

**COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE**  
**Minutes of Housing SPC Meeting held on Wednesday, 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022 in the Council Chamber, Galway County Council at 10 a.m.**

**I Láthair:-**

**Baill:**

Cllr. Joe Byrne, Chairperson

Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

Cllr. Thomas Welby

Cllr James Charity

Cllr Eileen Mannion

Cllr Seamus Walsh

Ms. Aimee McGee (Clúid)

Ms. Nora Corcoran (Social Inclusion)

**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. Evan Mulvey, Housing Liaison Officer, Housing

Ms. Marie Nicholson, Traveller Liaison Officer, Housing

Ms. Genevieve Byrne, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing

Mr. Eoin Hardiman, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing

**Apologies:**

Mr. Kieran Keon, Mr. Mark Coffey

- Cllr Joe Byrne began the meeting by offering condolences on behalf of the Housing SPC to Angela Spelman on the recent loss of her mother.
- Cllr Byrne welcomed Eoin Hardiman as a new member of the Housing team in attendance at the SPC meeting.

- Cllr Byrne thanked Carmel Kilcoyne for compiling the Master Agenda for the SPC containing items that could be discussed at future meetings. Cllr Byrne suggested that the document should be reviewed by the members of the SPC for further discussion at the next meeting, and invited comments in relation to same

## 1. Minutes of SPC meeting held 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022 were adopted on the proposal of Cllr. James Charity and seconded by Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

## 2. Housing Delivery Action Plan – presentation by Mr Damien Mitchell, Senior Engineer

(Housing Delivery Action Plan has been circulated by email to the SPC and full Council)

### Discussion:

- Mr Damien Mitchell gave a presentation on the Housing Delivery Action Plan
- Mr Liam Hanrahan thanked Rachel Lowe and Damien Mitchell for their work in compiling the Housing Delivery Action Plan document which has been approved by the Minister for Housing
- Mr Hanrahan indicated that progress on delivery of units is reported back to the Department via an online tracker system called TRABIS on an ongoing basis
- Mr Hanrahan explained that the target for the provision of housing units for 2022 was approximately 230 units which is on target for delivery – Mr Hanrahan advised that the target for 2023 is 351 which is currently projected to deliver 236 which is a shortfall
- Mr Hanrahan indicated that the shortfall may be met through Turnkey developments and units provided through the Approved Housing bodies, and that a lot of discussion is taking place with developers currently
- Mr Hanrahan also mentioned that large amounts of units will be provided through Part V going forward
- Mr Hanrahan also confirmed that land is being purchased to provide further housing and that updates will be delivered to the Housing SPC periodically
- Cllr Joe Byrne thanked Mr. Mitchell for his presentation
- Cllr James Charity also thanked Mr. Mitchell for the presentation and queried the target of 504 units to be provided from the Land Bank given that there are very little lands available
- Cllr Charity queried if the targets contained in the Housing Delivery Action Plan are achievable and asked if a compulsory purchase of land will be considered going forward
- Cllr Charity also asked if Galway County Council would be using its €10 million loan provision to purchase the land
- Cllr Charity pointed out that builds by the Approved Housing Bodies are negligible and that the national plan is problematic given the volatility of the market and the extortionate costs involved

- Mr. Damien Mitchell confirmed that projects in relation to the Council's land bank are under active discussion, but that delivery of a project can take from 18 months to 2 years approximately
- Mr. Mitchell pointed out that the Department of Housing has been proactive in funding land purchases by the Council.
- Mr. Mitchell indicated that there is now a price variation clause built into the Turnkey and Part V contracts which gives security to the developer
- Mr Mitchell confirmed that there has been a large level of engagement from developers in relation to sites with planning permission – in some cases the developer might need to revise their planning permission based on the housing need of the Council, or alternatively the Council could take a portion of a site/development
- Mr Mitchell indicated that it was too early to say if compulsory purchases would be required as opportunities for sites are available currently and conversations are ongoing with developers
- Mr Liam Hanrahan pointed out that the Housing Delivery Action Plan provides for social and affordable housing which will support young families in the future obtaining housing
- Mr Hanrahan explained that the Department now provides funding for the purchase of sites can now be drawn down more quickly than in the past. Funding for land purchase can also be claimed back after planning permission is approved without waiting for the construction to commence as previously was the case
- Mr Hanrahan confirmed that in some circumstances that the borrowing for land would be used but in general that half of site costs would be funded by the Department
- Cllr Thomas Welby queried if the Council's construction project at Claremount, Oughterard was with An Bord Pleanála
- Mr. Damien Mitchell confirmed that the Claremount project is at planning permission stage and that other projects listed are at design stage
- Cllr Joe Byrne thanked Mr. Mitchell for the presentation and pointed out that the engagement with the developers at planning stage would be important in relation to the Turnkeys
- Mr. Mitchell confirmed that there are a number of conversations ongoing with developers but that there may be an issue with the requirements of the Housing unit and what will be approved by the Planning Department
- Cllr Joe Byrne summarised that the Housing Delivery Action Plan would need to be monitored and discussed at SPC at least twice a year with the intention of delivering the required housing in County Galway

