

**Minutes of the Social Development Strategic Policy Committee Meeting  
held in Áras Contae an Chláir on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018 at 2.30pm**

---

**Present:** Cllr. Gerard Flynn, Chairperson  
Cllr. P.J. Kelly  
Cllr. Tony O'Brien  
Cllr. Ann Norton  
Cllr. Pat Burke  
Cllr. Paul Murphy  
Cllr. Tom McNamara  
Dermot Hayes  
Trudy Leyden  
Thomas Guilfoyle  
Patrick Keogh  
Anne Haugh, Director of Service  
Siobhan McNulty, Senior Executive officer.  
Helen Walsh, County Librarian  
Orla Flanagan, Director, Glór  
Tim Forde, Head of Sports and Recreation  
Mairead Corbett, Administrative Officer  
Liam O'Connor, Administrative Officer  
Etain McCooey, Administrative Officer  
Liam Brett, Senior Executive Engineer  
Tony Neville, Senior Executive Engineer  
Kathy Lordan, Assistant Staff Officer

Aisling Corcoran, Respond  
Maureen Rynne, Respond

**1. Minutes of meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018.**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2018 were proposed by Cllr. Pat Burke, seconded by Cllr. Paul Murphy and agreed.

**2. Matters Arising.**

Dermot Hayes referred to his request at the previous meeting that homeless statistics for the county be included on the Council's website. It was confirmed that the website would be updated accordingly.

**3. Presentation from Respond.**

Aisling Corcoran from Respond gave a brief overview of Respond informing the meeting that they are over 30 years in operation. Respond currently have 6 Estates in County Clare consisting of 128 Units. Units are a mix of CAS (Elderly units) and CLLS (Family units).

Respond delighted to see Homeless Hub on Agenda, as Respond currently have 4 open and operational in Dublin and Limerick.

Aisling highlighted the need to review income thresholds for families who fall into the income categories of over 30,000 to 40,000 – families in this bracket finding it difficult to secure housing as mortgages and affordability of private rents is an issue for this bracket.

Respond thanked Cllr. Gerry Flynn for the invite and advised that they are happy to be involved in the partnership.

A. Haugh advised that Clare County Council is working closely with Respond and other Approved Housing Bodies for the provision of accommodation and that for 2018 we are reliant on the AHB sector for the delivery of new build units with LA direct builds to come on stream in 2019.

T. Guilfoyle suggested that the SPC might draft something to address the cap on the wage structure for social housing as the cap of €25,000 (for an individual) is not right as it is creating ghetto scenarios. He further suggested that the social housing title be removed as it creates a stigma.

Cllr. G. Flynn advised that we could contact the Department to see if the income thresholds could be reviewed.

Cllr. T. McNamara indicated that there is a cohort of people who don't qualify for social housing and are struggling to get a mortgage.

Cllr. T. O'Brien advised that in parts of East Clare there is a lack of housing stock and high demand for same.

Cllr. A. Norton highlighted the number of individual people needing housing and that the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan needs to take on board the number of single people needing housing and they need to be prioritised.

A. Haugh advised that there is some work going on at National level through the development of an affordable purchase scheme and also a pilot on a cost rental scheme which are aimed at assisting what is termed as the "squeezed middle" where people are over the income limit for social housing but unable to qualify for a mortgage.

**4. Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan – targets and progress.**

S. McNulty updated the meeting as follows on targets and progress to date under the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan:

	<b>Target 2018</b>	<b>Estimated Output 2018</b>	<b>Comment on Output</b>
Build	29	41	30 at Acha Bhile by Cluid, 5 at Roslevan by Co-operative Housing Ireland, 4 at Clarecastle (Anvers) and 2 turnkeys at Corofin.
Acquisition	35	72	57 sales closed to end November 2018 - est. outturn 60. Also 12 no. individual house acquisitions by Approved Housing Bodies expected to be completed in 2018.
Leasing	100	70	59 completed to date. Property availability continues to be an issue - very limited supply of properties available.
	164	183	
Voids		13	Estimated outturn for 2018 to be 75 units but limited to counting 13 no. for the purpose of returns.
Sub-total	164	196	
HAP	414	400	At present there is on average of 7 households per week gross taking up HAP.
RAS	17	0	No. new RAS tenancies coming on stream. Now being set up under HAP
Sub-total	431	400	
<b>Overall Total</b>	<b>595</b>	<b>596</b>	

