

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

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Galway City Community Network
Líonra Pobail Chathair Na Gaillimhe

Cruinniú /Name of Meeting	Housing and Social Inclusion SPC
Ionadaí FPCG (glacadóir - nótaí) Name of GCCF Rep (note-taker)	Karen Golden
Dáta & Suite Date & Location of Meeting:	22.11.2019 Galway City Council, 2pm
I láthair/ Attendance	Cllr Donal Lyons (Chairman) Cllr Mike Cubbard Cllr Declan McDonnell Cllr Terry O'Flaherty Cllr Frank Fahy Cllr Ollie Crowe Cllr Alan Cheevers Walter King, CIF Mark Lohan, ICTU Bridget Kelly, GCCN Karen Golden, GCCN Dermot Mahon, GCC Helena Martyn, GCC Tom Prendergast, GCC Attracta Lyons, GCC Sharon Lawless, GCC Siobhán Donoghue, GCC Ann Brett, GCC

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Príomhphointí pléite / Key Issues Discussed:

1. Minutes noted
2. Draft Corporate Plan presented by Eithne Murphy Acting SEO

Dermot Mahon – 5-year Corporate Plan has very broad priorities. Keywords are good quality social and affordable housing.

Corporate Plan is to come before December Council Meeting and due to be adopted within six months.

3. Attracta Lyons – Draft West Region Homelessness Action Plan 2020-2022
 - Statutory requirement that Galway City, Galway County, Roscommon and Mayo develop and adopt a Homeless Action Plan to address Prevention and Reduction of Homelessness.
 - Local Action Plans to be then developed in each LA area.

Questions:

Mayor Cubbard – good to get the figures, stark as they are. Increase in family homelessness a damning indictment of where we are. Commended Housing Staff for their efforts. Why have the figures increased so much? Where are the people who are homeless? Rough Sleepers – welcome that the Cold Weather Response is in place earlier this year. But where do people go in April? How many are on the streets who won't engage with any service, who won't come off the streets? Also concerned about the notable increase in the number of Travellers who are becoming homeless. Are there any improvements from Central Government in terms of keeping rents under control?

Cllr Frank Fahy – a lot of the rough sleepers on Shop Street are foreign nationals, can we help with repatriation? Would a lump sum for example help them with resettling in their own country? Rough sleepers are a topic of conversation with tourists now. In relation to boarded up houses, photos are going up on Facebook... where are we in relation to turnaround now? (Not all Council houses.) Can we work to expedite the turnaround? Proposal for Carrowbrowne Halting Site – are there any proposals on where these Travellers will be moved when it closes down? How many of the homeless families are from the Travelling Community? In relation to HAP, how long from when a landlord agrees to let a property until the paperwork is processed and the property can be let?

Cllr Declan McDonnell – Thanks to Attracta for presentation. What is government policy in relation to allocations for those who are homeless? Is it necessary to allocate 30% for housing? Shocked to see that Traveller Accommodation is going up so much – why is this? Never an issue in the previous five years. With Direct Provision, do they have to have permission to stay and then we need to allocate housing? A minimum and maximum rent for each area would help.

Mark Lohan – It is a difficult task that the Housing Dept here in Galway deals with. Stark hearing that 200 children are homeless and half are from the Traveller Community. Is this new, or is it increasing? On the HAP Placefinder, that is going to be spread across the other regions, are there adequate resources for this? Point 4.5 relating to Interagency supports – why is this specifically mentioned? Where is extra funding that is going into homeless services going?

Cllr Ollie Crowe – Believes the housing situation to be a National Emergency. Disingenuous for Minister Murphy to be blaming Local Authorities and going to building sites in a hard hat and implying the issue is being addressed. Minister English took issue with Local Authority also. Accountability needs to change. On a daily basis, middle aged single men are finding it extremely difficult to find one bed units. Single person can only get 690€ under HAP, but landlords can be charging perhaps 900€. Is there any delay in the handover process for new housing? Is there a need to expand the facilities team? Will there be a report from the Taskforce coming back to this Chamber, given that there are no public representatives on the Taskforce?

Cllr Terry O'Flaherty – thank you to Attracta also. What do we do in relation to Rough Sleepers, particularly in April when the Cold Weather Response closes? Commended Cope and Galway Simon for the work done. In relation to the turnaround, some properties have fallen into disrepair by the time they are turned around. And in the meantime, we are paying for Emergency Accommodation.

