

## **MINUTES OF MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HOME AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT SPC**

A meeting of Limerick City and County Council, Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee was held on **the 21<sup>st</sup> April** by Cisco WebEx.

**In Attendance:** An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Michael Murphy

**SPC Members Present:** Cllr. Sharon Benson, Cllr. James Collins  
Cllr. Sean Hartigan, Cllr. Stephen Keary, Cllr. Fergus Kilcoyne  
Cllr. Joe Leddin, Cllr. Tom Ruddle, Cllr. Conor Sheehan, Cllr. Brigid Teefy, Cllr. John Costelloe, Cllr. Catherine Slattery, Mr. P.J O'Grady, Mr. Mike McNamara, Cllr. Mike Donegan, Cllr Eddie Ryan, Ms. Tracey McElligott, Ms. Una Byrnes, Ms. Anne Cronin

**In Attendance:** Ms. Aoife Duke, Director of Service, Housing Development  
Mr. Rory Culhane, Clerical Officer, Housing Development  
Ms. Jeannine Butler, Clerical Officer, Housing Development  
Mr. Seamus Hanrahan, A/Director of Service, Capital Investment  
Ms. Astrid Coughlan, Assistant Planner, Housing Development  
Mr. Sean McGlynn, A/Senior Executive Officer, Design & Delivery  
Ms. Elaine O'Connor, Administrative Officer, Regeneration  
Ms. Clíona Corry, Senior Executive Architect, Regeneration  
Ms. Jennifer Ahern, Staff Officer, Housing Development  
Ms. Deirdre Hourigan, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Development  
Mr. Cathal Quaid, Administrative Officer, Operations & Maintenance  
Ms. Sarah Newell, A/Senior Executive Planner, Housing Development  
Mr. Declan White, Senior Executive Engineer, Regeneration  
Ms. Jurate Andrijauskiene, A/Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Development  
Mr. Rob Lowth, A/Senior Executive Officer, Housing Support Services  
Ms. Patricia Phillips, Administrative Officer, Housing Support Services

**Apologies:** Cllr. Adam Teskey, Mr. Patrick English, Ms. Dee Ryan, Cllr. Sarah Kiely

### **Welcome by Chairperson – Cllr. Michael Murphy**

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 to receive a copy of the revised standing order can request a copy.

### **Item 1: Confirm minutes from meeting held on 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. Cllr. Keary proposed that the item would be seconded.
- Cllr. Eddie Ryan wished to second this item.
- Mr. Rob Lowth noted that this topic was discussed at length during the previous meeting. He went on to say that there could be a feasibility issue with this as COVID-19 has already caused delays to the existing process and with Garda vetting, the sign up for HAP could be further delayed by three to five weeks depending on the process.
- Cllr. Keary asked Mr. Lowth to give his interpretation of the Minister's letter. Mr. Lowth stated that his interpretation of the letter was, when someone applies for social housing, they can be vetted at that stage. Mr. Lowth noted that if someone had a conviction within a year for looking for HAP, that then could be refused but if someone had paid their debt to society then we could not say that that person should not be given a housing support. Cllr. Keary went on to say that if those people were Garda vetted properly then they would not qualify for the HAP scheme. Mr. Lowth noted that this would be between the landlord and the potential tenants, to be interviewed properly at the start.
- Cllr. Keary noted that his interpretation of Minister O'Brien's letter is that the Council had an obligation to Garda vet any potential HAP tenants and he would stick by this.
- Cllr. Leddin noted that his understanding of the HAP scheme is that the landlord registers and enters into their agreement with the relevant Housing officials and the onus is on the landlord to identify a suitable tenant to live in the property. Cllr. Leddin went on to say that why a landlord who would be concerned about anti-social behaviour would, let their property under the HAP scheme, only to draw issues and problems upon themselves. Cllr. Leddin noted that there is a duty of care on behalf of the landlord to let their property to suitable tenants and it's not for the Local Authority, under this scheme to determine whether individuals should get a particular property. Cllr. Leddin stated that the Council's job is to support the landlord and that he would not support this requirement to Garda vet tenants.
- Cllr. Ryan stated that, in order to qualify for HAP, you must also qualify for Housing which Mr. Lowth advised was correct. Cllr. Ryan went on to say that due to this, which indirectly, the tax payer could be supporting criminals rent. Cllr. Ryan also noted that the other element to this is that the person who qualifies for Housing would surely have to be Garda vetted. Mr. Lowth advised that the process as it stands in terms of a Housing application, is based on the application being assessed and vetting is not done at the application stage. Vetting is done at the point of allocation to a property and if the person is at the top of the HWL, Mr. Lowth noted that they would consider looking at vetting before they would be allocated a property. Mr. Lowth advised that this would be due to the volume of applications that Housing Support Services would receive in a month. Mr. Lowth noted that the resources and time needed to process these is onerous on the HSS staff on top of the HWL application process itself and from that perspective, the HAP Garda vetting would be adding an additional layer of work on top of an already long process. Mr. Lowth went on to say that if Cllr. Keary looked to Garda vet every HAP tenant at the point of them signing up to the HAP scheme, they would not get processed in due course and would lose the properties which could create a larger homeless problem.
- Cllr. Keary noted that LCCC could ask potential tenants, irrespective of whether they are getting a HAP house or an LA house, to have Garda vetting at an earlier stage – this could alleviate some of the problems that Mr. Lowth had mentioned. Cllr. Keary noted that some landlords throughout Limerick do not care about the tenants they are letting their properties to. Mr. Lowth noted he took on board what Cllr. Keary was saying however, at the last SPC,