## **5. Update on Planned Maintenance programme.**

T. Neville reported on the property surveys which commenced on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2018 and the status at 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2018 as follows:

- Phase 1: Ennis – 99% complete - 448 no surveys completed from 454.
- Phase 2: Ennis – 93% complete – 311 no surveys completed from 334.
- Phase 3: North Clare – 95% complete – 334 no surveys completed from 352.
- Phase 4: West Clare – 93% complete – 406 no completed from 436.
- Phase 5: East Clare – 69% complete – 236 no completed from 344.
- Phase 6: Shannon – 67% complete – 330 no completed from 489.
- Traveller Accommodation Sites – 28% complete – 16 no completed from 57.

In total, 2081 Surveys have been completed, this equates to 84% of the total stock surveyed.

A pilot tender to include approximately 40 No. units from Ennis Phase 1 will be advertised shortly. This will include all Statutory Items listed in the Housing Regulations 2017 (Standards for Rented Houses). These items include the provision of;

- Smoke Alarms
- Carbon Monoxide Alarms
- Fire Blanket
- Window Restrictors

A. Haugh advised that the focus at National level is on moving from responsive to preventative maintenance and future funding will likely be directed towards this model with reduced expenditure on return of long term voids to stock.

Cllr. T. O'Brien requested confirmation of cost and timeframe. T. Neville advised that a cost of approx. €3.5 k per unit for priority works applied to be completed county wide on a phased basis by Q2 2020 with an overall cost of approximately €9m.

T. Guilfoyle queried low number of traveller accommodation sites surveyed. T. Neville advised that surveys were being done in conjunction with upgrade works.

## **6. Update on proposed Homeless Transition Hub and HAT office**

Transition Hub:

L. Brett advised that Cusack Lodge has recently been acquired by Clare County Council for the Provision of Homeless Transition Accommodation.

- The Operator has now been appointed.
- Next Steps;
  - Design Team is in place, and in process of completing tender documentation.
  - Going to Tender pre Christmas 2018.
  - CCC expects to appoint a Contractor in early January 2019.
  - Works to commence in February 2019.
  - 4 Week Refurbishment Period.
- Works include refurbishment and reconfiguration to accommodate 5 Families.

HAT Office:

L. Brett advised that Clare County Council is in the process of developing a single point of contact for Homeless Services (a Homeless Action Team Office) within County Buildings, New Road, Ennis.

The HAT Office will be located within the Ground Floor, of Housing.

The reconfiguration of the space will allow for;

- 9 additional desk spaces
- 2 additional meeting rooms
- Additional storage for documentation

The status of the Project is:

- Design Team is in place, works have been tendered, and Clare Co Co are close to appointing a preferred Tenderer.
- Works to commence in Early January 2019.
- 5 Week Construction Period.

Cllr. A. Norton welcomed the purchase of the Hub and the establishment of the HAT office in Aras Contae an Chláir.

D. Hayes queried how much the purchase has cost so far and how much the agency is costing. He also advised that at a recent meeting of the Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), the members requested that a Voucher System for hot meals and laundry services be put in place and be provided by Clare County Council until the new Homeless Hub is available.

## **7. Update on Vacant Homes Action.**

M. Corbett updated the meeting in relation to Vacant Homes as follows:

### Introduction

A Vacant Homes Action Plan for Co. Clare was prepared by the Social Development Directorate and submitted to the Department in December, 2017. Vacancy rates from CSO (Census 2016) showed 10,925 vacant homes in the county and when holiday homes are excluded the figure reduces to 6104. Geo-Directory figures from An Post show 2,700 unoccupied dwellings. The disparity between the two figures is being examined nationally.

The Council examined Geo-Directory figures as it identifies vacant postal addresses whereas the Census data does not give this information. Initial indicators suggest that the level of vacant dwellings is significantly overstated.

Ennis and Shannon were initially assessed. As per Geo-Directory Ennis & Environs had 329 vacant properties and Shannon Municipal District showed 196 as being unoccupied. A number of properties were eliminated for various reasons such as:

- Insufficient data
- In rural locations
- Unsuitable
- No demand
- Since sold or re-let
- Under development
- Occupied
- Temporarily Vacant

When houses under the above categories are excluded, the list is reduced to 96 no. properties (74 in Ennis and 22 no. in Shannon) and Clare County Council is interested in progressing under the Buy and Renew Scheme, Repair & Leasing Scheme or a long term leasing arrangement.

