



**DRAFT TRAVELLER
ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME
2025-2029
FOR
COUNTY OFFALY**

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Section 1

1.1 Introduction

Under the provisions of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, Offaly County Council is required to prepare, adopt and implement a Traveller Accommodation Programme.

Circular Letter Housing 46/2023, issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on 18th December 2023, requires Housing Authorities to prepare, for Adoption and Implementation, a Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period from 1st January, 2025 to 31st December, 2029 as per Section 10(1) of the 1998 Act. The Minister has specified 31st December, 2024 as the latest date by which Accommodation Programmes must be adopted.

This Traveller Accommodation Programme will be the sixth Programme to be adopted by the Council since the commencement of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998. The Council has exceeded its target for the provision of 65 units of accommodation in the current Programme 2019-2024; to date 75 families have been accommodated since the Programme commenced in 2019.

The Council at present accommodates Travellers in Group Housing; Halting Sites; and Standard Housing in Council and Approved Housing Bodies, and through various Leasing and Rental Accommodation Schemes. It also supports private-rented tenancies through the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) Scheme. This Programme outlines this Council's proposal to meet the needs of the Traveller families normally resident within this County and the strategy it will adopt to achieve these proposals.

1.2 Legislative Context of Traveller Accommodation Programme

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 came into effect on 10th September 1998. The primary purpose of the Act is to provide a comprehensive legislative framework, which requires Housing Authorities to meet the accommodation needs of Travellers normally resident within their administrative areas.

The provisions of the Act play an integral part in promoting social inclusion and equality and counteracting discrimination that may be experienced by members of the Traveller community. The Act further provides for a comprehensive and planned response by Housing Authorities in meeting the varying accommodation needs of the Traveller community, a process underpinned by a thorough consultative process with all concerned interests.

Sections 21 and 22 of the Act provide for the establishment of a Local Traveller Consultative Committees (LTACC) in each Local Authority to advise on the provision and management of accommodation for Travellers, including the preparation and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes. The role of the Committee is outlined in Appendix 2. The membership of the LTACC comprises of elected members, officials and local Traveller representatives.

The provisions of the 1998 Act are reflected in the structure of this Traveller Accommodation Programme.

1.3 Consultation

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 requires that an extensive and thorough consultation process be undertaken in the preparation and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme. Accommodation Programmes are required to be prepared in consultation with other adjoining local authorities, Health Service Executive, Approved Housing Bodies, local Traveller organisations and groups, Local Traveller Consultative Committee (LTACC), other relevant community groups and the public in general.

The purpose of this broad consultation process is to ensure that the interests of all concerned with or affected by proposals for Traveller Accommodation are considered and to facilitate a planned and comprehensive response by housing authorities to the accommodation needs of Travellers.

1.4 Information/awareness and consultation

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 and the Guidelines for the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes 2025-2029, issued in December 2023, set out the timeframe, notifications required and the consultation process that is required for the development and adoption of the Traveller Accommodation Programme.

Notice of the intention to prepare the Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025-2029 and inviting submissions at an early stage in the process was communicated to the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC), the HSE, adjoining Housing Authorities, Approved Housing Bodies, and Voluntary/Community bodies as deemed appropriate including Local Traveller organisations.

Submissions were received from eight parties listed in Appendix One. These submissions were considered in the preparation of this plan and have been incorporated into the plan as appropriate.

The Council will comply with whatever statutory requirements are currently in force in relation to public consultation in providing accommodation under this programme, such as the provisions of Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as amended.

Consultation with Travellers and their support groups will be an essential element of the Programme, especially with regard to detailed design specifics of each individual development with a view to meeting in full the accommodation needs of the Traveller families who will occupy them.

Section 2: Statement of Policy

2.1 Statement of Policy

Offaly County Council, as one of its objectives, strives to implement national housing policy to ensure that every household that needs it has access to quality, affordable housing in an acceptable environment. Individual housing needs are met through a number of different schemes and initiatives.

