

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT SPECIAL MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DOORADOYLE, LIMERICK, AND ONLINE, ON TUESDAY, 2ND NOVEMBER, 2021, AT 2PM

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Councillor D. Butler, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors Benson, Collins (B), Collins (J), Collins (M), Costelloe, Daly, Donegan, Foley, Galvin, Hartigan, Keary, Kiely, Kilcoyne, Leddin, McSweeney, Mitchell, Murphy, Novak Uí Chonchúir, O'Brien, O'Donoghue, O'Hanlon, O'Sullivan, Ruddle, Ryan (E), Ryan, (M), Scanlan, Secas, Sheahan (J), Sheahan (K), Sheahan (M), Sheehan (C), Slattery, Teefy.

An apology for her inability to attend the Meeting was received from Councillor O'Donovan.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive (Mr. P. Daly), Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Support Services (Mr. S. Coughlan), Director, Housing (Ms. C. Curley), Director, Community, Tourism and Culture (Mr. G. Daly), Director, Regeneration (Mr. J. Delaney), Director, Planning, Environment and Place-Making (Ms. N. Gallagher), A/Director, Economic Development and Enterprise (Mr. V. Murray), Meetings Administrator (Ms. L. Flannery), Administrative Officers, Corporate Services and Governance (Ms. F. McCormack and Mr. M. Leahy), Senior Executive Officer, Strategy and Non-Local Authority Housing Construction (Ms. S. Newell).

An apology for his inability to attend the Meeting was received from the Director, National and Regional Shared Services Centre.

The Mayor stated that he had called the Special Meeting to discuss Affordable Housing in the context of 'Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland,' the Government's Housing Plan to 2030. He confirmed that he called the Meeting following a presentation made to Members on 'Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland' at a recent Meeting of the Municipal District of Newcastlewest, and that the sole purpose of the meeting was to discuss the issue of Affordable Housing.

1. Affordable Housing

The Senior Executive Officer, Strategy and Non-Local Authority Housing Construction confirmed that the Government had set a target of 300,000 homes to be delivered over the next decade for social, affordable and cost rental, private rental and private ownership housing, supported by over €4 billion in funding annually.

She then gave a PowerPoint presentation to the Members summarising the Affordable Purchase arrangements that were available under ‘Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland’.

Included in this was the provision of 54,000 affordable homes (36,000 affordable purchase and 18,000 cost-rental) between now and 2030 to be facilitated by local authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, the Land Development Agency and through a strategic partnership between the State and retail banks. As part of this, local authorities were required to determine any affordability constraint in their area based on the Housing Need and Demand Assessment, and plan provision accordingly.

With regard to Affordable Housing, she confirmed that there were two schemes in ‘Housing for All– A New Housing Plan for Ireland’, namely the Affordable Homes Fund which was available now; along with the First Home Scheme but that further details were awaited from the Dept. of Housing, Local Government & Heritage regarding this scheme.

With both Affordable Housing schemes, she confirmed that the core principles included a fully repayable Equity Stake; an allowance for the gap between the market value and what household can afford. She explained that schemes were for First Time Buyers, that eligibility would be based on the maximum loan under Central Bank Rules (3.5 times salary plus 10% deposit); and Local Authority Home Loan and Help to Buy was available. She also outlined the particular conditions relating to the Affordable Homes Fund and the First Home Scheme.

In order to qualify for consideration under these two Affordable Housing schemes, she referred to correspondence received from the Dept. of Housing, Local Government & Heritage on the 26th October 2021 stating that the following seven criteria must be satisfied in order to be eligible for funding under the Affordable Housing Scheme and that it was a competitive bid process:

1. Proposals located within the CSO settlement boundaries of the five cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford) will be eligible for Affordable Housing Funding. Proposals located outside the five cities must be located within local authority areas with a minimum average 5% Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) Affordability Constraint for new housing demand over the period 2021 to 2026, calculated for the entire local authority area.
2. Proposals must include a minimum of 10 dwellings.
3. Location of any proposal must be within an urban settlement area as defined by the CSO as a settlement of more than 1,500 people based on 2016 census data. Proposals for funding exceeding €50,000 must be located in a strategically important city or town with a population of over 10,000, or identified as a key town in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs).
4. Proposals must meet the net residential densities specified for the relevant site type, location and place typology in accordance with Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas, issued as statutory Guidelines for Planning Authorities in 2009.

5. Unit cost ceilings apply to proposals for affordable homes with a €375,000 cap per unit in schemes with density of less than 35 units per hectare; €400,000 cap per unit in schemes with density 35-50 units per hectare; and €450,000 cap per unit in schemes with density 50 units or more per hectare.
6. Minimum 15% discount on open market values of comparable new build properties for affordable.
7. Proposals which contain more than 100 affordable dwellings, must include: a) A minimum of 5% of the dwellings must be reserved for older people or b) A minimum of 5% of the dwellings are reserved for people with disabilities or c) A minimum of 5% of the dwellings are reserved for members of minority groups such as the traveller community or a combination of the above cohorts. For proposals of more than 100 dwellings to be developed on local authority land, the following minimum inclusion requirements will also apply d) a minimum of 5% of the dwellings meet universal design requirements.