LCCC had advised that Councillors could discuss concerns they have on HAP tenants with LCCC and that LCCC have power to remove payment from individuals.

- Cllr. Keary went on to say that the genuine landlords who let their properties to criminals would lose out on HAP payments due to those tenants not paying and that LCCC oversees in excess of €600 million annually to fund the HAP system and that it is a shame that LCCC, which are the lead authority for the HAP scheme, are expending such an amount of money without proper Garda vetting.
- Ms. Una Byrnes noted that she completely agreed with Mr. Lowth, the vetting would add another layer of bureaucracy to the HAP scheme and it would definitely add to the homeless problem through Limerick City and County. Ms. Byrnes went on to say that there would be huge repercussions for moving people out of Homeless accommodations if the potential tenants who had convictions from a long time ago were excluded from the HAP scheme.
- Ms. Aoife Duke proposed that LCCC could look at the current process versus the introduction of Garda vetting and see what the impacts are in terms of timeframes. Ms. Duke went on to say that would there be a possibility of some alternative as Mr. Lowth suggested, around the withdrawal of HAP supports where particular issues arise. Ms. Duke noted there is a need to compare both steps and review then based on impact on timeframes and we also need to look at internal resources which would be reviewed with Sean Coughlan.
- Cllr. Sharon Benson agreed with points made by Ms. Byrnes, Mr. Lowth and Ms. Duke, that the vetting would add serious waiting times and anything that could stop or prevent a person from taking up HAP would be a serious issue. Cllr. Benson noted that this would also create a backlog for people who need Garda vetting for employment, this would create a backlog for them. Cllr. Benson also noted the role of the Residential Tenancies Body (RTB) in the HAP scheme and that the RTB provide a resolution service for tenants and landlords but also for third parties who may be neighbours in the area.
- Cllr. Murphy noted that this topic has been discussed at length. Cllr. Keary asked for a proposer and seconder for this proposal and that it could be brought to a full Council meeting for discussion. Cllr. Keary asked that his proposal is not discounted. Cllr. Murphy agreed.
- Cllr. Benson put in a counter proposal that SPC members agree with the recommendation that members received at the last SPC and take it to a vote if we need to.
- Mr. Lowth noted that since this issue was raised first at a previous SPC in 2020, no Councillor had approached HSS with any incidents of anti-social behaviour or concerns from HAP tenants apart from today's meeting. Mr. Lowth noted that they are looking to remove HAP support from the particular family. Mr. Lowth went on to say that evidence needs to be provided for motions like this to be put forward to allow for investigation.
- Cllr. Murphy noted that he felt that there was not enough evidence or support for moving Cllr. Keary's proposal forward to a full meeting.
- Cllr. Ryan noted that applicants for Local Authority houses are Garda vetted but applicants for private HAP properties are not and he felt it was a contradiction. Cllr. Ryan went on to say that he had no desire or wish to leave anyone homeless but believes there would be a case here for anyone that has nothing to hide to be fearful of the vetting process. Cllr. Ryan agreed with Ms. Byrnes that there is a homeless situation but this is a different scenario.
- Mr. Mike McNamara noted that we should be cognisant of the fact that the HAP service is a shared service and there a number of Local Authorities that have bought into the scheme that LCCC runs the HAP service on behalf of those Local Authorities. Mr. McNamara noted that if there were any change to the rules around HAP then that would have a knock-on effect for other Local Authorities. Mr. McNamara went on to say that in relation to Cllr. Ryan's point on the difference in vetting between applicants for a Local Authority property and no vetting for a HAP property, that the RTB is a regulatory body for private landlords and the onus is on them to vet the people who they are letting their property to. Mr.

