

**MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON  
18<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2024 IN THE COUNTY HOUSE, LIFFORD**

C/4/24

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Cllrs M Harley, Cathaoirleach, T Conaghan, G. Crawford, P Mc Gowan, J O' Donnell, and J S O' Fearraigh.

*Online:* Cllrs L Blaney, K. Bradley, C Brogan, P Canning, D Coyle, N. Crossan, T. Crossan, A. Doherty, G Doherty, L. Doherty, R Donaghey, N Jordan, J. Kavanagh, D M Kelly, N. Kennedy, M.C Mac Giolla Easbuig, M. McBride, M Mc Clafferty, M. Mc Dermott, P Mc Garvey, J Mc Guinness, M Mc Mahon, G McMonagle, A Molloy, J Murray, M Naughton, and B Sweeny.

C/5/24

**OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE**

John Mc Laughlin, Chief Executive, Patsy Lafferty, Director of Housing, Corporate and Cultural Services, Meetings Administrator, Michael Mc Garvey, Director Water & Environment, Liam Ward, Director Community Development & Planning Services, Eamon Brown, Divisional Manager, Housing & Corporate, John Gallagher, Senior Engineer, Gillian Dempsey, Senior Executive Engineer, Donal Walker, Senior Engineer, Donna Mc Groarty, Area Manager, Housing Capital, Claire Burke, Senior Executive Architect, Housing Capital, Jim Boner, Senior Executive Engineer, Housing Capital, Daniel Mc Crystal, Economic Development, Seán O' Daimhin, Rannóg na Gaeilge, Róise Ní Laifeartaigh, Rannóg na Gaeilge, Frances Friel, Communications Officer, Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer.

C/6/24

**HOUSING ISSUES**

The Cathaoirleach thanked members for their attendance at the meeting on the 17<sup>th</sup> of November and acknowledged the many tributes that had been paid to the late Cllr Noreen Mc Garvey.

Mr Patsy Lafferty, Director Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services noted that this was the third Special Meeting dedicated solely to housing issues. The focus today, he said, was on land acquisition, the Letterkenny Flagship Projects and a general update on social housing delivery. There would, he advised, be a focus on specific projects that had been flagged at the November meeting and detail provided in relation to those expected to go on site in 2024.

Introducing the presentation, he confirmed, that additional updates would be provided to the Letterkenny/Milford members in relation to the Letterkenny flagship projects over the coming months.

Mr John Gallagher, Senior Engineer provided an update on the delivery of the Social Housing Programme and the progress since the last meeting on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2023. An overview of the upcoming deliverables was also provided.

Mr Jim Boner, Senior Executive Engineer, advised members of the current position in relation to land acquisition and

Ms Gillian Dempsey, Senior Executive Engineer outlined the progress to date in relation to the Letterkenny Flagship Projects, i.e., sites at Ballymacool and High Road, Letterkenny, which were earmarked for social housing development.

Concluding Mr John Gallagher, Senior Engineer advised of the key progress updates as of January 2024. Members were informed of the following:

- That 344 social housing units were either completed or under construction throughout the county.
- 391 units are due to start on site in 2024.
- 83% of the Departments target of 879 will be completed or on-site by the end of 2024.
- New turnkey process underway and information events to commence in February 2024.
- 3 existing turnkey projects to commence on site by end March 2024.
- 3 in-house design projects (74 units at tender stage).
- 2 in-house design projects (18 units) to be presented for approval at the January 2024 Plenary Council Meeting.
- 7 offers to acquire further lands accepted.
- Tenders for Architect Led Design Team for Ballymacool lands to be advertised this week.

A lengthy discussion took place during which members acknowledged that there was a general improvement in the overall situation across all Municipal Districts. It was noted that the model in place from 2016 until 2023 had not worked and that the renewed focus on all aspects of housing had paid dividends. Members welcomed the fact that public information events would take place across the county and advised that this was a key element in terms of housing delivery. It was noted that a number of large projects were in the pipeline and that continued effort was required to ensure that specific targets were met. There was an appreciation also of the efforts made to increase land acquisition in the Letterkenny area.

There was general agreement that a continuous effort needed to be made to meet the targets and time frames outlined in the various presentations.

Reference was also made to the fact that there were issues with planning in rural Ireland and with settlement frameworks in particular where the familial tie aspect needed to be relaxed.

The following issues were raised:

- Zoning issues need to be addressed. Specific problem in Letterkenny where footpaths, roadways, water, and sewerage

facilities are in place, yet planning regulations are preventing additional homes being built.

