

Minutes of the Housing Strategic Policy Committee Meeting

Friday 24th February, 2023

In Attendance: Cllr. D. Lyons, Galway City Council (Chair)
Cllr. T. O' Flaherty, Galway City Council
Cllr. D. McDonnell, Galway City Council
Cllr. E. Hoare, Galway City Council
Cllr. A. Cheevers, Galway City Council
Cllr. I. Byrne, Galway City Council

Mr. M. Lohan, ICTU Representative
Ms. K. Golden, GCCN Representative

Officials: Mr Brian Barrett, A/Director of Services, Housing Department
Ms. H. Martyn, A/Senior Executive Officer, Housing Department
Ms. M. Gibsey, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. E. Fanning, Senior Engineer, Housing Department
Ms. A. Brett, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. M. Fallon Ward, Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Mr. D. Healy, A/Administrative Officer, Housing Department
Ms. C. Ni Fhlaithearta, Senior Staff Officer, Housing Department

Apologies: Cllr. M. Cubbard, Galway City Council

Present Ms. F. Griffin, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing Department

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 25th November, 2022

The Minutes of the Meeting of 25th November were proposed by Cllr. T. O'Flaherty and seconded by Cllr. D. McDonnell and agreed by all.

2. Matters Arising

No matters arising.

3. Housing Capital & Affordable Housing update

Ms. E Fanning provided an update on a Report which had been issued to members in advance of the meeting and responded to queries raised by the members as follows:

- Is there a document available outlining the criteria individuals must meet in order to apply for affordable housing – The documents are in progress and will be released to the members once finalised.
- In relation to the site in Ballybane, how many contractors submitted a tender and when will the contract be awarded – This is still in the tender process, it will be awarded if everything goes to plan in March/April and then straight to site.
- At the last Council meeting it was agreed to write to the Minister requesting an urgent meeting in relation to decisions refused, has the letter gone and what was the response – The letter issued 23rd February, 2023 and await a response on same.

- Is there a delivery date for the 114 affordable units currently in process – Once the finance is approved and developer on board we will have a more defined timeline that we can share with members.
- Clarity was sought in relation to units at Leana Mor, do Galway City Council check the contracts have been signed between the developer and the AHB before allocating units, is there a clause that can be put in the contract going forward – This was an RCT issue and the way in which the agreement was signed with the developer. Galway City Council do not get involved in the agreement between the developer and the AHB.
- In relation to the refusals received for Keeraun and Headford Road sites, is there a plan to further develop these sites, a joined approach between Housing and Transport is required – Planning is now more transportation led, the new Infrastructure unit will have Transportation, Capital, Planning and Climate Change coming under the same Directorate which will allow us to re strategize going forward. The members will be updated accordingly as this plan is advanced.
- We are over dependant on Approved Housing Bodies and purchasing units from developers at premium prices in order to house people on the Housing Waiting List, what are Galway City Council doing to allow the purchasing of sites in order to build our own houses – There are plans to develop our own sites, Galway City Council will always aim and continue to build our own homes however it will always be in conjunction with AHBs and with turnkeys in order to address the Housing crisis.
- A budget was allocated for 5 employees to manage the social and affordable home scheme, what stage is the recruitment process at – We have received sanction from the Department and progress is being made for recruitment.
- Concerns were expressed that we are at 50% of delivery.
- The Departments guidance for Emergency Accommodation which was published in September 2022 indicated that ideally single or twin rooms would be the maximum, is it still the intention to progress with the dormitory style accommodation that was proposed – We are required on humanitarian grounds to provide a basic service and issues were seen this year with the numbers arriving at Westside and having to share the same space. We are also constrained by the site in terms of what can be delivered. Concerns have been taken on board however this is a genuine response.
- Do Galway City Council include penalty clauses in their contracts – Civil and Contract Law doesn't allow penalty clauses but what we have to keep track on the Programme is liquidated damages.
- A commitment was previously made that there would be no more social housing on the Ballymoneen Road and the site at Ballyburke would be affordable and social housing. The report indicates the site will now consist of 84 social units, there was a request that this be reconsidered.
- It was requested that the SPC make a statement to the CEO on his submission to the Planning Regulator that the sites turned down to date have put Galway City Council in a difficult position and some of these sites should now be allowed to go ahead. The Acting Director of Services was asked to relay the sentiments of the SPC. It was agreed that this would be noted in the minutes.

