

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE DHUN NA nGALL

Oifig Riarthóir na gCruinnithe
Aras an Chontae
Leifear
1 Deireadh Fómhair, 2024

FOGRA CRUINNITHE

A Chara,

Beidh Cruinniú Speisialta den Comhairle Chontae Dhún na nGall ar siúl Dé Luain 7 Deireadh Fómhair, 2024 ag **10.00rn. in Áras an Chontae, Leifear.** Tá Clár an chruinnithe leis seo. Seolfar nasc leictreonach chuig an chruinniú i gcomhfhreagras eile.

Mise, le meas



Pádraig Ó Laifearaigh
Riarthóir Cruinnithe

DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL

Office of Meetings Administrator
County House
Lifford.
1st October, 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 7th October 2024 at 10.00am in the County House, Lifford. The agenda for the meeting is attached. An online link to join the meeting will issue separately.

Yours sincerely



Patsy Lafferty
Meetings Administrator

AGENDA

1. Housing Capital Update.
2. Regeneration and Housing.

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF DONEGAL COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNTY HOUSE, LIFFORD ON THE 7TH OCTOBER 2024
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C/316/24

MEMBERS PRESENT

Cllrs N Kennedy, Cathaoirleach, J Beard, M Boyle, F Bradley, J Brogan, T Crossan, T S Devine, A Doherty, A Farren, M Farren, N Jordan, D M Kelly, M C Mac Giolla Easbuig, M Mc Bride, M Mc Clafferty, P Mc Garvey, D Mc Gee, P Mc Gowan, G Mc Monagle, D Meehan, J S O' Fearraigh, and M Scanlon.

Online: Cllrs L Blaney, C Brogan, P Canning, D Coyle, G Doherty, J Kavanagh, F Mc Brearty Jnr, M Mc Dermott, M Mc Mahon, A Molloy, D Nic Mheanman, and J Murray.

C/317/24

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, Liam Ward, Director Community Development & Planning Services, John Gallagher, Senior Engineer, Housing Capital, Eamonn Brown, Divisional Manager, Housing & Corporate, Patricia Mc Intyre, Town Regeneration Officer, Sinead Mc Cauley, A/Senior Executive Planner, Regeneration & Development, Carol Margey, Senior Executive Planner, Urban & Rural Regeneration, Róise Ní Laifeartaigh, 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/318/24

APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Harley who was unable to attend the meeting.

C/319/24

MINUTES SILENCE

A minute's silence at the request of Cllr Mac Giolla Easbuig was observed by all present for the family of missing kayaker Paul Buchanan.

C/320/24

HOUSING CAPITAL UPDATE

Mr John Gallagher, Senior Engineer gave an update in respect of the various capital projects and items progressed since the last Special Meeting on the 16th September.

He said that the Housing Capital team utilised various departmental schemes to purchase and renew vacant housing units and to make them available for social housing use. This, he confirmed, was done in conjunction with the Regeneration Team and allowed the local authority to purchase vacant properties of any age and carry out remediation works. It also, he added, supported strategies on vacant homes, urban renewal and helped tackle dereliction. This work, he noted complemented the Repair & Leasing Scheme and tapped into the potential of housing that was currently sitting vacant. Housing delivery, he confirmed, was being coordinated in conjunction with the Regeneration Team and properties purchased acquired in line with the

current House Acquisition Policy. Costs it was acknowledged in respect of acquisition and remediation works were subject to departmental approval with ten properties currently going through this process. Mr Eamonn Brown, Divisional Manager, Housing & Corporate outlined the purpose and objective of the “Repair and Lease Scheme”, noting that under the scheme the Local Authority or an Approved Housing Body could provide an interest free loan of up to €80,000 inc VAT to repair a vacant property and bring it to rental standard with the specific condition that it be made available for social housing. He outlined the operational details involved.

Mr Liam Ward, Director Community Development & Planning Services Introduced the members of the Regeneration Team and said that the total value of the URDF calls to date was €26.1m.

Ms Sinead Mc Cauley, A/Senior Planner said that URDF funding allowed the Council to tackle dereliction in multiple ways and referenced the workflow process to date.

