

Minutes of the Housing & Social Inclusion Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Meeting 24th September, 2021 (via Zoom)

In Attendance: Cllr. D. Lyons, Chairperson, Galway City Council
Cllr. D. McDonnell, Galway City Council
Cllr. T. O’Flaherty, Galway City Council
Cllr. E. Hoare, Galway City Council
Cllr A. Cheevers, Galway City Council
Cllr. I. Byrne, Galway City Council
Ms. K. Golden, GCCN Representative
Ms. M. Conneely, GCCN Representative
Mr. M. Lohan, Irish Congress of Trade Unions

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. M. Fallon-Ward, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. A. Lyons, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. S. Donoghue, Senior Social Worker, Housing Department

Present Ms. K. Lohan, A/Staff Officer, Housing Department

Apologies: Cllr. M. O’Connor, Galway City Council
Cllr. M. Cubbard, Galway City Council

Absent: Mr. W. King, Construction Sector

Cllr. D. Lyons thanked all present for attending the meeting and advised that he would have to depart the meeting at 11.15am, he advised that Cllr. O’Flaherty would act as Chair in his absence.

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 26th May, 2021

The Minutes of the Meeting of 28th May, 2021 were proposed by Cllr. T. O’Flaherty and seconded by Ms. K. Golden.

2. Matters Arising

In response to queries raised by members Mr. Mahon, Mr. Prendergast and Ms. Martyn advised as follows:

Void Properties – Galway City Council has currently c.65 void units including a small number of long-term voids. Funding applications for 46 units were issued to the Department for funding in the region of €450,000. Turnaround and issue of offer letters for these properties is expected to be completed by late November 2021. A suite of works now takes place on properties prior to re-letting in contrast to minimal works which would have taken place in the past. An update on the current void properties will issue to City Council members in the coming weeks. Security is present on sites with CCTV used where necessary and appropriate. When contractors are in place carrying out work on void properties they are responsible for providing security.

Choice Based Letting (CBL) – in the year from August 2020 to August 2021, 109 properties were advertised through CBL with over 3,400 expressions of interest noted. In this period, 88 properties were allocated, 21 are in the process of allocation and there were 8 refusals. 50-60 properties were not advertised and were allocated using the traditional model and to transfer applicants. Transfer applicants are unable to bid on

properties on CBL for practical reasons, for example as the system is time based the tenants transfer application date is the date the system will use and therefore it is highly probably they will be too far down the list to be considered for the selected property with the high level of interest for properties on CBL. As noted, a certain number of properties are not advertised on CBL and transfer applicants among other applicant categories are considered for these properties. An update on transfers can be included in a future Chief Executive's Monthly Report.

Housing Waiting List – details on the number of applicants by area of choice and property size are included in Quarterly Reports which issue to the full Council. The Quarter 3 report will issue with the October Agenda. Requirements for two bed accommodation make up a large portion of the housing list and the Housing Service Delivery Plan for 2022-2026 will set out how Galway City Council proposes to meet its targets.

3. Homeless Report and Update/Housing First

Ms. H. Martyn provided a summary of the report circulated to members prior to the meeting. In particular she highlighted the funding available to services, progress on the COVID 19 vaccine roll-out and response to COVID 19, Housing First roll-out, numbers availing of services including hubs, and high number of Notice of Terminations and landlords leaving private rented market. She also thanked services providers for their work during challenging times.

The following queries were raised by members and responded to:

- Lack of one bed accommodation units – the meeting was advised that the SPC cannot adopt a motion in its own right. The City Development Plan is considering this issue. There is a demand for one and two bed accommodation and high density development on brownfield sites are one solution to this. The Chair advised that he would submit a Notice of Motion to the full Council meeting requesting a letter be issued to the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage calling for a relaxation in the regulations on one-bedroomed accommodation.
- Welcome the reducing number of people and families availing of emergency accommodation, the numbers peaked in early 2019 and has been reducing, however it was noted there is an increase in 2021 from 2020, funding and resources on homeless prevention is needed in addition to monies for emergency accommodation.
- Housing First is continuing and that the date for targets to be met is June 2022, it was acknowledged the scarcity of one bedroomed accommodation available which is most suitable for Housing First is making targets difficult to achieve.
- Pilot Benzo Detox Project – Ms. K. Golden advised that this pilot project run by Galway Simon is working well and has benefited 40 people since it started. It is funded by the HSE and it is hoped the funding will continue past 2021. Cllr Hoare requested that a presentation on the project be given to a SPC meeting in the future.
- Westside Hub – Approximately 30 families have availed of this service since May 2020 and 13 have moved to alternative accommodation, the average stay is 6 months but this can vary. The Hub managed by Peter McVerry Trust is working very well, for any anti-social behaviour issues that arise from time to time there are clear protocols in place and they are dealt with by Peter McVerry Trust and Galway City Council can assist if requested. Overall there has been very few issues to date, if problems do arise, like in any other service, people can be excluded from services available. Ms. H. Martyn congratulated the COPE Modh Eile complex on the recent ICSH award they won.
- Homeless Forum – Ms. Martyn advised that the next meeting will be in Quarter 4, and that the Homeless Steering Committee will meet prior to this meeting. She expects both meetings to take place prior to the next SPC meeting and updates from these meetings will be brought to the SPC.
- Mr. Mahon referenced the Focus Ireland report circulated to members prior, he advised it give a good breakdown of the numbers availing of services, the report does not go into the reasons why people were availing of services as this was not part of the brief. This report is not yet published but Focus Ireland agreed for the report to be circulated strictly to Housing SPC members only.