Bridget Kelly – In relation to the Traveller Interagency, there is no interagency at the moment. In relation to homelessness, it is an issue that relates to everyone and compliments to the staff of Galway City Council for their significant work. The reason that the

number of Travellers in Emergency Accommodation is increasing is because there is a Traveller Accommodation Plan and the targets are not being met. In addition, due to discrimination and racism, it is even more difficult for Travellers to access HAP Accommodation. Is there a plan in place in relation to buying 4/5 bedrooms for larger families?

Cllr Alan Cheevers – where are we on Public Private Partnerships? Are there any prosecutions in relation to Short Term Lets?

Responses:

- Dermot Mahon – on some of the broader issues, the breakdown of the why, City Council doing some research on this with the Dept at the moment. Taking NTQs from March 2019 and follow through eg. if a landlord was selling, were the properties sold. The significant number of homeless relates to NTQs.
- Rough Sleepers - Cold Weather Response: effectively those who are in the units on the 26th of April will have nowhere to go on the 27th, as happened this year and last. Working with Service Providers in relation to this. Housing First is part of the response. Lack of one bed units a challenge here.
- Number of vacant properties – list will be going to Councillors shortly. Roughly 70 at present; 10 are long term and 15 are recent acquisitions. There is a challenge to turn property around. Aiming to get it down to 10 weeks. Do have staff in place now. Council engages contractors to an extent, because staff have to do day to day maintenance as well. The Council is being criticised in relation to both number of vacant properties and length of vacancies and aiming to get both down.
- LTACC – would prefer to brief this Committee first in January in relation to plans for Traveller Accommodation. TAP adopted last June and within this a number of broad objectives set.
- Government directive on allocations to the homeless – there was a directive in place previously under Minister Kelly. This led to some unintended consequences. No directive in place at present. City Council does work to prioritise some homeless families.
- HAP Placefinder – operating successfully in the City. County has established one also. Mayo setting one up. Roscommon is not. It is a good system that does prevent homelessness. Up to 150 odd in the City in just over a year.
- Differential Rents – there will be increases in rent arising from the introduction of the new scheme; about 95% of tenants have been notified of increases. Average increase is 2-3%. Goes into the general pot, rather than being allocated to Housing specifically. However, the overall Housing budget has increased from 28m in 2019 to 33m in 2020. Significant increase is for homeless services. 4m in 2018 to 8m in 2019 and 9.5m in 2020 – most of this is going to Emergency Accommodation. Also new services eg. family hubs.
- Mix – of approximately 4,000 people on the housing waiting list, close to half are singles. Need to allow for single person households within mix of housing being built.
- Taskforce Report – will be doing an end of year report for the Chairperson. Once this has been considered by the January meeting, it can be circulated to the SPC members. Can circulate the July report now.
- Overall delivery – 178 targeted this year between build, acquisition and leasing. On track for 174 ie pretty much on target for this year.
- Interagency Group – hasn't operated for a number of years. Council is looking at this.
- LTACC – Council will present to the LTACC in January
- Numbers of Travellers in Homeless Accommodation – Dermot agreed with Bridget that this is largely due to the fact that the Council has not met its targets.
- PPP – a PPP due to start in the near future and Tom Prendergast will outline details in his presentation later.
- Short term lets – this is a planning issue, albeit that it impacts on Housing.
- About 50 families are in private emergency accommodation in the City; roughly half are from the Traveller Community. The average number of children is three.
- There are ten families currently in Corrib Haven and longer term solutions are being worked through.
- Modular Housing – Peter McVerry will be managing these units.
- Regional Action Plan – it would be good to get the input of the SPC on this plan and please forward any input. Input from the SPC would be welcome into the Local Plan also.

Further Comments

Cllr Ollie Crowe – not hearing enough in terms of one bed apartments.

Cllr Cubbard – Rough Sleepers, how many have not engaged? April 27th – where will people go? Propose we invite Minister down to hear these figures. How do we compare to other regions?

Cllr Fahy – Landlords and timelines for inspections. Repatriation for Rough Sleepers. Breakdown of homeless figures.

