that the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 was developed in the context of a number of factors including the suspension of the housing construction programme nationally and the curtailment of the Voluntary Housing Programmes. On this basis proposals requiring significant capital investment, including a longstanding proposal relating to the provision of group housing at Craughwell Halting site, were not included in the Programme. In the interim, the availability of capital funding afforded the Council the opportunity to secure a capital allocation from the Department to allow for the development of group housing at Craughwell Halting Site in order to meet the preferred accommodation needs of the current residents. He said it was considered appropriate therefore to avail of the review to amend the Programme to support this significant project and to include further capital proposals relating to the necessary enhancement of existing accommodation.

Mr. Owens said that the review also noted that the Programme was developed prior to the auditing of fire safety in local authority provided Traveller accommodation that was undertaken in the aftermath of the fire tragedy in Carrickmines Dublin. The report relating to the audit proposed a series of actions to bring accommodation in line with appropriate safety standards, together with a parallel programme of community fire safety standards. It was considered appropriate to avail of the review to embed the issue of fire safety in Traveller accommodation in the Programme. This reflects the priority the Council affords the issue of fire safety and the responsibilities of the council and those of the residents of Traveller accommodation to enhance and maintain appropriate and necessary fire safety standards. Mr. Owens said that by unanimous decision of Galway County Council it was agreed that amendments to the Galway County Council Traveller Accommodation Programme to include the requirement for capital investment and appropriate fire safety standards were required.

Mr. Owens advised that the Draft Amended Programme also reflects the consultation with the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and with individual Traveller families in relation to their accommodation needs. It also reflects the current and projected accommodation need, taking into consideration the Housing Needs Assessment and the Annual Traveller Count 2016. Mr. Owens said that the Programme identified a requirement of 173 accommodation units to meet the then current and projected need comprising a current need of 48 and a projected need estimated at 125 accommodation units. He advised that while there are variances across the various accommodation types, Galway County Council exceeded its overall targets in the programme for 3 years to December 2016, with the accommodation needs of 116 households met during this period. Mr. Owens said that the introduction of HAP has made a significant contribution to meeting housing need and that the council are heavily dependent on it for that purpose.

Cllr. Hynes asked what the position is on the provision of capital funding from the Department for building and purchasing houses. Mr. Owens said under the Social Housing Strategy 2015-2017 the current stock is what the council has. He advised that under the

SHS 2018-2020 the council are looking at proposals to submit to the Department however is mindful not to compete with first time buyers. Mr. Owens said that the Housing Needs Assessment currently underway will determine the allocation of funding for the next SHS. He said that the change in the area of choices will improve project prospects however there will be a number of challenges i.e. land bank deficit, services at capacity and policy changes on sustainable communities. Cllr. Hynes queried the Affordable Housing Scheme and buying in the urban area of Loughrea. Mr. Owens advised that the Affordable Housing Scheme is not in being and the issue was raised with the Minister that the policy approach needs to change. In relation to land acquisition Mr. Owens advised that the Department will only fund site cost at the build costs therefore the Council needs to be able to carry lands cost.

Cllr. Killilea queried the LTACC and if the doubling of the target is being realistic. He highlighted Galway City Councils application for a hardstand in Oranmore catering for its own applicants and questioned if Galway County Council will be responsible for them. Mr. Owens said that the Council do not have discretion in determining targets and the targets are derived from existing and projected need. He advised that the Census indicates that Galway County has the largest traveller population. Mr. Owens said that the responsibility of these tenants will remain with the City Council and that the land is owned by the City Council. Ms. EcElmeel queried if future applicants from that halting site will impact on Galway County Council's listing and what the rationale is for this measure. Mr. Owens advised that if the applicants include the halting site it will be the City Council however if they include an area in the County outside of the halting site it will be Galway County Council. He said that it was his understanding that it was being proposed as a temporary measure on the grounds of health and safety while the City Council advance proposals for a more long term solution.

5. Creative Ireland

Ms. Donohue gave a very comprehensive and detailed account of the Governments Legacy Programme for Ireland 2016. She explained that it is a five year initiative from 2017 to 2022, a wellbeing strategy that aims to improve access to cultural and creative activity in every county across the country. Ms. Donohue said that there are five pillars to the Creative Ireland National Programme and from the five pillars, the National Creative Ireland Team have ten initiatives to be completed and in place by the end of 2017 – three of which relate directly to Local Authorities, these are (1) A Culture Team, Director-led, configured to local needs; (2) Crinniú na Cásca programme is put in place for Easter Monday, and (3) A Culture and Creativity Plan.

Ms. Donohue said that Galway County Council has undertaken its three actions. She said that the Culture Team and been established which currently consists of the County Librarian, County Archivist, Heritage Officer, Environmental Education Officer, Architectural Conservation Officer, Social Inclusion Officer, Sports Officer, Arts Officer and staff from Corporate Services, the Library and Community & Enterprise. The team is being led by Director of Services, Catherine McConnell. Ms. Donohue said that the Easter Monday Crinniú na Cásca event was held in Medieval Athenry which was a great success embracing each of the Creative Ireland Pillars. She advised that the Culture and Creativity Plan for County Galway has been complete.

Ms. Donohue said that the official launch of all the Local Authorities Plans will take place on May 25th 2017 and will include Galway County Council's Plan. The local launch of the Councils Culture and Creative Plan will be held on May 30th 2017. She advised that Galway County Council's Plan includes the following:

1. Culture and Educational Portal – As the Council offers a wide range of innovative services to schools, the aim of this project by the Arts/Community & Enterprise office will be to map all of this work in one location to provide easy access for the many wonderful opportunities provided by the Council.
2. Galway's Gastronomical Heritage – The Heritage Office Social Inclusion Unit and Archivist of the Council in partnership with local heritage groups, networks, schools, individuals and the National Museum of Ireland Country Life have embarked on documenting Galway's rich gastronomic heritage on a website. This being very apt as Galway is the Region of Gastronomy in 2018 and this provides the opportunity to include the older population, children and new communities in the common experience of food cultures, food traditions and heritage is a key element of this project.
3. Architecture on the Edge – This project in conjunction with the Architectural Conservation Officer is the 'Architecture is.....On the Edge' (AE) festival which invites all citizens to explore their city and county. On the Edge 2017 will focus on the theme of housing, titled 'Architecture is.....Home' and will be held over the 6th to 8th October 2017.
4. Literature on the Move Galway's Great Read – This project aims to encourage people to get back to reading for pleasure while inviting them to get involved and visit their library and attend events which will be hosted by brank libraries throughout the City and County. The proposal for 2017 is to concentrate on the life and works of Pádraic Ó Conaire.
5. Crinniú na Cásca – Experience the Magic of Creativity was the theme for this event which proved to be an outstanding success with up to 7,000 persons attending which was held at 6 locations throughout the medieval town of Athenry.

Ms. Donohue said that due to 1/3 of the year being passed for 2017, A Culture and Creativity Plan for the county is well underway for 2017 which will include projects that the Council can now proceed with through the funding from the Creative Ireland Programme. However, later in the year a Culture and Creativity Strategy for 2018 has to be prepared. She said that this will be done through a public consultation forum to help inform the Strategy.

6. Any Other Business

Cllr. Hynes queried the number of rent supplement recipients moving to HAP and said that getting properties appears to be the biggest hurdle. Mr. Owens advised that there is a target of 10 households per week for 2017 including new and rent supplement recipients.

This concluded the business of the meeting.