

**COMHAIRLE CHONTAE DHUN NA nGALL**

Oifig Riathóir na gCruinnithe  
Aras an Chontae  
Leifear  
10 Meán Fómhair, 2024

**FOGRA CRUINNITHE**

A Chara,

Beidh Cruinniú Speisialta den Comhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall ar siúl Dé Luain 16 Meán Fómhair, 2024 ag **11.00rn. in Áras an Chontae, Leifear.** Ta Clár an chruinnithe leis seo. Seolfar nasc leictreonach chuig an chruinniú i gcomhfhreagras eile.

Mise, le meas



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**Pádraig Ó Laifearthaigh**  
**Riathóir Cruinnithe**

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**DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL**

Office of Meetings Administrator  
County House  
Lifford.  
10<sup>th</sup> September, 2024

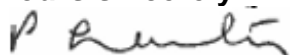
**TO EACH MEMBER OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL**

**NOTICE OF MEETING**

**Dear Councillor,**

A Special Meeting of Donegal County Council will be held on Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September, 2024 at 11.00am in the County House, Lifford. The agenda for the meeting is attached. An online link to join the meeting will issue separately.

**Yours sincerely**



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**Patsy Lafferty**  
**Meetings Administrator**

## **AGENDA**

1. *Schemes and Options available to support Home Ownership.*
  - a) *Current Purchase & Rental Market.*
  - b) *Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme.*
  - c) *First Home Scheme.*
  - d) *Help to Buy Scheme.*
  - e) *Cost Rental Scheme.*
  - f) *Vacant Property Renovation Grant Scheme.*
  - g) *Ready to Build Scheme – Service sites for New Homes.*
  - h) *Local Authority Home Loans & new Local Authority Purchase & Renovation Loan.*

**MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN  
THE COUNTY HOUSE, LIFFORD ON THE 16<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2024**

C/285/24     **MEMBERS PRESENT**

Cllrs N Kennedy, Cathaoirleach, J Beard, F Bradley, D Coyle, T Crossan, A Doherty, A Farren, M Farren, D M Kelly, M Mc Clafferty, D Mc Gee, P Mc Gowan, M Mc Mahon, G Mc Monagle, M Naughton, D Nic Mheanman, J S O' Fearraigh, and M Scanlon.

*Online:* Cllrs L Blaney, C Brogan, J Brogan, P Canning, B Carr, T Devine, M Harley, N Jordan, J. Kavanagh, M.C Mac Giolla Easbuig, P Mc Garvey, D Meehan, A Molloy, and J Murray.

C/286/24     **OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE**

John Mc Laughlin, Chief Executive, Patsy Lafferty, Director of Housing, Corporate and Cultural Services, Meetings Administrator, Garry Martin, Director Economic Development, Information Systems and Emergency Services, John Gallagher, Senior Engineer, Housing Capital, Eamonn Brown, Divisional Manager, Housing & Corporate, Claire Burke, Senior Executive Architect, Patricia Mc Intyre, Town Regeneration Officer, Liam Mc Carron, Senior Staff Officer, Housing & Corporate, Thomas Melly, Senior Staff Officer, Housing & Corporate, Róise Ní Laifearthaigh, Rannóg na Gaeilge, Dónall Mac Giolla Choill, Tacaíocht do Sheirbhísí Aistriúcháin, Frances Friel, Communications Officer, William Colvin, Assistant Communications Officer, Anne Marie Crawford, Staff Officer, Corporate Services.

C/287/24     **SCHEMES AND OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO ASSIST HOME OWNERSHIP**

Mr Patsy Lafferty, Director Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services informed members that the key objective of the presentation was to provide a broad overview of the housing initiatives available to those who generally would not qualify for social housing support. The significant increase in housing prices and rents, he noted, had made home ownership and rental much more difficult with many young families priced out of the private market.

Members received a presentation in relation to the range of housing options and the various schemes available. Mr Eamonn Brown, Divisional Manager, Housing & Corporate outlined the various options available and gave an overview of current house prices for both the purchase and rental market. He alluded to the fact that the median price of a newly built home in County Donegal in the period September 2023 to March 2024 was €316, 707. Rental prices, he advised had seen a 59% increase over a three-year period and rental costs had risen from €744 in 2021 to €1,185 in 2024. This, he said, was compounded by the fact that Donegal had the lowest median annual earnings in the country.

