

**Minutes of Kildare Council Housing SPC**  
**11th May 2017**

Present: Cllr. Paddy Kennedy, Chairperson, Cllr. Aoife Breslin, Cllr. Tim Durkan, Cllr. Joanne Pender, Cllr. Suzanne Doyle, Cllr. Brendan Weld, Denis Buckley, Pat Doyle,

In attendance: Annette Aspell, SEO, David Creighton, A Snr Arch., Ollie Brady, AO, Siobhán Scully, AO, T Mc Donnell, Director of Services, Alice Corbett, AO, Gerry Halton, SEO, Sonya Kavanagh, Director of Services.

Apologies: Cllr. Deborah Callaghan, Cllr. Thomas Redmond

### **1. Minutes**

The minutes of the SPC meeting of the 9th February 2017 were approved. Proposed by Cllr. Pender, seconded by Cllr. Durkan.

### **2. Matters Arising**

Cllr. Paddy Kennedy informed the members that Ramon O'Reilly resigned from the committee as he recently retired from SIPTU. He thanked Mr. O'Reilly for his contribution to the work of the committee.

### **3. Correspondence**

A list of circulars received by the Housing Dept from 09/02/2017-11/05/2017 was circulated to all members for consideration.

### **4. Discussion of the Annual Housing Needs Assessment (HNA) & Related Matters**

O Brady provided an update of the HNA which was underway, there followed a general discussion of the HNA and particularly the requirement of housing applicants to complete the HPL01 form. Cllr. Weld queried the length of time taken to assess a housing application especially where it related to homelessness or special circumstances. He queried if more staff were required. Cllr. Breslin raised delays in the processing of HPL01 forms by the Revenue Commissioners. Cllr. Durkan advised that he contacted the Revenue Commissioners and the delay was due to the volume of work. Cllr. Pender enquired if it is possible to accept a housing application pending submission of the HPL01. Pat Doyle advised that a number of SPCs requested additional HNAs in order to ensure that housing lists are accurate. He stated that the council was bound by regulations and the HPL01 forms would identify housing applicants who inherited properties. A Aspell reiterated that the council were bound by the regulations with regard to the HNA and that the Members could if they wished write to the Minister.

### **5. Motions Referred**

***Cllr B Weld: To consider the management of new local authority housing estates. To discuss how estates will be managed in the future and also how new tenants will be supported, given the limited resources currently available in the area.***

Cllr B Weld queried how new local authority estates currently under construction would be managed. He highlighted the differences between local authority estates and privately owned estates, where there is a sense of ownership. He cited the example of Anne Street, Prosperous which provided quality housing however there are instances of anti-social behaviour. He stated that the removal of the community function from the housing section was problematic, that tenant liaison officers are effectively fire fighting and that older tenants feel vulnerable. He stated that the

council need to plan from the outset and there is a role for TLOs, Social Workers and Community Workers, however housing required strengthened resources.

Councillors Durkan, Pender, Kennedy and Breslin concurred with the motion. Cllr Durkan advised that he was aware of serious assaults occurring on council estates. Cllr. Pender cited examples of anti-social behaviour occurring and queried if this could be prevented by mixed income tenancies. Cllr. Kennedy stated that new tenants should be provided with training over a number of sessions. Cllr. Breslin stated that in a number of estates the problems are escalating and that bad allocations lead to bad estates. She accepted that the homelessness crisis was exacerbating the problem and that as a result of anti-social behaviour the council were losing good tenants.

T McDonnell advised the Committee that 2017 will be the first time in 10 years in which allocations will be made to council built houses. Kildare County Council is bound by the allocation scheme and that the council would be exposed to litigation if it did not comply with the provisions of the scheme. The council is effectively a landlord of last resort and that it is difficult to obtain court orders relating to anti-social behaviour. He accepted that 1 day of pre-tenancy training was inadequate, and that as housing and community are in separate directorships that consideration should be given to allocating additional resources to the Community Section. He advised that a meeting had taken place between the Housing and Community Section to advise of new housing schemes which are coming on stream so that they could be incorporated into the work programme of the Community Section. He further advised that the officials of the council are bound by data protection rules when it comes to information sharing with the elected members, this was in response to statement from Cllr Weld that in the past councillors were consulted about allocations. He advised that estates built by Public Private Partnership will be managed by approved housing bodies.

