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Minutes of Meeting of Housing, Community and Culture Strategic Policy Committee held via MS Teams on Wednesday, 9 February 2022.

Members Present:

Councillor Thomas Mulligan (Cathaoirleach)
Aodh Flynn
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
Justin Fannon, Senior Executive Officer Housing Capital
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Suzanne Duffy, Administrative Officer, Housing
Kathleen Ellis, Assistant Staff Officer
Susan Barry, Community Development
Pauline Brennan, County Librarian

Apologies:

Pauline Moran
Sean O'Reilly
Oluwakemi Aina Fawehinmi
Councillor Mary Bohan
Philip Delamere, Arts Officer

1 Adoption of Minutes

Proposed by Councillor Sean McDermott, seconded by Councillor Paddy O'Rourke, and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED:

“That the Minutes of the Housing Policy, Social and Cultural Development Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on 1st December 2021 be adopted.”

2 Consider SPC work Programme for 2022

Ms Mary Quinn, Director of Services, outlined the suggested policy areas for consideration under the SPC Work Programme 2022 to the members. A copy of the Draft Work Programme as circulated to the Members appears as **Appendix 1** to the minutes of this meeting.

Ms Quinn advised the SPC work programme can be reviewed during the year if necessary and that the agreed work programme will be presented to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration.

Councillor Enda Stenson welcomed the update and sought clarification on the Retrofit

Scheme which was recently announced and if this scheme is now part of the Local Authority remit.

Ms Quinn outlined that the role of the Local Authority in this regard is unclear at this stage.

Councillor Enda Stenson said he hoped the Local Authority would have a role in the administration of this scheme as it would benefit the community and the Local Authority.

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke said it was discussed at a recent council meeting that the increasing of housing grant limits for the elderly would be considered in the context of rising costs in the construction industry and the recent high inflation. He asked if there has been any update on this matter from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Ms Quinn confirmed that there has been no indication to date to increase the upper limit.

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke outlined that a job carried out 1.5 years ago cost €2,500 is now costing in the region of €3,200 and he noted the grant is not meaningful now.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Thomas Mulligan welcomed the announcement of the Retrofit scheme. He added it is important that our concerns are expressed in relation to the grants for the elderly and that there is a need to increase the upper limits in this regard.

Councillor Sean McDermott expressed his concern in relation to the Kiltyclogher Library and he wanted it flagged that the schools in Rossinver and Kiltyclogher use this library and it offers an important service to the area. Councillor Padraig Fallon supported Cllr McDermott in this regard.

Councillor Padraig Fallon proposed that the SPC report to the full council should include reference to the high costs of construction works, and that the upper limit on housing grants for the elderly be increased. This will enable a motion to be put forward at full Council to increase this threshold.

Councillor Padraig Fallon queried if there was any communication from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in relation to increasing the thresholds regarding HAP.

Ms Mary Quinn said the comments have been noted in regard to Kiltyclogher Library. The issues raised by the SPC members in regard to increasing the upper limit of housing grants for the elderly and a motion to increase the HAP thresholds will be included in the Housing, Community and Culture SPC report to the plenary council for their consideration.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Thomas Mulligan sought an update on the Library in Mohill.

Ms Pauline Brennan, County Librarian said a lot of the outstanding works are almost complete. Interviews are taking place next week to resource the library and the final works

will be completed in the coming weeks and it is hoped to have the library open in the very near future.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Thomas Mulligan said he would like to see the works completed as soon as possible.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Councillor Paddy O'Rourke
SECONDED by Councillor Enda Stenson

It was **AGREED** the SPC work programme for 2022 would be presented to the Corporate Policy Group for consideration.

3 Consider schedule of meetings for 2022

The following dates was agreed:

- Wednesday 18th May 2022, at 10:00am
- Wednesday 28th September 2022, at 10:00am
- Wednesday 30th November 2022 at 10:00am

Ms Mary Quinn said a hybrid model for holding meetings would be looked at to facilitate committee members. Councillor Enda Stenson proposed that a hybrid model for holding meetings. This was supported by Members.

The schedule was noted by the members.

