

HOUSING, CULTURAL AND SOCIAL STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF MEETING

12th October 2020 via TEAMS - 10.30am

Attendance: Cllr P Treanor (Chair) John Murray
Cllr A McCooley Nuala Woods
Cllr A Campbell Drew Hurley
Cllr C Carthy Catherine Elliott
Teresa Carolan Shirley Clerkin
Candice Moen Somhairle MacConghail
Noeline O'Neill Pauline Maguire (Scribe)
Tom Freeman

Apologies: Liam Bradley

1. Welcome

Chair Cllr P. Treanor welcomed everyone to what is our first "Virtual" meeting and thanked everyone for their co-operation. This meeting is convened following postponement of June scheduled meeting, due to COVID19 crisis. He expressed condolences to all members who had recently been bereaved and sympathy in relation to added grief caused by the pandemic restrictions in place at this time.

2. Change to Agenda Order

Committee agreed to the change of Item order on Agenda – Item 5 (Heritage) moved to Item 3 to allow Heritage Officer presentation.

3. Heritage

Heritage Officer, Shirley Clerkin presented her document "County Monaghan Biodiversity and Heritage Strategic Plan 2020 – 2025". Committee thanked Officer for in-depth interesting report and will now recommend submission to full Council meeting in November for Adoption. Tom Freeman suggested inclusion of Holy Well site in Magheraclone for funding and development. He also suggested that farmers be grant aided to leave part of their land for natural flora/fauna/bird habitat.

Proposed: Tom Freeman

Seconded: Cllr Aidan Campbell

4. Minutes of Previous Meeting – 12th March 2020

Minutes adopted without amendment.

Proposed: Teresa Carolan

Seconded: Tom Freeman

Matters Arising

• Housing Acquisitions

Chair Cllr P. Treanor asked in relation to whether Housing could look at a policy whereby individuals in privately owned 3bed+ houses, looking to downsize, could be accommodated in smaller council properties, thereby allowing Council take over the larger unit. Nuala Woods stated that this would be a difficulty as was against current Housing Policy as property owners do not qualify for social housing. John Murray further advised that the significant demand within County Monaghan is for the smaller 1-2 bed units, therefore acquiring 3+bed units would have little effect on the current Waiting List.

• Boiler Service – Pilot Scheme

Chair Cllr. P. Treanor commended Council on this initiative, requesting update. Nuala Woods confirmed that the scheme, rolled out in Clones/Ballybay MD, had received 120 applications. Regrettably, due to COVID19 restrictions, whereby only Emergency Repairs are being dealt with, it

was necessary to review the applications and prioritise 50 properties for the scheme, which is being carried out by one of the Council's own Craftworkers.

5. Housing

(a) Nuala Woods outlined the current Housing Programme of Works as follows:-

- There has been a big increase in the Housing Stock figure over the past 4 years – currently at 1866.
- The Waiting List stands at 1167.
- Over the past 6 years, Monaghan County Council has allocated 830 houses, which is the largest delivery in our history. However, Waiting List remains fairly static.
- Of the 1167 households on the List, 54% of them are being provided with Social Housing Supports through HAP (Housing Assistance Payment Scheme) or RAS (Rental Accommodation Scheme).
- The timeline for over 80% of households applying for and being allocated social housing is within 5 years – based on national figures, this is a very favourable outcome.
- 2020 - €1m expenditure on Planned/Response Maintenance
- 30 Units completed under Energy Efficiency Works
- No current long-term voids
- Department approved acquisition of 1 house at beginning of 2020 – now approved a further 10 before year end.
- €1.25m allocated by Department for Private Housing Grants
- MCC own resources of 20% allows further funding up to €1.5m total
- Applications received amounting to over €3m
- MCC applied to Department for additional funding and this was increased up to €2m
- Of funding approved, €175K of works not progressing – currently re-allocating this funding.
- January 2021 – will have approx. €1m funding approved and pending allocation in 2021.

Cllr A. Campbell acknowledged and complimented the significant work of the Housing section which has continued during the difficult pandemic period. An exceptional number of newly acquired/built properties were developed putting MCC ahead of many other local authorities in this regard. Cllr C. Carthy enquired if new applications for Private Housing Grants were being reviewed for re-allocation of unspent funding. Nuala Woods confirmed this review had been undertaken and priority was given to applications where a Medical Urgency was highlighted. Teresa Carolan advised that applicants approved for funding were experiencing difficulties in getting contractors to complete the works, especially given the current restrictions. Nuala Woods acknowledged this but stated that funds needed to be spent in 2020 and MCC were re-allocating to priority applicants where works would be completed as a matter of urgency. If funding is NOT spent within the Year, it is withdrawn by Department and cannot be carried into next year. John Murray advised that significant applications are pre-approved for 2021 and it is likely that the 2021 allocation from the Department will be fully committed by March / April.

(b) Drew Hurley presented a full report on the ongoing Capital Projects

Chair Cllr P. Treanor acknowledged this work and stated that MCC were being cited as examples by other outside organisations for their pro-active approach.

The Clones Renewal Scheme was an exceptional example by providing additional social housing in the area and addressing dereliction problems.

Discussion took place in relation to the increasingly complex nature of applicants and tenants and the need to address additional needs of tenants, persons with disabilities, persons with mental health issues. In certain instances these are matters that require a multi-disciplinary approach.

In addition, Nuala Woods outlined that in Mullaghmatt in an attempt to address specific anti-social behaviour issues there are monthly meeting with the garda to specifically identify and address problems that arise and coordinate action in relation to tenants who are causing problems in that area

Cllr C. Carthy said he was very proud of the MCC Executive and Housing Section. He expressed concern at demand for 1/2 bed units and suggested more focus on providing such units.

What land could MCC use and/or acquire for this provision? He noted the specific sheltered accommodation provided in Dundalk (the Haven) and asked if similar could be considered by MCC. Nuala Woods stated that consideration is currently being explored at a site in Castleblayney – it is at a very early research stage with mock drawings. Drew Hurley stated future developments will focus on the 1-2 bed units. He also confirmed that recent Newspaper advertisements had issued seeking expressions of interest from land/property developers where planning permission was already approved on site.

6. Alternative Living / Eco Villages – Presentation by Candice Moen

Candice Moen gave an in-depth presentation on various examples and benefits of developing alternative living modules, Eco Villages, Co-Housing projects and LILAC (Low Impact Living – Affordable Communities)

Chair Cllr P. Treanor commended this initiative and research and agreed that housing should not be looked at as a commodity but rather as a need, incorporating economy/climate.

Drew Hurley referred to the cooperative model of O’Cualain and advised that this model required significant LA support in that the LA involved sold the sites at €1000, and waived Development Levies in respect of the overall development.

Cllr A. McCooley acknowledged the presentation and agreed that this was most beneficial alternative as there was too much emphasis on city style living resulting in not enough green space and issues of mental health problem.

7. Library

Catherine Elliott presented her report on the Policy of delivery of Library Services during CoVID19.

Cllrs. P. Treanor, C. Carthy and A. Campbell commended all Library staff on their initiative and development of on-line courses and facilities to ensure continued and improving services for all customers and confirmed the importance of promoting and advertising this most valued community service.

8. Any Other Business

John Murray advised that, in order to keep meetings to a reasonable timeline, the next meeting could feature items from Museum and Arts sections.

Chair Cllr P. Treanor requested the committee to look at the function of the SPC as a Policy Group and to submit ideas for any policy development, review or amendment relevant to the services provided.

9. Date of Next Meeting

To be advised

