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Strategic Policy Committee – Housing , Regeneration & Planning

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Minutes of Meeting  
held on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020  
in Áras An Chontae, Portlaoise

- In the Chair: Ms. Thomasina Connell, M.C.C.(TC)
- Present: Ms. Mary Sweeney, M.C.C (MS)  
Ms Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C., (CF)  
Mr Paschal McEvoy , M.C.C., (PMCE)  
Ms Caroline Dwane Stanley, M.C.C (CDS)  
Mr Michael Kelly , (MK)  
Mr Michael Cobbe, (MC)   
Ms Sheelagh Coyle (SC)
- In attendance: Mr Joe Delaney (JD), Director of Services, Housing and Planning, Ms Nicola Lawlor (NL),A/SEO Housing, Mr. Trevor Hennessy (TH), SEE Housing, Ms. Fionnula Daly (FD) Senior Social Worker, Housing, Ms. Angela McEvoy (AMCE) Senior Planner, Ms. Antoinette Brennan (AB) Executive Technician, Mr. Pat Grassick (FG) Head of IS, Ms. Marie Murray (MM) A/SSO Planning
- Apologies: Cllr. Aisling Moran
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1. WELCOME

*Cllr Thomasina Connell welcomed all members to the SPC and reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2020, which was proposed by Cllr. Mary Sweeney and Seconded by Mr. Michael Cobbe*

2. PLANNING UPDATE

**Taking in charge Policy Review**

AMCE informed the SPC members that a draft issues paper regarding the Taking in Charge Policy (which requires to be updated to take into account the role of Irish Water), will be brought before the September SPC Meeting to be discussed.

**No Matters Arising**

**Draft Local Digital Strategy**

AMCE gave detailed presentation on the Draft Local Digital Strategy 2020 – 2024, a copy of which will be issued to all Councillors. AMCE informed the members that a presentation will also be made to the Environment and the Economic & Community SPC. The period of consultation is open and submissions can be made through the consultation portal. The Chief Executive Report will be presented at the September SPC meeting and following this will be presented to Full Council.

TC enquired what is the percentage of overall homes without Broadband in County Laois and asked that the role out of broadband be seen as urgent and a priority for the County especially in the current times - when people were asked to work from home. PG informed the members that all relevant details are outlined in the plan and currently 32% of all premises in the county are without access to high speed Broadband.

TC asked about the promotion of County Laois online, to promote the tourism side of Laois. AMCE stated that there was a digital marketing drive 'Connect Laois' which is delivered through the Business Support Unit.

PG advised that the Draft Local Digital Strategy document outlines the actions to use digital technology to improve the tourist experience in the county.

MC asked how the Digital Work Hubs in County Laois were functioning and AMCE stated that an update will be provided for the next SPC meeting.

PMCE enquired as to the Broadband Connection Points BCP's which are outlined on page 25 of the Draft Local Digital Strategy.

JD outlined to the SPC members that Laois County Council are not charged with the delivery of the National Broadband Plan but rather enable the role out by facilitating the relevant agencies to enable the infrastructural work to be carried out and engage with the public.

CDS asked about what the health risks are concerning the role out of 5G telecommunication masts, JD informed the meeting that the World Health Organisation WHO have issued guidance on this and undertook to distribute that information to the Councillors.

### **Urban Regeneration Development Fund (URDF)**

The SPC members were presented with a briefing on the Urban Regeneration Development Fund, the process and procedures involved were outlined by AMCE and the members were informed that two applications were made before the end of May 2020 regarding funding for 1. Portlaoise Cultural Quarter and 2. Integrated Urban Design Framework Tyrellstown/Stradbally Road.

Laois County Council are currently in the process of procuring consultants to prepare the Master plan, there will be engagement from the public regarding consultation. The plan will include mixed housing, education, infrastructure, social and cultural development Portlaoise is the only urban area in the County which can benefit from the scheme.

TC enquired as to the overall cost of the project, JD stated that the total project cost is estimated to be €27m.

CF enquired as to the plans for Esker, JD informed the members that a multi skilled team consisting of Ecologist and Landscaping consultants will be procured to develop the Ridge Road which is zoned as open space and amenity, there will be sensitive and appropriate walkways implemented in the scheme.

### 3. HOUSING UPDATE

NL gave an overview of the current Housing Programme, stating that it has been a difficult past 3 months in Housing as a result of the restrictions in place with COVID 19, however they have managed staff and kept the emergency services for housing customers open throughout this time.

FD provided a detailed report on the Homeless Section of the Housing Department

CDS commended the staff in the Housing Department during the past 3 months. A discussion took place regarding the litter/refuse problems associated with some Council tenants, and dumping which has taken place in O'Moore Place.

FD confirmed that Estate Management Section of the Housing Department will liaise with the Environment Department regarding the issuing of litter fines and breach of tenancy.

PMCE recommended that the price of refuse collection be included in the tenant's rental charge and MK agreed with PMCE recommendation.

JD informed the members that the Housing and Environment Legislation are completely separate and there are certain constraints in place in doing this, he acknowledged the concerns outlined and stated that Housing may be able to liaise with Environment in the issuing of warning letters. JD outlined other agency support will be needed regarding Waste Prevention Bye Laws and will follow up with Environment and prepare a report for the next SPC meeting.

### 4. HOUSING MAINTENANCE

TH provided an update on Housing Maintenance and advised of the way in which the Department worked prioritizing calls over the term of Covid 19. The calls were classified as emergency/urgent and routine, all emergency calls were attended to over the Covid 19 lockdown period 80 in total, since the 08<sup>th</sup> June all classifications are now been attended to however members to note there is a current backlog of maintenance requests.

TH outlined that there was 49 properties re-let since January 2020 and currently there is 21 properties in the process to be re-let.

### 5. CAPITAL SCHEMES and APPROVED HOUSING BODIES AHB SCHEMES

TH advised the SPC members that there are currently 24 capital schemes in operation all at different stages. NL outlined the support been given from Approved Housing Bodies in other developments and informed the members that the Housing Department has a very good working relationship with the AHB's, there are 645 units currently being delivered and supported in the following towns; in Portlaoise 379 units, Graiguecullen 138 units and Borris in Ossory 128 units. In all cases the allocation of these properties will be from the Council's Housing list.

### 6. AOB

None

### 7. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT - SPC MEETING

The 02<sup>nd</sup> September, 2020 at 11.00 am was agreed for the next SPC

This concluded the Business of the meeting

Signed Managers Council Ann Gray  
Chairperson Senior Planner  
Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date: 18/9/2020.