Mr Liam Mc Carron, Senior, Staff Officer, updated members in relation to the “Local Authority Affordable Purchase Scheme”. It was noted that the Affordable Housing Survey 2024 had ran online from 21<sup>st</sup> February 2024 to the 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2024 to assess the potential level of demand for such a scheme.

It was acknowledged that a total of 270 submissions had been received with 19 appearing to be eligible and financially viable. There was recognition also of the fact that Departmental guidance had stipulated that developments under this scheme should be of ten units or greater. Thus, it was noted that Letterkenny with a potential scheme of 6 houses was possibly the only viable location in the county at present. Mr Mc Carron advised that there had been initial discussions with the Department and that the initial focus would most likely be on Letterkenny subject to identifying the required resources to advance the scheme.

Members were briefed also in relation to the “Local Authority Home Loan” and the “Local Authority Purchase and Renovation Loan”.

Mr Eamonn Brown, Divisional Manager, Housing & Corporate provided an update in relation to the “First Home Scheme”, the “Help to Buy Scheme” and the “Cost Rental Scheme” together with the “Ready to Build Scheme” and the “Serviced Sites for New Homes” initiative. He confirmed that a high-level assessment was currently ongoing with regard to a number of potential sites across the county under the “Ready to Build Scheme”. Recommendations on same would be advised be tabled for discussion at MD level early in 2025.

Ms Patricia Mc Intyre, Town Regeneration Officer, said that the Croí Cónaithe , Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant Scheme represented an affordable option for home ownership with 885 applications received to date. 524 of these, she noted, had been approved with 46 paid to totalling €2.52m in value. An overview of the “Vacant Property Renovation Grant Scheme” was provided, and a number of case studies highlighted.

Mr Eamonn Brown, Divisional Manager, Housing & Corporate concluding the presentation referenced the fact that house prices and rental costs had significantly increased over the last 2 to 3 years yet income levels in the county were comparatively low. He said that there were a number of schemes available to assist potential homeowners, but that suitability for same depended on individual circumstances and location.

Attention was drawn to the fact that there was considerable demand in the county for the “Local Authority Affordable Housing Scheme” but that the terms of the scheme were such that the numbers eligible in Donegal would be nominal. Alluding to the positive impact of the “Vacant Property Renovation Grant Scheme”, he confirmed that this was the most affordable way at present to get on the property ladder in Donegal.

Mr Patsy Lafferty, Director Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services said that the presentation had been most informative and had provided an excellent assessment of the options available to home owners..

Mr John Gallagher, Senior Engineer gave an update in relation to progress on a number of Housing Capital projects for the period 23rd July 2024 – 16th September 2024.

The meeting was then opened to the floor with members raising the following issues:

- Rural housing must be prioritised, and more detail provided in relation to the S.I. process. People are being forced into towns where Uisce Éireann are not able to provide the associated infrastructural capacity and support.
- Developer related issues with regard to Part Vs require immediate action.
- HAP payment is not sufficient given the low-income levels in Donegal.
- Need to keep the momentum going in relation to serviced sites.
- Ongoing issues arising from the fact that a significant portion of the Council's housing stock is affected by defective concrete.
- Concern expressed that the flagship projects identified in Letterkenny may not come to fruition because of ongoing infrastructural deficits in the waste and water systems. Specific reference made to the Oldtown site in Ballymacool and the fact that this should only proceed when all the infrastructural elements are in place and a proper plan implemented.
- Noted that Uisce Éireann did not appear to have an infrastructural plan for the upgrading of water and sewerage systems in the county and that this had major implications for Letterkenny in particular. Problems identified in estates such as Gort na Greine/ Glentain.
- Uisce Éireann need to step up in relation to the Sewerage Scheme in Falcarragh which at present is hampering development.
- Connection fees for water and sewerage services are far too high and are hindering rural development.
- Access to the N56 also a hindrance to development.
- Withdrawal of homeless vouchers in certain circumstances is causing a problem.
- Short term housing options need to be explored as a matter of urgency.
- Housing acquisition must be progressed in Letterkenny.
- Lending institutions must be on board so that there is access to funding for those who want to purchase or rent their home.
- Update requested in respect of the Local Authority Purchase & Restoration Loan Scheme.
- Further engagement needed in relation to the Turnkey development in Carndonagh (Cloondara)
- Affordable Housing Survey data indicates that there are problems with eligibility. This has implications for towns such as Buncrana and Carndonagh. Income levels a major issue and a scheme needed that suits rural Donegal.
- Request that queries by tenants seeking to buy out their own council home or S.I. house be addressed, and the relevant replies provided.
- Suggested that special meetings at MD level would be more beneficial in addressing issues locally.
- Lack of housing provision in the Glenties MD a major problem.

