

**Minutes of Meeting of the Social Development Strategic Policy Committee
held in the Council Chamber on Wednesday 8th June 2022 at 2.30pm**

Present: Cllr. Gerard Flynn, Chairperson
Cllr. Tony O'Brien
Cllr. Joe Garrihy
Cllr. Paul Murphy
Cllr. Donna McGettigan
Cllr. Ann Norton
Larry Brennan
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
Kathy Lordan, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies: Tommy Guilfoyle

1. Minutes of Social Development SPC meeting held on 9th March 2022

Minutes of meeting held on 9th March 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Tony O'Brien, seconded by Cllr. Ann Norton and agreed.

2. Matters Arising

Noel Kearney queried the % of universally designed properties in new schemes with regard to property suitability for others with disabilities.

SMcNulty advised that the limitation was on funding with 10% of the units funded for universal design but that all properties meet Part M of the building regulations and are allocated in line with the Councils allocation scheme.

3. Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027

JCorry advised that this item is to be on the agenda on a quarterly basis to ensure the SPC are briefed on the progress of the Local Housing and Disability Steering Plan as required under national policy 'Housing for All'. This Local Strategic Plan was considered by the Social Development SPC at meeting in March 2022 and was subsequently adopted by Clare County Council at the April meeting of the Council.

Details regarding how the Housing and Steering Disability Group are performing against the objectives and targets set in the Local Strategic Plan for Housing People with a Disability 2021-2026 for the period Jan to May 2022 were circulated to the members.

The members thanked John for the update.

A discussion on universal accessible properties ensued where members were advised that all new builds have a requirement to have a ground floor accessible toilet with space provided for an accessible shower.

Cllr. T O'Brien queried how we can meet the need for housing for the disabled if the need is ~27% and the funding is limited to 10%.

JCorry advised that not all disability need was for physical adaptation to the property and that many with disability need can be accommodated in 'standard' housing due to the nature of the disability.

Cllr. Donna McGettigan queried the protection of tenants who feel they cannot report property defects.

S McNulty advised that tenants are protected by their tenancy agreements and the Residential Tenancy Board and that there should not be consequences for tenant if landlord is not meeting minimum standards.

Noel Kearney queried if a person is taken off the Housing list if they avail of HAP.

S McNulty advised that if they are approved for social housing support and avail of HAP they are transferred to transfer list.

Noel Kearney advised that there are currently 10 people in nursing homes and sought information on policies of the Council to house them.

S McNulty advised that the Housing Disability Steering Group meet quarterly where requirements for housing are identified she advised that this has yielded very positive results in recent times.

3. Climate Change and Biodiversity

Adrian Headd, A/Senior Engineer, presented to the SPC on the use of Heat Pumps in New Social Housing Developments & Retrofit Schemes.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien and Cllr. Donna McGettigan expressed concerns regarding the impact of retrofitting on more vulnerable tenants and the impact on turnaround time.

Mary Leahy queried the additional electricity cost and the impact of this additional cost on households.

Larry Brennan highlighted the advantages of heat pumps and acknowledged that while electricity costs will increase overall heating costs fall. He stressed the importance of maintenance of these systems by the Council.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy supported the energy retrofitting programme and suggested the Council should explore alternative avenues for delivery of this programme.

Adrian Headd reiterated the Councils obligation to deliver and meet the terms and conditions of the scheme. He advised that all tenants were supported in the use of the technology but the basis premise is to leave them alone as they are self regulating.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn requested and was supported by Cllr. Donna McGettingan that a study be undertaken on electricity costs before and after the energy efficiency works.

Adrian Headd advised the studies have been done by TUS in relation to new builds. As of now we have not seen information on retrofits but we will continue to liaise with TUS in relation to this action.

5. Construction Cost Inflation

Adrian Headd advised:

- Since early 2021 the cost of certain construction materials has risen.
- The CSO advise that the cost of timber & steel alone has increased more than 60% while other certain materials has seen increases between 7 – 20% which are not typical increases.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine has pushed energy prices to record levels and has increased uncertainty with respect to certain supply chains.
- The Housing Dept. of Clare County Council are engaging with our Contractors where relevant contracts apply for the purposes of setting up these frameworks to provide assistance to our Contractors in the delivery of our projects in accordance with the OGP guidance.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien queried the impact of inflation on the delivery of private house grants and suggested the current limits were inadequate and that the SPC should seek to raise these limits.

This action was supported by Cllr. Gerry Flynn with a suggestion the difficulties be communicated to the Minister.

The SPC were advised that this item falls outside of the construction contracts but acknowledged the impact of construction inflation on all and that the grant limits are set nationally not locally. It was cautioned that if limits are increased there will be less grants administered as the allocation is set annually. It was further noted there is a significant backlog building again due to extensive demand and limited by funding available.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy queried the impact on current and pipeline projects and how the additional cost will be recouped from the exchequer by the Local Authority?

William Cahir advised that any project that had looked for certification before 10th May 2022 would be excluded and queried if any projects in Clare are caught in this loophole.

Adrian Headd advised that we haven't received a claim from any contractor to date.

6. Update on HFA Delivery Targets

Table outlining projected delivery targets for 2022/2023 under Housing for All was circulated to the members.