4. Housing For All/Affordable Housing Update

Mr. Mahon provided an update to members on the Housing for All document recently published. In particular he highlighted the following actions relating to Galway City:

- There is a target of 1,235 social housing units, acquisition of units through one off purchase (excluding CAS) will be extremely limited, Part V is amended to 10% social units and 10% affordable units, there is a move away from Long Term Leasing. Unsure if targets are enough to meet current demand but have to be realistic on what can be delivered in the timeframe 2022 to 2026.
- Local Authorities will be responsible for direct build, purchase of turnkey schemes for social and affordable use. Mixed tenure developments can be constructed, however there will be different funding application processed (eg social housing, affordable housing) to the Department of Housing. The Department and Local Authorities are looking at ways to streamline the process. Mono-tenure schemes can also be built. Details will be included in the Housing Services Delivery Plan which will issue later this year.
- Affordable Housing Applicants – there will be no waiting list, invitations for applications will be taken on a scheme by scheme basis, it will be based on a Scheme of Eligibility and the price paid for a property will be dependent on income and based on family size at time of application. The Direct Subsidy Grant is increased to a maximum of €100,000 however the regulations which are yet to be published will clarify issues.
- National standardisation of Differential Rents Scheme pending.
- Tenant Purchase – the maximum discount is reduced to 25% and the period an applicant needs to be a tenant has increased from one year to ten years.

Mr. Mahon and Mr. Prendergast responded to the queries raised by members as follows:

- The Shared Equity element has to be agreed in Regulations, the equity percentage will have to be redeemed at some point in the future either when a person wants to repay it, sale of a property or in a will. The owner will be advised at various stages of the amount outstanding. There will be no claw-back for affordable homes. The Local Authority can issue a Notice of Realisation and funds redeemed are repayable to the Department by the Local Authority. A 10% deposit will be required to purchase affordable properties.
- Fresh Start – no definition provided to date, but expect it includes separate couples who no longer have an interest in a property.
- Cost Rental is based on the cost of construction, depreciation value and maintenance costs, the Land Development Agency proposed development at Sandy Road will include an element of cost rental.
- Capacity restraints are acknowledged in Housing for All, eg finance, land, staff skills, cost of building, additional staffing resources requests have issued to the Department. Galway City Council is actively looking to acquire land and significant land acquisition will be required over the coming years. Capacity constraints in construction industry is an issue and needs to be addressed.
- Rebuilding Ireland loans are available for a joint income of up to €75,000, it follows similar due diligence to banks, no automatic guarantee an application will be granted. Help to Buy is available up to €30,000.
- Merlin Park, Ballyburke, Clybaun Road, Castlegar and Bothar an Choiste are the first sites that will be examined for affordable housing schemes.
- Procurement requirements will be followed for all projects.
- Hoarding of residential zoned land and planning permissions will be dis-incentivised.
- Approved Housing Bodies will not be involved in providing affordable housing.
- Support for contractors with credit is available under the house building fund through House Building Finance Ireland, unsure if Housing for All included any additional measures.
- Local Authorities have not being notified to date if there are any penalties if targets are not met.

The Chair Cllr. D. Lyons thanked staff for the presentation and arranging site visits to Ard Cre and Clairin.

5. Capital Programme/Traveller Accommodation Programme update

Mr. T. Prendergast provided an update to the meeting on the housing capital programme and he advised that the work to date is consistent to meet targets. He highlighted the schemes completed, work currently taking place on site, schemes currently in the planning process and funding applied for.

In response to queries raised by members, Mr. Prendergast responded as follows:

- **Rockfield Park Ballybane** – it is disappointing that the work is not further along, there are some issues with the contractor that are being dealt with through the contractual process and that where necessary, issues have been referred to a third party for resolution. The contractor is currently not working/due to start work on any other Galway City Council sites.
- **Bothar an Choiste** –Galway City Council are progressing options regarding road widening to facilitate access to Council lands. The area is under examination for an affordable housing scheme.
- **Keeraun** – there has been significant engagement with the Traveller community about this site. Potential occupants have been identified for the site when it is completed. Funding has been approved by the Traveller Accommodation Unit.
- **Fana Glas Site** – work is ongoing on developing plans to remodel/reshape the wider area.

6. Any Other Business

The next meeting of the SPC is scheduled for Friday 26th November at 9.30am.

Cllr. T. O'Flaherty in the absence of the Chair, from 11.15am, thanked members and officials for attending, the meeting concluded at 11.45am.