

## **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 **13<sup>th</sup> March 2025** in the Council Chamber, Dooradoyle and via MS Teams.

**In Attendance:** An Cathaoirleach, **Cllr. Stephen Keary**

SPC Members Present: Cllr. Catherine Slattery, Cllr. Sharon Benson, Cllr. Adam Teskey, Cllr. Sarah Beasley, Cllr. Abul Kalam Azad Talukder, Cllr. Francis Foley, Cllr. Noreen Stokes, Cllr. Tommy O'Sullivan, Cllr. Maria Donoghue, Cllr. Elisa O'Donovan, Mr. Sean Golden.

**In Attendance:**

Mr. Brian Kennedy, Director of Housing  
Mr. Joe Delaney, Director of Service, Regeneration  
Ms. Sarah Newell, Senior Executive Officer  
Ms. Mary Hayes, Senior Executive Officer  
Mr. Brendan Kidney, Senior Engineer, Housing  
Ms. Patricia Philips, A/ Head of Unit for Housing Welfare and Traveller Accommodation  
Mr. Declan White, A/Senior Executive Officer, Housing  
Mr. Shane Neylon, A/Executive Engineer, Housing Welfare  
Ms. Kathy O'Grady, Administrative Officer, Housing  
Mr. Joe McDonald, Administrative Officer, Homeless Action Team  
Ms. Elizabeth Rea, Administrative Officer, Housing  
Ms. Aoife O'Brien Slater, Administrative Officer, Housing  
Ms. Miriam Donnelly, Administrative Officer, Housing  
Ms. Tina Knox, Administrative Officer, Housing Management  
Ms. Gillian McNamara, Administrative Officer, Housing  
Mr. Gerard McNamara, Senior Staff Officer, Housing  
Ms. Maria Coffey, Senior Staff Officer, Housing  
Ms. Jennifer Browne, Senior Staff Officer, Housing  
Ms. Jayne Power, Senior Staff Officer, Housing  
Ms. Niamh O'Brien, Staff Officer, Housing  
Mr. Rory Culhane, Staff Officer, Housing  
Ms. Christine Skehan, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing  
Ms. Amanda Glasper, Clerical Officer, Housing  
Ms. Melissa Lynch, Clerical Officer, Housing

**Apologies:** Cllr. Sarah Kiely, Cllr. Tom Ruddle, Cllr. Joe Leddin, Cllr. Ger Ward, Cllr. Frankie Daly, Ms. Toyin Salmon, Ms. Una Burns, Mr. PJ O'Grady, Ms. Carol McNamara.

**Welcome by Chairperson – Cllr. Stephen Keary**

An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Stephen Keary opened the meeting and welcomed Mr. Brian Kennedy, new Director of Housing to the SPC as well as wishing Ms. Caroline Curley best wishes on her recent retirement. He then welcomed all new and current members to the March SPC meeting.

**Item 1: Confirm minutes from meeting held on 30th May 2024**

**Proposed:** Cllr. Adam Teskey     **Seconded:** Cllr. Catherine Slattery

**Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes**

No matters arising from previous minutes.

**Item 3: Role of the SPC**

Mr. Brian Kennedy, Director of Service gave a presentation on the Role of the SPC.

The presentation was well received by the committee.

**Item 4: Changes in the various Grant Schemes i.e. Housing Adaptation Grants.**

Mr. Gerard McNamara, Senior Staff Officer, Housing, gave a presentation on the changes in the various Grant Schemes.

A discussion took place. Cllr. Stephen Keary asked if the presentation could be circulated to Full Council. It was agreed to make information available.

Ms. Mary Hayes, Senior Executive Officer gave an update on the work of the private grants team, informing the members that the allocation for 2025 will be similar to that of last year and advised that the Department have given Local Authorities advance notice that there will not be additional funding available as was heretofore the case in previous years. There will be a need to manage budgets accordingly and to ensure there is sufficient funding ring fenced for priority cases.

Cllr. Noreen Stokes welcomed the new changes, she queried how many times one may apply for the grant and will applicants get a second grant if they re-apply. Mr. Ger McNamara, replied there should generally be only one grant type for each household application.