4 Housing Update

Ms Mary Quinn provided the members with an update on the latest Housing information for Leitrim as follows

- Housing Delivery Action Plan was submitted to the Department of Housing Local government and Heritage on 17th December 2021.
- The delivery of 30 Housing units is the target for 2022.
- A Housing Summit will be held by the Department in late February 2022 and the Chief Executive and Ms Quinn will be in attendance
- Housing Delivery Programme - Change to rules regarding private acquisitions. The LA now require prior approval from the Department to acquire a house and it must be for a specific need.
- Housing initiatives under the recently launched Town Centre First Policy and the Vacant Homes scheme are scheduled to come on stream in 2022
- In 2022, 25% of the Private Rented stock is the target to be inspected – approx. 500 inspections.
- As per the Housing Delivery Action Plan, Leitrim was deemed not to have an affordable housing need. Regulations in regard to affordable housing are in progress.
- The level of activity in Housing Grants is quite low but is on par with activity for this time of year.

5 Tenant Purchase Scheme

Ms Mary Quinn outlined that the detailed guidelines on the Tenant Purchase Scheme are still awaited by the Local Authority from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

The following are an overview of the Scheme

- Minimum Income limit reduced from €15,000 to €12,000
- People in receipt of pensions are entitled to buy council homes under this scheme
- Persons must be in receipt of social housing support for at least 10 years to qualify for the scheme
- Limited Accommodation Dwellings were excluded previously, and it is likely they will remain excluded from the scheme.
- Consideration must be given to what stock is excluded from the scheme, the availability of stock in key/strategic locations, the availability of stock that meets specific needs

Leitrim County Council will need to be mindful of the overall stock and housing requirements and must consider the cost of rebuilding replacement stock.

Councillor Sean McDermott queried as to what kind of inspections are to be carried out and if this will include issues in relation to upkeep of dwellings by tenants.

Ms Quinn confirmed that the inspections relate to private rented housing stock. The landlord must comply with regulations in relation to windows, heating, ventilation etc and if there is any non-compliance the landlord is issued with an improvement notice and ultimately issues of noncompliance may be dealt with through the courts. Matters in relation to upkeep is a matter between the Landlord and the tenant in question.

Councillor Pdraig Fallon said we need to retain and increase our housing stock as there are significant changes in demographics of tenants and he said when reviews are being carried out it is important to take into consideration mixed age groups.

Mr Aodh Flynn said the Voluntary Housing sector do not normally sell houses to tenants and said that when the 30-year mortgage has expired long term tenants should have the opportunity to buy their houses. Mr Flynn said the same policy that applies to Local authorities should apply to the Voluntary Housing sector in this regard.

Councillor Pdraig Fallon supported these comments and Councillor Enda Stenson concurred and said some of the tenants are excellent and it should be their right to purchase their home at this stage.

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke agreed that there should be a mixed group of people in housing estates. Younger tenants may have the ambition to buy their home at some point and the

Local Authority should not thwart that ambition.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Thomas Mulligan said that where younger people are coming into older more settled estates, there is a need for a more vigorous assessment process prior to the allocation of properties to tenants. He highlighted incidents that have occurred in Mohill in past that have caused disruption in in previously settled estates.

Ms Quinn advised that the issue raised by Mr Flynn concerning the purchase of Voluntary Housing is a matter for Government Policy and that this matter was discussed before, but ultimately the Local Authority have no responsibility in this regard.

Councillor Sean McDermott sought an update on the special need's accommodation in Manorhamilton.

Mr Justin Fannon said the HSE have committed to providing the funding for the wrap around services when the building is in place. It is hoped to move rapidly with development of the unit once a suitable property has been identified and discussions are commencing in this regard.

Councillor Sean McDermott welcomed this update.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Thomas Mulligan asked if much or any progress has been made in relation to former business/retails units in our towns which would lend them to residential type use.

Ms Quinn confirmed that vacant residential units on main streets will be addressed under Housing for All. The Buy and Renew scheme in Town Centres will be one element of the Housing Delivery Programme.

