

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

**Minutes of Housing, Culture and Recreation SPC Meeting held in Room G01,
County Hall, Tuesday, 21st March 2017 at 3.00p.m.**

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. S. Walsh, Chairperson
Cllr. E. Mannion
Cllr. M. Fahy
Cllr. T. McHugh
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
Ms. J. Gibbons, S.O. Housing
Ms. M. Flaherty, C.O. Housing

Mr. Owens welcomed the new Chair, Cllr. Seamus Walsh and said that he looks forward to working with him. He acknowledged the previous Chair, Cllr. Tom McHugh and said he was delighted that Cllr. McHugh has remained on as a Committee Member.

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 16th September 2016

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th September 2016 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. McHugh, seconded by Cllr. Fahy.

Matters Arising

None

2. Update on Social Housing Strategy

Mr. Sheil gave an update on the Social Housing Strategy and progress to date in relation to construction projects and acquisitions. He advised on the status of the 5 construction schemes in working progress whereby Planning has been approved for 88 units. Mr. Sheil advised that of 6 Rurals, 3 have contracts to be signed on April 3rd 2017 with a commencement date of April 24th 2017 and completion date of April 2018. The remaining 3 Rurals are tendering within the next 2 weeks with a commencement date of June 2017 and an expected completion date of June 2018.

In relation to Capital projects Mr. Sheil advised that the 30 units at Weir Road have an expression of interest assessment date of Thursday 23rd and Friday 24th March 2017, a tendering date of April 10th 2017 with on-site commencement in June 2017 and an expected completion date of September 2018. The 12 units at Esker Fields and Garbally Drive have a return date of April 4th 2017 for the expressions of interest, tender date of May 23rd 2017 with on-site commencement early July 2017 and an expected completion

date of April 2018. The expressions of interest for the 40 units at Gilmartin Road is complete, there is a tender date of May 23rd 2017 with on-site commencement early July 2017 and an expected completion date of April 2018.

Mr. Sheil advised that there are currently 18 CAS (Capital Assistance Scheme) projects, 8 of which are Construction, 9 Acquisitions and 1 Construction/Acquisition, with a total of 102 units of which 16 have been delivered. 3 Projects are currently awaiting Department approval. In relation to CALF (Capital Advanced Leasing Facility) Mr. Sheil advised that 46 units have been delivered to date, a further 112 units (6 projects) have been approved and 440 units (18 projects) are under consideration. He also advised that from 2014 to date there has been 53 acquisitions with a further 54 purchase agreed totalling 107.

Cllr. McHugh queried how many additional houses the Council will have by the end of 2017. Mr. Sheil advised that there has been 53 acquisitions to date with a further 54 by the end of 2017. He said it is all dependent on how quick the AHBs can deliver. He advised in relation to units under CAS all will be not be delivered by the end of 2017 and of the construction projects they are at various levels of planning. Cllr. McHugh said if it were to be 100-130 units the Council would be doing well. Mr. Sheil advised that under CALF 46 units have come through to date with a further 112 to follow. He explained that acquisitions come in more quickly. Mr. Owens advised that Voids also add to stock to which Mr. Sheil advised that there is significant activity in that area and GCC are well on target.

Ms. McElmeel queried if units are being obtained through Part V. Mr. Sheil advised that there are developments of 30-40 units beginning to progress whereby the Council will be yielding 3 to 4 units per development however delivery will be 2018. He advised that developmental activity is picking up particularly in areas such as Oranmore and Bearna.

Cllr. Mannion queried if there will be a Phase 2 to the Cluid housing development in Letterfrack and if it is a Part 8. Mr. Sheil advised that there is a Phase 2 of Cluid Housing in Letterfrack under CAS and it is not Part 8.

3. Review of Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme

Ms. Brann circulated a response that had been received to the letter issued to the Minister requesting that consideration be given to reviewing the criteria in assessing reckonable income for potential purchasers. She outlined the contents of the letter noting that the Minister advised that in order to ensure the sustainability of the scheme it is essential that the applicant's income is of a long term and sustainable nature. This being necessary to ensure that the tenant purchasing the house is in a financial position, as the owner, to maintain and insure the property for the duration of the charged period, in compliance with the conditions of the order transferring the ownership of, and responsibility for, the house from the Local Authority to the tenant.

The Minister advised that in line with the commitment in the Programme for a Partnership Government and reaffirmed in Rebuilding Ireland – Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness, it is intended that a review of the Scheme will be undertaken in January 2017 following the first 12 months of operation and any changes to the terms and

conditions of the scheme which are considered necessary based on the evidence gathered at that stage will be brought forward.

Ms. Brann advised in terms of an update on Galway County Council's figures, 55 applications have been received to date of which 16 applications were invalid and the rest are at review stage some with further information requested. A total of 9 offers have been made to tenants and she advised that GCC await feedback from the national review of the scheme.