McNamara noted that we need to be careful that we do not start encroaching on people's constitutional rights and entitlements plus any decision LCCC make on this process, could have a knock on effect for other Local Authorities.

- Cllr. Keary asked for clarification on whether the proposal is being allowed to go to a full Council meeting or not and if not, Cllr. Keary would bring it himself. Cllr. Murphy noted that he would prefer if Cllr. Keary brought it to a full meeting of the Council by himself and that he is not allowing the proposal go through at the SPC as the majority of the speakers were not in support of the decision and he respected Mr. Lowth's views. Cllr. Keary advised that his interpretation of Minister O'Brien's letter was clear and asked for copy of letter to be read out at today's meeting.
- Cllr. Murphy noted that he would make a ruling that the proposal is not relevant for the SPC meeting and that he would be moving on with the meeting. Cllr. Murphy 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.

Ms. Duke noted that the vacancy report numbers change regularly as had been discussed previously. Ms. Duke went on to say that in the last number of weeks, Housing have been getting a number of requests for Voids information.

Ms. Duke advised that LCCC would be looking at finding a more sustainable solution to dealing with vacancies and voids. Ms. Duke went on to say that while we were looking at trying to find faster and more efficient ways of turning around vacant properties, it continues to be a particular challenge within the department.

Ms. Duke outlines vacancy report:

Total number of vacant properties held in LCCC stock as of 21/04/21: **326**

Ms. Duke added that this figure was up slightly from the previous figure. Ms. Duke noted this was due to CPO properties that had been included (Urban Village Renewal Team)

Ms. Duke went on to say that according to iHouse, LCCC own approx. 5,500 properties and of the 326 there were a number that were currently being refurbished and in the process of being allocated and available for letting. Ms. Duke noted that allocations can take time especially with refusals.

Vacant Properties with Minor Refurbishments Required: **73**

Vacant Properties with Major Refurbishments Required: **102**

Vacant/Other: **82**

Ms. Duke noted for Vacant/Other that some of these houses would be used for community use, (e.g. AHBs) some are planned for disposal and some for demolitions.

Ms. Duke noted that in 2020, the SPOC (Single Point of Contact) process was introduced for vacant properties. Ms. Duke went on to outline the process - an e-mail system was set up, when a house

became vacant the SPOC was notified. An inspection would then be arranged within the first week of vacancy where the house would then be categorised depending on level of works required.

Ms. Duke noted that there are four categories that these houses could fall under:

**Cat 1 and 2** (small works – generally costing less than €30,000.00) where in most cases works completed by the Ops and Maintenance team within own budgets, if there are more specialised works then contractors could be brought in. Ms. Duke advised that an application is made for a voids funding contribution towards Cat 1 and 2 houses.

**Cat 3 and 4** (tend to cost upwards of €30,000.00) assigned to Design and Delivery team. Ms. Duke noted that we are currently building an in-house team for this category. Due to high cost, Ms. Duke noted that we are looking to Department to support return of those houses at 100% funding.

Ms. Duke advised that current works programme is based on the categorisation of the houses and there are **180** houses as part of programme. Ms. Duke noted that when Ops and Maintenance are notified of the vacant houses (on a weekly basis) as a result of inspections, Cat 1 and 2 are automatically assigned to them. Ms. Duke advised that Ops and Maintenance currently have **57** houses which are on the current work programme and we have completion dates for each one.

Ms. Duke noted that the SPOC is beneficial because the liaison person is always aware of the relevant dates for the properties (for example notify allocations 6-8 weeks in advance of completion of houses).

Ms. Duke advised that there are other properties assigned to various different teams for example Cat 3 and 4 are assigned to Design and Delivery. Ms. Duke noted that we are dealing with a legacy issue around Cat 3 and 4 houses and dealing with the CPO derelict houses which tend to be in a poor state.

