

# MEATH COUNTY COUNCIL



## TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

**1<sup>st</sup> JULY 2019 – 30<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2024**

ADOPTED 7<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2019

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Under the provisions of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998, Meath County Council is required to prepare, adopt and implement a new Traveller Accommodation Programme to meet the accommodation needs of the County's indigenous Traveller community for the period 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 to 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024.

The purpose of the Act is to put in place the necessary focus and resources so as to ensure the accommodation needs of Travellers are strategically addressed by Housing Authorities.

Directions under the Act in relation to the preparation of the new Traveller Accommodation Programme are contained in Circular 35/2018 and related 'Memorandum on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Local Traveller Accommodation programmes 2019-2024' issued on 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2018.

The adoption of the Traveller Accommodation Programme is a reserved function of the elected members of Meath County Council

In preparation for this Programme, the following was undertaken:

- Review of Meath County Council's current Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018
- Consultation with the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees
- Input requested from external agencies and the general public and review of submissions received (three submissions received)
- Analysis of accommodation statistics relating to the Traveller community, including the completion of a needs survey
- Identification of targets and delivery mechanisms for the period 2019-2024

This Programme has been developed at a time of increased supply of housing units, both private and social, after a protracted period of limited housing supply. However, there is significant demand on all tenure types and unfortunately, the high level of homelessness recorded in recent years, continues to persist in the short term. It is recognised that the Traveller community has been disproportionately affected by homelessness.

Meath County Council is committed to the successful implementation of this Traveller Accommodation Programme, and will endeavour to work with all stakeholders in meeting the identified accommodation needs of the Traveller community in the County for the period subject to this Programme.

## **2.0 POLICY STATEMENT**

- Meath County Council recognises that Travellers are a distinct ethnic minority group, with a long history and specific cultural characteristics which are associated with a tradition of nomadism. Meath County Council endeavours to provide accommodation and associated accommodation supports to the indigenous Travelling Community, having regard to this

- Meath County Council is committed to addressing equality and human rights concerns for all in the delivery of Meath County Council's Housing functions, including Traveller accommodation, by the promotion of the values of dignity, inclusion, social justice, democracy and autonomy. Meath County Council will endeavour to develop a human rights focus into the work of this Accommodation Programme, in accordance with our Public Sector Duty (Section 42 (1), Irish Human Rights & Equality Commission Act 2014)
- Traveller accommodation can be simply defined as any form of housing occupied by members of the Traveller community; in practice this can mean standard housing (private home ownership, Local Authority, private rented with assistance from Local Authorities or independently), halting sites and group housing schemes
- It is the policy of Meath County Council to provide a high standard of living accommodation, which will be based on the distinct needs of Travellers which will be accommodated, in so far as possible
- Accommodation need will be assessed in accordance with generic housing legislation, 1966 to 2014, including the Traveller Accommodation Act 1998. Qualified applicants will be considered for available accommodation in accordance with Meath County Council's Allocation Scheme
- It is the objective of Meath County Council to ensure that practical and appropriate fire safety measures are applied in order to contribute to preventing loss of life and serious injury in Local Authority Traveller accommodation. Accordingly, Fire safety in Traveller accommodation will remain a set Agenda item for the quarterly meetings of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- An interagency approach will be adopted in the delivery of Traveller services
- Meath County Council will continue to engage on Traveller issues through the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC)
- Traveller accommodation will be managed on the same basis as Meath County Council's policy for the maintenance and management of all its housing stock, with specific regard to Meath County Council's Tenancy Agreement, Anti Social Behaviour Policy and Routine Maintenance policy
- Unauthorised encampments will be dealt with in accordance with the appropriate legislation
- The issue of transient sites has been discussed at the LTACC in preparation of this Programme. It is the view that no need has been identified for the provision of a transient site at this time
- Travellers, who present as homeless, will be afforded the supports of Meath County Council's Homeless Service, within the strategic context of the Mid East Region Homeless

