

**Minutes of Meeting of Housing, Community and Culture Strategic Policy Committee held in  
via MS Teams on Wednesday, 6 October 2021.**

**Members Present:**

Councillor Mary Bohan  
Councillor Padraig Fallon  
Councillor Sean McDermott  
Councillor Paddy O'Rourke  
Councillor Enda Stenson

**Officials Present:**

Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services  
Samantha Healy, Senior Executive Officer Corporate Services and Housing  
Justin Fannon, Senior Executive Officer Housing Capital  
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator  
Suzanne Duffy, Administrative Officer, Housing  
Susan Barry, Community Development

**Apologies:**

Pauline Moran  
Councillor Thomas Mulligan (Cathaoirleach)

**21 Adoption of Minutes**

As Councillor Thomas Mulligan had sent his apologies and was unavailable to attend the meeting, Cllr Enda Stenson proposed the Cllr. Mary Bohan as Acting Cathaoirleach. This proposal was seconded by Cllr. Sean McDermott.

As no other proposal was received, Cllr Bohan was appointed as Cathaoirleach for this meeting.

**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 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 be adopted.'

**22 Housing Update**

Ms Mary Quinn advised the members that following the recent publication of the Government Housing Policy document 'Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland', there is now a requirement on the Local Authority to prepare a Housing Delivery Action Plan before 17<sup>th</sup> December 2021. There is a requirement for an additional 139 additional social housing units to be delivered in County Leitrim by the end of 2026. The government's policy document envisaged that 40% of the units in Leitrim will be provided by the voluntary housing sector through Approved Housing Bodies.

Ms Mary Quinn advised that the Department have prepared a template document to assist Local Authorities in preparing the Housing Delivery Action Plan. Affordable Housing Provision as set out in the template will not form part of the Leitrim Housing Delivery Plan, as there is currently no demand for Affordable Housing in Leitrim.

Ms Quinn advised the members that Housing Delivery Plan would be prepared for the next SPC meeting.

Cllr Mary Bohan stated that it was unrealistic to expect the voluntary housing sector to deliver 40% of the required housing units and that this figure was excessive, and the Department should be made aware of this.

Cllr Pdraig Fallon asked if a workshop could be held with all elected members as part of the preparation of the Housing Delivery Plan.

Cllr. Enda Stenson supported this

Cllr. Sean McDermott also supported the call for a workshop and noted that the no. of units to be delivered over the next 5 years was quite small. He also felt the issue of Homelessness should be addressed in the plan.

Ms Mary Quinn stated that the no. of units of social housing to be delivered in Leitrim is reflective of the demand for housing.

Ms Mary Quinn said the matter of the Housing Delivery Action Plan preparation would be referred from this SPC to the next Corporate Policy Group meeting for consideration. An update from the CPG, including this matter, would be brought before the plenary council meeting in November.

## **23 Issues referred from Council Meeting**

### **Homeless Policy**

The members received an update on Leitrim County Council's Homeless policy which is framed within the national regulations as set down by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The national regulations set the criteria for eligibility to access Homeless services in any county.

In keeping with the national regulations, the Leitrim Homeless Policy determines eligibility for access to temporary emergency accommodation by the person presenting as homeless having had their last permanent address is in County Leitrim. If their last permanent address was in another county, then the person must present to that Local Authority to access homeless services there.

If other accommodation is available in another county, for a person presenting as homeless in Leitrim, then they are not eligible for temporary emergency accommodation provided by

Leitrim County Council.

Where Leitrim residents present as homeless an assessment process, including a means test, is carried out by the staff in the Housing Section. Where the person does not have the means to provide accommodation for themselves, Leitrim County Council provide temporary emergency accommodation in Sligo, on a short term, rolling basis in a hotel or B&B, while the person applies for social housing. Short term accommodation has been sourced in Longford and Mullingar on occasion.

Staff in the Housing Section work with the individual to provide a longer-term solution to their housing need either through HAP or through the Choice Based Letting scheme.

The availability of temporary emergency accommodation for persons presenting as homeless is dependant in what accommodation can be sourced in the private sector. There is no hostel type accommodation for the provision of homeless services available in Leitrim. The provision of regional homeless accommodation for Leitrim & Sligo is currently being explored but is expected to take some time to put in place. Where no alternative accommodation is available, as a last resort, Housing Section may provide the person with a sleeping bag.

Cllr Enda Stenson queried an on-going individual case in Leitrim on which there has been numerous comments posted on social media in recent days.