### **3. Matrix for Garda checks – presentation by Mr Evan Mulvey, Housing Liaison Officer**

(PowerPoint presentation has been circulated by email to the SPC and the full Council)

#### **Discussion:**

- Mr Liam Hanrahan thanked Evan Mulvey for his presentation
- Mr Hanrahan confirmed that the matrix had been tested by judicial review and had proved to be a fair method to establish eligibility for tenancies
- Mr Hanrahan outlined that the matrix system is used when a person is in line to be allocated a Council property and that they will not be considered for the period of a year if the score on the matrix is 10 or over
- Cllr Joe Byrne queried if the most serious type of offence would always prevent a person being allocated a house
- Mr Hanrahan pointed out that the person is obliged to divulge the criminal conviction but that the score would be higher if the offence was not declared
- Mr. Evan Mulvey outlined that it was possible to have been convicted of a most serious offence and to be scored between 1 and 9, but that not declaring the offence would mean a penalty of 2 meaning the score would be 10 and over and leading to failing the matrix and not to be allocated a house
- Mr Mulvey pointed out that it is a criminal offence not to declare a previous conviction on a statutory form
- Cllr James Charity queried if account was being taken of the Spent Convictions Act
- Mr Mulvey confirmed that this was the case
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn outlined a situation where a partner of a current tenant could be released from prison having served their sentence and move into a Council property without being subjected to the matrix system
- Mr Liam Hanrahan confirmed that a new tenant/occupant would be required to submit their own housing application to be added to an existing tenancy, and that the matrix would be applied at that stage to the Garda check result
- Cllr McClearn queried how the tenancy status could be proved
- Mr Hanrahan explained that an investigation would be carried out by the Tenancy and Estate Management Team – the process would include engagement with other agencies in a complicated process to build up proof – an example of this would be where a property address would be given during a bail hearing which could be verified by the Gardaí with the Council
- Cllr Joe Byrne suggested that the procedure should be similar to the Planning Enforcement model where situations or concerns could be brought to the attention of the Housing unit
- Mr. Evan Mulvey explained that he would have dealt with the Gardaí, Prison Service, Revenue and Social Protection as part of his work with the Tenancy & Estate Management unit

- Mr Mulvey explained that obtaining information from the Department of Social Protection in relation to the origin of payments can assist in gathering information
- Mr. Mulvey also confirmed that there is an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy in place and complaints can be made by member of the public or tenants
- Mr. Mulvey outlined that once an issue is discovered that meetings take place with the relevant stakeholders which might lead to an Exclusion Order
- Mr Mulvey stressed that it was dependent on obtaining information from others but that this need to be verified to be sworn in Court
- Mr Mulvey mentioned that CCTV has been of assistance in certain cases
- Cllr James Charity queried what the procedure would be if an Exclusion Order was issued and if the person presented themselves to the Homeless unit
- Mr. Mulvey indicated that it was up to the discretion of each Local Authority as to how this situation would be handled and that the homeless application would need to be assessed and a decision made on a case-by-case basis
- Cllr Joe Byrne thanked Mr Mulvey for the presentation and asked that it be circulated to the Council members

#### **4. Refugee Settlement Programme – presentation by Ms Nuala Heffernan, Administrative Officer**

(PowerPoint presentation has been circulated by email to the SPC and the full Council)

##### **Discussion:**

- Ms Nuala Heffernan clarified that this programme does not relate to refugees from Ukraine
- Cllr Joe Byrne thanked Ms Heffernan for the very informative presentation
- Cllr James Charity commended Ms Heffernan and her team on the 15 families that have been housed to date with 69 individuals
- Cllr Eileen Mannion queried if the refugees were coming directly from the countries of origin
- Ms Heffernan clarified that the refugees in this programme have been through Refugee Orientation Centres and have status to remain in Ireland – in some cases the people have been here since 2019, before the Covid outbreak

#### **5. Any Other Business**

##### **Update on Ukrainian Response by Mr Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services**

- Mr Liam Hanrahan clarified that the Ukrainian refugees differ from the refugees under the Refugee Settlement Programme in that they have leave to remain in the country for one year and do not have refugee status
- Mr Hanrahan indicated that each Local Authority has looked at the Red Cross pledge list for properties offered to house the Ukrainian refugees

