

21st April 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 21st April 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.

Cllr. Murphy noted that there had been a review of SPC standing orders and that meetings must stay under two hours. Cllr. Murphy advised that any member who wishes a copy of the revised standing order can request a copy.

Item 1: Confirm minutes from meeting held from 17th February 2021

Proposed: Cllr. Joe Leddin

Seconded: Cllr. Eddie Ryan

Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes:

Cllr Stephen Keary noted that he had an issue at the previous meeting on the letter that was received from the Minister for Housing, Darragh O'Brien regarding the HAP payment scheme and he proposed that all potential HAP recipients are to be Garda vetted as per Local Authority tenants.

A discussion took place around this between the SPC members and LCCC and Ms. Duke noted there is a need to compare and review based on impact on timeframes and we also need to look at internal resources.

The Chair noted that he would make a ruling that the proposal is not relevant for the SPC meeting. The Chair noted that he wished for Cllr. Keary to put in a motion for a full Council meeting, do more research on the letter from Minister Darragh O'Brien and for it to be debated at a Council meeting.

Item 3: Voids Update

Ms. Duke gave a presentation to the members of the SPC in terms of the number of vacant properties with LCCC.

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

Cllr. Benson went on to say that there is a challenge regarding voids due to backlog from 2018 and the SPOC system worked very well at the start but fell by the wayside after a period of time. Cllr. Benson also stressed the urgency of getting the voids issue sorted as soon as possible.

Cllr. Keary queried that for Cat 1 and 2 we had noted 68 voids however, funding was only sought for 58 and asked for the reason. Mr. Cathal Quaid advised that units can only attract voids funding once so that if a house comes back a second time in a seven year period we cannot apply for funding and 10 of the 68 have fallen into this category and have to then be refurbished from our own resources

Cllr. Catherine Slattery asked is there a delay with refurbishing properties that have already been allocated and gave an example of a particular case. Ms. Duke asked to hear the specifics of case after SPC from Cllr. Slattery.

Cllr. Brigid Teefy mentioned the 21 vacant properties in the Cappamore-Kilmallock district and noted the large demand for the area on the HWL. Ms. Duke advised that at the Cappamore-Kilmallock MD meeting, she could discuss possibility of the AHBs stepping in to take some of those properties and turn them around to eliminate waiting as the Cat 3 and 4 Design and Delivery team are still being set up.

Mr. PJ O'Grady requested for voids presentation to be sent to SPC members. Mr. O'Grady asked for an update on the vacant houses in the private estate in Patrickswell. Ms. Newell advised she will follow this up.

Cllr. Conor Sheehan asked what impact had SPOC on the turnaround time for voids. Cllr. Sheehan asked does LCCC have a dedicated vacant homes officer as he noted that the Government were looking to introduce one a few years ago. Cllr. Sheehan also asked how many properties LCCC acquired through acquisitions in 2020. Ms. Duke advised that there is a need to assess in more detail some of the issues that Cllr. Sheehan had raised and would go back with a more detailed response to him.

Cllr. Mike Donegan supported Cllr. Benson's idea of borrowing money for the long term voids to help bring them back into stock.

Cllr. Joe Leddin noted that LCCC had a goal for zero voids not so long ago and expressed his disappointment and frustration with the current voids figures notwithstanding the efforts being made by team. Cllr. Leddin proposed a special meeting to discuss the voids situation. Cllr. Benson seconded Cllr. Leddin's proposal. Ms. Duke advised she would speak to Corporate to arrange meeting and she noted that she would feedback member's concerns to the head of Finance as it comes down to funding and resources.

Proposal to hold a Special Meeting on Voids/Vacant Properties:

Proposed: Cllr. Joe Leddin

Seconded: Cllr. Sharon Benson

Item 4: Infills Update – Elaine O'Connor

Ms. Elaine O'Connor gave presentation on the Rapid Infill Housing Project in Moyross and Southill.

