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Strategic Policy Committee – Housing, Regeneration & Planning

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Minutes of Meeting  
held on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> June 2021  
remotely on Microsoft Teams due to Covid 19 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 Paschal McEvoy, M.C.C. (PMCE)  
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, Ms. Georgina Ireland (GI) SEO Housing, Ms Nicola Lawler (NL) AO Housing, Mr. Trevor Hennessy (TH), SEE Housing, Ms. Fionnuala Daly (FD) Senior Social Worker, Housing, Mr Brian Ward (BW) SO Housing

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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 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021, which was proposed by Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley and Cllr Catherine Fitzgerald.*

2. PLANNING UPDATE

AMCE advised that the Chief Executive's report is being prepared on the submissions of the second stage of the consultation County Development Draft Plan. Once it has been prepared it will be available for Council members and will be published online. It is anticipated that there will be a meeting of full council during the summer months to go through the plan formally. Any amendments will be put forward for a third stage of public consultation.

Consultants are preparing a Chief Executive's report on submissions made to the Regeneration Strategy for Portarlington.

CF asked if the County Development Plan would be put back by one year due to Covid. AMCE advised that the timeframe of the process is currently on target.

JD advised that LCC is engaging with the last point on the Tyrell's Land Masterplan and will advise the Portlaoise Municipal members before the end of the month.

### 3. HOUSING UPDATE:

GI advised that housing staff are continuing to adhere to Public Health Guidelines and are split into four teams, with one team working in the office each day and the remaining three teams working from home. This strategy is working effectively.

TH advised that since March all routine maintenance is now being carried out on units after being on hold due to the lockdown. Since 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021, 1,500 work orders have been raised and just over 1,100 have been closed.

LCC is back doing full re-lets. Since January, 37 units have been completed and tenanted. There are approximately 47 properties on the re-let list – 32 are existing tenants handing in keys and 15 are acquisitions.

7 LCC capital schemes are in progress – 2 are almost complete and a further 2 will be complete by the end of the year.

3 Turnkey units consisting of 44 units are in progress.

Private Rented and HAP inspections are currently on hold due to Covid restrictions.

LCC is almost ready to appoint a contractor for Phase 1 the Midlands Retrofit Scheme, consisting of 62 units, so work will commence soon. Phase 2, consisting of 98 units, is out to tender.

Energy Efficiency Retrofit Programme consisting of 31 units in O'Moore Place – Surveys are almost complete, and programme will go to tender next month.

CDS raised an issue regarding delays with relets due to be carried out on certain properties and asked when the necessary work will be done. She also expressed her belief that units could be tenanted while deep retro fitting was taking place by working with the tenants. JD advised that the timeframe undertaken in converting houses for reletting shows that LCC is doing a good job on a national basis compared to other Local Authorities. There was a significant allocation of funding from the Government so LCC will be continuing with the reletting programme throughout the year. There is a delay in providing houses due to specifications and contractors doing work, but the average turnaround time is 20 weeks which is lower than the national average. There has been an increase in investment in 2020/2021. TH advised the number of re-lets are increasing and that had been putting pressure on resources and budgets, but increased funding has been now received. CDS asked now that the funding is there that works be carried out as soon as possible.

NL advised that 56 homes have been delivered through 6 AHB Schemes this year. 5 other schemes which will provide a further 86 units are currently under construction. There are a further 3 schemes due to start before the end of the year that will provide a further 138 units.

In relation to grants, private grant schemes for housing adaptation and mobility aids with a total budget of €1.2 million for 2021, have approved 138 grants to the value of €688,000. In relation to Social Housing Grants, a budget of over €1 million was granted of which €552,000 has been committed.

109 RBI Home Loans have been approved to date since February 2018.

There 1096 active HAP Tenants currently.

Inspections on Private Rented Properties and HAP properties are currently unable to be carried out due to Covid.

FD advised that the Estate Management Team is currently carrying out a survey to tenants residing in their homes for over 55 years in relation to any adaptations that may be needed in the future.

LCC has paid 29 Estate Management Grants to date totalling €13,600.  
LCC is in the process of providing Clean Up Packs to promote clean ups of estate.  
A Painting Programme is in progress in some estates.

FD advised that there have been 95 homeless presentations to date in 2021. There are currently 17 adults and 5 children in B&B accommodation.

The majority of presentations this year are single males with addiction issues or mental health problems.

There are 6 transition units in operation occupied by 6 adults and 6 children.

Housing First has 5 tenancies and 2 more applicants identified and awaiting tenancy.

CDS asked if Low Carbon Emission Funding can be obtained for planting trees in estates and asked if homeless numbers have increased since the eviction ban during Covid was lifted in April. FD replied that funding was being investigated looked into and that the homeless numbers have grown since April.

MC asked if a booklet that had been previously issued to the Committee in 2018 detailing Social Housing supply numbers could be issued as a regular report. CDS seconded this with a request that details of upcoming housing projects to be included. NL advised that this report would be presented to the committee at a future meeting.

#### 4. HOUSING NEEDS ASSESSMENT AND DISABILITY STRATEGY UPDATE

GI presented in respect of the Housing Needs Assessment in Laois detailing figures of current housing need, and outlining categories of those seeking housing e.g., Housing List, HAP and transfer applicants.

