

MINUTES OF HOUSING, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE MEETING
12th March 2020 – 10am – MTEK 1 Building – Council Chamber

PRESENT:	Cllr. Pat Treanor (Chair)	John Murray
	Cllr. Colm Carthy	Nuala Wood
	Cllr. Mary Kerr Conlon	Drew Hurley
	Noeline O'Neill	Somhairle MacConghail
	Candice Moen	Liam Bradley
	Tom Freeman	Catherine Elliott
	Teresa Carolan	Shirley Clerkin
	Eimear McCarthy	Sandra McQuaid
		Pauline Maguire (Scribe)

- **Minutes of Previous Meeting – 23/01/2020**
To be amended – Shirley Clerkin (Heritage Officer) to reflect her contribution to meeting which was omitted.
Proposed: Tom Freeman **Seconded:** Teresa Carolan

- **HOUSING**
 - **Housing Acquisition Policy** – Nuala Woods, Senior Executive Officer Housing, informed meeting of the purchase of 30 Housing Units in 2019 and thanked the Councillors for bringing some of these “For Sale” units to the attention of the Council. This year, 2020, funding was very limited and would result in the purchase of only 1 or 2 units – Average cost of 3Bed is approx. €150,000. She further advised that the national housing fund for 2020 is €15million – this is to be targeted at Traveller Specific Accommodation only or Exceptional Needs – CAS (Capital Assistance Scheme) for people with Disabilities and/or Elderly. Cllr. Colm Carthy commended the work but would have preference for Councils to build houses – not just a benefit for the Council Waiting List but also economically for the Construction Industry. Cllr. Pat Treanor asked if Council identified RAS/HAP units where tenants were already in situ and pursue the purchase of these properties.
Teresa Carolan/Tom Freeman agreed this would assist families to stay in the area of their choice with schools, Drs etc already in place.
Nuala Woods confirmed that this is actively pursued by the Council. However, it should be noted that funding from the Department for acquisitions is generally specified for VACANT properties but MCC has received funding for tenanted properties where there is an exceptional need identified.
 - **Social Housing Refusals of Offers** – Pauline Maguire, Staff Officer Housing, informed meeting that in 2019 there were 259 Offers of Local Authority Housing of which 64 were Refused (approx. 25%). There were instances of properties being offered to more than 3 applicants before an Acceptance was received.
 - **Latlorcan** – 40 Newly constructed Units - over 50 applicants offered before all 40 units accepted.
 - **Bree** – 8 Newly constructed units – over 15 applicants offered before all 8 units accepted.
 - **RESPOND Housing** – 50 New units provided by this AHB required over 65 nominations as there were a number of refusals from the initial 50 nominations forwarded to **RESPOND**.

- **RESPOND Housing** – 3 CAS Units long-term vacant. In 2019, 7 Nominations forwarded to the AHB – all refused. Further nominations submitted and awaiting results from **RESPOND**.

MCC review Refusals and categorise them as either Reasonable (ie medical, family, work) or Unreasonable. Examples of Unreasonable Refusals returned by applicants are:-

- Garden Not Big Enough
- No Ensuite Bathroom
- Living Room Not Big Enough
- Electricity Pole at Front of property – too close

In relation to the AHB properties offered, the refusals are often related to the fact that the applicant cannot buy the house at a later date. John Murray, Head of Finance/Housing stated that the volume of Tenant Purchase Applications received annually does not substantiate this reason for refusal.

Nuala Woods, Senior Executive Officer Housing noted the Choice Based Lettings may be looked at to try to reduce the level of refusals as it would then be the applicants CHOICE to decide if they are interested in the property BEFORE an offer would be officially issued. However, this method has been used by other Councils who are now considering opting out of this scheme. It does not provide for good estate management, does not take into account the real family need and it removes local Councillor knowledge. Drew Hurley, Senior Executive Housing also added that as it is an IT system it may exclude a number of applicants who may not have access to or knowledge of IT.

- **Pilot Scheme for Boiler Servicing** – Drew Hurley, Senior Executive Housing, outlined that the servicing of the boiler is the responsibility of each tenant. The Pilot Scheme rolled out in the Clones/Ballybay area had been taken up by over 50 households. The cost to MCC is €104 per household and this is being charged to the tenant by way of an additional €2.00 per week added to their rent.
- **Management of Pre-Pay Meters** – Drew Hurley presented a proposal to deal with some of the difficulties experienced in relation to Pre-Pay Meters. It is proposed that all tenants in new properties where Heat Pump systems are in place will NOT be allowed to install Pre-Pay meters as the systems require a continuous supply and will malfunction if there is a break in supply. It is also proposed that tenants in properties where standard heating systems are in place will require written permission from MCC if they wish to install Pre-Pay meters. The Utility Suppliers have all been written to and advised that they cannot install Pre-Pay meters in any Council property unless written permission has been received. He further informed the meeting that a survey on price comparisons in relation to Pre-Pay versus Bill-Pay indicates that the Pre-Pay meter will cost the customer in the region of €300.00 per annum MORE than Bill-Pay. It has been the experience of MCC that on termination of a tenancy where Pre-Pay is installed, the Utility suppliers have been exceptionally difficult in deactivating the meter and this has resulted in additional costs to MCC and delays in re-letting properties.

Proposed: Agreement to Proposal – Cllr. Colm Carthy **Seconded:** by Teresa Carolan

- **MUSEUM**

Liam Bradley, Curator, outlined and distributed the Events Guide 2020 and asked for the continued assistance from all parties in the promotion and advertising of the Museum Exhibitions which have been a great success – ie War of Independence Events. Committee applauded the great work undertaken.

- **LIBRARY**

Catherine Elliot, Senior Executive Librarian, introduced and distributed the Draft Policy on Meeting Room / Exhibition Space Booking. Committee acknowledged and commended the activities and services provided.

- **HERITAGE**

Shirley Clerkin, Heritage Officer informed and distributed the Draft County Monaghan Heritage and Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025. Committee acknowledged and appreciated the work undertaken.

- **ARTS**

Somhairle MacConghail advised that the Arts Grant had not yet been allocated – due in April. He will present further information at next meeting.

- **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Cllr. Mary Kerr Conlon asked about events/groups for children and young people in her area.

- Shirley Clerkin advised regarding the Heritage/Schools Programme – visiting local sites of interest.
- Somhairle MacConghail advised regarding CMETB and Cavan County Council – Music Generation Programme with Schools and Patrick Kavanagh Centre.
- Cllr. Colm Carthy agreed these programmes are very good but targeted mainly to school children – up to 17/18 years. Suggested Youth Café/Club at full capacity and required increase support for young people outside the school age – late teens. Lack of activities can lead to anti-social behaviour and gatherings.

John Murray, Head of Finance/Housing advised meeting that the current COVID19 situation was continually under review and may result in shut-down of public offices. There is an Emergency Plan in place for such a situation to ensure services can be provided. Meetings such as this may be cancelled but alternative (though technology -Microsoft Teams., ZOOM, etc).

- Cllr. Colm Carthy commended the work of the County Council on the Emergency Plan.

Candice Moen asked if any plans for future development of Eco Villages and Community Housing programmes were being considered.

- Teresa Carolan advised of the visit some time ago by a contingency from the SPC Group to see the OPD Great Northern project in Dundalk.
- Candice Moen agreed to submit information on Eco-Villages/Community Housing Projects for next meeting.

- **Next Meeting**

Due to COVID19 uncertainty the next meeting is *provisionally* booked for 12th June 2020, at 10.00am – Council Chamber, MTEK.