- Challenges exist for those who do not qualify for social housing and are unable to source accommodation in a private capacity.
- Affordable serviced sites must be provided.
- Water and sewerage constraints need to be resolved and a review of the connection costs.
- Level of support provided must be equitable on a county-wide basis and not concentrated specifically in Letterkenny.
- Concern in relation to the fact that the development at Oran Hill in Letterkenny had not been well handled and that there had been a disconnect in terms of the input from Uisce Éireann.
- Council previously able to handle housing developments without outside intervention. Need to cut out red tape.
- Procurement process needs to be reviewed.
- Genuine engagement needed with builders and developers.
- S.I. process should be enhanced given that the template is already in place to move forward with this cost-effective model of housing provision. Specific need in South Donegal.
- Public information events must be well advertised on Highland Radio and other key social media outlets.
- Housing provision in the Milford EA is non-existent as development is being concentrated in Letterkenny. Issues also in South Donegal with insufficient provision in Kilcar, Carrick and Glencolmcille, Dunkineely and Killybegs.
- Housing units must be provided in smaller towns to revitalise towns such as Mountcharles, Inver, Laghey, Pettigo, Carrick and Kilcar.
- Rural areas are not being accommodated in terms of housing provision and this is contributing to the overall decline of rural communities.
- Families being forced to live in towns thus impacting negatively on smaller towns, villages, and rural areas.
- Pressure must be put on Uisce Éireann to ensure that water/sewerage infrastructure is in place and upgraded before building commences in Ballymacool.
- Housing provision for those with a disability must be considered at the Ballymacool and High Road sites in Letterkenny.
- Reservoir at Rahan, Letterkenny is too small and capacity issues need to be addressed.
- Issues with the provision of utilities in Ballyshannon. Cognisance must be taken of the type of development required, the needs of the area and the fact that it has developed as a service town.

- Affordable housing and serviced sites needed in Ballyshannon. Similar scenario for other towns in the county.
- Independent living accommodation initiatives should be promoted together with fold type developments/ retirement village options.
- Statistics provided do not reflect the numbers living in overcrowded conditions or with family and friends.
- Need for collaboration with Uisce Éireann in terms of forward planning and to ensure that their plans meet the Council's needs.
- Concern that Uisce Éireann are preventing developers paying into wastewater treatment systems.
- Purpose built homeless type accommodation should be prioritised.
- Focus needed in relation to housing in Raphoe.
- Analysis needed in relation to the bottlenecks in the process and who is ultimately responsible for reviewing same.
- People need to be housed in their own areas so that communities are maintained and strengthened.
- Access issues on the N56 need to be resolved.
- Land acquisition process must be speeded up in the Glenties MD.
- Lack of sewerage and water infrastructure in Dunfanaghy, an issue, together with electricity and broadband deficiencies.
- Every effort must be made to get projects over the line using the Section 179A process.
- Consideration should be given to utilising designated green areas in estates for additional development as these are often not maintained.
- Number of vacant sites in Manorcunningham should be looked at.
- Croi Cónaithe/Vacant sites must be progressed if housing delivery is to accelerate.
- Land acquisition not moving at a sufficient pace in South Donegal.
- Public need to be made familiar with the various stages and the processes to be accessed in terms of acquiring social housing.
- Concern that an anomaly exists whereby people who have received eviction notices are moving quicker on the housing waiting list.
- Contracts for turnkey developments should be signed at the outset and not a late stage in the process.
- Need to lessen the dependency on the Approved Housing Bodies with the Council building more houses.
- Going forward new estates need to facilitate the development of play parks, shared living spaces, and accommodation to enhance independent living and Special Needs families.
- Gaeltacht areas must be supported and provided with adequate housing provision.

Members raised the following queries:

- What level of co-operation exists between the Council and Uisce Éireann?
- How important is footpath connectivity and is this holding up development?
- Updated report requested in relation to commencements and completions for the years 2020-2021, 2021 – 2022, and 2022 – 2023.
- How many of the above were provided by direct acquisition, the Approved Housing Bodies or through the Part V process?
- Has there been any progress in terms of developing serviced sites in each MD given that this initiative is endorsed by the Department? Collaboration with the private sector required.
- Update requested in respect of the proposed 17 turnkey units proposed for Milford.
- What is the status of the site on the Main Street in Ballyshannon?
- Are there sufficient builders and developers in the county to meet the anticipated targets?
- How many four and five bedroomed houses are factored into the Ballymacool development?
- Has any provision been made for Homeless type development/hostel etc?
- Updates requested in relation to the situation in Falcarragh, Gweedore, Annagry, and Dunfanaghy.
- How many houses have been bought in the Glenties MD in the last four years?
- How many landlords have been in contact since the ads went out seeking land availability?
- Where are the two accepted land acquisitions in the Inishowen MD?
- Query as to the intent of the Approved Housing Bodies in contributing to housing supply in the Inishowen MD.
- What capacity has Uisce Éireann to deliver for housing in Carndonagh?
- What reserves do we have to assist those families who fall into homelessness and what collaboration exists with the HSE and the Approved Housing Bodies?
- What is the situation in relation to the land in Fintown?
- Has there been any further progress in relation to the Fire Station at Glenties?
- Update requested in relation to several sites in Ardara.
- What is happening regarding Shannon House in Ardara where the Council owns specific lands? Identified the need for social housing at this location.

- What advances have been made in terms of providing emergency accommodation?
- Are we actively looking at providing modular housing as a solution to the housing crisis?
- What has been done to date to enhance and augment the Council's own land bank?
- Can the Council actively promote notices in relation to the availability of vacant houses in the Milford, Rathmullan areas?
- Why can't private developers be given permission to build housing units in Dungloe?

Mr Patsy Lafferty, Director Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services alluded to the fact that a number of pertinent issues had been raised in respect of housing issues countywide and that a number of these would be dealt with in the February and March meetings where there would be room for more detailed discussion. These, he advised, would include affordable housing, S.I.s, homelessness and emergency accommodation together with the acquisition process. He confirmed that a written response would be provided in terms of specific locations, turnkey projects etc as soon as possible prior to the next meeting.

It was acknowledged that the process the local authority had to go through as a public body to develop and provide housing was significant and had been highlighted in the presentation with regard to a number of flagship projects. This process, it was noted, was similar for all housing projects and part and parcel of the delivery process.

He alluded to the fact that there were 391 starts scheduled to come to fruition this year but that cognisance had to be taken of the fact that there was a lead in time to get on site.

It was noted that there was ongoing engagement with Uisce Eireann in relation to capacity requirements.

The Director of Services noted that there were still challenges in terms of getting staff, and that there had been a low number of applications in response to a recent advertisement for technical staff. There was now, he confirmed, relative stability in terms of the staffing complement and that Design and Build options were being used as a mechanism going forward.

Ongoing engagement with the HSE in terms of independent living projects. Noted this had been an element of the Trusk Road site in Ballybofey and that there were plans to look at similar projects in other locations.

Indications are that the capacity in terms of local builders has increased over the past year or two with an increased number tendering for

projects locally. Cost stabilisation over the last number of months has also helped in this regard.

Concluding, he said that a number of specific questions raised regarding stated locations, turnkey projects etc would be responded to in the questions and answers document and through the MD workshop process.

Mr John Gallagher, Senior Engineer, acknowledged members' comments and the good work and commitment from the team.

He advised of the following:

S.I.s and rural housing would be looked at further in the upcoming workshop.

That the Serviced Site initiative was being looked at on a cross-directorate basis and that members would be updated in relation to this work.

Disability Steering Group involved and engaging with the HSE in terms of housing need, the needs of the elderly and the independent living aspect all filtering into the overall housing need.

Noted that there were a lot of constraints and challenges in delivering housing and that there was a responsibility to work within the remit of the public spending code, and that much of this is statutory and mandatory, thus feeding into the overall delivery process for housing.

Housing Section has a requirement to meet the obligations set out by the funding body, which is the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage. Many processes and constraints to be worked through to avail of this funding.

Availability of infrastructure important in terms of progressing schemes and in advancing land acquisition in the short term.

Flood risk, footpath connectivity, disposal of surface water from sites are all issues that have to be addressed in the short term. Can be looked at through the workshop process at MD level.

Noted that there was interest in the Turnkey projects in Carndonagh and Milford and that submissions had been sent to the Department for funding with offers now made in relation to both.

Modular Housing – Noted these rapid delivery options may be fabricated off site but were still subject to current building regulations. These options being looked at under the design and build mechanism.

The Cathaoirleach confirmed that responses in relation to specific items would be circulated to members in writing after the meeting. Concluding the meeting, he thanked members for their engagement and the housing team for their input. It was intended, he said, to deal with affordable housing and the Homeless Action Plan at the meeting on the 21<sup>st</sup> of February and with S.I.s and housing acquisition at the meeting on the 27<sup>th</sup> of March.

This concluded the business of the meeting.