

Minutes of the Housing & Social Inclusion Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Meeting held on 18th May 2017

In Attendance: Cllr. Declan McDonnell, Chairperson, Housing SPC
Cllr. Niall McNellis, Galway City Council
Cllr. Mike Cubbard, Galway City Council
Cllr. Ollie Crowe, Galway City Council
Cllr. Mairead Farrell, Galway City Council
Mr. Paul Hargaden, Voluntary Sector

Officials: Ms. Patricia Philbin, A/Director of Services, Housing Department
Mr. Dermot Mahon, Senior Executive Officer, Housing Department
Ms. Siobhan Donoghue, A/Senior Social Worker, Housing Department
Ms. Helena Martyn, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. Anne Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. Sharon Carroll, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. Ailish Coppinger, A/Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Department

Apologies: Cllr. John Walsh, Galway City Council
Cllr. Michael Crowe, Galway City Council
Cllr. Mark Lohan, Galway City Council
Mr. Diarmuid O'Sullivan, Threshold
Mr. Paul Carey, Construction Sector
Mr. Alan Daly, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

(1) Minutes of the previous Meeting 5th April 2017

The adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the 5th April, 2017 were proposed by Cllr. N. McNelis and seconded by Mr. P. Hargaden and agreed.

(2) Matters Arising

Cllr. N. McNelis stated that misinformation had been portrayed by other elected members advising members of the public that applicants are removed from the waiting list once they sign up for HAP. Mr. P. Hargaden stated the only disadvantage with HAP is if the public do not tick the transfer box when signing up and queried if Galway City Council are experiencing any issues with the Limerick Hub.

Ms. A. Brett AO advised that a large amount of praise has been given to Galway City Council with regards to the HAP Scheme. The Limerick Hub is the key driver for HAP and it is essential for valid applications to be submitted when applying for HAP. There is a major issue with regards to the rent being paid on the last Wednesday of each month, ideally it should be at the beginning of the month and Galway City Council, along with other local authorities are following up on this matter.

Cllr. M. Cubbard queried if there will be an increase in the number of homeless transitional units in the City and have letters issued regarding the Rent Scheme. Ms. P. Philbin A/DoS stated that an advertisement has issued looking for additional units around the city, specifically to cater for the cold weather response.

Mr. D. Mahon SEO informed the members that letters had not yet issued to the tenants regarding the rent review. The Housing Department are currently working on the arrears and 800 accounts must be assessed in

order to notify the tenants and this may take a number of months. There is a necessity to advise the Finance Department of the totality of the credit which will be applied to each account. Cllr. M. Farrell questioned the order of the 800 assessments and Ms. S. Carroll AO advised that those tenants in receipt of tenancy warnings will be prioritised.

(3) Draft Scheme of Letting Priorities

Ms. H. Martyn, AO advised members that the document was previously circulated for comment and an overview of the content of the Scheme was provided. Ms. Martyn noted the provision for Choice Based Letting in the Scheme and outlined its objectives. She advised members that the adoption of the Scheme was a reserved function of the elected members. A discussion then took place on the Draft Scheme and the following points were raised and noted:

- There is a requirement to include Housing First and Housing Led as objectives in the Scheme
- If persons obtain HAP in the County area will they remain on the Galway City Council waiting list and are the income limits the same.
- The tenants in the transitional units are not being moved onto suitable accommodation in an appropriate timeframe. People with criminal records increase the anti social behaviour in estates and it is unfair on certain areas in the city as there is no social integration. It was agreed to circulate the number of transitional units in the Electoral Areas of the city.
- Currently, the areas of preference cannot change within 12 months but in specific cases e.g. abusive relationships, can this criteria change.
- Clarification was requested on Galway City Council's policy if an application is frozen where criminal records are identified.
- Point 3.7 should be widened to include reference to transitional units.
- Point 3.8 household size – is there discrimination against single people. There is a need to address how to deal with single people on the housing waiting list.
- Point 4.1 Housing First be referenced and include caretaker tenancy as a clause under Section 4.
- An update was requested on the printing in the media of the B&B's and hotels which are used by Galway City Council for homeless services.

The members were informed by Ms. Martyn that Housing First and Housing Led are specific based projects with a multi agency approach including Cluid, Cope and Simon. There is scope to change areas of preference depending on the circumstances and flexibility can be included. There is no active Freedom of Information request in relation to homeless providers in place at present. The Office of the Information Commissioner had overruled the decision but local media have not released the names of the accommodation providers to date.