4. Traveller Accommodation Programme Update

Ms. E. Fanning provided an update on a Report which had been issued to members in advance of the meeting and responded to queries raised by the members as follows:

- An update was requested in relation to the issue with Japanese Knotweed at the Doughiska site – If Galway City Council get the licence and the result and decision in a timely manner we could be in a position to hand over the clean site to Respond by the end of September 2023.
- How many Traveller specific units will be delivered this year – There are no units on track to be delivered this year, it is anticipated 5 units will be delivered next year and 4 in Doughiska the following year.
- What is the status of the possible Traveller specific accommodation behind Fana Glas – This is currently being looked at, consultation is needed with Traveller families in terms of what the group scheme will look like. There is an extensively long Planning regulatory process.
- There was a proposal a number of years ago that Housing for the Elderly would be put into Fana Glas, is this still a possibility.
- Is the knowledge not already there in terms of Traveller Housing needs from the consultations with the Traveller Community over the last number of years – We have learned a lot from the Travelling Community in terms of the design of units, the design is not the issue. The regulatory process including approvals from the Department, Planning approval and site selection is lengthy and difficult.

5. Croi Conaithe Update

Ms M. Gibsey provided an update on the Croi Conaithe scheme and advised that Galway City Council started accepting applications in December 2022. The scheme is exclusively available to households in which the property will be their primary principle residence. It is a refurbishment grant of up to €30,000 for a property that is vacant and up to €50,000 for a property that is derelict. We currently have 5 applications submitted, we are awaiting further information on these applications before they can be approved.

6. Acquisition Procedures

Ms. M Gibsey provided information to the members on the Acquisition Procedure Document. Under the SHIP programme it is another mechanism to acquire units for Social Housing Delivery. Private landlords exiting the market can offer their property through expressions of interest to Galway City Council to acquire. The process set out in the procedure has been happening but has never been documented in an overall procedure, this is now completed and will be circulated electronically to the members following the meeting. If there are any questions on the document Ms. Gibsey advised the members can contact her directly and she will be happy to answer same.

The following queries were raised and responded to:

- What is the annual budget for Galway City Council for acquiring units – there is no set budget and it is dealt with on a case by case basis.
- When acquiring a unit is there a limit on the amount can be spent – Amounts are set and published nationally under the SHIP Programme for how much can be spent on a property

- Is there an annual plan in terms of having an average number of units per year to acquire, is it promoted – It is not promoted, Galway City Council do not want to interfere in the private housing market too much, properties are looked at on a case by case basis, if for example a household has a Notice to Quit and is on Galway City Councils Social Housing List the property may be acquired in order to avoid homelessness.

7. Homeless Report and Update / Housing First / CWR

Ms. H Martyn provided an update on a Report which had been issued to members in advance of the meeting and responded to queries raised by the members as follows:

- How well covered are nomadic people in the law in their rights to be nomadic and what can we do to support them while respecting their rights to remain Nomadic – Mr. B. Barrett advised this is a complex area in which we could look into and come back to the members on at a later date.
- Have HAP tenants been informed about the 35% increase – An analysis of the HAP database was undertaken and those most vulnerable contacted directly. It has not been advertised as of yet because we are still receiving a huge number of requests and a backlog to deal with. Once GCC are satisfied that we have targeted the most vulnerable it can be advertised more. It is not a blanket 35% increase some households may be entitled to less than this going by the affordability criteria set by the Department.
- How can we get those who are not currently in the system to engage with services – Significant progress has been made over the last couple of years through the Housing First Programme. Particularly vulnerable people are being provided with wrap around services, it can sometimes take a period of time to build a level of trust with people and all of this positive work is continuing.

8. AOB

- Is there any update on the situation in An Sean Bhaile – this is being worked on and hope it will be resolved shortly.
- Is there an update on the backlog with the retrofit programme for Council tenants – Additional technical resources have been sought in the budget for 2023, we are currently awaiting sanction from the Department to fill those positions which will enable us to catch up on the Programme.

Next Meeting scheduled for Friday 26th May, at 9.30 am.