A Aspell advised that there is a distinction between new and older estates in terms of estate management. She reiterated that community resources no longer exist in the Housing Section. She stated that it was a small cohort of tenants who are problematic and that while the allocation policy was robust in certain respects, there was a risk of homelessness being created if we are too stringent in our allocation policy. She advised that the council is in the process of recruiting tenant sustainment officers and in time the focus will switch from homelessness to tenancy sustainment. and advised that the Gardai have a role to play in dealing with anti-social behaviour.

S Kavanagh reassured the Committee that community resources still exist within the council. She advised that the findings of research conducted for the LCDC indicated that there is a concentration of people residing in local authority estates who require additional supports. Induction courses should cover topics such as general household management and should be a cross-agency effort. She stated that local authorities are landlords of last resort and that there is a concentration of low income households in local authority estates. She stated that LA tenants spend a large amount of time in their homes on a daily basis and this can exacerbate problems and that the Gardai have a role to play. She stated that Kildare County Council has a long history of community support however it is difficult to get community groups to form in new estates. She further stated that the Department are receptive to requests for additional supports.

Pat Doyle spoke about the challenge of managing people in communities and managing behaviours. Households require additional supports in the first 6-12 months of tenancy. Occasionally household members other than the named tenant are engaged in anti-social behaviour, and when this occurs it is difficult to address.

Cllr Kennedy acknowledged and thanked Alice Corbett and her team for the work which they carry out. Cllr. Durkan stated that it should be a requirement that residents associations be set up.

***Cllr. Suzanne Doyle: That this council convene a consultation group of existing social housing tenants, Health Service Executive (HSE) inspectors and poverty proofing experts to inform the design and delivery of proposed social housing developments, that tenants be canvassed to subscribe to a questionnaire assessing best practice in housing function and design in order to maximise outcomes for consumers of sizeable proposed capital investment in social housing.***

Cllr. Doyle discussed the requirement to build good quality estates. The council should harness the experience/knowledge of people who live in local authority estates to design better houses. Small changes could be made a large difference to households, with particular focus on issues like storage which can improve overall estate management. The council should build houses which work for tenants.

There was general support for the motion. Cllr. Pender stated that the cost of producing houses was high so we should be asking questions which ensure that we are producing houses which work for tenants. Cllr Durkan queried the possibility of building houses with dormer trusses which would facilitate later adaptation therefore alleviating overcrowding.

P Doyle advised that the Peter McVerry Trust is working on a project of poverty proofing 1/6 houses. The works primarily relate to ventilation and heating. The initial costs are high however a full cost/benefit analysis is required.

T McDonnell concurred that the design of houses should address the practicalities of daily living.

## **6. Review of Vacant House Report**

There was consensus that the report being presented to the Council Members was adequate. T McDonnell reported that following a review of long term vacant houses it is considered that 4 houses are unsuitable for renovation. Cllr Pender questioned alternative uses for the sites. T McDonnell advised that the houses would require demolition and that there was an issue relating to the availability of services. Cllr. Weld queried the turnaround times for vacant units and fact that good houses are being boarded up. Cllr Breslin agreed with Cllr Weld. T McDonnell accepted that there was a deterioration in turnaround times and this would be reflected in the performance indicators and that new house purchases were impacting on the time taken to repair vacant units. A framework is being established to deal with quick turn arounds/major works. D Creighton reiterated this point and advised that volume of DPGs is impacting on available resources.

