**MINUTES OF STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING ON HOUSING COMMUNITY, SOCIAL & CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, COURTHOUSE, CAVAN**

**16th February, 2017.**

**Present:-** Cllr. Madeline Argue, Chairperson

Mr. Joe McLoughlin, Director of Services

Ms. Lynda McGavigan, Cavan County Council

Cllr. Shane P. O’Reilly

Cllr. Noel Connell

Cllr. Clifford Kelly

Cllr. Paddy O’Reilly

Mr. Larry McCluskey, CPPN

**Apologies:** Apologies for inability to attend were received from:

Mr. Philip Coleman, Senior Engineer

Ms. Orla Brady, Cavan County Council

Mr. Thomas Maughan, Cavan Traveller Men’s Shed

Cllr. Madeline Argue, Chairperson, welcomed all present to the meeting.

1. **MINUTES**

On the proposal of Cllr. Clifford Kelly, seconded by Mr. Larry McCluskey, the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd November, 2016 were confirmed and signed.

1. **HOUSING PROGRAMME:**

Ms. Lynda McGavigan circulated a Housing Programme Update Report. The main points are as follows:-

* **Programme of Works to Void Units** - 2016 Allocation

€ 312,600 - 35 no units completed for this programme.

* **Energy Retrofit Works** – Phase I works completed, awaiting allocation and conditions associated with Phase II works. 2016 allocation for phase 1 works €732,700.
* **2016 Programme for DPGs and Extensions to Council Houses**

Allocation for 2016 : Total = €330,789 Exchequer funding = €297,711 Own Resources = €33,079. All works complete.

* **Private Housing Adaption Grants** -  LA Funding Allocation for 2016

Total = €1,357,960

Exchequer funding = €1,086,368

Own resources = €271,000

Allocation fully utilised - 177 grants paid

* **Voluntary Housing Capital Assistance Scheme 2016**

Approval for 11 units at Castlemanor received €566,500

* **Construction Programme**

Consultants (Michael Fitzpatrick Architects Ltd, Butlersbridge) appointed. Stage 3 Approval has been received from the department and will be going to tender on etenders for construction of 4 No units in Butlersbridge by mid February. Proposed site start April.

Consultants (MH Associates, Letterkenny) appointed to prepare tender documents for construction of 8 No units in Woodlands, Ballyhaise. Preparing detailed drawings and documentation at present to submit to Department for Approval. Subject to their approval of Stage 3 we will to go to tender in mid March. Proposed site start by end of May.

Consultants (DMC Architects Ltd, Cavan Town) appointed to prepare documents for construction of 8 No units in Rosehill, Mullagh. Preparing detailed drawings and documentation at present to submit to Department.

**Activity Report 2016**

Waiting List: 944

Total Stock 2033

Vacant Property 88 (4.3%)

**Statistics 2016**

Offered 101

Appointed 93

Refusals 16

Vacated 62

**Reasons Vacated 2016**

Abandoned 5

Deaths 10

House Surrendered 26

Other 2

Purchased Outright 4

Transfer 15

62

**Homelessness**

**2013** 22 presentations (28 people in total)

**2014** 60 presentations (115 people in total)

**2015** 90 Presentations (172 people in total)

**2016** 105 Presentations (131 Adults + 109 children = 240 people in total)

A discussion took place on the Housing Programme during which the following points were raised:

* Delays in allocation of housing units at Castlemanor by Tuath Housing Association. Lynda McGavigan gave a commitment to keep pressure on Tuath.
* Reasons for refusal of housing offer.
* Reasons for vacating houses.
* Number of abandoned houses – Housing Liaison Officer role v housing appointed wardens on estate (perhaps paid by reduction in rent).
* Homelessness – sharp rise in presentations, hidden homeless figures, role of housing / social worker and challenge to housing department dealing with same, availability of emergency accommodation.

1. **REPAIR & LEASE AND BUY & RENEW SCHEMES**

Ms. Lynda McGavigan outlined the details of the Repair & Lease and Buy and Renew Schemes which Minister Simon Coveney announced under Pillar 2 “Accelerate Social Housing” of Rebuilding Ireland An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness.

Both schemes are planned to be rolled out in Cavan County Council during 2017.

**Repair & Lease Scheme - RLS**

* **Objective**

Bring vacant, privately owned residential properties back into productive use by addressing property owners inability to access financial resources to bring property up to private rental standard; accelerate the supply of social housing; and fit together with the other actions and powers required of / available to LAs in relation to vacant properties

* **Target**

Minister has committed €140m towards the cost of the scheme to 2021; 3,500 units targeted. 150 units profiled in 2017 with provision of €6m (capital). Involves both capital and current costs.