Cllr. McHugh said that it was a great pity that the Department does not see how the criteria in assessing reckonable income is posing difficulty for potential purchasers in particular OAPs whereby they would not have money from employment. He said applications should be addressed on a case by case basis.

Cllr. Walsh asked if there is a requirement that houses must be sold through a scheme. Mr. Owens advised that this was an issue before and that Section 183 does not apply to Council stock and therefore housing can only be sold through the Tenant Purchase Scheme.

4. Tenancy Sustainment Strategy

Mr. Owens circulated a copy of the Draft Tenancy Sustainment Strategy 2017-2019 which was reviewed by the committee. He outlined the strategies currently in place, the Tenancy Estate Management Strategy / Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy and explained that it has been a long standing priority of the council members and the housing unit to link these with Tenancy Sustainment.

Mr. Owens advised that the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy outlines the various interventions and supports available to assist tenants in sustaining their tenancy and contribute positively to their neighbourhood and community during the various 'life stages' of their tenancy. It also outlines the Council's role in enabling its tenants to avail of the advice and support provided by other stakeholders, help guide the Council's work with key statutory partners and stakeholders and establish protocols. He advised that it will introduce a 'risk based' approach to intervention which will help to target council resources and those of the partners more efficiently and effectively. It will help to determine the need and nature of intervention and which stakeholders need to be involved in planning and subsequently providing appropriate advice, support and/or care.

Mr. Owens explained that the main aim of the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy is to minimise tenancy breakdown and promote stable and sustainable communities through Prevention, Tenancy Support and Partnership Working. He advised that the specific objectives of the strategy are to minimise the rate of tenancy failure, to ensure tenants understand the implications of the failure of the tenancy, to equip staff to support tenants in sustaining their tenancy either directly or through appropriate organisations and to work in partnership with other organisations in the development, provision and procurement of advice and support services.

Mr. Owens advised that through the various 'life stages' of a tenancy the Council will seek to (1) Prevent Crisis, which will be based on a risk assessment of tenants; (2) Early Intervention, which will be the Council's way of ensuring that problems are 'nipped in the bud' and do not escalate meaning the Council will plan with its vulnerable tenants from the earliest stage of contact, appropriate actions and interventions; and (3) Planned Action, involving the production of a Tenancy Support Plan where appropriate in conjunction with key partner stakeholders, the plan will have an agreed set of priorities to enable effective tenant liaison and support.

Mr. Owens outlined the general housing supports for applicants to include the Housing Supports Advice Clinic whereby all applicants will be afforded the opportunity to meet with a member of staff from the Housing unit on a one-to-one basis by means of a scheduled appointment, where possible, within 12 weeks of submitting their housing application. The Clinics are to be held on a regional basis providing applicants with advice on the allocations process, giving an indicative timeline for meeting their housing need and providing them with information for appropriate external stakeholders e.g. MABS, Threshold.

Mr. Owens advised that this will be followed by Moving In and Early Tenancy Supports whereby all applicants, as a condition of accepting an offer of a tenancy, will be required to participate in a Tenancy Induction Programme (Pre-Tenancy Training). A 'welcome visit' by housing staff will be undertaken in the first week of the tenancy with a follow up visit within the first month of tenancy. These visits will focus on ensuring the tenant has a clear and full understanding of the behaviour and responsibilities required of them, checks on rent payments, home management, and will include particular focus on personal welfare, including relations with neighbours and fit with the local community.

Mr. Owens outlined the final support, the Starter Tenancy Support whereby further home visits will be undertaken by housing staff between the third to sixth month and ninth to twelfth month of the tenancy. These visits will place a significant focus on home management, nuisance and anti-social behaviour. Mr. Owens advised that the intensive engagement and support during the first twelve months of a starter tenancy will enable the early identification of any issues which may affect the sustainability of the tenancy.

Based on an assessment of risk and by developing the understanding of 'risk triggers' Mr. Owens advised that a Tenancy Support Plan (TSP) will be produced for vulnerable tenants. The aim of the plan will be to put in place a range of targeted interventions and supports to assist the tenants in sustaining their tenancy with emphasis on the tenant's full co-operation and participation in the process. The TSP will be agreed with and delivered in partnership with other key partners and stakeholders. Mr. Owens explained that to ensure the appropriate supports are provided to all tenants Tenancy Sustainment Checks will be undertaken in all of the neighbourhoods/estates on the basis of a rolling annual programme. This Tenancy Sustainment Programme will aim to ensure that a visit is made to every tenant on an annual basis.