Ms. A. Brett informed the members that a new circular from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government indicates that inter county changes can occur with HAP as the rates remain the same. Galway City Council may have to process HAP applications for the county area. A HAP tenant would have to give their landlord adequate notice if moving out into a social house. Ms. P. Philbin advised that the Housing Department are obliged to offer housing to people with a criminal record, where they have a housing need, but each case is looked at individually. The transitional units available to Galway City Council have to be used regardless of the location and it was agreed to provide the number of units in the City to the committee members.

<p>On the proposal of Cllr. M. Farrell and seconded by Cllr. O. Crowe it was agreed to propose the adoption of the Draft Scheme of Letting Priorities for full Council consideration subject to the minor amendments discussed.</p>

(4) Draft Anti Social Behaviour Policy

Ms. S. Carroll, AO informed the Committee that the Draft Anti Social Behaviour Strategy document would be included on the June Council Meeting Agenda for the consideration of members as a reserved function, subject to the consideration of the SPC.

The following queries and comments were raised by the members on the draft Strategy:

- The members welcomed the document and advised there is a requirement for the Strategy to be implemented and acted upon.
- What safeguards are in place for tenants and/or elected members to make an anonymous complaint?
- The document is more a statement of policy rather than strategy, a list of actions is required in order to implement the policy which should include measurements and timeframes.
- Include diversity training for staff under point 6.1.
- Is there a provision for the Local Authority to act regarding anti social behaviour by minors.
- CCTV cameras allow for peace of mind for council tenants, is there criteria in place regarding what estates CCTV cameras are placed.

Ms. S. Carroll stated that it is the intention to implement the document and same will strengthen the action that can be taken as it is a defined document based on enhanced legislative provisions under the 2014 Housing Act. There is a provision in place for Galway City Council staff to give evidence in law. The members were further advised that the Anti Social Behaviour Strategy refers to all household members and Galway City Council work closely with An Garda Síochána in dealing with minors. The incorporation of CCTV into estates is a very intensive process which is currently being reviewed by the Housing Department.

Ms. A. Brett AO informed the members that all anti social behaviour complaints referring to RAS and Long Term Leasing tenancies must be referred to the Residential Tenancies Board with matters of dispute and all proposed tenants are vetted. Ms. Brett also noted that there are a number of exemptions for confidential information to be released under the Freedom of Information Act.

A proposal by Cllr. N. McNelis that a one page document on Anti Social Behaviour be prepared for circulation to residents associations was seconded by Cllr. M. Cubbard and agreed.

It was agreed to propose the adoption of the Draft Anti-Social Behaviour Policy for full Council consideration, as its adoption is a reserved function.

(5) Homeless Report and Update

Ms. H. Martyn, AO provided an update to the members on current homeless statistics. Galway City Council is under severe pressure due to issues sourcing accommodation during the summer months. A discussion took place on same and the following points were raised by the members:

- There is no improvement in the homeless situation in the city with an increase in the number of families presenting, mental health issues and cross city travel is causing huge stress along with an increase in the number of children being bullied.
- Is the funding for the Cold Weather Response provided at national or local level and is there provision to provide the initiative for 12 months of the year. Could community centres or local authority buildings be availed of.
- On his visit to Galway City Council, Minister Damien English stated that there is no problem with funding for housing therefore will houses come on stream either from voluntary or social in the coming months.

Ms. H. Martyn advised that the funding is provided at a national level for the Cold Weather Response and requires a huge amount of complex and intensive work. Tusla have created a protocol to deal with children in long term accommodation. Mr. D. Mahon stated that there is a lot of activity with the voluntary bodies and it is hoped that 100 nominations will be made this year. Ms. P. Philbin informed the members that housing supply is very limited in the city. Housing acquisitions will continue to be sourced by Galway City Council. Ms. Philbin advised that the N6 Galway City Ring Road is having significant impact on the land owned by Galway City Council resulting in the lack of land available to build new social houses.

Following discussion, it was agreed that the next SPC meeting in July would focus specifically on the homeless issue.

(6) Any Other Business

A discussion took place on the recent visit of Minister Damien English and it was noted by Cllr. O. Crowe that the Chair of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee should have been in attendance at the meeting and Cllr. D. McDonnell queried if the quality of applications submitted to the Department were of the required standard.

Ms. P. Philbin, A/Director of Services advised that Galway City Council were advised to advertise turnkey developments, advance developments on Galway City Council owned lands and Public Private Partnerships.

This concluded the business of the meeting.