## **7. Homelessness**

Cllr. Kennedy praised all involved with the development of the Family Hub at the Dominican Priory, Athy and stated it represented value for money. P Doyle advised that the fire certification was being finalised and the first tenancies were imminent. O Brady presented the Procedures in Relation to Assessment and Allocation of Emergency Accommodation which deals with how homeless assessments are made and details recorded, he also outlined the out-of-hours homeless service. Cllr. Pender queried why KCC does not deal with people in advance of homelessness occurring. She also raised a query regarding how people with habitual residency status are dealt with, such as the members of the Roma community.

P Doyle advised that The Peter McVerry Trust operates a free-phone advice service and that Threshold offer a similar service. The Dublin authorities work with a UK based group called BARKA who work specifically with the Roma and Polish Community however he accepted that there was a difference in resources available to KCC when compared with the Dublin authorities and this could be raised as an issue for Budget 2018.

Cllr Durkan stated that members of the Roma community living in Maynooth did not wish to engage with local service providers. He also raised the issue of landlords not wishing to become involved with RAS/HAP schemes.

A Aspell responded that KCC can fast track applications however we do require applicants to provide all information requested. Presently the Housing Section is running ahead of the 12 week assessment target. She stated that new rules regarding the use of commercial facilities as homeless accommodation will cause difficulties in the supply of homeless accommodation. KCC is currently sourcing transition units. She discussed the capacity of the council to deal with a major housing emergency.

T McDonnell stated that the council currently has a service level agreement with 3 charities for the employment of Homeless Assessment Workers, and that these individuals have a role in homelessness prevention.

## **8. Housing Update**

The members were provided with information on the following schemes: Repair and Leasing Scheme, Buy and Renew Scheme, Rent Pressure Zones.

**Repair and Leasing:** S Scully provided an update on the Repair and Leasing Scheme and provided details of how the scheme in County Kildare would be delivered in partnership with approved housing bodies. Despite the fact that the Scheme had been advertised twice in local papers there was a small number of applications from the property owners.

P Doyle advised that it was the experience of the Peter McVerry Trust that landlords did not wish to be involved in renovation works.

Cllr Breslin discussed the resources required to operate the scheme.

## **9. 2017 Work Programme**

**Choice Based Lettings:** A Aspell provided an update on the choice based lettings system, stating that an IT system would be set up. Choice Based Lettings would not be used for large-scale nominations. Cllr. Pender queried how the system was working in other local authorities. T Mc Donnell reported that it was working well in South Dublin County Council.

**Rebuilding Ireland:** The members were presented with the quarterly housing statistics for the period from January-March 2017.

## **Rapid Build Housing**

D Creighton provided an update on Rapid Build Housing. The Office of Government procurement have established a framework. Construction methods must comply with building regulations. The key to achieving efficiencies is to limit the complexity of design. There is negligible cost saving, the significant saving is on the construction time (on-site). Rapid Build is suitable for schemes of 80-100 houses. The durability of the units is 60 years. It is essential that quality control is monitored carefully while units are being built. He advised that there are few suitable sites in the ownership of Kildare County Council. A site in the north west of the county is being examined, the Department previously rejected another proposal for this site on the grounds of sustainability.

P Doyle stated that Rapid Build is concerned with speed as opposed cost savings. Fingal County Council and South Dublin County Council had plans in place for the delivery of social housing units. There is potential to split sites to provide for emergency accommodation.

Cllr. Pender stated that it would be preferable to reserve Rapid Build for homeless accommodation. She expressed concern regarding the fire safety of timber frame construction. She also queried if the Millfield fire report was available and how could we ensure the safety of Part V units.

D Creighton advised that timber frame construction is safe provided it is constructed properly and confirmed that fire safety works were carried out on Part V and CAS units in Millfield.

T Mc Donnell stated that the potential Rapid Build site in Kildare County Council is small. In order to achieve efficiencies Rapid Build requires a large site in order to achieve efficiencies of scale. He stated that the new BCAP process should result in better quality houses.

## **Anti-Social Behaviour Policy**

A Aspell advised the members that the Anti Social Behaviour Policy was adopted at the February council meeting.

The meeting concluded.