

Minutes of the Housing & Social Inclusion Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Meeting held on 22nd November, 2018.

- In Attendance:** Cllr. D. McDonnell, Chairperson, Housing SPC
Cllr. M. Lohan, Galway City Council
Cllr. M. Cubbard, Galway City Council
Cllr. M. Farrell, Galway City Council
Mr. A. Daly, Irish Congress of Trade Unions
Ms. K. Golden, GCCN Representative
Ms. K. Timothy, GCCN Representative
- Officials:** Mr. D. Mahon, A/Director of Services, Housing Department
Ms. H. Martyn, A/Senior Executive Officer, Housing Department
Mr. T. Prendergast, A/Senior Engineer, Housing Department
Ms. A. Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. S. Carroll, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. L. Sharkey, A/Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. S. Lawless, A/Administrative Officer, Housing Department
- Present** Ms. K. Lohan, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Department
- Apologies:** Cllr. N. McNelis, Galway City Council,
Cllr. O. Crowe, Galway City Council
Cllr. J. Walsh, Galway City Council
Cllr. M.J. Crowe, Galway City Council
Mr. P. Carey, Construction Sector

Presentation from “Homes for Life” on the Mortgage to Rent Scheme

Mr. S. Curtis, Homes for Life provided members with a detailed presentation on the Mortgage to Rent scheme. In the presentation he outlined the origins of the scheme, how the scheme operates and a breakdown of the figures county by county.

Following the presentation Mr. Curtis responded to queries raised by members as follows:

- He does not have a breakdown for Galway City as the figures are Central Bank figures and it goes not breakdown figures by Galway County and Galway City.
- Over time lenders are getting less Court Orders of Possession so are now engaging more with the scheme.
- When the scheme started voluntary bodies were not initially engaging as they did not buy many one-off houses but now some Voluntary Housing Bodies are specialising in this scheme.
- There is an option for the tenant to buy back the property.
- Applicants need to qualify under social housing supports requirements.
- Many who apply initially qualified for a mortgage but due to changes in circumstances are now in arrears for a long time.
- Not many applicants are on the borderline of the income limits.

1. Minutes of last meeting 20th September, 2018

The Minutes of the Meeting of 20th September, 2018 were proposed by Cllr. M. Farrell and seconded by Cllr. M. Cubbard and agreed.

Matters of Accuracy:

None.

2. Matters Arising

Mr. D. Mahon responded to matters arising from members as follows:

- The motions agreed at the last meeting will be forwarded to Corporate Services for inclusion on the City Council agenda when these SPC minutes are agreed as the full Council need to approve the proposals before letters can issue.
- Regarding the Part VIII proposals at Corrib Park, Ballinfoile Park and Castle Park the statutory process has started and the City Council is obliged to complete it. A four week consultation period is available for submissions. He can meet with resident representatives (up to 5) and go through the proposals but resources are not available for a public meeting. The documents for the proposals are available for inspection in the Planning Office of the City Council and can be made available in the local areas. He further stated that Government policy supports the utilisation of infill sites and their advice is to move forward with these proposals.
- Notifications on Choice Based Letting will issue in Quarter 1 2019.

3. Homeless Report and update

- Ms. H. Martyn, A/Senior Executive Officer gave an update of the number of people currently accommodated in emergency accommodation. She stated that the Cold Weather Response initiative will be available from the weekend 24th November and is expected to run for the same period as in 2017/2018. There are 37 beds available in the service.
- Tenders are currently being examined for the hub service and that it is expected the service will be available in March 2019 and she will provide a further update at the next meeting.
- Tenders are being sought for the Housing First Initiative which will provide a “wrap around service” initially targeted at single persons in homeless hostels or rough sleepers. The HSE and voluntary sector will also be involved in the initiative. 30 units over a three year period is planned and funding is available from Genio for three years. She will contact the Department to give members a presentation on the service. Ms. K. Golden confirmed that the service is currently in operation in Cork and it would be welcomed in Galway.

Ms. K. Golden in her role as C.E.O. of Galway Simon gave a presentation to the SPC on the issues facing homeless services in the city and the contributory factors which are causing homelessness. Following the presentation members queries were replied to as follows by Ms. Golden, Ms. Martyn and Ms. Brett.

- The demographic of rough sleepers is a mixture, some are local to the city, some are from Galway county areas, other areas of the country and non-habitual residents. Some rough sleepers do not wish to engage with services.
- The Cold Weather Response is available to all rough sleepers, non-residents can be repatriated to their home country but some choose to return again.
- Weekly meetings take place on the Cold Weather Response and posters are displayed in Cope Services promoting the initiative.
- The vast majority engaging with services are local to Galway.

- A long term solution is necessary and Housing First can assist.
- Rent caps are an issue and how to protect tenants from rent price hikes.
- New Bill will allow RTB to carry out investigations without a complaint.
- Landlords have to certify rent increases, the 4% increase is an issue as it only applies to current tenants and not new tenants, enforcement of the policy is an issue and a rent register would be useful.
- The unsustainability of rents is an increasing issue, HAP applications may be refused for this reason or a guarantor may be required.

4. Draft Housing Estate Management Strategy 2019-2023

Ms. S. Carroll provided members with a summary of the draft policy. She advised that in 2019 under Section 5 of the policy, focus groups and action groups will be arranged and also that a report on estate management can be provided quarterly to the SPC. During this item she advised the meeting of the following notices issuing to tenants:

- The number of tenancy warnings issued and the number that have escalated to legal proceedings.
- Number of abandonment notices issued
- Number of demands for possession issued
- An Exclusion Order is currently being prepared
- The number of site visits to date conducted by Housing Tenant Liaison Officers and that the majority of issues are resolved at the first meeting.
- The number of active Resident Associations, the number currently being formed. Tenant Liaison Officers attend meetings and contact can be made with Galway Network to organise focus groups.

Mr. D. Mahon and Ms. S. Carroll replied to queries raised by members as follows:

- Local Authority staff can confirm the presence of an abandoned animal but a third party is notified to remove the animal and that a new contract will be in place shortly. Community Wardens also have certain powers regarding this issue.
- Not in all cases of abandoned houses are rent payments discontinued.
- Regarding CCTV the Department is to issue a report and no plans can be moved forward until agreement is reached nationally.

5. Draft 2019 Differential Rent Scheme

Ms. S. Carroll advised the meeting that the 2019 Differential Rent Scheme is currently being prepared and that this item is for noting. She confirmed that assessments will take place 12 weeks going forward and that the previous assessment will be completed before the 2019 process begins and that the Local Authority will reassess changes in circumstances as quickly as possibly once notified.

This item was noted by members.

6. 2019 SPC Work Programme

The 2019 SPC Work Programme items were agreed as follows:

- West Regional Homeless Action Plan 2019-2022
- Homeless Cold Weather response 2018/2019
- Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2023
- Rent Assessment 2019

- Housing Capital Programme (including part VIII proposals)
- Housing Assistance Payments and RAS updates
- Choice Based Letting Policies and Procedures
- Housing Needs Assessment 2019

The dates and times of the SPC meetings 2019 were agreed as follows:

- Thursday 21st February 2019 at 9.30am
- Thursday 2nd May 2019 at 9.30am
- Thursday 19th September 2019 at 9.30am
- Thursday 21st November 2019 at 9.30am

8. Any Other Business:

The Chair Cllr. D. McDonnell stated his dissatisfaction at some members leaving meetings after a short period of time. He asked members to attend and contribute to the full meeting going forward.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 21st February 2019 at 9.30am.