

***Minutes of the Social Development Strategic Policy Committee Meeting
held in Áras Contae an Chláir on Tuesday, 6th March 2018 at 2.30pm***

Present: Cllr Gerard Flynn, Chairperson
Cllr Paul Murphy
Cllr Tony O'Brien
Cllr Ann Norton
Dermot Hayes
Pat Keogh
Liam Conneally, Director of Service
Siobhán McNulty, A/Senior Executive Officer
Helen Walsh, County Librarian
Dolores Meaney, Executive Librarian
Mairead Corbett, Administrative Officer
Tony Neville, Executive Engineer
Tim Forde, General Manager Leisure Facilities
Liam O'Connor, Administrative Officer
Steve Lahiffe, Senior Staff Officer
Valerie Fleming, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies: Geraldine Hetheron, Cllr Pat Burke, Cllr Tom McNamara, Cllr. P. J. Kelly, Tommy Guilfoyle.

At the outset Cllr Gerry Flynn highlighted that this was Liam Conneally's last SPC meeting as Social Development Director and wished him well in his new post as Director of Economic Development.

1. Minutes of meeting held on 7th December 2017.

The minutes of the meeting held on 7th December 2017 were proposed by Cllr Paul Murphy, seconded by Cllr Tony O'Brien and agreed.

2. Matters Arising.

Dermot Hayes enquired about the progress of the CRM project and Liam Conneally advised that CRM implementation is on schedule and will be rolled out in April 2018. He said staff have embraced the significant additional workload involved in the implementation as they are fully aware of the long term benefit of CRM. Liam C. complemented the positive staff engagement on this project.

3. Briefing on work of Residential Tenancies Board.

Cllr Gerry Flynn introduced Rosalind Carroll, Director of the Residential Tenancies Board to the meeting.

Using a PowerPoint presentation Rosalind spoke about the extensive role of the Residential Tenancies board whose vision is "An effectively regulated residential rental sector that is fair, accessible and beneficial to all".

She outlined that there are 340,000 tenancies registered with the Board. 28% of the population are renting and 70% of landlords own just one rental property. She expects the rental rate to increase going forward. The priorities for the RTB are (a) Information and education, (b) Improved regulation, (c) Dispute Prevention and (d) Data and Research.

Cllr Gerry Flynn thanked Rosalind for her comprehensive presentation and issued an invitation to her to present at a future Social Development SPC meeting. He asked her opinion on the HAP thresholds which apply to Clare and Rosalind responded that the average rent varies according to Electoral Area in Clare. She said that a case to increase the HAP threshold should be made to the Department for the relevant Electoral Area and she said the Residential Tenancies Board can provide the Council with data to endorse this case.

Cllr G Flynn then suggested dealing with Item No 7.

7. Report on Inspection of Private Rented Accommodation.

Steve Lahiffe advised that in 2017 Clare County Council inspected 496 properties and the main minor issues found were the absence of fire blankets and ventilation issues. He said 95% of landlords comply with inspection reports. Tenants advise the Council if the major issues are not complied with.

Liam Conneally referred to the almost 2,500 properties owned by Clare County Council and said the new Planned Maintenance Programme will ensure stock is kept in good condition and therefore help protect the Council's assets.

6. Report on Planned Maintenance Programme.

Tony Neville, EE, advised that three submissions had been received in response to the tender for the stock condition survey.

The Draft Programme is as follows:

- contract signed - 21st February
- commence survey - 21st May
- project completion - 28th November.

He advised that the communication of the project to tenants is critical to its success and a letter will issue to each household 4 weeks in advance of commencement of the survey. The building surveyors will contact households by letter 2 weeks before and again in person 2 days before the survey commences.

He said there will be a pilot of 9 model houses which will give a good indication of what improvement works will be required.

Liam Conneally added that Clare County Council are the biggest landlords in the county and will now know the potential risk in terms of this important Council asset. The survey will also assist the Council when applying for finance as the value of the asset will now be known.

Cllr Gerry Flynn thanked Tony Neville, EE, and also acknowledged the work done by Robert Burns, SEE, on this project.

