

## COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of Housing SPC Meeting held on Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023 in the Council Chamber, Galway County Council at 10.00 a.m.

### I Láthair:-

**Baill:** Cllr. Joe Byrne, Chairperson  
Cllr. Jimmy McClearn (Remote)  
Cllr. James Charity  
Cllr. Thomas Welby (remote)  
Cllr. Eileen Mannion  
Cllr. Seamus Walsh  
Mr. Mark Coffey  
Mr. Martin Ward (remote)

**Oifigigh:** Mr. Michael Owens, Director of Services  
Mr. Gerard Scully, Senior Executive Officer  
Ms. Carmel Kilcoyne, Senior Executive Officer  
Mr. Damien Mitchell, Senior Engineer  
Ms. Nuala Heffernan, Administrative Officer  
Ms. Angela Spelman Administrative Officer  
Ms. Michelle Connellan, Vacant Homes Officer, (VHO)  
Ms. Kathleen Lohan, Staff Officer, Housing  
Mr. Brendan Kelly, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing

**Leithscéal** Mr. Kenny Deery  
Ms. Marcella Conneely  
Mr. Kieran Keon, Senior Social Worker

- The chair opened the meeting by welcoming Mr Owens to his new role as the Director of Service in Housing & Ukrainian Response and he also acknowledged the role played by Liam Hanrahan as the outgoing DOS.

### 1. Minutes of the meeting of 7<sup>th</sup> June 2023

- The minutes of the SPC meeting held on 7<sup>th</sup> June 2023 were proposed by Cllr. Walsh, seconded by Cllr. Welby and agreed.
- **Matters of Accuracy** – None
- **Matters Arising** - Mr. Ger Scully gave a detailed update regarding the impact of the amendments to the Housing Allocation Scheme 2020 that came into effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2023. These changes related to the qualifications under bed categories of the scheme, whereby any lone parent or family with one child were

moved to the 3-bed category. This impact reduces the demand for 2 beds while increasing the demand for 3 bed units substantially.

- Mr Scully outlined that the number of applicants in the 1 and 2 bed categories had reduced significantly (see below table), while the number of 3-bed applicants had increased dramatically.
- In terms of the age profile associated with each housing category, Mr Scully outlined that the changes resulted in very little change in the 65+, 58-65 and 47-57 categories.
- However, the biggest single change was experienced in the 18-47 years old profile whereby applicants who are more likely to have a second child were moved into the 3-bed category.
- Prior to this change the demand for two beds units was 75% and most turn keys being developed are 3 bed properties.
- Going forward, the ratio demand will be roughly be about 60% (2 bed) to 40% (3 bed). Thus, the changes to the Housing Allocation Scheme have flattened the curve to suit the type of units being constructed by the private market.
- In effect, applicants who would have previously been placed within the 2-bed category on the higher end of the need profile (i.e. Homelessness, Disability, Unfit, etc) are now placed within the 3-bed category.
- In conclusion, Mr Scully welcomed the positive effects of this strategic change in policy by the SPC and Council Members and he noted that it will be included in both the Management and Annual Reports.

In response to Mr. Scully’s presentation, the Chairperson suggested that it may be helpful if a screenshot of the two information slides could be distributed to the committee members for review. With the next discussion topic in mind (Housing Delivery Action Plan update), the Chair suggested that GCC look at the number of units either in the planning and construction phases to see if GCC is favouring the construction of 3-bed units going forward.

Mr. Mitchell confirmed that these changes certainly help in relation to current and future Turn-Key developments, whereby he stated that 3-bed units offer far better value compared to 1-bed units, and he noted that a person allocated a 1-bedroom unit may experience a change in their circumstances and he acknowledged that 2 and 3 bed roomed units cater to current and future needs of most housing support applicants/clients. As per GCC’s Housing Development Action Plan, Mr. Mitchell stated that the design and development of each project is based on the needs of each individual area and that these needs are identified by the Housing Departments HLOs.

