

**Minutes of Meeting of the Social Development Strategic Policy Committee
held in Council Chamber, Aras Contae an Chláir on Wednesday 9th
September 2020 at 2.30pm**

Present: Cllr. Gerard Flynn, Chairperson
Cllr. Tony O'Brien
Cllr. Mark Nestor
Cllr. Ann Norton
Cllr. Paul Murphy
Cllr. Joe Garrihy – via Zoom
William Cahir
Tommy Guilfoyle
Larry Brennan
Noel Kearney
Mary Leahy – via Zoom
Anne Haugh, Director of Service
Siobhan McNulty, Senior Executive Officer
Helen Walsh, County Librarian
Siobhan Mulcahy, County Arts Officer
Tim Forde, Sports & Recreation
Deirdre Ryan, Administrative Officer
Pat Stephens, LCEA
Kathy Lordan, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies: Cllr. Donna McGettigan

1. Minutes of Social Development SPC meeting held on 17th June 2020

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th June 2020 were proposed by T. Guilfoyle, seconded by Cllr. Mark Nestor, and agreed.

2. Matters Arising

Noted that no response has been received to correspondence dated 13th March & 20th July to Irish Water. Agreed to email the 2 letters to local TD's to raise in the Dáil.

In relation to a schedule of lands owned by Clare County Council being made available, S. McNulty advised that some detail is available in relation to large plots; small plots being compiled; grazing rights is public information.

L. Brennan explained that the reason he had requested this schedule was to see if land banks could be built on. S. McNulty replied that CCC continues to review opportunities for developments on Council lands.

3. Climate Change and Biodiversity

P. Stephens, Manager, Limerick Clare Energy Agency, presented to the meeting on Energy Balance and Action Plans and referred to:

- Energy production & consumption
- Energy analysis by fuel
- Energy analysis by sector
- Emissions analysis by fuel
- Emissions analysis by sector
- Emissions – Kyoto Commitment
- Summary emissions reduction
- Individual Responsibility

The members thanked P. Stephens for the presentation and a number of items were discussed including:

T. Guilfoyle queried why the Climate Action Regional Office (CARO) office was based in Cork; who funds the office and how it operates. P. Stephens replied that the office was established early last year with funding from the Government, Department of Communications, Climate Action & Environment (DCCA). A number of LA's put forward requests to host the CARO, however Cork County Council, who already had a large number of staff engaged in Climate Change Action issues, secured the office. Regional monthly meetings are held. These meetings are attended by Cyril Feeney as it comes under the Physical Development Directorate in Clare County Council.

N. Kearney queried how close to the LECP Community Plan target of 3,529 GWh reduction p.a. are we. P. Stephens advised that CCC reductions are on track; in relation to Community - total houses done 12,670; resources not in place to track the entire county across all the different sectors; in discussions with CARO to look at how we are managing at County level.

N. Kearney queried if the Data Centre goes ahead would it be solar energy. P. Stephens replied that he hadn't seen the plans, but various forms of renewable electricity in County Clare could be allocated for the data centre. An issue with data centres is excess heat, which is usually harnessed to provide heat for local use in houses, community facilities or sometimes horticultural / market gardening.

J. Garrihy queried if funding for this area is increasing and if more actions were required in the future. Also if Pat saw a value in CCC playing a stronger role in strategizing and maximizing the preparations and working with communities to be best prepared to avail of national supports/funding from upcoming budgets?

In response P. Stephens advised that the DCCAIE has already committed to over €500 million in funding for Climate Action projects between now and 2027. In addition the SEAI has been tasked under the Climate Action Plan 2019, to establish 1,500 Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC's) by 2030. The Climate action Plan also states:

"5. Local Government Leadership

- *To further develop the community engagement role of local authorities, we will pilot 'climate action community engagement' offices in a number of Local Authorities*
- *Through these new offices, Local Authorities will become key partners and enablers of an expanded network of Sustainable Energy Communities across Ireland, complementing the actions for Local Authorities on citizen engagement and community leadership".*

4. HAP

D. Ryan presented to HAP and began by giving the background as follows:

- HAP was introduced nationally on a phased basis during 2014 – commenced on 29th June 2015 in Clare.
- Recipients are responsible to source their own accommodation from the Private Rented Sector (PRS). The tenancy agreement remains a private agreement between the tenant and their landlord. In general, under the Residential Tenancies Acts 2004-2015, all private residential tenancies must be registered with the Residential Tenancies Board.
- HAP also has a number of other objectives including:
 - the removal of a potential barrier to employment by allowing recipients to remain in the scheme if they gain full-time employment;
 - provision of a better integrated and more streamlined service and better regulation of the PRS (each property and tenancy must be registered with the RTB)
 - Most long-term recipients of Rent Supplement (longer than 18 months) will transfer to the HAP scheme on a phased basis

T. Guilfoyle expressed the opinion that HAP is not the solution to the problem; referred to motion looking for a review of HAP; the private market has prolonged the problem; hopeful that the SPC can change Government strategy dealing with the housing problem.

L Brennan advised that CIF built 122 houses; only one for rental purposes.

Cllr. T. O'Brien agreed with T. Guilfoyle; the Government has a huge role to play; thresholds are a major concern; need to be reviewed.

Agreed that HAP needs to be reviewed at a National level and that the Minister for Housing should be invited to come and talk in Clare re. measures in place to address shortfalls and address SPC on Housing policy.

N. Kearney queried how many in HAP are in arrears. D. Ryan advised that payment and collection of rents are managed in Limerick; every effort is made to reduce differential rent of any tenant in financial difficulties.

