

16th June 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 16th June 2021.**

A Chomhairleoir, a chara,

Summary Report/Main Issues

The Chair opened the meeting and welcomed all SPC members to the virtual meeting of the SPC.

The Chair thanked everyone who contributed to the Housing Workshop which was held on the 11th June 2021.

The Chair congratulated Ms. Aoife Duke on her new appointment to Head of HR in the University of Limerick and thanked her for work. The SPC members gave their thanks to Ms. Duke on all of her work over the years and conveyed their best wishes to her for the future.

Item 1: Confirm minutes from meeting held from 21st April 2021

Proposed: Cllr. Joe Leddin

Seconded: Cllr. Sarah Kiely

Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes:

No matters arising from previous minutes.

Item 3: Repair and Lease Presentation (RLS) – Ms. Jennifer Ahern

Ms. Ahern gave a presentation to the members of the SPC on the Repair and Lease Scheme.

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

- Cllr. Tom Ruddle expressed his support that the RLS had gone from €40,000.00 to €60,000.00 in a zero interest refurbishment loan. Cllr. Ruddle asked how long do owners have to pay back the loan and how long do the owners have to lease the property to LCCC. Cllr. Ruddle also queried whether there would be interest in derelicts in rural areas under RLS. Ms. Ahern advised under the RLS owners can lease property to Council for a period of between 5 and 25 years. Ms. Ahern also noted that there should be a re-advertisement of the scheme over the next few months. The properties that are brought to Housing are assessed by the Allocations team to verify demand for that property in the area. Ms. Ahern advised that there has not been many applications for units in rural villages and some of the applications for these units had not been progressed as there was no demand for the area as verified by Allocations.
- Ms. Una Burns asked were the 23 units delivered over the last 5 years and Ms. Ahern confirmed this and noted that the first unit was delivered in 2017. Ms. Burns asked how Limerick compares to other cities with the delivery of the RLS. Ms. Ahern advised that we are one of the highest counties for delivery under the scheme outside of Carlow and Waterford, the pilot counties for the scheme.
- Ms. Dee Ryan asked about the advertisement of the scheme compared to other schemes relating to vacant sites and CPOs. Ms. Ahern advised that vacant sites and CPOs are dealt with by another section (Community Development Directorate) but the Housing Development Directorate liaise with them regarding advertisements. Ms. Ryan asked how does the Vacant Site Levy relate to RLS in terms of planning. Ms. Ahern advised that as the scheme only relates to vacant units being refurbished and not sites.
- Cllr. Brigid Teefy noted that the increase in RLS funding is very welcome. Cllr. Teefy noted the huge amount of vacant houses in the City and County. Cllr. Teefy asked is there a special interest on loan and Ms. Ahern advised that it is a zero interest loan. Cllr. Teefy also queried if there is a certain type of dwelling that would be taken on, Ms. Ahern advised that LCCC will review any vacant residential property. Cllr. Teefy asked does the property go back to the owner at the end of the lease. Ms. Ahern advised it depends on the length of lease. Cllr. Teefy asked could the house be in any place and Ms. Ahern advised it depends on the demand in a particular area.
- Cllr. Stephen Keary noted that the rollout of scheme was not fast enough and he is glad the funding has increased but noted it should be higher to get a more substantial refurbishment. Cllr. Keary asked what type of BER would the building have to be. Cllr. Keary asked are the LCCC tenants who are allocated a RLS unit Garda vetted. Ms. Ahern acknowledged that the RLS funding is still too low and it has been brought to the Department's attention and it is being reviewed. Ms. Ahern advised LCCC would look for a B minimum BER rating under the RLS. Mr. Rob Lowth and Ms. Ahern advised the tenants are vetted the same as all LA tenants.
- Cllr. Eddie Ryan asked is there a limit in the total budget available to LCCC and is there a time limit on the scheme. Ms. Ahern advised there is no limit on funding available to LCCC and it is running as part of the Government's 'Housing For All' programme which has a remit to 2025.
- Cllr. John Costelloe queried if the property owner is deceased is the Council protected and Ms. Ahern advised him that LCCC are protected and the tenant is protected for the duration of the lease period if the owner is deceased.
- Ms. Burns asked can a commercial unit be used for the scheme and Ms. Ahern advised yes, the owner can look for a planning exemption from commercial to residential if vacant for at least 2 years. A site could not be used for the scheme, an existing unit must be there.

Item 4: Energy Efficiency Update – David Leahy

Mr. Leahy gave a presentation to the members of the SPC regarding an update on the Energy Efficiency programme.

