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

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**Minutes of Meeting  
held on 04<sup>th</sup> October 2022  
at Laois County Council**

**In the Chair:** Ms Caroline Dwane Stanley, M.C.C (CDS)

**Present:** Ms Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C., (CF)

Mr Paschal McEvoy M.C.C., (PMCE)

Mr. Barry Walsh M.C.C. (BW)

Ms. Thomasina Connell, M.C.C.(TC)

Ms Sheelagh Coyle (SC)

Mr. Michael Kelly (MK)

Ms. Eavan Magner (EM) & Mr. Cormac Lally (CL) Threshold

**In attendance:** Ms Angela McEvoy (AMCE), Director of Services, Housing and Planning;

Ms. Carmel McNicholl (CMN), A/ Director of Services Ukrainian Response

Mr. Trevor Hennessy (TH), A/Senior Engineer Housing; Louise McEvoy,

(LMCE) A.O. Housing, Ms. Georgina Ireland (GI) Housing; MS. Fionnuala Daly

(FD) Senior Social Worker Housing; Ms. Marvic Thompson (MT) Social Worker

Housing; Mr. David O'Hara (DOH) A/Senior Planner; Mr. Donal Kiely (DK)

Senior Executive Planner; Marie Murray (MM) S.S.O. Planning,

**Apologies:** Ms. Catherine Casey (CC), Heritage Officer

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1. The new Chairperson of the Housing Regeneration and Planning SPC - Cllr. Caroline Dwane Stanley welcomed all members, staff and invited guests to the meeting. The Minutes of the meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> Jun 2022 were agreed and proposed by Cllr. Pascal McEvoy and seconded by Cllr. Barry Walsh.
  2. *Matters Arising*  
SC sought an update in relation to the 2 houses on Emmet Street in Mountmellick. GI advised that that the Council has applied to the Department for funding under the Buy Renew & Construct Scheme and advise that the properties are in Laois County Council Ownership.
  3. *Presentation by Threshold*  
Eavan Magner gave a presentation on behalf of Threshold and outlined that the organisation is, a National Housing Charity founded in 1978 and described the different services that they provide

advice, advocacy, negotiation, mediations and RTB/WRC representation on behalf of people renting throughout the county.

She further advised the issues facing the rental markets and how they have overcome some issues in the past.

The Chair invited members for questioning.

SC enquired as to the difference between what Threshold do and other organisations and asked how they were funded. EM advised the difference between Threshold and other agencies is mainly Threshold do not provide accommodation. Their primary aim is to keep people in their homes, prevent homelessness by assisting renters on the ground in dealing with landlords, tenancies, rtb, and then through advocacy in policy with the Department.

Cormac Lally on behalf of Threshold advised members that the funding is split 60/40. The 60% funding is given by Government Sources, Local Authorities such as Galway City and Cork County Council as Threshold have an on-street presence in both these counties. 40% of funds are raised through fundraising, last year of a budget of €304m, €107m was raised through fundraising initiatives.

CDS asked Threshold about the 500 interventions that they had made over the past year in Laois and what made up this figure? How did they prevent homelessness happening?

EM advised that they had prevented almost 100 people from entering homelessness, through informal advocacy, extensions of time with landlords, reviewing invalid Notice to Quit letters, representation at the RTB and linking people with rent arrears into HAP and other funding streams. She advised that most renters find themselves with a No Fault Notice – where Landlords are leaving the market and selling their properties.

BW made the comment that it is difficult for people to access properties when in receipt of HAP payment, landlords are selling and leaving the rental market and there should be an encouragement or incentive to keep landlords in the market.

CL agreed with the comment and advised that they have called for tax breaks for landlords but supply of housing is also a large problem.

It was agreed through the Chair that the presentation and contact details for Threshold would be circulated to the members.

#### **4. Update on Ukrainian Emergency Accommodation**

CMN as the Director of Service for **Ukrainian Response** provided a brief update outlining that the **LCC Ukrainian Response Team** has been established since July 2022. They are responsible for co-ordinating the local response effort, liaising with both the Department of Housing and Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth (DECDIY) on emergency accommodation options, managing and matching pledged accommodations.

CMN briefed members on the Various Emergency accommodation options that are under review which include:

- Privately owned– suitable for emergency accommodation

- Facilities which may have a medium term use
- Modular Housing or similar

BW enquired if there is any legislation/regulation or standards that have to be adhered to apart from Fire Safety and Building Regulations? CMN advised that there is an inspection process for pledged accommodation and the Department also carry out due diligence including garda vetting.

AMcE stated that there are some discretions in the use of protected structures under Planning legislation (also converting commercial space to residential) but Fire Safety and Building Regulations would have to be complied with.

CF commented that Ukrainian families had been moved after 5 months from Laois to another county. That the families were settled in schools and in the community and this was disruptive to them and the community. CMN advised that the Chief Executive had asked for reconsideration of this move, however the decision was taken by the Department of Children Equality Disability Integration and Youth.

CDS enquired about the modular housing element. CMN advised that the Department are reviewing suitable sites for modular housing, CDS asked that the SPC and Elected members be informed in any sites identified for this use.

Questions surrounding guidance from the Department and the rate of arrival of Ukrainian people into Ireland were posed by TC. It was advised by CMN that the current rate of arrival is on average 126 people per day, this figure fluctuates from day to day. It also depends on the war and what is happening on the ground in the Ukraine regarding territories been brought back under there control.

The Department are predicting an increase in numbers and a demand in capacity for the month of October and heading into the winter months.

