

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of Housing SPC Meeting held on Thursday, 20th February 2025 in the Council Chamber, Galway County Council at 11.00 a.m.

I Láthair:-

Baill: Cllr. Michael Maher (Chairperson)
Cllr. Eileen Mannion
Cllr. Shaun Cunniffe
Cllr. Gerry Finnerty
Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. Declan Kelly
Ms. Helen Jennings
Mr. Rachel Stewart
Mr. AJ Dean
Mr. Seamus Duffy

Oifigigh: Mr. Michael Owens, Director of Services
Mr. Gerard Scully, Senior Executive Officer
Ms. Karen O'Donnell, Senior Executive Officer
Mr. Kieran Keon Senior Social Worker, Housing
Mr. John Waters, Administrative Officer, Housing
Mr. Brendan Kelly, Assistant Staff Officer, Housing

Leithscéal Cllr. Peter Keaveney

1. Minutes of the meeting of the 12th of December 2024

Matters arising from the Minutes:

Cllr. Mannion enquired if the legal advice had been received from the Council's Law Agent regarding the introduction of restrictions on the disposal/sale of council owned properties by way Section 183 Disposal. Mr. Owens confirmed that Housing has not yet received the requested legal advice from the Law Agents regarding the introduction of restrictions on the sale of council owned derelict properties that are beyond economic repair or are no longer required for a social housing need. He stated that a report on the topic of Section 183 Disposal will be on the agenda for the May SPC meeting. Mr Owens reiterated his commitment not to bring forward any new Section 183 properties for disposal pending a policy review by the Housing SPC and Plenary Council.

The Chair, Cllr. Maher asked Mr. Owens for an update on the CPO Activation Program. Mr. Owens confirmed that the Vacant Homes Survey identified approximately 800 vacant properties in the county, and he stated that the Vacant Homes team is actively engaged in returning these properties to full use by way of the Vacant Properties Refurbishment Grant (including the Derelict top-up grant) and the Repair and Leasing Scheme. If a property owner is not in a position or willing to return these vacant properties to full use, then a Local Authority will then consider the CPO Activation processes. He stated that the first tranche of vacant properties for activation by CPO are currently being considered and he expected that these CPOs would be published in Q2 of this year. He said that he expected that a second tranche of CPO properties would be identified in April 2025. Mr. Owens confirmed that an update on the CPO Activation Programme will be included on the agenda for the May SPC meeting.

The minutes of the Housing SPC meeting held on the 12th of December were proposed by Cllr. Eileen Mannion, seconded by Cllr. Shaun Cunniffe and agreed.

2. Safe Home Ireland – Presentation by Karen McHugh

Mr. Owens provided the members with an introduction to the background for today's presentation by Ms. McHugh, whereby he reminded the members of the below Notice of Motion from Cllr. Dr. Evelyn Parsons that went before both the Housing SPC and Plenary Council meetings that occurred in April 2024.

Notice of Motion for April 2024 Plenary

Motion on provision of social housing support for returning Irish emigrants

I propose that where need has been identified and a qualifying applicant has been approved by Safe Home Ireland, that Galway County Council will allocate one age-friendly property per year (in each of the Council's electoral areas) to a returning Irish emigrant and that a copy of this motion is distributed to the other local authorities. The proposed applicant must have their housing needs assessed by the Local Authority and be approved for inclusion on the social housing waiting list.

Background Information - About Safe Home Ireland

Safe Home Ireland (Safe Home) is a not-for profit national registered charity. The organisation was set up in 2000 to facilitate the desire for older Irish born emigrants abroad to return home. After much advocacy and publicity at that time, Safe Home succeeded in highlighting their circumstances and this recognition was reflected in the granting of the Amendment to the Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) in November 2001 (see below). The Amendment gave qualifying Irish born emigrants a realistic chance of realising their dream of returning home to Ireland by allowing them to be considered for housing in Ireland. This recognition continues to this day, primarily facilitated by Local Authorities and Housing Associations throughout the

country. Over the years, Safe Home has evolved from simply facilitating a housing option for older Irish born emigrants. It now provides a targeted range of services to Irish emigrants abroad, regardless of age or circumstances, who desire to return home, as well as supporting those who have recently made the journey back home.

Cllr Dr Evelyn Parsons

Mr. Owens outlined that should the motion be accepted by the SPC members, then this would require amending the current Housing Allocation Scheme by Plenary Council to allow for its implementation. He concluded by joining with the Chairperson to welcome and thank Ms. McHugh for presenting at today's SPC meeting.