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

- Cllr. Keary asked what the cost was per unit last year versus this year. Cllr. Keary asked does this project include provisions for replacing defective windows and doors and queried the high cost for consultants. Keary suggested that the work could have been done in-house by LCCC. Mr. Leahy noted that the cost per house last year was €40,000.00 - €45,000.00 which included Dept. funding and internal LCCC match funding. Mr. Leahy advised that windows and doors would be replaced. Mr. Leahy advised that when there are a lot of specialist skills involved when it comes to the design of heating systems and decisions around that and that there is a huge safety element involved and noted the sheer scale of the project. Mr. Leahy then noted the consultant is also the contractor who is fully involved in the project and that there is no conflict of interest.. Mr. Leahy noted that there is a requirement in the Dept. circular that the LA must engage with an obligated party and the obligated party is the consultant.
- Ms. McElligott queried the 8 units listed on the presentation for Metro North and asked, do they include the Thermal Upgrades in Regeneration areas. Mr. Leahy advised that they are separate programmes, and the 8 units are for the Energy Efficiency project only. Ms. McElligott asked will those homes be issued with a new BER cert when the works are completed, Mr. Leahy confirmed that they would be issued with a new cert. Ms. McElligott noted from her experience with the Thermal Upgrade programme that some of the residents would be unsure of the new installed systems even after two years as they are technical, and their costs have increased significantly. Mr. Leahy noted that a learning from last year's Energy Efficiency project was that there needs to be better tenant engagement due to the technical systems and proper, accurate engagement is a key focus on project this year.
- Cllr. Sharon Benson agreed with Ms. McElligott's point regarding tenant engagement and thanked LCCC staff for working with tenants through those issues.
- Cllr. Ruddle noted that some constituents in Newcastle West have advised that their bills have been high with the heat pump system, but he recognised this could be a budgeting issue and advice to tenants would be welcomed.
- Cllr. John Costelloe agreed with Cllr. Benson's and Ms. McElligott's points around the heating systems in Regeneration areas. Cllr. Costelloe noted that there are many houses in Ballynanty that are still very cold.
- Ms. Ryan asked is it possible for people who are availing of funding for Repair and Lease to avail of the grants. Mr. Rob Lowth noted that the R&L scheme is for private owners and the Energy Efficiency programme is for LA tenants.
- Cllr. Conor Sheehan advised that there needs to be a concerted effort around educating tenants on how to use these systems and suggested that they should be put in the tenant handbook. Cllr. Sheehan raised a concern around some Thermal Upgrades in Ballynanty and noted that there should have been a better line up between the Thermal Upgrade project and the Operation and Maintenance section of LCCC as some of houses who had received thermal upgrades still need a lot of other work done.
- Mr. PJ O'Grady queried what happens with Semi-Detached houses where one house is upgraded and the other one has not been upgraded and the downpipe is in the other house. Mr. Leahy

noted the importance of this issue being addressed and he advised that in situations like this this year, the gutters could be extended across the private house as well, all the way down to the downpipe and the problem would be eliminated totally.

Item 5 – Air to Water Pump Report

Mr. Leahy gave a presentation on the Air to Water Pump system, and he outlined how the Air to Water Pump system worked.

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

- Cllr. Brigid Teefy asked how many units were selected for Cappamore-Killmallock and how were they selected. Cllr. Teefy asked Mr. Leahy to attend a Municipal District meeting and present on the project. Cllr. Teefy noted the issues for tenants around using the system but was glad that Mr. Leahy and LCCC had recognised those issues and are committed to working with the tenants to rectify them.
- Cllr. Benson asked had LCCC gone back to those houses where there had been a report of high bills or would he consider doing a survey for all the houses that have had the system fitted to evaluate the overall system. Mr. Leahy advised that LCCC are looking at installing meters in those houses to record electricity usage and investigations were conducted on houses that had reported high bills. Mr. Leahy advised every unit has a black box that records usage of electricity and the information had been downloaded and analysed by the specialist contractors and that follow on support would continue.

Item 6 - HAP Review

Mr. Lowth gave a presentation to SPC members on the current HAP process versus the implications of Garda Vetting at HAP stage on HAP applications. Mr. Lowth noted the extensive discussions around this at previous SPCs and he also noted that it had gone to full Council and ended back at SPC level.

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

- Cllr. Ruddle queried how other LAs work with HAP applications. Mr. Lowth advised that other LAs would operate similar to LCCC and not Garda Vet potential HAP tenants.
- Cllr. Keary expressed his concern that LCCC would not Garda Vet the potential HAP tenant the same way LCCC vets LA and RAS tenants. Cllr. Keary expressed his desire for an overall HAP review and Mr. Lowth agreed with Cllr. Keary's point.
- Cllr. Slattery shared her experience of an individual who had a HAP tenant that left the property in a poor state, leaving the individual to spend a significant amount of money refurbishing the property and Cllr. Slattery asked, would there be anything available for people in that situation. Mr. Lowth advised not from a HAP perspective and it would come down to landlord/tenant management and regular visits from landlord to property. Cllr. Slattery asked is there scope for the landlord to call LCCC in a case such as this and report it. Mr. Lowth noted that it would be

important for evidence to be provided by the landlord in a case such as this and costings etc. Cllr. Slattery noted she would follow up with individual to ensure a complaint is lodged with LCCC.