It is Offaly County Council's policy to respect the distinctive culture and identity of the Travelling Community. Offaly County Council will seek to provide accommodation for Travellers in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, and having regard to the provision of accommodation for Travellers as provided for in a number of statutory policy documents of Offaly County Council, in particular the following: -

- Offaly County Development Plan 2021- 2027
- Offaly County Council Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029 (Draft – for adoption in late 2024)
- Offaly Local Economic and Community Plan 2024 – 2029 (Draft – for adoption in late 2024)

Specific reference is made to the Traveller Community and objectives around meeting accommodation needs in the County Development Plan. The wider but related issues of social inclusion and equality are also referred to throughout the documents.

Offaly County Council County Development Plan 2021-2027 (Chapter 2) contains the following statements in relation to the Traveller Community:

- Offaly County Council recognises the needs of the Travelling community within the County. These are addressed and delivered within the context of an adopted Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 and subsequent programmes, subject to funding **(2.6.3 Specific Needs Housing)**.
- **HP-02:** It is Council policy to seek to ensure that groups with special housing needs, such as older people (in accordance with the Age Friendly Strategy for Offaly 2018-2021 and any subsequent editions), single person households, persons with physical and / or learning disabilities, the homeless, the travelling community, asylum seekers and refugees, and those in emergency accommodation are accompanied in a way suitable to their specific needs **(2.7 Housing Policies)**.
- **HO-05:** It is an objective of the Council to provide suitable housing accommodation and living conditions for the Traveller community in accordance with the Offaly Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024, and any subsequent programme adopted by the Council **(2.7 Housing Policies)**.

2.2 Provision of accommodation

Applicants seeking Social Housing accommodation, including Traveller Specific accommodation, are required to submit a Social Housing application and relevant documents to the Council in accordance with the Housing Regulations. The Social Housing Assessment (Amendment) Regulations 2022 provided for the revising of the Social Housing application form from 14th March 2022 to include a Traveller identifier question to identify Travellers

wishing to be assessed in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 and included in Traveller Accommodation Programmes.

It is the policy of the Council to consult with Traveller applicants regarding their accommodation needs and requirements, and to provide, where appropriate, Traveller Specific Accommodation. However, this may not always be available to each applicant and, therefore, other available options will be explored and offered. The Council will not accept responsibility for providing accommodation to Traveller families (including traders) who from time to time move into the area. Also, the Council will decline to assist if they are satisfied that applicants have adequate accommodation available to them in other areas, or have had specific traveller accommodation provided for them under Traveller Accommodation Programmes of other Housing Authorities, or possess the means to provide such accommodation from their own resources.

There are a full range of housing options available in the provision of accommodation for Travellers, including:

- Standard Social Housing
- Traveller Group Housing
- Traveller Halting Site
- Social Leasing Scheme / Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)
- Private Rented Accommodation with support of Housing Assistant Payments (HAP)
- Assistance in Private House Ownership - Tenant Purchase Scheme, Local Authority Home Loan, Housing Adaptation Grant, Special Traveller Grant, Vacant Homes Grant, Improvement Works In Lieu of Housing.

The Council will continue to provide Homeless Service supports, where applicable, to housing applicants from the Travelling community. The Council employs a Homeless Prevention Officer and HAP Place Finder to support such applicants.

2.3 Provision of support

Offaly County Council employs a Social Worker with a specific role of working with members of the Travelling community. During the 2019-2024 Traveller Accommodation Programme Offaly County Council sought and received Departmental sanction and support for the employment of a Traveller Tenancy Sustainment Officer (TTSO) on a two-year contract basis. The TTSO provides support to Traveller families who are being appointed to new tenancies and to those in existing tenancies who may need support to sustain their tenancies. Having regard to the success and support provided by the TTSO it is proposed during the lifetime of this Programme, to seek the continuation of this contract beyond 2025.

The Council also works closely with other statutory agencies including Health Service Executive, Department of Social Protection (Community Welfare); Tusla Child & Family Agency; Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS); Laois Offaly Education and Training Board (LOETB); Traveller support groups including Birr Travellers & Settled People's Group and Offaly Traveller Movement; and other local voluntary organisations in order to support the provision of accommodation, education, health services, training and employment supports and to avoid any unnecessary overlap and duplication of resources.

