

Minutes of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee Meeting

Friday 26th May, 2023

In Attendance: Cllr. D. Lyons, Galway City Council (Chair)
Cllr. T. O' Flaherty, Galway City Council
Cllr. D. McDonnell, Galway City Council
Cllr. E. Hoare, Galway City Council
Cllr. A. Cheevers, Galway City Council
Cllr. I. Byrne, Galway City Council
Cllr. M. Cubbard, Galway City Council
Mr. M. Lohan, ICTU Representative
Ms. M. Conneely, GCCN Representative

Officials: Ms. P Philibin, Director of Services, Housing Department
Ms. H. Martyn, A/Senior Executive Officer, Housing Department
Ms. M. Gibsey, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. A. Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. M. Fallon Ward, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. Louise Esler, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Mr. D. Healy, A/Administrative Officer, Housing Department

Apologies: Ms. K. Golden, GCCN Representative

Present Ms. F. Griffin, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Department

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 24th February, 2023

The Minutes of the Meeting of 24th February were proposed by Cllr. E. Hoare and seconded by Cllr. T. O'Flaherty and agreed by all.

2. Matters Arising

- Clarification was sought in relation to the 114 affordable houses mentioned in the previous minutes – It was advised that there is 85 in the Merlin Park scheme and there is also the Clybaun scheme. Discussions are still ongoing with the Department to establish if affordable units can be placed on the Ballyburke site.
- It was reported at the last meeting there would be a new infrastructure directorate, what is the current status of this.
- What is the current status of the retrofitting of properties, it was reported there was a € 1 Million surplus in the rent collection, can this be used to fund the project.
- Ms. M Conneely asked the contents of the email sent by Ms. Karen Golden in relation to the minutes of the previous meeting be noted. It is noted that the Local Authority intend to proceed with the dormitory style accommodation for Seamus Quirke Road, concerns have been raised about this by Dr. Kieran Coleman, Nurse Regina Boyle, COPE Galway, Galway Simon Community and members of linkage group over the last number of years. Further to the Departments guidelines in relation to emergency accommodation indicates that 1 or 2 bed accommodation is preferable, will these concerns be taken on board by the Local Authority. – It is the intention of the Local Authority to

proceed with the dormitory style accommodation, this is within the guidelines from the Department, space is needed desperately hence the design of Seamus Quirke Road.

3. Affordable Housing Update

Ms. L. Esler provided a presentation and responded to queries raised by the members as follows:

- In relation to the 70/30 split, the 70% should be open to Galway City applicants and not the other way around – This is laid out in the legislation received from the Department and is rolled out nationally. The 70% split is open nationally, Galwegians can apply, it is the 30% where the additional criteria of living/working in Galway must apply.
- What evidence of address will be required to stop applicants using someone else’s address in order to qualify for the scheme – Galway City Council will be following the guidance that comes from the Housing Authority.
- If people on the Social Housing Waiting List now have an increase in their income, can they now qualify for affordable housing and move off the Social Housing Waiting List – Applicants on the Social Housing Waiting List can apply for affordable housing if they wish to do so.
- Will each individual scheme be advertised in its own right –each scheme will be advertised individually and well in advance of the applications going live. Advertisements will be on both the council website and at least one newspaper.
- In relation to the online applications, how will we accommodate people who are not computer literate – GCC will have to revert to the Housing Agency on this and will revert when guidance is received.
- A suggestion was made that an Information Open Day should be provided by Galway City Council in advance of applications opening so that members of the public can drop in and get more information and ask any questions they may have – This is something that will be looked at when the scheme is further advanced.
- A request was made that the presentation be circulated to the members –it was agreed to circulate the presentation to members following the meeting along with the FAQs. This has been completed.
- As the applications will be system based has a risk assessment been carried out if the system fails, what is the backup – The system will be a Housing Agency system, it has been outlined to the Housing Agency that GCC will need to see the system and heavily test it before going live.
- Will this be done on a first come first served basis rather than the point system used previously – applications will be prioritised by “time and date” stamp.
- Will there be a clause which will stop people renting out the houses once they have bought them – People buying affordable units must be the owner/occupier. You cannot rent an affordable unit to someone else, if an applicant decides to sell the property there will be claw back limits on it from the Local Authority.
- Clarification was sought on the income limits for the scheme – Salary income limits will be determined by the type of property applied for and the mortgage that the applicant can achieve.
- Concerns were raised in relation the time and date system as with other schemes in the Local Authority applicants are not penalised for being last in with their application e.g., CBL, the same

message should apply to applicants across all schemes in the Local Authority – the time and date system has been set nationally by the Housing Agency.