<b>Bed Categories</b>	<b>Pre-Changes Applicants</b>	<b>Bed Categories</b>	<b>Post-Changes Application</b>	<b>Change +/-</b>
1 Bed	1509	1 Bed	1462	Down 47
2 Bed	916	2 Bed	343	Down 573
3 Bed	641	3 Bed	1250	Up 609
4 Bed	156	4 Bed	158	Up 2
5 Bed	28	5 Bed	28	No Change
6 Bed	4	6 Bed	4	No Change

## 2 Housing Delivery Action Plan Update

Mr. Mitchell provided a detailed summary to members of the various projects and targets under Housing for All for 2023. He confirmed that work was continuing to ensure delivery of housing units and to increase Galway County Council's landbank for housing purposes. Mr. Mitchell stated that GCC has a target of 351 units for 2023 and that they are currently on track to deliver approximately 300 to 330 units for this year. Mr. Mitchell outlined that there are still several developments that are under consideration and GCC may be closer to the 2023 target. He outlined that there will be a very strong delivery of units in 2024 and this will help to balance out any shortfall in delivery of units in 2023. All these numbers are subject to several factors including negotiations with Turnkey and AHB developments. He outlined that the life cycle of any development is approximately 18 months and GCC have already commenced work in order to deliver the proposed number of units for 2024.

- He confirmed that GCC's Turnkey Developments at Cullairbáun, Ballydavid South, Dunlo Hill, Kilgarve and Lakeshore, Glenamaddy are all on track for completion in 2023. The Tubber Road development in Gort is still in Judicial Review so it is not included in any figures.
- He stated that GCC have limited control over the AHB delivery, but all the indicators suggest that they are on track for 2023. These include 16 units in Rivercrest in Tuam, 4 in Cillin Court, Gort.
- CALF delivery at Dunlo, Ballinasloe is on track for 2023 and there are several units in Portumna that will have their delivery dates finalised.
- Part V's are on track for 2023.
- Part VIII developments at Dunlo Hill and St. Joseph's in Ballinasloe will have to be re-advertised and this is expected to be brought forward to the November meeting. Initially it was hoped to have a contractor on site in 2024.
- The signing of the contract for the 8 units at Ballymoe will take place on the 13<sup>th</sup> of September 2023 and the second phase at Weir Road, Tuam will be completed in 2024.
- 4 Acres of land acquired on the Galway Road in Tuam will provide GCC with 35 to 40 units.
- The PPP Scheme in Tuam will form part of the post 2026 delivery.
- A further 4 acres of land has been acquired in Portumna and GCC will proceed to develop the site once legal issues are resolved.
- GCC has received a preliminary design for the development/regeneration of St. Josephs, Portumna.

In response to queries raised by members Mr. Mitchell advised as follows:

- He confirmed that there is an expression of interest being sent out to all the tier one AHB's in relation to their interest in taking on the project at Nan Burkes, Oughterard. Once a AHB is appointed to the development it will be a Part VIII application. Mr. Mitchell acknowledged Cllr. Welby's representations on behalf of the local boxing

club, and he advised it was under consideration as part of the development on community and amenity lands. He confirmed that the advertisement of this development is imminent, and the documentation is with GCC's Law Agents for review and approval and that it is expected that within a couple of weeks it will be issued.

- **Carna** – He confirmed that there is limited capacity for additional units, however, GCC does own additional lands adjacent to the site and he has consulted with the Planning Department to see if the existing wastewater treatment plant can be expanded to build an additional 10 units on the site. It is his understanding that this proposal will be brought forward to the senior management team for consideration.
- **St. Brigids Road, Portumna** – He confirmed that GCC has received the preliminary design for the proposed redevelopment of St. Brigid's Road in Portumna. The Planning department will need to be consulted before is put forward to the Department of Housing as a stage 1 application. He confirmed that there are several units on the site near the road that have not been acquired, but the project will proceed with the lands that GCC currently own. If any of these units are subsequently acquired by GCC they can be added into the project at a later stage. He also confirmed that the land behind the St. Brigid's Road site is zoned as a green area and it is hoped that this would be a green area associated with the redevelopment. Once an agreed outline of the design is confirmed it will be forwarded to the members to review.
- **Tubber Road, Gort** – Legal proceedings are ongoing.
- **Ardrahan & Kinvara Social Housing Direct Builds** – In relation to Ardrahan, he acknowledged that there are delays with the development. He confirmed that for future builds that are in the pipeline, GCC is currently designing and seeking planning permission for Part VIII and Exempted Development and that they are being expedited as quick as possible.

### 3 Galway Social Housing Task Force

Mr. Owens gave a detailed update to the members regarding the Galway Social Housing Task Force.