Action Plan 2018-2020. In this context, the Housing First model may be considered in certain cases where cyclical homelessness exists due to underlying health issues, such as mental health and /or addiction

- Traveller households that have a member with a disability, will also fall under the supports and measures as detailed in Meath County Council's Strategy for Housing Person's with a Disability 2016-2019

### **3.0 REVIEW OF TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME 2014-2018**

#### **3.1 Existing Accommodation Provision**

Meath County Council has been proactive in assisting Traveller families with accommodation throughout the years. This is evident in the accommodation provided, including Traveller specific accommodation, standard housing and assistance in securing private rented accommodation.

In terms of Traveller specific accommodation, the following is the current provision in Co. Meath:

- 2 halting sites (30 bays)
- 5 Group Housing Schemes (40 units)

#### **3.2 Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018**

Meath County Council adopted the Traveller Accommodation Programme on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2018.

Outlined below is the progress made in respect to Traveller Accommodation for the period concerned:

- **36** Traveller families were accommodated by Meath Council Council through standard social housing allocations, exceeding the targets set for the period (20)
- Estimated that **202** families were assisted in securing private rented accommodation
- Works to the value of **€180,639**, were carried out by Meath County Council under the Local Authority Adaptation Works Scheme, to 15 properties that were tenanted by members of the Traveller Community. These works primarily centred on catering for the needs of household members that had a disability, in the form of the provision of extensions, wet rooms, level access showers and stair lifts
- Maintenance expenditure, including routine maintenance, relet expenditure and waste removal to the value of **€336,400** was expended in the upkeep of Meath County Council's two halting sites

- Routine maintenance expenditure of approximately **€200,000** on Meath County Council's Traveller specific Group Housing schemes
- Social Worker specifically employed for Traveller Accommodation provided ongoing supports to Traveller families in respect to their accommodation needs and vital linkages with health and welfare services
- Agreement attained with residents of St Francis Park halting site, on a proposed refurbishment plan for the site, with Part 8 planning process to commence shortly. This has been a long standing capital project, that has spanned a number of Traveller Accommodation Programmes, but is now nearing a point where the refurbishment of the site can now be achieved, subject to Departmental funding approval
- Quarterly meetings of the LTACC were sustained throughout the period of the previous Programme, providing an ongoing forum for consultation and accountability. In addition, there was engagement by the LTACC with national events on the matter of Traveller accommodation, including conferences and participation at a cluster meeting of LTACCs and the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee in May 2018

#### **4.0 CONSULTATION**

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 requires that a consultation process underpins the preparation and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme. Those that will be consulted include Travellers, the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, community and interest groups, and the public in general.

##### **4.1 Consultation with Travellers**

Meath County Council undertakes consultation with individual Travellers in relation to their accommodation requirements on an ongoing basis. This is achieved through Meath County Council's Social Worker, and also Housing Officers who assess Travellers accommodation needs as social housing applications are submitted.

##### **4.2 Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee**

Co. Meath's Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee is comprised of Travellers, elected members, members of Traveller support groups and officials of Meath County Council, and meets quarterly. The Committee has a key role in the consultation process in devising the Accommodation Programme and will have an ongoing monitoring role following adoption of the Programme

### **4.3 Consultation with Interested Organisations**

Notice of the intention to carry out the Assessment of Need and to prepare a Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme was given to the following external agencies:

- Meath Traveller Workshop
- Health Service Executive
- Approved Housing Bodies (active in the County)
- Neighbouring Local Authorities

The following submissions were received and given due consideration:

- Irish Traveller Movement
- Pavee Point
- Minceirs Whiden

Similarly, submissions will be invited in respect to this draft.

### **4.4 Meath Traveller Workshops**

Meath County Council maintains a positive working relationship with the Meath Traveller Workshop in relation to the accommodation and other needs of the Traveller Community within the County, and acknowledges their assistance.

