

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of Housing SPC Meeting held on Wednesday, 15th November 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 (Remote)
Cllr. Thomas Welby
Cllr. Eileen Mannion (Remote)
Cllr. Seamus Walsh
Mr. Mark Coffey
Mr. Martin Ward (remote)

Oifigh: 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

1. Minutes of the meeting of 6th September 2023

- The minutes of the SPC meeting held on 6th September 2023 were proposed by Cllr. Welby, seconded by Cllr. McClearn and agreed.
- **Matters of Accuracy** – Vacant Homes Survey
- In response to a query from Cllr. Welby, Mr Owens confirmed that the 1,727-figure referred to the number of vacant properties that are subject to the Vacant Homes Survey and that these are all located within the 1km catchment area of an existing settlement zone and these properties were all identified by using both the CSO and GeoDirectory data. Mr. Owens also confirmed that the true number of vacant properties within County Galway is far higher than the 1,727-figure.
- In response to a query from the Chair, Mr. D. Mitchell confirmed that there are 57 units in the Tubber Road site, he confirmed that Legal proceedings are still ongoing. Mr. Mitchell confirmed that Cilin Court is located in Gort at Church street,

Ballyhue and the development is for 4 units. However, he outlined that this development is no longer part of GCC's programme as the owner has withdrawn from the proposed project.

- **Matters Arising – None**

2. Overview of the Healthy Age Friendly Homes Programme (or HAFH)

Mr. Francis Kane of Age Friendly Ireland gave a comprehensive presentation on the Age Friendly Homes Programme which is a tripartite agreement between the Department of Health, the Department of Housing and Age Friendly Ireland. Mr. Kane is the local coordinator for the programme that operates within both the County and City Local Authority areas for Galway, and he advised that it was initiated due to the challenges associated with Ireland's increasing and aging population. It is forecasted that, by 2051, the number of persons over 65+ will have increased from 629,800 to 1.6 million while the number of persons over 80+ will be approximately 549,000. It is intended as a support service that is designed to enable older people to remain living in their own homes and to reduce the need to transfer persons to a long-term residential care setting. He outlined that this service is free and that it collaborates with a broad spectrum of agencies and services, including Local Authorities, Health Services, Community and Voluntary Groups, the Gardaí, Elected Members. This shared service is funded by the Department of Health, and it is administered by Meath County Council on behalf of local authorities.

Mr Kane outlined specific aspects of the programme as follows:

- Referral Pathway
- Role of the coordinator
- What the Coordinator can help with – Six main areas
- What success of the HAFH Programme will look like
- Identification of the Strategic Partners.
- Summary of supports provided.

The Chair thanked Mr. Kane for his highly informative presentation and invited the members for their queries and comments:

- Cllr. McClearn thanked Mr. Kane for his detailed presentation, and he outlined that helping constituents apply for LA grants was a major part of a councillor's role, However, he stressed that the primary impediment to older persons living in their own homes was the lack of adequate home help hours. He stated that many of his constituents require home help and that it was very difficult to get additional hours.
- Cllr. Mannion, also thanked Mr. Kane for his informative presentation and she concurred with Cllr. McClearn that attaining additional Home Help hours is a major concern for older people living on their own and she suggested that the Home Help

program needs to be overhauled. Cllr. Mannion asked Mr. Kane to explain what the Be-Friending Service mentioned in his presentation was.

