

FOCUS ON FAMILY HUBS IN CORK CITY

Over the past year Cork City Council has solidified its response to the housing and homelessness emergency in the Leaside city. Brian Geaney, the council's recently-appointed Director of Services for Housing and Community, says it's not a simple undertaking but a very complex and dynamic set of circumstances that cannot be resolved by single-focus initiatives.

Cork City Council is making solid progress on all fronts in relation to the current homeless crisis, by delivering results including new homes. And with the continued collaboration from all stakeholders including communities and elected members, our workable and effective plans and policies will achieve much more.

The Housing and Community Services Directorate is further engaged this year as it transitions to expand and cater for housing and associated service delivery to citizens in the upcoming extended city boundary in 2019. Cork City Council is currently busy dealing with the management of this change.

Before the Government's Rebuilding Ireland initiative was rolled out, the main emphasis generally focused on housing, rather than homelessness. This may have led to homelessness being viewed merely as an absence of suitable housing and remaining on the fringe of both housing and social policy consideration.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

In addition to alleviating the plight of the homeless through housing provision, family hubs and financial supports, more community consultation and evidence-based research into policy development in this area is needed, especially the 'new homeless'. This would provide a clear reference for future strategy development.

Cork City Council continues to find innovative and practical ways to help those who are at risk of homelessness or find themselves without a home. Integral to this approach is the



commitment and collaboration within the council and with its statutory and voluntary sector partners.

The first Family Hub opened its doors earlier this year on the Western Road, Cork in a beautiful old Victorian red-bricked building backing on to the Mardyke and Fitzgerald Park with all its amenities. The Hub can cater for 19 families and has been a resounding success to date. The council now plans to open further similar facilities and support services for families in the city later this year.



Brian Geaney, recently-appointed Director of Services for Housing and Community at Cork City Council.

REBUILDING IRELAND RESPONSE

Building and providing new homes in the city is the council's main plank as part of its Rebuilding Ireland response and it has progressed well on this front in the past year, by rolling out new housing schemes right across the city on both sides of the River Lee, while a further swathe of new homes are due to be handed over to families in October.

Some of the larger and more significant schemes being delivered directly by Cork City Council have commenced in Deanrock, Church Road, Skehard Road, Gerald Griffin Street, the South Parish, Togher, High Street and Banduff.

Schemes consist of a range of housing types from apartments to traditional three-bed semis to innovative sheltered step-down homes. Other schemes and services are being provided in the City North West Regeneration programme with estates recently opened and more contracts just started, as well as more in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs); all schemes direct and in partnership with others are funded by the Department of Housing, Planning and Community and actively supported by members of the council.

Planning permission for housing has been acquired by Cork City Council on lands in Boherboy Road, to progress this year together with advancing the LIHAF funded enabling infrastructure scheme on the Old Whitechurch Road landbank.

ACTIVITY RAMPED UP

Rapid delivery has been boosted using the Competitive Dialogue



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EU procurement and Part 8 planning procedure, in tandem with the traditional design and build delivery methods supported by the City Architect's Department and the Housing Agency.

Staff and resources have been augmented to handle the increased activity in both procurement and implementation phases of new homes delivery across the city. Construction activity has also been ramped up right across the housing built – asset base with enhanced works in planned maintenance and energy retrofitting of existing homes.

Given the scale of planning and implementation of new housing projects, the ramping up of activity across the board in housing includes tackling emerging issues such as changes and risks in homelessness and other problems.

So, combine all this with the increase in staff and the transformation/expansion underway in the transition to a greater city with a much larger population; Cork City Housing and Community Directorate is certainly buzzing with action!