**Minutes of the Housing & Social Inclusion**

**Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Meeting**

**held on 22nd February 2018**

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

Cllr. N. McNelis, 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:**  Mr. D. Mahon, Senior Executive Officer, Housing Department

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

Ms. S. Donoghue, S.S.W., Housing Department

Ms. H. Martyn, Administrative Officer, Housing Department

Ms. A. Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing Department

Ms. S. Carroll, Administrative Officer, Housing Department

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

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

Mr. P. Carey, Construction Sector

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

1. **Minutes of Meeting of the 19th October 2017**

The Minutes of the Meeting of 19th October 2017 were proposed by Cllr. M. Lohan and seconded by Mr. A. Daly and agreed. There were no matters of accuracy.

1. **Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

1. **Housing Supply/Delivery Update**

Mr. T. Prendergast, A/SE., updated members on Capital Projects at the following locations:

* Ballymoneen Phase 1
* Ballymoneen Phase 2
* Ballyburke PPP
* Ballybane
* Infill sites at Ballinfoile/Castlepark etc
* Monivea Road

Members welcomed the report and the Capital projects. Cllr. M. Lohan queried if there would be affordable units included in some of these schemes and also enquired if the proposed development at Ballyburke would be coming back before the full Council for consideration. Cllr. N. McNelis queried if the issues raised by residents regarding the Ballymoneen development had been addressed and what further public engagement there would be on this development. Cllr. D. McDonnell sought clarification on the timeframe for Part 8’s to come back before the Council.

Mr. T. Prendergast advised members that for the future developments at Ballyburke a mixture of social, affordable and private could be considered. He advised members that direction was being sought from the Department in respect to Affordable units as there was currently no scheme in place. The development in Ballymoneen was currently progressing through Part 8 which has a public submission period before returning to full Council. He added that amendments had been made to the scheme to address some of the concerns of the residents. This Part 8 was expected to come back before Council at the June meeting.

Cllr. D. McDonnell suggested an additional SPC may be required on this subject. Cllr. N. McNelis requested an area meeting with Councillors in advance of the other Part 8 applications being finalised.

Mr. D. Mahon, SEO Housing, added that the Approved Housing Bodies were also advancing some new developments but cautioned members that many of these units would not be delivered until 2019/2020. He added that the Council were being proactive in trying to acquire lands for development together with turnkey opportunities. In addition, the Vacant Homes Officer would be appointed from April and it was hoped this new scheme would yield 80/90 additional units over the coming years. He cautioned, however, that this increase in housing stock would put extra pressures on the Estate Management services of Galway City Council.

1. **Proposed Amendments to Scheme of Allocations 2017**

Members were requested by Mr. D. Mahon S.E.O., to approve amendments to the Scheme of Allocations previously adopted in 2017 which would then go before full Council for consideration. The amendments proposed were:

* To allow for the amalgamation of Section 6.3 and 6.4 into a revised Section 6.3 and to remove the reference to ‘refusing to accept’ an application
* To include for an Elderly Property Owners / Vacant Homes policy to allow the Council to work with home owners where properties are at risk of dilapidation or becoming derelict.

With regard to the Elderly Property Owners / Vacant Homes policy, Cllr. M. Lohan enquired about the issues of probate for families and whether independent legal advice would be included for. Concerning the amendments to Section 6.3 Mr. A. Daly enquired if these amendments would preclude people from availing of homeless services while Cllr. N. McNelis asked do we take on board the reasons why tenants may give up a tenancy.

Responding to Cllr. M. Lohan, Mr. D. Mahon advised that this arrangement is utilized in a number of local authorities and is based on voluntary agreement with the homeowner. Independent legal advice would be a requirement of the scheme. The scheme is principally used where properties are at risk of falling into dereliction. With regard to the changes to Section 6.3 Mr. D. Mahon advised that where Local Authority or Voluntary housing is surrendered, homeless services are usually withheld. However, consideration is given to all circumstances of each particular case. This was further elaborated on by both Ms. H. Martyn and Ms. S. Carroll who advised that each case is assessed on its individual merits and all options would have been explored. For these exceptional cases there would be an interagency approach taken.

**It was proposed by Cllr. N. McNelis, seconded by Mark Lohan to recommend the amendments to progress to full Council. This went to a vote with 5 in favour and 1 against.**

1. **Choice Based Letting**

Ms. H. Martyn, A.O., informed members that Choice Based Letting was proposed to be rolled out in Quarter 2. Work was currently ongoing with ICT to progress this and the issue would be brought back before the members when further advanced. The benefits of Choice Based Letting were outlined and it was noted that it had the benefit of reducing the number of refusals on a property thus speeding up allocation times.