- Cllr. Welby thanked Mr. Kane for his presentation, and he acknowledged the importance of this all-inclusive wraparound service. He pointed to the €1.5 million funding allocated as part of the SEAI Contribution and he enquired if there was any further additional Capital funding that could be supplemented with existing Council funds. Furthermore, he sought confirmation regarding the two additional coordinators that will be assigned to County Galway under Phase 2 of the HAFH program. He also enquired if there was any backlog in relation to assessment time for each referral received.
- The Chair Cllr. Byrne enquired if there was any interaction between community alert groups and the use of smart assistive technology like the Panic Pendants mentioned in Mr. Kane's presentation.
- The Chair also invited the Council staff present to ask questions or make any comments they may have. Ms. Nuala Heffernan thanked Mr. Kane for his presentation, and she explained how she had worked with Francis on a previous project, in which a particular housing client had lived in difficult housing conditions for over 25 years, and with Mr. Kane's help, GCC housing staff and local councillors, DSP and community-based support groups were able to resolve the situation.
- Mr. Owens thanked Mr Kane for his detailed presentation on the HAPH program and he welcomed the prospect of additional resources being allocated within the county as part of the phase 2 roll out. In relations to Housing Grants, Mr. Owens outlined that GCC was in the process of updating all our correspondence templates to include a reference to the HAPH programme and associated contacts and allow for a referral with consent given. Going forward, Mr. Owens expressed his hope that this change would lead to greater awareness of the HAPH program.

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

- He explained that ALONE provide a Be-Friending Service both by phone and in person visiting service, while other local groups like FORUM Connemara also provide a similar service. He also emphasised the need for organisations like Age Friendly Ireland to collaborate with local groups who are aware of vulnerable individuals within their respective localities. He also acknowledged the important community role that postmen/women, Home Help Carers and Meals on Wheels staff play in keeping older people engaged in their communities.
- Integrated Care Plan - Mr. Kane explained that an older person can be referred to this service by either a GP or Primary Care Team, and that it usually occurs when a client requires a targeted coordinated approach to providing support services that meet an individual's particular needs. He stressed that this new program is separate from that of the existing Primary Care Team services and that it is intended to provide access to a clinic whereby each member of the team understand and know the patient history and medical needs. He outlined that when a person's needs are non-medical in nature,

then Age Friendly Ireland are contacted to see if they can assist in resolving an older person's issues.

- In terms of Home Care Services, he said that the funding is there to provide a better service and that it must be made more attractive to persons who wish to get involved in Home Care service.
- In response to Cllr. Welby's questions, he explained that the €1.5 million SEAI funding relates to the Home Energy Assessment (or HEA). These HEA's would identify what changes are needed to make the house more energy efficient, what grants are available. He confirmed that there is no funding in place to carry out works and this is why Age Friendly Ireland would try and link referrals with the Warmer Home Scheme by means of the Fuel Allowance scheme. He expressed his hope that funding for remedial Home Energy Efficiency works may yet become available, as the Age Friendly Homes Program gets rolled out nationwide in Phase 2 of the project.
- He confirmed that there is collaboration between the Senior Alert Scheme and the use of Pendant Alarm devices.
- Under Phase 2 of the program, he confirmed that two co-ordinators will be assigned to the County and one to the City Council administrative area.
- He also outlined that referrals are usually assessed within a six-to-eight-week period and that a referral can also be taken over the phone.
- Mr. Kane thanked all the housing staff for their help and support since the HAFH program was started.

3. Housing Delivery Action Plan Update

Mr. D. Mitchell provided a detailed summary to members of the various projects and targets under Housing for All for 2023. He confirmed that there is a minimum shortfall of approximately 60 units from the previously projected figure for 2023. He outlined that approximately 40 units with Peter McVerry Trust are also subject to review and he explained that GCC was made aware of these issues too late in the year to counteract the shortfall in delivery. In relation to these stalled projects, Mr. Mitchell confirmed that there are ongoing discussions with other Approved Housing Bodies, and it is expected that they will be delivered in 2024. Mr Mitchell expressed his disappointment regarding the overall number of units delivered in 2023, however, he pointed out that GCC will have a significant delivery of housing units in 2024 and 2025.

Mr. Mitchell updated the meeting on the following housing developments:

- **Turnkeys** - He confirmed that GCC's Turnkey Developments are all on target for 2023 and he expected that approximately 100 units to be delivered.
- **AHBs Developments** – All on Target for 2023. Mr. Mitchell outlined that there has been a lot of engagement with the AHB sector and as such GCC is getting more units delivered. Dunlo Hill, Ballinasloe is near completion and that the development at Rivercrest, Tuam is also on target.
- Part VIII's were approved for developments at Dunlo Hill and St. Joseph's, Portumna.
- He confirmed that the contractor is onsite at Ballymoe.