- In terms of the end of year figures, there was a reduction in the vacancy rate between 2021 and 2022.
- The vacancy rate for 2022 and 2023 will be influenced by the number/level of units that come into stock and are allocated towards the end of the year.
- The timing of the 300+ units outlined by Mr. Mitchell in his update, will have an impact on the allocation and vacancy rates.
- The Social Housing Task Force is to convene Thursday week (14<sup>th</sup> of September 2023) for its next meeting and there will be an update at that point by both Local Authorities and it is intended that we will share the reports and minutes of the task force with the members and the SPC. This help to create a link between the Housing SPC and the Housing Task force and between the Task Force and the Plenary Council. There is also a consideration before the task force that their reports would be shared with members of Oireachtas. Going forward, the taskforce will update the Housing SPC on a regular basis.

## **4 Vacant Homes Action Plan**

Ms. Carmel Kilcoyne (SEO) & Ms. Michelle Connellan (VHO) provided a detailed update to the members on 5 main topics under the Vacant Homes Action Plan. These included the following:

- Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant (Croí Conaithe) Update
- Repair & Lease Scheme Update
- Vacant Homes Survey
- Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) & URDF Funding
- Vacant Homes Audit

### **Croí Conaithe Grant**

Ms. Connellan outlined some of the changes to the scheme since it was updated in May 2023. Prior to these changes the scheme was only open to owners who intended to renovate a vacant/derelict dwelling and use it as their principle private residence. The scheme is now open to owners who intend to rent their vacant properties post renovation and emphasized that they must be registered tenancies with the RTB. The scheme is now open to properties built up to 2007, while the length of time for works to be carried out has been reduced from 18 to 13 months, and this applies from the owner's date of approval for the grant. Since the 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2023, the scheme is now available to applicants who want to renovate a property on the islands of Inishbofin, Árainn (Inis Mór), Inis Oírr and Inis Meáin. These island-based properties can apply for an additional support of up to a maximum of 20% more than the standard maximum award of €50,000.00. (up to €60,000 for the refurbishment of a vacant property, and up to €84,000 where the property is confirmed to be derelict.) Ms. Connellan confirmed that GCC had received approximately 250 applications with 67 approved and a further 129 in progress. Of the 129, approximately 100 applicants have been asked for further Information, while 23 are awaiting their initial inspection and 7 are with GCC's technical team to confirm the dereliction status of the property. 12 Applications have been refused and Ms. Connellan discussed in detail the various reasons behind these refusals.

### **Repair & Lease Scheme Update**

Ms. Connellan explained that this scheme is aimed at bringing vacant properties in need of repair back into use for social housing. This scheme involves an interest free loan of €80,000 (including VAT) and the property must be leased to a Local Authority or AHB. These loans must be repaid over the term of the lease, and these can range in length from 5 to 25 years.

### **Vacant Homes Survey**

Ms. Connellan outlined that under the Governments Housing for All Pathway 4, GCC will be carrying out a Vacant Homes Survey in the coming weeks. The aim of this survey is to determine vacancy in private properties with a view to advising the Owners of the options of reusing existing buildings to reduce the overall vacancy rate. Ms. Connellan outlined in detail the following:

- The Vacancy Data Project commenced in May 2023
- The Department of Housing has developed a map-based app compiled from the Geo Directory vacancy data that is compiled from the 2016 Census that identified 1,727 vacant properties in Galway County.
- This number is likely to increase as more properties are added during the survey.
- Inspection staff will be disseminating an information leaflet and displaying a poster on each vacant/derelict property to let the owners know that council staff have visited the site and to inform them of their options to bring the building back into use.
- All these properties are within a 1km settlement buffer as these areas are more likely to have a private or social housing need.

### **Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) & URDF Funding**

Ms. Kilcoyne outlined that the CPO Activation Programme launched in April 2023. As per the associated Departmental Circular, GCC has been set a target of surveying 300+ vacant or derelict properties that may be candidates for compulsory purchase. GCC has a target of commencing 27 CPO's in 2023. She outlined that the delay in starting the survey was due to staffing and that it was highly unlikely that GCC would meet the 2023 target of 27 CPOs, however, GCC will have started the process of identifying potential properties for CPO by the end of the year. She also confirmed that GCC will be supported by the Housing Finance Agency Funding and that ultimately these projects will be ultimately self-financing.

Ms. Kilcoyne outlined in detail the steps in the CPO Activation Programme as follows:

- **Step 1** – Identify that the property is vacant/derelict.
- **Step 2** – Identify the Owner of the Property.
- **Step 3** – Start the process of engaging with the property owner – For example, if the owner says that they intend to apply for the Croí Conaithe grant to bring the property back into use, then the property would exit the CPO Programme & GCC would record the outcome.
- **Step 4** – In the event that the owner cannot be identified or does not want to bring their property back into use. Then GCC can begin the CPO activation Program.
- **Step 5** – Then the property is assessed for Compulsory acquisition.

