

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 20th October 2021** in the Council Chamber, Dooradoyle and by MS Teams.

In Attendance: An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Michael Murphy

SPC Members Present: Cllr. Sharon Benson,
Cllr. Sean Hartigan, Cllr. Stephen Keary, Cllr. Fergus Kilcoyne
Cllr. Joe Leddin, Cllr. John Costelloe, Mr. P.J O’Grady, Cllr. Mike Donegan, Cllr Eddie Ryan,
Ms. Una Byrnes, Ms. Anne Cronin, Mr. Patrick English

In Attendance: Ms. Caroline Curley, Director of Service, Housing
Mr. Rory Culhane, Clerical Officer, Housing
Ms. Jeannine Butler, Clerical Officer, Housing
Ms. Astrid Coughlan, Assistant Planner, Housing
Ms. Elaine O’Connor, Administrative Officer, Regeneration
Ms. Jennifer Ahern, Staff Officer, Housing
Ms. Sarah Newell, Senior Executive Planner, Housing
Ms. Jurate Andrijauskiene, A/Assistant Staff Officer, Housing
Mr. Rob Lowth, A/Senior Executive Officer, Housing
Mr. Conor Culloo, Senior Engineer, Housing
Mr. Eóin Lehane, Clerical Officer, Housing
Mr. Brendan Troy, Senior Executive Officer, Regeneration
Ms. Jennifer Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing
Ms. Miriam Donnelly, Administration Officer, Housing
Ms. Noelle Deedigan, Clerical Officer, Housing

Apologies: Cllr. Adam Teskey, Cllr. James Collins, Cllr. Catherine Slattery, Cllr. Brigid Teefy,
Cllr. Conor Sheehan, Ms. Dee Ryan, Mr. Mike McNamara, Ms. Tracy
McElligott, Cllr. Eddie Ryan, Cllr. Tom Ruddle

Welcome by Chairperson – Cllr. Michael Murphy

Cllr. Michael Murphy opened the meeting and welcomed all members to the October SPC meeting.

Cllr. Murphy congratulated Ms. Caroline Curley on becoming the new Director of Services for Housing.

Item 1: Confirm minutes from meeting held on 16th June 2021

Proposed: Cllr. Stephen Keary

Seconded: Cllr. Sarah Kiely

Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes

- Cllr. Sarah Kiely noted that as part of the discussion about HAP tenancies and allocations, Mr. Rob Lowth was to explore the possibility of looking for references for people who had been on the HWL for a long time and who had been allocated Local Authority housing. Cllr. Kiely also noted that Cllr. Catherine Slattery had raised an issue in the previous minutes about the appalling state of some properties and that the deposit given would not cover the cost of bringing the property back up to standard due to length of tenancy. Mr. Lowth noted that they have amended their inspection process, due to Covid-19 restrictions easing, they are getting to meet the individuals during the assessment process prior to their allocation of a LA property. Mr. Lowth also noted that in the first twelve months of an individual's or family's tenancy that there is HSS engagement with them which is proving to be successful.

Item 3: Introduction to new Housing Directorate

Ms. Caroline Curley introduced the new Housing Directorate and noted it now excludes Regeneration.

Ms. Curley introduced her senior team – Ms. Sarah Newell (Housing Strategy and Non-LA Housing), Mr. Rob Lowth (Housing Support Services) and Mr. Conor Culloo (Local Authority Construction and Maintenance)

Ms. Curley noted that the new structure would allow a more streamlined and efficient delivery of Housing.

Item 4: Housing For All Presentation

Ms. Sarah Newell gave a presentation on the recently published Housing For All document by the Department of Housing.

Ms. Newell noted that the government are committing to a spend of €4bn per year for the next ten years for the delivery of housing. Their target is 33,000 homes per year.

Ms. Newell elaborated on the Four Pathways:

1. **Supporting Home Ownership and Increasing Affordability –**
 - a. Affordable Housing Act signed into law and this contains the provisions for Cost Rental Homes for the first time, this means delivering affordable rental homes, which must be achieving 25% below the market rent. Ms. Newell noted that this is primarily focused on cities.

- b. The Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme – Ms. Newell noted the five city sites under the Service Sites Fund and the aim is to try to achieve at least 15% below the market value.
- c. Ms. Newell advised that Limerick City and County Council are awaiting detail on the 'First Home Scheme' but is due to hear Q1 of 2022.
- d. Ms. Newell noted a key change with the Part V scheme is that it has increased from 10% to a mandatory 20% for social housing.

2. Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion -

- a. Focused on eradicating Homelessness by 2030.
- b. Focus on looking at 1-bed and 2-bed units and Ms. Newell advised that LCCC have noted a severe lack of these units and it is affecting how Homelessness is tackled particularly in relation to single individuals.
- c. Ms. Newell noted that a Housing Delivery Action Plan needs to be submitted by end of year and there will be set targets for the use of vacant properties and Ms. Newell advised that we will be liaising with Gordon Daly's team in terms of CPOs and potential for Buy and Renews. Ms. Newell noted it will be brought to Councillors and sectoral representatives before the end of the year.
- d. Ms. Newell noted the phasing out of the Long Term Lease scheme which is an important point for Limerick City and County Council as the target for 2022 is set at zero. However, Repair and Lease will stay to tackle vacancy and dereliction.
- e. Ms. Newell advised that there are discussions to increase staffing for Housing as target for next five years has doubled.
- f. It was noted by Ms. Newell that as the delivery of social housing ramps up, there will be a gradual reduction of RAS and HAP.
- g. Ms. Newell shared the Housing delivery targets with members from 2022 – 2026 which totalled to 2693.

3. Increasing New Housing Supply -

- a. Ms. Newell noted the potential activation of land banks around Limerick Docks in conjunction with the LDA.
- b. Ms. Newell also advised that there is huge drive to bring in Vacant Property Tax.
- c. Ms. Newell shared summary of overall National targets under the plan until 2030.

4. Addressing Vacancy and Efficient Use of Existing Stock -

- a. Ms. Newell noted the importance of the 'Croí Cónaithe (Towns) Fund' for rural towns as it aims to refurbish existing houses and to look at affordable service sites.

Ms. Newell shared the Next Steps with SPC members.

A discussion took place and the main points were:

- Cllr. Kiely noted conflicting information on 'Project Tosaigh', at some meetings she was advised there was AHB intervention and Cllr. Kiely advised her preference would be the LDA as it would benefit the population of Limerick more. Ms. Kiely asked for feedback from other Councillors on this. Cllr. Kiely asked, do we have a replacement for the Long Term Lease scheme and what happens if someone is in the middle of delivering a Long Term Lease unit currently. Cllr. Kiely noted the staffing shortage in Housing and asked how many Housing officers are there in Assessments. Cllr. Kiely asked when is the Planned Maintenance approach to Local Authority housing due to begin and she would welcome a workshop and she also asked does that include Regeneration housing stock.
- Ms. Newell noted that under 'Project Tosaigh' it includes the Guinness Sites and this is currently in the Service Sites Fund and the DHLGH has asked whether Limerick City and County Council is going to stick with the SSF or go towards the Affordable Homes Fund. Ms. Newell advised that the difference between the two is that there is a cap on the subsidy under the current SSF of €50,000.00 and under the new Affordable Homes Fund it is €100,000.00. Ms. Newell noted the LDA is working to understand what type of partnership approach is available and we are working with them on this and will update Councillors and SPC members on this.
- Ms. Newell advised that Build is the only replacement to the Long Term Lease scheme.
- Mr. Lowth noted the staffing issue in assessments and flagged that it should be rectified by start of December. Cllr. Kiely noted that this would lead to a more delays to assessments. Mr. Lowth flagged that we are fulfilling our statutory deadline of twelve weeks and often ahead of that.
- Mr. PJ O'Grady flagged that the Housing for All plan does not deal with rural Ireland. Mr. O'Grady asked would builders be brought in for building, as the rising cost of supplies is a big issue. Mr. O'Grady noted the amount of vacant houses around the country and looked for a timeframe for turnaround of these units.
- Ms. Newell advised timelines would be set out in action plan and itemised by settlement and this would be communicated to all SPC members.
- Cllr. Keary asked how many houses per annum is LCCC obliged to deliver over the period of the Housing for All programme. Cllr. Keary asked where the proposed development for 31 units in Adare is sitting at and flagged lack of progress. Cllr. Keary asked about the status of sale for land block attached to Adare scheme.