Ms Samantha Healy stated that Leitrim County Council would not comment on any individual case but has set out the criteria for eligibility to access homeless services in Leitrim.

Cllr Sean McDermott asked that the Homeless Policy is shared with all the members. He stated his dissatisfaction with the provision of sleeping bags to individuals.

Ms Mary Quinn assured the members that a thorough and rigorous eligibility assessment is carried out on all homeless presentations made to Leitrim County Council. Access to the service is based on eligibility criteria, which may be impacted by choices and decisions that a person presenting as homeless chooses to make in attempting to access homeless services. A decision to provide a person with a sleeping bag is not made easily or lightly by the Housing Section staff.

Cllr Mary Bohan said that the policy is very clear, and the Local Authority must operate within guidelines. People must take responsibility as to why they are presenting in Leitrim if they have accommodation available to them in another county.

Cllr. Pdraig Fallon said he had no doubt that Housing staff do their very best to assist their clients. He queried if people originally from Leitrim could be accommodated even if they had accommodation available in another county.

Ms Samantha Healy outlined that this would set a precedent leading to homeless presentations in one county arising from a person vacating housing in another county. The eligibility criteria refers to temporary emergency accommodation only, the person can still

apply for social housing. Leitrim County Council also engage with other agencies to ensure that persons presenting as homeless have access to the support services that they may require.

### **Rising building costs affecting grant allocations**

Cllr Paddy O'Rourke raised the issue of building materials and costs rapidly increasing in price. Builders' quotes received by Housing Grant applicants are outdated in a very short space of time due to the rising cost of materials and by the time the grant works are complete the finished price is often much greater than the quoted price. He queried how the Local Authority can assist applicants with this issue.

Ms Samantha Healy acknowledged that Leitrim County Council is aware of the issue. As there is on fluctuation in the building materials market, it would not be prudent to adjust the rate amounts payable for grant works (Unit Rates) at this time. While the current instability in the market continues, once the applicant has had grant works completed on their property, they can seek a review of the grant allocation amount. Leitrim County Council Technical staff will assess and inspect the works completed and decide on appropriate costs based on current market conditions. The grant scheme will only fund the basic provision of works. It does not fund works that are aesthetically required by the applicant or otherwise over and above the basic provision.

Leitrim County Council have no control over the maximum limit of a grant. Maximum limits are set by the Department. Increasing the maximum limit is a matter for the consideration of the members of Leitrim County Council.

Cllr Mary Bohan recommended that that grant applicants engage with the Housing Staff where price differential exists from the quote received from their builder and before they decide not to undertake works due to increased costs and for which they are approved grant funding.

Cllr Paddy O'Rourke supported this recommendation.

### **24 Presentation from Comhairle na nÓg**

Acting Cathaoirleach, Councillor Mary Bohan welcomed Comhairle na nÓg representatives, Niamh Ryan, Eimear Moran, and Grace Coles to the meeting. The Cathaoirleach also welcomed Valerie Moran, Co-Ordinator of Comhairle na nÓg, and Pat Forde, North Connaught Youth Services to the meeting.

A copy of the presentation delivered by the Comhairle na nÓg representatives appears as **Appendix 1** to the minutes of this meeting.

### **25 Update on Playground Strategy**

Ms Suzanne Duffy delivered an update on the Playground Strategy, as circulated in the document pack, to the committee members.

A copy of the Playground Strategy appears as **Appendix 2** to the minutes of this meeting.

Ms. Samantha Healy advised the members that the Playground Strategy, as presented, focused primarily on playgrounds as activity centres for children under the age of twelve. A separate piece of work will be prepared in conjunction with Leitrim Sports Partnership and the Arts Office for similar outdoor activity facilities for children over the age of twelve.

Cllr Sean McDermott highlighted an issue with maintenance at the playground in Glenfarne and also queried if additional pieces of apparatus could be added. Ms Susan Duffy said that the maintenance issued would be investigated.

Cllr Mary Bohan praised the Playground Passport initiative that was launched over the summer and said it was an excellent publication.

Cllr Paddy O'Rourke proposed that Playground Strategy be referred to the Corporate Policy Group and Plenary Council meeting for adoption.

Cllr Padraig Fallon seconded the proposal.

## **26 Summary of issues for the Corporate Policy Group**

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

## **27 Date and Time of the Next Meeting**

Mr. Kieran Brett informed the members that the next meeting of the Housing, Cultural & Community SPC is scheduled for Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> December 2021 at 10 am.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Chairperson**

**SIGNED:** \_\_\_\_\_

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

**DATE: Wednesday, 1 December 2021**