Once a property has been identified as a possible derelict site it will be assessed by GCC's Environment Department to confirm its classification as being derelict, as per the Derelict Sites Act 1990. There are two pieces of legislation under which a CPO can be executed, the Derelict Sites Act 1990 and the Housing Act. If the site is not deemed to be derelict, then it can be compulsory acquired under the Housing Act, alternatively if it is deemed as derelict then the site can be purchased under the Derelict Sites Act 1990. Once acquired, the intention is to carry out some renovation works to allow the property to be put back on the open market and ideally sold to persons outside for social housing client base. If this is not successful, then the property can be used as social housing or community use. The funds generated by these sales are used to self-finance current and future CPO acquisitions. She outlined that under the URDF funding model there are several properties that have been identified and prioritised

in Tuam (6), Ballinasloe (9), Oranmore (6) that are to be surveyed first by our Environmental Department.

### **Vacant Homes Unit Audit**

Ms. Kilcoyne outlined that at the end of 2022 GCC's Internal Audit Department carried out a full audit on our Vacant Homes Unit and they identified several key recommendations. She commended the outgoing Acting VHO Patricia Morley and welcomed the new VHO Ms. Connellan to her new position. The audit recommended that the following be implemented.

- The Vacant Homes Action Plan needed to be reviewed and all the key responsibilities of the Vacant Homes Office are to be implemented in full.
- The above review of the Vacant Homes action plan will be part of the SPC Work Program for 2024.
- The recording of all new fixed assets are now recorded on GCC's dedicated asset register. This has been implemented.
- All new houses are to be added to GCC's insurance cover – This has been implemented.
- Creation of a Policy and Procedural Manual – This is underway and partially complete.
- Vacant Home Stock Management (Social Housing). Ms. Kilcoyne outlined how the Allocations Team has done major work in this area and as such, GCC's vacancy rate has been reduced from 7.2% in 2021 to 4.8% in 2022. She outlined how the Vacancy Rate for any given year can increase if the council receive a large number of units in November or December and this can increase the rate dramatically, but that they will be allocated tenants early in the next year. GCC have also reviewed 31 Sites & Identified 12 Derelict sites that will be listed for public sale, and these will be advertised by our Estate Agent Remax shortly. There has also been a review of properties that require major refurbishments, and it is hoped that they will be brought back into stock in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2024.
- Invoices not being issued from Agresso – This is yet to be completed.
- Website to be reviewed and updated with a full listing of all the options open to the public if they want to bring a vacant home back into use - this is yet to be completed, but Housing is in discussions with the IT department to implement this.
- Vacant Homes Register to be established - this is yet to be completed, but the first step of implementation will be the execution of the Vacant Home's Survey.

The Chair thanked and welcomed these comprehensive and detailed presentations and he inquired if there were enough staffing resources in place to carry out the Vacant Homes survey and the recommendations identified in the internal audit report.

In response, Mr. Owens acknowledged that the level of work needed to implement these recommendations was significant and that it will require additional staffing resources. He outlined that new VHO and Assistant Staff Officer had been appointed and that there will be a need for additional admin and technical staff will be needed to administer the schemes outlined. Mr. Owens also acknowledged that he did not envisage that the target of 27 CPO's would occur in 2023, and he outlined that there is a significant level of work involved in any CPO and that additional staff and resources will be needed. From a housing perspective, the

Strategic Workforce Plan will allow GCC to look at what funding is available from the department, and he outlined how the VHO is now 100% funded by the department and that there is also additional funding available to carry out and complete the Vacant Homes Survey.

In response to queries raised by members Mr. Owens, Ms. Kilcoyne and Ms. Connellan advised as follows:

**Croí Conaithe** - VHO confirmed that a Croí Conaithe property must be within a 1km radius of a settlement/urban zone. Mr. Owens also confirmed that if an owner of a derelict house does not want to sell their property to the GCC then a CPO Activation Program can acquire the property. Cllr. Mannion also stated that the 1km buffer zone may need to be extended as there were many more vacant properties located outside this zone. Ms. Kilcoyne stated that this was only the start of the scheme and that the Department had identified these properties as a starting point for the scheme and that it will most likely be rolled out to rural areas in the future. Properties within the 1km settlement zone will also mean that a large amount of vacant and derelict sites can be surveyed together, and the VHO outlined that the scheme is particularly aimed at urban based vacant properties, as these areas are more likely to be experiencing pressure on the housing supply.