While members welcomed its rollout concerns were expressed regarding its availability to all. Cllr. N. McNelis considered that there should be a review mechanism included in the scheme and also that it should be smart phone compatible.

1. **Housing Needs Assessment 2018**

Ms. H. Martyn advised members that the Housing Needs Assessment was now an annual requirement adding that direction from the Department was awaited prior to commencing the 2018 Housing Needs Assessment. It was confirmed to members that public notices would be issued and all relevant applicants would be written to. Mr. D. Mahon informed members of the implications for applicants where Housing Needs Assessments are not returned. If no correspondence is received their file will be closed and, under the new General Data Protection Regulations closed files could potentially be destroyed. Cllr. N. McNelis considered this should be stressed in correspondences that are issued.

Members were informed that the 2017 Housing Needs Assessment results were published in January and reflected over 2,000 applicants as assessed and in need of social housing. These figures excluded those on both HAP and RAS schemes. A full report would issue to all elected members in this regard.

1. **Homeless Report and update / West Region Homeless Action Plan 2018-2021**

Ms. H. Martyn provided members with an update on the current homeless figures in the city and informed them that the Regional Homeless Action Plan was currently being drafted. Cllr. M. Farrell queried how many times the CWR had been full and what was its capacity. In response, Mr. D. Mahon informed members that there were 31 beds generally operating. Ms. A Brett, A.O., Housing, informed members that the Homeless HAP place finder service would now be rolled out in Galway allowing for assistance with deposits and rent in advance.

Cllr. N. McNelis welcomed the report and queried the numbers of children to adults in the figures. He also enquired as to what was the length of time people generally spent in transitional accommodation. He also asked if the Non-HRC terms could be circulated to members. Cllr. D. McDonnell enquired if the spend on homelessness had increased on the previous year. In response, Ms. H. Martyn, A.O., advised members that the budget applied for in 2018 was over € 4 million which was higher than previous years.

There were issues with capacity in the city and limited accommodation available for homeless services. She also addressed the difference in eligibility criteria between the city and county councils as adding to the homeless presentations in the city. She advised members she would provide a clearer breakdown on figures at the next meeting.

Mr. D. O’Sullivan, Threshold, enquired about the Regional HAP scheme. Ms. A. Brett, A.O, confirmed that people on the city housing list could access HAP anywhere in the country but would not be able to transfer their time on city housing waiting list to another local authority. Cllr. N. McNelis raised the issue of Air BnB and the lack of planning enforcement, advising members that he would be bringing a motion before the Council on this matter.

It was proposed by Cllr. N. McNelis, seconded by Cllr. M. Farrell that this SPC should write to the Minister for Housing requesting ‘This SPC wishes to standardise income thresholds between City and County’.

1. **Estate Management Policy – Overview**

An update on the outline of the new estate management policy was provided by Ms. S. Carroll, A.O., and she stepped through the document circulated. She informed members that that the format of the strategy would be similar to other strategies developed under the LCDC.

Cllr. D. McDonnell asked how members could have an input and was advised by Ms. S. Carroll that the strategy was very much at its infancy and this would be brought back before the SPC again. Mr. A. Daly considered induction training should be included. Mr. D. Mahon responded that induction training worked when there was a large number of allocations being done together and could be considered for the developments referenced earlier.

Mr. D. Mahon informed members that a press release had recently issued from the Department on the following schemes: Affordable Purchase Scheme, Affordable Rental Scheme and Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan. He confirmed that an update on the affordable schemes could be provided at the next SPC meeting. Ms. S. Carroll outlined the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Scheme to members referencing the numbers of refusals. Members asked if the Council could be flexible on the lending criteria but were advised by Ms. S. Carroll that there is a credit policy in place which we must adhere to.

1. **AOB**

Cllr. D. McDonnell sought an update on the current Rent Assessment. Mr. D. Mahon informed members that the assessment was ongoing stating it was hoped to have it completed by year end but that the project had been impacted by staffing resources. He confirmed that any refunds would be processed and backdated accordingly. Individuals would only be written to where a refund had been identified.

Members discussed the staffing resource issues within the Housing Department. Cllr. N. McNelis proposed that this SPC make a formal recommendation for additional staffing resources for housing.

Mr. D. O’Sullivan, Threshold, asked if the non-council members could receive a copy of the Housing quarterly report.

Concerns were expressed by members around resources required to process Freedom of Information request where is was considered they may be vexatious. Mr. D. Mahon advised that this as a necessary process to ensure openness and transparency within Council affairs.

The next meeting was scheduled for 24th May 2018 with the potential to call a special meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.