- **Purchase of Lands** – Galway County Council has purchased lands in Portumna and Galway Road, Tuam and discussions are ongoing with the Planning Department to see how these sites can be advanced for social housing units.
- **PPP Scheme** - The PPP Scheme in Tuam will form part of the post 2026 delivery.
- **St Joseph's Portumna** – A preliminary design has been completed.
- **Oughterard** – Galway County Council have received two reply's to the EOI sent out to the AHB's and these will have to be assessed and the preferred AHB proposal will be selected.
- **Carna** – project will be informed by guidance from the Planning Section regarding the possibility of expanding the onsite wastewater treatment plant and housing need.
- **Ardrahan & Kinvara**– The Ardrahan project is currently going through the tender process to appoint a contractor and the Kinvara project is near completion.

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

Carna – Cllr. Mannion referenced the importance of progressing a project in Carna.

Housing Delivery Targets 2023 - Mr. Mitchell confirmed to the Chair that the housing target for 2023 was 351 units. He stated that there were two Peter McVerry Trust sites in Portumna that are currently subject to review. He told the Chair that there are no ongoing works at these locations, and that they will not be delivered in 2023.

PPP – In response to the Chair's queries regarding the PPP delivery model, Mr. Mitchell stated that the Department of Housing was looking at every possible method of delivery of housing units and therefore the Council is looking at every available option as a means of providing more housing at a faster pace. This PPP Scheme is located on the Ballygaddy Road, Tuam. PPP Developments are typically located in major urban locations like Tuam. He stated that GCC envisage a mixed tenure scheme will occur at this site and the development will be social and affordable units.

4. Update on the Homeless Program

Ms. N. Heffernan gave a detailed update to the Elected Members on GCC's Homeless Programme. Ms. Heffernan advised that the number of people in Emergency Homeless Accommodation and seeking Homeless Accommodation has continued to increase. As of the end of Q2 2023, there were 12,827 people in Emergency Accommodation nationally and that this represented a year-on-year increase of 16.8% in the demand for Homeless Services. In terms of the day-to-day services provided by GCC's Homeless Unit, Ms. Heffernan outlined the following:

- Galway County Council Homeless Service was established in the Housing Section in October 2020 and the unit is currently composed of 3 staff. A dedicated Homeless Assessment phone number and email address is in operation with responses issuing to people within a 24-hour period. On

average there are 4 presentations per day. During the month of October 132 phone calls were received and 290 emails.

- All emergency homeless accommodation is provided in Galway City, for both City and County clients, The City Council is the lead organisation for homeless services for the Region.
- 2 City based Homeless Emergency Accommodation facilities area available:
 - Fairgreen Hostel – mens hostel – **6 beds** available to GCC clients
 - Osterley Lodge, Salthill – women’s hostel – **3 beds** available to GCC clients
- Cope Galway is contracted to provide homeless services for the region.
- Private Emergency Accommodation – 7 large purpose-built B & Bs in Galway City which are owner-operated and contracted by COPE Galway to provide this service for the region. This is a shared service with Galway City Council and there are no designated number of beds/rooms available for each Local Authority. The allocation of rooms is based on availability and greatest need.
- Accessing homeless services is not dependent on being eligible for Social Housing (Housing Act 1988) however, Galway County Council requests that a Social Housing application is submitted and assessed to inform consideration and assessment for homeless services. Applying for Housing Support provides the client with a potential exit plan for leaving their current emergency homeless accommodation.
- Other Emergency Accommodation Services:
 - Modh Eile – Domestic Abuse Support Service
 - COPE Day Centre, Westside
 - COPE Family Support Service, Tuam Road
 - No. 4 Youth Service - Supports young people aged 18 – 25
 - Addiction Treatment Centre - Cuan Mhuire, Turloughmore
 - Galway Simon Day Centre, Bridge Resource Centre, Ballinasloe
- Number of applicants currently availing of services with Galway County Council:
 - Currently 207 households classified as homeless on IHouse
 - 58 of these households are on a Notice to Quit
 - 6 people residing in the Fairgreen
 - 3 people residing in Osterley Lodge
 - 13 families are residing in Private Emergency Accommodation
 - Waiting lists in place to access all forms of emergency accommodation.
 - 13 individuals are residing in Housing First tenancies.
 - 8 individuals in Community Based Housing Scheme – 4 properties
 - 7 households (9 tenancies) are residing in properties leased by Galway County Council to an Approved Housing Body – 7 properties
 - 6 occupants in Youth Housing properties – 3 properties
 - Cold Weather Response (operated by Galway City)– a Winter initiative to offer shelter to people who are rough sleeping and may not qualify for Social Housing or who may not have a Social Housing application submitted. This service is available from the beginning of November to the end of March/April. There are a limited number of beds available