Cllr. Stokes queried the word “Remote” contained on the form as it was causing confusion and suggested the use of tick box only to make the form more user friendly.

Ms. Hayes replied, to contact the team if households had difficulty using forms and that they would review the wording on the form.

Cllr. Francis Foley queried the removal of fossil fuel burners from the grant scheme and noted cases of older persons who were hoping to get an oil boiler installed. Under the present scheme, new boilers don’t qualify. Cllr. Foley with the support of Cllr. Keary recommended that a query go back to the Department to query as required. Mr McNamara confirmed that there are alternatives and advised there is a list available.

**On the proposal of Cllr. Francis Foley seconded by Cllr. Noreen Stokes it was agreed that under the present scheme, a recommendation be sent to the DHLGH to accommodate the installation of New Fossil Fuel Boilers.**

**Proposed:** Cllr. Francis Foley **Seconded:** Cllr. Noreen Stokes

Mr. McNamara went onto to give a brief overview of what the scheme provides grant assistance towards.

Cllr. Abul Kalam Azad Talukder posed a question on housing adaptation grants for private properties asking, do they need to be registered with the Rental Tenancies Board (RTB) and who is the applicant for that grant, the landlord or tenant.

Mr. McNamara noted that landlords need to be registered with the RTB, the landlord needs to give permission to the tenant to apply for the grant. Works will remain in place if the tenant moves on from the property. There is nothing in the regulations once works have been done and if tenant moves on (however this will be some provision of support under the RTB Notice period). Ms. Hayes advised that the Housing Grants Team will query with DHLGH and get back to Councillors with an update. Cllr. Keary also added there should be min of 5 years rental and a clawback so there is no waste of tax payers' money.

Cllr. Keary asked, are any changes on VAT claims for bathrooms/wetrooms. Mr. McNamara in reply advised that there are no changes.

Cllr. Keary asked if an elderly couple living in the house that is owned by a son or daughter is their income considered as the income for the grant.

Mr. McNamara in his reply stated that income taken into account is that of the homeowner. Ms. Hayes added that there needs to be clarity who is the legal owner of the property that can apply for the grant. Mr. Kennedy added this needs to be further clarified.

Cllr. Keary also asked if a husband and wife can apply separately, husband one year the wife the following year?

Ms. Hayes replied the general advice from the DHLGH is one grant per household.

Cllr. Stokes queried the delays with using Occupational Therapists (OT) and asked do Limerick City and County Council have an OT and asked if the team were aware there is a 3-month waiting list.

Ms. Hayes in reply regarding OTs advised that there is a panel in place of a list of OTs that are used at the request of the applicant. If an applicant wants an OT the grants team can facilitate.

Cllr. Elisa O'Donovan supports Cllr. Stokes query and advised that she did request same in her last council term, having a panel is very different to have an in-house OT. Ms. Hayes replied that they would review the matter.

#### **Item 5: Update on Tenant Purchase Properties**

Ms. Mary Hayes, Senior Executive Officer, Housing, gave a presentation on Update on Tenant Purchase Properties.

The presentation was well received by the committee.

A discussion took place. Cllr. Tommy O'Sullivan asked how many 1 bedroom apartments are projected over next few years.

Ms. Sarah Newell, Senior Executive Officer replied that they are looking at the possibility of the Hidden Homes Initiative in derelict properties Limerick City and County Council are acquiring and converting to 1 and 2 beds, she advised she can give a note to the Metropolitan District on projections in.

Cllr. Catherine Slattery asked for a projection of schemes and social housing over the next few years. Ms. Hayes in reply, added she will follow up.

Cllr. O'Donovan asked have we the figures of the people in the city area who availed of the Tenant in Situ scheme.

Ms. Newell clarified that we delivered circa. 100 with a mix of Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's) and LA acquired tenant in Situ.

Cllr. O'Donovan also asked for the number of Tenant Purchase applications and Ms. Hayes replied, the figures are updated in the DG report. Re. Tenant Purchase, approved 46 applications and received 71.

Cllr. Benson asked would it be an option to transfer tenants if unable to purchase property they are currently in, Ms. Hayes in reply added that yes it is a possibility.

Ms. Newell also added that tenants may also avail of the New Build Incremental Tenant Purchase Scheme.