Ms. Duke advised that after an analysis of the returned vacant properties we found that up to 60% of houses are Cat 1 and 2 and that the system that we are building towards will see a fast turnaround of those categories. Ms. Duke outlined that for Cat 1 and 2 in addition to our own resources we are applying for voids funding and in 2021 we applied for funding for 58 of those properties and we hope to receive €1.284 million (application with Dept. currently). The maximum grant per property is €12,500.00 therefore we are putting forward a significant balance ourselves, noted Ms. Duke. Ms. Duke went on to say that there is discussion at a national level of reforming the voids programme.

Ms. Duke noted on Cat 3 and 4 properties that are assigned to Design and Delivery, that we are at an advanced stage of discussions with the Department on the Single Stage Approval process (where we would get 100% funding) and Limerick City and County Council are being proposed as a pilot for this scheme. Ms. Duke advised that she will update members on that pilot scheme.

Ms. Duke noted that we are trying to get to the point where we can manage, in a sustainable manner, the throughput of houses that are coming in and Ops and Maintenance can absorb the level of Cat 1 and 2 houses in their work programme.

Ms. Duke advised on legacy issue of Cat 3 and 4 houses which we are continuing to grapple with and we will be proposing as one part of a wider solution an AHB pilot. Ms. Duke noted that this was discussed with the Newcastle West district Councillors and we have approval in principle to take a small number of the Newcastle West vacant houses through EOI to see if an AHB would be

interested in taking on some of these properties. The AHBs would provide wraparound supports and LCCC have allocation rights. Ms. Duke advised that this is something that we will be bringing to the Metropolitan meeting (May/June 2020) to gauge the level of interest.

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

- Cllr. Benson conveyed her thanks to the Housing department and the Council on the recent CPO properties. 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 noted the amount of red tape regarding AHBs and stated it seems to be a slower process for AHBs to get funding than it is for LCCC, that this could add an extra delay. Cllr. Benson queried when the Department funding for voids is usually approved and believed it is once per year in December. Ms. Duke advised that Cllr. Benson was correct. Cllr. Benson had a concern that as this was the case, anything that comes on stream since funding had been applied for won't be applied for until next year's application. Cllr. Benson noted that she believed the Government's void funding programme was due to finish in 2021 and recognized that funding in the area is an issue. Cllr. Benson asked is there any way to frontload these voids as we need to get a handle on it and would LCCC be in a position to get a loan from the HFA , front load the voids and then reimbursed from the Department. Cllr. Benson also stressed the urgency of getting this 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. Ms. Duke advised that it depends on level of work and the timeframe of how long the properties are vacant. 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. In reply to Cllr. Benson, Mr. Quaid advised that we start the housing programme refurb from Cat 1 and 2 straight away and they do not wait for grant allocation from the Dept. and try to refurb as many houses from our own resources. Mr. Quaid noted that last week just after voids application went in, six houses came back in a single week and he went on to say that the tenancy sustainment unit is working with Ops and Maintenance which will reduce down cost. Mr. Quaid also advised that the Department have released the application earlier this year.
- Cllr. Catherine Slattery asked is there a delay with refurbishing properties that have already been allocated as there is a case which Cllr. Slattery is aware of where a woman was allocated a house and it is lying idle twelve months later and Cllr. Slattery sought clarification on this. Ms. Duke advised that much of the time the delay comes down to funding and cost of refurbishment attached to the house, if a significant cost this leads to delay with funding. 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. Cllr. Teefy stated that some of those voids go back to 2018 and she enquired about the delay due to urgency in area. 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. Ms. Duke went on to advise that that team will be built to deal with 40 – 50 of those Cat 3 and 4 houses per annum and currently we would be dealing with a lot more than that. Cllr. Teefy asked is it funding that is delaying the historical voids as some of those were purchases by LCCC. Ms. Duke advised it can be funding as sometimes funding is given at a lesser amount which puts pressure on internal resources and that there is a mix of factors at play here. Ms. Duke noted that we got through 146 properties last year and noted the importance of having a team in place which we are trying to set up currently.