and potential users of the service are prioritised based on their needs and ability to access other number.

- Housing Led Family Support Scheme – pilot to be rolled out in Galway.
- **Homeless Action Team (HAT)** – The Homeless Action Team brings together all relevant statutory and non-statutory agencies involved in working with single individuals and families who are deemed as having high support or complex needs who are homeless.
- **Further Plans**
 - The establishment of medium-term 24/7 supported co-living housing service in the County – alternative to hostel accommodation.
 - Provision of Cold Weather Response to meet the needs of a small number of people sleeping rough in a county town easily accessible from Galway City to include onsite medical and office facilities.
 - The development of a Domestic Violence Refuge in Ballinasloe in collaboration with multiple agencies.
 - Consideration of allocating dedicated supported short to medium accommodation specifically for families exiting domestic violence refuge.
 - The expansion of Community Based Housing service in County to 20 houses

The Chair, Cllr. Byrne thanked Ms. Heffernan for her excellent presentation and invited the members for comment.

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

- Ms. Heffernan confirmed that submitting a Housing Support Application helped to ensure that a Homeless client had an exit plan for leaving emergency homeless services. Once a Housing Support Application is made, GCC can assess where they should be presenting for homeless services, what services they need and what long-term housing plan can be put in place. A person having no-fixed-abode is not an issue in terms of accessing Homeless services, however, what needs to be established is the local area connection, for example if someone attended a local school or lived within a particular area previously. Ms. Heffernan also outlined that if a person's income is outside the income threshold for Housing Support, then GCC will work with the homeless client to help them find private rented accommodation as a means of leaving homeless accommodation. Once a Housing Supports application is submitted and approved, then an address can be provided through COPE Galway. Ms. Heffernan confirmed that 90% of the Homeless Services costs are recoupable from the Department of Housing.
- She outlined that GCC deems any person within 3 months of a Notice to Quit end date as being Homeless on lhouse. This homeless designation allows GCC to priorities these housing support clients for allocation as per GCC Housing Allocation Scheme. In terms of additional persons identified as being homeless, Ms. Heffernan explained that there

are some people who do not wish to avail of homeless services, and B&Bs and hostels may not meet a client's particular needs or circumstances and the client ends up making their own arrangements. She confirmed to the chair that the number of persons making their own arrangements is thought to be approximately 60-70 persons.

- She confirmed that if a person overstays or overholds in property after the NTQ ends, then they are still deemed as being homeless by GCC. However, if a person refused one 'reasonable offer' then their application is recategorized from homeless.
- Cllr. Mannion complimented Ms. Heffernan's presentation and acknowledged the Homeless Unit's efforts in a challenging area and she remarked that getting people out of B&B's and Hostel accommodation was so important.
- Mr. Owens echoed the Chair's comments relating to the increased level of activity and pressure that is on the Homeless Unit and he commended and acknowledged the Homeless Unit's daily work in a difficult area.
- The Chair thanked Ms. Heffernan for her presentation and commended the work of the Homeless Unit.

