**Minutes of the Housing & Social Inclusion**

**Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Meeting**

**held on 19th October 2017**

**In Attendance:** Cllr. D. McDonnell, Chairperson, Housing SPC

Cllr. N. McNelis, Galway City Council

Cllr. M. Cubbard, Galway City Council

Cllr. M. Farrell, Galway City Council

Cllr. M. Lohan, Galway City Council

Mr. D. O'Sullivan, Threshold

Mr. P. Hargaden, Voluntary Sector

Mr. A. Daly, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

**Officials:**  Ms. P. Philbin, A/Director of Services, Housing Department

Mr. D. Mahon, Senior Executive Officer, Housing Department

Mr. T. Prendergast, A/ Senior Engineer, Housing Department

Ms. H. Martyn, Administrative Officer, Housing Department

Ms. A. Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing Department

Ms. S. Lawless, Senior Staff Officer, Housing Department

**Present** Ms. C. Clancy, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Department

**Apologies:** Cllr. J. Walsh, Galway City Council

Mr. P. Carey, Construction Sector

Cllr. O. Crowe, Galway City Council

Cllr. MJ Crowe, Galway City Council

1. **Minutes of Meeting of the 14th July 2017**

The Minutes of the Meeting of 14th July 2017 were proposed by Cllr. M. Lohan and seconded by Cllr. M. Farrell and agreed.

1. **Matters Arising**

The following matters arising were raised by the members:

Cllr. M. Cubbard sought an update on the reassessment of rent accounts and whether letters had issued to those affected.

Cllr. M. Lohan sought an update on extending the Ballymun Housing Co-op model to Galway.

Mr. D. Mahon advised that the rent assessment was well advanced and was expected to be completed by year end. He confirmed that accounts with significant arrears or were tenancy warnings had issued were being prioritised but that it was considerable task to undertake the full re-assessment. He advised that an additional staff resource was assigned to deal with assessment and that letters could be issued to those tenants not yet assessed to advise that a re-assessment was underway.

Members were advised that national guidance was anticipated on a new Affordable Housing Scheme and Ms. P. Philbin, A/ Director of Services confirmed that this had been discussed at the Housing Summit Review of Rebuilding Ireland. Cllr. M. Lohan proposed that the report presented at the Housing Summit be circulated to members. This was agreed.

1. **Homeless Report and update (including West Region Homeless Action Plan 2018-2021)**

Ms. H. Martyn, Administrative Officer, provided an update to members on homelessness in Galway City including detail on the numbers of rough sleepers in Galway, the roll out of the cold weather response and the response of the homeless services to storm Ophelia.

Cllr. N. McNelis queried what options were available to people looking for a hot meal after 4pm in the day centre. Mr. D. O’Sullivan, Threshold, sought an update on the roll-out of HAT in Galway. Ms. H. Martyn advised members that hot meals are prepared earlier in the day and are available after 4pm. Alternatively, individuals could be provided with food vouchers. Concerning the roll-out of HAT she confirmed it was anticipated to have this established before Christmas. She informed members that there is a growing issue with the placement of families in homeless services.

Cllr. M. Cubbard raised concerns around the response to storm Ophelia, addressing an individual incident he had dealt with. Following discussion it was suggested that in the event of another similar incident, Councillors should be provided with contact names and phone numbers of relevant service providers and accommodation options. Ms. P. Philbin, A/Director of Services, advised that Galway City Council were reviewing their emergency response in the wake of Storm Ophelia and all recommendations would be considered.

1. **Draft Strategic Plan for Housing Persons with Disabilities 2017**

Members were advised that it was proposed at the October Council Meeting to refer the following specific objective to the SPC for consideration to include in the Draft Strategic Plan for Housing Persons with Disabilities 2017:

*‘To ensure that the housing needs of people with disabilities living in social authority housing are prioritised and that when disabled extensions are solutions to these needs, that funding will always be applied for to central government and extensions delivered’*

In the context of this motion, a short discussion took place on the Disabled Persons Grant Scheme. Members were advised that new guidelines had recently issued from the Department on housing people with disabilities and it was suggested that a short summary of this document could be forwarded to members.

