

17th February 2021

To the Mayor and Each Member of Limerick City and County Council

**Chairperson's Report for the Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee
Meeting on the 17th February 2021.**

A Chomhairleoir, a chara,

Summary Report/Main Issues

Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all SPC members to the virtual meeting of the SPC. An Cathaoirleach Cllr. Murphy thanked Ms. Aoife Duke and team in relation to the Coonagh-Knockalisheen Road.

Cllr. Murphy also offered sympathies to Mr. PJ O'Grady on the recent death of his brother, Martin.

Item 1: Confirm minutes from meeting held on December 16th 2020

Proposed: Cllr. Sarah Kiely

Seconded: Cllr. Eddie Ryan

Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes:

Cllr. Eddie Ryan thanked the Housing team and Allocations team for their help with the seven units in Galbally which have been occupied by families since last Friday.

Item 3: 2021 Pipeline Update – Sarah Newell

Ms. Sarah Newell shared a document, which gives an overview of the 2021 Pipeline Delivery.

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. John Costelloe asked were the numbers for Moyross and Cosgrave Park included in the overall figures that Ms. Newell presented. Ms. Newell clarified that this is the output for the Build stream for 2021 – Acquisitions and Leasing are the other streams, they are generating their own numbers and are demand led.

Ms. Anne Cronin asked is it two units of housing for members of the Travelling community for the whole year. Ms. Newell clarified that there are two units up in Clonlong, which are under construction at the minute that are due for completion at the end of year. Mr. Lowth went on to say that, the overall allocation to Travellers in general Housing has been significantly high.

Cllr. Sarah Kiely thanked Ms. Patricia Phillips and the Allocations team for successful allocation of Traveller families.

Item 4: Mortgage to Rent Update – Jennifer Ahern

Ms. Jennifer Ahern gave overview on MTR scheme and shared presentation.

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. Sean Hartigan asked what happens to the difference between the house value and what is owed on the property. Ms. Ahern noted that it is written off, as the mortgage is no longer sustainable. Cllr. Hartigan also asked have we any figures on how many people have applied to mortgage lenders for this scheme and who have been refused. Ms. Ahern said she will contact MABS to get this information for Cllr. Hartigan.

Cllr. Benson noted she had a constituent that is not much over the €15,000.00 and cannot qualify for the scheme but there is a large amount of works to be done in the house to bring it up to standard and Cllr. Benson asked, is LCCC carrying out those surveys if there are works to be done to the house. Ms. Ahern noted that the surveys are carried out by an independent person who would send report to LCCC to review. Ms. Ahern asked Cllr. Benson to contact her about the constituent.

Cllr. Tom Ruddle asked are the figures nationwide or just for Limerick. Ms. Ahern clarified that they are just for Limerick.

Cllr. Leddin shared some of his experiences of the scheme with constituents who had mortgage arrears. Cllr. Leddin sought clarity around another issue and that is if a person has not lost their job but is in arrears through other personal issues and they are earning above a certain amount, can they qualify. Ms. Ahern noted that they couldn't. Cllr. Leddin sought clarity on the 2021 figures.

Cllr. Ryan asked about the succession rights for family remaining on in a MTR situation.

Ms. Cronin asked is it worth putting down the stumbling blocks around MTR due to the number of homeowners in mortgage arrears. Ms. Ahern will feed back to Housing Agency.

Mr. Mike McNamara sought clarification around the sale of the property and market value.

Item 5: Regen Structure Update – Elaine O’Connor

Ms. Elaine O’Connor (Regeneration Programme Manager/acting SEO) gave a brief update on the new staffing structure for Regeneration and shared a presentation of structure for both Northside and Southside.

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

- Cllr. Leddin asked is it possible to get an update for the physical side of Regeneration.

Item 6: Scheme of Priorities – Private Rightsizing Scheme – Sarah Newell

Ms. Newell noted that this is an update since September workshop.

The financial contribution and age band was endorsed by SPC members on the 22nd September. It was agreed as part of the financial contribution for the scheme was one flat band contribution for the age (55 – 80+) and that the contribution would be agreed at a quarter of the net proceeds of the sale of the private dwelling to become a tenant.

Ms. Newell showed members paragraph of text that is being proposed to be brought in to the allocation scheme

Ms. Newell is seeking endorsement from SPC members to proceed with the indicated text to Full Council for adoption for the Private Downsizing (Rightsizing) Scheme.