5. Update on Housing Maintenance

Mr. Kevin Murphy gave a detailed presentation to the meeting on the works carried out by the Housing Maintenance Section. In particular, he highlighted the following:

- Maintenance Section – team structure
- Housing Maintenance Budget
- Housing Maintenance Repair Requests
- Housing Maintenance Void Programme 2023
- Planned Maintenance Programme
- Traveller Accommodation Programme
- Extensions and DPGs for Social Housing Stock
- Energy Efficiency Retrofitting Programme
- The Chair, Cllr. Byrne thanked Mr. Murphy for his excellent presentation and opened the floor up to the members to ask questions and comments.
- Cllr. Welby enquired if the Voids Program budget was a rolling budget or did Maintenance have to apply for it on a yearly basis. He commended Mr. Murphy and his team's work in Maintenance and queried that did GCC have to fund the cost of installing solar panels and mechanical ventilation systems from their own budget, he acknowledged the impact of the increasing building costs on the Maintenance budget. He expressed concern regarding maintenance calls he was getting from Housing Support Clients that were allocated brand new homes.

- The Chair Cllr. Byrne said that his presentation was very timely given the upcoming discussions relating to budget 2024 and he said that these presentations helped to identify the issues relating to the high volume of maintenance issues and their associated costs to GCC. He stated there is only 3 maintenance crews to deal with issues coming from 2,800 GCC housing units and he queried the number of contractors engaged for Maintenance services. Mr. Murphy confirmed that from time to time there is the need to request the services of contractors for a variety of tasks.
- Cllr. Byrne referenced the high number of energy efficiency works been implemented by GCC, he suggested that it may be time to look at a rent review to help offset the costs associated with these works. In terms of the energy retrofits and voids, he enquired whether this was a Maintenance issue in the first place, given that Voids are a refit of a property and energy retrofits are Capital Projects and as such they don't appear to be a maintenance issue. He enquired if this should be removed from the Maintenance workload.
- Cllr. Mannion thanks Mr. Murphy for his presentation and she commended him and his team for the great work they had done in Clifden on the retrofitting of the older persons homes. In terms of Voids, she stated that the funds needed to return voids to working use is not being supplied quick enough. She thanked Mr. Murphy for his support over the past year and she requested that older houses would be looked at for possible up-grades.
- In response to comments and queries Mr. Mitchell thanked Mr. Murphy and his team for their efforts, given the fact that they are managing to maintain the high volume of maintenance requests that are associated with an existing housing stock of 2,800 units, and he acknowledged the fact that this number is expected to increase to 4,200 units by 2026. He stated that the average cost of each energy related retrofit was €50,000, while the available grant was €34,000. In terms of the older homes. Mr. Mitchell confirmed that these refits cost far more than the €50,000 and they could ultimately end up costing GCC €70,000-€80,000. He stated that this is a major problem given the fact that the funds are coming out of own resources. He pointed to the fact that Mr. Murphy's team had completed over 300 retrofits, and we have an existing housing stock of 2,800 units, so with this in mind, the €11,000 of funding per Void retrofit is clearly insufficient. Mr. Mitchell thanked the Chair and his colleagues for their comments regarding their support for looking for increased maintenance funds in the upcoming budget discussions for 2024. He stated that the financial demands on the maintenance budget was set to increase given the projected increase of housing units owned by GCC. He stated that unless there was a budget there to address this increase, it simply would not be sustainable to maintain the current level of maintenance works.
- In response to a query from Cllr. Welby, Mr. Murphy confirmed that the cost of electricity had effectively doubled since many of the retrofitted were carried out. He confirmed that there were a significant number of complaints in 2022 and to a lesser degree in 2023. However, he stated that people were not allowing for the fact that they were no longer buying oil or solid fuel as a means

of heating their homes. He stated that there are recorders (loggers) on the Solar PV panels that showed that a significant amount of electricity was being generated by these Solar panels, worth approximately €600 to €700 annually. Mr. Murphy informed the members that Pay as You Go Meters caused significant issues with the heat pumps, whereby if the credit ran out, the Heat Pump system would return to a regeneration cycle that would use a lot a credit as it restarted.

