
Strategic Policy Committee – Housing, Regeneration & Planning

**Minutes of Meeting
held on Wednesday 24th March 2021
remotely on Microsoft Teams due to Level 5 Government Restrictions**

- 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)
Ms Caroline Dwane Stanley, M.C.C (CDS)
Mr Michael Kelly, (MK)
Ms Sheelagh Coyle (SC)
Mr Michael Cobbe, (MC)
- In attendance:** Mr Joe Delaney (JD), Director of Services, Housing and Planning, Ms. Angela McEvoy (AMCE) Senior Planner, Ms. Catherine Casey (CC) Heritage Officer, Ms Nicola Lawler (NL) A/SEO Housing, Ms. Louise McEvoy (LMCE) A/AO Housing, Mr. Trevor Hennessy (TH), SEE Housing, Ms. Fionnuala Daly (FD) Senior Social Worker, Housing, Ms. Stephanie Kelly (SK) CO Housing
- Apologies:** Mr Paschal McEvoy, M.C.C. (PMCE)
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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 3rd February 2021, which was proposed by Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald and Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley.

2. HOUSING FIRST PRESENTATION

Presentation given by FD on how homelessness is dealt with in the region. This Housing First programme was expanded into Laois in December 2019 and the tender awarded to Peter McVerry Trust (PMVT). In year two of service provision, 6 tenancies were provided in Laois: 3 in Portlaoise and 3 in Portarlington. Laois surpassed target for year 1. There are 5 active Housing First tenancies within the county. Laois County Council are looking to get 40-50 new cases to go onto Housing First if funding can be secured. TC thanked FD for presentation. CF thanked FD and advised that Housing First is one of the best programs Laois has had in years and has proven a success already. CS thanked FD and of the success PMVT's programme in Laois. TC queried where funding comes from for the programme. FD advised it comes from Section 10 funding for homelessness and that the region would have to look for more funding under the National Implementation Plan.

3. HOUSING UPDATE:

TH gave presentation. On response maintenance regarding the 2,272 estimate of current housing stock, most of the stock was built between 2000 and 2010. TH went through the four scenarios of the tenant repair request process and the stages of each scenario. TH gave

1,059 active tenancies. Up to 15th March 2021 the following private grants have been given: 36 Housing Aid for Older People grants, 23 Mobility Aid grants, 21 Housing Adaptation grants. 470 private rented inspections have been carried out in 2020, due to restrictions there has been no physical inspections but 46 virtual inspections. For Housing allocations from 15th March 2021 there have been 47 properties allocated in total. CS queried affordable housing scheme or rental scheme. JD advised that Laois has asked to be considered for change to social housing limits, but no update on affordable housing. There was a discussion on mortgage rates and construction costs increases. CF advised that it would be beneficial for Laois to be brought up to Level 2 on the income limit threshold for social housing.

4. **PRESENTATION ON THE NAMING OF ESTATES, INFRASTRUCTURE AND MONUMENTS**

Regarding the Placenames Committee, which deals specifically with naming new residential developments, there have been a couple of requests lately in relation to naming of infrastructure, such as Portarlinton Leisure Centre, roads and commemorating events.

It is proposed to form a committee on **THE NAMING OF ESTATES, INFRASTRUCTURE AND MONUMENTS** which would bring in the Placenames committee into this committee. There are maybe 2-3 requests a year for naming of infrastructure, but a lot of requests for naming of residential developments. AMCE, Adrian Barrett in Roads Department and CF prepared this policy document to take into consideration the Placenames committee.

This proposal has gone through the infrastructure SPC. CF queried if final findings will go before full council?

AMCE advised it will go before full committee.

CF queried about the actual naming decisions. AMCE advised that right now the naming of estates remains with the committee not the council, but there are nominations of the council on the Placenames Committee.

5. **AOB**

County Development Plan Update

AMCE advised that the closing date for submissions for the Development Plan was 23rd March 2021. 150-160 submissions were received. A Chief Executive Report will be prepared on the Submissions and give recommendations on them. This will then go to elected members for review, discussion and adoption at a Council meeting during the summertime. After the amendments have been adopted by the Council they will go on public display and thereafter a Chief Executive Report will be prepared and then final stage is adoption of the plan by end of year.

Discussion regarding housing density and types of dwellings

A discussion was held on the possibility of promoting low density schemes as an alternative to one off housing in urban locations. Serviced sites and how they might work was discussed.

AMCE advised a plan like Colliers Lane in Portlaoise could be looked at. JD advised that a subcommittee could be formed to look at this issue.