## Progress to Date

80 houses have been surveyed to date in Ennis and Shannon and of those 22 appear to be potentially vacant. Ownership of 16 has been determined and the following is the position:

- 2 houses have been purchased with refurbishment pending and purchase of 4 others is in progress;
- The owners of the other properties have either:
  - Re-located and lack of knowledge on their whereabouts is a barrier to advancing acquisition, or
  - There are legal/title/financial issues with a number of properties in receivership or re-possessed by the Banks. In these cases issues have to be sorted before proceeding or there is a lack of response from the banks/receivers involved.

We are also examining the following avenues in order to progress with acquiring vacant properties.

- Engaging a pathfinder to carry out further investigations on identifying and locating the owners of vacant properties.
- Legal advice is currently being sought regarding compulsory purchase. Waterford City and County Council and Louth County Council have found this effective in some cases.
- Encouraging the public to make use of the vacant homes website established by Mayo Co. Council ([www.vacanthomes.ie](http://www.vacanthomes.ie)) and register vacant residential properties.
- Liaising with Rural Development Directorate and Economic Development Directorate. Also liaising with Elected Members and Council staff on the ground i.e. Account Managers, Estate Management Officers, Community Wardens, etc.
- Make use of software being developed nationally to assist with undertaking surveys and analysing data.

## Conclusion

Work will continue with a view to maximising the number of vacant units that can be returned to use. When work in Ennis and Shannon is complete, attention will turn to Kilrush and Killaloe MDs. A Vacant Homes Officer is in place.

Cllr. T. O'Brien indicated that there is a lot of confusion around vacant homes and queried where the published figures were coming from as clearly they are far from reality.

## **8. Proposed change to differential rent scheme to incorporate property charge.**

L. O'Connor reported that property owners, including local authorities, became liable for the Local Property Tax (LPT) in 2013 following the enactment of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 & the Finance (Local Property Tax)(Amendment) Act 2013.

All residential properties within the ownership of local authorities as well as properties leased by local authorities for a period of 20 years or more, with the exception of a limited number of exempted properties, are liable for an annual charge. At present the charge is €90 per unit.

Currently LPT liability is based on the valuation of properties as at May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013. In accordance with the 2012 Act, householders will be required to revalue their properties in 2019. These new valuations will come into effect in 2020. It is unknown at this point if the charge for local authority owned properties will increase at that point.

In 2018 Clare County Council's LPT liability amounted to €222,840 (2,476 liable units). It is estimated that this will increase to approximately €226,000 in 2019.

It is a matter for each local authority to decide whether it will pass on LPT liability to its tenants in the form of an increase in rent. The Council's differential rent scheme would have to be amended to allow for this. The amendment of the scheme is an executive function. Based on the current annual charge of €90, an increase of €1.73 per week would have to be levied on rent accounts of tenants residing in properties liable for the charge, if the Council is to recover the LPT cost.

Currently neighbouring authorities, Galway Co Co & Limerick City & Co Co, charge an additional €2 and €1.67 per week respectively for the LPT charge to their tenants.

A discussion took place following which Cllr. G. Flynn undertook that the SPC would contact the Government and request that this charge be waived for Local Authorities.

## **9. Update on Arts Plan.**

S. Mulcahy advised as follows in relation to the Arts Plan:

### **Context within which the Plan is being developed:**

- Arts Act 2003
- County Development Plan
- Making Great Art Work - Arts Council
- Clare Culture and Creativity Strategy 2018 - 2022

### **Consultations**

The Clare Arts Plan is currently being informed by:

- **Early 2018:** Feedback from Creative Ireland Public Meetings
- **Early 2018:** Feedback from Creative Ireland Focus Groups - Arts Office & glór
- **November 2018:** Arts Programme Focus Groups
  - Arts & Disability
  - Arts & Education
- **November & December 2018:** Key cultural organisations countywide
- **December 2018:** Monkey Survey
  - General Public
  - Artform Specific
  - Specific interest groups eg youth, elderly