Ms. Karen McHugh thanked the Chair and committee members for inviting her to make her presentation to the committee and she also thanked the members for considering Cllr. Parson's motion. She informed the members that Safe Home Ireland has presenting the motion to other Local Authorities and two councils have already adopted the motion. Ms. McHugh stated that the proposal would affect a small number of individuals who had left the country and who now wish to return and seek to access social housing supports.

The following areas were discussed in Ms. McHugh's presentation.

- **Safe Home Ireland**
 - Founded in 2000, provides key services to anyone considering moving or returning to Ireland, with a particular remit assisting older Irish born citizens to access social housing while still living abroad.
 - Admin base in Mulranny, Co Mayo, with offices in Galway and Carlow.
 - Our **vision** is that any Irish person living abroad who wishes to live in Ireland can do so with dignity and respect.
 - Our **mission** is to support Irish people abroad, particularly those who are in crisis and challenging circumstances, to transition and settle in community life in Ireland.
- **Our Four Pillars**
 - Information and Advocacy
 - Housing assistance
 - Advocacy & Outreach
 - Connect
- **Safe Home Qualifying Criteria (for housing)**
 - Irish born emigrants living abroad
 - Aged 57 years and over
 - Capable of Independent living
 - Living in rented accommodation abroad and unable to provide accommodation for themselves (from their own income/savings) on return to Ireland
- **The Process**

- Contact our office to discuss referral OR ask person/family member to contact our office. We will check eligibility criteria and commence process as follows:
- check if person has PPSN; if not we will process this
- we will then send our Housing Application and once fully completed
- we will then send Galway Co Co Social Housing application and we will submit with all supporting documentation
- once person approved on Housing list the Council can then make an offer directly via own stock or via AHB
- If person returns home and we then assist with all matters of resettlement/reintegration into the community again.
- If a person has returned home '**independently**' and requires support, we can offer 'outreach support'
- **Our Impact**
 - S.H.I has directly helped 2,238 older Irish born people return
 - **328** Active Housing Application across all 26 Counties.
 - Housing Applications – Galway Co Co – **13** fully approved and **2** waiting for more info
- **Contact Details**
 - **Address** Safe Home Ireland, St. Brenan's Village, Murlranny, Co. Mayo
 - **Tel:** + 353 98 36036 (**office**); + 353 86 059 4538 (**mobile – WhatsApp/texts**)
 - **Email** info@safehomeireland.com
 - **Website** www.safehomeireland.com
 - **Facebook** <https://www.facebook.com/safehomeprogramme>
 - **Twitter** <https://twitter.com/Safehomeireland>
 - **Instagram** <https://www.instagram.com/safehomeireland/>
 - **Newsletter/** <https://safehomeireland.com/newsletter-2/>

The Chair thanked Ms. McHugh for her detailed presentation, and he invited the members for their comments and comments.

- Cllr. Eileen Mannion welcomed the presentation, and she said that the work carried out by Safe Homes Ireland would allow people to make an informed decision about returning to Ireland. She enquired if many returnees decide to leave Ireland again due to the difficulties they faced when they returned to Ireland.
- Cllr. Shaun Cunniffe thanked Ms. McHugh for her presentation, and he said that he identified greatly with the motion as he had also emigrated from Ireland in 1980s and returned in the late 1990's. He stated that many of the people that left Ireland, had to leave and they struggled and fell upon hard times abroad due to Ireland not being able to support its population. He stated that Ireland owed these people a great debt as they had no other choice but to leave Ireland. Cllr. Cunniffe said that

the proposal was very important and that he would be highly supportive of it. He asked M. McHugh to expand or explain the 328 Active Housing Applications referenced in her presentation.