The Members thanked the Mayor for calling the Special Meeting to discuss Affordable Housing. They also thanked the Senior Executive Officer, Strategy and Non-Local Authority Housing Construction for the PowerPoint presentation, but agreed that with all the guidelines and criteria outlined, that it was hard to be fully clear on all aspects of what was being proposed in relation to affordable housing under the ‘Housing for All– A New Housing Plan for Ireland’

The Members expressed their disappointment at the details outlined in relation to the scheme and stated that this would more than likely result in affordable housing not being made available to people in most of rural Co. Limerick, based on the various criteria and conditions that were outlined. They noted the requirement of a minimum average 5% Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) Affordability Constraint for new housing demand, and that the PowerPoint presentation had outlined a current Housing Department HNDA analysis for Limerick of 3.68%, so Limerick City and County Council would fail these criteria

They agreed that this scheme would result in people moving away from rural areas toward urban centres, resulting in a further depopulation and decline in rural areas. They also agreed that the proposed Affordable Housing Scheme would not serve those in rural areas who were working and trying to provide affordable housing for themselves, and agreed that the scheme was not Housing for All, rather Housing for All in urban but not rural areas.

The Members asked if the scheme assumptions were based on the 2016 Census and, if so, should it take account of figures that will be contained in the proposed 2022 Census instead. They queried why a Scottish model was used for the requirement for the Housing Need and Demand Assessment (HNDA) Affordability Constraint for new housing demand. They agreed that no definition of affordability had been provided in the plan and that the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage should be asked to provide a definition of it. The Members also wanted clarification as to how the Metropolitan area of Limerick is defined and

was it based on the Metropolitan District of Limerick electoral boundary. They also queried as to whether there was a provision for separated people in the plan.

The Members agreed that housing provision was an urgent priority for all the Elected Members across both the city and county. They noted the high number of qualified applicants on the Housing Waiting List and that, overall, there was a huge demand across both the city and county for housing provision in all categories, not just affordable housing.

They agreed that the local authority needed to set out a plan of action to address this issue. They referred to ongoing contacts and correspondence from people regarding housing issues and the fact that most people wanted to reside in their own areas, close to existing family members and friends, etc. They also referred to the delays getting schemes delivered, increased building costs and whether builders had the capacity available to deliver on increased housing provision at the current time. A query was also raised as to whether the period for preparing the County Development Plan should be extended until the data from the Census 2022 was available

The Director, Housing Directorate confirmed that the statistics used for calculations were based on figures contained in the National Development Plan, rather than the Census returns. As this was a national scheme, she was not aware of the rationale used in selecting the Scottish model for the calculation assessment. She confirmed that CSO maps would be circulated showing city zoning areas.

The Director, Housing Directorate also confirmed that her Directorate was currently preparing a Housing Delivery Action Plan for Limerick City and County Council which had to be completed and submitted to the Department by the 17th December, 2021. She confirmed that this plan would be brought to the Full Monthly Meeting of the Council in November 2021, but was unsure as to whether it would also be presented at the various District Meetings due to the very tight timescale involved.

She confirmed that this plan would address all aspects of housing provision in both the City & County and would be based on realistic, achievable targets across all locations and areas having regard to the availability of required infrastructure services. She confirmed that the plan would provide clarity on specific numbers and targets for Limerick City & County.

The A/Director, Economic Development & Enterprise referred to the query regarding a possible suspension of the County Development Plan. He confirmed that the Government had put a process in place to enable local authorities to extend their County Development Plan review period, should that be considered necessary as a result of disruption associated with Covid and where it may not be possible to meet statutory requirements within the 'normal' two-year development plan review period.

However, he confirmed that there is no provision for a local planning authority to immediately extend or suspend a Development Plan review process that is currently underway. It remains the case that there is generally a two year period within which to complete the process (with plan reviews that were under way during all or part of an 8-

week 'suspension' period from 29 March 2020 as a result of Covid, subject to up to a further 8 weeks).

An extension of a Development Plan review period may be considered by a planning authority, but must be subject to statutory environmental assessments, to address any environmental impacts of extending the current Development Plan for the intended period of extension, beyond the 'normal' two years. He confirmed that it is only when a planning authority can be satisfied that environmental assessments are not required or can be screened out, or are required and have been completed and any environmental impacts can be addressed/mitigated, that a final decision to extend the Development Plan period may be made.

The following resolution was adopted:

Proposed by Councillor C. Sheehan;
Seconded by Councillor Sheahan (J);
And Resolved:

"That Limerick City and County Council calls on the Minister for Housing, Local Government & Heritage to extend Affordable Housing to all of Limerick and that once-off housing be included; if someone has a legal separation in Limerick, can that be treated as a first time applicant; and would the Minister specify the definition of affordability"

This concluded the Meeting.

Signed: _____
Mayor

Date: _____