**CPO Activation Programme** – Cllr. Charity suggested that it may be an idea to offer these CPO'd properties as affordable units, as this would prevent these properties being purchased by developers who are more likely to hoard properties. In response, Ms. Kilcoyne clarified that this is just one particular scheme and that it would be focused on one off houses and not large scale development sites. There are also conditions attached to the purchase of these refurbished CPO properties and any buyer must demonstrate how they intend to bring them back into use as a residence. Cllr. Charity sought confirmation from GCC that they would not sell these CPO'd homes to developers. Mr. Owens confirmed that there was a cap of €30,000 on the amount of refurbishment funds that a LA could spend on these properties prior to being sold on the open market. Any potential buyer be they an individual or developer would then carry on the process of improving the property for future occupancy. The only way that GCC can use these properties for social housing, would be if GCC was not able to sell the property on the open market. Mr. Owens also confirmed that LA's have been allocated funding under Housing for All that is specifically allocated for the provision of both social and affordable housing. Cllr. Charity stated that the available grant funding was not sufficient to bring these properties back into use and that the Government/Council was now using state funding to buy properties and resell them back to developers and that he had real concerns surrounding this scheme.

In response to a query from Cllr. Mannion, Mr. Owens confirmed that commercial properties can be acquired under the CPO Activation Program if they can be utilised for residential purposes.

The Chair outlined that some of the Croí Conaithe grant applications were very badly prepared and that this may account for the high number of refused and in-progress applications. Cllr. Byrne suggested that applicants should be advised that they should seek technical advice prior to submitting an application and that there should be a checklist of required information needed before any application is submitted. The chair stated that without certain

technical information being identified and included in an application, it was not likely to be approved. In response, Ms. Kilcoyne outlined that GCC will be facilitating further information session in each of the Municipal Districts.

## 5 Housing Adaptation Grants

Ms. Heffernan gave a comprehensive presentation on the type and volume of Housing Adaptation Grant applications that GCC process. She outlined the following.

- Three types of Housing Aid Grants available from Local Authorities:

**Housing Adaptation Grant (HAG)** - This grant is for people with a physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual disability. It is for big changes that are needed to make to your home more accessible. Maximum of €30,000.00 is available.

**Housing Aid for Older People Grant (HAOP)** - This grant is for people aged 66 years or more to do essential repairs, so that they can continue to live in their own home. Grant funding of up to €8,000 is available, depending on household income.

**Mobility Aid Grant (MAG)** - This grant is for older people and/or people with a disability who find it hard to move around their home due to mobility issues. Grant funding of up to €6,000 is available, depending on household income.

Ms. Heffernan outlined that these grants are jointly funded by the local authority (20%) and the Department of Housing (80%). In April 2023, the Department of Housing advised Galway County Council of the 2023 grant allocation which is €3,383,187, composed of €2,706,550 exchequer funding (80%) and €676,637 GCC funding (20%). The amount allocated in GCCs budget for 2023 is €375,000, which is a shortfall of €301,637.

Ms. Heffernan confirmed that to date in 2023 GCC had paid out on 389 housing grants. This number is more than what GCC paid out in 2020 and it matches the amount GCC awarded in 2021. Galway County Council's 20% contribution for 2023 to date is €520,487. Ms. Heffernan also outlined that the average grant awarded in 2023: HAOP - €5,657 - MAG - €5,074 - HAG - €11,533. This amounts to a total funding award of €2,602,487 for 2023.

All housing grant applications are assessed and evaluated by an inspector and grants are awarded in line with Galway County Council costings which were reviewed and adjusted in 2022. Costing are reviewed annually by the Senior Executive Engineer and Quantity Surveyor for grants. This review considers construction price inflation, consultation with neighboring LA's and the number and value of previous years grant applications. Ms. Heffernan pointed out that the grants are to assist with the cost of the work, and it is not intended to cover the cost of the work in its entirety. In summary, Ms. Heffernan pointed out that GCC had paid out on 389 grants in 2023 and this represents a total funding amount of €2,602,487. Of this, GCC contributed €520,000 which is in excess of the €375,000 budgeted by GCC for grant and that this shortfall was made up for from Internal Capital Receipts (ICR) of Galway County Council. The Department of Housing has confirmed that it will not be possible to use ICR's to match funding from 2024 onwards. From 2024, GCC will be expected to provide the match funding from its own funding budget. The Department has informed GCC that they are considering increasing the maximum award amount for each of the three grants, and this would require GCC to increase its contribution to the grants budget. The use of ICR's to make up the shortfall

in funding cannot be continued and at some point next year GCC may need to prioritize applications due to the envisaged restriction in the budget funds available.