- In Response, Ms. McHugh confirmed that the 328 Active Housing Applications represent the current live list of Housing Support Applicants across Ireland. She stated that Safe Home Ireland has directly supported 2,238 older Irish persons to return home, and that this is an average of 2 clients per week seeking advice since the service commenced in 2000. Ms. McHugh clarified that they are not looking for people to jump the Housing Waiting List (hereafter HWL), whereby she stated that some of their clients were first approved for Social Housing Supports in 2011 and 2014. She confirmed that it would be these approved long term HWL applicants that Safe Home Ireland is seeking an LA Housing allocation in the form of Age Friendly Accommodation). Ms. McHugh stressed that these persons represented a very small number of current approved HWL applicants.
- Cllr. Declan Kelly expressed his support for the proposal as it is based on the principle of social justice.
- Cllr. Mannion sought an explanation for why this Notice of Motion was being put before local authorities across Ireland.
- In Response to Cllr. Mannion. Ms. McHugh confirmed that her organisation believed that it was important that the Irish Diaspora was recognised at a county level. She stated that previously, Safe Home Ireland could make a direct referral to an Approved Housing Body (Hereafter AHB) for an allocation in a particular area of choice. However, she pointed out that AHB's must now submit their nominations to each Local Authority, and that in many cases the returning applicant did not feature high enough on the HWL to get an allocation. She stated that the historic 20% discretionary allocations from AHB's were not always possible or feasible given the small numbers of applicants involved.
- The Chair explained that this topic was being discussed due to Cllr. Dr Evelyn Parsons Motion to Motion that was submitted to the SPC for consideration/approval to submit the motion to the Plenary Meeting.
- Mr. Owens explained that if an AHB applied for 100% Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) funding for applicants with a specific housing need, (i.e. elderly or homeless, disability etc.) then all of the housing units built must be allocated directly to approved HWL applicants. If a AHB applies for 80% funding from the Department of Housing and provides 20% from its own financial resources, then they can allocate a portion of the properties directly without seeking a HWL nomination from the LA. He stated that AHB's typically apply for 100% CAS funding. Thus, when an older person dwelling is being allocated, GCC's Housing Department would only look at applicants

who were 60 plus with the longest person waiting to be housed being offered the nomination. Should Cllr. Parson's motion be adopted, Mr. Owens reminded the members that Galway County Council's current Housing Scheme of Allocation would require an amendment, as the motion requires GCC to allocate one age friendly property per year in each of the councils seven electoral areas to a returning Irish immigrant. He explained that the amendment would grant Housing the discretionary authority to reserve one property each year within each electoral area for a Safe Home Ireland housing applicant that was shorter period of time on the HWL than a person who is longer on the list but who is not a safe home Ireland applicant. Should the committee decide to support the motion, Mr. Owens confirmed that he would present a proposed amended Housing Scheme of Allocation before the May or September meetings of the Housing SPC.

- In response to a follow up query from Cllr. Mannion regarding the prevalence of older person dwellings within the county, Mr. Owens confirmed that older specific properties are located widely across the county, and these units are allocated in the first instance to persons who are over 60 years. If there are no applicants over 60, then the allocation would revert down to the next oldest applicant starting at 59, but it would never drop below 55 years old.
- In response to Cllr. Cunniffe who sought clarity on what was being asked of the SPC members in terms of the motion, Mr. Owens stated that the Notice to Motion was before the SPC for consideration and that the members would have to confirm if they wanted to proceed with the proposed amendment to the Housing Allocation Scheme which would allow the reserving of one property per year in each Electoral Area to be allocated to a HWL applicant under the Safe Home Ireland Initiative. If the members were not agreeable to proceed with the motion, he stated that Safe Home Ireland Applicants would continue to be supported under the existing provisions of the current Housing Allocation Scheme, and their duration on the HWL would be the primary determining factor for their allocation.
- In response to the Chair, Mr. Owens confirmed that it was the prerogative of the members present to defer a decision on the proposed motion until the May sitting of the Housing SPC, should they wish to consult further with their elected colleagues who do not sit on the SPC Committee. He reminded those present that any amendment to the Housing Scheme of allocation would require approval by Plenary Council.
- Regarding the 13 Safe Home Ireland clients currently on GCC's Housing Waiting List, Mr. Kieran Keon (Senior Social Worker, Housing) stated that Mr. Ger Scully (SEO Housing Applications/Allocations) could be consulted to find out the expected timeline for their short listing/allocation of a council unit. He stated that given the small number of applicants involved, he questioned if it was truly necessary to amend the Scheme of Allocation.

