

**COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE**

**GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**CÓIRÍOCHT DON LUCHT SIÚIL**

**TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME**

**2009 - 2013**

# INTRODUCTION

The existing Traveller Accommodation Programme for 2005 – 2008 will expire on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008. The Minister for Housing, Urban Renewal and Developing Areas has directed that relevant housing authorities prepare and adopt a new Traveller Accommodation Programme for 2009 – 2013, in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Programme 1998. The relevant Housing Authority in this regard is Galway County Council, and its functional area for this purpose includes Ballinasloe Town Council. In particular, the local authority's obligations under the Act include:

- A requirement to prepare and adopt by a specified date, an accommodation programme to meet the existing and projected accommodation needs of Travellers in their functional area
- Allowing for public input into the preparation and amendment of such programmes
- An obligation to take reasonable steps to secure the implementation of the Programme
- To review the Programme periodically, and in line with statutory 3-year review requirements
- A requirement for a Planning Authority to include objectives concerning Traveller accommodation in their County / City Development Plans

The date by which a Traveller Accommodation Programme for 2009 – 2013 must be adopted is 30<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Following initial Statutory Notice of preparation of a Traveller Accommodation Programme, the following submissions were received:

- Six no. submissions from residents of the Creggane area, Ballinasloe.
- Submission from the Irish Traveller Movement.
- Traveller Health Unit, Health Service Executive
- Western Traveller & Intercultural Development
- Galway Traveller Movement

The content of these submissions were noted and taken into consideration in the preparation of this draft Programme.

## POLICY

The Government Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) recognized that Travellers are a distinct ethnic group with their own customs, traditions and culture. Galway County Council also recognizes Travellers' identity as a minority ethnic group, some of whom are nomadic, and our specific policy statement included in the current County Development Plan states as follows:

*The Planning Authority recognizes the long tradition of the Traveller community within the County and has regard to the special needs arising from its indigenous culture. Galway County Council adopted a Traveller Accommodation Programme following a survey to determine existing and projected needs and having consulted with representatives of the traveller community.*

*The Council's stated policy is "to provide for the accommodation needs of Travellers as far as is reasonable and practicable using the full range of housing options available to the Council. This will be done in consultation with the travelling community, the settled community, and with the various other statutory and voluntary agencies concerned with the needs of Travellers".*

*Traveller Accommodation Policies:*

<i>HP6</i>	<i>Consult with Travellers before the design of new accommodation is finalized</i>
<i>HP7</i>	<i>Seek to ensure full participation of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee in the preparation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme and in the ongoing management of accommodation</i>
<i>HP8</i>	<i>Assist voluntary bodies in providing accommodation for Travellers</i>
<i>HP9</i>	<i>The Planning Authority will support these policies and measures for the duration of the Programme and adopt an amended Programme thereafter</i>

## **CONSULTATION:**

The Council consults with Travellers families directly about their accommodation needs from the time of application up to the time of their accommodation. In relation to standard housing, this consultation relates to their areas of preference and advice regarding likelihood of availability of housing in those areas. While all houses are finished to a particular standard of finish, consultation may also involve discussion regarding adaptations which may be required on medical grounds, as certified by a Medical Advisor. In relation to Traveller-Specific accommodation, consultations will take place with the relevant families to determine layout and design features required for their particular housing needs, while ensuring that account is taken of all technical, fire and public safety requirements. In particular, our staff members who are employed primarily to work with Travellers will be involved in the initiation, development and implementation of such proposals. The Council will have regard to any Ministerial Guidelines and directions issued regarding consultation on housing accommodation, in particular, the *Consultation Guidelines for Traveller-Specific Accommodation Projects* issued with Circular Letter TAU 8/2008.

### Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee:

This Committee was established in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, and comprises Travellers and Traveller representatives, Elected members, and Council officials. The role of this Committee is:

- To provide a liaison and facilitate consultation between Travellers and Members and Officials of the County Council
- To advise in relation to the preparation and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme
- To advise on the management of accommodation and any other aspect of accommodation for Travellers

The Housing Authority is committed to ensuring that the membership of the LTACC facilitates meaningful consultation with all parties, and is involved in the preparation, implementation and review of the Traveller Accommodation Plan. In general, the Committee meets quarterly during the year, or additionally as deemed necessary by its members. The membership of the LTACC is included in Appendix 1.