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

Ms. McElligott noted that the Moyross Resident's Association wanted PMVT and LCCC to be mindful around allocations from HWL. Ms. McElligott advised that there is potential for overcrowding in the future in terms of family mix and more 3 bed units would need to be built. Cllr. John Costelloe gave support for Ms. McElligott's point on the need for more 3 bed units and he noted he was glad the issue of allocations was addressed.

Cllr. Costelloe asked for the lifespan of modular units and what are they constructed from. Cllr. Costelloe also queried whether wraparound supports would be available for new tenants in these units.

Mr. McNamara noted a concern regarding timber framed houses from his experience as one particular scheme of houses had exposed base plates which could have been a fire hazard. Mr. McNamara also advised of the need to have an inspector appointed to oversee and check compliance for all employment related issues for all contracts on behalf of LCCC. Mr. McNamara asked for members to support a call on LCCC to engage a specific officer for compliance on sites that are operated by LCCC. Cllr. Costelloe seconded Mr. McNamara's proposal. Ms. Duke advised that it would be of use to share through the partnership the responses to the particular questions raised by Mr. McNamara.

Cllr. Ryan sought clarification around the term 'Infill' and noted that houses in Moyross and Southill that were only 40+ years old had been demolished. Cllr. Ryan also asked is PMVT financing this project. Ms. O'Connor advised that infills are a combination of replacement houses that were previously there and existing gaps in the area and it also helps connectivity.

Ms. O'Connor advised the financing is going to PMVT but it comes under the Regeneration programme due to the type of funding that it is (housing).

Cllr. Keary asked how many houses were there up to the beginning of Regeneration and asked how many houses are there now. Cllr. Keary noted that the houses originally in Moyross were constructed to a very high standard at the time and noted his delight that PMVT are taking on the project. Ms. O'Connor advised that in Moyross it was originally 1,100 houses and approximately 500 had been demolished. Ms. O'Connor noted 100 units are planned starting this year including infills, with a mixture of unit sizes. Ms. Duke advised that 75%-80% of the HWL requires one and two bed properties and that LCCC have to be mindful of that and that if there are three generations of families living in one house, it may be more appropriate for the older generation to move into the two bed units. Ms. Duke advised that the Department of Housing would not accept a housing scheme with only three and four bed units – they want the profile of the HWL.

Ms. McElligott expressed her concern that we are building for policy and not for families and noted that this needs to be addressed with the Department.

Cllr. Benson sought clarification on the rule around children over 10 not being able to share a room. Cllr. Benson also asked for the numbers of people who are approved for 2 bed properties on the current HWL – how many of those based on mixed gender of children, would be looking for a transfer in the next five years. Ms. Duke noted that we would come back with that analysis for review and discussion for the next SPC. Mr. Lowth advised in terms of the iHouse system we could retrieve the report of the numbers on the HWL that had been approved for 2 bed units but the information on children's age and genders would take further analysis he advised he would certainly look into it.

Cllr. Tom Ruddle noted that if a person was approved for a 1 or 2 bed property it would be very difficult with how LCCC works, to get a 3 bed property as that person would only have qualified for a 1 or 2 bed house – Cllr. Ruddle asked is that policy still in place. Mr. Lowth advised that Cllr. Ruddle is correct and he noted that we are guided by the Department in terms of the rules around how we approve a person on the HWL. Mr. Lowth advised on the issue of over accommodation which is being discussed nationally. Cllr. Ruddle sought clarification on planning for 1 bed units. Ms. Duke advised that for the next phase of housing we could look at the profile but we have to cater for what is on the actual HWL. Cllr. Ruddle noted that there does not appear to be anything for elderly people for example, bungalows.

Proposal for SPC members to support a call on LCCC to engage a specific officer for compliance on sites that are operated by LCCC.

Proposed: Mr. Mike McNamara

Seconded: Cllr. John Costelloe

Item 5: Area of Choice Presentation – Rob Lowth

Mr. Lowth gave an update on the updated Area of Choice form.

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

Cllr. Keary noted that there are twenty areas of choice for Adare-Rathkeale but in ten of those areas there are no council houses available. Mr. Lowth noted that if there are people who have a housing need and want to live in those areas, we must take that into account.