It was noted that URDF funding was a revolving fund to tackle long-term vacancy and dereliction in town centres and allowed Local Authorities to acquire property and place them on the open market for sale. Members were informed that Call 3 for funding had opened on the 30th January 2023 and that there were currently 46 vacant properties on the approved list. She gave an overview as to how Phase 1 and Phase had been implemented and the various steps taken in line with the national CPO Activation Programme Guidelines.

Ms Carol Margey, A/Senior Planner provided detail in relation to the various projects allocated funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. She alluded to the following projects all of which had been progressed as a means of addressing vacancy and dereliction:

- Ballybofey/Stranorlar Seed Project.
- Carndonagh – Tus Nua Regeneration Project
- Ailt an Chorráin (Burtonport) / Árainn Mhór (Arranmore) “Harbour to Island” Regeneration Project
- Killybegs 2040 “A Town Centre Regeneration Project”

She said that going forward it was intended to work closely with all the teams involved in the regeneration aspect so as to target vacancy and dereliction across all settlements, in the growth drivers, the service towns and rural settlements with the aim securing dedicated funding packages.

Mr Vincent Cranley, Vacant Homes Officer informed members that the “Croí Cónaithe - Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant Scheme” had received 931 applications to date with 617 approved. Presently, he said, that 59 had been paid to a value of €3.04m. Donegal, it was acknowledged, had the highest number of applications in the country. The success of the various drop in events was noted and it was

confirmed that further events were planned for October and November 2024.

Ms Patricia Mc Intyre, Town Regeneration Officer alluding to the “Property Activation Programme” launched in April 2023 said that a four-step approach had been taken to include:

- Step 1 Identification of vacant and derelict properties.
- Step 2 Identification and engagement with owners.
- Step 3 Communication regarding various schemes.
- Step 4 Use of CPO/Derelict Sites/Dangerous Structures Legislation.

She said that the set target to activate 350 properties had been met and the CPO process commenced in respect of 6 of these units.

The target for 2024, she added, was to activate 300 properties and commence the CPO process in respect of 6 of these. This work, she said, was now on track and all available options were being pursued to acquire funding and progress the acquisition of these properties.

Details were also provided in relation to a new service which the Council intended to offer to those seeking to purchase property in Donegal.

The “Find a Home Service” she confirmed was a free service which would match individual property owners with people who wanted to purchase a property in Donegal as their family home. The Council, she said, would hold two lists namely, potential buyers and the names of owners who were interested in selling their properties. She said that where the Council sees a potential match the seller and buyer would be put in touch.

Members were advised however that the Council had role in any subsequent negotiations or future sales and would not actively advertise the properties.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members of the various housing teams for the informative presentation and opened the meeting to the floor.

Members raised the following issues :

- Concern that the Vacant Property Scheme was putting money in private hands. Outlined the need for specific checks and balances and to ensure that those who applied lived in the properties concerned.
- Difficulties being encountered under the Croi Conaithe Scheme in terms of having to pay up front and then reclaim the monies. Staged payment system would work better for grant applicants.
- Additional information day sessions needed in respect of the “Vacant Home” options.
- Special Housing meetings best suited to the MD structure.
- Housing Construction staff should be based in each MD.