Proposed: Cllr. Catherine Slattery

Seconded: Cllr. Eddie Ryan

The Home and Social Development SPC noted the contents of the attached revision to the Limerick City and County Council Allocation Scheme to embed the financial contribution element of the Private Downsizing (Rightsizing) Scheme and endorsed the contents therein.

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. Catherine Slattery sought clarification around the financial contribution element and the price limit of the property which is indicated in the text. Ms. Newell clarified both.

Item 7: Orchard Site – Housing Development Directorate Update

Ms. Duke gave brief update and noted that Housing will come back with formal presentation as progress is made on the project.

St. Anne's Court Update:

Ms. Newell noted that we have funding for five sites in the City under the Serviced Sites Fund – one of those sites is Sonny's Corner. We have received approval from the Dept. to progress that site for affordable housing, which will include St. Anne's Court, which is currently under LCCC ownership. Ms. Newell noted that we are looking to progress an affordable housing scheme on the land bank. Ms. Newell gave background on the Service Sites Fund to members.

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. John Costeloe asked are we handing over LCCC land to a private developer. Ms. Newell clarified that we are progressing the site to design the site for affordable housing and then we look at the delivery of the site.

Item 8: Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor L. Galvin (to be referred to the Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee)

I will move at the next Meeting that this Council call on the Minister for Housing to include derelict houses in the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme.

Cllr. Liam Galvin gave background on scheme – it is a scheme used for people who do not qualify for mortgages from financial institutions, but it does not allow for derelict properties.

Cllr. Galvin felt there is an opportunity here to purchase derelict properties at a reasonable price and feels this would benefit the LA as well.

Cllr. Galvin sought support to write to Minister Darragh O'Brien to seek clarification on the current legislation under the RIHL scheme and to amend the legislation to allow for derelict properties to be included in the RIHL scheme. Also, to ask, what delegated authority and discretion can LCCC staff exercise in relation to this scheme.

Proposed: Cllr. Liam Galvin

Seconded: Cllr. Eddie Ryan

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. Ryan, Cllr. Teefy, Cllr. Foley, Cllr. Kilcoyne, Cllr Donegan, and Cllr. Keary support the motion.

Cllr. Keary voiced his frustration in relation to his experience with the RIHL and LCCC staff.

Mr. Lowth noted that the motion is fully supported as LCCC officials and that he agreed that the Derelict buildings should fall under this scheme.

Cllr. Donegan, Cllr. Leddin encouraged Cllr. Keary to withdraw his remarks on LCCC staff regarding the RIHL.

Mr. McNamara took issue to Cllr. Keary's comments in relation to LCCC staff and asked that he withdraw same.

Mr. McNamara also asked to include when writing to Minister O'Brien to ask what delegated authority and discretion can LCCC staff exercise in relation to this scheme.

Item 9: General Updates

a. Area of Choice – Rob Lowth

Mr. Lowth noted that they are in the process of updating the Housing Application and the SSHA information.

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. Benson asked for clarification about the newly adopted areas of choice and Cllr. Benson queried the roll out of choice based letting. Ms. Newell also noted that we could give an update on that at the next SPC.

b. Minister Darragh O'Brien Reply to HAP Letter – Rob Lowth

Mr. Lowth noted that the letter reiterates the discussions up to that point and the situation remains in terms of the design of the HAP scheme.

Mr. Lowth advised that if any members have concerns about HAP tenants to let Housing Support Services know.

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. Keary noted that the letter is quite clear for HAP and is similar to that of LA social housing and felt that if HAP tenants could be vetted, it would lead to a better outcome of tenancies.

Ms. Duke notes that our powers of removing HAP payments for proven anti-social behaviour is a good course of action and she is more than happy to listen any issues on HAP tenants from members.

Cllr. Benson was concerned when this came up initially about people losing out on HAP tenancies while the Garda vetting was being done but Cllr. Benson is delighted that Mr. Lowth is working with the Gardaí on the test cases.

Item 10: AOB

a. Notice of Motion from Cllr. Eddie Ryan

I will move at the next meeting of the Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee that each member of the public be limited to one rep per elected representative in relation to requests for housing support services and housing maintenance.

Cllr. Ryan gave background behind the motion.