Discussion was had about sites being bought and then being resold at a higher value and remaining vacant for years.

examples of Council responsibilities for repairs and tenant responsibilities for repairs. From February to March 2020 there was a drop off of repair requests during the first lockdown for Covid19 and then from October to December 2020 when only emergency requests were done, but normal requests dropped as well due to Covid19. In 2020, 225 maintenance requests were refused, and 1,535 maintenance calls were dealt with by Council staff. The average turnaround times were affected by Covid19 lockdowns, but after lockdown the turnaround time was down to a 10-day average. The expenditure on maintenance has increased over the past four years. Nationally, Laois County Council's average of maintenance cost per unit is half of the national average. TH then discussed maintenance on re-lets. Keys surrendered- increase over the last few years, with last year being the highest. Re-let turnaround time for maintenance is half of the national average. There has been a year on year increase on expenditure for re-lets. JD then discussed planned maintenance. JD is looking at a 10-year programme and organising a planned maintenance programme which could be provided for by extra income from new housing stock and a maximum rent increase. The proposed pilot programme would be for 31 properties in O' Moore Place, Portlaoise, subject to approval and funding. CS advises that she hopes this planned maintenance programme will help address the older houses in stock and the wear and tear in these houses, especially for older tenants as fixing these issues becomes an affordability challenge for some residents. SC commented on the maximum rent increase and that Laois is out of kilter with other counties and queried would increases be higher or lower? NL advised that all neighbouring counties' rents were examined, and that in other counties the maximum rent is €180 in Carlow, while some Local Authorities do not have a maximum rent at all. TC thanked TH for presentation.

TH gave an update on the current construction programme. Laois County Council's sites at Shannon Street, Mountrath and Canal Gardens, Ballymorris will be finished in the next few weeks, they were the only sites allowed to remain open due to Level 5 restrictions and 5 sites are currently closed. Harbour Court, Mountmellick Stage 2 application was submitted this week, Stage 3 application for Mooreville, Rathdowney to be submitted in April, the Contractor for St. Kieran's, Errill is being appointed, Abbeyleix Road, Portlaoise will be at Stage 2 in April, Oak Park Halting site was advertised on E-tenders Friday 19th March. For the Turnkey Developments: Borris in Ossory's 6 units are completed and keys are being handed out next week and Clonaslee's 7 units are completed as well. A Turnkey development was approved in March for 31 units at Church Avenue, Stradbally. Regarding Maintenance, only emergency and urgent repairs are being done due to Level 5 restrictions. Phase 1 of the Retrofit Programme is on E-tenders for 62 units and will close on 30th March. Phase 2 of the programme is for 98 units. Regarding Relets, 18 units completed so far in 2021 and 34 units are currently vacant. MS queried if an exemption could be made to resume construction at Gleann na Glaisce, Ballyroan? JD advised that sites in the initial or mid stage weren't considered for exemptions and that Laois County Council did make representations on a national level for resumption of these building sites for social housing. TH advised sites will resume as soon as allowed.


NL gave update on Approved Housing Body sites. There were 13 sites allowed to remain open and will yield 131 homes. Most of these units have been allocated and tenants will be receiving keys within the next month. These are as follows: Borris Road, Portlaoise final 9 units complete out of 36; Bellingham, Portlaoise 9 out of 30 units complete; Ballickmoyler Road, Graiguecullen 20 units complete; Dorinn Alainn 6 units complete; The Glen, Kilnacourt, Portarlinton 18 units; Lake Drive, Kilminchy, Portlaoise 10 units; Holdbrook, Portlaoise Phase 1 10 units; Clonroosk Abbey, Portlaoise Phase 1 14 units. There are 4 other sites: Spa Street, Droughill, Portarlinton 21 units; The Meadows, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise 48 units; Ballymorris Court, Portarlinton 46 units; and Harpurs Lane, Portlaoise 44 units. In addition to all of these, there are over 380 units for the County in the pipeline. The Refugee resettlement programme has housed 22 families. LMCE advised that the Rebuilding Ireland home loan has given out 97 loans since February 2018, with 91 being declined. HAP has

AMCE advised that notices for vacant sites will be sent to owners of these vacant sites in the next month or so.

Next Meeting

JD advised next meeting might need 2 or more hours, so might look at a different start time. Another date and time were not set for the next SPC meeting and will be decided later.

This concluded the Business of the meeting

Signed: 
Chairperson

Nicola Lawler
Senior Executive Officer
Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date: _____