

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

Representative Report

Name of Committee: Housing SPC

Name of Representative: Mary-Anne Parsons

Date of Meeting Attended: 9th December 2021 (zoom)

Most important actions or issues to emerge from a County Wicklow PPN perspective:

- Item 1 Minute of Meeting of 21st. October 2021
- Item 2 Matters arising
- Item 3 To receive update on Housing for all to include a presentation on the Housing Delivery Action Plan
- Item 4 To agree a policy on a Pilot Scheme for Relets
- Item 5 To agree a Housing Maintenance Policy on Heating
- Item 6 To discuss a policy on the disposal of derelict units that are not viable for Wicklow County Council to develop
- Item 7 To agree a policy on repair and lease scheme for Wicklow County Council
- Item 8 Any Other Business
- Item 9 To set date and time of next meeting

Item 1: Agreed

Item 2: None

Item 3: Housing delivery action Plan presentation delivered. MAP requested clarity on the cost of housing following the previous meeting, as it was stated that a target of 43% (to be confirmed) of housing was to be provided directly through the Local Authority. Previous meeting it had been noted that the Local authority could not compete with private construction companies on build cost. Joe Lane confirmed this related to AFFORDABLE housing only. The reason being build costs, land costs and abnormals needed to be below 15% market value to meet affordable criteria.

Discussion around housing bodies and accessible/ age friendly units

Item 4: Policy on Pilot scheme for relets - key principals

1. A number of new units have been released following client transfers - downsizing or moving to more appropriate units. This has resulted in a large number of properties available for relet.
2. These properties need to be renovated prior to reletting. The average cost is €28,579 (2020) with costs increasing significantly. Up to €32,000 expected in 2022.
3. Typical works for a relet are: insulation, kitchens, electrical upgrades, bathrooms, doors and windows, roof repairs etc.
4. Budget for Bray (where there are the most relet properties) €800,000. This allows for 31 properties (2020) down to projected 22 properties (2022)
5. It is expected that the number of relets in Bray will increase from 31 to 66 (€2.44m in 2022) and 81 (€2.99m in 2023)
6. Suggested three pronged approach to relets:
 - a. Pilot scheme – allocate properties as they are
 - b. Only renovate properties that need a reduced amount of work
 - c. Houses in poor condition to be boarded up
7. Pilot scheme for houses becoming available
 - a. Checked by technician

- b. If the house passes on PIR on the electricity supply, Fire safety (alarms, blankets and restrictors) it will be placed on the pilot scheme
 - c. Properties will be advertised on a choice based letting system
 - d. No renovations or pre-letting work will take place
 - e. A decision will be made of the successful applicant
8. Individuals being offered a house under this scheme will receive a paint grant but no pre-letting/ renovation works will be done (with a signed agreement)
 9. Clients must be willing to accept the property as is and renovate themselves
 10. Clients who avail of this scheme will get a house in a shorter timeframe.
 11. OUTCOME: 2 schemes under consideration at national level - which will increase the level of capital maintenance funding
 - a. Asset management/conditional survey and subsequent programme
 - b. Fabric upgrade scheme

In the interim existing budgets will be spent prior to year end and properties will be boarded up.

Unoccupied properties deteriorate quicker resulting in higher costs

Boarded up properties are not a good use of resources when people are waiting for houses

12. The intention is the relet scheme will only run until the number of re-lets reaches normal levels or additional funding is available.

There was some discussion around the scheme, but it was agreed that members needed more time to consider the proposals.

Item: 5 – Housing Maintenance Policy – Heating

1. General Principals:
 - a. Safety
 - b. Compliance and legislation
 - c. Energy efficiency
 - d. Economy
 - e. Effectiveness
 - f. Maintainability
2. Solid Fuel Systems
 - a. Central government move away from solid fuel and in particular back boilers
 - b. Base on air quality, energy efficiency and carbon emissions
 - c. Unsuitable for elderly and people with mobility issues (handling fuel and cleaning of hearth/stove)
3. Stoves
 - a. Council do not fit stoves and do not let tenants fit stoves themselves.
 - b. Pose a risk of CO poisoning
 - c. Do not have the budget for maintenance of stoves.
4. Existing back boilers
 - a. Remove existing back-boilers when installing gas or oil
 - b. Boiler must be completely removed and decommissioned
 - c. On removal, a standard fire back to be installed – allowing lighting of an open fire
 - d. CO alarm required in that room
 - e. Chimney flue to be sound
5. Chimneys
 - a. Damaged chimneys -requires relining at significant cost and maintenance budget
 - b. Where the house has oil or gas – fire place to be closed up.
 - c. If there is no gas or oil heating, such shall be installed
 - d.

6. 'Duelling': Operating a back boiler with an oil or gas boiler is not allowed (one is a vented system, the other a closed system).
7. Installation of new oil and gas heating systems
 - a. Annual program €200,00/year – approx. 30 houses
 - b. Houses without gas, oil, electricity, heatpump heating have been listed in order of the oldest tenant
 - c. Less than 50% of tenants accept the offer
 - d. Offers tend to require the removal of back boilers and/or internal maintenance work – eg removal of floor coverings by tenants and re-instatement by themselves.

There was some discussion around the scheme, but it was agreed that members needed more time to consider the proposals.

Item: 6 – Disposal of Derelict units

This item had been previously discussed. A number of units were tabled to be submitted to the local district councillors for voting. All properties are not in a state that they can be let (unsafe) The principal of disposal is:

POLICY ON SALE OF COUNCIL OWNED VOID STOCK

- Option A – Refurbish - In some cases, refurbishment is unfeasible and not possible due to issues which include sightlines, structural issues and overall condition.
- Option B – Demolish and Rebuild - Given the Council's current building programme, the Council's resources are prioritised in delivering schemes of multiple units.
- Option C – Sell – Interest has been expressed by a number of tenants and Social Housing applicants in purchasing these properties.

POLICY ON SALE OF COUNCIL OWNED VOID STOCK

- When a Council owned property becomes vacant and technical reports indicate that it is not suitable for refurbishment, the Council may offer the property for sale to the following:
 - Existing Council tenants who will surrender their Council property. (Priority 1)
 - Eligible Social Housing Support applicants (Priority 2)
 - For both (a) and (b) priority may be given to those from the locality where the house is situated.

It is proposed to add to this list: If no one suitable can be found to purchase the property it will then be offered as an affordable property to suitable candidates and then again if on one suitable can found to the open market.

There was some discussion around the scheme, but it was agreed that members needed more time to consider the proposals.

No further items were discussed. It was noted that the draft policies had only been circulated the previous day and this was not sufficient time to consider them. WCC noted there was no particular urgency in agreeing them, but funding in relation to re-lets would become an issue. It was agreed that members should make submissions to TOB by the end of the year, she would compile and circulate in January prior to the next meeting in January for further discussion.

MAP requested figures on the number of units that were on solid fuel – advised it is 400-500

Circa 1400 oil boilers

Circa 2200 gas boilers