## **5.0 ASSESSMENT OF TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION NEEDS 2019-2024**

### **5.1 Assessment Methodology**

The assessment of need was based on Traveller applicants on Meath County Council social housing waiting list, outcome of the annual Traveller Count November 2018, and knowledge of the staff of the Housing Department.

### **5.2 2018 Traveller Annual Count**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> November 2018, an Annual Count of Traveller families and their accommodation position was undertaken.

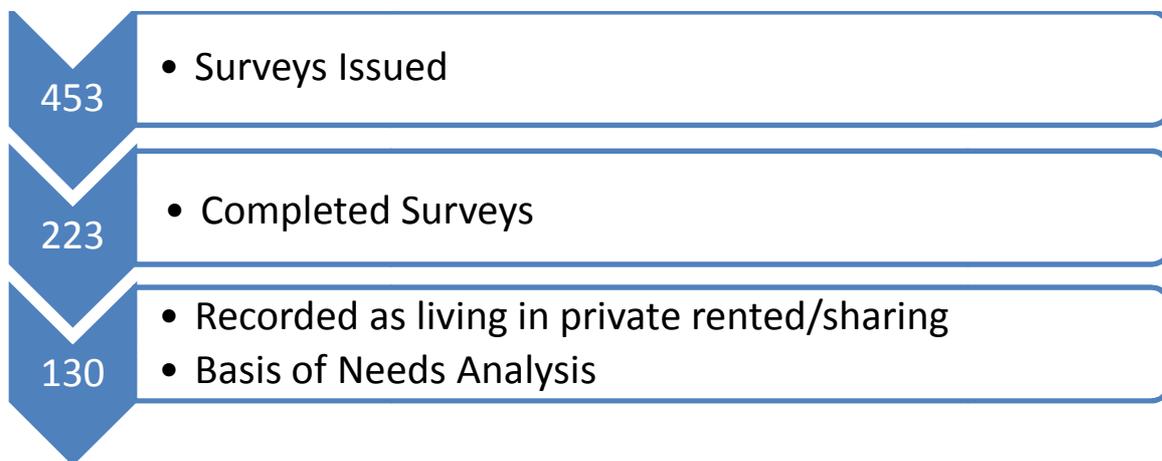
The Census recorded 453 Traveller families residing in the County. The majority of households (66%) were located in Navan, followed by Trim (9.9%).

In terms of Accommodation Type, 343 families were in a form of tenancy (social/private), while 76 households were deemed to be sharing with families, and a further 24 households were recorded as residing on unauthorised sites.

### 5.3 Traveller Accommodation Survey 2018/2019

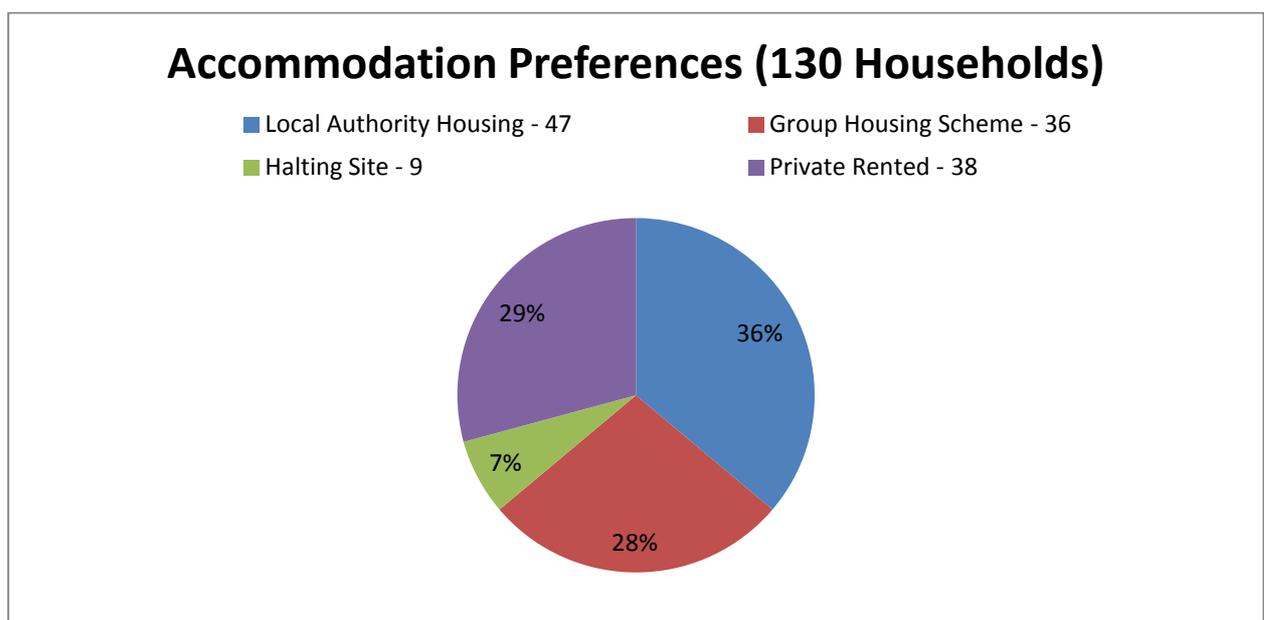
The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998, requires Housing Authorities to carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of Traveller Households for whom accommodation will be required during the period of the Programme. This assessment must also include an assessment of the need for transient sites.

