

**Minutes of Meeting of the Social Development Strategic Policy Committee held in the Council Chamber on Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> September 2022 at 2.30pm**

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**Present:** Cllr. Gerard Flynn, Chairperson  
Cllr. Tony O'Brien  
Cllr. Joe Garrihy  
Cllr. Paul Murphy  
Cllr. Ann Norton  
Tommy Guilfoyle  
Noel Kearney  
Mary Leahy  
William Cahir  
Anne Haugh, Director of Service  
Siobhan McNulty, Senior Executive Officer  
Adrian Headd, A/Senior Engineer  
John Corry, Administrative Officer  
Helen Walsh, County Librarian  
Siobhán O'Keeffe, Administrative Officer  
Mairéad Corbett, Administrative Officer  
Niamh Madden, Senior Executive Engineer  
Jason Murphy, Acting Director of Service  
Tim Forde, Sports & Recreation

**Apologies:** Larry Brennan  
Cllr. Donna McGettigan

### **1. Minutes of Social Development SPC meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022**

Minutes of meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Tony O'Brien, seconded by Mary Leahy and agreed.

### **2. Matters Arising**

Mary Leahy requested that the minutes of the meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022 be amended to include her query regarding the cost of servicing and the additional electricity running cost of heat pumps which were reported as ~€300 per annum additional electricity cost and €300 servicing cost.

*Post meeting note the servicing cost is carried by the Council. And that while there is ~€300 additional electricity cost there are no ancillary heating costs for the household.*

### **3. Update on Ukrainian response by Clare County Council**

Jason Murphy, Acting Director of Service presented to the SPC an update on the Ukrainian response by Clare County Council.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn thanked Jason for the update and queried how the ongoing arrival of Ukrainians into our community was impacting on our current social housing accommodation crisis.

Jason Murphy advised that whilst the Ukrainians continue to arrive the challenge is to identify available properties and the provision of private homes has a role to play.

William Cahir queried the services that were being provided to Ukrainians in order to assist them to source employment.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy commented on his admiration for the manner in which the Clare Community and the various agencies have responded to the Ukrainian crisis and mentioned the international recognition Ireland has received for our response. Cllr. Garrihy spoke of the resilience of the Ukrainian people and of the expertly qualified Ukrainian people that have arrived in County Clare. He spoke of the opportunity for us to recognise these qualifications as a resource, in particular he referred to a shortage of qualified childcare professionals in North Clare and he is aware of Ukrainian childcare professionals that have arrived in County Clare. Cllr. Garrihy feels that this is no longer an emergency response, and we now need to consider a medium-term plan.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien acknowledged that we already have serious issues at home and we need a medium to long-term plan to give direction going forward, with proper planning and structures in place. The last thing he wants to see is disenfranchised people.

Tommy Guilfoyle requested that a copy of the presentation was to be sent via e-mail to the SPC members. He also asked that the SPC go above and beyond and write to the Minister for Defence to ask that the Government try and negotiate a peace deal in Ukraine.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn commented that this request was outside of the remit of the SPC and his as Chair.

Jason Murphy advised that the Clare & Limerick ETB have translation classes in place for the Ukrainians, he advised that the hubs are making a difference and acknowledged that the more employment opportunities you can give to the migrant population the better for our own community.

With regard to the emergency response moving towards a medium to long term situation he advised that there is currently a national white paper being drafted.

#### **4. Biodiversity and Housing Capital Projects**

Niamh Madden, Senior Executive Engineer presented to the SPC on Biodiversity & Housing Capital Projects.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn thanked Niamh Madden for the presentation and commented that you can only conserve if you analyse and that is what Clare County Council are doing.

There was no further discussion on the presentation.

## 5. Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022 - 2026

Adrian Headd A/Senior Engineer, presented to the SPC on the Housing for All Housing Delivery Action Plan 2022-2026.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn thanked Adrian Headd for his presentation and made the following observations:

- that it would be helpful if large abbreviations were explained on such presentations.
- Disappointing that there is no affordable housing scheme in County Clare.

Tommy Guilfoyle asked if Adrian Headd would explain Table 1 of the presentation so that he could understand with reference to Clarecastle.

William Cahir commented that based on the data on Table 2 of the presentation that rural County Clare is in big trouble with no private developments. Irish Water are effectively prohibiting development in the County.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien commented that with the constraints being placed on us how do we develop and sustain communities with (currently) 52 towns and villages with no wastewater treatment, this is a huge challenge.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy observed that the rural communities have played a huge part in supporting the Ukrainians response and queried why the rural communities are not considered for social housing when clearly there is capacity. He also suggested that the role of the SPC should include taking on a study of the impact of sustaining the rural community.

