

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of Housing, Culture and Recreation SPC Meeting held on Thursday, 6th December 2018 in Council Chamber, County Hall at 10.30am

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. S. Walsh, Chairperson
Cllr. D. Killilea
Cllr. M. Fahy
Cllr. E. Mannion
Cllr. P. Hynes
Cllr. M. Noone
Ms. H. McElmeel

Oifigigh: Mr. M. Owens, A/ Director of Services, Housing
Ms. J. Brann, Senior Executive Officer, Housing
Ms. N. Heffernan, Administrative Officer, Housing
Ms. M. Forde, Senior Social Worker, Housing
Ms. M. Ward, Vacant Homes Officer, Housing
Ms. E. McKiernan, A/ Assistant Staff Officer, Housing

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 25th October 2018

The minutes of the meeting of the 25th October 2018, were proposed by Cllr. Hynes, seconded by Cllr. Fahy and agreed.

2. Presentation of Vacant Homes Action Plan 2018 - 2021

Ms. Maria Ward the newly appointed Vacant Homes Officer circulated the Draft Vacant Homes Action Plan 2018 – 2021 for Galway County Council.

Ms. Ward presented the Draft Vacant Homes Action Plan and addressed a range of queries from the Members.

The Draft Vacant Homes Action Plan 2018 – 2021 was approved on the proposal of Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. Walsh.

Cllr. Walsh wished Ms. M. Ward well in her new post and highlighted the importance of the plan being adequately resourced.

3. Update regarding Ó'Cuallann Cohousing Alliance following SPC of 25th October 2018

Mr. Owens advised that Ó'Cuallann Cohousing Alliance were examining the potential of two sites to develop a mixed tenure co-operative housing model. The sites are in Poolboy, Ballinasloe and Tuam.

Mr. Owens confirmed that a total of three sites were identified for consideration for affordable housing in accordance with assessment criteria as determined by the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government. These sites were in Athenry, Ardrahan and Oughterard, however, it was noted that the development of the three sites was constrained by issues with wastewater infrastructure.

Mr. Owens in reply to Cllr. Fahy advised that there was zoning and service constraints associated with the land bank in Gort, however, consideration would be afforded to all options available to the Council to meet the identified housing need in Gort and Environs.

Cllr. Hynes enquired about Anti-Social Behaviour issues in estates in Loughrea and raising the income threshold for eligibility for social housing as it is too low and excludes too many individual and families that are struggling. He also asked if the housing assistance payments could be increased in line with rent increases and advised that there is more money required.

Mr. Owens responded by advising that the final draft of the Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy was complete and would request that the Committee endorse same. In respect of the anti-social behaviour in Loughrea there are number of cases before the Courts and others being actively pursued and that due process needs to be adhered to.

Mr. Owens agreed that the eligibility for social housing in respect of household income limits had led to an increase in the numbers being refused. The Department is examining this and it has also been raised with the Housing Agency however the local authority has no discretion in the matter. Mr. Owens advised that the discretionary 20% for housing assistance payments must be related to market rent. Local authorities must exercise caution not to inflate the market rent by permitting the 20% discretionary payment where it was not warranted by market rent. Mr. Owens further advised of the recent appointment of a HAP Place Finder Mr. Neil Mulroy.

Cllr. Fahy enquired about the proposed housing development in Ardrahan. Mr. Owens advised that number of units was increased from 10 to 12 with the development to proceed to Part 8 in the first quarter of 2019.

4. Homeless Update

Ms. M. Forde, Senior Social Worker gave an update on the homeless situation. She advised that COPE Galway and Galway Simon run homeless services. The Cold Weather Response (CWR) commenced in late November and will be ongoing until April (date not yet confirmed). Eight male rough sleepers in the City area are availing of the service currently. Applicants are approved for the service within 24 to 48 hours upon presentation. Currently there are 30 families in Hotel or B&B accommodation, 6 of these families have been offered tenancies and 2 families are going to HAP. There are currently 6 men in the Fairgreen Hostel that will progress to either HAP property or Council tenancy and 3 women in Osterley Lodge who will need to move to supported accommodation.

Cllr. Fahy expressed concern for elderly persons sleeping rough in the County. He asked how they could access such a service. Ms. Forde responded that COPE offer an out of hours service over the Christmas period for the City but that during office hours these individuals in the County need to approach the homeless services of Galway County Council. Unfortunately there is no outreach service provided by COPE in Galway County but the Public Health Nurse or Gardai could get involved.

Cllr. Mannion enquired if the services were just operated night by night. Ms. Forde replied that the CWR facilities are only temporary in nature but that they would be open earlier in the day and are open on Saturdays and Sundays also. Individuals accessing these facilities outside of office hours are assessed at the facility by staff there.

Ms. Forde in reply to Ms. McElmeel advised that if any of those families are displaced from their current placements due to Christmas closure and cannot source their own accommodation COPE would assist them in finding alternative accommodation for that short period.

Mr. Owens explained that homeless funding is 90% recoupable from the Department under Section 10 of the Housing Act the remainder is funded by the Local Authority. Request for funding will be increasing by half a million for next year in line with our projections.

5. Draft Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy - presentation

Ms. N Heffernan, Administrative Officer, circulated the second Draft Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy detailing the principal change from the first draft including a more robust and extensive pre-tenancy induction programme involving participants from other agencies (Gardai, Social Workers).

Cllr. Noone asked about criminal convictions and the impact on a tenancy. Mr. Owens explained that a matrix system (Garda vetting) is used to assess this and can lead to various sanctions such as suspension or deferral. There is also the option of an exclusion order rather than evicting entire household. Galway County Council work with Galway Simon for a transition tenancy where an applicant is suspended due to matrix from the housing list. Galway County Council supply the property and the tenancy is managed and supported by Simon.

On the proposal of Cllr. Mannion, seconded by Cllr. Noone, the draft Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy was approved for consideration by Plenary Council.

6. Any Other Business

Ms. Brann circulated the schedule of meetings and draft work programme for 2019. It was agreed to hold the next meeting of the SPC on Thursday, 14th February 2019.