### **Emerging Themes**

- **National:** Low remuneration of artists, cultural diversity, development of public art working group
- **Local:** Need for targeted supports for talented individuals, burn out amongst the artistic community, need for greater networking, need for longer term projects, new platforms for exhibiting / performing
- **Values:** Active citizenship, cultural democracy, public engagement, partnerships, inclusivity, diversity of arts programmes on offer

### **Timeframe:**

- Plan to be completed by end of December 2018
- Plan to be forwarded to Arts Council for review in early January 2019
- Draft plan available for public comment in early January 2019
- Final Plan to go before before March 2019 meeting of the SPC

### **Amendments made if necessary and ready for adoption at Council Meeting of April 2019.**

#### **10. Update on Clare County Library Project.**

H. Walsh informed the meeting that the bid process for the construction of the new library closed on Thurs, 22<sup>nd</sup> November.

A total of 8 contractors were shortlisted to bid and 4 tenders were returned. At this stage the Council is following procurement procedures for the tender process including quality criteria assessment to determine the preferred bidder. This will also include checks and confirmation of the tender value relative to the pre tender estimate.

Following review, including value engineering proposals where applicable, it is intended to lodge a Stage 4 submission to the Department.

#### **11. Update on Creative Ireland Strategy.**

H. Walsh reported that the CI programme is nearing conclusion for 2018 – during the year the cross-directorate cultural team met on three occasions and administered 18 in-house projects including the Local Authority's response to "Bliain na Gaeilge". A total of €25,000 was allocated to the public in grant aid which supported 21 community based projects and a Decade of Centenaries library lecture series. The overall budget for 2018 will be expended at year end including the sums allocated to Cruinniú na nÓg which took place in June and the yearlong "Decade of Centenaries" programme.

It is anticipated that the budget allocation for 2019 will again be €96,000 with an additional €15,000 for Cruinniú and a probable €5,000 for the Decade of Centenaries programme. The Clare Strategy proposes a bursary/award scheme for the public in 2019 which specifically targets individual artists/innovators to engage in creative community activity. The award scheme is presently being advertised with a closing date of mid-Jan, 2019. Awards will be between €2-€5k.



The Creative Ireland team await any further direction on the Decade of Centenaries programme as we begin the start of the commemorative period of the War of Independence from January, 2019.

## **12. Glór Update.**

Orla Flanagan gave a presentation on glór detailing its mission and goals, financial situation and plans for 2019.

## **13. Large scale sports infrastructure grant funding.**

T. Forde advised as follows in relation to this item:

The National Sports Policy was published on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and provided for a Large Scale Sport Infrastructure Fund (LSSIF). The aim of the fund is to provide Exchequer support for larger sports facility projects. These are projects where the Exchequer investment would be greater than the maximum amount available under the Sports Capital Programme. In some cases, these may be projects where the primary objective will be to increase active participation in sport. In other cases, these may be large scale venues/stadia where the focus is more related to social participation and high performance sport. Initially the scheme will have a particular focus on National Government Bodies of Sport and Local Authorities. New swimming pool projects will also be considered. All project proposals will be subject to appropriate economic analysis.

The Government has provided a capital allocation of at least €100m over the period 2019 to 2027 for the LSSIF.

While this programme is aimed primarily at the NGBs and Local Authorities it is also open to other bodies, philanthropic funders, clubs and voluntary organisation to apply but such applications would necessarily have to be made and prioritised by a Local Authority and/or an NGB. Expressions of interest will be sought from the various sporting clubs and organisations in the coming weeks.

## **14. Date of next meeting.**

Agreed that next meeting would be held on Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> March 2019 at 2.30pm.

## **15. AOB**

D. Hayes requested up to date homelessness figures and was advised that currently 67 adults and 51 children are homeless.

Cllr. A. Norton referred to recent press reports which were critical of the Chair of the SPC on the basis of his position taken during the presidential campaign. She confirmed her total confidence in Cllr Flynn and complimented him on his efficiency, integrity and professionalism in carrying out his duties as Chair of the SPC. Cllr. G. Flynn expressed his appreciation for the support from members of the Committee and acknowledged the contributions and efforts of all in the work of the SPC.

T. Leyden, on behalf of the PPN, congratulated Clare County Council on being named Local Authority of the Year.

The meeting then concluded.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Cllr Gerard Flynn** **Anne Haugh**  
**Chairperson** **Director of Service**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_