- Concern regarding the lack of housing provision in the Milford Municipal District. Social Housing Programme needs to be ramped up as the Vacant property Schemes cannot be solely relied on to deliver accommodation.
- Housing delivery not happening at the pace anticipated.
- Dedicated programme needed in respect of the Cathedral Quarter in Letterkenny.
- Dereliction on the Main Street in Letterkenny must be addressed.
- Vacant business and commercial properties need to be identified also and their potential utilised with a targeted approach taken. Specific issues in Ballybofey/Stranorlar highlighted.
- Outlined the need to provide a home ground for Letterkenny Cricket Club on council owned lands adjacent to the River Swilly and the Neil T Blaney Road.
- Proper plan needs to be put in place for the Council owned lands opposite the Public Service Centre in Letterkenny.
- Social Housing policy must take into account and prioritise independent living options with cognisance taken of the wraparound services needed.
- Issues regarding the 15 houses in Letterkenny must be sorted and further engagement sought with the contractor as this is impacting on social housing development in Ballyshannon.
- URDF Funding needed in respect of all towns and villages .
- More accountability needed from Uisce Éireann as their inability to provide the necessary infrastructure is holding up a number of developments. Lough Mourne extension needs to be prioritised to ensure proper infrastructural development.
- Uisce Éireann connection fees are excessive and prohibiting development.
- 13th month timeline for completion of works under the Croi Conaithe Scheme is too short and needs to be extended.
- Building of Specific Instance Housing must be progressed as this method of provision is vital for rural communities.
- Lack of progress in relation to the Tus Nua Project in Carndonagh highlighted. Call made for a dedicated staff member to be allocated so that the project can move forward.
- Call for all parties concerned to resolve the issues with the Contractor regarding the Ballyshannon Housing Project.
- Concerns raised in relation to the “Housing First Programme” and the fact that some of the placements made are not always in the best interests of the wider community in a designated estate.
- General public need to be kept informed of developments.
- Imperative that the Housing Construction team and the Regeneration team work together to avail of every opportunity so that additional housing accommodation can be provided.
- Sewerage Scheme must be progressed in Falcarragh to facilitate proposed development.
- Information requested in relation to all possible developments for older people throughout the county.
- Concern that there are no AHB projects currently in the Inishowen MD.

- Noted that Uisce Éireann commentary in relation to the lack of infrastructure/capacity in an area was distorting the picture and as a result there was no clear picture of housing need in specific locations.
- 18 houses vacant in Newtowncunningham which could be utilised.
- Sewerage Treatment capacity in Killea will facilitate up to thirty houses This needs to be acted on.
- Must be an opportunity to downsize accommodation so that a range of housing needs can be met and facilitated.

Cllr Mc Brearty enquired as to the status of his request for a Special Meeting to discuss the outcome of the recent judicial review and as to why it had been taken by the defendants concerned. He asked what role the previous Cathaoirleach had played and if the current Cathaoirleach had been informed. He asked that he be given access to the full file on this case and queried why his request for a Special Meeting had been ignored.

The case, he said, had been settled behind closed doors and was directly related to standards and policies created by Donegal County Council.

He asked for a full explanation in relation to the settlement, the amount of same and the cost of employing a Dublin firm of solicitors and queried again as to why the Elected Members had not been informed. The Council, he said, was not an authority on standards as that was the remit of the National Standards Authority of Ireland.

He said that he had the documentation that had been presented in the High Court and now wanted to see transparency on the Council's part.

Queries Raised

- Have people signed up to the "Find a Home" service?
- Is the "Repair & Lease Scheme" up and running and how many houses have been repaired under this scheme?
- What is the status in relation to the provision of a ramp at the Port Bridge to allow the Emergency Services access the River Swilly?
- Whether any of the sites identified under the Property Acquisition Fund are in the Milford Electoral Area.
- What engagement has taken place with the banks in relation to loan facilities for those accessing Vacant Home Grants etc.?
- Update requested in respect of Baile na Carrage in Buncrana.
- Can Donegal County Council write to the Health Service Executive in relation to derelict property in Pettigo?
- What is happening in relation to properties owned by Ulster Bank in Bundoran?
- What is the position in relation to derelict sites in Ballyshanon and Bundoran?
- Can a number of derelict properties on the Main Street in Dunkineely be looked?
- Do we have a timeframe where we go back to contractors, regarding specific acquisitions? The model to date is not working

and there needs to be greater emphasis on the timeframes involved and the level of engagement taken. Dedicated staff member with a background in acquisitions is needed to progress the Acquisitions Programme.

- Why have remediation works not been carried out in respect of the Ard na Guala Duibhe Estate in Moville and what happened to Phase 2 of the development?
- What is the position in relation to independent living projects in Gweedore and Falcarragh?
- How active are the Approved Housing Bodies and Donegal County Council in delivering for older people in the county?
- What provision has been made regarding the provision of additional social housing in the Cloondara developing in Carndonagh?
- Has the Department approved tenders for social housing units in Carndonagh, Gleneely and Malin?
- Information requested in relation to the number of developers that have responded in relation to the latest advertisement for turnkey developments.
- Can contact be made with the Courts Service regarding the Courthouse in Carndonagh regarding the availability of the property and consideration given as to what could be developed on the site?
- Query as to whether there was any provision under the Vacant Property Schemes to accommodate three dedicated hubs to facilitate those wishing to access the Defective Concrete Blocks Scheme.
- Is there any recompense for a homeowner who has bought out their S.I House, and who now finds that it is impacted by defective concrete. They are now in the position where they have to find funding to cover the difference in their defective concrete block grant and the overall rebuilding cost which is expected to be in the region of €130k?

It was proposed at this juncture by Cllr Giolla Easbuig, seconded by Cllr M Farren to adjourn the meeting to facilitate the commencement of the Adjourned September Meeting. This was unanimously agreed.

On recommencement of the meeting Cllr Mac Giolla Easbuig said that the current Council Chamber was not fit for purpose and asked what plans were in place to progress the provision of a more modern chamber equipped to accommodate the members of the media and the general public.

Mr Patsy Lafferty, Director Housing & Corporate Services acknowledged that independent living was an important issue and said that the Council worked with the Health Service Executive and the relevant Approved Housing Bodies together with the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage to deliver and construct such projects. The HSE, he confirmed, then liaised with the Department in relation to the running costs. Examples of this type of initiative, he noted, were to be found in Ardara, Dungloe, Malin, Letterkenny etc with several new projects in the pipeline.

He said that a report would be prepared and circulated in relation to the legal case referenced by Cllr Mc Brearty.

With regards to the issues raised in relation to the role of Uisce Éireann, he said that these had been well articulated, and that the Council would continue to work with Uisce Éireann to get approval for projects.

It was confirmed that S.I Housing was for individuals on the approved social housing list and not for private applicants. An update would be provided, he said, in relation to current S.I. initiatives.

With regard to Ard na Guala Duibhe in Merville, he said, that there had been regular contact with the Department in relation to a remediation package for social housing and that indications were that this was imminent. As soon as this approval was received, he said, it would be possible to look at carrying out the relevant works.

There were provisions in place, he noted, to accommodate social housing tenants who wanted to downsize.

Mr Donal Walker, Senior Engineer, reminded members of the fact that closing date for the submission of turnkey projects was 30th September 2026 and said that it was imperative that this was widely publicised,

Mr John Gallagher, Senior Engineer confirmed that Rockytown Phase 2 in Buncrana had gone to tender and had been awarded with the contractor in question now in the final stages of submitting the necessary paperwork prior to the commencement of works. He said that the progress on the sewerage scheme in Milford was to be welcomed and that this would have significant implications for the development of housing in the area with more lands being made available for development. Ramelton and Rathmullan would, also benefit, he added.

Responding to Cllr Cannings comments in relation to Killea, he said that these had been noted and would be acted on.

Mr Liam Ward, Director Planning and Community Development thanked members for their positive comments on the Regeneration Programme. He said that the "Crói Cónaithe Scheme" operated with the guidelines laid down by the Department and that this would continue.

Referring to the comments by Cllrs Mc Bride and Devine in relation to Council owned lands adjacent to the Letterkenny Public Service Centre, he said, that these were outside the scope of the Regeneration Team. He said that he had spoken to Mr Eunan Quinn, Senior Planner in relation to putting a plan in place and alluded to the fact that there were competing interests involved in terms of the development of this location. Proposals, he advised would have to come before members regarding any potential leasing or utilisation of the said lands. He confirmed that information would be circulated in relation to the proposed drop-in events and that it would be possible to share the

results of the survey carried out in respect of the "Property Activation Fund" with members.

With Phase three underway, it was acknowledged that the focus of the URDF would move beyond Letterkenny. It was hoped, he added to see significant development on the ground in Letterkenny over the next 12 to 18 months.

He said that he would issue a response to Cllr A Farren in relation to a specific issue that had been raised with regard to planning permission in Malin Head. He noted however that there were particular challenges when development is sought in Special Areas of Conservation.

There had been, he confirmed, an oral hearing on the CPO process for the Tús Nua site in Carndonagh and the outcome of same was now awaited from An Bord Pleanála.