It should be noted however that many of the needs of the Traveller Community are not within the Council's remit. Health and education, for example, are outside the remit of the Local Authority but nevertheless play a very important part in the overall welfare of families. The Local Authority tries to ensure that such issues coming to its attention are referred to the relevant support agencies.

Offaly County Council will seek to re-establish the Traveller Interagency Group to address issues which are external to the purpose of this Programme.

The Council utilises the expertise of its staff such as technical and administrative staff, finance staff, assessment officers, tenant liaison officers, and anti-social behaviour investigation officers in housing provision, maintenance and management of accommodation, as required.

2.4 Unauthorised encampments

The Council has a procedure to ensure a co-ordinated response, when temporary dwellings/ unauthorised encampments are identified which give rise to public health, safety, planning compliance or criminal trespass issues. The statutory powers available, include: -

- Section 10 of Housing (Miscellaneous) Act 1992 as amended by Section 32 of Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998
- Section 69 of Road Act 1993
- Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1948
- Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998
- Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2002
- Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended
- Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 1994, as amended
- Public Health (Ireland) Act 1878 as amended by Environmental Protection Agency Act 1992

Cognisance will be taken of any new legislative requirements in this regard that may be enacted after the Programme has been adopted.

2.5 Estate Management

A well-maintained housing stock and the attractive appearance of a housing estate enhance the quality of life and the social well-being of tenants.

A tenancy agreement outlining the terms and conditions is required for all tenancies and all tenancies are subject to the payment of the appropriate rent. In the interests of all tenants living on the site or estate, the Council will enforce the contents of the tenancy agreement. Each tenant has a responsibility to ensure that the terms of the tenancy agreement are met in full. Estate management also includes securing the interest of the tenants in the enjoyment of their home and the avoidance, prevention and abatement of anti-social behaviour. Offaly County Council operates an Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for addressing anti-social behaviour emanating from Council owned dwellings and estates. The policy also covers tenants of Halting Sites and Group Housing Schemes. Anti-Social Behaviour emanating from privately owned dwellings or from tenants of the private rented sector is not a matter for the local authority. Complaints in this regard should be made directly to the landlord or An Garda Síochána.

It is essential that adequate arrangements are in place for the management and maintenance of Traveller accommodation. A caretaker is currently employed on a full-time basis to oversee the management and maintenance of the three permanent halting sites in Birr and Tullamore, in conjunction with the Housing Maintenance and Social Inclusion Teams.

The Council will support and promote the involvement of Travellers in estate management of their halting sites. The Council will further encourage the involvement of Travellers in estate management initiatives where Travellers are residing in local authority housing schemes.

2.6 Caravan Loan Scheme

A review of the Pilot Caravan Loan Scheme 2023 is currently being undertaken nationally. Offaly County Council did not partake in the Pilot Scheme. The Council, in conjunction with the LTACC, will consider the findings of the National Review.

Section 3: Strategy Statement

3.1 Implementing Authority

Offaly County Council has responsibility for the implementation of the Programme in the County. The Implementation Programme has been prepared across the three Municipal Districts in Offaly.

3.2 Provision of Accommodation

The Government's current Housing Programme *Housing For All - A New Housing Plan for Ireland (2021 – 2030)* is designed to improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more homes of all types for people with different housing needs. Offaly County Council aims to provide accommodation that responds to the different needs of Travellers by utilising the various forms of social housing delivery. These include: direct provision through the capital build programme; acquisitions by the Council and Approved Housing Bodies; re-letting of vacant units; houses sourced through private developers 'Part V' obligations; houses sourced through various leasing and rental accommodation schemes; and, private rented accommodation supported by Housing Assistance Payment.

The identification of suitable sites for provision of Traveller Group Housing is a challenge for the Council. Sites owned by Offaly County Council may be used for this purpose and additional sites may be acquired, if required, subject to availability of funding.