4. New Department Circulars.

New Affordable Loans:

Mairead Corbett advised this initiative was introduced on 1st February 2018 and is targeted at middle income earners to make home ownership more affordable. Under this scheme it is possible to borrow 90% and fund 10% from own resources to a maximum property value of €250k. 11 applications have been received under this scheme to date.

Cllr G. Flynn queried if the property being purchased can be in a different local authority area than that where the loan issued. Mairead to clarify this matter.

New Repair and Leasing Scheme:

This is a revised Scheme broadening the period of lease from 10 to 5 years upwards. There is a max of €40k funding available for repairs to vacant properties and this money is recouped through rent. There have been 10 applications to this scheme all in areas of low demand with cost of repairs exceeding the €40k threshold.

Local Authority Mortgage Protection Insurance (MPI) Group Scheme:

This Circular contains one amendment only in relation to separated couples.

New DoH Long Term Leasing Scheme:

The scheme is aimed at landlords who have in excess of 20 units available for social lease. The term of the lease is for 25 years and the tenants are nominated by the local authority. Previously 80% and now 95% of market rent is paid. The Housing Agency is the lead authority in the roll out of the Scheme and CCC are working through the HA with any potential clients/landlords.

5. (a) New County Library Project update.

Helen Walsh advised that the planning application for the development was lodged in February 2018. The project is now at Stage 3 which is the preparation of tender documentation. It is hoped to be on site with the project by August/Sept 2018.

(b) Creative Ireland Strategy.

This is a follow on project from the 1916-2016 celebrations.

The budget for this strategy has increased from €64k in 2017 to €96k in 2018 which will allow for the implementation of a grants scheme for the county.

The strategy and grants allocation scheme was proposed by Cllr Ann Norton, seconded by Cllr Tony O'Brien and agreed to proceed to full Council.

(C) Update on EASI initiative.

Three artists, a sculptor, a painter and a potter are in situ for a reduced rent of €150 per month at this leased property in Tobartescain. A shared studio costs €120 per month to rent under this initiative. There is a similar scheme already in operation in Tulla with 100% occupancy rates and a good record of success.

8. Transition HUB for Homeless.

Siobhán McNulty advised that the acquisition has just closed on the property for the Family Hub. Expressions of interest have been sought regarding the management of the facility. It is aimed to have the Family Hub operational by the end of Q3 with potential to cater for 4-5 family units.

Liam Conneally added that the Council will own the property which is to be run by an Approved Housing Body with expertise in the homelessness area; however the Council will maintain overarching ownership and control of the Family Hub building. He said the purpose of the Family Hub is to provide a transition arrangement to house families currently living in Hotels and B&B's and who will eventually be housed in Council housing stock.

9. Proposal on Household Waste Disposal Investigations.

Liam O'Connor advised that waste disposal companies notify the Council of which properties they provide a service to and in the event of there being no refuse collection for a property then occupants are in breach of their tenancy. As part of the rent review each year c.50% of tenants are required to provide evidence of their waste collection arrangements and if there are any particular issues then it is a matter for the Estate Manager to deal with.

10. Sports and Recreation update.

Tim Forde advised that the remit of this department increased significantly in 2017 and the unit now has responsibility for sports and recreation throughout the County of Clare. This involves the strategic development of owned and managed facilities and promotion, development and support of Community Facilities, clubs, organizations and volunteers working for the health and wellbeing of all citizens.

The ultimate goal is to make Clare the Sports and Recreation 'Hub' of the Mid West Region, that the importance of participating in Active Recreation, Sport and Physical Activity will be recognised and promoted, and that everyone living in or visiting our County will have an equal opportunity to enrich their lives through participation.

As this was Liam's last Social Development SPC meeting as Director of Service he addressed the meeting and paid tribute to all the staff of the Directorate for their hard work and dedication to public service. He also complimented the members of the SPC on the volume of items being dealt with at meetings and for the support provided by the committee to all policy matters in the Directorate.

The meeting then concluded.

Signed: _____

**Cllr Gerard Flynn
Chairperson**

Signed: _____

Director of Service

Date: _____