Housing & Community SPC
Minutes of Meeting 7th September, 2022

In the Chair: Cllr Joe Sullivan

Present: Cllr Jim Codd, Cllr John O'Rourke, Cllr Fionntán O'Suilleabháin, Mr Michael Wall, Mr Brian Galvin Acting Director of Service, Ms Anita McLoughlin, A/SEO Housing, Ms Caroline Creane SSO Housing, Ms Helen Meehan SSO Housing, Mr William Considine, Ms Rosaleen Lally, Irish Wheelchair Association, Mr Tom Fox Executive Engineer Housing, Ms Carolyne Godkin Director of Service, Mr Niall McCabe AO Credit Control, Ms Elaine Warren ASO Credit Control

Apologies: Cllr Lisa McDonald

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes

The minutes of the SPC meeting dated 2nd February 2022 were approved on the proposal of Cllr John O'Rourke and seconded by Mr Michael Wall. It was noted that there were no matters arising.

Customer Self Service Portal

The Credit Control AO gave a Powerpoint presentation to the members outlining the new Customer Self Service Portal. The meeting was informed that an Irish owned company based in Dublin XRS were successful in the tender for the provision of a debt management system. The benefits to Wexford County Council include efficiency and improved collection percentages and lowering the costs eg Billpay. The benefits to the customer include flexible payment plans, easy to use system and the option for recurring debit card payments. The system will go live to the customer on 27th September 2022.

The Credit Control ASO gave a demonstration of the system, showing the members how easy it is to set up an account, make a payment and check balances outstanding. A short discussion took place about the new system and the members were assured that this does not replace any other payment method. The system has been tested by some housing tenants and the feedback was very positive.

Correspondence

Motion 1 – "*I ask that this council review its policy regarding mutual transfers to make the process easier and quicker for tenants. Many requests for works are often made as a prerequisite for a transfer taking place. In the case of mutual transfers, these should be relaxed to facilitate the transfer, provided that both applicants are happy with the current condition of the properties and that there are no safety issues outstanding. "*

The above motion was forwarded to the SPC in January 2022 after being discussed at the Council meeting, it was agreed to invite Cllr Tom Forde to the SPC to discuss same. It was referred to the February and May meeting for discussion however, as Cllr Forde couldn't attend it was not discussed. As Cllr Forde did not respond to the meeting invite, the Chairman agreed to discuss this motion anyway.

A lengthy discussion took place about mutual transfers, it was noted that all properties must be up to a reasonable standard prior to any transfers or re-letting. The meeting was informed that Housing Dept have received only one complaint in 3 years. WCC does have a policy in relation to

mutual transfers. The motion was approved for recommendation to the full council by Cllr John O'Rourke and seconded by Cllr Jim Codd.

Motion 2 – *"That this Council, in consultation with the various Countywide initiatives and relevant community organisations, social and health services investigate the feasibility of a dedicated full time phone line Countywide for people who are in a vulnerable physical and mental condition to contact when in a time of adversity."*

The Director informed the meeting that there is a lot of agencies already providing services already eg Alone, Age Action, Hospice etc and she agreed to do some initial scoping and will come back to the November SPC meeting with a report on same.

Croí Cónaithe

The Vacant Homes Officer (VHO) gave a Powerpoint presentation to the meeting outlining the Croí Cónaithe (Towns) fund. The fund aims to tackle property vacancy and dereliction and will provide new choices for people to live in towns and villages. There is a fund of €50 million available to Local Authorities for this scheme. It was noted that a maximum grant of €30,000 is available for refurbishment of a vacant property and an additional top up grant of €20,000 is available if the property is derelict.

The fund is focused on home ownership with a view to the property being their principal residence. The VHO has received a number of queries and has received 4 applications so far. A lengthy discussion took place about the scheme, and it was noted that the successful applicants must reside in the property for a period of 10 years, if they sell within 5 years of receiving the grant, they will be liable to pay back 100% of the amount paid.

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)

The Housing AO gave a Powerpoint presentation to the meeting on the HAP scheme and in particular the discretionary payments. The meeting was informed that on 11th July 2022 the discretionary limits for HAP were increased to 35%. A lengthy discussion took place about HAP and the lack of rental properties in County Wexford at present. The AO informed the meeting that all tenancies pre 11th July are currently being reviewed by staff in the HAP unit, and any existing tenant can contact the HAP unit and submit a change of circumstance form and the staff will carry out a review.

Adverse Weather Protocol

The Homeless Co-ordinator outlined the Adverse Weather Protocol to the members. She informed the meeting that it normally comes into effect when we have cold weather however, measures were put in place during the recent hot weather also. A lengthy discussion took place about homeless people and what happens outside WCC opening hours. The Homeless Co-ordinator informed the meeting that people should ring Ozanam House in the first instance.

A query arose about having a dedicated phone line, however since Depaul Ireland took over the running of Ozanam House no one has ever been turned away. It was noted that there are 2 permanent crash beds available and 2 more can be provided if there is a need. Anyone who presents to Depaul at the weekend are assessed by the Social Care staff when WCC opens.

Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024

The Housing A/SEO gave a Powerpoint presentation to the meeting on the mid-term review of the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024. She informed the meeting that the TAP was adopted by Wexford County Council on 8th July 2019 and a target of 100 housing units (20 per year) would be proved over the lifetime of the programme. A circular was issued by the Minister of Housing, Local Government & Heritage on 6th July 2022 directing Local Authorities to carry out a mid-term review of the programme.

It was noted that 53 traveller families have been housed since July 2019 and a further 10 are in private rented receiving Housing Assistance Payment (HAP). A further 28 offers of accommodation have been refused by Traveller families in that period. Following an assessment of current need as part of the mid-term revies it was noted that 73 traveller families have applied to WCC for housing, the figure includes 47 from the existing programme and 26 new families. As the mid-term review has indicated that we are on target, it is not envisaged to amend the targets.

A discussion took place about the mid-term review, and it was noted that this is an executive function and does not need to be approved by the SPC as the targets are not being amended. The families at Park were briefly discussed and the biggest challenge is to get agreement with the relevant parties on a housing solution. The members were informed that the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) will meet more regularly going forward on a 3-monthly basis.

Any other business

- **Wexford Arts & Culture Plans 2023-2027** – Public consultations are ongoing on the Wexford Arts & Culture Plans 2023-2027 and details have been circulated to the members for information.

- **Disability Strategy** – The Housing SSO informed the meeting that the Housing & Disability Steering Group meets quarterly, and with recent Dept changes, they must now report on their targets to the SPC. A target of 20% of allocations has been set to be offered to persons with a disability is included in the Wexford strategy and it was noted that in Q1 2022 15% of allocations were offered to persons with a disability. At the next SPC meeting, Q3 stats will be reported on.

- **Attendance** – The Chairman expressed his disappointment on the lack of attendance from his elected member colleagues. It was noted that only one sent apologies for the meeting.

Next Meeting

The next SPC meeting is Wednesday, 2nd November 2022.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Chairman

Dated: _____