Travellers' who wish to undertake the provision of their own accommodation may access supports such as home loans and grants.

3.3 Financing the Programme

The delivery of the Accommodation Programme will be subject to the appropriate level of funding being made available by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The Department currently provides funding towards the provision of Traveller Specific accommodation. The delivery of the new Traveller Group Housing Schemes will be subject to the availability of funding from the Department.

Offaly County Council will continue to engage with the Department to secure funding for the provision of the various social housing options.

3.4 Assistance to Approved Housing Bodies

Offaly County Council has a strong working relationship with various Approved Housing Bodies for the delivery of social housing options. The Council worked with Cena Culturally Appropriate Homes Limited (CENA) in the development of the Group Housing Scheme at Chancery Walk, Tullamore which was completed in September 2020.

3.5 Development of accommodation proposals

The development of Traveller Specific Accommodation involves a number of key steps

including the identification, and where required acquiring, of suitable sites; preliminary design; approval of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage; early selection and consultation with the Traveller families with regard to the proposed development particularly at design stage; facilitate public consultation; required legislative planning process; tender preparation and selection; construction; allocation and pre-tenancy. It is important that consultation with all parties is maintained throughout the process.

It is not always possible to secure Traveller Specific Accommodation and accordingly other accommodation types, including the allocation of standard social housing, either directly by the Council or through nomination to the various Approved Housing Bodies will be considered.

3.6 Procedures for resolving difficulties

Council personnel involved in the provision of Traveller accommodation will be available to provide assistance in the event of any difficulties arising with regard to the accommodation programme. Where difficulties cannot be resolved through local consultation and dialogue, assistance may be sought from appropriate mediation services.

The assistance of Offaly Traveller Movement (OTM) and Birr Traveller & Settled People's Group have and will continue to be availed of during the lifetime of this Programme. The co-operation and assistance of both organisations during the Covid-19 pandemic period in the lifetime of the 2019-2024 Programme is acknowledged.

3.7 Review of progress

An annual review of progress on the Programme will be presented to the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) and the Council's Housing Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) with particular reference to the implementation of the Accommodation Programme. This will include a report on the number of families accommodated and the number of units and type of accommodation provided.

A statutory review of the Traveller Accommodation Programme will be carried out after three years taking into account the most recent annual census and appropriate amendments incorporated into the Programme. The Minister has, under section 17(1) (a) of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998, directed that a review of the accommodation programme 2025-2029 should be carried out no later than 30th June, 2027.

Section 4: Progress to Date & Assessment of Accommodation Needs

4.1 Progress Made Under Previous Programmes

In June 1999, Offaly Local Authorities appointed its first Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) and the Committee continues to meet four times each year. The role of the Committee is outlined in Appendix 2.

The following Traveller Accommodation Programmes have been adopted by Offaly County Council in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998: -

- The first Traveller Accommodation Programme was adopted to cover the period 2000–2004. A total of 82 families were accommodated under this Programme.
- The second Programme covered the period 2005–2008. A total of 74 families were accommodated under this Programme.
- The third Programme, adopted on 20th April 2009, covered the period 1st January 2009 to 31st December 2013. A total of 42 families were accommodated under this Programme.
- The fourth Programme, adopted on 14th February 2014, covered the period from 1st January 2014 to 31st December 2018. A total of 98 families were accommodated under this Programme, which represented a 53% increase on the target provided for in the Programme.
- The fifth Programme, adopted on 16th September 2019, covered the period from 01st July 2019 to 31st December 2024. A target for the provision of 65 units of accommodation under the Programme has been exceeded with 75 units of accommodation having been provided to date.

Offaly County Council and the former Town Councils of Birr and Tullamore have had a significant tradition, (including a tradition that predates the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, of catering for the housing needs of the Travelling Community.

4.2 Assessment of Need

The Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009 requires Housing Authorities, for the purposes of preparing a programme, in respect of their functional area, to make an assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers who are assessed under Section 20 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009 as being qualified for social housing support, including the need for sites.

