

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT SPECIAL MEETING OF THE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF ADARE-RATHKEALE HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNTY HALL, DOORADOYLE, LIMERICK ON THURSDAY, 27TH APRIL, 2017, AT 7.30 P.M.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR: Councillor A. Teskey, An Cathaoirleach.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors Keary, McMahon, O'Brien and Sheahan.

APOLOGIES:

Councillor O'Donoghue.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Director, Regional Services (Ms. C. Curley), A/Director, Social Development (Ms. C. Kirby), Senior Executive Officer, Community Support Services (Ms. P. Liddy), Senior Executive Architect, Social Development (Mr. S. Hanrahan), Housing Welfare Officer, Community Support Services (Ms. P. Phillips), Administrative Officer, Community Support Services (Mr. S. Hayes), Meetings Administrator (Mr. T. O'Callaghan), Staff Officer, Social Development (Ms. S. Hourigan).

1. Involvement of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) Working in the District.

At the outset, on the proposal of Councillor Sheahan, seconded by Councillor O'Brien it was agreed that standing orders be suspended to allow for deputations from Deel Manor Estate, Askeaton and Askeaton Community Council to be received during the Meeting.

The Cathaoirleach acknowledged the presence of Councillor Michael Donegan, Chair of the Home and Social Development SPC as an observer at the Meeting.

The Senior Executive Architect presented an overview of social housing provisions which included the following;

- Details in relation to homelessness, home provision and vacant homes, in the national and local context, as set out in Rebuilding Ireland, Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness – July 2016.
- The National policy with regard to Approved Housing Bodies and the extent of housing they provide both locally and nationally.
- Details of the Repair and Leasing Scheme and of the housing stock in Limerick and in the State.

The Cathaoirleach invited Ms. Audrey Sheehan, Deel Manor to address the Meeting. Ms. Sheehan noted that Deel Manor was a private estate and spoke of the struggle home owners have in meeting mortgage payments, the challenges of negative equity and the risk that the actions of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), purchasing property on the estate, would devalue

property there. Ms. Sheehan noted the extent of vacant property throughout the City and County and queried the need for AHB's to become involved in purchasing single private houses in Askeaton.

The Cathaoirleach invited Mr. Joe Whelan, Askeaton Community Council to address the Meeting. Mr. Whelan pointed out that, while there were issues in Askeaton in relation to high unemployment, there were no housing issues. He noted that the Community Council and others were working to keep Askeaton attractive for industry and newcomers but raised concerns as to who would vet and monitor tenants put in place by AHBs. He requested that the Council play an active role in this regard and called on the Elected Members and Council Executive to support this request.

Members thanked the deputations for their input and the following points were made by various Members during the course of discussing this item;

- National requirements relating to the mix of public and private housing were flawed as this mix would not be achieved peacefully.
- There were lots of empty houses in Askeaton and the town was in need of regeneration.
- Anti-social behaviour in Local Authority Estates was unacceptable but there was insufficient funding available from the Department to properly manage estates and many towns and villages did not have an adequate Garda presence.
- The Cluaid development at Ballingarry had been successful because Cluaid had explained their plans to the Elected Members and had a manager living on site.
- It was vital that AHBs engage with the Council, including the Elected Members. A line of communications should be opened between the Elected Members, housing staff and the AHBs and regular Meetings held.
- The public were approaching the Elected Members in relation to the outcome of decisions by some AHBs and the Elected Members had no knowledge of same. This applied in particular to some of the newer AHB's.
- Clarity was need with regard to the relationship between AHBs and the Local Authority and to what extent the business of AHBs was available for public viewing.
- The amalgamation of the City and County should not be used as an opportunity to move problem tenants from the City to the County and Members should be briefed on the extent to which this may have occurred.
- Askeaton had an unacceptably high proportion of its population not trained for employment and this had to be addressed, going forward.

On the proposal of Councillor Keary, seconded by Councillor Teskey, it was agreed that the District request the Chair of the Home and Social Development SPC to convene a Special Meeting of that committee, with representatives of AHBs present, with a view to agreeing a harmonised policy between the Council and all AHBs on tenant selection and rent levels.

On the proposal of Councillor Sheahan, seconded by Councillor Keary it was agreed that the District write to the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government calling on him to allow Local Authorities, based on their experience, to use their discretion in how

they apply, or not apply, requirements in relation to the percentage of social and affordable housing to be included as part of a development.

Staff from the Home and Social Development Directorate made the following points in response to issues and queries raised by Members;-

- The public portion of the public private mix had been recently reduced from 20% to 10% and there did not appear to be any plans in place, nationally, to further alter this figure.
- The Council had strong measures in place to manage its tenancies and prevent the occurrence of any related negative equity.
- Any tenants nominated by the Council to AHBs were Garda vetted and passed in advance. Figures in relation to the percentage of applicants that do not pass Garda vetting would be forwarded to Members.
- AHBs provide wrap-around services to support and monitor their tenants.
- In the case of houses funded through the Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF), 100% of the tenants are nominated by the Council to the AHBs. In the case of houses funded through the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) the percentage nominated by the Council varied between 75% and 100%, depending on funding.
- Differential rent applied in the case of houses funded by CALF and the economic rent applied in the case of houses funded by CAS. When housing supports were taken into consideration those tenants would, in general, pay a similar rent to Local Authority tenants.
- There were 23 families on the Councils waiting list for Local Authority housing in Askeaton. Legal advice had been received to indicate that those living in overcrowded accommodation could be considered homeless.
- The Council worked towards meeting the housing need of all those on the waiting list across the area. In general AHBs vacancies were filled from the Council's waiting list on the nomination of the Council, unless the property was purchased privately by the AHB.
- The Council acknowledged the need to build sustainable communities and worked with the Gardaí in this regard. AHBs also monitor and manage their tenants closely, take this issue seriously and have resources in this regard.
- Askeaton was a proposed pilot site for the planned area wide CCTV project.
- The Councils housing programme, which included for delivery of up to 1600 houses and with a focus on the purchase of existing houses, would be brought to the Districts for review.
- There were vulnerable people in all communities and while social supports were in place, including the input of AHBs, it was acknowledged that people have to live within rules.
- Council tenants had pre tenancy training and letting agreements and there were legal sanctions associated with same. AHB's had similar arrangements in place.
- Independent valuations were used to establish the market value of property.

Following discussion it was agreed that the May Meeting of the District would be held on Wednesday 17th May, 2017 at 2.00 p.m. in Croom.

This concluded the Meeting.

Signed: _____
Cathaoirleach

Dated: _____