The inclusion of the amendment was proposed by Cllr. M. Cubbard and seconded by Cllr. D. McDonnell and was agreed. The Draft Strategic Plan for Housing Persons with Disabilities 2017 will be amended to reflect this additional objective.

1. **Vacant Homes Strategy**

Mr. D. Mahon referred to the report issued to members on the requirement to prepare a Vacant Homes Strategy by the end of October and to designate a Vacant Homes Officer to lead out on actions within the Strategy. The discrepancy regarding vacant homes data between the CSO data and other data sources such as the Geodirectory was discussed by members. The timeframe to return void Council stock to productive use was discussed by members and Mr. T. Prendergast, A/ Senior Engineer confirmed to members that there is an objective to reduce the turnaround time for properties but highlighted that this is a resource intensive process.

Members sought clarification on the funding available for acquisitions of new properties. They were advised by Mr. D. Mahon that the purchase of properties was pursued by Galway City Council but that it was difficult to compete in the open market and there was an insufficient supply of houses to meet demand.

1. **Capital Programme Update**

Mr. T. Prendergast, A/ Senior Engineer, updated members on the Capital Programme advising on the progress of developments at Ballymoneen Rd and Ballyburke, the preparation of a Land Management Strategy and proposed infill sites. Mr. D. Mahon SEO, updated members on the suite of proposals being progressed by Approved Housing Bodies.

Cllr. M. Lohan requested that a copy of the Land Management Strategy be circulated and members sought clarification on the proposed increase in densities at the Ballymoneen Rd development and how these would be achieved. Clarification was sought on the planning process to be applied and what impact the proposed outer ring road would have on capital schemes. Clarification was also sought on the infill sites proposed.

Members were advised by Mr. T. Prendergast that the increase in density was achievable through the inclusion of lands previously reserved as connectivity spaces and an increase in duplex units. He confirmed that all applications would be brought through the Part 8 planning process and would therefore come before Council for approval. He clarified the percentage of lands lost to the outer ring road and clarified that the infill units were intended to create smaller units for those wishing to downsize within their area which would then free up larger homes.

1. **AOB**

An invitation was issued to SPC members by Mr. D. Sullivan, Threshold, to participate in a workshop to be organised by Threshold on homelessness issues in Galway.

Mr. A. Daly, ICTU, queried what mortgage assistance schemes were available in Galway City Council.

An update on traveller accommodation was sought by Cllr. M. Lohan with reference made to unauthorised caravans in housing estates.

Cllr. N. McNelis sought clarification on how to report on the selling of drugs in council properties.

Members were advised by the Chairman Cllr. D. McDonnell that ICTU were seeking to make a presentation to the SPC and he noted the content of a letter received from ICTU. It was agreed by members to facilitate this request at the next SPC meeting and to extend the meeting from 2 hours to 21/2 hours to facilitate this presentation.

Cllr. D. McDonnell sought an update on any proposed sale of Wellpark House.

Replies were provided by relevant staff and it was noted regarding traveller accommodation that suitable sites were currently being considered and would be brought forward in 2018 and that proposals may be based on the CENA model as presented to the elected representatives at the September Council Meeting. it was noted that issues regarding unauthorised caravans in housing estates were being addressed. Members were advised that the sale of drugs in council houses is dealt with as per Galway City Council’s Anti-Social Behaviour policy. Regarding Wellpark House members were advised that it was Galway City Councils understanding that this property was no longer on the market and that no Notices to Quit had been issued.

The following dates were agreed in principal for the 2018 meetings:

* Thursday, 22nd February 2018, commencing at 9.30am
* Thursday, 24th May 2018, commencing at 9.30am
* Thursday, 20th September 2018, commencing at 9.30am
* Thursday, 22nd November 2018, commencing at 9.30am

This concluded the business of the meeting.