- Mr. Seamus Duffy, reiterated Mr. Keon's comments, whereby he said the numbers involved appeared to be about 2 per annum and that this would in theory, allow for a quick decision regarding any allocation of a council property.
- Cllr. Cunniffe stated that the proposed amendment would most likely help two or three extremely needy individuals, and he reaffirmed his support for Cllr. Parson's motion.
- Cllr. Declan Kelly said that he agreed with Cllr. Cunniffe and he stated that it would behold the Government to implement and accelerate the supply of social housing units across the country. He expressed again his support for the motion.
- Mr. Owens stated that there were currently 587 HWL applicants that were 60+ years old and that this figure is comprised of both County and City applicants with an area of choice within the county. The removal of the City applicants left a total of 522 County applicants. In reply to Cllr. Cunniffe, Mr. Owens confirmed that 195 applicants were currently receiving the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).
- In response to Ms. Hellen Jennings, Mr. Owens confirmed that the above figures were based on the applicants stated Area of Choice. A breakdown of these figures revealed that there were **65** households/applicants in Tuam and a further **128** in Loughrea that were 60 years and older.
- Ms. Karen McHugh stated that certain areas of the county such as Clifden were well catered for with Older Person Specific Housing. However, this was not the case elsewhere in the county and she outlined that there was at least one Safe Home Ireland applicant in each area of choice within Galway County. She stated that there 3 individual Safe Home Ireland clients in both Tuam and Spiddal and 2 in Loughrea etc.
- In Response to Cllr. Mannion, Mr. Owens confirmed again that a Safe Home Ireland applicant would be prioritised for an allocation over a local person who was 60 years old and over, should the motion be adopted by the Plenary Council. For this reason, the Chair stated that he believed that further discussions were needed with non-committee Elected Members. He stated that the two Safe Home Ireland applicants in Loughrea would jump the current 128 HWL applicants that are in line for an allocation, and he suggested that the motion be discussed again at the May SPC.
- Ms. Karen McHugh thanked the members for inviting her to present at the Housing SPC and she expressed her disappointment that the motion was deferred until the May meeting. She stated that Safe Home Ireland is not asking for their clients to skip the HWL and she reiterated the small number of returnees/applicants that are

currently on Galway County Councils Housing Waiting List. She confirmed her availability to provide any further information that is required prior to the May meeting.

Actions:

- Should the members wish to defer a decision on the motion, Mr. Owens stated that he would bring a report to the May Housing SPC meeting that would detail the current number of households/applicants that are 60 years and older on the HWL (by Area of Choice). The report would also provide the members with a full breakdown of the existing housing units that are currently reserved for older persons that are 60 years plus. He stated that it would also detail the current HWL position of the 13 Safe Home Ireland Housing Support applicants. He stressed that this information would be anonymous, but it would help to identify if there are other HWL applicants that are closer in line for an allocation than each of the Safe Home Ireland applicants.
- In response to concerns raised by Cllr. Kelly, Mr. Owens confirmed that he would also bring forward a draft amendment of the Housing Allocation Scheme to the May meeting for consideration, should the Safe Home Ireland motion be approved to proceed to the monthly Plenary meeting. The committee agreed to defer a decision on Cllr. Parson's Safe Home Ireland Motion until the May Meeting of the Housing SPC.

3. Draft West Region Homelessness Action Plan 2025-2027

Mr. Michael Owens gave a presentation to the committee regarding the Draft West Region Homeless Action Plan. He outlined that the Plan has already been approved by Galway City Council and it will be included on the Agenda of the February Plenary. Prior to today's meeting, a PDF copy of the Plan was circulated to both the SPC members and the 39 elected members on Galway County Council. Mr. Owens detailed the background and context for the Plan, detailing current trends, the key objectives of the Plan and the Mission, Vision and Values underpinning the Plan.

The Chair thanked Mr. Owens for his very detailed breakdown of the **West Region Homeless Action Plan 2025-2027**, and he invited the members present and online for their comments and queries on the Plan.

In response to queries raised by members Mr. Owens and Ms. Deirdre O'Connor (Tenancy Sustainment Officer) advised as follows:

- In response to Cllr. Kelly, Mr. Owens stated that the December 2024 Homeless figures were presented to the February meeting of the Galway Housing Taskforce and there were 55 homeless adults and 15 families with 36 dependants. By way of context, Mr. Owens said that at the end of 2024, there were 14,864 individuals in emergency accommodation nationally, this figure represented a year-on-year increase of 11.6%. Of these, there were 2,092 families in emergency accommodation and that this represented a year-on-year increase of 9.2% increase on the previous 2023 December figure. Mr. Owens stated that the level of data for the prevention of homelessness is not as detailed as that for the numbers currently residing in emergency accommodation, however, he detailed that 922 adults exited emergency accommodation in Q4 2024 by way of a new tenancy and 1,652 were prevented from entering Homeless services. The latter represented an increase of 23.9% increase to the number of persons exiting Homeless Services and a 10.9% increase on the number of preventions to that of the 2023 Q4 figures.
- Ms. Deirdre O' Connor informed the committee that there are currently 16 families on the Private Emergency Accommodation list (or PEA). She outlined that the Council was finding it difficult to find emergency accommodation for larger families and that there are currently 2 families on the waiting PEA list. Ms. O'Connor informed the members that all six of the council's beds in the Fairgreen Hostel were occupied, and 3 Osterley Lodge beds were currently occupied, with 2 beds being reserved for the Cold Weather Response (CWR) and persons with a complex need. Of the 5 CWR beds available, 4 are currently in use. She outlined that several of the families in Homeless Accommodation are currently suspended from the HWL, and there is one family that has refused to open a housing application. Ms. O'Connor concluded by saying that both individuals and families often have complex needs that continue to be a challenge for the service and where possible the Homeless Service will refer to the Homeless Action Plan and Housing First to meet the individual needs of their clients.
- In response to comments from Cllr. McClearn and Cllr. Mannion, Ms. O'Connor confirmed that the six Fairgreen beds were for use by single men and that there were 3 full time beds for females in Osterley Lodge, with 2 more beds reserved for the cold weather response (i.e. rough sleepers). She stated that Homeless Services are working with these clients to meet their short and long-term housing needs.
- In response to a query from Cllr. Mannion, Mr. Owens said that the minimum standards apply to all private rental properties and is not limited to HAP, RAS or Rent Supplement. Mr. Owens informed Cllr. Mannion that he is not aware of any grant funding available to landlords whose property receives an improvement notice to bring the property to the required standard.
- Cllr. McClearn, stated that it was appropriate that rental property's be inspected to ensure that they meet a minimum standard, however he stated that he was aware of properties in good condition that were inspected within the last 3 years and that they have being recently inspected again, and yet there are Housing Grants applications that are still waiting to be inspected for

final sign-off by the Inspectorate Unit. Given that the Inspectorate was tasked with inspecting both Private Rental and approving final sign-off on Housing Grant applications, he questioned what the priority was.

- In response, Mr. Owens acknowledged Cllr. McClearn's point, and he stated that the Inspectorate's workload had increased significantly over the past two years which was largely due to a 75% increase in Housing Grant Applications, and he confirmed that the Inspectorate's current staffing level did not reflect this increase in workload. The Department of Housing has set the Private Rental inspections target for 2025 as 1,179. He stated that Housing Grant Inspections were prioritised in 2024, and consequently the Council was unable to meet the target of Rental Inspections for 2024. Mr. Owens said that it was his department's intention to recruit more staff to clear the backlog of inspections of rental properties and Housing Grant applications. He outlined that individual properties are inspected on foot of information received from the RTB and when a complaint is received by the Inspectorate. He explained that all new HAP tenancies require that the property be inspected within the past 12 months, and this may explain why some properties are inspected within the 3-year period referenced by Cllr. McClearn.
- Mr. Owens explained that the Homeless Action Plan was circulated to all the Elected Members, and two responded with queries and comments to be raised at the next Housing SPC. Cllr. Martin McNamara stated that he was happy to see that all individuals and families that present as homeless undergo an immediate Evaluation of Needs assessment prior to housing to determine their housing needs and support requirements. Mr. Owens confirmed that these assessments are currently carried out by GCC's Homeless Service, and they are then referred on to Cope Galway for access to emergency accommodation. Cllr. McNamara also welcomed the special attention on young people leaving care, the survivors of Domestic Violence, neurodivergent individuals and persons exiting institutions such as Prisons, Hospitals and direct provision centres.
- Mr. Owens read out the following comments from Cllr. Geraldine Donohue
 - Under 1.6 - it is disappointing that there is no reference in the report of the Council's Rightsizing policy. I think this is a missed opportunity given that there are some tenants who are advanced in years, and whose families have now left the 3-bedroom council two storey owned property and are seeking to downsize to 1 or 2 bed bungalows.
 - I would like to have seen the inclusion of Social Prescribing as part of the Action Plan as another support to those that would greatly benefit from same.
 - In relation to Galway County Council, I note on page 57 that it comprises of a part-time Administrative Officer - is this sufficient given the size of the county of Galway and the demands that this role takes. I would like to see this a full-time Administrative Officer similar to the City Council page 48.