Cllr. Keary asked regarding constituents looking to purchase a house and on social welfare. He stated that it was unconstitutional that persons who are occupied in an AHB property will never own the house. Ms Hayes added that this was to ensure good Tenure Mix and further clarified the Tenant Purchase process.

Cllr. Benson asked is the Tenant Purchase Scheme the only method a person can purchase a house or can they purchase outright if they don't qualify. Ms. Hayes in reply stated that this is the only mechanism available.

Cllr. Talukder queried the status of tenant in situ scheme. In response Ms. Newell added that there are a number of houses on hold until we await details of new scheme.

Ms. Newell added that there was a webinar from the DHLGH regarding the new scheme and need to await the budget, will prioritise on hold units from last year.

Cllr. Talukder asked how long this will take and Ms Newell replied we will circulate next week after circular has been received.

#### **Item 6: Update on Traveller Accommodation Programme**

Ms. Patricia Phillips, A/Head of Unit for Housing Welfare & Traveller Accommodation, Housing, gave an overview update Traveller Accommodation Programme and advised there would be a more detailed report at a future SPC meeting.

#### **Item 7: Notice of Motions**

##### **Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor S. Beasley - 26<sup>th</sup> July 2024**

*I will move at the next Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that Limerick City and County Council consider including Bin Charges as part of the Rent Structure fees for social housing tenants (unless on a waiver program).*

Cllr. Beasley gave more clarity on the motion, she advised that dumping around the city is more pronounced. She queried how do we confirm that households who have been in social housing for years have bin collection at present and can there be a review of same.

Cllr. O'Donovan added that's it's a good suggestion to incorporate the cost into the rent.

**Proposed:** Cllr. Sarah Beasley    **Seconded:** Cllr. Elisa O'Donovan

Ms. Mary Hayes, Senior Executive Officer, Housing, gave a response to the original motion and advised that they can link in with Community Sustainment to carry out an audit in problematic areas.

**Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor S. Benson (to be referred to the Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee) - 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

*I will move at the next Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that this Council establish a working group to further progress the work and recommendations of the Autism Friendly Limerick group, but specifically in the area of housing. It is envisaged that this group will work with stakeholders including the disability network providers, HSE, and advocacy groups to explore how LCCC can better address the housing needs of people with ASD and neurodivergence.*

Cllr. Benson gave an overview on her motion and also added that there needs to be an overhaul with all stakeholders involved and that a working group was needed to make the changes.

**On the proposal of Cllr. Sharon Benson seconded by Cllr. Elisa O'Donovan it was agreed that members of the SPC would establish a working group to further progress the work of the Autism Friendly Limerick group.**

**Proposed:** Cllr. Sharon Benson    **Seconded:** Cllr. Elisa O'Donovan

Ms. Hayes replied that there are 2 ways options, through the Housing Disability Steering Group (HDSG) that meets on a quarterly basis or alternatively set up sub working group of the SPC, this would be at Members discretion.

Ms. Hayes suggested setting up a working group as part of the HDSG and that members of the SPC and other relevant stakeholders could be invited onto it. If preferences could be made to Ms Hayes for it to be progressed before the next SPC meeting. Ms Hayes will liaise with Cllr. Benson.

**Notice of Motions submitted by Councillor M. Donoghue (to be referred to Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee) - 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024**

*I will move at the next Plenary Meeting of Limerick City and County Council that future disposals of vacant residential properties are focused on first-time buyers, owner- occupiers, older persons or households with changes in circumstances.*

Ms. Sarah Newell, Senior Executive Officer, Housing, gave a response. Ms. Tina Knox, gave further clarification on the reply to members.

The future disposal of vacant/derelict residential properties is currently under review. A number of cross-directorate meetings (between Housing and Property Management) have taken place regarding such properties. Due to increased resources in the Housing Directorate and an evidential

housing need, it has been proposed that many more properties from this source will be taken by the Housing Directorate to be made available under various schemes.

Cllr. O'Donovan added regarding residential homes, the derelict homes bought on the open market have no works completed and were the houses in the city and in need a lot of work are they going to housing or on sale on open market to be used by first time buyers. Ms. Knox in reply added that Housing will take those houses if there is a demand depending on condition of the property.

