

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE
Minutes of Housing SPC Meeting held on Wednesday, 6th April 2022 in the Council Chamber, Galway County Council at 10 a.m.

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. Joe Byrne, Chairperson
Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Eileen Mannion
Cllr. Thomas Welby
Mr. Enda McGuane (Business)
Ms. Aimee McGee (Clúid)

Oifigh: Mr. Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services, Housing
Ms. Carmel Kilcoyne, Senior Executive Officer, Housing
Ms. Nuala Heffernan, Administrative Officer, Housing
Ms. Angela Spelman, Administrative Officer, Housing
Mr. Damien Mitchell, Senior Engineer, Housing
Mr. Enda Hoey, Building Inspector, Housing
Ms. Genevieve Byrne, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing

I Láthair freisin: Ms. Karina Timothy, Threshold
Ms. Maeve Charles, Threshold

Apologies: Cllr Seamus Walsh, Kieran Keon (Senior Social Worker), Nora Corcoran (Social Inclusion), Tara Flynn (Construction)

Cllr Joe Byrne, Chairperson, began the meeting by welcoming Carmel Kilcoyne (Senior Executive Officer), Damien Mitchell (Senior Engineer) and Aimee McGee (Clúid representative). Cllr Byrne expressed thanks to Nuala Heffernan and Rachel Lowe for their work with the Housing SPC and acknowledged their excellent work.

1. Minutes of SPC meeting held 2nd February 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 2nd February 2022 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. Jimmy McClearn and seconded by Cllr. Thomas Welby.

Update regarding temporary housing of Ukrainian refugees given by Liam Hanrahan

- Mr Liam Hanrahan explained that the Minister for Housing had instructed that a meeting be hosted over St Patrick's Day weekend to arrange short term hotel accommodation due to the influx of Ukrainian refugees into Dublin Airport.
- Mr Hanrahan explained that at the time, IPAS and the Department were struggling to find hotel accommodation
- Mr Hanrahan reported that Ms Angela Spelman, Administrative Officer, is the liaison person for Galway County Council with IPAS and arranged hotel beds on a temporary basis
- Mr Hanrahan further explained that Stage 2 of the process is to identify long term buildings and to provide a list to the Department – it also needs to be identified if the buildings are available immediately or if there are works that need to be done. Buildings such as former schools, convents, monasteries are being looked at – institutions have been approached – these buildings may require work. An example of this are convents in Loughrea and Gort – there may be months of work required – the discussions are ongoing.
- 3 Liaisons have been appointed across the country assessing the buildings
- On an urgent basis, each Local Authority was asked to identify a community centre that could be used to house emergency beds – Angela Spelman and Nuala Heffernan identified a community centre with 75 beds in Oranmore but this is only available for weekends
- Last Friday, 1st April 2022, 44 people arrived at Oranmore Community Centre in the middle of the night and they were provided meals and support – the refugees later moved on to family and self- accommodation and the temporary facility was stood down on Monday evening.
- Mr Hanrahan commented that it was a very worthwhile process as the people were very traumatised – Mr Hanrahan thanked the various Housing staff, Civil Defence officers and also thanked the Oranmore Community Centre staff.
- It is expected that another call will be received at any time again to handle a similar overflow from the Dublin centre

Discussion:

- Cllr Joe Byrne mentioned that there are currently 85 Ukrainian refugees being sheltered in Kinvara and that lessons have been learnt from the issues that arose e.g

lack of SIM cards for phones, delays in obtaining PPS numbers, lack of public transport to school/post office etc.

- Cllr Byrne pointed out that this would cause a strain on the current public transport situation as the buses are already full currently bringing people to work/education. Cllr Byrne also pointed out that the lack of transport meant that extra pressure was put on the schools which were closer rather than those on the outskirts of the town.
- Cllr Byrne also indicated that it was hoped that approximately 12 of the Ukrainian people would be employed locally currently
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn pointed out that the hosting by families of the refugees would be on a short-term basis but that in reality arrangements on a longer-term basis would be required due to the nature of the situation in Ukraine – the hotel accommodation would also be a short-term provision
- Cllr McClearn complimented Angela Spelman and the team on their work to date
- Mr Liam Hanrahan explained that inter-agency meetings are taking place weekly – issues such as childcare and inclusion are being discussed there

2. Presentation by Threshold regarding their services

Ms Karina Timothy (Manager) and Ms Maeve Charles (Advisor) provided information on the services of Threshold (PowerPoint presentation had been circulated to the SPC and the full Council)

Discussion:

- Mr Enda McGuane welcomed the information provided in the Threshold presentation but pointed out that the DAFT reports are based on properties advertised which may overstate the rental trends.
- Mr. McGuane confirmed that it is the case that the tenants are not moving on from rental properties
- Mr McGuane also pointed out that 35,000 landlords have left the sector over the last 4 years
- Mr. McGuane outlined that the RTB index is probably a better source for figures
- Mr. McGuane also recognised that work is being carried out regarding building inspections in relation to minimum standards and the identification of issues – Mr. McGuane also noted that the role of the Local Authority should be augmented
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn confirmed that the private landlords are fleeing the market because of the taxation system in particular – this is leading to the pool of properties available getting smaller
- Ms. Karina Timothy agreed that the landlords are leaving the market and the fact that the figures on DAFT can be misleading
- Cllr Thomas Welby pointed out that there is a record amount of money on deposit with a low level of return at the moment and queried if this could be utilised in some way
- Cllr Welby also pointed out that the mortgage interest rates were much higher in the past and that they did not compare with the rates available today