A survey of Traveller families living in the County was carried out between September 2018 and March 2019. As many travellers as possible were surveyed in order to determine preference for accommodation requirements, based on the methodology cited in Section 5.1 above. The assessment covered both existing need and future projected needs of individuals over the lifetime of the Programme. A range of accommodation options were offered, including standard housing, group housing, halting site, private rented accommodation and transient sites.



The accommodation preferences of the 130 Traveller families who the survey identified as currently living in private rented accommodation or sharing with relatives are detailed in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Accommodation Preferences of those Recorded as Living in Private Rented Accommodation or Sharing**



In addition to the assessed need, consideration has also been given to the projected need for accommodation during the period of the programme. Nine imminent new family formations were identified in the immediate term that may realise an allocation during the period of this programme.

#### **5.4 Conclusions from Assessment**

In formulating this Programme, consideration is given to the projected need of Travellers and future family formations with a view to having a housing need during the period of the Programme, and in line with Meath County Council's Allocation Scheme, which is time based.

Accordingly, it is intended that those households who only recently joined Meath County Council's (newly formed Traveller households) social housing waiting list will be assisted through the Housing Assistance Payment in the short to medium term.

Furthermore, it is important that there is a realistic expectation in respect to the capacity of Meath County Council to fulfil the accommodation needs of those Traveller families surveyed as part of the aforementioned assessment process, in terms of their accommodation preferences.

The availability of social housing supply, competing priority demands, and the fact that there is a waiting period for all newly approved social housing applicants before an allocation of a social house is made, represents the context in which this Traveller Accommodation Programme will be delivered.

Having assessed the accommodation requirements of the Traveller Community as detailed above, and considered all factors involved, the following sets out a summary of the various types of housing supports required during the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024:

**Table 1: Project Traveller Housing Supports 2019-2024**

<b>TYPE OF HOUSING SUPPORT</b>	<b>REQUIREMENT</b>
Standard Local Authority Housing	45
Group Housing	20
Halting Site Bays	3
Housing First Tenancy	3
Local Authority Adaptation Works	15
Housing Assistance Payment	150

The assessment conclusion provides Meath County Council with a roadmap for the strategic delivery of Traveller accommodation over the next five years. However, it is based on a moment in time. Accordingly, it is worth noting that the accommodation preferences can, and may vary over time. Therefore, the accommodation needs of the Traveller community will continue to be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis by the relevant personnel of Meath County Council's Housing Department.