- Mr. McNamara noted as HAP is a shared service nationally, that dealing with the noted issues would need to be looked at nationally. Mr. McNamara queried if there would be any evidence of tenancies being registered with the Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) before payment starts to be made. Mr. McNamara felt that this would help with a lot of the anti-social issues and then enforcement could be conducted through those channels. Mr. Lowth advised yes LCCC would have to have the evidence that the property is registered with the RTB.
- Ms. Cronin commented that HAP is a social welfare support and noted that it is the only recourse that many people would have and there are many good examples of how it has worked well for people that are on the HWL and while it is not ideal, it is something that bridges the gap in the meantime
- Cllr. Kiely asked if a tenant is allocated a LA property, how much notice do they give to the landlord as landlords had approached her regarding this issue. Cllr. Kiely noted an issue with long standing RAS/HAP agreements where the property was left in very poor condition when the tenants moved on to the allocated LA property. Cllr. Kiely would like LCCC to check with landlords for references. Mr. Lowth advised that we are not legislated to check references as a LA and he would need to look into it from a legal basis as it's a very good suggestion.
- Cllr. Sheehan advised that in his experience he would be inclined to be cautious about anything that would lengthen the approval of a property on HAP and put people at risk.
- Cllr. Ruddle noted that if LCCC took more responsibility for tenants that more people would be inclined to rent their properties out for HAP tenants and gave an account of his experience.

An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Michael Murphy asked for proposer to allow the meeting to run over the two hours agreed time within the Standing Order in order for the remaining agenda to be discussed as next SPC would not be until October 2021.

Proposed: Cllr. Eddie Ryan

Item 7 – General Update

a) Demolition Update (Ballinacurra Weston and Southill)

Mr. Declan White update to SPC members on Regeneration demolitions.

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

- Cllr. Leddin asked for an update on proposed street linking off Byrne Avenue to Lenihan Ave. Mr. White noted that the street is to be delivered as part of the future masterplan and infill housing. Cllr. Leddin asked is there a future schedule of demolitions planned for Byrne Avenue and Lenihan Avenue and the general Ballinacurra Weston area and Cllr. Leddin asked for that to be sent to SPC members.
- Ms. McElligott asked for e-mail on Thermal Upgrades for Regeneration areas as no update was given at SPC.

- Cllr. Keary asked how many houses are being demolished under this project and what is the aim and is there Part 8 planning for demolitions. Mr. White outlined in Southill approximately 79 houses left to be demolished, approx. 13 in Ballinacurra Weston. Mr. White noted that LCCC are under the threshold for demolition.. Cllr. Keary queried the Part 8 exemption for demolition. Ms. Newell advised there is an exemption under the Part 8 regulations if it is under €126,000.00 capital value of works.

a) Orchard Site Update

Mr. Billy Lynch gave an update on the Orchard Site to SPC members.

a) Service Sites Fund Update

Mr. Mick Forde Bradley gave an update on the Service Sites Fund to SPC members.

Mr. Forde Bradley advised that the presentation would be brief, as a Housing Workshop on the Service Sites would be given to members in July.

a) Revision to Household Means Policy Circular Information

Mr. Lowth gave update to SPC members on the Revision to Household Means Policy Circular.

Mr. Lowth advised a Workshop for all Councillors and SPC members on the revision as it is quite detailed.

a) Recommendations from Council meetings

Ms. Duke confirmed that the approval for the Amended Scheme of Priorities which incorporates the revision for Affordable Dwellings has gone through full Council.

Item 8 - AOB

- Cllr. Keary asked about the programme for completion of units in Clonmacken and what is the cost overrun on it. Ms. Duke advised that an update would be given at the next SPC in October. Cllr. Keary noted that he would consider submitting a question on this for the next full Council meeting in order to get an update.
- Ms. McElligott queried the re-zoning of the land along the Coonagh-Knockalisheen Road that had previously been zoned for economic development. Ms. McElligott noted that there had been a concern in the community around how much land had been rezoned for private developers and how much land is left for residential and economic development. Ms. Cronin

advised that the linkage group had submitted a question on behalf of the PPN and noted that there is a lot of concern around the issue that Ms. McElligott raised. An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Michael Murphy, noted that there had been no decisions taken on re-zoning and anything submitted are just suggestions for the Development Plan. An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Michael Murphy, advised that members of the public are welcome to put in submissions against this if they so wished and noted that this is not the correct forum for it

- Mr. O'Grady asked for an update on the unfinished estate in Patrickswell and noted he was promised a response at the last SPC meeting. Ms. Duke apologised and advised they would follow up with an update on this over the next couple of days.

The Chair wished Ms. Aoife Duke a fond farewell and thanked her for all her help over the years. The Chair thanked everyone for logging in, for their presentations and everyone's valuable contributions.

END OF MEETING

Is mise le meas,

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