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**Strategic Policy Committee – Housing, Regeneration & Planning**

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**Minutes of Meeting  
held on Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2022  
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. Barry Walsh M.C.C. (BW)  
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, Mr. Trevor Hennessy (TH), Ms. Fionnuala Daly (FD), Senior Social Worker Housing, A/Senior Engineer Housing, Mr David O'Hara (DOH), A/Senior Planner.
- Apologies:** None

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**1. WELCOME**

Cllr Thomasina Connell welcomed all members to the meeting and the members also welcomed Cllr. Barry Walsh, who replaced retired Cllr. Mary Sweeney.

Minutes from SPC meeting held on Thursday, 30<sup>th</sup> November 2022, were reviewed and were proposed by Cllr Paschal McEvoy and seconded by Cllr Caroline Dwane Stanley.

**2. Matters Arising**

Arising from previous minutes, AMCE gave an update on the County Development Plan which was formally adopted by Council on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2022 and will come into effect on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022.

SC enquired about the CPO of two houses in Mountmellick, raising concerns around delays in the process, and was advised that a note would be forwarded separately in this regard.

AMCE advised that an internal Vacant Homes Working Group has been established to address vacancy and dereliction with a view to providing housing. This team is currently agreeing its terms of reference and Action plan for review.

### **3. Updates on Circulars/New Legislation/New Schemes**

#### **a. Housing**

GI gave an update on recent Housing Circulars:

- Housing Circular 1/2022 – Changes to Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme 2016
- Housing Circular 11/2022 – Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2022

She advised that a note would be forwarded informing the members of details of changes being made.

There was some discussion in relation to potential affordable housing/cost rental schemes to be introduced and this local authority's role in delivering same. It was noted that regulations and scheme have yet to be introduced.

The online survey in relation to gauging interest in affordable housing was also discussed and it was noted that it closes on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022. It was noted that this survey is for information purposes only and not an expression of interest. GI clarified that each affordable scheme would be advertised, and specific applications invited from prospective purchasers via advertisement, with specific deadlines for application.

AMCE advised that LCC would carry out further advertising on social media of the survey to gather information on levels of income/what people would think is affordable.

#### **b. Planning**

AMCE advised in relation to the New Town Centre First Policy for regeneration in town centres. Actions in this policy relate to establishment of Town Teams and recruitment of a Town Regeneration Officer.

DOH presented two changes in planning legislation:

- Response to Compliance with planning conditions - 8 weeks response time.
- Changes to Extension of Duration of a planning permission – it is no longer possible to extend a permission if substantial works have not been carried out pursuant to the relevant permission / for financial reasons.

BW sought clarification that this applied to all existing applications and was advised it does. Committee noted that this was a significant change to the legislation.

### **4. Quarterly report on Housing Disability Strategy**

FD presented Quarterly Report on Housing Disability Strategy to the Committee (copy attached).

Members noted/raised the following:

- all new developments should include some units allocated for disability needs. This could be addressed at pre-planning stage in terms of Part V contribution and disability access requirements and needs of applicants included on the housing / transfer lists.
- housing developments that cater specifically for disability/elderly needs noted as working quite well and could be replicated elsewhere, e.g. Court View Stradbally. It was also noted that cooperation with AHB's working in the sector also working well.
- 10% is a minimum target in terms of our commitment to accommodate applicants with a disability.
- Focus also needs to be on accommodation for young adults who are vulnerable, but who wish to live independently, while needing supports to assist them.

## 5. Proposed Work Programme 2022

AMCE presented the 2022 Proposed Work programme for 2022.

### *Housing*

- Review of LCC Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Review of Vacant Homes Action Plan 2018
- Review of Tenant Handbook
- Review of LCC Scheme of Allocation 2011
- Review of Regional Homeless Action Plan (Laois element)
- Affordable Purchase / Cost Rental Housing

### *Planning*

- Town Centre First Plan – Rathdowney
- Local Area Plans
  - o Portlaoise
  - o Mountmellick
  - o Portarlinton
  - o Graiguecullen
- Renewable Energy Strategy
- Development Contributions Scheme

Members unanimously agreed the Work Programme.

Comments were noted regarding:

- Review of Tenant Handbook - GI informed the Committee that an internal review of same by Housing staff is underway and a draft will likely be presented to the SPC for its review in Q3 2022.
- Members raised the issue of lack of homeless accommodation in Laois.
- Members questioned the fairness of the Housing application income threshold and lack of flexibility in that regard.
- Discussion on Housing Assistance Payment and its limitations in terms of income.

It was agreed that a deputation from this SPC would seek a meeting with the Dept of Housing in relation to a number of issues. Agreed members of the deputation – Cllrs. Thomasina Connell (Chair), Caroline Dwane Stanley and Catherine Fitzgerald. AMCE to seek a meeting and advise members.

#### 6. Issue Paper for Anti-Social Behaviour Policy

FD presented an issues paper in respect of a review of the current LCC Anti-Social Behaviour Policy.

Queries/points for discussion raised as follows:

- It was confirmed complainant details are not disclosed at any stage in the process.
- Eviction under Anti-Social Behaviour legislation may lead to a homeless presentation to the local authority that must be accommodated; eviction would be last resort action.
- Issue of non-payment of rent arose and there was some discussion around penalties for same.
- It was noted that Control of Dogs would be examined for inclusion in the ASB Policy.

GI outlined for members how this policy will move through the approval process and finally go to full Council as a recommendation by this SPC. This will include consultation with Joint Policing Committee, An Garda Síochána, the HSE and any other entity/organisation deemed appropriate in this area.

#### 7. Update on Social Housing Build Delivery 2022

TH presented update on social housing build for 2022.

There are 829 in progress:

- 444 under construction – LCC and AHB / 385 at Planning, Design or Tender Stage – LCC & AHB.

#### 8. Date of Next Meeting

The next SPC Meeting will take place on Wednesday, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022 at 2pm.

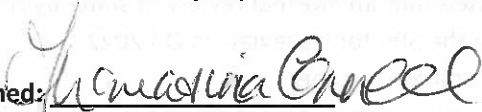
#### 9. AOB

CF queried how the site selection and funding for a Domestic Violence Refuge was progressing.


GI advised that LCC is actively looking for an appropriate site and assisting Laois Domestic Abuse Service in every way in that regard. She advised that Capital Assistance Scheme will likely be the most appropriate funding route in this regard.

CDS queried if LCC had yet been contacted in relation to possible accommodation of refugees fleeing the crisis in Ukraine and was advised that to date no contact has been made in that regard. CDS asked that the Committee be kept up to date on the situation.

Signed:



Chairperson



Director of Services  
Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date:

