

HOUSING STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE SPECIAL MEETING

MONDAY 23RD FEBRUARY 2015

MINUTES

1. Welcome for The Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr Nichola Mallon

Housing SPC members present welcomed the Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor of Belfast Cllr Nichola Mallon.

The Lord Mayor Cllr Christy Burke expressed his concerns regarding the provision of Homeless Services and waiting times to access emergency accommodation. The Manager advised that he will discuss issues here with Homeless Services and update the Lord Mayor directly. The Chair asked about visits to state funded Homeless Services. The Dublin Region Homeless Executive (DRHE) will forward on schedule on Tuesday 24th February to all Housing SPC members and Councillors who expressed an interest in these visits.

2. Minutes of meeting dated 21st November 2014 and matters arising:

No matters arising.

3. Chairperson's Business:

- **Regeneration Update**

Evelyn Hanlon, Senior Executive Officer gave presentation updating regeneration areas. All Housing SPC members present welcomed the update and discussion followed.

Cllr Chris Andrews said that there has been positive feedback from residents regarding proposals at Charlemont Street and he asked why Moss Street site is not included as a regeneration area. The Lord Mayor Cllr Christy Burke said that DCC should accept the current offer from the GAA to redevelop Croke Villas. He also said that proposals to refurbish O'Devaney Gardens to house persons facing homelessness is not a good idea here and that re-development should take place. Cllr Dáithí Doolan said that PPPs used in the past should not be revisited as a solution to the housing crisis. He welcomed the high standards at Thornton Heights but said that not enough units were provided here. Cllr Pat Dunne said that the process takes too long and there is a need to look at ways for new units to be delivered now. He asked about de-tenanting of regeneration areas and said that units should go to those on the housing/transfer list. Cllr Janice Boylan said that DCC should accept proposal from GAA regarding redevelopment at Croke Villas. She said that the proposals to refurbish O'Devaney Gardens for temporary homeless accommodation will not work. Cllr Ray McAdam said that GAA proposal for Croke Villas is welcomed by area and residents. Cllr Cieran Perry said plans to refurbish O'Devaney Gardens and Croke Villas for temporary homeless accommodation is neither cost effective nor desirable. He also said PPPs should not be used again to deliver housing as they didn't work in the past. Cllr Mannix Flynn said that there is a need to use a different model than PPPs to deliver on regeneration and that 'Get out clauses' caused problems. He said there is a need for a social housing programme and he called for caution if DCC are going to hand units over to AHBs.

The Chair said that while there has been progress at St. Teresa's Gardens it is slow. She commended residents on regeneration boards. She said that the community in this estate had been let down by PPP process in the past. She said time scale for purchasing a unit for purposes of de-tenanting of 2/3 months is too long. The Chair also expressed her dissatisfaction with Action 9 of the Government Action Plan to address homelessness.

The Manager advised that Moss Street is not a regeneration area but it will be addressed under the Housing Programme. He acknowledged that progress is slow but there is a desire to push forward with regeneration programmes. He stated that Action Plan 9 of the Government Action Plan to Address Homelessness identified O'Devaney Gardens and Croke Villas for temporary refurbishment to create additional of temporarily accommodation for homeless persons and families. Reports and costs for refurbishment at O'Devaney Gardens and Croke Villas have been prepared and forwarded to DOECLG and a decision is pending. The Housing SPC members will be notified when decision has been made. The Manager said that these are temporary measures and the masterplan for O'Devaney Gardens remain in place and will be implemented. He added that any proposals will have to be approved by Elected Members. Acquisition of properties to allow for de-tenanting of regeneration areas takes time and others factors, such as inspections add to this timescale but in general 2 to 3 months is not exceptionally long time to spend buying a property. Approval of Local Area Committee is needed if the scheme of letting priorities is deviated from in the allocation of housing (casual vacancies and acquired properties) for detenancing.

Cllr Mannix Flynn asked for acquisitions and reason for such purchases to be identified. Cllr Cieran Perry asked how much input the Elected Members could make to proposals to undertake temporary refurbishments at Croke Villas and O'Devaney Gardens given that there was a directive from the Minister. Cllr McAdam also sought clarification about whether the Council must comply with Ministers directive or if the Councillors could direct the Manager. The Manger advised that it was his understanding that the Council could direct that any proposed temporary works to O'Devaney Gardens or Croke Villas should not proceed. In response to Cllr Flynn the Manager stated that he will need to consider the request to provide details of allocations and acquisitions over and above what is already provided in weekly allocation lists.

Agreed: Forward on presentation to Housing SPC members

- **Traveller Accommodation Update**

Report circulated to members prior to the meeting. No matters arising.

Agreed: Traveller Accommodation Update accepted.

- **Ratification of Chair of St. Michael's Regeneration Board**

The Chair thanked SPC members' agreement to vote by e-mail, and subsequent agreement to ratify Eammon Devoy as Chair at St. Michael's Regeneration Board.

Cllr Cieran Perry enquired how many Chairs there are on various Regeneration Boards and he also asked about their remuneration. Cllr Mannix Flynn asked about experience and remuneration of Chairs appointed to Regeneration Boards.

- **Arms Length Management Organisations (ALMOs)**

The Chair stated that it is a year since the issue of establishing ALMOs had been raised at the SPC. She advised that representatives from Local Authority in Manchester are to be invited to meet the Housing SPC to share their experiences of the advantages and disadvantages of ALMOs in their area. The Chair extended an invitation to Housing SPC Chairs in the other Dublin LAs.

Cllr Alison Gilliland suggested inviting Rory O'Donnell of NEIC to this meeting given his expertise in this field. Cllr Cieran Perry said that public housing should be provided by the LA. He will only support the formation of ALMOs if it allows the Council to provide housing. Cllr Pat Dunne said he too would support setting up an ALMOs if it allows DCC to provide public

housing. He asked how proactive DCC management will in setting up ALMOs. Cllr Mannix Flynn said that he would be welcome the formation of ALMOs. The Manager advised that DCC, and all LAs, face difficulties in obtaining finance to deliver new housing. Because AHBs can borrow off Government Balance Sheet (whereas LAs cannot) they are needed to increase the supply of social housing.

Kathleen McKillion advised AHBs work closely with LAs and all tenants housed by AHBs come from LA Housing Lists. .

4. Rent Arrears Paper

The Chair said that Rent Arrears Policy has caused problems to tenants, especially in relation to historic arrears. She advised that a sub-group will be set up to address issues here.

The Manager advised that there is scope within the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 to look at developing policies to address problems with rent arrears.

Cllr Dáithí Doolan welcomed discussion on this issue. He said that DCC should be flexible when dealing with these cases and suggested the following options: i) agreement to bring arrears down to a certain amount and ii) agreement to pay certain amount. Cllr Pat Dunne said that rent arrears are, in the main, caused by re-assessment rather than non-payment of rent. Cllr Mannix Flynn welcomed this report. Cllr Chris Andrews asked for the number of tenants evicted as a result of non-payment of rent. Cllr Janice Boylan said that rents arrears caused by re-assessment are different to rent arrears caused by non-payment.

The Manager advised that abandoned dwellings cause DCC difficulties and expense. The differential rent scheme operated by DCC is based on ability to pay. Annual assessment shouldn't create arrears going back. He acknowledged that this is a complex area.

Agreed: Forward on presentation to Housing SPC members

Agreed: Housing SPC members wishing to be part of the sub-committee to register their interest with the Manager.

5. Housing Programme 2015-2017

Gerry Geraghty, Executive Manager made presentation on Housing Programme 2015-2017. He advised that this will be brought to all Local Area Committees for discussion, input and to address specific queries regarding sites included or which could be added.

The Manager advised that Housing Strategy was issued by Government in late 2014. Dublin Social Housing Taskforce is examining how social housing can be delivered using a new model of public/private partnership. €300 million will be allocated nationally with €100 million to go to the Dublin Region.

Cllr Cieran Perry asked who is represented on this Housing Taskforce. The Chair expressed her dissatisfaction that there are no elected representatives on the Housing Taskforce and asked that the Housing SPC supports a request to appoint a Councillor here. Cllr Pat Dunne said that while lots of announcements have been made with regard to funding and building there has been little progress made on the ground. Cllr Ray McAdam said that more information was required about the design of various projects and the stage reached. Cllr Mannix Flynn raised his concerns at the age of DCC housing stock and problems relating to heat and insulation. Cllr David Costello suggested that the lands banks at M50 between Finglas and Ballymun be used to develop housing even if this involves re-drawing the City boundaries. Cllr Dáithí Doolan said he would like to see Chair of Housing SPC appointed to the Taskforce. He said that AHBs have a role to play in providing niche housing but he would rather see funding being made available to LAs for general housing and that the Government's decisions on funding needs to be challenged. Cllr Anthony Connaghan said that the LAs should provide housing.

The Chair raised concerns regarding the over reliance on the private sector and that off sheet funding mechanisms are complicated and that their Phase 1 housing targets are unlikely to be met. She advised that the Innovative Housing Provision Sub-Group is looking at models that allow for faster procurement.

The Manager advised that members of the Dublin Social Housing Taskforce are selected by Government and that it includes the Chief Executives of the 4 Dublin LAs. He said that funding of €3.8billion has been assigned to deliver 35,000 social housing units between 2015 and 2020. He noted that these lands are zoned in the main for industrial/commercial use and the assisting of opportunities for the provision of jobs is also important for the Ballymun area. He reiterated that LAs and AHBs work closely together to provide housing.

The Chair asked if DCC have been given additional resources to facilitate Housing Assistance Programme (HAP) programme. The Manager advised that the HAP pilot is staffed and that there is an agreement by DOECLG to supply additional staff nationally and DCC can apply for staff if needed.

Agreed: Forward on presentation to Housing SPC members

6. Referred Motions:

Re: Motion 89 from South Central Area Committee held on 9th December 2014 **Motion in the name of Councillor Bríd Smith**

This Area Committee commends the work being carried out by a group of young women in feeding and clothing the homeless in the Ballyfermot area. We also acknowledge the tremendous support given to their work by the local community and community organisations. This Area Committee calls on management to meet with the women providing this service voluntarily in order to establish what assistance and support can be offered to them to alleviate the suffering of those who are homeless and sleeping rough in the Ballyfermot area. It was agreed that this motion would be referred to the Housing SPC.

Dáithí Downey, A/Director of DRHE advised the members present that he met with this group in South Central Area offices at Elbana House on 4th February 2015. He added that DRHE are happy to meet with any groups to discuss these issues.

Re: Motion 244 from North West Area Committee held on 16th December 2014 **Motion in the name of Councillor Anthony Connaghan**

That the Manager conduct a study of households in the Dublin North West Area with a view to finding out how many households are currently under-occupied (i.e. Senior Citizens living alone in 2-3 or 4 bed homes, but not exclusively Senior Citizens). Can the Manager utilise the expertise of DCC staff to come up with innovative plans to incentivise people moving to smaller accommodation and freeing up the under-utilised properties. Can the Manager provide me with any details of previous schemes and how they worked out?

ORDER: Report to Councillor. Cllr. Connaghan requested that this item and item NW/245/14 in the name of Cllr. Reilly be forwarded to the Housing SPC for consideration.

The Chair asked about options to encourage downsizing of under occupied homes of DCC tenants, e.g. 3 - 4 bed to 1 - 2 bed. She stressed that any such downsizing must be voluntary.

The Manager said that the Financial Contribution Scheme previously offered is currently closed to new applications as there is no allocated budget. The scheme was dependant on units being available for people to go to. Additional Senior Citizen Accommodation would be needed to meet demand which is not available now. He also said that care was needed to avoid perception that people could 'buy' their way into social housing and skip the queue and

that the Allocations Scheme has to be fair and transparent. He also pointed out that because of the Differential Rents Scheme operated by DCC tenants of similar financial means will pay the same rent for a 4 bed and 1 bed unit.

7. AOB

Cllr Mannix Flynn raised the issue of compensation paid to DCC tenants from private developers/organisations building near Council schemes. He asked if there was a protocol here and asked for a report on this issue.

The Manager said that this will be raised with the Law Agent for his advice but that it did not appear to be a matter for the Housing SPC or indeed the Council.

In Attendance:

Councillors:

Chris Andrews, Janice Boylan, Lord Mayor Christy Burke, Anthony Connaghan, David Costello, Patrick Costello, Dáithí Doolan, Pat Dunne, Alison Gilliland, Ray McAdam, Cieran Perry, Críona Ní Dhálaigh, Noel Rock, Sonya Stapleton

Sectoral Interests:

Kathleen McKillion, Sue Taylor

Officials:

Dick Brady, Gerry Geraghty, Evelyn Hanlon, Marguerite Staunton, Dáithí Downey, Karl Mitchell, Mary Hayes, Elaine O'Kelly

Other Councillors:

Mannix Flynn, The Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor of Belfast, Cllr Nichola Mallon

Others Present:

Olivia Kelly

Apologies:

Lillian Buchanan, Pat Doyle, Aideen Hayden, Catherine Kenny, Brendan MacConville

Councillor Críona Ní Dhálaigh

CHAIRPERSON