### Traveller Inter-Agency Group:

The establishment of these Groups was a recommendation of the *High Level Group on Traveller Issues* established in 2003, to ensure relevant State Agencies were focused on integrated delivery of services to Traveller families. Their recommendation was that an inter-agency approach should not involve the development of new structures, but rather the development of greater co-ordination in the existing functions of relevant state bodies. Thus, in 2006, each local authority was requested to establish a Traveller Inter-Agency Group under the aegis of the County Development Board. The Council is committed to maximizing inter-agency co-operation in the preparation and implementation of this Programme to ensure that not just housing needs, but health, educational and community needs, are addressed in a focused manner. This will be reflected in the Traveller Inter-Agency Strategy to be drawn up by the relevant CDB partners, and implemented through various Working Groups.

## **PERMANENT ACCOMMODATION / ESTATE MANAGEMENT:**

The Council fully assesses all applicants for housing and must be satisfied before consideration for housing that a letting to the applicant would not be contrary to good estate management. An application for housing will not be accepted if the housing applicant is deemed to be a risk to good estate management, and will be deferred if the applicant has engaged in anti-social behaviour. This includes the unauthorized parking of a caravan / mobile home at Council Estates / Houses.

The Council recognises the right of each tenant to enjoy living as they choose, provided this does not adversely affect other tenants and neighbours. The Housing Authority investigate breaches of tenancy relating to all our tenants regarding issues such as waste management, dog control, control of horses, and anti-social behaviour. In relation to traveller families, the Council recognizes that the

keeping of horses and scrap is traditional – however, the families must make their own arrangements for the acquisition or renting of land for grazing of horses and keeping of scrap as these practices cannot be allowed within gardens / lands of Council Estates for reasons of welfare, health & safety, and visual amenity.

Confirmation of estate management breaches or anti-social behaviour by a tenant results in the Housing Authority taking relevant disciplinary action. In the same way, where such issues are caused by an applicant for housing, the relevant disciplinary action is deferral of the housing application. The Housing Authority believes these actions are essential to protect the visual amenity of our estates and ensure all tenants are afforded a good quality of life.

## **TEMPORARY / TRANSIENT SITES:**

In designing and implementing policy in this regard, the Housing Authority has due regard to the nomadic nature of some Traveller families, subject to due regard to the need to provide for this at reasonable cost within the existing climate of scarce financial and staffing resources.

One of the measures open to the Housing Authority in accommodating transient traveller families is their accommodation at our existing network of Residential Caravan Parks, and the Housing Authority believe that there is sufficient capacity within existing facilities to do this. In this case, Traveller families are encouraged to ascertain the position regarding accommodation before moving to an area, and the Housing Authority will give priority to families who apply for admittance in advance.

It is noted that the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community and the National Guidelines for accommodating Transient Traveller Families, recommended that a network of transient sites be provided across the country. The Housing Authority believes that such a recommendation needs to be addressed and implemented on a national or regional basis, and in any case, the needs in this jurisdiction can largely be met through existing sites.

Temporary sites may also be utilized to deal with emergency accommodation issues.

## **ILLEGAL ENCAMPMENTS / PARKING:**

The Council discourages illegal encampments and to this end will use its range of legislative powers, in liaison with An Garda Síochána, where there are issues of public health and safety, or criminal trespass. In cases of illegal encampment, the Housing Authority will liaise with the family concerned with a view to establishing their circumstances and accommodation needs. Where temporary accommodation is offered and refused, the Council will have no option but to proceed to legal action.

In particular, the unauthorized parking of caravans / mobile homes by applicants for housing at Council Housing Estates cannot be tolerated by the Council, as this practice has a negative influence on estate management and the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme. A Caravan Policy has been introduced by the Housing Authority in this regard, due to the health & safety, fire safety, visual amenity, and welfare considerations, associated with this illegal parking. All such instances will be dealt with in accordance with the Council's Policy on estate management and anti-social behaviour.

# ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

## RANGE OF ACCOMMODATION OPTIONS:

The Council has through experience and consultation, identified standard housing as the preferred accommodation option for the vast majority of Traveller families. Standard housing provides for the inclusion of Travellers in mainstream housing programmes, and aids the integration of Travellers into the community. The Council will continue to assess Traveller families on the Housing Waiting List, for accommodation in accordance with the Scheme of Letting Priorities

The Council will continue to nominate Traveller families for inclusion in existing Voluntary Housing schemes, where this is expressed as a preference on their Housing Application Form. The Council will work closely with any Approved Housing Body who wishes to provide additional accommodation units as part of a Voluntary Housing Scheme.

The Council will facilitate Traveller families in accessing private-rented accommodation throughout the county, and will monitor the standards of such dwellings in accordance with its legislative powers. Where applicants are in receipt of rent supplement for the required period and have established a satisfactory record in private-rented accommodation, the Housing Authority may consider them for inclusion in the Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS). This Scheme provides a means of long-term housing, through the entering of a contract between the tenant, landlord and local authority for an agreed term.

There is a range of accommodation options which are designed around the specific needs of Travellers, as follows:

- Group Housing Schemes
- Temporary and Permanent Halting Sites
- A combination of Group Housing and Serviced Sites

The Council will facilitate a transfer from Traveller-specific accommodation into standard housing where a Traveller family so desires, and qualifies, to progress to an accommodation option which may lead to home ownership.

The Council recognizes that some Traveller families are in a position to provide accommodation from their own resources, and the Council has a number of schemes which may facilitate a path to home ownership:

- Local Authority Loans and Home Choice Loans
- Shared Ownership Scheme
- Affordable Housing Scheme

The extent of home ownership achieved in the Traveller community will be identified and reported annually through the Traveller Census.

## ASSESSMENT OF NEED:

A comprehensive assessment of accommodation needs of Travellers has been carried out in the collation of this Programme, to identify existing and projected accommodation needs. The existing need has been identified based on data collected for the Triennial Assessment of Housing Needs in March 2008, and an update of data included in the latest Traveller Census in November 2007.

The projected need is by necessity an estimated figure, based on projected population increase and new family formations over the period of this Programme. In general, it is expected that newly-formed traveller households will make suitable arrangements for securing private-rented accommodation, pending provision of accommodation by the Council in accordance with the Scheme of Letting Priorities.

In drawing up a Traveller Accommodation Programme for 2009-2013, the accommodation targets over the course of the previous Programme were initially examined. The following Table presents a summary of targets and outputs over the range of accommodation:

<b>Accommodation Options</b>	<b>Housing Need 2005 - 2008</b>	<b>Output 2005 – Sept 2008</b>	<b>Variation in Output</b>
Standard Houses:	85	89	+ 4
Group Housing:	16	8	- 8
Halting Site Allocations:	2	13	+ 11
Single Instance Houses:	10	18	+ 8
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>+15</b>

In examining outputs versus targets in the previous Programme, and in devising the targets and outputs for the new Programme, the following issues are noted:

- The number of Traveller families and their accommodation preferences in the previous Programme were based on existing need, but in fact are constantly changing and evolving over time. Therefore, the above output figures do not reflect the number of refusals of accommodation, or families who abandoned allocated properties. The statistics do reflect the general overall preference for standard-type housing throughout the Traveller population in the county.
- Planning and infrastructural issues delayed the development of some Group Housing Schemes and the relevant Group Housing Schemes have been carried over to the current Programme for implementation. Where delays of this nature have occurred, the Council will offer interim accommodation arrangements in another accommodation option if deemed necessary, e.g. on health and safety grounds.
  - In light of health & safety considerations for the residents, and submissions received, it should be noted that the proposal to re-locate 4 families from Creggane to a separate 4 unit Group Housing Scheme has been carried over to this Programme, and in the interim, the Council is committed to reducing the number of families temporarily resident at Creggane and to refurbishing the vacant unit for permanent occupation.
- The proposals for permanent Residential Caravan Parks include the integration of some group housing units at these locations over the course of this programme. The Council will re-examine the management of the temporary sites in terms of national guidelines, to identify and implement improvement works which would benefit the sites in overall terms.
- Existing tenants will only be considered for transfer to alternative housing units or purchased houses, where they meet the criteria for transfer set down in the Scheme of Letting Priorities.
- This Programme has been drawn up bearing in mind likely supply of social housing units over the 5-year period, and its targets are also subject to provision of sufficient capital funding for provision of single instance housing and infrastructural developments over the period.