Cllr. Ryan sought support to limit housing representations to one representation for one person per elected representative.

Proposed: Cllr. Eddie Ryan

Seconded: Cllr. Conor Sheehan

A discussion took place around this and the main points were:

Cllr. Sheehan, Cllr. Keary and Cllr. Donegan supported Cllr. Ryan's motion.

Cllr. Kiely noted that she understands Cllr. Ryan's sentiment but had a concern regarding volume of TD reps. Cllr. Kiely also felt that Councillor reps should take priority over TD reps.

Cllr. Benson noted that she agrees with the sentiment of Cllr. Ryan's motion but noted that she believes the notification e-mails should still go out to inform all. Cllr. Benson also noted the need to have a level playing field in relation to Housing clinics for Councillors.

Cllr. Kiely agreed with Cllr. Benson and Cllr. Sheehan, we need a level playing field. Cllr. Kiely noted that she would like to make an amendment to the motion if Cllr. Ryan would allow it, that Councillors get priority over TD's. Cllr. Ryan agrees with Cllr. Kiely's point but noted that he is not sure how that would work, and he went on to note that TDs are as entitled to make a rep for someone as Councillors are.

Ms. Duke asked the question are members happy how the current representations are being implemented in Planning and asked about the logistics of it. Cllr. Ryan noted that if a person selects a Councillor for their Planning application that they must stick with that Councillor however, this makes more sense as the applicant cannot go from one Councillor to another. Cllr. Ryan noted that he would like to see how this works for Housing reps.

Mr. Lowth advised that we would welcome an adopted approach across the board and for the Councillors to design the approach. Mr. Lowth went on to say that the motion is good, and it is to be supported but he advised members to look at the approach to take on the motion and to come back to officials on the guidelines.

An Cathaoirleach Cllr. Murphy asked is there a review of the rep system being done currently through the review of the SugarCRM system. Mr. Lowth notes that there is work going on in Customer Services, but it is focusing on the responses and how LCCC staff close the rep.

Cllr. Kiely went on to say that it is becoming a big issue for some Councillors that we cannot get the same work done as TDs and Councillors are the ones who are running the local authority. Mr. Lowth agreed with Cllr. Kiely's point.

Cllr. Keary noted that if we were to replicate the system in the Planning department there are exceptions there where there can be more than one rep and he asked Ms. Duke to get a template on how they work their system.

Cllr. Ryan noted that he would like to see this go to the Full Council meeting for their opinion and if full Council support then we can take it forward.

- PJ O'Grady asked is the Energy Efficiency programme going to be extended into the current year. Ms. Duke and Mr. Quaid noted that yes, once the circular is received from the Dept. this will be looked at.
- Cllr. Costelloe welcomed the new teams in Regeneration stated that we need to work on the problems in St. Mary's Park.
- Ms. Una Byrnes asked for the number of units that were brought back into occupancy under the Repair and Lease scheme. Ms. Duke noted that we would be more than happy to come back with a Repair & Lease presentation for the next SPC.
- Ms. Cronin asked was there any change to the 740 units under the Service Sites Fund due to the Coonagh Knockalisheen announcement. Ms. Duke advised that there was not and they are distinctly separate schemes.
- Cllr. Donegan would like an update on the seven houses allocated in Galbally to see if they were all allocated and if there was a delay in allocation. Ms. Ahern outlined the situation.
- Cllr. Keary asked for update on 16 units in Pallaskenry and asked for an update on the Council lands in Adare village and the land bank in Pallaskenry. Ms. Duke and Ms. Newell gave an update.

Recommendations (endorsed by SPC members):

- 1) That, this Council, notes the contents of the attached Limerick City and County Council Allocation Scheme to embed the financial contribution element of the Private Downsizing (Rightsizing) scheme and approves the contents therein.
- 2) That, this Council, write to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Minister Darragh O'Brien to seek clarification on the current legislation under the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme and to amend the legislation to allow derelict properties to be included in the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan scheme. In addition, to ask, what delegated authority and discretion can LCCC staff exercise in relation to this scheme.
- 3) That, this Council, limit housing representations to one representation for one person per elected representative.

END OF MEETING

The Chair thanked everyone for logging in, for his or her presentations and everyone's valuable contributions.

Is mise le meas,

Cllr. Michael Murphy
Chairperson
Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee