



COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE
GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL



DRAFT TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

2014 – 2018

January 2014



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1. Introduction

1.1 Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998

Galway County Council, under the provisions of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, is required to prepare and adopt a new Traveller Accommodation Programme for the five year period 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2018. The new Programme will replace the current Programme which will expire on 31st December 2013.

Under the 1998 Act Galway County Council has certain obligations in relation to the preparation, adoption and implementation of a Traveller Accommodation Programme. In summary, Galway County Council is required to:

- Prepare and adopt an Accommodation Programme to meet the existing and projected accommodation needs of Travellers in County Galway
- Allow for public input to the preparation and amendment of the Programme.
- Take appropriate steps to secure implementation of the Programme.
- Include objectives concerning Traveller Accommodation in the County Development Plan.

The Minister for Housing & Planning has set the latest date for the adoption of the Accommodation Programme as 30th April 2014. The Minister has also directed that a review of this Accommodation Programme should be carried out not later than 31st December 2016.

1.2 Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee

In accordance with the provisions of Section 21 and 22 of the 1998 Act a Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee has been established. The Committee meets regularly to advise Galway County Council on the provision and management of accommodation for Travellers.

The Consultative Committee plays an important role in the development of the Traveller Accommodation Programme and the views of the Committee, including the assessment of needs, have been taken into account in the preparation of this Programme. Implementation of the Programme will be monitored by the Committee and issues arising addressed. Membership of the Galway Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee comprises 14 members (see Appendix 1).

2. Review of Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2013

Targets reached

- Galway County Council reached its targets on social housing.
- Two extensions are underway to facilitate a one large family and another family with special needs.

Delivery Issues arising for Traveller Specific accommodation

- The family for whom a purpose built large home was at contract stage have decided that they did not wish to live there so this project will not proceed.
- Creggaun, Ballinasloe – after great efforts to build a group scheme for 4 families they clearly indicated that they no longer want group housing. Agreement has been reached to purchase 2 houses for the larger families.

Craughwell - The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2009-2013 proposed the addition of a 3 house scheme to the six bay halting site. The original time-frame for the delivery of this project was not achieved for various reasons including planning issues, changing requests from families, and laterally, resource issues. Travellers continued to have issues about increasing the size of the whole scheme to 9 units.

- **Rental Accommodation Scheme**

The anticipated level of outputs under the Rental Accommodation Scheme has been achieved under the 2009-2013 RAS Programme. Any successor to this programme will continue to be an important aspect in addressing Traveller accommodation needs under the 2014-2018 Programme. There are 16 Traveller families currently accommodated under the RAS scheme.

- **Local Authority Standard Housing**

While the targets in relation to the provision of Standard Local Authority Housing were exceeded over the period of the 2009-2013 Programme, Galway County Council's capacity to deliver units of standard local authority housing is negatively impacted upon by the suspension of the Housing Construction programme nationally, the curtailment of the Voluntary Housing Programme and the limited family type accommodation casual vacancies arising in existing housing stock. There is limited availability of larger family type dwellings which would be required for some of the family profiles involved. These issues will continue to impact on the capacity of Galway County Council to deliver standard local authority housing over the period of the new Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018.

- **Home ownership**

Approximately 80 Traveller families are home owners in the County and support and information continues to be available to individuals and families who choose this option.

Public Consultation Process

Galway County Council, in accordance with the requirements of Section 8 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, gave public notice on 12th September 2013 of its intention to prepare a Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2014-2018 and to carry out an assessment of existing and projected accommodation needs of Travellers.

Notice of our intention to prepare a Draft Accommodation Programme was also given to the following:

- Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- The Elected Members of Galway County Council
- Housing Strategic Policy Committee
- Adjoining Housing Authorities
- Health Service Executive West
- Galway Traveller Interagency Group
- Irish Traveller Movement

Pre- Draft Submissions

Submissions were invited for consideration for inclusion in the new Programme. A total of 3 submissions were received before the closing date for submissions of Friday 11th October 2013. Submissions were received from the following:

- Irish Traveller Movement
- Galway Traveller Movement
- Western Traveller Intercultural Centre

The contents of these submissions have been noted and taken into consideration in the preparation of the Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018.

Consultation has also taken place with the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and with individual Traveller families in relation to their accommodation needs.

Submissions on the Draft

There were 2 submissions received on the Draft programme and the issues raised have been incorporated into the programme

4. Assessment of Need and Projected Need

4.1 Assessment of Need

In accordance with Section 9 of the Housing Act 1988, as amended, and Section 6 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, Galway County Council assessed and identified the accommodation needs of Traveller families to be met during the period of this Programme, from 1st January, 2014 to 31st December, 2018.

This assessment relates to the existing accommodation need and the projected need estimated to arise across the range of Traveller Accommodation options, including group and standard housing, long term leasing, rental accommodation scheme, proposed new housing assistance payment scheme.

The assessment of need is based on the following:

- Annual Count of Travellers recorded on Friday 30th November, 2012
- Housing Needs Assessment completed as at 30th April 2013
- Meetings with individual Traveller households
- A desktop review of applications and household circumstances was undertaken and a cross-referencing exercise was completed to ensure that data was fully up to date and in order to determine individual accommodation requirements
- Information obtained has informed the total need over the period of this Accommodation Programme, including the estimate of new family formations, and the accommodation proposals to meet that projected need.
- New guidelines regarding income limits and the need to take income from all adult household members into account results in some large families no longer being eligible for social housing supports.

Note : Further joint work is required for City applicants who also expressed a preference for living in the County

Table 3: Traveller Households in County Galway by Current Accommodation Type

Accommodation type	
Standard Local Authority Houses	205
Group Housing	49
Houses purchased with LA assistance	60
Purchased without LA assistance (est.)	20
RAS	16
Rent Supplement	120 (estimate)
Private rented without rent supplement	15
Voluntary Housing	7
Affordable housing	4
Families sharing involuntarily	12
Families on services Halting sites	<u>13</u>
Other families (unauthorised)	26
Total	547

4.2 Projected need

The Council is obliged to make an assessment of the number of Traveller households who will require accommodation within the lifetime of the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014–2018. The figures from the Annual Traveller Count show that Galway's Traveller population has increased significantly over the past 10 years, from 382 households in 2002 to 547 households in 2012. There has also been a considerable level of new household formation with many of these new households, who would traditionally have emigrated or moved away, now opting to remain in County Galway.

Based on knowledge of families, the numbers of persons over 15 years in the county it is estimated that there will be in the region of 125 new families formed in the life of this programme. The number of non-indigenous Traveller families in recent years remains quite low.

Table 4: Current need and projected need of accommodation units by location

area	Current need	urgent	Projected need	Total need in 5 year plan
Loughrea / Craughwell	6		13	19
Killimor/Kiltormer/Clontuskert	4		8	12
Athenry	4		12	16
Tuam/Abbeyknockmoy	8		35	43
Headford	0		4	4
Ballinasloe	5		24	29
Ahascragh/Creggaun	14		13	27
Ballygar /Mountbellew	7		16	23
	48		125	173

The level of need and the range of accommodation required will be kept under review on an ongoing basis.

4.3 Current Accommodation and Requirements

There are 48 families living in County Galway in unauthorised sites, roadside encampments or involuntarily sharing accommodation considered to have urgent need of accommodation.

The expressed accommodation preference of the majority of Traveller housing applicants is for standard local authority housing or private rented accommodation. With the exception of a small number of households who

wish to be accommodated on the existing halting sites and group schemes no demand or requirement for additional Traveller-specific accommodation has been expressed or identified.

It is anticipated that the housing need will be met over the period of this Accommodation Programme predominantly through the provision of standard Local Authority Housing and through the Rental Accommodation Scheme and the proposed new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)¹.

The ability of the Council to provide local authority standard housing continues to be negatively impacted however by a number of factors including:

- Suspension of the Housing Construction programme nationally
- Curtailment of Voluntary Housing Programmes
- Limited family type accommodation vacancies arising
- Limited availability of larger family type dwellings which would be required for some of the family profiles involved
- Estate Management issues
- The standardisation of differential rents will mean a loss of income to the council

Accordingly it is anticipated that the need arising will predominantly be met through the Rental Accommodation Scheme and proposed new Housing Assistance Payment.

Joint application area with City Council

A cohort of 54 families who are City Council applicants have expressed an interest in being accommodated in the County. Thirteen of these are requesting Traveller Specific type accommodation. Galway County Council will work jointly with the City Council in consultation with the families to ascertain the specific details.

¹ **Housing Assistance Payment:** Responsibility for recipients of rent supplement with a long term housing need is to be transferred from the Department of Social Protection to Housing Authorities under a new Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) – the HAP payment is to be tested in a number of selected local authorities in 2014, following the enactment of the necessary legislation.

5. Policy

Galway County Council's mission statement is *"to develop the County in a manner which contributes to the positive well being and quality of life for all citizens"*. Our Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 reflects national and EU Equality Legislation and aims to achieve the core values of the mission statement of Galway County Council. Galway County Council recognises Travellers' identity as a minority group and will endeavour to meet the needs of Travellers using the range of accommodation options available to the Council. This provision takes place in consultation with the Traveller community, the settled community and with the various other statutory and voluntary agencies delivering services to Travellers as required.

5.1 Travellers Specific Accommodation

Recognising Travellers' distinct culture and needs, Galway County Council has provided Traveller specific accommodation in Ballygar, Loughrea, Tuam, Abbeyknockmoy, Craughwell, Portumna, Clontuskert and Athenry, in consultation with local Travellers and Traveller Support Groups. The Assessment of Needs 2013 has not identified any requirement for additional Traveller specific accommodation from County applicants. Galway City Council applicants who express an interest in accommodation in the County area will have their circumstances reviewed in accordance with County Council eligibility criteria. All accommodation provided will comply with the directions and guidelines issued by the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government. There is currently an availability, within Galway County Council, of Group Housing and Halting site tenancies. Galway Co. Council will continue to monitor and explore the accommodation needs in Craughwell.

5.2 Long-Term Accommodation

The Council will have regard to the full range of housing options available in the provision of long-term accommodation for Travellers including Standard lettings in Local Authority Estates, Group Housing, Residential Halting Sites, Voluntary Housing, Long Term Leasing and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)/Housing Assistance Payment (HAP).

The Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011 set out the manner in which a housing authority will determine a household's qualification for social housing support and the description and classification of its housing need. All applicants for social housing support must be assessed in accordance with these regulations.

Existing tenants of Galway County Council accommodated in standard local authority accommodation, Group Scheme Dwellings, Permanent Halting Site accommodation or households accommodated in dwellings under the Rental Accommodation Scheme or the Long-Term Leasing Scheme can apply for a transfer to alternative local authority accommodation. Each transfer application will be assessed on its own merits having regard to the particular household circumstances, and in accordance with the Council's Transfer Policy.

Where tenants surrender their existing local authority accommodation, other than in an approved transfer situation, their tenancy will be terminated and they will no longer be eligible for reassessment for inclusion on the housing waiting list and/or to access the Rent Supplement Scheme for alternative private rented accommodation, on the basis that their housing need has previously been addressed by the local authority. In any such circumstances tenants will be informed of the serious implications of surrendering their tenancy before a surrender of tenancy form will be accepted by Galway County Council. Where former tenants proceed to surrender their accommodation they will be deemed responsible for meeting their accommodation needs from their own personal resources.

In the event that properties are abandoned by a tenant and the property is not occupied by the household as their normal place of residence for extended periods of time, proceedings will be initiated to recover possession of such properties and the properties will then be re-allocated to qualified applicants on the Housing Waiting List in accordance with the Council's Allocations Scheme.

5.3 Transient Sites

The incidence of roadside or unauthorised encampments is relatively infrequent in Galway with no discernible pattern arising. The numbers involved are relatively small. It is considered that transient accommodation suitable to meet the needs of nomadic families would best be provided on a regional basis with appropriate caretaking, maintenance and management services delivered.

5.4 Unauthorised Encampments

Unauthorised encampments present difficulties in relation to health and safety and can be hazardous to road users. Galway County Council will consult with relevant parties to address issues arising. The Council will however utilise powers available under the legislation to remove caravans/temporary dwellings when deemed appropriate and necessary.

5.5 Emergency Accommodation

Existing procedures for meeting emergency housing needs will continue to be used for emergency Traveller housing needs. This may include sourcing temporary emergency accommodation where a bona fide housing need has been established or the provision, in exceptional circumstances.

5.6 Voluntary Housing

Galway County Council will further assist and encourage Voluntary Housing Bodies to make more housing units available for Travellers in the life of this programme and a number of projects are at discussion stage.

5.7 Housing Allocation Policy

Traveller applicants will be considered in conjunction with all other eligible applicants for suitable accommodation vacancies arising in accordance with the Council's Allocation Scheme.

5.8 Transfer and Succession of Tenancy Policy

Existing tenants, including tenants of dwellings provided under the Social Housing Leasing Initiative, Rental Accommodation Scheme, or by Approved Housing Bodies, may apply for consideration for a transfer to alternative accommodation in the following circumstances:

- Down-sizing requirement,
- Exceptional medical/disability or compassionate grounds, or
- Where there is over-crowding.

Galway County Council will not consider transferring a tenant because of unsatisfactory relations with a neighbouring tenant or because of dissatisfaction in general with the estate or the neighbourhood.

Tenants seeking a transfer must also comply with all the general provisions of their tenancy agreement, including the requirement to have a clear rent account.

On the death of a tenant, the tenancy may be transferred to the tenant's partner/spouse or to a member of the tenant's immediate family normally resident in the dwelling at the date of the tenant's death. In determining whether or not the tenant's immediate family was normally resident in the dwelling on the date of the tenant's death, details included on the previous Rent Assessments will be taken into account. The entitlement to make an application for a succession of tenancy will not apply where Galway County Council is satisfied that the applicant for succession deliberately took up occupancy in the dwelling for the sole purpose of obtaining tenancy in these circumstances.

5.9 Back Up Services and Support

The Council's Housing Unit employs two fulltime caretakers to deal with maintenance issues in relation to Traveller specific accommodation units. Supports also include a Traveller Liaison Officer, two Social Workers and a Senior Social Worker. In addition, the staff of the Housing Department are available to deal with issues arising. New housing applicants are assessed by the Housing Unit and information and advice is available to applicants as required on the range of housing options available.

5.10 Inter-Agency Approach

It is the policy of Galway County Council to adopt an inter-agency approach in the provision of services and accommodation to Travellers. This approach is critical, particularly in relation to addressing any special needs

accommodation and support requirements. The HSE Public Health and Occupational Therapy services are central to this process.

6. Strategy Statement

Section 10 (2) requires that an accommodation programme should specify a strategy for securing the implementation of the programme.

6.1 Implementing Authority

Galway County Council is the authority responsible for implementing the Traveller Accommodation Programme. The Council co-operates and co-ordinates with other agencies to meet the accommodation needs of Travellers. In particular, a number of groups have an important role to play in securing the implementation of the programme including:-

- The Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- The Housing and Corporate Services Strategic Policy Committee
- Local Traveller Development/Support Groups
- Galway Inter Agency Travellers Services Group
- Health Services Executive West
- An Garda Síochána
- Department of Social Protection
- Department of Education and Science
- Voluntary Housing Groups

It will be the responsibility of Galway County Council to seek the co-operation of the above groups to ensure the implementation of the Programme. Progress in relation to the Plan will be monitored by the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

6.2 County Development Plan

Provisions contained in the Galway County Development Plan 2009-2015 – are sufficient to realise the Traveller accommodation objectives set out in the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014 - 2018. Appropriate provisions will also be incorporated into the Galway County Development Plan 2015 – 2021.

6.3 Development of Proposals /Implementation of Programme

The Council will avail of the full range of housing options having regard to expressed accommodation preferences and working within the existing budgetary constraints on capital funding. In relation to standard

housing the need will be met, having regard to the cessation of the housing construction programme, through casual vacancies arising in existing local authority housing stock and subject to resources, a limited number of acquisitions. The Long Term Leasing Scheme, Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) once operational, will also be utilised as a means of addressing long term housing needs. The Voluntary Housing sector are also expected to provide accommodation units.

It is acknowledged that there are issues arising in relation to the availability of private rented accommodation. Assistance will be given to Approved Housing Bodies in the provision of Traveller Accommodation through the available voluntary housing funding channels. It is considered that there is potential for this approach to result in increased supply of suitable accommodation.

6.4 Financial Resources

The successful implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014 – 2018 will be dependent on the provision of funding (capital and revenue) from the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government.

6.5 Management and Maintenance of Accommodation

The effective management and maintenance of accommodation is crucial. Traveller accommodation will be managed on the same basis as all other housing stock. Galway County Council will endeavour to ensure maximum tenant participation to manage and maintain accommodation schemes to a high standard.

7. STRATEGY FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The strategy of the Housing Authority for implementation of this Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014-2018 will focus on the following areas:

- **Ongoing review:** the Council will review this Programme on an ongoing basis through the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC), and in any event, before December 31st 2016 as statutorily required. These reviews will include all issues associated with the accommodation of Traveller families.
- **Interagency 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 this approach is currently working well in terms of tenancy sustainment.
- **Ensuring mutual respect and community harmony.** The recognition and respect of all stakeholders for each other is central to the successful integration of Travellers into the community. The Council's monitoring and support of Estate Management, Resident Associations and tenancy agreements support this position.
- **Promoting voluntary housing:** the Council is committed to the objective of utilizing this scheme to provide additional Traveller 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 (if available) under the Capital Assistance Scheme or Rental Subsidy Scheme as appropriate.
- **The management and maintenance of 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 facilitate access to Traveller-specific accommodation, and to report any maintenance issues, breaches of tenancy, and anti-social behaviour at these sites. In addition, the Council employs three Housing Liaison Officers and a Traveller Liaison Officer, who are involved in implementing estate management initiatives, and also deal with breaches of Tenancy Agreements. 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.
- **Dealing with Anti Social Behaviour** is a huge drain on human and financial resources therefore strict adherence to Tenancy Agreements is required for all tenants. . It is proposed to have CCTV cameras installed on three different estates, one being Traveller Specific Accommodation and appropriate action will be taken against offenders.

7.1 Targets for delivery 2014-2018

As outlined above the Projected Need over the period of this Accommodation Programme is broken down as follows:

Category	Number of Households
Existing urgent need i.e. sharing accommodation involuntarily or living in unauthorized sites +or basic serviced bays in sites	48
New Household formations (projected need)	125
Total	173

The Galway County Council targets for meeting this projected need, over the period 2014 to 2018, are as set out in Table 5 below:

Table 5 – Targets for Delivery – 2014-2018

Accommodation Type	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	Total
Group Housing Scheme - Existing	1	1	1	1	1	5
Permanent Halting Site Service Block - Existing	1	1	1	1	1	5
Local Authority Standard Housing	5	5	5	5	5	25
Rental Accommodation Scheme / Long term leasing	7	7	7	7	7	35
Purchase by G Co. Co.	2	1	1	1	1	6
Voluntary housing	2	5	5	5	5	22
Purchase by Travellers	1	1	1	1	1	5
Housing Assistance Payment/ Private rented accommodation with or without rent supplement	14	14	14	14	14	70
Totals	33	35	35	35	35	173

The above proposals address the net need as assessed together with the projected need as estimated and also address the expressed preferences of existing approved applicants for Standard Local Authority/RAS/Long Term Leased/Private Rented accommodation rather than Traveller-specific accommodation.

The delivery of outputs under the Rental Accommodation Scheme, the Long Term Leasing Scheme and the proposed new Housing Assistance Payment is dependent on units being available in the private housing market

and the willingness of the landlord/agent to engage in these Schemes. Given the extent of the Traveller population, and the level of general demand in some locations, households will have to consider a broader range of locations, within a reasonable distance, in terms of meeting their accommodation needs.

Galway County Council has 2,747 approved applicants on the housing waiting list and allocations will be according to the scheme of letting priorities. It is expected that Approved Housing Bodies will make a significant contribution, in terms of accommodation units, to this five year programme.

Travellers who are in a position to purchase their own homes will be encouraged to do so and grants and subsidies will be subject to availability of funds.

8. 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.

The targets set out in this Programme have been developed having regard to the existing and projected need for Traveller accommodation. The delivery of this Programme requires a commitment from all stakeholders to work together and is also dependent on the availability of necessary funding. The success of the programme also depends on Travellers and support agencies recognising the current constraints on accommodation provision and accepting that applicants will have to be more flexible about locations if their housing need is to be met.

Galway City Council applicants who express an interest in accommodation in the County area will have their circumstances reviewed in accordance with Country Council eligibility criteria.

The Council recognises that the provision of appropriate associated supports is also a critical factor in ensuring that the accommodation solutions delivered for individual families are successful. We will continue to work closely with Travellers, their representatives, the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, Traveller Support Groups, Galway Inter Agency Traveller Services Group and other relevant agencies in this regard. We will also continue to actively seek, in conjunction with other agencies as appropriate, to identify and access potential funding opportunities to progress initiatives in relation to Traveller development, support and integration.

Appendix 1

Membership of the Galway Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee

The current Membership of the Galway Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee is as follows:

Owen Ward Traveller representative
Martin Ward Traveller representative
Geraldine Ward Donovan Traveller representative
Pam Mahony / Maedhbh Moroney GTM

Cllr. Michael Maher
Cllr. Gerry Finnerty
Cllr. Tom Mc Hugh
Cllr. Peter Roche
Cllr. Johnny Walsh
Cllr. Liam Carroll
Cllr. Peter Feeney
Cllr. Seosamh O'Cuaig
Michael Shiel. S.E.E.

Ellen Mongan TLO
Martina Downey AO
Margaret Jordan AO
Jean Brann SEO
Mary Forde SSW
Michael Raftery Acting Director of Services