- Concern that certain people are profiting from the Croí Cónaithe Scheme.
- Noted that there are still a vast number of vacant houses not showing in the Croí Cónaithe applications and that cashflow is an issue for potential applicants.
- Need to look at providing S.I Housing for those with specific needs. Lack of provision an issue at present.
- Government policy needs to be challenged as current housing policy is failing and many of the schemes referenced are not applicable to Donegal.
- Donegal County Council must step up and deal with the lack of social housing and the DCB crisis.
- Provision of Modular Homes is the only quick fix solution at present. Could be provided in each Municipal District.
- Housing rental market is in crisis and more and more families are going to be impacted as people will be unable to pay the current market prices.
- Affordable Housing model is wrong and there needs to be an emphasis on building private houses in the countryside.
- Highlighted the fact that the extension of the Lough Mourne Reservoir to include the Letterkenny MD should be prioritised and funding sought to develop same thus facilitating housing delivery.
- Housing need in the Milford Electoral Area is not being addressed and there is a lack of urgency in the overall delivery of same.
- Additional information needed on S.I.s and Part V applications and an assessment of all available options. Additional funding needed.
- Additional Roadshows needed to encourage public engagement and make public aware of the range of schemes available.
- Need to explore further opportunities in terms of derelict properties in our towns and villages. CPO process must be used to deal with vacant properties and to send out a strong message that dereliction is being tackled county-wide. Important that people are encouraged to report vacant houses. Donegal County Council should look at buying such properties.
- Some concern that those selling properties are incurring additional expenditure in terms of testing for mica.
- Opportunities in terms of the Urban Regeneration Development Fund need to be pursued.
- More engagement needed with contractors regarding the various delivery options.
- Significant problems with eviction notices and suggestion made that Donegal County Council should be in a position to buy these properties when they come up for sale.
- Cognisance should be taken of all available properties on the market including Apartment Blocks.
- General welcome for the fact that there is to be further engagement with the lending institutions.
- Time should be set aside at the beginning of each Special Housing Meeting to facilitate presentations from the Approved

Housing Bodies, the Banks, Credit Unions and the Construction Industry together with other appropriate bodies.

- Noted that after the next round of allocations there will be only five houses available in the Donegal MD, yet there are over 400 families on the waiting list.
- Encouragement should be given to older people living in isolated areas to move to urban areas thus freeing up accommodation in the country-side.

Queries raised:

- What plans are in place for the remediation of defective concrete block affected social housing? Specific query re houses in Carndonagh.
- Have sites been identified in North Inishowen for the disposal of DCB waste and rubble?
- Has there been any engagement or involvement with the Approved Housing Bodies in relation to the Cloondara development in Carndonagh?
- What long term plan do Uisce Éireann have for the Gweedore area?
- Update requested in respect of Ard Scoil Mhuire Gweedore .
- Are there any proposals to develop sheltered housing accommodation? Noted the success of the Habinteg development in Lifford.
- What certainty is there that the concrete blocks used at present and the material from the quarries is fit for purpose? Are the relevant checks being carried out and is a certificate issued?

Mr Patsy Lafferty, Director Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services said that the purpose of the meeting was to make people aware of the range of schemes available how they could help them attain home ownership. Some he noted , had been, very successful and others less so. He said that the Vacant Home Grant Scheme had been well received in Donegal and that the new Renovation Loan option would complement this initiative. He said that there would be continued engagement with the Department in relation to all applicable options.

Significant progress, he added, had been made to date in terms of Social Housing delivery and every effort would be made to continue with same. It was acknowledged that there was frustration in relation to the various infrastructural deficits but that the intention was to continue engaging with Uisce Éireann.

Members were informed that several submissions had been made to the Department in relation to the DCB Scheme for Social Housing and that an update would be issued after the next scheduled meeting with the Department in early October. He said that Donegal County Council whilst not experts had introduced a higher specification for concrete so that the issues previously encountered would not happen again. This, it was acknowledged, would be used until a new national standard was issued.

He confirmed that the Housing & Regeneration team intended to roll out a number of roadshows in the various Public Service Centres and that new members would be provided with an overview of the S.I. process.

This concluded the business of the meeting.