- Mr Hanrahan stated that 500 properties were pledged in Galway, the vast majority of which were shared accommodation offers and that 20 locations exist across the county including hotels, ex convents etc – there are approximately 1,400 Ukrainian refugees in County Galway
- Mr Hanrahan reported that a meeting took place yesterday with Minister Joe O’Brien which included representatives from Tusla, the ETB, Social Protection, and Local Link
- Mr Hanrahan detailed that the language classes are going well for the Ukrainians and that some of the people have been moved along to participate in adaption courses which will give them certification in their field to enable them to seek employment in their area of expertise from Ukraine
- Mr Hanrahan indicated that the Red Cross pledge list will no longer be used after the end of September, and that a website similar to the vacant homes website will be provided – information provided on properties from the website will be investigated by the Local Authorities and forwarded to the NGO partners
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn indicated that there are a number of empty houses throughout the county and queried if a list had been provided of recently vacated parochial houses
- Mr. Liam Hanrahan confirmed that the religious orders had given a list of properties nationally, some of which may not have been taken up for reasons such as location
- Cllr Joe Byrne queried the amount of funding being provided by the State
- Cllr Eileen Mannion queried a specific case in relation to transport to and from school which Mr Hanrahan indicated had been dealt with in the meeting with the Minister yesterday
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn stressed that the long-term needs needed to be examined as there may be issues with the refugees returning to their homeland even if the war ends
- Mr Liam Hanrahan confirmed that the Minister had mentioned a more long-term plan in the meeting yesterday
- Cllr James Charity confirmed that a longer-term plan would be required and suggested that a survey of the people be taken to find out what their long-term plans are
- Mr Hanrahan pointed out that the long terms plans are premature at this stage as the situation is still at crisis management stage

## **6. Any Other Business**

### **Increase in income thresholds for Social Housing – Mr Liam Hanrahan**

- Mr Liam Hanrahan informed the SPC that the income threshold for a single person in County Galway for social housing has been increased from €25,000 to €30,000 as per a letter issued by the Department yesterday – this change will be implemented from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2022
- Mr Hanrahan indicated that there will be an increase in allocations and applications as more people are now eligible to apply. Persons who were previously refused on the basis of their income being over the threshold will now need to make a new housing application

- Mr Hanrahan stated that the Housing unit are currently processing a Housing Need Assessment to request updated income from housing applicants in addition to any change in their circumstances – a return will be made to the Department based on this information
- Cllr Joe Byrne pointed out that the increase would only affect those who had been refused social housing support based on the old income limits and also new applicants
- Cllr Thomas Welby enquired in relation to the new income threshold bands for Galway County Council
- Mr. Liam Hanrahan confirmed that the change of bands only related to the income thresholds
- Cllr Eileen Mannion asked if there had been additional staff provided to deal with the new applications
- Mr Hanrahan replied that recruitment of staff is ongoing but that it is difficult to fill posts for both administration and technical roles
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn welcomed the increase in the income threshold but stressed that there should be no difference in the income thresholds between Galway City Council and Galway County Council – currently single city applicants can earn up to €35,000
- Cllr Eileen Mannion pointed out that more houses will need to be built

**Other Business continued:**

- Cllr Joe Byrne asked if there was any update on the judicial review being carried out in relation to the Turnkey development at Tubber Road, Gort
- Mr. Damien Mitchell indicated that there was a date set for the 1<sup>st</sup> November for the judicial review and there would likely not be any update until then
- Mr Liam Hanrahan outlined that there are changes taking place in relation to the Control of Horses
- Mr Hanrahan thanked the recently retired Council veterinarian, Rita Gately, who was supportive to the Housing unit in relation to Control of Horse issues
- Mr Hanrahan updated the SPC that there are discussions taking place with the LGMA as the Department of Agriculture will be taking over responsibility in this area and the Local Authority's role needs to be clarified going forward
- Cllr Joe Byrne sought an update on the private housing grant applications and queried if it was still the case that priority one medical applicants were being prioritised
- Cllr Byrne suggested that the Council engage with the applicants as they are not receiving any updates following application
- Mr Hanrahan confirmed that the possibility of writing to the applicants would be considered
- Cllr Jimmy McClearn pointed out that queries were being answered by the Grants team
- Mr Hanrahan confirmed that the entire Grants system needs to be examined – currently applications are taken in even if the budget is spent and Galway County Council contributes to the funding of the Grants through the Revenue budget

- Cllr Thomas Welby asked what the current figures were in relation to Grants applications
- Mr Hanrahan outlined that 119 grants had been paid– 382 applications are currently in the system and 392 applications are approved but not drawn down yet

**The next Housing SPC meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> November 2022 at 10am in the Council Chamber**