

Minutes of the Housing & Social Inclusion Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) Meeting 26th February 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. M. O’ Connor, Galway City Council
Cllr. F. Fahy, Galway City Council
Cllr A. Cheevers, Galway City Council
Cllr. M. Cubbard, Galway City Council
Cllr. I. Byrne, Galway City Council
Ms. K. Golden, 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
Mr. E. Humphreys, Executive Architect, Housing Department
Ms. A. Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. S. Carroll, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. M. Ward, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. A. Lyons, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. L. Sharkey, A/Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. S. Donoghue, Senior Social Worker, Housing Department

Present Ms. M. Kilgarrieff, A/Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Department

Apologies: Mr. W. King, Construction Sector

Cllr. D. Lyons welcomed all present and thanked them for attending.

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 27th November 2020

The Minutes of the Meeting of 27th November 2020 were proposed by Cllr. D. McDonnell and seconded by Cllr. T. O’Flaherty.

2. Matters Arising

It was agreed to add the Traveller Accommodation Programme and the Capital Programme update to the agenda for every second meeting, to allow room for other items to be discussed also.

Choice Based Letting is running according to plan. Letters are being issued in batches and Councillors will be briefed on Monday.

The Control of Horses Bye Laws are on the agenda for the March Council meeting for noting. They will be published on March 25th for consultation and preparation of submission. A report on the consultation will be presented at the May SPC meeting and, if the SPC agrees, the Draft Bye Laws will go before the Council in the summer.

Under Level 5 COVID restrictions, construction at the scheme in Ballybane has ceased until at least April 5th. An update will be provided in the March CE report.

3. Homeless Report and Update/Housing First

Ms. H. Martyn advised that Galway City Council was part of the Housing First pilot with Cork and Limerick. The programme is currently funded by philanthropic sources. A review is to take place before the end of 2021. The intention is that the Department will fund the programme going forward but this is not the case for 2021. It is hoped that Galway City Council will reach the target of 30 Housing First tenancies by the end of the 3 years. Housing First has now been rolled out regionally with COPE and Simon providing key supports.

Ms. Martyn referred to the Homeless Services report which was circulated before the meeting. She noted that services have been impacted by COVID and offered thanks to the service providers for containing any outbreaks and for managing the situation effectively. The Cold Weather Response at the Glenoaks is at capacity, which is usual for the time of year. 18% of families in homeless services are Travellers and the challenge of getting private rented accommodation was noted.

Concerns were voiced in relation to a possible upsurge in Notice to Quits when the moratorium is lifted and Ms. S. Donoghue asked that anyone with concerns around Notice to Quits should contact Homeless Services as soon as possible to discuss their options.

4. Affordable Housing Scheme/Land Acquisition Programme

A number of documents were circulated before the meeting in relation to the Affordable Housing Bill which is currently at proposal stage. Sites at Merlin, Castlegar, Bothar an Choiste, Clybaun Road and Ballyburke are earmarked for possible inclusion of affordable homes under the scheme. It will be challenging to provide houses that are affordable, meet all relevant regulations and that are designed in such a way that people will be interested in buying them. Any land costs may have an impact on the price. The previously adopted Scheme of Allocations may be replaced in favour of a more first come, first served system.

Mr. E. Humphreys provided a detailed presentation outlining the plans for the Merlin Lands Scheme. The laneways at the rear of the properties are gated and amenities will be developed in consultation with Parks. Any seating areas are intended to be within the curtilage of the properties and not in public areas, but this can be discussed.

Current estimates indicate a projected cost of €160,000 - €230,000 per unit approximately, however, this will depend on the procurement costs and the final legislation. Mr. D. Mahon stated that incorporating more special needs units into the scheme can be looked at, but cost may be an inhibiting factor as specially adapted units tend to be more expensive to build and this may take the cost of the properties beyond the affordable limits. The percentage of applicants who would require these kinds of adaptations is also not known at present. Considering an online expressions of interest to see what market might be there before building the scheme in Merlin Lands. Access to the scheme will be through Coillte Mhuirlinne. Access through Ballybane and the Dublin road may be considered eventually but Galway City Council does not own those lands.

The need for one and two bed properties to be built was emphasised.

Mr. D. Mahon pointed out the difference to previous schemes in that it appears that the clawback remains the same and does not wither away over time as it had in the previous scheme, even if the property value decreases. The land cost at Ballyburke will have to be recouped somewhere. If this is through the price of the properties they will no longer be affordable.

5. Energy Efficiency Programme

Mr. T. Prendergast provided a presentation in relation to the Energy Efficiency Programme. This programme was launched in 2013 and Phase 1 included less invasive upgrading works. Phase 2 was to be restricted to a smaller number of older units, however, this scheme has been discontinued and replaced by the Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme. An allocation of funds has been given to all Local Authorities for 2021, with a

rolling allocation after that. Galway City Council has been provisionally allocated €600,000 for 2021. The scheme aims to bring the BER rating of all properties to a B2. Phase 1 of the scheme is being completed at the moment, however, works have been paused due to COVID restrictions. Works at 2 properties in Ballinfoile have been completed but the properties are not currently occupied.

6. AOB

Galway City Council is looking to move toward a planned maintenance programme. This is expensive to roll out and will require greater resources. Currently there is a 24 hour emergency call-out time and an out of hours service. Local Authorities are not required to report on maintenance turnaround time. Non-emergency works are not being dealt with at the moment.

The deficit of resources in the area of Energy Efficiency was highlighted. An Environment Engineer has taken over the role of Energy Manager along with their own duties and responsibilities. A Climate Action Implementation Group has been formed and an in-house energy team is being established and is due to meet next week.

Cllr. D. Lyons and Mr. D. Mahon thanked Ms. S. Carroll for her contributions to the Housing Department and the SPC over the years and wished her well in her new role in the Environment Department.

Cllr. F. Fahy advised the meeting that he intends to step down from the Housing SPC and Cllr. Eddie Hoare will take his place, subject to normal Council ratification.

Cllr. Lyons thanked all members and officials for their attendance and the meeting then concluded.