
Strategic Policy Committee – Housing , Regeneration & Planning

Minutes of Meeting
held on Wednesday 4th March 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)
Mr Michael Kelly , (MK)
Mr Bobby Fitzpatrick, (BF)
Mr Michael Cobbe, (MC)
Ms Sheelagh Coyle (SC)
Ms Caroline Dwane Stanley, M.C.C (CDS)
- 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 Louise McEvoy(LMCE) AO Housing, Ms. Fionnula Daly (FD) Senior Social Worker, Housing, Ms. Angela McEvoy (AMCE) Senior Planner, Ms. Catherine Casey (CC) Heritage Officer, Ms. Marie Murray (MM) A/SSO Planning
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1. WELCOME

Cllr Thomasina Connell welcomed all members to the SPC and reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on Monday 2nd December 2019, which was proposed by Cllr. Mary Sweeney and Seconded by Cllr. Catherine Fitzgerald

2. HOUSING UPDATE

JD gave an overview of the current Housing Programme, the projected target as set by the Department for Laois County Council (LCC) is 627 units to be delivered by the end of 2021. JD explained that there is less reliance on acquisitions and outlined the different mechanisms to reach this target which includes construction, purchase, part V, leasing, acquisition, Buy & Renew and collaboration with Approved Housing Bodies.

CDS queried if the Housing Department can offer an affordable housing scheme as is the case in other Local Authorities;

JD outlined that where schemes have been offered the Government Site Services Fund initiative has been used. This is a fund towards the cost of providing infrastructure on a particular housing scheme thereby reducing the cost of the overall units for sale. This Fund is currently closed to new applications but once it reopens Laois County Council will consider strongly if any of its could be used for such a scheme.

CDS and CF queried the provision of the Cost Rental Scheme. JD explained there was no national scheme at this point but that a few of the Dublin authorities had progressed schemes in collaboration with other Agencies. These schemes require a state subsidy, free or

low cost land and long term low cost finance. Laois County Council is certainly interested in progressing these schemes but without most ~~all~~ of the above conditions in place there would be serious financial implications for Laois County Council. These issues have been raised at National Level.

MC queried the availability of Serviced Sites and NL outlined the current status of the serviced sites which are available in Castletown, Clonaslee and the possibility of upcoming sites in The Swan which will be brought to Council meeting for approval.

TC queried if the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan provided for self build houses on these sites, NL confirmed that stage payments can be drawn down with the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan for self builds.

MC raised concerns regarding the amount of vacant homes in the towns and expressed concern regarding the strength of the CPO process. NL confirmed that the Vacant Home Officer is carrying out surveys of all the towns and villages in Laois. Currently 6 properties have been secured under the CPO process.

3. HOUSING MAINTENANCE

TH provided an update on Housing Maintenance and advised of the continued increase year on year in the amount of housing maintenance requests. A presentation will be presented to full Council in March

4. HOUSING ADAPTATION GRANT SCHEME

The SPC members were presented with a briefing on the new Housing Grant application form to be used for both Private Housing and Social Housing grants.

PMCE queried the length of time taken to pay contractors and CF expressed concerns for contractors regarding this too. NL outlined reasons for delay in payments. TC asked that JD take up same with the Head of Finance.

5. PLANNING UPDATE

i County Development Plan (CDP) review process

The SPC members were presented with a briefing on the County Development Plan process and advised that the process commenced on the 6th January 2020. There was Public Consultations meetings held throughout the county and over 60 submissions have been received to date including community plans submitted.

The next steps will be the presentation of the CE Report to the Councillors. They will have a period of 10 weeks to consider the report. The Draft Plan will be presented to SPC in September 2020.

CF asked if the Strategic Housing Development Applications can be notified to the Councillors. AMCE stated that each MD would be made aware if there was an SHD application lodged with An Bord Pleanala for an area within the respective MD.

ii Draft Local Digital Strategy

AMCE gave a quick summary of the process & timeline Draft Local Digital Strategy. Consultations were undertaken in 2019 and an online survey has recently been carried out. Over 300 people have replied. AMCE advised all SPC members to make submissions and advised that the Draft Strategy would be discussed at the Special SPC Meeting on the 30th April 2020 before issue to Full Council.

iii Taking in charge Policy Review

AMCE presented the SPC members with a draft issues paper regarding the Taking in charge Policy which requires to be updated to take into account the role of Irish water. This item will be brought before a Special SPC Meeting on the 30th April 2020.

iv **Heritage Plan**

Catherine Casey Heritage Officer gave an overview of her role as Heritage Officer and the current consultation process which is underway regarding a new Laois Heritage Plan. Each SPC member was given a form which is designed to obtain the views of the public on issues and actions of importance which should be addressed through the new Laois Heritage Plan.

6. **ARRANGEMENTS FOR ADDITIONAL - SPECIAL SPC MEETINGS**

The 30th April, 2020 was agreed for a Special SPC Meeting to discuss

- (1) The Digital Strategy and
- (2) Draft Taking in Charge Policy


7. **AOB**

JD advised all SPC members, if they have any issues they wished to be discussed to advise the Chairperson and this can be added to the Agenda.

This concluded the Business of the meeting

Signed:


Chairperson


Senior Planner
Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date:

1 July 2020.