Cllr. Keary added that the properties would be sold to first time buyer with housing need and not to a vulture fund and must show proof of funds that they can refurbish the property.

Cllr. O'Sullivan added that there should be a restriction on the amount and bed type of properties being sold to one owner. Ms. Knox added that this will be covered under this new system.

#### Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor S. Beasley – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2025

*I will move at the next Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that there should be no more undignified 'open mic' discussions at the Homeless Action Teams facility in Limerick.*

Cllr. Beasley asked could there be clinics arranged.

**On the proposal of Cllr. Sarah Beasley seconded by Cllr. Sharon Benson it was agreed to bring forward if clinics could be arranged.**

**Proposed:** Cllr. Sarah Beasley    **Seconded:** Cllr. Sharon Benson.

Ms. Mary Hayes, Senior Executive Officer, Housing, gave an update.

Cllr. Slattery added, the Homeless action team need to feel safe in place of work and added that the traffic wardens have been given body cams. Cllr. Slattery went onto to clarify she found Homelessness action team very efficient.

Cllr. Beasley & Cllr. Benson agreed with Cllr Slattery on staff safety, the team are overwhelmed, could there be an appointment system that went through customer service. Cllr. Benson also added, could we look at a phone system? When Notice to Quits (NTQs) are issued tenants get very distressed.

Ms. Hayes acknowledged Mr. Joe McDonald and the team in the Homeless Action Team and added, they can look at how the calls are managed. She also advised to make them aware of any particular cases to the team.

Ms Mary Hayes advised that the Homeless Action Team will look how calls are managed and if it is feasible for clinics to be arranged.

#### Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor J. Leddin – 20<sup>th</sup> January 2025 (to be referred to the Home and Social Development Strategic Policy Committee)

*I will move at the next Meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that the Council invite the Land Development Agency to a meeting to receive an update on what funding was secured for LDA sites in Limerick from the national budget and to provide an update on each site and timeframe for planning applications.*

Ms. Kathy O'Grady, Administrative Officer, Housing, gave an update to members and advised that The Land Development Agency have agreed to brief the Elected Members of the Metropolitan

District of Limerick on Monday, 7th April 2025, at 2pm in the Council Chamber, Merchants Quay and Online. She also advised that if any elected members of the SPC wished to attend they could contact corporate to arrange same.

#### **Item 8: SPC Programme of Work 2024 & 2025**

Ms. Kathy O'Grady, Administrative Officer, Housing, gave a further update on the SPC Programme of work.

Ms. O'Grady further clarified that the programme of work may be updated following on from the Corporate plan being finalised. Ms. Hayes mentioned that the Corporate Plan will be confirmed by end of March.

Cllr. O'Donovan asked in relation to IHREC to add equality statement to housing allocation. She also recommended to engage with relevant stakeholders when forming the statement.

Ms. Hayes replied, we have responsibility under the public sector duty that all plans are approved and that relevant stakeholders would be contacted.

Cllr. Keary questioned the working group to tenants paying costs to the council for maintenance works and council arranging for said works.

Mr. Brendan Kidney replied that it's in the tenants handbook, it's the tenants responsibility but sometimes can't arrange due to age etc. Mr. Kidney clarified that a working group would need to be organised.

Cllr. Keary replied that, if they do update, some credit should be given to the tenant if they carry out upgrade works.

#### **Item 9: For Noting**

Ms. Kathy O'Grady, Administrative Officer, Housing, gave an update on the Pipeline Delivery and Reporting to Housing Disability & Steering Report that have been circulated to members.

#### **Item 10: AOB**

Cllr. Keary queried commencement on new builds to Mr. Kidney on housing schemes in Adare and Pallaskenry. Ms. Newell in reply added that the development in Pallaskenry is going through final checks with the Housing Finance Agency. Ms Newell clarified, Will keep members updated. It's due to legal due diligence.

Mr. Kidney in reply to query regarding Adare – that they are currently gathering tender documents.

**April SPC meeting date Thursday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2025**

An Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Stephen Keary thanked everyone who attended the SPC meeting and wished everyone a happy St. Patricks Day.

**END OF MEETING**