Larry Brennan advised that the CIF had a presentation last week from the Department who were seeking the support of the CIF in reaching housing delivery targets. He expressed concern with regard to the lack of private housing delivery due to the focus on social housing delivery.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy queried if the Council can purchase properties anywhere as there are available houses and lands in serviced towns and villages.

Cllr. Donna McGettigan suggested the squeezed middle need to be looked after as they can't afford houses and are over the threshold for access to social housing supports.

Siobhan McNulty responded that there is a dearth of private development in Clare and that consequentially impacts on the squeezed middle due to lack of supply. In relation to acquisitions the Council has received an increased allocation from the Department to acquire properties subject to very specific conditions including meeting need for the homeless; for 1 or 2 person households or to accommodate Travellers.

Anne Haugh noted it is regrettable that Clare is not recognised as having an affordability constraint in order to qualify for the approved housing fund to deliver affordable housing which would assist the squeezed middle in acquiring properties. She advised that the shared equity scheme will be launched in the coming weeks which everyone will be eligible for; will provide for the state taking up to 30% stake in the house and will be for purchases in private developments.

7. Ukrainian Response

Anne Haugh briefed the members on where Clare County Council are at in response to the Ukrainian crisis.

The most recent set of numbers show there are in the region of 2,300/2,400 accommodated in hotels, guesthouses and commercially operated properties in Clare – that is outside of Ukrainians who may be housed in private homes. This means that the Council may be required to identify more longer term housing for ~2,300 Ukrainians in emergency accommodation.

In addition the Council were tasked with inspections of private properties pledged under the Red Cross Scheme; where they are deemed suitable we are engaging with Mid-West Simon to match up suitable applicants to the properties. This exercise is not yielding huge numbers and the local authorities are asked to look at methods of dealing with shortfall of beds to meet the demand.

There are still 3 rest centres in the county available for emergency accommodation; total capacity 70 people; currently not in use. Recruitment of

Acting DOS to head up specific team to address the Ukrainian response is underway.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn advised that people who made offers did so in good faith but didn't envisage a long term situation and outlined the difficulties in relation to availability of school places for both Ukrainians and the locals.

Cllr. Joe Garrihy welcomed the appointment of a Director and team. He commended the work of local community groups in supporting the Ukrainian people in Clare which has taken its toll but has been hugely rewarding; incredibly proud of the way the people of Clare have responded; challenges are huge; we have to stand up now as a Local Authority and be leaders and respond best way possible. Cllr. Donna McGettigan supported Cllr. Garrihys position.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn acknowledged that Clare has been very responsive but cautioned that we must continue to support the vulnerable people in the County.

8. Defective Concrete Blocks

Update and current status was circulated to the members.

The members were advised that the most recent meeting with the Pyrite Action Group was to present the findings of additional testing requested by the Department which proves beyond doubt that the damage to homes in Clare is because of excessive amounts of pyrite; submission went to the Department 4 weeks ago and awaiting response.

Cllr. Donna McGettigan thanked the Director for the work in this area.

9. Sports & Recreation

Activities in all facilities is back to pre-Covid activity with all restrictions lifted. It was noted there is a sustained demand for all pitches.

Regarding the Sports Capital Grants 2022 the Council were approved for a Multi-use games area (Muga) in Kilrush (€71,824) and the upgrade of the running track in Lees Road (€59,570) – both are in early stages of delivery.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn commended the Council on the facilities provided and acknowledged there is room for further developing the offerings due to the amount of people engaging in sport.

Larry Brennan requested the Lees Road walking path be surfaced over its full length.

Siobhan McNulty advised that funding was provided under the outdoor recreational infrastructural scheme (ORIS) to upgrade the surface and that we would seek additional funding under this scheme once it opens for applications.

William Cahir queried the overlapping of seasons of soccer and other sports and what plans are in place to monitor capacity or future expansion plans.

Mary Leahy suggested that additional seating in the vicinity of the pitches would be welcomed in Lees Road.

Siobhan McNulty advised that Clare Sports Partnership have commenced a sports audit to identify gaps and overlaps in facilities in the County the aim of this audit is to target funding for projects where there are identified deficits. Additional seating was installed during 2020/21 along the walkways but it would be difficult to put fixed seating in pitchside; we will continue to pursue funding for seating in the facility.

10. Library, Arts & Culture Update

Helen Walsh updated on the Library capital project: Coolsivna started on site on 28th April with an anticipated completion date of Q3 2023.

Creative Ireland Strategy – Clare County Council has been awarded a sum of money which is divided out to awardees of grants during the year; breakdown of funding was circulated to the members. Creative Ireland programme to be extended with work ongoing on the development of another 5 year strategy.

9. AOB

Cllr. Joe Garrihy proposed that the SPC focus on delivery of housing in rural Clare and requested a presentation on schemes including Croi Conaithe for the next SPC meeting. He also sought information on when details of Croi Conaithe will be released.

Anne Haugh advised that Croi Conaithe Cities Scheme was launched but we were awaiting detail on Croi Conaithe Towns Scheme. She advised we anticipated the imminent launch of this scheme and acceded to bringing this information to the next SPC meeting.

The meeting then concluded.

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

Date: _____