Mr. Owens advised that the Councils approach to tenancy sustainment is based on a number of commitments to include ensuring the tenants understand the costs and responsibilities of taking on their tenancy before they commit; providing/enabling advice through a variety of mechanisms; ensuring actions are informed; genuinely seeking to engage tenants both in decisions affecting them directly and more widely concerning the

services we provide; comply with relevant legislation and recognised best practice; work effectively with appropriate partner stakeholders; improve understanding of tenancy failure and seek to address the causes; have an action plan setting out how the strategy will be implemented and promotion of same along with regularly reviewing the effectiveness of the Strategy.

Mr. Owens outlined a number of key outcomes for the Tenancy Sustainment Policy which included building stable/sustainable communities; tenant's individual needs are recognised and they get the information they need on how to obtain support to remain in their home; promote partnership and minimise tenancy terminations. He advised that the Strategy will be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the Business Planning process and the monitoring and review of the action plan will be undertaken by the Housing Senior Management Team on a monthly basis whereby progress will also be reported to the Housing, Culture and Recreation SPC. Mr. Owens explained that the responsibility for the delivery of the strategy rests with the Director of Services for Housing and that the Council will formally review the policy at least every 3 years or sooner if required.

Cllr. Fahy commended the strategy and how it was presented to the SPC. Cllr. Wash said the strategy with its excellent content was most welcome. Ms. McElmeel whilst welcoming the strategy requested that such strategies/reports be circulated in advance of meetings to allow time for them to be reviewed to which Mr. Owens agreed.

Cllr. McHugh queried if anti-social behaviour is decreasing, if it exists at a lesser degree or are problems arising more now than ever given that a large number of houses are now being rented under HAP/RAS within estates. Mr. Owens advised that there is a legislative framework for Anti-Social Behaviour which has been changed to introduce the requirement for a staged process of interaction with tenants to include an engagement piece prior to court i.e. warning notices. He explained through Tenancy and Estate Management a structure is being put in place at an early stage to deal with anti-social behaviour before it gets to the courts looking for eviction. He stressed the importance of the Council ensuring it has the strongest possible case if going to court. Mr. Owens advised that there are a number of cases currently being processed which will be proceeding to court within the coming months. He advised that the Council is responsible for the management of estates and addressing issues raised and is confident that the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy will assist in addressing this.

Ms. McElmeel queried tenancies and the number that are at risk/failing and if built environment i.e. clusters, are affecting tenancies.. Mr. Owens advised that the Estate Management Strategy now in place deals with the environment within estates.

The Tenancy Sustainment Strategy 2017-2019 was proposed by Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. McHugh.

5. SPC Work Programme and Schedule of Meetings

Mr. Owens circulated the SPC Work Programme and Schedule of Meeting for 2017 and advised it was open to amendment.

Schedule of Meetings

21st March, 2017

23rd May, 2017

20th June, 2017

19th September, 2017

24th October, 2017

Work Programme

- Allocations Scheme
 - Choice Based Letting
 - Review/Reduce Areas of Preference
 - Strengthen Estate Management / Tenancy Sustainment & Estate Management Strategy
- Social Housing Strategy 2018+
- Local Strategic Plan – Disability
- Homelessness Strategy Plan
- Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy
- Housing Maintenance – Preventative Maintenance
- Accessible Recreation and Play
- Draft Casual Trading Bye-Laws
- Creative Ireland

Mr. Owens advised that the scheduled meetings will feed into the Plenary Council meetings and are open to change. Cllr. Walsh advised that the preference would be for a morning meeting and suggested 11am which was agreed.

Cllr. McHugh asked if consideration could be given to incorporating walking and cycling in to the Tenancy Sustainment Strategy / Work Programme. Ms. Brann advised that this could be done through Sports Partnership and the engagement of tenants under the estate management plan.

The SPC Work Programme and Schedule of Meetings for 2017 was proposed by Cllr. McHugh, seconded by Cllr. Fahy.

6. Any Other Business

Cllr. Fahy queried an estate in Ardrahan and advised that there are severe potholes and problems with the footpath. He asked if the Housing Section could contribute to rectifying the situation. Mr. Sheil advised that all of the units in the estate in question were purchased outright, that the issue is for Roads area and that Housing cannot put funding towards roadworks. Cllr. McHugh suggested he liaise with Roads.

Cllr. Fahy acknowledged the passing of Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness and acknowledged his work and achievements, this was proposed by Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. Walsh.

Ms. McElmeel raised two concerns impacting housing supply. The first being inactive Local Area Plans whereby they have expired and as a result of their expiration there is no provisions for Part V. The second being shared treatments plants whereby a planning decision has been taken to no longer permit same. She advised that going back to half acre sites with stand-alone treatment plants is not desirable and that areas within the County are under severe pressure with the result being an immense risk to the provision of housing. This suggests it may be that the planning department is now having regard to high powers i.e. An Board Pleanala who typically refuse planning where private treatment plants form part of the scheme. It was agreed that this should be brought to the attention of the Planning Department.

This concluded the business of the meeting.