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Strategic Policy Committee – Housing , Regeneration & Planning

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Minutes of Meeting  
held on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 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)  
Mr Michael Cobbe, (MC)  
Ms Sheelagh Coyle (SC)

In attendance: Mr Joe Delaney (JD), Director of Services, Housing and Planning, Ms. Angela McEvoy (AMCE) Senior Planner, Mr David O'Hara (DOH) Executive Planner, Ms. Catherine Casey (CC) Heritage Officer, Mr. Jim O'Sullivan (JOS) SE Technician Planning, Ms. Clíodhna Scanlon (CS) Assistant Planner, Ms Nicola Lawler (NL) A/SEO Housing, Ms. Louise McEvoy (LMCE) A/AO Housing, Mr. Trevor Hennessy (TH), SEE Housing, Mr. Pat Lalor (PL) Chief Technician Housing, Ms. Fionnula Daly (FD) Senior Social Worker, Housing, Mr Brian Ward (BW) SO 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 Friday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2020, which was proposed by Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley and Cllr Mary Sweeney. Cllr Thomasina then reviewed the minutes from the Special Meeting held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2020, which was proposed by Cllr Mary Sweeney and Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley.*

**2. WORKPLAN FOR THE YEAR AHEAD**

JD proposed draft items for consideration for the Workplan for the Year ahead which included topics such as Update on Social Housing Need and impact on the delivery of social housing schemes for the coming decade, the County Development Plan, Masterplan for Lands at Stradbally Road, Portlaoise, Strategic Infrastructure, the Heritage Plan, Climate Change and Council owned houses, Housing First Model, Portarlinton Regeneration Strategy and Town and Village Regeneration.

CDS asked for upkeep of housing stock to be included to Work Plan

TC asked for presentation on Cost Rental and Affordable Purchase Shared Scheme to be included in next meeting and how LCC can apply so it can be available in Co Laois.

AMCE stated that there will be an update with a small presentation on the Portarlinton Regeneration Strategy at the next SPC meeting. TC asked if submissions were currently

closed on the strategy. AMCE advised they have, but a draft will be drawn up for MD members before going back to public consultation where there will be further opportunity for submissions.

MS asked for emphasis to be placed on smaller villages in Town and Village Regeneration.

JD advised there will be a committee meeting with all Council Members in relation to Housing Maintenance in the future.

JD advised that that role of the Local Authority is not clear yet in relation to the rolling out of Affordable Housing, as the only guidance so far is the Draft Bill that was published and that more information on a national basis would be needed. Also, Local Authorities need to apply to the Site Services Fund for Affordable Housing. JD stated that LCC will look at potential opportunities should that fund become open. Cost rental is being pitched to Approved Housing Bodies.

SC asked how much money is available for the Town Centre Initiative and Town and Village Regeneration. AMCE answered that levels of funding depends on the application made by the Local Authority and the level of the project.

MC stated that he has not seen any service sites advertised for sale. JD answered that sites in Castletown are the only ones for sale from the Council presently, but other sites may become available going forward.

### 3. PRESENTATION ON THE DRAFT LAOIS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2021-2027

AMCE gave presentation on the Draft Laois County Development Plan 2021-2027. The plan was adopted by the Council to go on public display as a draft on the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and was published on the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021. AMCE went through the timeline of the plan and the making of the plan is currently a year into the 2 year review process. Stage 1 has been completed where it has been presented to Members of Council, and it is currently at Stage 2, where it is at Public Consultation Phase which conclude on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2021. There will be a series of consultations through webinars commencing on 18<sup>th</sup> February 2021, which will be advertised beforehand. There will be a Chief Executive's report on the submissions received, which will then be brought before Council Members in May/June. Any amendments will go out on display for a shorter period, and the plan will be most likely be adopted in November.

AMCE went through the plan which is broken up into 4 documents. Volume 1 is the Written Statement which which is divided into 14 different chapters.

Volume 2 is the Settlement Strategy which contains land use and zoning maps for towns and villages throughout the county

Volume 3 lists the 8 Appendices associated with the plan.

Volume 4 contains the Environmental Reports that were prepared in the plan – the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, Natural Impact Report and SEA Environmental Report

AMCE advised that the plan is up on [consult.laois.ie](http://consult.laois.ie) and a copy of the notice will be sent to all SPC members which details how you can make submissions to the plan

CDS asked if submissions made on the Tyrell's Land Masterplan would be included on the Development Plan Public consultation. AMCE advised that the Development Plan consultation is stand alone and a new submission must be made by e-mail or on [consult.laois.ie](http://consult.laois.ie) if they wish to make submissions to the County Development Plan in relations to Tyrrells Land .

