PRESS RELEASE

July 17, 2017

Fingal County Council’s Director of Housing and Community, Margaret Geraghty, and Mary Egan, a Senior Executive Officer with the Housing and Community Department, appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government in Leinster House on Thursday, July 13. This is the opening statement to the Committee on behalf of Fingal County Council which was delivered by Ms Geraghty.

Opening Statement to the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning, Community & Local Government

Fingal is the second largest of the four Dublin Local Authorities and Fingal County Council has the third biggest local authority catchment area in the country. The results from the Census 2016 show that Fingal is Ireland’s fastest growing county with the youngest population and Balbriggan is the youngest town in the country. Fingal has a population of 296,214, an increase of 22,223 since 2011. This 8.1% increase is the highest of any county or city in the last five years and is over twice the national rate of increase.

The provision of social housing for those who are unable to provide housing for themselves is a high priority and a big challenge for Fingal, particularly in light of the significant increase in population. There are currently 7,865 eligible applicants for social housing. The aim is for every household that has a need, to be able to access an affordable home of good quality, which is suited to their needs and in a secure environment. There has been a 60% increase in the social housing stock in the Fingal area between the years 2006 and 2016.

Social Housing Delivery

Fingal County Council is very proactive in the delivery of social housing units and has provided housing for 1,408 families through a range of delivery mechanisms. The Council has already exceeded the targets set under the Housing Strategy 2020. Delivery output on the 1,376 target stands at 102.33% at the end of June
2017. This equates to 1,408 housing units delivered over the various delivery mechanisms since the start of the Strategy, with a further 842 units approved for delivery.

**Funding**
The Council was allocated €81m under Housing Strategy 2020 to fund delivery until end 2017. To date the Council has spent €85m and projects expenditure of a further €66m to year end bringing the expenditure total to €150m versus the initial allocation of €81m. Based on current approvals it is projected that a further €120m will be required during 2018. Total expenditure requirement from 2015 to 2018 = €271m.

**Construction Programme**
In Fingal we put a lot of time and focus into managing projects through to completion. This is supported by strong project management processes as initiatives move from the architects through to housing completion. This may seem basic but housing delivery can be a complex process and putting a relentless focus on all stages of the process has proven to be successful for us.

A major element of our strategy has been to bring forward plans to the elected members on a regular basis for building social housing units on land in the ownership of the council. We have brought through more proposals in the last 18 months, than we have been in a position to do over the previous six years or so. This process has ensured a continuous pipeline of planned units for construction across the county over the coming years and it has been heartening to see the Council back building houses.

There is a significant construction pipeline already underway with 23 active sites delivering 630 social houses over the next two years. Construction is underway on 160 houses with a further 219 at tender stage. There are 222 at pre-planning stage.

The Council owns significant land banks at Donabate, Mulhuddart, Cappaghfinn, Castlelands and Hacketstown and is in the process of developing land management plans for these sites which have the potential to deliver 3,200 housing units over the medium term. In line with policy, these developments will be of mixed tenure with social, affordable/cost rental, co-operative housing, private etc. The Council will consider various models of delivery to optimise the housing potential of these lands. The Council has received infrastructural funding though the LIHAF for the land bank in Donabate.


**Acquisitions Programme**
The Council has undertaken an ambitious acquisitions programme to acquire properties on the open market. A number of bulk purchases of turnkey units have also been acquired directly from developers. To date the Council has acquired or is in the process of acquiring 286 properties.

The Housing Agency is in the process of acquiring a further 92 properties on behalf of Fingal.

**Part V**
Activity in the Part V area is increasing with the upturn in construction in the county. The Council seeks early on-site delivery of units during Part V negotiations with developers. There is potential to yield over 2,000 social units through Part V in the coming years based on planning permissions already granted.

**Leasing**
The Council is working with a number of developers across the county to bring housing to the market for purchase and leasing. We are actively working a couple of interested developers on leasing proposals which have the potential to yield significant numbers of properties for social leasing. A new form of social leasing scheme would support these proposals.

**Homelessness**
Homelessness has emerged as a major issue within the housing crisis and we are working with our partners in the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE), Approved Housing Bodies and the Housing Agency to deliver long term sustainable housing solutions for people who have been affected by homelessness. Family Hubs will provide quality family accommodation as an alternative to commercial hotels while we work to provide long term tenancy solutions. In addition, the Housing Assistance Programme (HAP) has now been rolled out in Fingal and is another means of supporting people in finding accommodation.

