

Minutes of Kildare County Council SPC Meeting 7th September 2017

Present: Cllr. Paddy Kennedy, Chairperson, Cllr. Aoife Breslin , Cllr. Joanne Pender, Cllr. Robert Power, Cllr. Thomas Redmond, Cllr. Brendan Weld, Denis Buckley, Ger Dunne.

In attendance: Annette Aspell, SEO, David Creighton, A Snr. Arch., Ollie Brady, Ao, Sinead Fitzpatrick, AO, Siobhán Scully, AO.

Apologies: Pat Doyle

At the outset of the meeting , the Chairperson welcomed Ger Dunne, ICTU representative to the Committee.

1. Minutes

The minutes of the SPC meeting of the 11th May 2017 were approved. Proposed by Cllr Pender, Seconded by Cllr Breslin

2. Matters Arising

Youth for Peace: Cllr Redmond raised the code of governance for Youth for Peace (YFP) and the payments issued to YFP by KCC. O Brady advised that KCC has a service level agreement with YFP for the provision of homeless service. He contacted the Housing Agency to confirm their status as an approved housing body. The Housing Agency advised that they were not included on the register of AHBs as they had not made an annual return, however as the payment being issued by KCC related to current expenditure as opposed to capital funding, they were not required to be entered on the Register.

Internal Audit Report AHBs: Cllr Pender raised the issue of Internal Audit Report on Approved Housing Bodies and indicated that she was disappointed that she received no response or it was not placed on the agenda.

Millfield Fire Report: Cllr Pender raised the issue of Millfield Fire Report and reported that the residents of Millfield Manor were unhappy with the report. Following a brief discussion it was resolved that the issue would be raised with Sonya Kavanagh, Director of Services.

Cuan Mhuire: Cllr Redmond enquired about the operation of homeless services by Cuan Mhuire. A Aspell advised that while Cuan Mhuire provided a good service, the focus of its work is addiction recovery and not the provision of homeless services. KCC are supporting a number of existing clients of Cuan Mhuire however no further referrals will be made for emergency homeless accommodation.

Support of AHBs to Purchase Units: Cllr Redmond enquired about the process involved in Kildare County Council supporting an AHB to develop/buy units. A Aspell advised that the Council consider the size and location of the proposed development and confirm that there is a housing need, based on this support for the scheme is confirmed.

Assessment of Housing Needs: Cllr Redmond queried how many people were removed from the housing list following the most recent Assessment of Housing Needs. A Aspell advised that this information would be published in November.

3. Correspondence/List of Circulars

ICTU - The Chair circulated a letter received from the Irish Congress of Trade Unions requesting a meeting with the SPC to provide details of their briefing report- A Local Authority led Emergency Response to the Housing Crisis. Attendance at the next SPC was proposed by Cllr Breslin and seconded by G Dunne.

A summary of circulars received from 11th May was circulated to the committee.

4. Housing Update

Vacant Home Strategy: A Aspell provided an update on the Vacant Home Strategy, the focus of which will be to bring vacant properties back into productive use and advised members that Kildare County Council is required to produce a strategy by year end. She highlighted that there was no provision within the budget to provide for additional staff required to deliver any new programmes and that it would place further constraints on an already stretched department. She advised that Census 2016 reported 2, 000 vacant properties in Co Kildare, however this may not be accurate. Cllr. Pender raised the issue of Department of Defence owned vacant properties on the Curragh. She stated that a number were listed as protected structures and should not be allowed to fall into disrepair. The fact that the vacancies occurred in terraces/rows of occupied properties is problematic. She stated that KCC should contact the Property Services Manager of the Dept. of Defence with a view to having vacant properties included in the Repair and Leasing Scheme. Cllr Breslin stated that the availability of financial and staff resources was an issue for the management of any new schemes, and that the Council is already experiencing difficulty turning around its own stock. The expectations of the Department are unrealistic. She welcomed new initiatives however housing is a complex area and resource dependent.

Cllr Power and Cllr Redmond queried the resources required to implement a Vacant House Strategy, Cllr Redmond highlighted the fact that Budget 2018 is now being drafted and this would provide an opportunity to allocate resources. A Aspell advised that there is little interest in the Repair and Leasing Scheme from either property owners or AHBs. She stated if the council allocated resources in this area this would impact on the budgets of other directorates, the housing section intend to seek sanction for additional employees for the implementation of the vacant house strategy. The members requested that a letter be sent to the Minister outlining their concerns.

Differential Rent Scheme : S Fitzpatrick advised the committee that the Differential Rent Scheme 2008 required an amendment in order to deal with rent being charged to Housing Assistance Payment tenants and Council tenants in 1 bedroom apartments/houses. The adoption of the differential rent scheme is an executive function however she wished to advise the members of a required change. The current scheme states that tenants aged under 65 of one-bedroom properties are charged a maximum rent of €50.00, on reaching the age of 65 the tenant's rent is reduced to €25.00. The scheme was drafted prior to the implementation of the HAP scheme and before the Council commenced purchasing a large number of private properties and allowing this clause to remain could result in anomalies in the rents being charged. She advised that the council proposed the following amendment: The maximum rent of €25 be abolished for all tenants on one-bedroom properties.