G. Flynn queried what was the percentage of differential rent. D. Ryan advised that it is at 17%.

G. Flynn confirmed his support to the members and indicated that recent motion to Council got unanimous support.

T. Guilfoyle stated that the use of HAP to house one person who is homeless is okay; system has channelled public funds to the private sector and hopes the HAP Scheme can be changed.

5. New Allocation Scheme

Draft proposed Allocation Scheme was circulated with a consideration period to end of September; facilitation of meetings from 15th to 30th September; submission to SPC for approval in December; submission to full Council for adoption in Q1 2021.

L. Brennan stated that it is a comprehensive document and queried if it was a template from Dublin.

S. McNulty advised that it is not a template; all LA Schemes were reviewed and best fit for CCC taken from them.

W. Cahir stated that there were a lot of issues to be looked at from a legal point of view.

G. Flynn advised all the members of the SPC to forward any submissions they may have on the Scheme before 30th September.

6. Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

Draft Strategy had been circulated to the Committee. S. McNulty stated that it had not been reviewed for some time; issues increased during Covid; 220 complaints received to date in 2020; up from 139 complaints for all of 2019. The strategy should be viewed as a communication mechanism for people to understand the avenues open to them; advised that it is difficult to investigate anonymous complaints and that identity of complainant is protected.

Cllr. A. Norton agreed that anti-social behaviour has become an issue; stated that the Gardaí investigate anonymous complaints; queried if legally people can be

evicted and will this document make a difference to people who should have the right to live in comfort in their own home.

Cllr. M. Nestor advised that there are issues in the area where he lives; anonymous complaints in writing should be investigated by CCC; suggested CCC could look at preventing anti-social behaviour by purchasing one-off houses to prevent it; queried if Elected Members could be communicated with regarding who is going to be houses in an area.

Cllr. P. Murphy stated the input of local residents should be taken into account for better estate management.

Cllr. G. Flynn indicated the document is aimed mainly at Council estates and needs to include other areas; agreed with the holding of pre-tenancy training courses and that same should be mandatory; should be weekend cover for estate management i.e. a dedicated staff member and number – DOS should take to Management Team.

W. Cahir queried if there was a breakdown of figures in relation to complaints, e.g. numerous complaints from same person and also how quickly complaints elevated to legal proceedings.

T. Guilfoyle queried if there was interaction between the Council and the Gardaí and if the Council are made aware of criminal convictions of proposed tenants.

Cllr. T. O'Brien indicated that the Councillors' role is just representational.

Cllr. G. Flynn stated that there is a need for extra staff and a specialised unit.

A. Haugh stated that this discussion was appreciated as anti-social behaviour has become one of the most frustrating pieces of work and has escalated significantly during Covid; referred to the model of housing CCC provides which has local authority housing in private estates which can lead to issues; new houses being built and a fresh approach is needed to ensure these are maintained and respected; CCC reactive and needs to be proactive – possibly have a presence on the ground.

Cllr. T. O'Brien suggested implementing a system whereby we rent for a 5 year period and use first couple of years to see how suitable people are for new housing.

S. McNulty agreed there was merit in that but legally there is no statutory basis for temporary tenancy; also there is a rigid process re. progressing to legal and will be late 2020/early 2021 before critical cases can be got to Court; advised that under GDPR a complainant can't be updated which is frustrating; some cases are complex; CCC has close to 5,000 tenants and there are no issues with the vast majority – less than 10 are very problematic.

S. McNulty that a High Level Steering Group meeting will be held - where collectively a lot can be achieved - on 23rd September involving agencies such as:

- Clare County Council
- TUSLA
- HSE : Mental Health services, Disability services and Primary Care

- Probation Service
- Gardaí
- LCETB
- Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection
- North Clare Family Resource Centre
- Traveller Mediation Service
- Irish Traveller Movement
- Clare Haven Services

T. Guilfoyle queried how this SPC could help to achieve the Director’s desired approach to estate management.

Cllr. G. Flynn indicated he would be debating a motion and calling for additional resources and confirmed that he would agree motion with the SPC before putting before the Council.

7. Correspondence from LCDC

Correspondence dated 29th July 2020 from the Chair of the Local Community Development Committee was discussed and the following noted:

- During Covid, those in emergency accommodation were provided with hot meals;
- All CCC Housing forms are prepared to the Plain English standard;
- Embargo on Evictions was lifted from 1st August;
- Traveller Accommodation Circular complied with in full;
- People with disability living in Nursing Homes was raised at the Housing Disability Steering Group meeting and it was agreed that the Council can provide support to the HSE in relation to this.

Cllr. G. Flynn indicated a response should issue to the LCDC.

8. Library, Arts & Culture

S. Mulcahy advised that Culture Night will be held on 18th September 2020. Majority of events will take place online this year and can be viewed through www.culturenight.ie.

H. Walsh advised that the annual summer reading programme for children – Summer Stars – is drawing to a close with certificates ready for awarding to 1,000 children.

9. Sports & Recreation

T. Forde indicated that work has begun on dressing rooms at Tim Smythe Park; very positive feedback received on post Covid operations at Ennis Leisure and Lees Road.

Cllr. G. Flynn wished to complement all the staff on work done.

10. AOB

Cllr. G. Flynn referred to the Rebuilding Ireland Home Loan Credit Committee meetings and requested that they take place every month of the year, including August.

T. Guilfoyle requested that a report be brought to the SPC regarding a footbridge over Drehidnagower Bridge and that this be an item on the next agenda.

Cllr. G. Flynn agreed to check if it was within the remit of the Social Development SPC.

Cllr. P. Murphy advised that funding was sought and turned down recently.

A. Haugh indicated that it was in the remit of the Physical Development Directorate.

The meeting then concluded.

Signed: _____ **Signed:** _____
Cllr Gerard Flynn **Anne Haugh**
Chairperson **Director of Service**

Date: _____