Cllr. Costelloe asked does the 12 month rule still if a person is refused an area of choice where there are new builds out of their three areas of choice, can they reapply for a new area of choice in this instance. Mr. Lowth advised as part of the SSHA they can change their area of choice. Cllr. Costelloe advised LCCC need to be more flexible. Mr. Lowth advised that the delivery of new houses has accelerated this year and there will be more choice for new builds in those areas.

Ms. McElligott asked how many of the new builds on the Condell Road and Mungret are 2 and 3 beds. Mr. Lowth advised he believed that there are more 3 beds. Ms. McElligott noted that she felt that there are more 3 bed units being built outside Regeneration and queried this. Ms. Duke advised that the housing delivery pipeline across the City and County is made up of 45% 1 and 2 beds irrespective of Regeneration.

Item 6: New Build Incremental Update – Sarah Newell

Ms. Newell and Ms. Helen Creed gave an update on the New Build Incremental Scheme to SPC members.

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

Cllr. Keary asked for clarification on household income and he noted that based on value of the property and the household income, is it really realistic for a person earning €15,000.00 to be able to afford the repayments. Cllr. Keary asked should all applicants be eligible for the RIHL. Cllr. Keary queried what the return is for LCCC if applicants want to sell property after a few

years. Ms. Creed advised that the charge reduces over time (2% per year) and LCCC would be owed a percentage from that and that LCCC would look at market value at that time. Cllr. Keary asked could that be made available to Councillors and SPC members. Ms. Creed advised consent for sale would be required by LCCC and we would get first refusal also. Cllr. Keary asked could the unsuccessful applicants be put on a panel for the future so that they don't have to go through process again. Mr. Lowth advised that depends on circumstances but if someone has expressed an interest in an affordable property then LCCC would have a register of them. Ms. Creed advised that when assessing applications they would not want any potential financial hardships and that it would be checked at that stage.

Ms. McElligott queried affordable price for homes and Ms. Creed advised Housing Development had set prices and that there is a discount worked out depending on income (either 60%, 50% or 40% of the cost). Ms. McElligott sought clarification on eligibility of applicants and Ms. Creed advised that eligible applicants have to be identified as being in need of housing support, in receipt of RAS, HAP or Long Term Leasing.

Item 7: Affordable Scheme of Priorities Update – Sarah Newell

Ms. Newell gave an update on the adopted scheme of priorities for affordable dwelling purchase arrangements and a requirement to amend what was adopted by the full Council in November 2019.

A discussion took place and the main points were:

- Cllr. Ruddle noted that he supports proposal.
- Cllr. Benson advised that any recommendations for SPC members need to be circulated prior to the SPC meeting so that members are fully aware of recommendations.
- Ms. McElligott asked do we have a price for what an affordable house is. Ms. Newell noted that the legislation says no more than 35% of your income should be on a mortgage or a rental payment for an affordable purchase or a cost rental.

Proposal to allow Housing to go to the full Council in May with an amended scheme of priority which incorporates revisions for affordable dwellings.

Proposed: Cllr. Tom Ruddle

Seconded: Cllr. Joe Leddin

Item 8: AOB

Cllr. Benson noted issue around Air-to-Water pump system that had been installed in some Local Authority houses Cllr. Benson advised that for two months some people's bills were €535.00 and €608.00 and noted that these systems were meant to be energy efficient. Cllr. Benson proposed that LCCC link in with all tenants who had these installed and to monitor and report on their bills to SPC members. Ms. Duke advised she will review and revert. Cllr. Costelloe supported this proposal.

Recommendations (endorsed by SPC members):

1. **That, this Council, notes the amended scheme of priority which incorporates revisions for affordable dwellings and approves the revisions therein. (**Background information attached separately**)**

END OF MEETING

The Chair thanked everyone for logging in, for their presentations and everyone's valuable contributions. The Chair advised that the Special Meeting for Voids will be arranged over the coming weeks and that the remaining items from today's meeting would be deferred to the June SPC.

Is mise le meas,

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