- In response to Cllr. Donohue's comments, Mr Owens stated that the Councils Rightsizing Policy is listed in the Housing Allocation Scheme, and this relates to a Transfer Policy for existing Council tenants that are under-occupying their council property due to their family members no longer living with them in the property. Private Homeowners can also submit an Expression of Interest to sell their property to Galway County Council when there is a specific housing need in an Area of Choice. The council would then offer alternative housing to the private homeowner who sold the property to the LA. Mr. Owens said that the Councils Rightsizing Policy was already provided for in the current Scheme of Allocation and that there was no need to amend the current Homeless Action Plan.
- In response to Cllr. Donohue's comments on Social Prescribing, Mr. Owens referenced Page 19 point 2.5 of the Action Plan, that referred to actions that would be considered part of Social Prescribing principles (See below snip).

Social Integration and Community Development				
2.5	Support people to thrive in their tenancies, actively participate in and feel a sense of belonging to their Communities. Socially valued roles support sustainable tenancies. Support inclusive participation in: Community Events Training Education Employment	Galway Simon Community Social Integration Service Workability – Pathways to Employment Finbarr's Terrace Learning Studio COPE Galway Community Supports for older people in Galway City	Galway City Council/ Galway Simon Community Galway City Council/ COPE Galway	

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- Mr. Owens reminded the committee that Galway City Council is the regional lead for the Homeless Action Plan, and this is why they have been granted funding for the full time Administrative Officer. He stated that Galway County Council has recently received funding approval for the hiring of an additional Homeless Programme Coordinator (Grade 6) and Tenancy Sustainability Officer in 2025.
- Mr. Owens stated that the Homeless Action Plan had already been adopted by the City Council and any future amendments would require the City Council to revisit the action plan for approval and adoption again. He reminded the committee, that GCC plans to bring forward its own specific Homeless Action Plan for Galway County Council and it would be the SPC's responsibility to develop and include any comments and suggestions referenced by both Cllr. Donohue and Cllr. McNamara. He said that it was his intension to bring forward Galway County Council's Homeless Action Plan to either the May or September meeting of the Housing SPC.
- In response to a query from Cllr. Kelly, Mr. Owens confirmed that GCC has not yet received a Tenant in Situ (TIS) allocation for 2025 from the Department of Housing. The topic was discussed at the last Galway Housing Taskforce meeting, and it was mentioned that a revised TIS scheme is currently with the Minister of Housing for review and approval. An update on the revised allocation is expected in the coming weeks.

- In response to the Chair, Mr. Owens stated that the comments and issues received from the two councillors are broadly included in both the proposed regional Homeless Action Plan and GCC's existing Scheme of Allocation. He reiterated that specific topics such as Social Prescribing can be addressed in more detail in GCC's Homeless Action Plan. He recommended that the proposed regional Homeless Action Plan 2025 – 2027 be adopted without amendment.
- The Homeless Action Plan was proposed by Cllr. Cunniffe and seconded by Cllr. Eileen Mannion.

4. Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy

Mr. Owens informed the committee that Galway County Council (GCC) is required to adopt an Anti-Social Behaviour strategy that will instruct how the Council would respond to and address anti-social behaviour within council tenancies and estates. Under the Housing Acts the policy has previously been developed by the Housing SPC whereby they consulted with An Garda Síochána by way of the Joint Policing Committee. He stated that an initial draft of the proposed Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy would be brought before the Housing SPC. Mr. Owens invited the members to submit any items or comments that they would like to have incorporated into the proposed Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy. He outlined that the draft strategy will also be sent out to all the non-committee Elected Members for review and comment.

5. Affordable Housing Update

Mr. John Waters gave a detailed update on Affordable Housing. The following areas were Discussed.

- **Phases 2 and 3 of Garraí Na Gaoithe**
 - Applications for Phases 2 and 3 of Garraí Na Gaoithe, which comprise 2 two-bed, 27 three-bed and 15 four-bed houses, will be accepted via an online application portal from Monday 24th February 2025 at 10:00am until the deadline of Monday 17th March 2025 at 5:00pm.
 - A 'drop in' information evening on the development and the application process took place in the Claregalway Hotel on Thursday, February 13th. There were over 100 attendees who engaged one to one with members of staff, the estate agent DNG and the pillar banks.
 - It is expected that these units will be available for occupation from Q4 2025
- **Advertising in Print & Social Media**
- **Expressions of Interest**
 - An expression of interest (EOI) took place to encourage developers and landowners to submit proposals for affordable housing projects as well as making land available for sale.
 - The EOI process took place on eTenders between December 18th and January 30th.
 - There was 1 EOI for affordable housing totaling 5 units and 7 EOIs for land acquisition.
- **Other Developments**

- An application for AHF funding for 36 affordable houses and 30 cost rental houses in the 88-property development at Droim Na Gaoithe, Claregalway is complete and will be lodged with the Department. Construction is expected to start on site in Q2 2026.
- A tender has been advertised for the design phase of two affordable housing projects totaling 44 units in Athenry. There will be 28 units in Raheen and 16 units in Pairc na hAbhainn, Athenry with delivery anticipated in Q4 2026. The tender process will close of February 28th and assessment will take place thereafter.