To conclude, Ms. Heffernan outlined that the Housing Grants section received 440 direct phone calls to the Housing Grants phone land line and over 480 emails in the month of June. These figures do not take into account the amount of phone calls received by each of the three full time grants admin staff.

In response to queries raised by members Mr. Owens and Ms. Heffernan advised as follows:

**ICRs** - In response to a query from the Chair, Mr. Owens outlined that the Internal Capital Receipts were composed mostly of income generated from the Tenant Purchase Scheme and that this fund has helped to alleviate the shortfall in match funding that is required from GCC to deliver the grants scheme. With this no longer possible, Mr. Owens stated that whatever amount is provided in the Revenue Budget for Grants is the maximum that GCC can provide in match funding, and this will impact the amount of grants that can be paid out in 2024 and beyond. Notwithstanding the issue surrounding the grants funding for 2024, the Chair welcomed the information presented to the members and he suggested that the maximum award limits for each grant does need to be reviewed and increased to reflect the increase in building costs for each of the grant schemes. The Chair stated that only a few years previously, applicants were expected to contribute far less than they do now to bridge the gap between the amount of the award and the cost of the works being carried out due to increased costs in the construction sector. In response to a query from Cllr. Charity, Mr. Owens outlined that the ICR are subject to a proposal that is submitted to the Department each year to have our internal spend approved, so it is not at the Council's discretion to determine how ICR funds are used. The most affected areas will be extension works to social housing to alleviate overcrowding/disability requirements and the roll out of the planned maintenance program and the energy retrofit in terms of the amount not covered by grant funding. Mr. Owens outlined that the Housing for All program will deliver a 36% increase in GCC's housing stock between 2022 and 2026 that brings the number of social housing units to over 3,000 units and the Department has stated that the associated costs to the maintenance budget will be the priority for IRC income. Cllr. Charity, suggested that the council could reduce funds from elsewhere, such as the retrofit grant and divert this to cover any shortfall in funding experienced with grants. In response, Mr. Owens reiterated that at the moment the level of grant funding is dependent on tenant purchase sales and that this income does fluctuate depending on the amount of TPs processed in any given year.

**Assessment Times** - The Chair acknowledged the high volume of phone calls and emails received by the grants section, but he queried why it took so long to have each application assessed and suggested that after 3 months the applicant should receive a letter/email to say that their application is still being assessed. In response, Ms. Heffernan confirmed that Grants Section are paying out on applications that have been received since before the middle of June 2023 and that there had been a significant backlog of applications and that these have been processed and dealt with. Ms. Heffernan confirmed that there are approximately one hundred applications currently in the system and there have been staff changes, particularly in the Inspectorate who deal with the applications and in many cases an application is received as incomplete and needs to be returned or Further Information sought. She stated that GCC would not have the capacity to email the applicant after 3 months with an update. Mr. Owen's confirmed that the Inspectorate has had a significant turn over in staff, particularly when it

came to the Technician 1 & 2 Grades, and that this will be addressed in the Strategic Workforce Plan. He also outlined that Senior Management is looking at implementing a help system, like that in the LEO Office whereby assistance is given to persons prior to submitting a housing grant application and that this should increase the efficiency levels.

Cllr. Walsh complemented Ms. Heffernan on her and her grants Teams efforts to process grant payments. Cllr. Walsh stated that any of the grant applications that he had made representations on had been dealt with in an efficient and compassionate manner, and that in some cases applicants just wanted a new roof and there may not have been a real urgent need requiring this work. He stated that the genuine hardcases need to be prioritised over applications received from persons who are simply apply for a new roof because they are over 66 years old.

## **6 Any Other Business**

Mr. Owens outlined that the number of SPC meetings between now and next April/May is somewhat limited, and that if any of the members had topics or policy/priorities, they would like to bring forward for discussion in the SPC, then he and his Department would be open to facilitating this. He outlined that the Vacant Homes Action Plan and Vacant Homes Audit are two areas that will be brought to the members early next year. Going forward, Mr. Owens confirmed that any Housing Circular's that are relevant to the SPC will be shared with the members. The Chair confirmed that he will be meeting with the Ms. Kilcoyne in the coming weeks to draw up the SPC schedule for 2024.

The chair confirmed that the next Housing SPC meeting will take place on the 15th of November 2023. He thanked all participants and concluded the meeting.