

Sligo PPN Community Representative Feedback

Sligo Strategic Policy Committee 1: Housing and Corporate

April 13th 2021

Sligo PPN Community Representatives

- Pippa Black (PB) Social Inclusion
- Melinda Swann (MS) Environment
- Alan McMenamin (AM) Community & Voluntary

Some Terms that Might Come Up

PPN – Public Participation Network

SEO – Senior Executive Officer (Sligo County Council)

SPC – Strategic Policy Committee

HAT – Homeless Action Team

HAP – Housing Assistance Payment

HF – Housing First

RAS – Rental Accommodation Scheme

NB : These are **NOT** the official minutes of this SPC meeting.

This is a synopsis based on the feedback and perspective of Sligo PPN representatives on SPC1. This is intended only to generate discussion and potential follow up activity for PPN representatives and interested PPN member groups.

Proposals and Issues Raised by PPN Representatives

Social Inclusion Focus

Issue and Notes	Actions
<p>Removing Binary Gender Bias from key SCC forms</p> <p>The proposal from PB to address the gender question on the forms was well received. Three Elected Members (Cllrs Bree, Boyle and Fox) spoke in support of the motion and SPC Chair, Arthur Gibbons, mentioned his agreement when the agenda item was first tabled. One of the main issues to deal with is that not all forms used by SCC are locally produced, they are set Nationally and used by all of the Local Authorities. In fact, the Housing Assistance Application form was in the process of being updated.</p> <p>Local feedback to date suggests not asking the question at all would be most ideal. Alternatively, a third box labelled Non-binary and the word (optional) under the prompt for gender would be appropriate changes. It was also stressed that training for front-line staff needs to go hand-in-hand with any changes.</p>	<p>The executive to check about the update of the Housing Assistance Application form and to pass on the PPN request 'up the chain' for broader review and to progress at national level as required.</p> <p>John Moran sent the new Application Form for Social Housing PB. It no longer includes binary gender tick boxes. Instead, it provides a blank field. It was scheduled to go live on 19 April 2021 at the time of writing that is still pending. PB will follow up.</p>

	PPN to carry out an initial review of the forms and PB to provide an email to John Moran outlining the proposal. Email to include mock-ups of current forms to illustrate how simple the process of amendment needs to be
PPN representatives asked for more information on the local process regarding the Housing Review for People with Disabilities	A presentation is to be provided on this by SCC for the June meeting
PB enquired as to the status of the County Sligo Access and Inclusion Plan and particularly the progress of actions contained in the plan	This is to be placed on the agenda for the June meeting and update from SCC provided

Environment

Issue and Notes	Actions
MS made enquires with regard to the programme for the installation of heat pumps into social housing in Cranmore.	A planner from SCC will attend the June meeting to present on this
MS raised the issue of the SCC fleet and a 'leading by example' approach to making the fleet all electric. It was pointed out that all departments need to think about the environment and questions were also asked about; a sustainability plan in the council building and for SCC to explore the installation of a charging point at Council buildings.	John Moran said this was the responsibility of the roads department. Issue of environmental sustainability across SCC departments to be raised again by PPN rep.
PPN rep proposed a question sent through from the Environment college; "Will the corporate section have a role in coordinating and overseeing the overall council climate response? "	John Moran said the Climate Action SPC would handle this. PPN to reinforce approach that environmental action is relevant across all SPCs – not the remit of SPC4
PPN rep raised 2 nd query from Environment college around the speed limits on urban/residential roads and the identification that an 80km limit is way too high for single car roads.	John Moran referred rep to the roads department and Emer Concannon. These contact details to be offered to Environment College member to make direct contact.

Community & Voluntary

Issue and Notes	Actions
<p>PPN reps requested a report on the available landbanks in ownership of Sligo County Council for housing purposes that could be explored.</p>	<p>An update and report is to be provided at the June meeting. Request seconded by local cllr and report to be sent to all SPC1 reps shortly.</p>
<p>AM asked about the Social Housing Bundle 3 programme which is a Department led initiative to deliver social housing across a number of counties. It was highlighted that progress appeared slower in Sligo with regard to the proposed Finisklin development.</p> <p>It was identified that survey works are ongoing with a view to being ready to go to planning in 2022.</p>	
<p>Sligo has yet to host a meeting for the approved Housing Bodies Forum which brings together local housing organizations such as Cluid, Simon, St Vincent de Paul, Respond etc. AM asked for an update on this process.</p>	<p>A date for this meeting will be provided at the June meeting. Delays were due to Covid</p>
<p>PPN reps backed Cllrs looking for current RAS be examined and a report on the programme in Sligo be provided at the June meeting, including details of rent policy and allocations.</p>	<p>Report to be provided at June meeting</p>
<p>Vacant Housing Action Plan</p> <p>PPN requested that the current Vacant Housing Action Plan be looked at in more detail and a report provided to the SPC at the June meeting. PPN requested that as there is no mid-term review included in the scheme so PPN reps have asked Corporate Service to review and report back.</p> <p>The plan was written by SCC development planning unit in 2018, but Cllrs identified that they received it in 2017. Clarification needs to be sought on this. The plan is quite vague. The plan points out that 'unlocking the potential of empty homes is an essential part of meeting the housing need, as it will not be possible to provide all housing through new builds'. However according to Sean Murphy it is too costly to bring old houses up to standard and can take up to 2-3 years even though there is a pot of money in the council for retrofits and a separate pot of money for new builds. It was pointed out that the budget is too low at €150-200,000 for retrofitting. The fact that it is not cost effective to bring old houses back into use seems to go against the recommendations of the plan by the planning unit and goes against issues from an environmental viewpoint such as reuse and recycle.</p>	<p>Update to be provided at June meeting</p>

<p>General agreement that there are discrepancies in housing figures across different reports that need to be clarified so that there is a clear understanding of vacancy rates in Sligo and which are held by Local Authorities V private ownership. A Geodirectory and CSO figures are contradicting. PPN reps suggest that a closer examination needs to be completed to get the actual figures correct before any future discussion can be had and requested confirmation on this.</p> <p>PPN reps asked specific question regarding the appointment of a Vacant Homes Officer as specified in the plan.</p>	
<p>Upgrading Stock: A discussion on upgrades was held. PPN reps asked if clarification of the national figure mentioned by the Government so that we could see what Sligo could potentially be allocated.</p> <p>Also, PPN reps asked if the Council could avail of the SEAI upgrade funding as was the case in previous years. Executive replied to SPC reps that the Council were asked not to apply for SEAI finances as local authorities must go directly to the Department where funds for upgrades are now allocated.</p>	<p>Further updates on this in due course</p>

General

- PPN reps raised the issue of a programme of work for the SPC so that reps would have an idea of key programmes and policies that would be coming before the committee across the year and would have time to prepare proposals and feedback
- An example of the Galway City SPC agenda was provided and is to be circulated to the committee with a view to working towards a similar programme framework.
- The chair of the SPC also raised the idea that members should get the agenda 2 weeks ahead and it was agreed that committee members will get a reminder to get agenda items in one week before that. There was also a lot of willingness coming from the Council executive to include more corporate issues on the agenda and the programme for work.
- 2021 meeting dates have been set with 3 remaining meetings in the year. PPN reps are to explore how to supplement the basic 4 meeting schedule with additional sub-meetings to allow the progress of specific positions