- 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 and believed that LCCC are taking them over, he asked could that be confirmed. Ms. Sarah Newell noted that we had not received an EOI to take over any estate in Patrickswell but advised that it could be with Gordon Daly's team and she could find out. Mr. O'Grady stated that it has been vacant for fifteen years and confirmed it was the estate at the entrance to Lisheen Park. 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 as he is aware that Minister Darragh O'Brien looked for councils to acquire houses as the Government would not meet their social housing targets last year and Cllr. Sheehan asked how many of those acquisitions were voids. Cllr. Sheehan noted that the amount of voids funding drawn down by Local Authorities in the years 2016, 2017 and 2018 was low and believed this is why there are so many vacant properties. 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. Ms. Duke advised that we had introduced the SPOC in 2020 – they were a number of individuals as part of a team, a few have moved on due to secondments and promotions. Currently one staff member and inspector remain in place and Ms. Duke noted the part that is being kept is the process for categorising properties and is an efficient system in terms of monitoring and reporting. Ms. Duke noted that one of the lessons learned from last year is that while we had a large throughput of houses, we tended to put a lot of houses through the voids system where the balance of funding predominantly sat with LCCC which meant a large amount of Council resources were used. Ms. Duke then noted that what we do now is we apply for voids funding under the Cat 1 and 2 houses and going forward the plan is to seek 100% funding for Cat 3 and 4 houses – we are in a transition to that system. Ms. Duke advised that Mr. Quaid had applied for 58 houses for voids funding for this year and where the Dept. come back to us and they have had a lower uptake nationally, more funding may be available and if they do that, Cathal would have a list ready to go. Ms. Duke noted that we have been given targets for the year for Buy, Build and Lease and the targets for 2021 are Build 441, Buy 10, and Lease 87. Ms. Duke advised that the Build programme is costing so much that the extra money is not available to support an Acquisition programme but we had been told there may be a window of opportunity to acquire more than 10 properties due to Covid restrictions but in reality we would only have up to the end of May or start of June to acquire properties to have sales closed before year end. Ms. Newell noted that there were 25 acquisitions in 2020 but reiterated the long process of acquisitions. Ms. Duke advised that she will update SPC members on voids at every meeting due to the urgency of issue.
- Cllr. Mike Donegan supported Cllr. Benson's idea of borrowing money for the long term voids to help bring them back into stock. Cllr. Donegan noted that one of the voids in the Cappamore-Kilmallock district had been vacant so long it now has a dereliction notice put on it. Cllr. Donegan asked for update on Cluid Housing built in Bruree and any expected allocations.
- 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 stated that he felt like we were losing the battle with these vacant properties. Cllr. Leddin noted the amount of boarded up properties around the city and county and expressed his concern about the situation as there is a homeless crisis and there is a need to house people. Cllr. Leddin advised that we need to have a fundamental re-look at this situation and noted that he had suggested the category system previously to help with quick turnaround of vacant properties. 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.

Ms. O'Connor noted that there was a briefing given to Metropolitan Councillors last week on Rapid Infills in Moyross and Southill.

The project is being delivered in Moyross and Southill for 38 units in total by Peter McVerry Trust.

The project is being run by PMVT in partnership with LCCC with funding from the Department of Housing under the Regeneration programme.

Ms. O'Connor outlined that there will be 20 units in Delmege Park, 4 units in Hartigan Villas and 14 units in Southill. The project was approved in February 2021 and Ms. O'Connor advised that Level 5 restrictions have to lift in order for works to start.

Ms. O'Connor advised the units are modular, fabricated houses which will be built on site in the Galvone Industrial Estate. Ms. O'Connor noted that the properties will also improve connectivity within the areas and jobs will generated from the building of units.

Ms. O'Connor outlined the unit mix for Delmege Park to be a 2 bed and 3 bed mix – Moyross Avenue will extend on to Coonagh-Knockalisheen Road. The Hartigan Villas infills will be at either side of existing bungalows.

Ms. O'Connor noted that meetings had been held with residents in Moyross and Southill recently and advised that any issues had been discussed with residents and relayed to team.

Ms. O'Connor outlined Southill units – 14 units – and mix is 2 bed and 3 bed units.

Ms. O'Connor advised that Delmege works will start next week, Hartigan Villas will start end of June and Southill units to start being constructed at the end of June – it will be a phased process with the completion due to be December 2021.

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

- Ms. Tracy McElligott advised that they welcomed the new homes and the issues around gable ends had been sorted with residents and LCCC. Ms. McElligott noted that the Moyross Resident's Association just wanted PMVT and LCCC to be mindful around allocations from HWL. Ms. McElligott advised that there is potential for overcrowding further down the line if there are predominantly 2 beds being built as families with two children of different genders cannot share the same bedroom after ten years of age and noted it as a concern for possible



future need to re-allocate to a larger house. She noted going forward there would be more of a need for 3-bedroom units.