The Council are required to carry out an Annual Estimate of Traveller families and their accommodation status each November. The returns for 2023 are detailed in Table 4.2.1 below. The count indicated that 361 Traveller families were living in County Offaly on the specified date of 24th November 2023 and has informed the preparation of this current Programme.

Table 4.2.1 Annual Estimate of Traveller families and their accommodation status undertaken on the 24th November, 2023 for Co. Offaly.

Local Authority Standard Housing	146
Local Authority Group Housing	7
Privately Owned Owner Occupied Houses acquired or improved with Local Authority Assistance	21
Privately Owned Owner Occupied Houses acquired or improved without Local Authority Assistance	7
Private Rented (HAP 18, Own Resources 2)	20
RAS and Social Leasing Schemes Tenancies	12
Voluntary Housing	46
Permanent Halting Sites	24
Shared accommodation in Standard/LA/Group /AHB/RAS/ Social Leasing	26
Shared accommodation in Privately Owned Owner Occupied Housing	3
Shared accommodation in Private Rented Housing	3
Shared accommodation on Permanent Halting Sites	10
Illegally occupying/footpaths on Permanent Halting Sites	7
Roadside/Unofficial Sites including Private Yards	26
Emergency Accommodation	3
TOTAL	361

Of these 361 families recorded on 24th November 2023, 283 families (78%) were deemed to have security of a tenancy either in housing or on an official halting site bay; 42 families (12%) were found to be sharing accommodation in various accommodation types; 33 families (9%) were living in caravan accommodation on various unauthorised sites; 3 families (1%) were in emergency accommodation.

The total number of approved social housing applicants from members of the Travelling community in Offaly in March 2024 was 77. Of these 77 applicants, 51 were seeking standard housing only (66%), 26 had expressed an interest in Traveller Specific Accommodation, i.e, Halting Site or Group Housing (34%). Of these 26 applicants, 4 were seeking Halting Site only; 4 were seeking Group Housing only and 10 were seeking Group Housing or Standard Housing. A further 8 were seeking Halting Site, Group Housing or Standard Housing.

The lack of affordable private rented accommodation is having a negative impact on all sectors of Irish society. Offaly, likewise, is experiencing significant housing issues as a result of the lack of affordable private rented accommodation; the Traveller community in Offaly have been particularly badly impacted. The number of Traveller families in private rented accommodation has continued to decrease in the last five years, from 44 to 20. With the decrease in the availability of private rented accommodation across the County, many of the new accommodation arrangements outlined on Table 4.2.1 above have emerged.

Since the 'Winter Emergency Period' under the *Residential Tenancies (Deferment of Termination Dates of Certain Tenancies) Act 2022* ceased on the 31st April 2023, Offaly County Council has availed of the national Tenant in Situ (TiS) Acquisition Programme. A number of housing units have been acquired where the Tenant had received a valid Notice of Termination and four Traveller families accommodation needs' have been met to date with the help of the TiS programme.

4.3 Estimation of the number of Travellers

The numbers and locations of families change frequently. The main concentration of families has traditionally centred around Tullamore and environs, Birr, and to a much lesser extent, Edenderry.

From time to time, the Traveller population in the County increases in number through the arrival of Travellers from other parts of the country, particularly during the summer months.

The Traveller count in November 2018 recorded 320 families in the County. The Traveller count in November 2023 recorded 361 families in the County, an increase of 41 families.

It is difficult to accurately predict the level of Traveller family formation in the County, based on these recent trends. It is estimated that over the lifetime of the Programme the number of families will increase by approximately 36, i.e., 10% increase in the total number of traveller families recorded in November 2023.

Having regard to the foregoing, it is estimated that the housing supports required over the lifetime of the Programme will be 96.

4.4 Implementation Measures 2025 – 2029

A range of accommodation options will be required to meet the needs of Travellers over the lifetime of the 2025 – 2029 Programme.

The Council's Planning Department has seen an increase in the number of residential unit applications granted in Offaly in recent times and, as these new housing units materialise across the County, it is hoped that a significant increase in new private rented accommodation units will be seen in the coming 2 to 5-year period.

The Local Authority options and resources on the provision of accommodation will include:

- (a) Standard Social Housing (Local Authority and Approved Housing Bodies)
- (b) Group Housing Scheme
- (c) Halting Site
- (d) Leasing Scheme and Rental Accommodation Scheme
- (e) Private Rented Accommodation supported via Housing Assistance Payment
- (f) Local Authority Home Loan
- (g) Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme
- (h) Housing Adaptation Grants
- (i) Improvement Works in Lieu of Housing
- (j) Special Traveller Grant
- (k) Housing Transfers

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 the allocation of a social house is made, represents the context in which the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025 - 2029 will be delivered.

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 Offaly County Council's Allocation Scheme. Standard social housing includes housing provided by the Local Authority or Approved Housing Bodies directly, or through leasing arrangements.

Those households who only recently joined the Council’s social housing waiting list can be assisted through the Housing Assistance Payment in the short to medium term.

4.5 Annual Targets

As the programme will be driven mainly by the Social Housing Programme it is difficult to estimate the number of families who will be allocated accommodation during the lifetime of this programme. Offaly County Council has exceeded its targets in the 2019-2024 Programme by the provision of an additional 10 units of accommodation to date. Notwithstanding this, Offaly County Council must be cognisant of the following external conditions which may impact on its ability to meet the identified housing need:

- The development of the private rented market in order that the pressure on rental properties is eased and the supply of housing in the County become more readily available. The development of private housing schemes will also directly increase the Council’s housing stock, through the acquisition of Part V properties.
- The availability of affordable properties through the private rental market, from which RAS and leasing options are met.
- The continuation of funding for construction projects and the acquisition of social housing units.
- The allocation of Group Housing and Halting Site vacancies will be retained for Traveller applicants.
- Unexpected external factors and constraints in the construction industry.

Table 4.5 Annual Targets for Units of Accommodation to be provided:

Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025 - 2029		2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	Sub-Total	Total
Municipal District of Birr	Standard/RAS/Leasing/AHB	4	3	4	2	4	17	25
	GHS		4		4		8	
	Halting Site bays							
Municipal District of Tullamore	Standard/RAS/Leasing/AHB	7	6	8	6	6	33	45
	GHS		4			4	8	
	Halting Site bays		4				4	
Municipal District of Edenderry	Standard/RAS/Leasing/AHB	2	2	2	2	2	10	10
	GHS							
	Halting Site							
TOTAL								80

(a) Standard Social Housing (Local Authority, Approved Housing Bodies, Leasing Arrangements)

The Assessment of Need (4.2 above) identified applicants on the Council's Housing List requesting Standard Social Housing. Standard Social Housing can be provided directly by the Local Authority or by the Council making a nomination of an applicant to an Approved Housing Body. Approved Housing Bodies play an important role in providing housing throughout the County. The Council will continue to encourage and support Approved Housing Bodies involved in the provision of Traveller Specific Accommodation. The Social Leasing Scheme and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) also provide housing units to the Council to allocate to those on the Housing List and are an integral part of Social Housing Provision in Offaly.

It is proposed that 60 units will be provided under this category during the lifetime of the Programme.

(a) Group Housing Scheme

A Group Housing Scheme, 4-unit development, at Croghan Road, Birr, is currently being built and is scheduled to be completed during the lifetime of the 2019-2024 Programme. Another Group Housing Scheme was completed in Chancery Walk, Tullamore in September 2020 with the co-operation of CENA. The development of a further two Group Housing Schemes in Tullamore MD provided for in the 2019-2024 Programme have been retained in the 2025-2029 Programme while two further Schemes are provided for in Birr MD. Pre-development consultations held with the relevant families were very successful and beneficial to all concerned in the Croghan Road and Chancery Walk Schemes. Similar consultations will be held for planned Schemes during the lifetime of the 2025-2029 Programme.