The Chair thanked Mr. Waters for his detailed update, and he invited the members present for their comments and questions.

- With a price tag of €465,000, the Chair questioned the affordability of these houses given that most families could not qualify for a mortgage to buy these houses.
- Cllr. Mannion thanked Mr. Waters for his detailed update. She acknowledged that these houses are expensive and not very affordable, but she welcomed that there were current and planned Affordable schemes being delivered for people looking to own their own homes.
- In response to the Chair, Mr. Waters explained that Cost Rental properties will be available to rent at a reduced rate of 25% below that of the current market rent price. He stated that it is intended that these units would be delivered in a cost neutral manner that prevented the Local Authority from making profit while they retained ownership of the properties. The rent charged would be sufficient to repay the finance needed in their construction and any maintenance costs incurred during each Cost Rental tenancy. This financing of these properties would be repaid over a 30 year period.
- In response to queries from A.J. Dean, Mr. Waters confirmed that the Expression of Interest online portal is currently closed, however he expected that the portal will re-open soon (approximately 2-3 months) and this will give developers an opportunity to submit proposals for Affordable Housing projects. Mr. Waters invited any developer to contact him directly to discuss any proposal they may have in advance of the EOI portal reopening.
- In response to Helen Jennings, Mr. Waters stated that 70% of the properties at Garraí Na Gaoithe were allocated on a first come first served basis, with the remaining 30% of units being allocated under the Scheme of Priorities associated with the development. These criteria would initially look at the number of applicants that are currently living in the administrative area of Galway County Council and this was considerably oversubscribed. In an attempt to overcome this, applicants currently residing within a 10-kilometre radius of Claregalway were assessed and this too was also oversubscribed. He explained that a lottery system, supervised by a Commissioner of Oaths was employed to allocate the remaining 30% of units in Claregalway. He confirmed that the same allocation process will be used for the proposed Affordable Homes project in Athenry.
- In response to Seamus Duffy, Mr. Waters confirmed that the MASP Area is officially comprised of the Claregalway, Oranmore and Bearne areas, but there are also urban areas elsewhere in Galway (i.e. Moycullen, Athenry etc...) that would have the Affordability Gain criteria due to the open market valuation of properties in these non MASP locations.

- In response to Cllr. Cuniffe, Mr. Waters outlined that a 2 bed Affordable unit have an upper-market value of €320,000 but they are sold for €245,000 after the maximum subsidy of €75,000 is applied. Three bed units are initially priced at 362,000 – €372,000 and they are sold at €287,000 to €297,000 when the maximum subsidy is applied. Four bed units are initially priced at €440,000 to €465,000 and they are sold at €365,000 to €390,000 when the maximum subsidy is applied. He stated that if an area has a planning density of 35-50 properties per hectare, then affordable projects can avail of the maximum subsidy of €75,000 per Affordable unit. However, if it drops under 35 properties per hectare then the subsidy is reduced to that of €50,000 and in these cases the affordable model does not apply to the smaller urban areas of Co. Galway.

6. Any Other Business

In response to Cllr. Kelly, Mr. Owens stated that the Council did not meet the Housing Departments 2024 Housing Delivery target, and he outlined that both Housing For All and the Housing Delivery Action Plan are multi-year delivery programmes and a short fall in one year's delivery can be made up for in a subsequent years delivery. He stated that the current focus is to meet and exceed the current and future Housing Delivery targets for Galway County Council. He explained to the members that it typically takes 2-3 years for a Housing project to be delivered from Stage 1 Approval to the allocation of keys to housing support applicants. Mr. Owens stated that it is Galway County Council's intention to focus on Council owned lands for the delivery of direct build Local Authority schemes whereby GCC is in direct control of the scheme from start to finish. He stated that 75% of the projected 2026 delivery will be composed of LA direct build units that are constructed on GCC owned lands and this will allow GCC to meet and exceed our 2026 targets. He stated that the delivery of additional Turnkey Units are largely outside of the control of GCC, however they offer additionality and supplement the delivery of units in any given year.