Mary Leahy asked what census the figures were taken from?

Adrian Headd advised that:

- the template used for the data was provided by the Department and not developed by Clare County Council.
- The figures were from the social housing demand figures and not the census.
- Purpose was to highlight issues in counties and to work with Irish Water on particular projects to try and resolve these issues.

Adrian explained in detail the information in Table 1 relating to Clarecastle.

Anne Haugh highlighted that this was the first time the DHLGH has requested this information and the benefits of having the information recorded based on social housing need per settlement. The purpose of the data was to highlight the constraints and to seek to address them. Anne also noted that:

- Clare County Council are continuously looking for schemes
- The target for 2022 is 200 units under the Housing for All and Clare County Council are well exceeding that target.

Siobhán McNulty noted:

- That the figures presented were done at a point in time and no census figures were used and housing need and demand change regularly.
- 2977 was the housing need of which 1400 were currently accommodated in other forms of social housing i.e., transfer applicants.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn welcomed the change in income thresholds which is due to come into effect from 01/10/2022.

## **6. Quarterly briefing on Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 -2027**

A report outlining the quarterly allocations for Disabled People was circulated to all SPC members at the meeting.

John Corry advised the SPC meeting that Clare County Council had the single highest allocation of units in a quarter of which 31% were allocated to Disabled people and this figure was well above the national target.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn commented that there is a deficit in funding for housing adaptation.

Siobhán McNulty noted that this was the first time Clare County Council had adapted properties available for allocation and that 31% was a significant figure. She also commented that grants for adapting private houses was different to allocation of stock and that the amount available for adaptation grants was still capped although some of the available individual amounts had increased.

Cllr. Ann Norton asked the following:

- Did we know how many people on the waiting list had disabilities – is this figure available?
- Queried if the information Clare County Council required on a yearly basis from people with disabilities who were still interested in social housing was necessary, Cllr Norton, highlighted that it was very difficult in the current climate to get access to HSE staff or OT staff that were available for admin work to complete medical information.
- Wondered if we were losing people from the housing list due to this requirement as difficult to access professionals to complete paperwork and there is a lot of information required from people with disabilities.

Cllr Ann Norton noted that she had received a lovely phone call from a parent of an adult child (28 years old) with a disability who had been allocated a property and was now independently living. Cllr Norton remarked that it was lovely to hear a good news story and that she would like to see more people with disabilities coming off the waiting lists.

John Corry advised that the SSHA (Summary Social Housing Assessments) forms are an annual requirement, CCC has no discretion with the requirements and the deadline for return of the forms is 16/09/2022. He noted that any applicants that had applied for social housing after the 23/09/2021 were not written to as these applicants had been recently assessed.

With regard to the HMD1 medical form John Corry noted that this is a National Directive and CCC will assist any applicants where they are made aware of issues. It is always a last resort to remove someone from the list.

Siobhán McNulty advised that of the 2901 applicants registered on the housing list 313 had a disability requirement, of these 43% or 134 applicants had a physical disability, and 122 of the applicants with a disability requirement were already in some form of housing and are transfer applicants.

## **7. Circular Housing 29/2022: Changes to the HAP Discretion Levels**

Siobhán O’Keeffe circulated a copy of Housing Circular 29/2022 together with a report on the changes to the HAP Discretion levels.

Siobhán O’Keeffe – welcomed the two changes to the discretion levels; increase in the HAP discretion rate from 20% to a maximum 35% applicable to both new and existing tenancies. Also additional flexibility to allow local authorities to apply a couple rate to a single person household, this will only apply to new tenancies.

Cllr Gerry Flynn asked if there was a mechanism to advise HAP recipients of the changes as Siobhán had advised that it is up to the tenant to contact CCC and request a review of their HAP in order to avail of the discretion rates, they will not apply automatically.

Tommy Guilfoyle commented that the HAP scheme was introduced originally as a temporary measure, he feels it is now prolonging the housing crisis by giving money to the private sector rental property owners, these funds should be used to fund building houses. He welcomes the changes but it is not a solution nor is it the way forward.

## **8. Vacant Homes including Croí Conaithe update**

Mairéad Corbett circulated a report on Vacant Homes including a Croí Conaithe update.

Cllr Joe Garrihy had requested the report, feels Croí Conaithe is not enough, he is underwhelmed by considering all of the derelict properties in the county. He believes there is massive potential in the vacant homes area to help with the housing crisis. He asked how long the repair / lease and buy to new schemes in place. Mairéad Corbett advised that they were introduced 2016/2017.