Cllr McDonnell – monitoring of rents and conditions; new document in relation to NTQs is not very strong – doesn't give enough protection.

Mark Lohan – seconded Cllr Cubbard's motion to invite the Minister

Cllr Terry O'Flaherty – can we have a policy for Rough Sleepers from April to October also?

Cllr Cheevers – how will hub units in Westside to be allocated?

Further Responses

- Ann Brett – no delay on the part of the Council in allocating properties; delay tends to be on landlord's side. Inspections can happen within eight months.
- RTB has set up a new enforcement section, only staffed in the last few weeks. One of the key criticisms of RPZ was that it was up to tenant to make a complaint.
- NTQs – 50% of the reason for NTQs is the landlord selling; 25% because landlord wants it for his own use; balance for other reasons such as anti social behaviour. The major flaw in the RPZ legislation was that it came in overnight, which went against those who had been charging more reasonable rents. RPZ only addresses demand side of the equation. Rent increases will only be addressed when the supply side comes up. Have lost 123 properties under RAS and leasing because Council was unable to meet market rents less 8%. Average rent for 2 bed is 1,200 and HAP limit is 690, so refusing some applications because if Council grants HAP where rent will be unaffordable which may in turn impact ability to pay and credit rating.
- Dermot – intending to expand the number of single person units over the next couple of years, in association with planning.
- In relation to Rough Sleeping, reviewing the need for another hostel for 2020.
- The Council will work with any Rough Sleeper who requests repatriation.
- LTACC – training day scheduled for Dec 13th and first meeting will follow in January.
- In relation to hub in Westside, a visit can be organised for January for members of the SPC. Idea of modular units is to take people out of hotels. McVerry will be working with service providers to find housing as is intended to be short term.
- Siobhán – weekly interagency meetings with Cope and Galway Simon.
- Have brought BARCA down from Dublin to work with Cope;
- It takes time to engage with Rough Sleepers. Have had some success. Housing First will reduce the numbers. Cope go out once or twice a week to engage.

Draft Regional Action Plan – Cllr Fahy proposed, Cllr McDonnell seconded

4. Tom Prendergast – Capital Programme

Tom gave a detailed presentation in relation to the Capital Programme.

Questions

- Declan McDonnell. Funding at the back of John Paul Centre was 96, but 120 indicated. Have we been approved for funding for Baile an Choiste road or are we funding it ourselves? Is it still affordable?
- Mayor Cubbard – great to see progress; good to see we are catching up as we are so far behind. Mayor Cubbard raised a number of questions in relation to specific sites and asked if there any affordable schemes coming forward?

- Cllr Fahy – Bothar na Choiste; application for 1-2 m to open up road was refused by Dept; what is happening now? Difficult to make out on the slides the location of the sites – is it possible to get larger maps. What are affordable market rents?
- Cllr Cheevers – 58 social housing or is there some affordable also going into one site? What plans are there for Services in Merlin? What is the status of allocations? Sraith Fada – has due diligence been done on the management company eg no public lighting working at present.
- Cllr Terry O’Flaherty – Doughiska, can you elaborate further on sites? Do we have enough staff in place to deal with Council’s own properties going forward eg anti social behaviour?
- Mark Lohan – good to see the progress. Lands at Ballyburke – 70% of them will be private - private developer on public lands?
- Cllr Ollie Crowe – Gaelcarrig Park – a number of residents raised concerns re development. Good progress but not enough with 4,000 families (12,000 people) on our social housing waiting list.
- Bridget Kelly – HAP figures for 2018, are they carried over into 2019?
- Cllr Donal Lyons – welcomes mix of social, affordable and private. People who are being housed by voluntary sector cannot own their own home, whereas those who live in Council housing can aspire to own their own home.