The types of accommodation required were detailed showing that the highest need is for those seeking one-bed units consisting of nearly 40% of overall need.

The age ranges of applicants were broken down in terms in accommodation needed.

Applicants' areas of choice were broken down showing that Portlaoise is the most popular area of choice.

GI summarised that there is a broad age range of applicants seeking one-bed accommodation. This will need to be investigated further to determine its implications and to determine the specific types of accommodation required to suit people's needs. In terms of area of choice, Portlaoise and other urban areas are the most popular areas of choice due to connectivity and access to services. The issue of 'Rural vs Urban' will affect how LCC plans its construction and acquisition programme to accommodate what future needs will be.

MK stated that there could be an uneven market where there is a small private housing market determining new builds but there is a large market for social housing building. JD agreed with concern and acknowledged that LCC need to be mindful of this of but stated that there is a high need for social housing and will continue to rely on turnkey developments.

SC asked if there were any plans to build one bed apartments due to the high housing need for them. JD stated that the desire for one-bedroom homes is across all age groups, and this will need to be looked into and addressed.

CDS raised issue of income threshold limit is locking people out from getting on to the Housing List due to be being so low, and that there would be a need for Affordable Housing, which would be a mix of council tenants, private homeowners and affordable housing into estates. JD stated that LCC has been pressing to review income limits in relation to the Housing List.

CDS stated that people who are on the RAS scheme do not realise that they are taken off Housing List and asked that does who are on the RAS scheme over 10 years can be facilitated with a view to housing them. JD stated that RAS scheme prohibits LCC from offering transfers.

FD gave an update in relation to the draft Disability Strategy, advising that every local authority is currently preparing a Disability Strategy. The first one was prepared in 2016 and is now out of date. The vision is to facilitate access for people with disabilities to the appropriate range of housing and related support services. The Housing Agency is co-ordinating the strategies.

As part of consultation process, each Local Authority must produce their individual plan which must feed into the National Plan (2021-2026). The Steering Group, comprising representatives of the LCC Housing Section and sectoral reps, is responsible for producing this document.

The four categories of disability referred to in this strategy are sensory, mental health, physical and intellectual.

In preparation of the plan, LCC carried out an assessment on the Housing waiting list. The current demand with regards to disabilities is 142 with physical disabilities, 13 with sensory disabilities, 42 with mental health disabilities and 53 with intellectual disabilities out of a total of 1,896 on the waiting list.

LCC has a housing stock of approximately 2,400 and tenants can apply for a transfer if their medical situation changes. The current number looking for transfers are 25 with a physical disability, 1 with a sensory disability, 1 with a mental health disability and 7 with an intellectual disability. AHBs have 10 people on the transfer waiting list on the grounds of disability. There are currently 14 homeless people with disabilities – 6 with physical disabilities, 7 with mental health disabilities and 1 with an intellectual disability.

To date, 186 people have applied for Disabled Persons Grants in 2017, 137 in 2018, 169 in 2019, 123 in 2020 and 55 up to 18<sup>th</sup> May in 2021. These figures will feed into the Disability Strategy that will provide actions and targets to provide accommodation for disabled people within the next 5 years.

CF asked if a scheme of bungalows could be built for the disabled. FD acknowledged that there is a shortage of bungalows with the relevant adaptations particularly in Portlaoise. JD stated that LCC are looking at bungalow accommodation in Mountrath and Portarlinton and that ground floor accommodation could be looked at.

## 5. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ACCOMODATION

The SPC members agreed to the addition of Domestic Violence Accommodation to the Agenda for this meeting.

JD stated that LCC had been engaging in a feasibility study for emergency accommodation for families and people affected by domestic violence. This would preferably be in a central area in Portlaoise. A site will hopefully be secured before going through planning and the tendering process. SC asked how long this process would take as it has been 10 years since a need has been highlighted for the county and would like to see it being put down as a priority.

TC asked if existing buildings could be looked at and what funding streams are available.

JD advised that the possibility of provision of site is being investigated, so that funding could then be sought. If approved, the site costs would be funded by the Department of Housing. Other steps needed would be for Laois Domestic Abuse Service to register as an Approved Housing Body, funding to be agreed by the Department of Housing and funding to be agreed and provided by Tusla.

It was agreed that this committee would be kept up to date on any developments in this regard.

#### 6. DATE OF NEXT SPC MEETING

The date of the next SPC meeting will be on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021.

#### 7. AOB

##### AHB Land Ownership

MC asked if the land that AHBs are building on registered to the AHB or the Local Authority. NL confirmed that the AHB becomes the owner of all of the land.

##### Naming of Estates

MC raised that there seems to be a large number of estates do not have names displayed. NL advised that LCC does have a Place Naming Committee and information in relation to the process for naming housing estates and the conditions around this would be sought and this committee advised.

##### Vacant Units in Town Centres

MC stated that there are many vacant buildings in town centres such as Portlaoise, Portarlinton and Mountmellick and asked if this could be addressed. NL advised in relation to the Repair and Lease Scheme, which has been developed to address dereliction and vacancy in towns and villages. Through this scheme, a property owner or developer can apply for funding to bring a building they own/have purchased up to standard and which then can be used to provide housing. She advised that other regeneration proposals are being looked at throughout the county for town centres.

This concluded the Business of the meeting.

Signed:    
Chairperson Senior Executive Officer  
Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date: 30/9/21.