

**Tuairisc/Reporting Template for Galway City  
Community Network (GCCN) Reps**

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**Galway City Community Network**  
Lionra Pobail Chathair Na Gaillimhe

<b>Cruinniú /Name of Meeting</b>	Housing Strategic Policy Committee
<b>Ionadaí FPCG (glacadóir - nótaí) Name of GCCF Rep (note-taker)</b>	Karen Golden
<b>Dáta &amp; Suite Date &amp; Location of Meeting:</b>	2/5/2019, Council Chamber, City Hall
<b>I láthair/ Attendance</b>	<p><b>Cllr D. McDonnell (Chairperson)</b>  <b>Cllr M. Lohan</b>  <b>Cllr M. Cubbard</b>  <b>Cllr J Walsh</b>  <b>Cllr M Farrell</b></p> <p>A Daly, ICTU  K. Golden, GCCN Rep  D. Mahon A/Director of Services, Housing Dept  T. Prendergast, A/Senior Engineer, Housing  A. Brett, Admin Officer, Housing  S. Lawless, Admin Officer, Housing  A. Lyons, Housing Dept  S. Carroll, Housing  L. Sharkey, Housing  J. Waters, Housing</p> <p><b>Apologies</b>  <b>Cllr N McNelis</b>  <b>Cllr O Crowe</b>  <b>P. Carey, Construction Sector</b>  <b>K. Timothy, GCCN Rep</b></p>

## Príomhphointí pléite / Key Issues Discussed:

1. Minutes proposed by Mark Lohan, seconded by Mike Cubbard
2. Homelessness Report
  - a. Attracta Lyons presented the Homelessness Update
  - b. April - 341 people homeless; 80 families and 218 children
  - c. PEA: 52 families currently in the city, 20 in the county, 13 in transitional housing,
  - d. Homeless HAP Placefinder Service – 94 households since started in 2018; 44 since January
  - e. Corrib Haven Family Hub – hope to have operational soon, to be managed by Cope
  - f. Modular Hub – units being procured at the moment, once tender awarded there will be a 20 week lead in, expect to be in place by October. Once design complete and procurement underway, Council will be liaising with all relevant parties. Aim is that facilities will be in place to allow service to operate from October 2019. Peter McVerry will be the Service Provider.
  - g. Housing First – objective to work with homeless who have complex house needs. Partners are HSE, Cope and Simon. Some recruitment has taken place. Hope to commence service on June 1<sup>st</sup>.
  - h. CWR – 239 people availed of the service over Winter 2018/9, average stay 11 nights, average occupancy 17
  - i. Allocation from Dept has now been received – 2.6m which is 100k more than last year. In addition to this, there is the allocation for Emergency Accommodation which is reviewed regularly.
  - j. Homeless Regional Action Plan – planning underway; executive will bring a draft to the Housing SPC later in the year
  - k. Mike Cubbard – people who are presenting as homeless who are being given blankets when there is no bed available, where do they go? Attracta and Dermot replied. CWR has now closed. If there isn't a bed, there isn't a bed and people are given a harm minimisation pack – essentially a sleeping bag. Council currently reviewing if the CWR might be extended year round in 2020 when particular pressure expected on services.
  - l. Declan McDonnell queried significant increase in NTQs. Many of these relate to renovations where, following the tenant quitting the property, the rent for new tenants is increased well above the 4% RPZ cap. Should a proposal be put to Council in relation to this? Ann Brett replied – the number of terminations coming in is extraordinary. 20% uplift being given to 65% of HAP tenancies at present. Constantly making representations to the Dept. What is going through the Oireachtas at the moment is Eoghan Murphy's legislation that will provide for longer term notice periods and enforcement powers to the RTB (not the Dept). Even when in a situation where allowing a higher HAP might prevent homelessness arising (even, for example, if there is a case of a family with special needs), Council cannot give more than 4% increase. RAS tenants going into HAP are losing their special transfer status. This is like a timebomb.
3. Presentation on Affordable Housing Scheme
  - a. Laura Sharkey gave a presentation on the Affordable Letting Scheme
  - b. Scheme presented by Council is in line with Dept guidelines. Council needs to agree/approve the criteria eg the km radius for eligibility
  - c. Key issue will be the level of the discount – if Council constructs dwelling for 200k and discounts by 50k to 150k, the discount of 25% remains repayable if the house is sold. The homeowner can make repayments against this over the period of the charge. Further if the property increases in value over time, say to 300k, then 25% of the value at the time of resale would be repayable on sale.
  - d. Council will be supporting this and will be rolling out a number of schemes over the coming period of time.
  - e. Details from the Dept in relation to how the schemes will be funded and the regulations around the schemes have yet to issue.
  - f. Mike Cubbard and Declan McDonnell queried the radius on the proposals. Mike Cubbard was also very critical of the lack of detail issuing from the Dept. He asked if it might be possible for the Executive to provide any indication as to when the scheme might deliver homes on the ground? Mark Lohan welcomed the scheme, but again expressed frustration with the lack of detail. He spoke at length about concerns in relation the radius also. He also asked if one of the criteria would be that the applicant would need to have been declined a mortgage by an institution. Alan Daly sympathised with the Executive on having to work with such a vague document from the Dept. He also pointed out that