## **6.0 STRATEGY & IMPLEMENTATION STATEMENT**

### **6.1 Introduction**

Meath County Council is the implementing authority for the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024. It is the objective of Meath County Council to provide accommodation for Travellers that formed part of the assessment process detailed earlier, within the lifetime of the Programme.

### **6.2 Provision of Accommodation**

Meath County Council will provide a range of social housing supports/options for Travellers including:

- Standard Local Authority/Approved Housing Body Housing
- Group Housing
- Halting Site Bays
- Housing First Tenancies
- Local Authority Adaptation Works
- Improvement Works in Lieu of Housing
- Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)
- Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)
- Long Term Leasing
- Mobility Aid Housing Grant Scheme
- Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability
- Housing Aid for Older People

Meath County Council will ensure that all necessary funding submissions will be made to the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government in the realisation of this Programme. Furthermore, consideration will be given to the accommodation needs of the Traveller Community in the County/Local Development Plan/s.

### **6.3 Prioritisation of Applicants for Traveller Specific Accommodation**

In the allocation of Traveller Specific Accommodation, priority will be given to applicants based on length of time on the social housing waiting list, in accordance with Meath County Council's Allocation Scheme. Meath County Council will have regard to estate management considerations,

with the compatibility of families also to be taken into account, and consultation on this issue will take place with other families in the development, with the consent of the applicant. However, Meath County Council reserves the right to allocate any unit as it deems appropriate.

#### **6.4 Management & Maintenance of Traveller Accommodation**

In order to ensure that the accommodation and its surrounding area are maintained in good condition and that Traveller families successfully reside with other families, both from the Traveller and settled communities, it is important that arrangements are in place for the management and maintenance of Traveller Accommodation. Measures such as pre tenancy training, estate management and Tenancy Sustainment support will be delivered. The responsibility to achieve sustainable communities in the context of Traveller accommodation rests with both Meath County Council and the tenants concerned.

#### **6.5 Collaboration**

Meath County Council will continue to collaborate with a broad range of stakeholders in the delivery of sustainable Traveller accommodation, including the Traveller Community, Approved Housing Bodies, Health/Welfare agencies, Training/Employment services.

Meath County Council recognises the role of the Meath Traveller Workshop as a Community Development Group and its role in supporting Travellers to participate and represent their collective needs in the County, as well as providing a resource centre for Travellers in the County.

Meath County Council is committed to the principles of interagency working and will continue to work in partnership with all relevant agencies to ensure positive outcomes from this Programme.

#### **6.6 Development of Traveller Specific Accommodation**

Meath County Council will endeavour to ensure best practice is adopted in the development of new Traveller specific accommodation, including success factors as composition/compatibility of families sharing a group housing scheme, design and maintenance, location, consultation with Travellers, meeting needs and interagency involvement.

#### **6.7 Implementation Measures & Annual Targets**

The programme will be predominately driven by ***standard social housing*** provision, either through new units or casual vacancies as they arise during the delivery period, in line with Meath County Council's Allocation Scheme. Standard social housing includes housing provided by either the Local Authority or Approved Housing Bodies directly, or through long term leasing arrangements.

Vacancies in Group Housing Schemes or ***halting sites*** will be retained for Traveller applicants. It is envisaged that applicants who wish to avail of a bay on a halting site will be facilitated through vacancies that arise on the current halting site provision in the County. The current underutilisation

of **St Francis Park halting site** to be reversed with the proposed refurbishment scheme, which will allow for full occupancy.

Provision has been made for the delivery of a number of **Traveller Group Housing Schemes**, in addition to the existing 40 units provided across five such schemes. This new provision includes for two Group Housing Schemes in Navan comprising of eight and six units each (mixed GHS and family GHS respectively) and a mixed Group Housing Scheme of 6 units in Trim. Each of the three new schemes identified will require appropriate site identification in the first instance, and thereafter will be subject to the Four Stage Approval Process by the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government.

**Housing First tenancies** have been included in recognition of the need to end of the cycle of long term homelessness for a number of Travellers through the provision of intense health and welfare supports, in tandem with accommodation.