6 Receive update on Library Sense-Ability Project

Ms Pauline Brennan presented an overview on Library Sense ability project as follows:

- The project was carried out in collaboration with Roscommon, Sligo and Leitrim Library Services
- Funding of €65,000 was obtained through the Department of Rural Community Development under Dormant Accounts.
- The project which commenced in January 2021 focused, in particular, on neurodiverse people with sensory sensitivities e.g., autistic people, people with dyspraxia, dyslexia, attention deficit disorder etc.
- As neurodiverse people very often experience difficulty in accessing library services due to the sensory overload they can experience in new places, the purpose was to establish a library-based programme of services and spaces which would be inclusive of neurodiverse people.
- Advice and expertise were provided by an Occupational Therapist in Residence, Dr. Dorothy Armstrong

- Training in relation to inclusive practices with neurodiverse service users was delivered to library staff.
- Sensory spaces, such as sensory rooms or cubbie pods, were installed in a branch library in each authority, to aid self-regulation and help neurodiverse persons access library services.
- Sensory equipment can be expensive to purchase, and parents very often have difficulty in accessing the items that match the child's changing needs, so a library-based collection of sensory tools were recommended for each branch library
- The project itself was launched in May 2021 by Minister of State Mr. Frank Feighan together with the then 3 Cathaoirliog of each authority Cllr. Mary Bohan represented Co Leitrim.
- A series of 6 public webinars were held during May and June 2021 which were conducted by experts in their fields.
- 150 Items were purchased for a lending collection. These items can be borrowed by parents, carers, and schools from all 3 library services.
- A series of instructional videos for the public were also created and focused on how to use the items in the collection
- A catalogue of all available items was compiled with photographs and descriptions of each item and will be available in both hard copy and online. Hard copies will be made available in Health Centres, Doctor's surgeries, schools, therapy units and relevant community groups.

It is planned to have an official launch of the service in May 2022. The service will need ongoing promotion to reach the communities that need it most. Leitrim Library Service consider this a hugely important service as it opens the library service to those who often receive very little help and are constantly battling for the needs of their children. Each of the 3 collaborating library authorities are committed to adding to the collection and plan to run an annual series of public lectures on topics relating to the collection and drawing up guidelines on including neurodiverse children in community events run through the library services.

The aim of the project is to communicate a warm welcome to neurodiverse people and their families within the library service and ensure that Leitrim Library continue to promote the library as an inclusive and welcoming service.

7 Consider Draft Plaques and Memorials policy

Ms Pauline Brennan presented the Draft Plaques and Memorials Policy as set out in **Appendix 2** to the Minutes of this meeting and asked the members for their comments/observations on the draft policy as presented.

Councillor Sean McDermott said plaques and memorials must be done tastefully and messages on them need to be balanced.

Councillor Paddy O'Rourke proposed that a sub-committee be set up on this to look at a criterion or set of rules to look at. Councillor O'Rourke said too many plaques tend to lose

their meaning and he outlined that it is important that the committee who are organising the civic memorial monument or plaque would consult with the family members or descendants to ensure it sits well with the family of the person to be commemorated. The proposal should also include details of how the memorial will be cared for and maintained.

Ms Quinn confirmed that the items raised are included in the policy. Ms Quinn said she would seek the input of the Heritage Officer, Arts Officer and Senior Planner and if members have anything further to add to email the County Librarian and this will be incorporated into the policy, and it will be brought to the next SPC meeting and then go before the full Council for approval.

Mr Aodh Flynn said the statue of Sean MacDiarmada is the most significant monument in the County and it would be the preference to take responsibility given its vulnerability. Mr Flynn said he wrote to the OPW to take responsibility for it some time ago as the Local Authority said it was not their responsibility and he said he did not know if it is in charge of Leitrim County Council or not.

Ms Quinn said there was a request for it to be cleaned by Leitrim County Council a number of years ago. The monument is recorded in the Record of Protected Structures.

Cathaoirleach, Councillor Thomas Mulligan said it may not be necessary to have large plaques as people now use apps on their phones to get the information relating to plaques/monuments.

8 Summary of issues for the Corporate Policy Group

Ms Mary Quinn summarised the items from this meeting for presentation to the Corporate Policy Group and plenary Council Meeting.

9 Date and Time of the Next Meeting

It was agreed the next meeting of the Housing, Cultural & Community SPC is scheduled for Wednesday 18th May 2022 at 10 am.

This concluded the business of the meeting 11.03 am.

SIGNED: _____
Councillor Thomas Mulligan
Chairperson

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

DATE: Wednesday, 18 May 2022

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