the charge on the discount was unprecedented and queried if the charge at the end of the mortgage period would put people in significant debt? He also queried mortgage payments as a % of household income – by his calculations an applicant on a salary of 36k would be excluded. Dermot clarified that 35% of net income is the affordability criteria on the scheme. Declan McDonnell welcomed the scheme and indicated that the Council would need to approve it in May. Would the charge of, say 50k as per the example above, be repayable at the end of the mortgage or would it be a %age of the value at that time? Cllr McDonnell also queried if the Executive had any visibility on when the Dept regulations would issue. John Walsh echoed the other Councillors in welcoming the scheme and thanking Laura for her presentation. Dermot, by way of response, clarified as follows: What is being asked of the Council at the next meeting is to approve the order of priority/eligibility criteria. The Dept has not, as yet, provided any indication as to when further details on the scheme will issue. People who live outside of the area are entitled to apply, but will have a lower priority according to the eligibility criteria adopted (Dept has requested that eligibility will be limited to Local Authority functional area). Income levels for eligibility yet to be issued but likely to be in line with Rebuilding Ireland. No requirement that applicant has been denied a loan from an institution, to be eligible for this scheme. No natural priority given to first time buyers under the criteria. Dermot expects that it will be a minimum of two years – if not more – before houses under this scheme are delivered, allowing for the process that the Council needs to go through and then the build time. Laura clarified that the proposed 5km to place of work criteria relates to the address of the house to be acquired rather than your current address at time of application. Mark Lohan asked if it would be open to the Council to review the criteria in, say, 3 years? Dermot indicated that there is no provision in the scheme for such a review but presumably it would be open to the Council to review – he suggested that the Council would need to go through a few schemes to see how it is operating and then review. Cllr Lohan proposed and Cllr Walsh seconded that the proposal would be brought to the full Council meeting.

#### 4. 2019 Housing Needs Assessment

- a. Attracta Lyons provided an update. 235 applicants have been written to and are required to respond by May 10<sup>th</sup>. Those who have been written to are those who have not been assessed since March of last year, including new applicants. (400 new applicants last year, up slightly on the previous year – number of applicants increasing every year). Typically those who were assessed last year will not be reassessed. Anybody who fails to return is removed from the list. No exceptions. Some 300 households were removed last year, when they did not reply – even after 3 reminders. Those who are on RAS or HAP are not included in the assessment.
- b. Mike Cubbard asked if there would be sufficient staff in place to ensure that there won't be the same chaos as there was last year, particularly when rent review is underway at the same time. Dermot replied that they had extra staff for the HNA last year, this year's numbers would be approx. 10% of last years and could be managed within the Council's own resources.

