
Strategic Policy Committee – Housing, Regeneration & Planning

**Minutes of Meeting
held on Tuesday 30th November 2021
at Laois County Council**

- In the Chair:** Ms. Thomasina Connell, M.C.C.(TC)
- Present:** Ms Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C., (CF)
Ms Caroline Dwane Stanley, M.C.C (CDS)
Mr Paschal McEvoy M.C.C., (PMCE)
Mr Michael Kelly Jnr, (MK)
Mr Michael Cobbe, (MC)
Ms Sheelagh Coyle (SC)
- In attendance:** Ms Angela McEvoy (AMCE), A/Director of Services, Housing and Planning, Ms. Georgina Ireland (GI) Senior Executive Officer Housing, Ms Nicola Lawler (NL), Administrative Officer Housing, Mr. Trevor Hennessy (TH), A/Senior Engineer Housing, Mr David O’Hara (DOH), A/Senior Planner, Ms Catherine Casey (CC), Heritage Officer, Ms Stephanie Kelly (SK) Clerical Officer Housing.
- Apologies:** Ms Mary Sweeney, M.C.C. (MS)
Ms Fionnuala Daly (FD)
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1. WELCOME

Cllr Thomasina Connell welcomed all members to the SPC and reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on Thursday, 30th September 2021, which was proposed by Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley and seconded by Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald.

2. DRAFT HERITAGE AND BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY 2021-2026

CC gave a presentation on the Laois Heritage & Biodiversity Strategy 2021-2026 and went through the issues raised on the public consultation and how those were resolved.

TC thanked CC for the presentation. TC asked if the report would be distributed to the Councillors. CC advised that the report has gone by email to Councillors. There were no further questions.

The Strategy was proposed to go to full Council meeting for adoption by Cllr Thomasina Connell and seconded by Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley.

3. HOUSING DISABILITY STRATEGY

AMC gave a presentation on the DRAFT Strategic Housing Plan for People with Disabilities 2021-2026. *(Presentation attached)*.

There was a discussion regarding options available for people with disabilities, such as downstairs bedrooms and wet rooms. CF highlighted the need for housing options for those who are in need of assisted living. AMC advised that groups like Muiriosa Foundation and Simon Community were involved on the Disability Strategy stakeholder Group and can advise on the delivery of units in that regard. GI advised that in terms of that Group, Approved Housing Bodies (AHB's) have expertise in types of accommodation, such as sheltered accommodation, and that Housing will be working with AHBs to make sure that the numbers are included in the delivery programme. It was agreed that units with downstairs bedroom and wet room should be considered for future planned housing developments.

PMCE's comments in relation to need for appropriate provision for assisted living or having a carer and CF's comments regarding the provision of accommodation for applicants with mental health issues, were noted. CDS queried and was advised as to the overall figure on LCC Housing list in respect of people with disabilities and confirmed that a child with a disability on an application is also reflective of this figure. GI advised also that the figure will change as new applications are received, but for the purposes of the Strategy a particular snapshot in time was taken in respect of the figures in the Strategy.

The Strategy was proposed to go to full Council meeting in December by Cllr Paschal McEvoy and seconded by Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald.

4. 'Housing for All' Delivery 2022-2026

GI gave a presentation on the Housing for All Delivery 2022-2026. *(attached)*

TC thanked GI for the presentation. There was some discussion regarding affordable housing and making it work in Laois. CDS pointed out that there is a key opportunity for it at Tyrell's land. Members raised concerns regarding the Affordable Housing Scheme and the clause where the Council must own 30% of the home. Members also raised concerns around the social housing build delivery targets over the plan period, stating that they might be low. GI advised that while targets are set by Department of Housing, these are minimum targets and that Laois would exceed targets over the course of the plan period.

CF requested a workshop for councillors on Affordable Housing Scheme and Cost-Rental Scheme. GI advised that such workshops can be arranged as soon as further information in relation to the

Affordable Housing scheme is available, as only the concept of the scheme has been advised by the Dept of Housing – regulations, scheme and guidelines are yet to issue. CDS queried the type of survey being done for the Affordable Housing Scheme and was advised that the survey would cover location of choice, income and what prospective buyers consider to be affordable.

SC noted that the highest need for housing in Laois is for 1-bed accommodation and was happy to see some provision for these 1-bed units in the delivery programme. SC queried the length of the Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) process and its legal costs. GI advised that we must follow housing legislation for the CPO process, and that wait periods between each stage must be observed, with delays also caused by legal challenges or compensation arbitration.