(b) Halting Site

Two Halting Sites are provided in Birr, namely, Millbrook Park, Birr (8-bay) and Croghan Road, Birr (6-bay). It is proposed that refurbishment works would take place at these sites during the lifetime of this Programme. Consultation with the residents of Millbrook Park, Birr, has commenced and will continue in this regard. Similar consultations will be held with the residents of Croghan Road, Birr.

It is also proposed that refurbishment works would take place at Kilcruttin Halting Site (16-bay) during the lifetime of this Programme. This will include the refurbishment of the four vacant units included in the Annual Targets above. Consultation with the residents of Kilcruttin will commence before the end of the 2019-2024 Programme.

The Assessment of Need (4.2 above) identified applicants on the Council's Housing List requesting Halting Site accommodation, and they will be considered for newly refurbished and/or casual vacancies as they arise on the existing Sites in Birr and Tullamore. It is not proposed to provide any additional halting site spaces during the lifetime of this Programme.

Transient Sites: Given the current demand for permanent traveller-specific accommodation it is considered that priority should be given to delivering permanent accommodation requirements identified in this Programme. Therefore, there is no provision for Transient accommodation in the 2025-2029 Programme.

(c) Housing Assistance Payment

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) will continue to represent a key form of social housing support provided by Offaly County Council to Traveller applicants during the course of this

Programme. Under HAP the housing applicant will be required to source their own preferred accommodation in the private rented sector. Where the applicant is eligible and approved for HAP, the local authority will pay a contribution, prescribed by circular, directly to their landlord. (The applicant will be required to meet any top-up payments to the landlord that applies.) In return the applicant will be required to pay a contribution towards rent to the local authority. This will be a differential rent based on their household weekly income, in a similar way to the differential rents charged for all local authority housing. Once the applicant is in receipt of HAP their housing needs are met. However, they will be able to apply for transfer to other forms of social housing.

While it is acknowledged that the supply of HAP properties has decreased significantly across all sectors in recent years, it is hoped that an increase in new private rented accommodation units will be seen in the lifetime of this Programme due to an increase in construction activity. The Council through the HAP Placefinder will continue to work with traveller families to secure private rented accommodation. The number of Travellers supported through HAP will be monitored and reported to the LTACC.

(d) Other Housing Supports

Offaly County Council will continue to provide other supports as set outlined in 4.4 Implementation Measures above. Adaptation works are an important means to facilitate Traveller families in their existing homes, when a household member has a disability, and specific requirements to the property are required as a result.

Section 5: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

Achievement of the objectives outlined in this Programme present a real challenge to Offaly County Council. The most effective means of implementing the Programme will be through a process of partnership with the Traveller community and widespread consultation with all interested parties.

The Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee will also have an important role to play in the process. It will provide, in particular, a structured forum for dialogue between Travellers and the Council.

The Council is confident that the approach set out in this Programme to address the provision of suitable accommodation and living conditions for Travellers has potential to succeed subject to the following:

- Central Government commitment to providing the necessary capital resources.
- The availability of a five-year structured programme setting out clear, focussed accommodation targets and objectives and a practical approach to implementation and achievement of these objectives.
- An ethos and acceptance by all parties that consultation must be meaningful and relevant.
- The availability of dedicated specialist staff in Offaly County Council.
- A successful estate management forum process.
- A pro-active Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee.
- A good working relationship between the Local Authority and Traveller community in the county.

Appendix 1

Submissions were received from the following:

- A joint submission from the Irish Traveller Movement; National Traveller Women's Forum; and Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre
- Birr Traveller & Settled People's Group
- Cena Culturally Appropriate Homes Limited
- Offaly Traveller Movement
- Cluid Housing
- HSE National Traveller Health Implementation Group
- Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS)
- Irish Coalition to End Youth Homelessness

Appendix 2

The role of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee is:

- Advise the Local Authority in relation to the preparation and implementation of any Accommodation Programme for its functional area
- Advise on the management of accommodation for Travellers
- Provide a liaison mechanism between Travellers and members and officials of the council
- The Committee must be consulted by the Council in relation to the assessment of needs and the accommodation programme.