

Minutes of Meeting of Housing, Community and Culture Strategic Policy Committee held via zoom on Wednesday, 30 September 2020.

Members Present:

Councillor Mary Bohan
Councillor Padraig Fallon
Councillor Sean McDermott
Councillor Paddy O'Rourke
Aodh Flynn

Officials Present:

Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services
Samantha Healy, Senior Executive Officer Corporate Services and Housing
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Philip Delamere, Arts Officer
Ornaith O'Shannon, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies:

Councillor Caillian Ellis (Cathaoirleach)
Councillor Enda Stenson
Maura Gallagher
Sean O'Reilly

1 Adoption of Minutes

Proposed by Councillor Sean McDermott, seconded by Councillor Mary Bohan, and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED:

'That the Minutes of the Housing Policy, Social and Cultural Development Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on 15th July 2020 be adopted.'

2 Housing Programme Update

Ms Mary Quinn, Director of Services, advised that the Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on meeting agreed housing targets. The acquisition programme is being augmented on foot of permission given by the Department for additional housing unit acquisitions. The current housing need is 218, there are 308 on the transfer list, 281 of these are HAP transfers, 27 are local authority transfers. There are 80 private RAS tenancies and 15 short term leases. There have been 43 tenancies created in 2020 to date and currently there are 23 vacant properties.

Cllr Mary Bohan queried the number on the transfer list.

Ms Quinn advised that 27 people on the list are already in receipt of Local Authority housing and have requested a transfer to a larger house or different area. The remaining 281 on the transfer list are accommodated in HAP. When an applicant applies for HAP they have the option to request to be on the Local Authority transfer list.

Ms Samantha Healy, Senior Executive Housing Office, advised that the majority of people on this list are satisfied with the social housing they have obtained through HAP and are not actively seeking a transfer at the moment.

3 Update on Choice Based Letting Scheme

Ms Ramona McAvenue, Administrative Officer, gave an overview of the Choice Based Letting scheme. She advised this is a pilot scheme advertising available properties on the council's website. All standard local authority properties will be included with the exception of properties in the Carrick on Shannon area where there is high demand. Properties that have been adapted for the elderly or people with special needs are not included in the pilot scheme.

Correspondence has been issued to people on the waiting list advising that this will be the method of allocation and how they can express interest. Similar communication will also be circulated to the elected members.

Ms McAvenue advised there are advantages to choice based letting, as hard to let properties are advertised and open to everyone on the waiting list. It affords greater transparency, as both elected members and the public can see what properties are available.

Cllr Mary Bohan welcomed the development and level of transparency this scheme will provide. She queried how the allocation of a property will take place when there are a number of expressions of interest.

Ms McAvenue advised when all expressions of interest have been received the original housing application will be taken into account. If someone had the area in which the property is located listed as their area of choice, then they will be given preference over someone who had not expressed an interest in the area on their original application. Allocations will still adhere to the order of priorities that are laid out in the allocation scheme. Properties are only available to people on the waiting list and those on the transfer list.

Cllr Pdraig Fallon enquired what consideration has been given to individuals who may not have access to the Council's website

Ms McAvenue advised this has been considered and correspondence has been issued to people on the waiting list advising that staff are available to help if required. Properties are advertised on the first working day of each month and people on the waiting list can phone the housing department for a list of properties that are available.

Cllr Mary Bohan queried if people on the waiting list who have expressed an interest in a particular area on their application still need to respond to the list published online.

Ms Samantha Healy advised that this pilot scheme is a method of communicating with everyone on the list by advertising all available properties on the website. It is the responsibility of the individual to play an active role in the process and express interest in a property they would like.

Cllr Paddy O`Rourke expressed concern that some people on the list may be at a disadvantage due to the requirement to use the internet to view available properties.

Ms Healy advised the list will be available online and people can also contact the housing department directly for a copy of the list. This method increases the options available to people on the waiting list as they can see all properties available in the county as opposed to the council making them an offer based on their area of choice. She added this is a pilot scheme, the process will be reviewed as we progress through the scheme and it may require adjustments. The objective is to have an allocation scheme that is transparent, fair and easy for people to understand.

Cllr Sean McDermott welcomed the pilot scheme and enquired how long this pilot scheme will run.

Ms McAvenue advises it will run for 12 months initially. A customer survey will be conducted after 6 months and feedback will be gathered from participants and the elected members.

Cllr Pdraig Fallon enquired if the elected members will have access to the list of available properties, so they could assist individuals they are aware of that would not be in a position to access the list online.

Ms Healy advised the list will be published online and will be circulated via email to the elected members.

4 Housing Grants Update

The members received an update from Ms. Mary Quinn in relation to Housing Grants. The allocation for 2020 is €549,373. To date 38 grants have been paid to the value of €135,767 and there are 40 grants approved to the value of €400,000. There are over 50 applications under assessment with an estimated value of €376,000. The updated schedule of Units Rates is available on the website.

Ms Quinn advised that although the Covid-19 restrictions have impacted construction work, every effort should be made ensure claims are submitted before the end of 2020. She appealed to elected members to encourage people who have completed approved works to submit their claim as soon as possible.

Cllr Pdraig Fallon queried if the housing department has received any extension of time on funding due to Covid-19 restrictions and enquired if the SPC should write to the Department and request an extension of time.

Ms Samantha Healy advised there is provision to apply for an extension of time however no specific extension has been granted by the Department in relation to Covid-19. There has been no guidance from the Department regarding delayed works due to the lockdown. Ms Healy further advised the members that the amount recouped from the Department in a year impact the allocation amount the following year.

5 Draft Public Art Policy

Mr Philip Delamare, Arts Officer, gave an overview of the Percent for Art Policy. He advised the members that when applying for a capital project an additional application for an arts project to the value of 1% of the main capital project can be submitted. These capital projects are typically housing and roads projects. This Arts funding must be applied for with the capital project application as it is not possible to apply for the Arts funding retrospectively.

The funding available under the scheme has increased from €64,000 per project up to €500,000. When the funding was capped at €64,000 a project was more likely to receive funding, however with the budget increased to €500,000 it may be more difficult to secure funding.

Cllr Sean McDermott queried if this Arts funding is reducing the total of the capital project.

Mr Delamere advised it is separate to the capital project, it comes from the same Department as the capital project funding but it is an extra 1%.

Mr. Aodh Flynn advised he had previously advocated for a commemorative piece of artwork at Glencar waterfall to commemorate Yeats' poem "The Stolen Child" and asked if future consideration could be given to this. He added that as mile stones are been removed around the county, it may be a worthy project to tell the story of their existence.

6 Summary of issues for the Corporate Policy Group

Ms Mary Quinn summarised the items for presentation to the Corporate Policy Group and Council.

7 Date and Time of the Next Meeting

It was agreed that the next meeting of the SPC will be held at 10.00am on Wednesday, 2nd December 2020.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

SIGNED:

Councillor Caillian Ellis
Chairperson

SIGNED:

Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator
Housing, Community and
Culture Strategic Policy
Committee

DATE: Wednesday, 2 December 2020