

***Minutes of Meeting of the Social Development Strategic Policy Committee  
held in the Council Chamber on Wednesday 9<sup>th</sup> March 2022 at 2.30pm***

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**Present:** Cllr. Gerard Flynn, Chairperson  
Cllr. Tony O'Brien  
Cllr. Mark Nestor  
Cllr. Paul Murphy  
Cllr. Donna McGettigan  
Larry Brennan  
Noel Kearney  
Mary Leahy  
Anne Haugh, Director of Service  
Siobhan McNulty, Senior Executive Officer  
Helen Walsh, County Librarian  
Siobhan Mulcahy, County Arts Officer  
Tim Forde, General Manager, Sports & Recreation  
Congella McGuire, Heritage Officer  
David Lenane, FAI  
Denis Hynes, FAI  
Kathy Lordan, Assistant Staff Officer

**Apologies:** Cllr. Joe Garrihy; Cllr. Ann Norton; Tommy Guilfoyle; William Cahir.

The Chair welcomed all to the first meeting of 2022.

### **1. Minutes of Social Development SPC meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021**

Minutes of meeting held on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2021 were proposed by Cllr. Nestor seconded by Mary Leahy and agreed.

### **2. Matters Arising**

Cllr. G. Flynn advised that a letter issued to the Minister re. pyrite/mica re-dress scheme for County Clare on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2021. Follow up correspondence will issue.

Also confirmed that, as requested, a presentation was made to Council meeting on Housing for All on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

### **3. Climate Change and Biodiversity**

Congella McGuire, Heritage Officer, presented to the SPC on the Clare Biodiversity Manual and highlighted some of the successful initiatives over the last 2 years e.g.

- Clare County Council signed up to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan in February 2020
- County Clare Demonstration Sites for Biodiversity Management 2020/2021
- "Let's Get Buzzing" Local Authority Pollinator Award

Cllr. G. Flynn thanked Congella for the presentation and stated the work being done is invaluable.

Queried re. creation of SAC's and procedure;

Re. Invasive Species – can take a number of years to deal with – needs strategic approach – resources needed;

Noticeable that a lot of trees that come down during storms are laden down with ivy; need to look at that.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien expressed interest in the guidance document and queried:

Re. Planning document – there is an influx of wind energy applications which are having a huge impact on natural environment; huge volume of data comes with planning application – data weighed in favour of application – is it possible that the guidance document is available to Planners and be taken into consideration for future planning?

Wind Energy Strategy was taken out of our remit – this may be a way local communities could rely on guidance document.

Cllr. G. Flynn stated the Wind Energy Strategy included in the County Development Plan 2017 – 2023 was a very progressive and advanced document.

Cllr. Donna McGettigan – can the manual be rolled out to the tidy towns and other community groups – seem to be running parallel with this.

Larry Brennan queried if the Best Practice Guidelines were on display for public to review.

Congella replied:

Re. SAC's – designated in late 1990's; National Parks and Wildlife service only now working through final phases of designations and making them official; when they were identified they were protected and their protection has not changed; there are no additional SAC's; there is a reluctance to add more as they need to finalise list.

Re. Invasive Species – huge problem; need to be more strategic.

Re. Trees & ivy – trees are not killed by ivy but ivy acts as a sail for wind to bring down tree.

Wind Energy Strategy – needs to be raised in context of County Development Plan.

Congella advised she will request Planning re. making manual available to local communities; at the moment it is a Clare County Council document.

Document was not put out for public review; it is in developmental stage; a lot of work to be done around the manual going forward.

#### **4. Sports & Recreation**

David Lenane and Denis Hynes FAI presented on:

- FAI Grassroots Department Structure
- Positive Partnerships Delivering Impact Across Clare
- Social Impact Programmes in Clare 2021/2022
- Planned Social Impact Programmes 2022
- Future Focus Areas

Cllr. Gerry Flynn thanked David and Denis for presentation and referred to the benefits of Ennis & Kilrush Active and how it would be the vision to have a Clare Active; recreation spaces during Covid were priceless; future targets, Shannon & North Clare – very important – would be great to bring them along; currently exploring the possibility of providing a cricket pitch in Shannon.

Cllr. Paul Murphy agreed and offered any help that the Councillors can give; also acknowledged the work of Clare Sports Partnership.

### **Sports Capital Grant Scheme Allocation Update:**

Siobhan McNulty advised that the Sports Capital Grants were announced in early March; over 70 clubs in Clare benefited in the amount of €4.68m. Clare County Council received €71,824 for the MUGA in Kilrush; €59,870 for upgrading running track at Lees Road; match fund requirements and body of work to be progressed to develop those works.

## **5. Review of Differential Rents Scheme**

Siobhan O’Keeffe advised that consequent on the recent changes in Social Welfare rates it is proposed that a change would be made to item **4. Subsidiary Earners** on Clare County Council’s Differential Rent Scheme;

### **Item 4. Subsidiary Earners**

*After the rent payable by the principle earner has been determined, 10% of each subsidiary earners income shall be added, except for those on a reduced rate of social welfare of less than ~~€115~~ €117.70 who shall be liable to pay €5.*

The increase from €115 to €117.70 is proposed in order to protect the intention of clause 4 of the scheme and to ensure that €5 only is added in respect of the income of subsidiary earners in the calculation of rent for those on a reduced social welfare rate.

This proposed change is simply to reflect the recent change in Social Welfare rates and to protect the intention of clause 4 of the Differential Rent Scheme.