The Assessment of Need is included at Appendix 2, distinguishing between direct provision by the Council and Town Council, Voluntary Bodies and private individuals.

The phasing of permanent accommodation proposals to be implemented by the County Council and Town Council is included at Appendix 3.

# STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The strategy of the Housing Authority for implementation of this Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009 – 2013 will focus on the following areas:

- **ONGOING REVIEW:** the Council will review this Programme on an ongoing basis through the auspices of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC), and in any event every three years as statutorily required. These reviews will include all issues associated with the accommodation of traveller families.
- **INTER-AGENCY APPROACH:** many other statutory and semi-state agencies have responsibilities in relation to traveller accommodation and all its associated needs. The Council will engage fully with these agencies in the implementation of this Programme, and will seek to utilize the structures of the County Development Board to ensure a co-ordinated delivery of services to the Traveller community.
- **ENSURING MUTUAL RESPECT:** both the local authority and the settled community have a responsibility to ensure provision of accommodation for the Traveller community. In turn, the Traveller community has responsibilities to the community at large. The mutual recognition and respect for these responsibilities is central to the successful integration of traveller accommodation into the community. In this respect, the Council will work with all parties and their representatives to improve relations through mutual respect.
- **PROMOTING VOLUNTARY HOUSING:** the Council is committed to the objective of utilizing this scheme to provide additional traveller-specific accommodation units. This assistance will take the form of provision of advice at all stages of the application process, provision of sites for housing if available and required, and provision of funding under the Capital Assistance Scheme or Rental Subsidy Scheme as appropriate.
- **MANAGEMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF HOUSING UNITS:** the Council carries out pre-tenancy training for all its tenants, and their rights and obligations under the Tenancy Agreement are clarified at this stage. The Council employs two Caretakers to control admissions to traveller-specific accommodation, and to report any maintenance issues, breaches of tenancy, and anti-social behaviour at these sites. In addition, the Council employ 3 Housing Liaison Officers & Traveller Liaison Officer, who are involved in implementing estate management initiatives, and also deal with breaches of the Tenancy Agreement. In particular, there is a focus on tenant participation in the management and maintenance of estates, through the establishment of Residents Associations in all Council Estates. The Council's Social Workers work closely with the Traveller community, to assist them in meeting their housing and associated welfare needs, liaising with other State Agencies as required.

## CONCLUSION

The Council has an excellent record in the provision of accommodation and integration of Traveller families into the community, and with the continued commitment of the Council and the assistance of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and Traveller Inter-Agency Group, it is hoped that this success will continue, subject to the availability of all required resources.

# APPENDIX 1

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## MEMBERSHIP OF LOCAL TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Section 22 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 sets out that the membership shall comprise as follows:

- a) members of the appointing authority concerned
- b) officials of the appointing authority concerned
- c) representatives of local travellers and traveller bodies, and
- d) where a local consultative committee has been appointed by the council of a county, one member from each relevant housing authority (if any) within the administrative county concerned

and the number of members referred to in paragraphs a) and d) shall not exceed one half of the membership of the local consultative committee and the number of representatives referred to in paragraph c) shall not be less than one quarter of the membership. The making of an appointment to the Committee is a reserved function.

### Elected Members:

Cllr. Peter Feeney (Chairperson)

Comh. Sean O'Tuairisc

Comh. Seosamh O'Cuaig

Cllr. Bridie Willers

Cllr. Tom McHugh

Cllr. Tomas Mannion

Cllr. Tom Reilly

### Officials:

Mr. Frank Gilmore, Director of Services

Ms. Mary Forde, Senior Social Worker

Ms. Ellen Mongan, Traveller Liaison Officer

Mr. Michael Timmins, Senior Engineer

Ms. Mary McGann, Administrative Officer

### Traveller Representatives:

Ms. Nora Dowd

Ms. Kathleen Ward

Mr. Martin Ward, Western Traveller & Intercultural Development (WTID)

Ms. Pam Mahony, Galway Traveller Movement (GTM)