- 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. Ms. O'Connor advised that in terms of allocations we would be working closely with allocations team and took on board concerns. Ms. O'Connor advised that in relation to unit houses, the Housing Strategy is currently being reviewed and being finalised to make sure housing mix is appropriate for each area and she also noted that LCCC were conscious of overcrowding. Ms. O'Connor advised the units are timber framed. 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 noted the importance of having an inspector from LCCC inspecting houses being constructed on our behalf. 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 and he advised that the unions have brought this up during partnership meetings to have an officer appointed to oversee compliance with sectoral employment orders and all employment related issues. Mr. McNamara noted that it is a self-declaration system at the moment for contractors to say that they are in compliance with legislation and he advised that he had a question submitted through the partnership meetings that asks LCCC solicitors a number of questions which relate to LCCC and being tied in under the Civil Liability Act as there are issues with contractors not having the proper entitlements in place for their employees. 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. Ms. Duke also advised that LCCC have a Building Inspector who has been nominated to assist with this for the Rapid Infills project and that PMVT also have technical inspectors. Mr. McNamara sought clarification around the project's partnership. Ms. Duke advised that formally it is a PMVT project but LCCC are working tandem with them to ensure project is delivered. Mr. McNamara noted that the he had asked could the Building Officer's role be extended to look after employment issues and he had been advised that this was a no as the role was only intended for Social Inclusion issues.
- 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. Ryan noted that his experience is similar to Mr. McNamara's when it comes to the modular 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. Cllr. Keary also noted that the building of 3 beds is something that needs to be seriously considered going forward and asked what is the difference in cost between building a 2 bed property and a 3 bed property particularly with the modular housing. Ms. O'Connor noted that she would revert to Cllr. Keary with the cost. 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. O'Connor expressed confidence with quality of the

infills units and the contractors. 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. Duke also noted the importance of an accurate 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. Ms. McElligott noted it would be prudent to have a presentation by Clenn Construction through the SPC on the modular houses. Ms. Duke advised that this could be arranged. Ms. O'Connor referred to previous point and advised the lifespan of these houses are a minimum of 60 years.
- 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. Cllr. Ruddle noted that this is from his experience. 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. Mr. Lowth noted as it stands a couple with one child or a single parent with one child would have a typical allocation of a 2 bed house and the Local Government auditor can pull samples from iHouse annually to ensure we are abiding by the regulations. Cllr. Ruddle noted that this would make it impossible for smaller family units to get approved for 3 bed properties. 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

Response for CPG: the employment of a compliance officer has several implications. The proposal will be sent via HR to the LMGA for review.

**Item 5: Area of Choice Presentation – Rob Lowth**

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

Mr. Lowth noted that the old system for the Metropolitan area was very much based on the traditional Local Authority estates which meant it was very limited. He noted that people would make selections on areas that they may not have wanted to go to or they felt they were the only areas that they knew.

Mr. Lowth advised that it was felt it was better to broaden out the Metro district areas and it is much more expansive and reflects the expectations and demands on the people looking for housing. Mr. Lowth advised documentation will be circulated.

Mr. Lowth went on to note that the likes of the Condell Road with the 150 planned new units would not have been on the old form and this is a welcome addition. Mr. Lowth advised that the traditional Local Authority estates are more grouped now and it is more logical especially with the new housing schemes being delivered.

Mr. Lowth advised that for the Municipal Districts, the area of choice has been doubled and there is a much wider choice for people.

Mr. Lowth advised that these area of choices will be part of the new housing application and part of the SSHA that will be completed during summer 2021.

Mr. Lowth noted that similar to earlier conversation regarding bedroom mix in houses, the area of choice is driven also by demand and it's a strategic way of improving the data LCCC have. Mr. Lowth advised if data is not accurate at the application stage, then it is very hard to then inform policy around that. Mr. Lowth also reiterated the point that Ms. Duke made about the huge demand for 1 bed properties.

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. Mr. Lowth advised that if there is demand for those areas then we can use this to inform the future. Cllr. Keary stressed that they are very rural places in the new area of choice form and the sewerage system is inadequate. Mr. Lowth noted that this is reflected in the Census information for Irish Water.
- Cllr. Costelloe asked does the 12 month rule still apply 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 location.