* **Key players**

LA, AHBs, Housing Agency, Department, private property owners, contractors

* **Basics**

LA will determine the eligibility of a property for the scheme having regard to the location and the suitability of the property for social housing and also taking into consideration the extent of the repairs that may be required. Not all properties offered will be suitable.

The maximum costs of repairs allowable under this initiative will be €40,000

Based on a longterm lease model provided under SHCEP. Minimum lease allowable is presently 10 years. Will consider shorter term arrangements later depending on uptake and feedback from LAs after Yr 1.

Management and maintenance of the units will be the responsibility of the LA or AHB

A property owner can either choose to arrange a contractor to carry out the repairs themselves, or the LA or AHB can arrange this instead

As with existing arrangements under SHCEP, LAs will pay over lease/ P&A payments etc. Department will recoup

* **What’s in it for the property owner?**

There are real benefits of this scheme to a property owner. These include:

* up-front financing for the cost of repairs - in fact, the property owners need not even get involved with arranging the contractor or works for repairs, if they wish not to;
* guaranteed rent for the length of the lease term, with no need for advertising etc;
* avoidance of loss of rent during vacant periods; and no day-to-day responsibilities for managing the tenancy or collecting rent - property owners will have no landlord responsibilities as this will be dealt with by the LA or AHBs.
* **Pilot**

Waterford and Carlow local authorities operational since first week in October

Issues examined during the pilot include:

* Average costs of repairs and draft schedule categories and costing
* Assessing standards of property
* Funding of works and who carries out the works- LA/ property Owner/ AHB
* Framework of protection where LA/AHB carry out repairs
* Furniture- properties required to be furnished- who pays?
* Recoupment Process- How and when are the LA/AHB recouped for capital costs
* Suite of Legal documents required- Agreement to lease (before works); Lease Agreement (after works); Homeowners Agreement and Licence; modified P&A.
* Role of the Housing Agency

**Buy & Renew Scheme**

This is a new funding scheme to support Councils and approved housing bodies (AHBs) to purchase and renew housing units in need of remediation, and make them available for social housing use.

It provides a real potential for Councils to buy houses and suitable premises in cities/towns where there is a need for social housing, to remediate them and make them available to those on the waiting list.  Similarly, approved housing bodies may have an interest in this, particularly where they are seeking town centre locations for specific housing needs.

While recognising these challenges, there is also great opportunity in this initiative.  It can be part of the response that Councils make in tackling dereliction and improving streetscapes in urban areas/towns.

This ‘Buy and Renewal Initiative’ will also be complementary to the new ‘Repair & Leasing Initiative’. It will mean that Councils and AHBs can approach owners of vacant, privately-owned houses in need of repair/remediation, with the option to either lease/repair the housing unit, or to buy and repair/remediate the unit.

Lynda McGavigan explained that Louth County Council are already providing a good example of this work in acquiring premises in Dundalk and Drogheda that are in need of repair/remediation and making them available for social housing.

The Minister will make an initial €25 million available for this initiative in 2017 and proposes to increase this to as much as €50 million in 2018.

1. **PRESENTATION ON HOUSING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT (HAP)**

Ms Lynda McGavigan gave an in-depth presentation on Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) which is a form of social housing support which replaces rent supplement for those with a long term housing need.

HAP has been rolled out nationally and commenced in Cavan County Council on 1st December 2016.

**Objectives**

* Provide a more integrated social housing service with local authorities being responsible for all households with an established housing need
* VFM for the Exchequer and facilitates greater regulation of the private rented sector through inspections and tax compliance for landlords
* More consistency in the application of social housing policies in relation to needs, allocations, rents and tenure, anti-social behaviour & paths to home ownership

**Who is eligible for HAP**

* Any household that qualifies for social housing support
* Current Rent Supplement recipients who qualify for social housing support

**How does HAP work – there are 4 main stakeholders involved:**

* the recipient
  + Finds suitable accommodation in private rental market – within the rent limits
  + Completes HAP application Form
  + Signs Rent Contribution Agreement
  + Pays weekly differential rent to housing authority through An Post or bank standing order
  + Adheres to tenant obligations under RTA 2004
* the landlord/agent
  + Provides bank details for rent payment by housing authority
  + Provides proof of ownership
  + Provides tax registration details & evidence of tax compliance
  + Permits access for property inspection
  + Adheres to landlord obligations under RTA 2004
* the Housing Authority
  + Confirms household qualification for social housing support and HAP
  + Provides HAP information pack to applicant &
  + validates HAP application form
  + Confirms HAP eligibility for rent and property
  + Signs rent contribution agreement & verifies rent deduction through An Post or bank standing order
  + Arranges and completes property inspection
* the HAP Shared Services Centre
* Confirms rent contribution and deduction method (to recipient)
* Confirms HAP eligibility for rent and property (to landlord)
* Activates rent contribution and landlord payment transfers
* Maintains & monitors obligations of tenancy, including arrears
* Verifies landlord tax compliance