A total of 175 households have had their homeless circumstances alleviated through the allocation of social housing support, up to the end of June 2017. Fingal County Council is currently in contact with circa 380 families who are in homeless circumstances or at risk of homelessness.

The Housing Assistance Payments Scheme (HAP) continues to be a valuable source of social housing. There were 243 Homeless HAP tenancies in place since the Dublin Region HAP Pilot scheme was introduced in 2015. In addition, there are 99 mainstream HAP tenancies in place at the end of June.
Private Developments
A new Development Plan for Fingal, Fingal Development Plan 2017-2023 (FDP), came into effect on the 16th March 2017. The strategic vision of the new FDP is to build on previous successes and to strengthen our strategic advantage as a County. The recently adopted Development Plan has made adequate provision for housing supply over the lifetime of the plan with 1,737ha of land zoned for housing in the county.

Fingal County Council has ambitious plans for growth in the development areas identified by the Metro Economic zoning designations. The recent zoning of this land reflects the importance of this infrastructural investment for both Swords and the entire County and will support the development of a new vibrant planned sustainable mixed use urban district providing for a significant level of employment and residential development.

Fingal secured €26.58m under LIHAF to fund infrastructure deficiencies in three strategic land banks. These land banks have the potential to deliver a total of 10,300 units over the long term with 2,500 of these deliverable by 2021.

Currently there are 49 private development sites under construction in the county.

Vacant Homes Strategy
In anticipation of the publication of the Vacant Homes Strategy Fingal County Council is preparing a vacant homes action plan. The action plan takes account of the unique circumstances in the county. Central to this is expanding the efforts to identify vacant buildings and locate the owners of these properties.

The Geo-Directory and CSO figures for vacant properties in Fingal have been significantly overstated.
- 3,000 were listed as vacant in the county
- Commercial properties, those under construction and those currently in the planning process were eliminated.
- 361 residential properties identified as possible vacancies
- As a pilot inspectors visited 74 of these properties in two areas of the county
- Only 13 were actually vacant

As the existing data has proven to be unreliable the Council has now appointed a company to survey all streets in the Dublin 15 and Swords areas to create a
report of properties that appear to be vacant. When owners are identified they will be contacted with a packaged range of options from the existing and new schemes, including short and long term leasing, repair and lease, buy and renew or purchase. A publicity plan is already in place for members of the community to inform Fingal County Council of empty homes which are not advertised for sale, which may of interest for the purposes of social housing.

**Derelict Sites**
Following an examination of the 46 properties listed, the elimination of non-residential properties, those that are in the planning process or listed for sale, there are a small number of properties which are being further investigated with a view to contacting the owners and encouraging them to bring their properties back into use. The CPO process may be utilised in these instances.

**Voids**
The Council manage and maintain circa 4,800 homes. The repair and re-letting of unoccupied Council owned stock is a priority and less than 1% of Council owned stock is vacant at any one time. Currently there are 32 properties where pre-let repairs are underway.

**Repair and Leasing Scheme**
The Repair and Leasing Scheme (RLS) targets vacant properties and secures them for social housing, by financing the cost of repairs. The scheme was rolled out on a national basis in February 2017. The Council has advertised the scheme widely across all forms of media, with our current landlords, estate agents, etc. To date there has been little or no interest in the scheme in Fingal probably due to high demand and low supply in the housing market. Any vacant properties are either being rented on the private market, being prepared for sale or other use.

**Conclusion**
Over the next 14 years, the population of Dublin is forecast to grow by 22% to 1.63 million. This will place further pressure on services but it also represents an opportunity and economic asset. It is essential that Fingal continues to grow in order to support the sustainability of the Dublin region. Fingal County Council has embarked on an ambitious programme of social housing delivery which has potential to deliver over 10,000 housing units of mixed tenure in the medium term. In relation to private sector housing, there is significant provision in our Development Plan to meet the needs of an ever expanding county.
However, there are challenges for Fingal including:
- Funding
- Infrastructure Deficits
- Population/Economic Growth
- Affordable Rental/Cost Rental Schemes
- New Form of Social Lease
- Identify Vacant Properties

There has tended to be a lot of public criticism, from many sources, that the Local Authorities have been too slow to react to the current housing crisis. In the case of Fingal, we have mobilised comprehensively, had good support from the elected members and department officials, while our staff have stepped up to the mark in an exceptional manner.

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