#### 5. Differential Rent Scheme

- a. Sharon Carroll reported on updates to the Differential Rent Scheme. Rent will be calculated based on 17% of combined household income, excluding the income disregards, going forward. Minimum rent has been increased from 30 to 32euro. The current maximum rent is approx. 180euro – there will be no maximum rent going forward. This will come into effect from July 1<sup>st</sup> for new tenants. A review of all existing tenants will also be done to bring their rent into line with the new Scheme. As the calculations are easier to calculate now, they will all be done on the ihouse system. While the scheme is effective from July 1<sup>st</sup>, it may be that it is sometime in August that the new rents will become applicable. There will be no backdating (this raised considerable issues the last time).
- b. The timelines for the Rent Review were also outlined. Three staff will be allocated to work on this.
- c. Dermot outlined an analysis of current rents. Average across 17 categories at present, under the 2016 scheme, is 16% of income. Average under the new scheme likely to be 17%. A couple, for example, may see an increase of €5 per week. There have been increases in social welfare since 2016, but current rents still based on 2016 social welfare rates. The rent review brings rents into line with increases in income.
- d. Intention going forward is to review rents annually, every Summer – subject to a national scheme being introduced by the Dept.
- e. Mike Cubbard asked if there are many close to the maximum rent of 180€. Alan Daly asked if an assessment might be done on an OAP living alone. He also asked about the charge for waste

management. In relation to the cap, if there are three grown children working in a house, the net income if they are on minimum wage would be 1,400 euro – the lack of a maximum rent cap might lead to children moving out. Declan McDonnell asked about the collection of waste. Glen Bán was allocated money a few years ago to put in new windows in the old section. If rents are being increased, the Council needs to maintain its estates as well. Where is the programme for new windows at - will those who are going to see an increase in their rent see something in return?

- f. Sharon responded. In relation to waste, the Council is not going back into the business of collecting waste. However, in a limited number of areas, the Council has some communal bins – some were being charged for this and others weren't. This provision is to make things fair, so that everyone is paying the same. (Also in some cases, there are management companies and the Council is paying the management fees). The Council has calculations done for categories including OAPs. Increases are as a % of income and every attempt has been made to make the scheme as fair as possible. As a differential rent scheme, it is based on income and will not be more than 17% of household income. In relation to Estate Management, a new post has been advertised and will complement the existing team. A 'qualifying child' will include children up to the age of 21 if they are in full time education. Mike Cubbard asked if guarantees could be given in relation to maintenance – Dermot said this could not be done; maintenance and estate management are not linked to rent. Declan McDonnell asked if the increase in rent could be ringfenced for maintenance. Dermot said he would welcome the Council doing this – this would be done via the budget. Cllr Farrell asked if the only way this could be done is via the budget. Dermot responded that there will be additional resource requirements for the new social housing to come on stream in the coming years. Cllr Walsh asked how much additional income the rent review would generate for the Council. Dermot estimated that it might lead to 150k extra, on a rent budget income of approx. 7m and undertook to do further calculations.
- g. In relation to maintenance – windows and boiler upgrades are being rolled out at present and there are monies in the budget for this. No current planned maintenance; all reactive maintenance being done. Council intends to do full stock condition surveys in the coming years with a view to full planned maintenance with, for example, windows to be replaced every 20 years. Additional staff being recruited for the capital section – good progress being made on coming back to full staff complement ie sufficient staff to maintain 2,400 Council properties.

#### 6. AOB

- a. Choice Based Letting – Executive waiting on new Council and the completion of the HNA before rolling this out. Likely to be implemented over the Summer.
- b. The logging and relogging of maintenance calls was raised by Mike Cubbard and Cllr McDonnell. The Housing Dept is liaising with IT to upgrade the system to manage calls. The current system is very cumbersome. GDPR considerations to be taken into account.
- c. The Chair thanked all of the staff for their cooperation over the period of this Council – they have always been helpful and friendly to himself and to other councillors. Dermot in turn thanked Cllr McDonnell for his cooperation with the staff and for attending CPG and advocating for resources etc

**Gníomhaíochtaí**

**Action(s) required from GCCN:**

**Dáta don chéad chruinniú eile**

**Date of next meeting :**

**To be confirmed after new Council elected**

**Moltaí breise /Any Other Comments:**