4. Housing Capital & Affordable Housing update

An update was circulated to members in advance of the meeting. Queries raised by the members were responded to as follows:

- Is it possible to get a more comprehensive map for the Clybaun scheme and is there a timeframe on when construction might start as it is not going through a Part 8 process – The details are being finalised at the moment, it is the intention to meet with the area Councillors in the coming weeks to go through the designs and hear any concerns which may be raised by residents. While it isn't going to a full Part 8 process, we will follow the consultation process with other Departments within City Hall and the area Councillors. Construction must commence by December 2024.
- It was noted that any proposed developments for Social and affordable housing between now and December 2024 unless there is a particular Environmental concern will not be subject to the Part 8 process.
- What is the status of the possible Traveller specific accommodation behind Fana Glas – This is currently being looked at, consultation is needed with Traveller families in terms of what the group scheme will look like. There is an extensively long Planning regulatory process.
- Is there an update on Kiltullagh House – This has been appealed to An Bord Pleanála and there is no decision at the moment.
- Do we have to wait until the Planning for the Docks development before that site can be considered for Housing – There is ongoing discussions between the Docks and the LDA in terms of residential development on the Docks land, it is not dependant on the overall Planning.

5. Acquisition Update

Ms M. Gibsey provided an update in relation to Acquisitions and advised as follows:

Earlier in the year the Government issued guidance to Galway City Council which gave an initial target of 50 acquisitions in the year. To date we have 51 Expressions of Interest on file that are under consideration. 24 of those units have tenants in situ with the others coming as vacant possession. Galway City Council have in total acquired 4 units since January – 2 vacant possessions and 2 with tenants in situ. We are at the stage of sale agreed with 14 other units.

Ms M. Gibsey responded to queries raised by the members as follows:

- Since the lifting of the eviction ban has there been an increase in expressions of interest from landlords – Yes there has been an increase in EOIs however 50% of those are vacant units.
- In terms of the increase expected do we have sufficient staff resources to deal with same – In terms of the workforce Plan we are looking at where the pressure points are within the Housing Services area now.
- In terms of the Notice to Quits being served on tenants, do we have any statistics on the reasons for the NTQ? E.g. – Landlord selling, house being refurbished etc. –

- In relation the Croi na Conaithe scheme, can Galway City Council qualify for the grant to refurbish some of our own vacant stock – The Local Authority cannot qualify for the grant, it is only open to private property owners.
- For tenant in situ acquisitions is there a certain length of time the tenant needs to be on our Social Waiting List for Galway City Council to acquire the unit – There is no specific guideline on this from the Department, GCC are looking at a 2-year time basis. However, each will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and the circumstances surrounding same.
- Is there a restriction on the amount GCC can pay for a property – Guidance on this is issued to us by the Department. There is a specific price range for a 2 bed, 3 bed, 4 bed etc. In that price range we also need to be able to accommodate any refurbishment costs that need to be carried out. We are actively trying to pursue properties with minimum works required.

6. Strategic Plan for People with a Disability – Q1 2023 update

Ms. H Martyn provided an update on a report which was circulated to the members in advance of the meeting and responded to queries raised by the members as follows:

- A query was raised in relation to a change of energy supply within a house, would the adaptation grant cover the change in energy costs for older people with a disability – This is something that will have to go back to our Social Work team if there is an impact in terms of the cost of living. If people are having financial issues our recommendation would be to contact MABS.

7. Homeless Report and Update / Housing First / CWR

Ms. H Martyn provided an update on a Report which had been issued to members in advance of the meeting and responded to queries raised by the members as follows:

- There have been advertisements recently in relation to modular homes, is this something Galway City Council will be pursuing – The modular homes being discussed are in relation to Ukrainians.
- In relation to Notice to Quits received what capacity does the Council have in terms of emergency accommodation to facilitate applicants who are unable to find alternative accommodation – The council are challenged in terms of emergency accommodation, as spaces become available families are entered into the accommodation. Homeless Services closely with COPE who manage the private emergency accommodation for GCC in terms of what services can be offered as well as the PMVT hub.
- The €53,000 limit for the cost rental scheme, is this a separate application to social housing – There has been very little uptake to date. The Housing Agency manages the scheme separately however people should contact Galway City Council in the first instance and the applicants details will be passed to the Housing Agency.
- Have many applications been submitted under the Croi na Conaithe scheme – It has generated a lot of interest however to date there has been a total of 5 applications.
- Is it correct to say that 168 of the 211 people availing of homeless services are Travellers – There are approximately 70 families. Figures can be clarified after the meeting.
- Who would interact with people who find themselves homeless and do not avail with homeless services and are sleeping rough – COPE Galway street outreach operates 4 times a week and over

weekends in an attempt to interact with individuals.

8. Amendments to Scheme of Letting Priorities 2017

- Ms. M Fallon Ward provided an update on proposed amendments to the Scheme of Letting Priorities 2017, these proposed amendments were circulated to the members in advance of the meeting.
- Amendments were proposed in Section 10 (8) in relation to succession of tenancy. There is also a new clause proposed to be added which also relates to succession of tenancy.
- It is also proposed to remove Section 12 (4) in relation to tenant purchase which would previously allow joint tenancy in respect of a parent and child, this was allowable at the time as the joint tenant needed to be in occupancy of the property for 1 year. However new legislation introduced in 2021 means that both the tenant and joint tenant must be in receipt of social housing for 10 years.

It was agreed by the members to bring the proposed amendments to full Council for approval.

9. AOB

No other business.

Next Meeting scheduled for Friday 29th September, at 9.30 am.