#### **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.

Ms. Newell advised that Ms. Creed is managing scheme and noted it was a pilot scheme that LCCC are undertaking on two turnkeys in Pallaskenry and one in Redgate, Cratloe Road.

Ms. Newell outlined the scheme is an initiative by central government that allows a new build purchase option to assist households with lower incomes. The house would be sold at a discounted price but it only applies to new builds and excludes apartments. Ms. Newell noted that the applicant is required to have mortgage approval in principle secured at time of application to the Council under an EOI – to be rolled out shortly.

Ms. Newell outlined that there are three different bands of household incomes, the discount applicable on a charge period.

Ms. Newell advised on the sites – Redgate, Cratloe Road is a turnkey project directly with LCCC and planning permission is for 40 units.

Ms. Newell proposed that 50% of those units are piloted under this scheme.

Ms. Newell outlined that the units are 3 bed houses and in a well located neighbourhood. The discount applicable can range from anywhere from a household looking for a mortgage of €150,000.00 up to €173,000.00.

Ms. Newell advised on the second site which is a 16 unit construction in Pallaskenry and again bands will apply relative to be all in construction costs which is set down in legislation. Ms. Newell noted that the applicable mortgage based on income bands could be anywhere from €94,000.00 up to €142,000.00.

Ms. Newell went on to outline programme and advised that the process is to notify SPC members and to have a workshop on the detail of EOI with all Councillors. Ms. Newell noted that they hope to launch scheme in mid-May and hoped for closing date at end of July, with assessment period starting in August with successful applicants will proceed to contract to purchase house.

Ms. Creed outlined application form process as part of the EOI.

Ms. Creed advised that Housing Support Services would be responsible for the administration of the scheme and that the scheme would be advertised in local press and before the application form is submitted, they would encourage pre-application enquiries.

Ms. Creed advised that there are four stages of the application process.

Determine household eligible income and confirmation of purchase funding or evidence of finance.

Ms. Creed advised that there are two types of households that could be considered for inclusion in this scheme – 1. Households that have been assessed by LCCC as being eligible for or being in need of social housing support and 2. Households who are already in receipt of social housing support. Ms. Creed advised that all of the above must satisfy a household means policy to determine income, eligibility and affordability.

Ms. Creed outlined that in relation to income the household must have a gross annual income of not less than €15,000.00 in order to be eligible for consideration to purchase under the scheme and only the income of the applicant/s would be assessed.

Ms. Creed also noted other checks to determine eligibility, anyone who is living in a household should not be engaged in anti-social behaviour and this will be checked, the applicant/s must not be in rent arrears for more than twelve weeks in the past three years and if this is the case, a payment

arrangement must have been made with LCCC. Ms. Creed noted that the applicant/s also must not have purchased a previous dwelling from LCCC.

Ms. Creed advised that the applicant/s would have to pay purchase price in full at the time that the house purchase is completed and Ms. Creed noted that they would be looking into how this money is being made available (savings, mortgage loan etc...) and applicants must meet requirements in relation to how they are going to pay for the property.

Ms. Creed advised once this is determined the applicant/s would be issued a letter of offer and the applicant/s have a period of time to accept the offer. If the applicant/s is made an offer they can arrange to view property and then the legal process follows.

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.

Ms. Newell noted that the full Council meeting took place in November 2019 where the draft scheme of priority for affordable dwelling purchase arrangements was adopted.

Ms. Newell made the distinction from item 6 and outlined that this is in place for affordable dwellings for incomes between €55,000.00 up to €75,000.00. Ms. Newell advised that the order of priority is based on key criteria: Eligible households being suited to a dwelling, living in the area and being within a certain kilometer distance of education and work.

Ms. Newell advised that for the purpose of today's meeting is the suited to a dwelling criteria and outlined that this was brought up from SPC members and Councillors, that the current adopted scheme may be inflexible for future affordable dwellings and future affordable self-build projects.

Ms. Newell outlined that the current criteria does not allow for flexibility in a household and the proposed revision is to make it more flexible, for a one bedroom dwelling that becomes available on an EOI is open to one or more persons, a three bedroom dwelling would be open to two or more persons for example.

Ms. Newell sought endorsement from SPC members to allow Housing to go to the full Council in May with an amended scheme of priority which incorporates revisions for affordable dwellings.

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 had been contacted by residents who had these installed in October to say that their bills from then until January were extremely high and at installation were informed to keep settings the same as installation day and not to change them. 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.

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.