- Mr Liam Hanrahan thanked Karina and Maeve for their presentation and confirmed that the Homeless unit in the Housing Section communicates with Threshold regularly in relation to the validation of notices to quit
- Cllr Joe Byrne thanks Karina and Maeve for their presentation also

3. Building inspection statistics – presentation by Enda Hoey, Building Inspector

(PowerPoint presentation had been circulated to the SPC and the full Council)

Discussion:

- Mr Liam Hanrahan outlined that a similar presentation was given by Mr Hoey last year as it appeared that there was not an awareness that other privately rented properties were inspected besides HAP properties
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn thanked Mr Hoey for his presentation and pointed out that there was a weakness in the system in that the inspections are carried out when the tenants are already in the property
- Mr. Enda Hoey replied that the landlord and the tenant sign a contract when the tenancy begins and that the legislation outlines that the inspection must take place within 8 months of the first HAP payment to the landlord
- Cllr McClearn also queried if spot checks could be carried out on properties that are proposed for HAP
- Cllr Thomas Welby queried if there was a resident engineer on site for the Turnkey estates being purchased by Galway County Council – Cllr Welby mentioned that he was aware of a Turnkey estate with issues that should have been addressed at an earlier stage
- Mr Liam Hanrahan clarified that the Senior Engineer and Senior Executive Engineer from the Capital team would usually be on site for the Turnkeys a couple of times a week
- Cllr Thomas Welby pointed out that he was not aware of virtual inspections being carried out by the Inspectorate
- Mr Enda Hoey clarified that the virtual inspections arose out of the pandemic when there were restrictions on entering properties
- Cllr Eileen Mannion thanked Mr Enda Hoey for the presentation and indicated that she had a lot of interaction with the Inspectorate team and had found it to be a very satisfactory process – Cllr Mannion queried the procedure when the works required following a HAP inspection were not carried out
- Mr Enda Hoey indicated that an Improvement Letter would be issued in the first place where works were not carried out, and that following 8 weeks that there would be a re-inspection. Mr Hoey stated that it would be unusual for there not to be any engagement but that if the works were not carried out that the next stage would be an Improvement Notice leading to legal proceedings, and finally a Prohibition Notice which would result in a District Court case – this could lead to a fine of €5,000 or 6 months in prison

4. Presentation from Enda McGuane, Business Sector Representative - Construction Price Overview

(PowerPoint presentation had been circulated to the SPC and the full Council)

Discussion:

- Cllr Joe Byrne thanked Mr. Enda McGuane for the presentation and gave an example of the price of windows increasing by 10% over a period of a few days
- Mr. Enda McGuane mentioned voluntary projects for which there is a danger that the builders cannot work within the fixed price contract due to the increases in supplies/materials as outlined in the presentation document
- Mr Liam Hanrahan explained that there is currently a good working relationship with contractors on current capital projects but that larger contractors are not building in the County – Mr Hanrahan mentioned an issue of a Strategic Housing Development being constructed in phases which would delay the delivery of social housing units
- Mr. Enda McGuane indicated that there is a workforce/labour issue, but many contractors are willing to build in Galway if there are sites available

5. Any Other Business

- Cllr Jimmy McClearn gave an example of a retrofit project in Shannon Park which had worked well but that there was an issue regarding a similar project at Cloughbrack/Eyrecourt
- Mr Liam Hanrahan replied that he would ask Alan Brogan of the Maintenance team to follow up this issue
- Cllr Eileen Mannion queried if the pilot project relating to City Council applicants that are living in the HAP tenancies in the County Council area had been commenced
- Mr. Liam Hanrahan explained that the pilot project for 20 people had not commenced as there had been no further progress on national level
- Cllr Joe Byrne queried if a revised Tenant Purchase booklet was available taking into account the changes in the scheme
- Ms Nuala Heffernan replied that the booklet was not available from the Department yet and the change related to pension recipients being eligible to purchase the house they are renting from the Council – this is the only type of social welfare income that is eligible
- Cllr Joe Byrne thanked the presenters for their information and suggested that a maximum of 2 presentations be made at an SPC meeting to allow sufficient time for discussion
- Cllr Byrne suggested that the Housing Action Plan and the Allocations scheme should be discussed at the next meeting. Mr Liam Hanrahan advised that approval for the Plan had not yet been received from the Department and suggested this should be discussed at the first SPC following receipt of Departmental approval.

- Cllr Byrne stated that he may not be available for the next SPC meeting on 1st June 2022 and may deputise for the meeting

The next Housing SPC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 1st June 2022 at 10am in the Council Chamber