Tommy Guilfoyle – challenges facing the CPO process, stop funding private house owners to repair their properties, CCC should buy these houses. Suggested that a letter should be written to the Minister to seek changes in the CPO process.

Anne Haugh – the CPO process is being reviewed nationally with the intention of expediting the process, recruitment of Town Regeneration Officer is on-going this week and part of their role will be to liaise with the vacant homeowners.

## **9. Sports & Recreation Update**

Tim Forde provided an update; he wished to mention some staff retirements and acknowledge their work and service; namely Michael Dinan Caretaker Tim Smythe Park and Jackie Coote Active Ennis Pool Manager.

Tim also wished to acknowledge the work of the Clare Sports Partnership in the Lisdoonvarna area in particular their work with the Ukrainian community and with children who have Autism.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn – we couldn't underestimate the value of sport to the community, and he looks forward to there being a Clare Active similar to Ennis Active. He is delighted to see that the focus is on participation in sport and not so much on success.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien wanted to compliment the team in Lees Road, acknowledged the recent achievements of the Clare Ladies Minor Football team in winning the All-Ireland C Championship. He also mentioned the CCC Sports Active Fun Day that was taking place in Lees Road on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September and said that all are welcome.

Cllr. Paul Murphy thanked Tim for his update and queried if there had been any developments in putting turnstiles at the entrance to the running track in Lees Road. Tim confirmed that the turnstiles were part of the capital project that they had just received funding for.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy thanked Tim Forde for the vital role he plays in chairing the Clare Sports Partnership. He acknowledged the wonderful achievements of Marie O'Connor in the European Transplant Games; she was named athlete of the games. He also mentioned the All-Ireland successes of both the Clare Boys and Girls U16 teams. He suggested that CCC should consider the use of all available renewable energy options for the provision of their facilities.

Mary Leahy complimented the Caretaker from Tim Smythe Park on all his wonderful work and wished him the very best in his retirement. She asked if the toilets in Tim Smythe Park could be opened earlier than 9:30am.

Tim Forde advised that they are looking to expand the manpower to resource the earlier opening of the facilities.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn asked if CCC could consider installing some public toilet facilities similar to those currently in Salthill where the charge is 10 to 20 cent. He also supported the good wishes to the CCC retirees.

## **10. Library, Arts & Culture Update**

Helen Walsh circulated a report on the Creative Ireland Survey Results to the CPC. The survey was carried out as part of the preparation for the new 5-year strategy. The strategy will come before the December 2022 SPC meeting for discussion and adoption.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn asked if the new library development was on track. Helen confirmed that August 2023 was the completion date for construction works and January 2024 was the completion date for fit-out and occupation.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy – complimented the great service being provided. He asked if it was possible to extend the opening hours of the library in Lisdoonvarna.

Helen Walsh advised that they are moving towards opening the library in Lisdoonvarna for another day per week. They are allocating additional resources to Lisdoonvarna. Helen also advised that they are stocking the library with additional Ukrainian and Russian books.

## **11. AOB**

Cllr. Gerry Flynn acknowledged the recent staff changes announced and wanted in particular to mention the fantastic working relationship he had with Siobhan McNulty, he regretted very much that she was leaving but sincerely thanked her for all her work and wished Siobhán the best of luck in her new role.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien wanted to concur with everything Cllr. Gerry Flynn had said and in addition he commented on how proactive Siobhán was when dealing with problems. He thanked her for her service to the SPC and to the public.

Cllr. Paul Murphy wished Siobhán the best of luck with her new role and thanked her for always being so helpful and available for help and advice.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy concurred with what had been said already about Siobhán and said that Social Housing's loss was North Clare's gain.

Cllr. Ann Norton said that Siobhán will be missed.

Anne Haugh wished to compliment Siobhán McNulty on how she has assisted her in her role as Director of Service, there is nothing that Siobhán doesn't know, she has a wealth of knowledge, she fought many the battle with integrity, fairness, professionalism and always with the best of intention. Anne thanked Siobhán for all her work on behalf of the Senior Management team.

Siobhán McNulty thanked everyone for their good wishes, she said the announcement came as a shock, she had thoroughly enjoyed her time in the Housing Department, always relished the challenge of housing and is saddened to leave.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn asked that the Mica / Pyrite issue should be kept continuously on the agenda for discussion. Anne Haugh advised there is no update from the last meeting in that Clare remain approved for access to the scheme and that the Housing Agency has recently visited households with a view to setting a damage threshold. The Housing Agency will be the decision makers on household access to the scheme.

Noel Kearney advised that Clare PPN are holding a zoom meeting at 7pm on the 15<sup>th</sup> September on Census 2022 and are inviting participation.

The meeting then concluded.

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

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