MC asked if submissions made to Portarlinton Regeneration Strategy would need to be made again. AMCE advised that they should read through the Strategy once it is on public

display and if it has not been dealt with, a new submission could be made then to the strategy within the set timeframe.

#### 4. TAKING IN CHARGE PROCESS AND PROCEDURAL

AMCE explained Taking In Charge Policy and Protocol. She described the Policy Document and Strategy Framework involved. AMCE described the Taking in Process, what it entails and the types of infrastructure involved to be taken in charge.

AMCE described the process where an estate is requested to be taken in Charge by the developer.

AMCE described the process where an estate is requested to be taken in Charge by a plebiscite formed by Homeowners.

AMCE advised that the document will be circulated to SFC members.

TC noted that Taking in Charge is a long process and is glad to see that some cases that have been applied for a long time ago have progressed in the last year.

JD stated that a focus group has been set up in Planning, Transportation and Infrastructure which is currently gathering information on outstanding Taking in Charge cases.

AMCE advised that the Policy and Protocol Document will also be published on [www.laois.ie](http://www.laois.ie). Once finalised

#### 5. HOUSING UPDATE

NL advised that all Housing Staff are currently working from home under current Level 5 Government restrictions and full service is still being provided.

FD stated there are currently 7 single persons in homeless accommodation. This figure is down from the same time last year.

TH advised that Part VII planning Permission was granted to Oak Park Halting Site. Tender documents are being finalised and will likely be out to tender in 4-6 weeks.

TH stated that only emergency and essential requests are being carried out for Housing Maintenance during current restrictions and that there is a bag log of routine jobs. 3572 maintenance jobs were carried in 2020.

112 re-let properties were processed last year. Currently working on 35/36 vacant properties.

TH advised that approval was granted for 160 houses under the Midlands Retrofit Programme and the first phase is currently out to tender.

LCC has 7 construction schemes but only two are currently progressing, the remaining five have been shut down due to Government restrictions.

NL advised that 9 AHB sites have been designated as essential under current restrictions which are all Covid compliant. These 9 sites have protentional to deliver 100 units by the end of February 2021. The Allocations team are currently working on allocating these units. Current restrictions could push some units out from being delivered this year into next year.

NL advised that LCC was tasked with housing 22 families under Refugee Re-settlement Programme and 21 have been housed. The remaining family is expected to be housed within weeks. An extension has been requested for Settlement Worker assigned to these families.

NL advised that 70 Housing Aid for Older Persons Grants were processed to the sum of €248,000, 4 Mobility Aid Grants to the sum of €230,000 and 35 Housing Adaptation Grants to the sum of €401,000. There are currently 1060 active HAP units in the county. 94 Rebuilding Ireland Home Loans have been granted.

TC stated that the average spending on re-lets is half the national average and was concerned that it was policy to apply minimum standards to re-lets. TH stated that re-let standards were being met but that it also comes down to the budget. JD stated that putting

more investment in re-lets would take away from spending on other council services. CDS stated that there should be separate funding for re-lets. TC asked if money invested in re-lets could be reviewed.

CDS raised the issue in terms of repairs of tenants being advised that certain repairs are their responsibility and not that of the Council's. She expressed the difficulty that some elderly and disabled tenants find with this policy. JD stated that LCC completed over 3300 work repair items in 2020. If more works are carried out, LCC would require a bigger budget which could cause rents to be increased. This policy may be reviewed for vulnerable and elderly tenants, but it will not be general procedure for all tenants. JD stated that the existing stock needed significant investment in terms of energy retrofit. Additional income will have to be sourced to pay for that investment.

CDS asked for update on when developments in Borris Meadows, Phase 2 and Clonroosk Abbey, and Kilminchy will be delivered. NL replied that they are on track to be delivered at the end of February. FD advised that all units in Borris Meadows have been allocated.

6. A.O.B.

SFC members agreed on dates for the remaining meetings throughout the year. The provisional dates agreed were:

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021


Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> June 2021

Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021

Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November 2021

This concluded the Business of the meeting

Signed:

  
Chairperson

  
Senior Executive Officer

Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date: 26/03/21