Works under the **Local Authority Adaptation Works Scheme (LAAWS)** have been included in this Programme's projected output as an important means to facilitate Traveller families in their existing Local Authority homes, and in particular when a household member has a disability, and specific requirements to the property are required as a result.

The targets outlined below have been set from an agenda of accomplishing both ambition and realism for Meath County Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024.

**Table 2: Annual Targets for Meath County Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme 1<sup>ST</sup> July 2019 – 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

	2019/2020	2020/2021	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	TOTALS
<b>Standard Social Housing</b>						
▪ Casual Vacancies / New Build/Acquisition/AHB	9	9	9	9	9	45
<b>Group Housing Schemes</b>						
▪ Navan (2021 & 2024)	0	0	8	6	6	20
▪ Trim (2023)						
<b>Halting Sites</b>						
▪ St Francis Park Refurbishment*	6*	0	1	1	1	9
▪ Casual Vacancies						
<b>Housing First Tenancies</b>						
▪ Mid East Region Homelessness Action Plan	1	0	1	0	1	3
<b>LAAWs</b>						
▪ MCC Housing People with a Disability Strategy	3	3	3	3	3	15
<b>TOTALS</b>	19	13	21	19	19	<b>92</b>

In addition to the above, it is recognised that the **Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)** will represent a key housing support that will be provided by Meath County Council to Traveller applicants during the course of this Programme. It is estimated that 150 tenancies will be supported through HAP, and this aspect will also be monitored and reported upon to the LTACC

## **6.8 Challenges to Implementation**

### **6.8.1 Limitations on Delivery**

The success of this Programme will require that Applicant Households are mindful of the limitations that Meath County Council operates within. For example, Applicants may request accommodation in areas where vacancies are unlikely to arise, which may inhibit Meath County Council's ability to achieve the targets as set down. Equally, there will be a limited supply of social housing, and competing priority demands, which will restrict Meath County Council's capacity to fulfil all the social housing accommodation needs of Travellers in the short term.

### **6.8.2 Holistic Approach Required**

While this Programme is focused on the physical delivery of accommodation, it is important to note that there are many issues such as health, education, training and employment which need to be addressed in conjunction with the provision of Traveller accommodation in order to successfully implement this Accommodation Programme.

### **6.8.3 Traveller Specific Accommodation**

The provision of Traveller specific accommodation needs to respond to a range of culturally specific needs, which include nomadism, proximity to family and access to other social and economic activities. These needs have specific implications for the location and design of sites and housing schemes. The Centre for Housing, NUI Galway noted the following *'Traveller families' needs and preferences vary, can be difficult to clarify, and if clear, can be difficult to realise. Accessing appropriate sites is a challenge, as is ongoing maintenance and management'*

Equally, there are challenges within the Traveller community, such as conflicts or feuds that can limit a Local Authorities' ability to successfully sustain occupancy

Notwithstanding the above, it is important to note that where Traveller specific accommodation works well, it can work very well, and this is what Meath County Council wishes to achieve.

#### **6.8.4 Planning & Development**

Reports have highlighted a number of barriers to providing Traveller specific accommodation (Weafer & Associates Research 2009: Research into the barrier to the provision of Traveller Accommodation/Oireachtas Library & Research Service Spotlight Report – Traveller Accommodation: The Challenges of Implementation 2018), including:

- Lack of suitable land
- Planning issues, including objections from local residents/representatives
- Unrealistic Traveller expectations
- Travellers changing their mind regarding accommodation preference
- Conflict/Feuds between families
- Lack of trust between Travellers and Local Authorities

In the delivery of Traveller accommodation, Meath County Council is cognisant of the above potential challenges to delivery.

#### **7.0 Monitoring & Review**

The proposed targets will be monitored on an annual basis, with an Annual Progress Report presented to the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee so as to ensure progress will be maintained.

This Accommodation Programme will be formally reviewed within three years of adoption.