##### **5. Presentation on Capital Housing Projects**

GI provided an in-depth presentation and gave a detailed update on each of the Capital Housing Schemes by Municipal District. The current target for delivery of houses for 2022 is 254 units. To date 51 have been delivered.

TC enquired as to the difficulties in Ard Branagh and GI advised there was a difficulty in agreeing the cost of the Part V units although the developers have recently re-engaged.

BW enquired into the costs per unit of the County Hotel site. AME advised that Housing are working with Cluid on a plan and Cluid are undertaking enabling/clearance works on the site to determine the fabric of the building.

Members will be kept up dated of the cost per unit on this town centre site. TH to circulate the proposed design of the site to members.

CDS commented regarding the apartments for people aged over 55 and that housing bodies need discussion with Local Authorities in this regard. Gi Agreed that discussions will take place regarding same.

## 6. Quarterly report on Housing Disability Strategy

FD presented Quarterly Report on Housing Disability Strategy to the Committee.

TOTAL NUMBER OF ALLOCATIONS TO PERSONS WITH A DISABILITY SINCE LAST SPC - 18

- Laois County Council – 10 ( 2 mental health and 8 physical)
- Approved Housing bodies – 8 ( 3 intellectual, 1 sensory and 4 physical.)

The committee welcomed the report.

## 7. Updates on Circulars/New Legislation/New Schemes

(a) Planning: DOH outlined the most recent circulars received by the Planning Department

- i. Planning Circular No. PL 06/2022 Site Plans and Maps - regarding the accuracy of Maps/neighbouring properties when submitting a planning application
- ii. Solar Panel Exemptions – exemptions removed regarding the installation of solar panels apart from exemptions that exist relating to buildings in a 5km radius of an airport.
- iii. Circular letter PL 02/2022 - Planning and Development Act (Exempted Development) Regulations 2022 - S.I. No 75 of 2022 - exemption from the requirement to obtain planning permission in respect of the change of use of certain vacant commercial premises, including vacant areas above ground floor premises, to residential use
- iv. Residential Zone Land Tax – replaces the vacant sites land tax. DOH outlined in brief the new residential land zone tax which will apply to all lands zoned residential/mixed use. The Revenue Commissioners will be responsible for the collecting of this tax. A survey of all towns has been undertaken and will go on public display from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 with submissions been accepted up to the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2023. Elected members will be briefed in full and a full presentation given to the full Council on the 17<sup>th</sup> December 2022.
- v. DOH advised of Minister Burke's decision to Issue a Direction to Laois County Council on the Laois County Development Plan 2021 – 2027  
The ministerial direction in relation to the County Development Plan was received. The minister has directed that the reference to 1.5km be removed from the plan, the limitation to 3 storey building heights be removed and a number of changes of land zonings.  
AMCE advised that the Core Strategy table of the County Development Plan would be updated to reflect this.

- (b) Housing: GI advised regarding circulars on the Mid Term Review of Traveller Accommodation Programme, HAP; Croí Cónaithe Towns Fund which is a grant for the refurbishment of vacant/derelict properties to be used as a principle private residence; Circular received regarding the summary of social housing assessments, rent to build, serviced sites – which will be circulated to the members.

CDS enquired if there are any proposals to introduce an Affordable Housing Scheme. AMCE advised that other than the Regulations and the scheme itself there is currently no houses to provide for such a scheme. Housing Dept. are awaiting Departmental funding regarding resources and a team to be set up and review Affordable Housing and a workshop will be help with Elected members in Q1 2023 in this regard.

CDS welcomed the change in the income bands for social housing increasing from €25k to €30k and enquired as to the rates of refusal in housing loan applications. Update to be provided for the next meeting

BW enquired about developing Serviced Sites.

AMcE informed members that the Housing Department are developing serviced sites in villages that have public infrastructure ie. Castletown, Durrow, Doonane. There is a need to market these sites for sale and also they will only appeal to specific people, 1<sup>st</sup> time buyers/fresh starters.

GI will provide information on same to SPC members

PMcE asked about the new threshold for the Housing List income limit been raised to €33k.

When the Circular is received on this it will be circulated to members

PMcE and CF directed that a letter be issued to the Ministers office regarding social housing term of 12 months – that there should be discretion allowed in this regard. FD advised that the Ombudsman has recently ruled that current circumstances should be taken into account when assessments are carried out.

## **8. AOB**

FD gave a detailed presentation on the Traveller Accommodation Plan 2019-2024

A Mid Term Review is issued every 3 years with set targets. The target of 27 houses and 3 bays was exceeded as the Council had delivered 37 houses and 3 bays. All Traveller families within the county were given the opportunity to comment and take part in the review. There is currently 22 traveller families on the housing list. There is no change to the current Traveller Accommodation Plan and FD sought the members approval not to change the 2019-2024 plan.

Proposed by Cllr. Catherine Fitzgerald and Seconded by Cllr. Paschal McEvoy.

**Date for Diary**

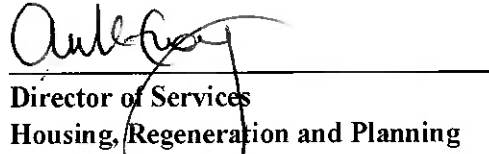
Spc Members and all Elected Members are invited to attend Seminar on Vacany to be held on the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2022 from 2pm to 4.30 pm in the Midlands Park Hotel

**9. Date of Next Meeting**

The date and time of the next SPC Meeting 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 at 11.00 am in the Council Chamber

Signed:

  
Chairperson

  
Director of Services  
Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Date:

6<sup>th</sup> December 2022