Mr. Owens outlined that the Approved Housing Bodies (or AHBs) also play a major role in providing additional units under Housing For All and the Housing Delivery Action Plan the sector and it is envisaged that they provide 40% of the proposed target with the LA's providing 60%. In County Galway, the delivery of AHB units is less than 25% and he outlined that this shortfall has to be made up by GCC. Mr. Owens stated that he would be attending later today a meeting of the AHB Forum and that they will be addressing some of the issues and obstacles that are preventing the AHBs from meeting their 40% minimum target. He explained that both he and the Chief Executive Mr. Liam Conneally will also meet with the AHB's to encourage greater delivery from the sector in County Galway.

In terms of **Part V** delivery, Mr. Owens reiterated that the delivery of these units is largely outside of the control of GCC, and their delivery numbers have been impacted due to the low level of construction within County Galway. He stated that GCC can deliver more direct build units under its Capital Programme, and this is reflected in the projected 2026 delivery of over 550 housing units within County Galway. In terms of the housing delivery for 2027 and beyond, the focus of GCC will be to acquire additional R1 and R2 lands as set

out in the Borrowing Required discussed at the November SPC meeting and approved at the subsequent Monthly Plenary Council meeting. He outlined that it is proposed that GCC will be commencing a CPO program to acquire serviced lands for the delivery of LA Housing Units. He concluded by saying that not meeting the 2024 target was disappointing and that it was not down to any lack of commitment or effort on GCCs part, and he reaffirmed his commitment to make up any shortfall in 2025, 2026 and beyond.

In response to Mr. Owens comments, Ms. Rachel Stewart welcomed the fact that the delivery targets will be increased for both Social and Affordable units, and she pointed out that the Planning Process was the primary delay to the delivery of private sector homes, and she requested that other supports may be considered for these units.

In response to Ms. Stewart, Mr. Owens acknowledged the challenges associated with private sector projects, and he pointed to the relatively high cost of finance being a major issue for developers. Within County Galway, Mr. Owens stated that the acquisition of serviced lands that have adequate wastewater treatment plants was a major issue that affected both developers and GCC when it comes to the delivery of housing units. He stated that within the MASP area only three towns were currently serviced by wastewater plants, while plans to build/upgrade existing plants in several smaller towns like Craughwell are still 2-3 plus years away. Mr. Owens referenced the Regeneration Development Funds that has been discussed at the Galway Housing Taskforce meetings, and it is his understanding that there is a proposed infrastructural fund that will be made available to allow the delivery of housing units in areas where the water treatment services are lacking. He stated that LA's will be invited to bid for this infrastructural funding based on the provision of both private and social housing units in tandem with water treatment services.

In response to Mr. Owens, Mr. Seamus Duffy stated that there was no issue with water-services in Ballinasloe when both social and modular homes schemes were approved at the planning stage, however the wastewater issue is raised when a private developer submits a planning proposal. He welcomed the provision of social and modular homes in Ballinasloe, and he stated that private developments were also needed, and that they should be treated on a par with those provided by the council.

In response, Mr. Owens clarified that his comments regarding water services being at capacity were in direct reference to issues experienced in areas such as Ballinasloe.

In response to Cllr. Kelly, Mr. Owens confirmed that GCC has not yet received the 2025 DPG allocation, and he outlined that GCC has been asked by the Department of Housing to provide details of the number of applications that have been received, and this figure will inform the level of available funding for the allocation. In terms of the 2024 allocation, Mr. Owens confirmed that GCC received €676,898.00 which represents the 90% departmental contributing and remaining 10% of match funding of €75,211.00 was met by GCC. He confirmed that to date, GCC has received 97 applications that represent a total value of €777,886.18 and there are currently 18 DPG Extension applications received with an estimated value of €1.197 Million. Thus, the current combined value of DPG applications is approximately €2 million. Mr. Owens stated that the projected 2025 allocation will not be

sufficient to provide funding for all the applications received and there will be a need to prioritise individual applications.

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking the Director of Service and his staff for their presentations and he confirmed that the next meeting of the Housing SPC will take place on the 22nd of May 2025 at 10 am in the Council Chamber.

Minutes Confirmed by Chairperson

Michael Maher
Cllr. Michael Maher

Date: 13-06-2025