She stated that all rent calculations can be appealed and that €127 is generally the highest rent paid by tenants.

There was general agreement with the changes being proposed. Cllr Redmond queried the number of tenants who would be affected. Cllr Pender stated that she agreed with the amendment and that the introduction of a cost rental model would lead to the freeing up of social houses.

A Aspell advised the committee that work is ongoing on the introduction of a national differential rent scheme, however the council's scheme is fit for purpose apart from the issue of the one-bedroom maximum charge.

Update Family Hub, Athy: O Brady provided an update on the family hub and advised that 6 of the 7 units are currently occupied. There was ongoing contact with the hub manager. Cllr. Kennedy enquired about the origins of the residents. O Brady advised that they were from various locations however a bus had been organised in order that children could still attend their own school. Cllr. Redmond queried if given that there are 200 people in emergency accommodation if there were plans for other hubs and how residents for the Athy hub are selected. O Brady advised other opportunities are being sought. The selection of residents is on a case by case basis, residents will have moved from emergency accommodation and that an important consideration is the likelihood of residents being able to move on to more suitable accommodation. Cllr Breslin stated that families should be assisted to move to sustainable tenancies. A Aspell advised that three tenancy sustainment officers will be appointed in the coming 1-2 months and the council also has three homeless outreach workers who assist people to move out of homelessness to sustainable tenancies. She acknowledged the excellent work carried out by staff on contract from the homeless charities.

Cllr Pender raised the issue of the length of time Michael Gary House tenants were in situ. O Brady acknowledged that it was an issue and had been discussed with The Peter McVerry Trust. Homeless Outreach Workers regularly meet the tenants who have a complex range of needs. He advised that he would raise the issue with next HAT Multi-Agency Meeting.

A Aspell advised members that she is a member of the TUSLA mutli-agency steering committee for care leavers and she will provide the members with an update on work of the committee. Cllr Pender highlighted the work of EPIC , the agency which works with care leavers.

Cllr Redmond queried the policy of purchasing houses for housing applicants with a disability. A Aspell advised that if we do not have a suitable property we may purchase a property or seek assistance from an AHB, however it is difficult to find suitable accommodation and we the council is obliged to have regard to the allocation criteria of time on the list. Cllr Kennedy advised that he was aware of housing applicants who had been appointed as tenants.

5. Work Programme 2017

Rapid Build: D Creighton advised the members that the Department issued a call for Rapid Build proposals in July. Kildare County Council submitted an application for 14 units in Clogherinkoe, adjacent to site developed for affordable houses. This site was selected as the most suitable due to the availability of existing services and the fact that a previous Part 8 established the principle of development. While this scheme is small in size, it likely to be contractually complex.

Cllr. Pender queried if these units would be used as homeless accommodation, if they would be timber framed and if the units and process in Poppintree were reviewed and highlighted that Dublin City Council were examining the Lewisham model of multi-unit development . Cllr Redmond enquired about the cost of the units and the expected time frame for construction. Ger Dunne stated that there would be no benefit to workers from such schemes. D Creighton advised that the units would provide permanent housing and are required to have a minimum life span of 60 years, there are 3 methods of pre-fabrication, steel, timber or concrete. The framework consists of 10 contractors. The units to be constructed would be traditional style houses. The Council are meeting with Dublin City Council to review the results of the development at Poppintree. Costs are to be based on overall scheme costs in accordance with individual unit cost ceilings. The on-site build time would be quicker than the non-rapid build models, however the design stage will be at least equal to traditional schemes, with a 3 step approval process. In effect the design team will provide outline

design specimens. Addressing Mr. Dunnes concerns regarding employment he advised that opportunities will still exist in the following areas, bricklaying, wiring, plumbing.

Assessment of Housing Applications

Cllr. Weld requested that the time frame for assessing applications be added to the agenda and that is unacceptable that it takes 12 weeks to assess an application.

A Aspell advised that the 12 week time-frame is laid down in the guidelines, however usually applications are assessed in a shorter period. An additional staff resource has been allocated to this area. She advised Cllr Weld and the other members if they had particular concerns regarding an application to bring it to O Brady's attention. She advised that the Department will be reviewing the housing assessment regulations and that any amendment of the income bands will require legislative change. Cllr Weld stated that this timeframe is unacceptable when people are on the verge of homelessness and that he will take it up with the Minister. Cllr Pender raised to the issue of tenants on 28 days notice, A Aspell advised that Threshold could intervene.

Rebuilding Ireland: Quarterly housing statistics were circulated to the Committee. A Aspell advised that the Chief Executive recently attended the Housing Summit Meeting, arising from this meeting KCC are awaiting revised Rebuilding Ireland targets.

Cllr Redmond followed up with a query on inter-county HAP and the equity of this provision, A Aspell advised that the council had expressed their concerns regarding this measure to the Department.

Choice Based Lettings: A Aspell provided an update. It is envisaged that an IT system will be in place by year end. Kildare County Council has a low level of refusals.

Date of Next Meeting: A Aspell requested that the members of the committee consent to the change of date of the next meeting in order that the members have an opportunity to review and discuss the Homeless Action Plan. There was general consent, the Chair advised that the committee would be advised of the revised date in due course.

The meeting concluded.