CF asked for clarification on if the 1-bed need is for a single person or if some of them have children? GI advised that if there is a legal agreement in place for access to children then that applicant would be approved on housing list for 2-bed accommodation, but in terms of delivery a 1-bed is for 1 person. Members asked for clarification in relation to this to be brought to the next meeting.

TC asked if the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) was being phased out and those tenants were being moved to a different scheme. GI advised that Laois County Council are not accepting new RAS applications, but those on the scheme will remain on the scheme and are still assessed as in need of social housing.

TC queried the criteria for derelict housing to be suitable for social housing. AMCE advised that the Chief Executive had indicated that a protocol would be established in this regard.

MC highlighted the AIB building in Portarlinton that was left in dereliction and about to collapse. MC advised he would like the question put forth in the Dail about what could be done with these abandoned structures that are owned by the State. AMCE said in relation to the AIB property, it has been difficult to engage with owner, but CPO could be an option.

5. Directorate Update

a. Housing

TH gave an update on the maintenance programme to date:

- 3,341 work orders to date and pushing 4,000 work orders by end of year; 400 work orders are open and 3,000 closed.
- For relets, 95 sets of keys have been handed in, 9 for acquisitions and the rest were surrendered. 87 relet properties have been completed; 55 properties are currently on the relet list.
- For the Midlands Retrofitting Programme: Contractor for Phase 1 is on the ground and has started works; Phase 2 Contractor is also on the ground; Phase 3 Contractor is appointed and will begin works after Christmas.
- For the Energy Efficiency Programme in O'Moore Place, the Contractor tenders are in, but costs are higher than expected.

GI gave a general housing update:

- 127 Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans since the beginning of the scheme, 107 applications declined.
- 935 active HAP tenancies.
- 23 DPG adaptations works and 2 extensions underway up to 12th November.
- Private housing grant - estimated €967,000 will be recouped from the Dept of Housing.
- DPG social housing - €320,000-€330,000 to be recouped by end of this week.
- To date; 69 homeless presentations, 25 emergency homeless, 20 adults & 3 children in emergency accommodation.
- Allocations up to 11th November, 224 allocations. 1,724 on the housing waiting list. There is a difference in number compared to last meeting's figures because there was a social housing needs assessment which resulted in several deletions from the social housing list.

Queries raised regarding:

- Tenders coming in at higher costs for the retrofitting at O'Moore Place and will the project still stay on due to higher costs.
- When the 55 houses on the relet list will come available for tenanting.
- Clarification sought as to why only €400,000 of the funds were spent in relation to DPG's. GI advised that a funding application was made in April to the Department and allocation advised in May. Allocation was more than double the usual allocation advised in previous years. There were 9 extensions on the list that that required OT reports, design, costing and contractor procurement. She outlined the difficulty in procuring contractors for both small works and extensions. TH agreed that funding approval was only received in May 2021 and that €600,000-€700,000 portion of the funding was for extensions, but it would be impossible to get 9 extensions completed by the end of the year with the current shortage of contractors. Members expressed their disappointment in this regard.

b. Planning

AMCE gave an update on Planning. The County Development Plan is almost at the end stage, in-committee meeting to be held on Monday, December 6th, and will go before the Council on 13th December for consideration of amendments.

Regarding the Tyrell's Land Masterplan, it is envisaged that final draft will be before MD Members early in 2022.

The Development Contribution Scheme will come before the SPC next year.

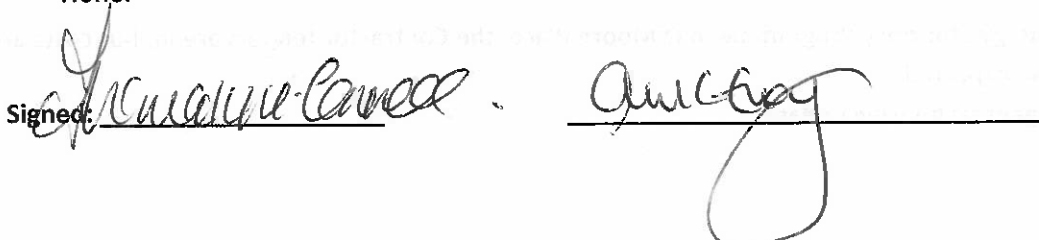
6. DATE OF NEXT SPC MEETING

The next SPC Meeting will take place on Wednesday, 2nd March 2022 at 2pm.

7. AOB

None.

Signed:



Chairperson

A/Director of Services

Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date: 2nd of March 2022