The amending of a differential rent scheme is an executive function however as has been the case for the last number of years this proposed change is being presented to the SPC for their observations.

## **6. Local Authority Home Loan Scheme**

Siobhan O’Keeffe reported on new Local Authority Home Loan which is the successor to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan announced as part of the Governments ‘Housing for All’ plan and took effect from 4 January 2022 (Housing Loan Regulations 2021 (S.I. No 701 of 2021)).

Cllr. Gerry Flynn suggested a PR campaign on this would be useful.

Larry queried how many of the 11 applications currently on hand are for new houses; it would be difficult to buy a house in Clare for €250k; the scheme is farcical.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn indicated it was a scheme put in place by the Government; Officials have to follow schemes in place.

Cllr. Tony O’Brien queried if there was a house for 265k or 275k and a family member wanted to help out is that allowable?

Siobhan replied the ceiling is €250k; assistance is allowed in terms of savings; gift can be 7% of the 10% deposit.

Mary Leahy highlighted that her house is up for sale; she is a tenant of Clare County Council; all of the 27 bungalows and apartments in Pairc na Coille are for sale and apparently Clare County Council are purchasing them; residents have been left in a vulnerable state; somebody needs to have transparency; not good enough for the elderly in Ennis.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn advised if issues affecting Mary personally to talk to Housing staff.

## **7. Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027**

John Corry referred to Draft Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 which was circulated to members.

Mid way through 2021 the Housing Agency requested that a local strategic plan for housing people with disabilities be prepared by each Housing and Disability Steering Group based on a template they circulated. Clare’s Housing and Disability Steering Group held several meetings to consider and draw up strategy. Clare’s is made up of representation of the executive of the Council, HSE, Approved Housing Bodies, Cllr. Norton and various other agencies that support people with disabilities; Draft strategy was forwarded to the Housing Agency and was used to draw up National Strategy which was rolled out earlier on; draft strategy now brought to SPC for consideration; it will then be brought to full Council to adopt.

When adopted, Clare County Council can raise awareness of the strategy by publicly advertising on social media and on website; HSE can promote with all their service users.

A key objective of the Strategy is to quantify the current need for housing and identify sources of potential emerging need; in the 5 years of the strategy the local authority and AHB's provision of social housing needs to be escalated; all categories of disability need to be examined from a supports perspective; Plans will be reviewed during 2022 and there will be quarterly reporting to the SPC.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn referred to figure of 375 for grants for next number of years; it is crucial for people to stay in their own homes; rather than make it more difficult for people to get help it should be made easier.

Noel Kearney queried what percentage of new social housing is disability friendly; noted big difference between rural and urban living – keep in mind services have to be there.

Siobhan McNulty advised percentage that is universally designed is 10%; Council always strives for more than that but the Department will fund 10%.

Larry Brennan indicated they would love to do something for disability but there are always obstacles put in the way; resistance under Part V; ready and willing to help with disability requirements if discussions could be held.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn suggested if correspondence is sent from the CIF it can be investigated to see where those blockages are.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien referred to the Strategy as a fantastic and very welcome document; advised not all disabilities are physical or visible; was there a public advertisement for stakeholders to become involved in this, how were expressions of interest sought?

Also, the housing adaptation grants are becoming inadequate in the current climate; should we be planning on building houses that won't need adaptation in the future?

Siobhan McNulty advised the group developed organically; have always written to all parties and local contacts.

Re. grants, it would be better off to never have to retrofit a house; the obstacles around that are funding; 10% universally designed, from an age friendly and future proofing point of view it would be great if it was higher but constrained by available finances.

Anne Haugh chairs the group and advised they have responded to requests to have others included; door always open for others to join; housing list shows total of 299 who have declared disability on forms; HSE and others would be aware of people receiving services who are in need of accommodation so face to face meetings very much informs where the specially adapted houses are allocated in new schemes.

John Corry referred to the new housing form which has a section dealing with those who wish to identify themselves as having a disability.

Cllr. Tony O'Brien queried how relevant is the application form now with CBL taking over.

Cllr. Gerry Flynn agreed CBL is not an exact science and raised that at Council meeting; would prefer to have more staff in the Council to look at first 3 choices of people and when a property comes up that they are all considered rather than missing out on CBL.

Siobhan McNulty advised that specially adapted properties are in the main not on CBL unless they are in an area where they were provided for somebody and not taken by them.

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

Siobhan Mulcahy, County Arts Officer, presented on the Clare Public Arts Strategy 2022-2023.

Advised of Steering Committee being led by the Arts Council of Ireland looking at national guidelines on public art; Clare County Council is one of 3 local authorities selected as models of excellence by the Steering Committee the others being Cavan and Dublin City Council.

The purposes of projects arising from this policy include the following:

- To make available ambitious and innovative art projects to the people of Clare.
- To engage communities in creative partnerships with artists.
- To enhance and enrich the county's cultural and physical environment and public spaces.

Proposing that this Strategy be adopted until end of 2023 when new guidelines come out and it will be reviewed then as part of the Clare Arts Plan.

Larry Brennan queried if the 1% applies when the Council buy houses directly from developers.

Siobhan Mulcahy – no; there is significant funding available to us; we can pool funds and produce projects that offer better value for money for the county.

Helen Walsh advised contract for new Library is about to be awarded.

## **9. AOB**

The meeting then concluded.

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

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