- Ms. Newell outlined targets to SPC members for the next five years. Ms. Newell advised delivery of new builds for 2020 and 2021 had been impacted hugely by Covid-19. Ms. Curley advised that we have hit over 80% of our overall target (incl. Leasing and Acquisition).
- Mr. Conor Culloo advised that he is looking through DHLGH correspondence in relation to the 31 units in Adare and is working through issues that were identified. Cllr. Keary noted his dissatisfaction at how long this has taken.
- Ms. Curley noted that the function of the SPC is for policy related questions only.
- Cllr. Sharon Benson asked are the build targets Local Authority build or AHB build. Cllr. Benson flagged a concern about the Tenant Purchase Scheme and an overall concern about the Housing for All plan. Cllr. Benson raised a concern around voids and the cost of materials associated with maintenance refurbishing units.
- Ms. Newell advised that the 90,000 build target is strictly social housing and the blend is AHB's 40% and Local Authority 60%.
- Cllr. Kiely had asked about planned maintenance under Housing for All. Mr. Culloo noted the constraints around planned maintenance and agreed with Cllr. Kiely's point and advised that he would come back with more concise information as soon as he has it.
- An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Murphy raised a concern that he had heard from another forum, that First Time Buyers are being squeezed out by Turnkey developments and AHBs and Cllr. Murphy noted that Turnkey developments are being encouraged in the Housing for All document. Cllr. Murphy asked is the commitment to end Direct Provision going to put extra pressure on the Housing for All plan.
- Ms. Newell noted that a Turnkey policy was brought in through the SPC with a specific tenure mix and to allow for owner occupation. Ms. Newell flagged the planning condition for large SHD's.
- Mr. Lowth advised that we have always been involved with Direct Provision and this is reflected on the HWL. Mr. Lowth flagged we will be received a small number from the Department of Justice as part of a wider resettlement.
- Cllr. Keary raised a concern about asking questions and An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Murphy advised the SPC is for formulation and development of policy.

Item 5: Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor C. Sheehan

- An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Murphy noted that Cllr. Conor Sheehan sent his apologies and asked for his Notice of Motion to be deferred to our next Home and Social SPC.

Item 6: AOB

- Cllr. Benson flagged that she is receiving communication from Home Improvement applicants (Disabled Person Grants, Mobility Aid Grants, Housing Adaptation Grants) regarding extremely high quotes for works due to rising supply costs and labour shortages. These quotes are way above the max grant of €30,000.00 for some works and the applicants do not have the funds to pay the remaining cost of works. Cllr. Benson proposed that LCCC write to the Minister for Housing requesting a review of the maximum grant allocation for Housing Adaptation Grants for disabled people.
- Cllr. John Costelloe raised his concerns about the severe lack of tradesmen in Limerick, his experience of the extension for St. Patrick's GAA club, is that they can't get block layers. Cllr. Costelloe agreed with Cllr. Keary's point that they are not getting the answers they need for issues. Cllr. Costelloe also expressed his concern at an over reliance on AHBs being used by LCCC.
- Ms. Curley noted that the use of AHBs in delivering social housing is Government policy and 40% of social housing delivery will continue to be provided by AHBs. Ms. Curley advised that an AHB representative could give a presentation at the next SPC. Ms. Curley noted Cllr. Costelloe's point about lack of tradesmen and advised that it is a concern. Ms. Curley flagged that under Housing for All the Department of Housing have policies to engage with the construction and education sector.
- Cllr. Kiely supported Cllr. Costelloe's point on AHBs and flagged her frustration around trying to find which AHB is managing specific tenancies. Cllr. Kiely noted her concern over some AHB managed housing and advised that specific AHBs should be brought under the Local Authority quickly. Cllr. Kiely flagged some incidences of AHB managed tenancies negatively impacting neighbours. Cllr. Kiely complimented Tenancy Sustainment Team with their efforts. Cllr. Kiely flagged the significant length of time that it can take to address tenancy issues and behaviour. Cllr. Kiely asked is there a process if concerns are flagged as she would have flagged concerns a number of times. Cllr. Kiely suggested that when we are considering AHBs we should ask how they manage anti-social behaviour. Cllr. Kiely also asked for a contact for every AHB that comes on board.
- Mr. Lowth advised that if there is a concern with an AHB, the Tenancy Sustainment Team are the first point of contact and it's important for Councillors to flag issues to them.
- Ms. Curley advised that if a protocol for AHBs is proposed, that LCCC will research it and come back with recommendation.
- Ms. Una Burns noted that AHBs play a very important part in social housing delivery and they also provide skills and expertise to support households which need significant complex support that the Local Authority may not be able to support due to numerous factors. Ms. Burns flagged her concern about members bringing up individual cases and noted the processes are there and they adhere to them.
- Mr. O Grady agreed with Cllr. Kiely's point on AHBs and anti-social behaviour.

Proposal to write to the Minister for Housing requesting a review of the maximum grant allocation for Housing Adaption Grants for Disabled People

Proposed: Cllr. Sharon Benson

Seconded: Cllr. Sarah Kiely

END OF MEETING

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The Chair thanked everyone for joining the meeting and advised the next SPC is the 15th December 2021.