- Of the 3,000 plus maintenance requests submitted, Mr. Murphy confirmed that approximately 2,000 were refused/closed and that many of these can be deemed as repeat requests. All such requests must be reviewed and decided upon by a technician and if they are repeat requests they are closed. Many of these requests are deemed as being the responsibility of the tenant.
- In response to a query from Cllr. Welby, Mr. Owens confirmed that the Department funds the construction and purchase of council houses and GCC can sell them under the Tenant Purchase Scheme. He stated that this funding received from tenant purchases is ring fenced and there is limited discretion on how and where it is spent. The Department of Housing now decides where this funding is spent and it is no longer permissible to use the IRC funds as match funds for Housing Grants. The Department has indicated that they wish to direct some of these funds towards existing Planned Maintenance and Energy Efficiency programs.
- Mr. Owens stated that the housing maintenance budget was inadequate, and it does not allow GCC to provide the service that is required in terms of the minimum level of standards. He pointed to the fact that housing stock was approaching almost 3,000 units of various age profiles. He stated that the challenges associated with finding the investment needed to maintain so many aging properties to a minimum requirement is what the Planned Maintenance Program was designed to address. In terms of the Capital program, Mr. Owens stated that GCC had to also manage the significant number of new housing units being delivered and that these needed to be maintained on an ongoing basis. In comparison, he stated that the Voids Program allows €11,000 in funding per unit from the Department, while the Vacant Homes Grant provides €50,000 to return a property to being occupied. He stated that the Council is also committed to delivering the Energy Retrofit Program albeit from inadequate resources in the form of the 3 maintenance teams within a wide Geographical area. For example, he pointed to the fact that one maintenance team is responsible for maintenance of units in Gort, Athenry, Claregalway and Clifden. Geographically, the level of service required is challenging. He confirmed that a submission had been made through the Strategic Workforce Plan to ensure that additional dedicated resources are assigned to Housing Maintenance. Mr. Owens in reply to the Chair agreed to include an update on housing maintenance on the Agenda for the SPC in 2024. He confirmed that there are ongoing discussions with the Head of Finance in relation to the budget for 2024, with Planned Housing Maintenance and Grants being areas of priority. He stated that GCC cannot just look at the expenditure side, but also need to look at the income side. He stated that it has been several years since a Rent Review was carried out and he confirmed that a rent review was

going to be suggested for 2024. Mr. Owens said that GCC had to consider how this additional funding would be directed given the fact that our housing stock was a revenue generating asset with an income of over €9m.

6 Any Other Business

- Mr. Owens outlined that GCC had received notification that the Department of Housing had engaged the IPA to complete a review of the operations of the Strategic Policy Committees. They have issued a circular and it will be circulated to the committee members shortly.
- Mr. Owens also confirmed that they had received a brief update from the Department of Housing regarding the Rent-a-Room Scheme and the allocation/expansion of it to LA housing. The intention is that it will apply to LA's properties from the 1st of December 2023, he advised that GCC had not yet received a copy of the application form to date.
- Ukrainian Response - Mr. Owens advised members that some GCC owned sites were submitted for assessment as possible locations for the building of Modular Homes including Poolboy, Ballinasloe. He outlined that these sites are exempt from planning, however, there will be a requirement under Section 183 of the Local Government act for the approval of a lease between GCC and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The proposal is that this Section 183 will come before the December meeting of the full council for approval. If approved, this will allow the OPW to begin ground works and it is projected that modular homes will be completed by July 2024. It is currently proposed that the site will accommodate 92, 2-bedroomed modular units with a max capacity of accommodating 4 persons from a family unit. Mr. Owens outlined that the Ballinasloe MD had received several updates and briefing sessions from both the lead Government Department and the OPW and that a public information session had taken place recently in the Shearwater Hotel. The OPW and the Department have offered to the Ballinasloe MD members a site visit to a similar Modular Homes site that is near completion. This visit would also include a trip to a manufacturing site located in Tullamore, Co. Offaly. A provisional date of Friday the 24th of November has been suggested for this site visit. Mr. Owens confirmed to Cllr. Welby that the Section 183 would be coming before the next Plenary Meeting.
- The Chair Cllr. Byrne advised that a draft schedule of meetings for 2024 would issue to members early in 2024.
- The meeting then concluded.