Responses

- Tom Prendergast. Awaiting further clarification on how we are to draw down monies and progress the Affordable Scheme.
- Bóthar an Choiste – applications for funding were not successful; will be internally funded; will recoup a substantial amount through development levies. Will be bringing forward an application for SCHEP funding.
- Monivea Road Site – will come down to planning and density.
- Circular Road Traveller Specific Site – Keena are bringing forward a proposal for the site; group housing type development; CAS application has gone in.
- Coillte Mhuirlinne – this is the only site currently approved for Services Site funding which is linked to Affordable Housing Scheme.
- Rocklands Avenue – 58 all social housing; SCHEP funded (no flexibility to have affordable element).
- Ballyburke – significant legacy debt; real need to pay down debt; development licence model will enable Council to mix social, affordable and private. Competitive bidding process for developer to get on site; Council will retain ownership of site; developer will be on site under licence.
- HAP figure – 2018 is separate to 2019 figure; no carryover.
- Tenant Purchase Option for voluntary sector – policy level question for the Department. There is a distinction between Local Authority and Voluntary Sector.
- Belmont – waiting on a request for allocations from Co-operative Housing.

Further Comments

Cllr Frank Fahy – requesting clarification in writing in relation to proposals for a particular site.

Further Responses

- Tom Prendergast – will provide written clarification. Proposal is to get mix onto the site and to pay down the legacy debt (which is a significant issue).
- Density and number of units for Doughiska will be in line with Development Plan.
- Additional numbers of social units will place an additional burden on staffing. There will be a need for ongoing and consistent increases in staffing.
- Amenities associated with new developments – there will be a requirement to comply with planning. There will be a requirement for a crèche and a play area on one of the sites.

- Sraith Fada – management company... CALF funded acquisitions by the AHBs. The AHBs will have to do their due diligence in relation to the management companies. Tuath will need to manage any issues there.
 - Housing Grants – further details to follow.
5. Housing Rent Review – Sharon provided an update. Came before previous SPC. Galway City Council tenancies, weekly rental charged based on income. Differential Rent Scheme in place since 2016 was reviewed in 2019. A lot of changes in household composition and household income. Key element is that rent is based on 17% of household income with €5 deduction for each child in full time education up to 21, OAPs and somebody on disability. Minimum increased from 30 to 32 and maximum was removed.

2,257 tenants contacted. Excellent engagement with only 57 tenants who have not submitted information. Estate Management Team following up. As of last Monday new rent applied to 1,800 households. Other accounts being followed up. Others to be finished by the end of the month. No back dating. Increase in the majority of cases – 78% with majority increasing by less than €2; 22% will see a decrease or stay the same. Average rent €64.50 per week.

Questions

Cllr Crowe – thanked Sharon for her update. He was in Bohermore yesterday and believes that what we need is more liaison with the Community. We need to employ staff to stop the frightening activity that is happening in social housing estates in the City. We have 2,500 social houses and no monies do them up, but we do have money to give to private tenants for doing up their homes – absolute lunacy. Some couples are paying €170 and that has gone up again... not good value for money for the conditions of their property.

Cllr Frank Fahy – average rent increased by 2€ per week. Where somebody is paying the max rent, is there a provision for somebody to purchase the house? What are the households who have not engaged being charged, now that there is no max rent?

Cllr McDonnell – Cllr Crowe should withdraw remarks in relation to anti-social behaviour in social housing, which cast aspersions on social housing tenants. Some households experiencing significant increases.

Mark Lohan – 5€ reductions are welcome. As we are in a RPZ, with max rent increase of 4%, how can the Council increase by more?

Cllr Terry O’Flaherty – if someone is on high rent, and circumstances change, can rents be reduced?

Cllr Donal Lyons – welcome that there is no backdating, as this caused an issue in the past.

Responses

Sharon – by way of response - new rent scheme, rather than a rent increase. In previous scheme, rent charged on 2016 social welfare rates, but current income – this was unfair on people who are working. New scheme based on current social welfare and/or current income. As a result, if income had increased in the intervening years, rent did increase. If tenants had been informing Council all along that their income had gone up, they would have no rent increase.

Highest rent is based on 17% of income. This is national policy. Maximum rent was 180€, recommendation of Government and City Council auditor is that there be no max. But there is a clause that it can only increase by 50%. So max now is 270€.

Council has seen an increase in tenant purchase applications. This is available to tenants, as is the Rebuilding Ireland Homeloan Scheme.

Penalty charge may be applicable to the 58 who have not yet engaged. Council will go down the enforcement route.

Rent scheme is based on income, this is national policy.

6. Next Meeting

9.30am – 28th February.

Socruithe déanta/ Key Decisions Made:

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

Dáta don chéad chruinniú eile
Date of next meeting :

9.30am – 28th February.

Moltaí breise /Any Other Comments:

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