**Will HAP recipients be able to access other housing supports?**

* Under HAP, a household’s housing need will be deemed to be met and they will be removed from the housing list
* HAP households are offered a choice to go on transfer list when they are approved for HAP
* No less favourable terms than if they had remained on the housing waiting list
* Must apply for a transfer within 2 weeks of entering HAP

**Terms & Conditions**

**Tenant**

* Must source suitable property within HAP rent caps
* Must pay differential rent to the local authority
* Must remain in the property for a minimum period of 2 years
* Must not engage in anti-social behaviour

**Landlord**

* Registration of tenancy with the RTB
* Property must comply with the standards for rental accommodation. Under HAP the local authority is obliged to inspect properties within 8 months of the first payment to the landlord
* Landlord must be tax compliant. Requirement to submit tax clearance certificate within a period of 5 months of the first payment or before payments to the landlord exceed €10,000 in 12 month period, whichever is sooner

**Tenant – Landlord Relationship**

* **Tenancy is between the Landlord and the Tenant.** The local authority has no role in managing the tenancy
* Tenancy covered by the Residential Tenancies Act 2004. Security of tenure the same as private sector tenancies
* No contractual relationship between the local authority and the landlord

**HAP Payments**

* HAP payments are made directly to the landlord by the local authority on a monthly basis in arrears
* Under HAP **the tenant is responsible for the payment of any deposit.** Currently, DSP may consider applications for exceptional needs payments to assist with deposits
* HAP payments may be suspended or ceased if:
  + - Property is substandard
    - Landlord is not tax compliant
    - Tenant fails to pay differential rent
    - Tenant engages in anti-social behaviour

**What are the benefits of HAP?**

**For the recipient:**

* Recipient can take up full-time employment while still receiving HAP
* Recipient pays a rent contribution based on the differential rent scheme for their housing authority – based on household income & ability to pay
* HAP will help regulate the private rental sector & improve standards of accommodation
* Recipient will be able to avail of other social housing supports and options, if they so choose

**For the landlord/agent:**

* Landlord will receive prompt payments directly from the Housing Authority on a monthly basis in arrears, subject to the recipient paying the Housing Authority their rent contribution
* No need for rent collection from recipients
* All payments are made electronically
* Additional tax reliefs are available for landlords who rent their properties to recipients in receipt of rent supplement or social housing support such as HAP

**For the Housing Authority:**

* Housing Authority will become a one-stop shop for all social housing supports
* rent & arrears will be collected by the HAP Shared Services Centre
* availability of existing social housing stock will not be impacted
* no property maintenance costs will be incurred

**HAP – where are we now?**

* Total HAP tenancies created – 20,074 at 13th February 2017
* 11 HAP tenancies created by Cavan County Council at 13th February 2017

Cllr. Madeline Argue thanked Ms Lynda McGavigan for her informative presentation.

Ms. Lynda McGavigan advised that two members of housing staff had been assigned to and trained on HAP systems. These staff members met each new HAP applicant and over the coming months will being processing into HAP those on long term rent allowance.

A discussion took place in relation to HAP in particular rising rents throughout the county. Cllr. Shane P O’Reilly stated that while income limits for housing and bands for HAP were set for the county he was concerned regarding high rents currently being charged through the commuter belts within the county. Mr Joe McLoughlin, Director of Service, stated that the Housing Agency is constantly reviewing these limits and bands

1. **A.O.B.**
2. Cllr Madeline Argue raised the issue of SPC membership and enquired if any response had been received to the invitation to nominate a replacement member. Ms. Lynda McGavigan advised that no formal reply had been received.
3. Cllr Clifford Kelly advised that housing loans and an increase to net income limits had been discussed at the December Council Meeting.
4. Mr Larry McCluskey encouraged those present to make time to visit The Seamus Heaney Centre in Bellaghy, Co Derry.
5. **DATE AND VENUE FOR NEXT MEETING:**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on 18th May, 2017 at 2.30pm.

**Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Chairperson**