Alluding to comments from Cllr C Brogan in relation to the engagement with property owners, he said that a proactive approach had been taken in relation to this aspect, but that he would be happy to follow-up where there had been gaps in communication.

Donegal County Council, he stated, was one of the first to adopt an Age Friendly Strategy and this had been taken into consideration in terms of the universal design aspect.

With regard to the acquisition of properties it was noted that the Council had an obligation initially to derisk the property and the overall intention was to recoup any costs incurred. It was also confirmed that the Council could not sell a property at a loss without getting Departmental approval.

Concluding, he said, that it would be possible to review the issues highlighted in respect of vacant properties in Dunkineely and Pettigo.

Ms Patricia Mc Intyre, Town Regeneration Officer advised members of the following:

- That work was ongoing in relation to the compilation of database for those who wished to use the "Find a Home" service.
- It had been agreed to carry out settlement surveys in three settlements within each MD and that a further rollout of the survey was now due to take place outside of Letterkenny. Further information, she said, would be provided to the various MD Committees.
- It was noted that the initial survey information had come from the Geo Directory and that properties that did not have Eircode's would be picked up as well.
- There was discretion for the Council to extend a Crói Cónaithe application beyond the designated 13-month period and she encouraged applicants to contact the vacant homes office as early as possible should delays arise.

- The various financial institutions have been invited to attend a meeting on the 21st October at which they will be briefed on the various schemes available and the funding issues facing homeowners when accessing such schemes including the necessity of having a staged payment option.
- There was some follow-up in terms of Carndonagh Courthouse but that there were no plans at present in respect of the overall refurbishment.
- As part of the ongoing survey works the properties alluded to in Pettigo and Dunkineely would be picked up and there would be ongoing co-operation with the housing team.

Mr Eamonn Brown confirmed that the “Local Authority Purchase and Renovation Loan Scheme” was now open for applications and that the same criteria, eligibility and affordability options were in place as applicable to the existing “Local Authority Home Loan”. It was possible now, he said, to progress stage one of this application process and that further clarification was awaited in relation to the next stage of the programme.

He acknowledged the fact that there had been challenges with the Housing First Programme. Nationally, he said, a new tender process was taking place, but that Sligo Social Services currently provided the specific support mechanisms. He said that he was currently involved in discussions regarding the need for increased levels of supervision and an enhanced support network within the new programme.

With regard to the issues raised by Cllr Mc Gowan, he confirmed, that he would speak to the housing team involved and the Area Manager concerned regarding the ongoing situation.

He agreed to provide details in relation to the number of houses repaired under the Repair and Lease Scheme and said that he would contact Cllr J Brogan in relation to his specific query on S.Is.

The Chief Executive addressing members drew attention to the fact that there was a considerable amount of work taking place at present in comparison, to 5 to 10 years ago. The monthly meeting process, he said, had been beneficial in keeping members up to date on issues such as the Capital programme, with co-operation the key for any future development. He thanked the Housing and Regeneration Teams for their efforts.

In relation to Cllr Mac Giolla Easbuig’s call for a new Council Chamber, he alluded to the fact that a comprehensive proposal had been put forward a number of years ago for a brand-new chamber. This, he said, had not been progressed at the request of the members, who had not been able to support the project for varying reasons.

It would be possible, he contended, to take a fresh look at the proposal but that ultimately it was a matter for the members to decide. It could, he added, be worked through the Corporate Policy Group going forward.

There had been, he advised, considerable discussion recently in relation to the type of blocks used in social housing projects on the basis that many of these had crumbled in the past.

The Council, it was noted, had raised the standard for concrete blocks as a result but were well aware that they were not the standard setter for the product. He said that in the absence of a designated standard from government there had been no other option. There had, he confirmed, been challenges to this decision and a specific legal case had been taken. The Council, it was noted, had defended same and the case subsequently quashed. As referenced by the Director of Housing, Corporate & Cultural Services, he alluded to the fact that an update would be provided and circulated to all members.

Cllr Mc Brearty said that he was unhappy with the replies from the Chief Executive and the Director of Service and said that he had requested a Special Meeting back in August to discuss the judicial review.

This concluded the business of the meeting.