



TRAVELLER

ACCOMMODATION PROGRAMME

2019-2024

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 35/2018 issued by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government in July 2018 requires Housing Authorities to prepare for adoption and implementation an Accommodation Programme for the period 1st July 2019 to the 30th June 2024 as per Section 10 (1) of the 1998 Act. The Minister has directed that the latest date for the adoption of Accommodation Programmes is 30th September 2019.

Since the commencement of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 this will be the fifth Traveller Accommodation Programme to be adopted by the Council. The Council exceeded its target by 53% for the last programme, 2014 – 2018, housing 98 families over this period.

The Council at present accommodates Travellers in group housing, halting sites, standard housing which include rented Council and Approved Housing Bodies accommodation and through various Leasing Schemes, Rental Accommodation Schemes and also supports tenancies via Housing Assistance Payment 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.

Section 21 of the Act provides for the establishment of Local Traveller Consultation Committees (LTACC) who advise on the provision and management of accommodation for Travellers, including the preparation and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes. 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 underpin the preparation and implementation of the Accommodation Programme. Accommodation Programmes are required to be prepared and implemented in consultation with other local public authorities; community groups and other bodies;

Travellers both directly and via the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC); Traveller Support Groups; and the public in general.

The purpose of this 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 and Implementation of Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes 2019-2024, issued in July 2018, sets 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 2019 – 2024 and inviting submissions at an early stage in the process was communicated to the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, the Midlands HSE, adjoining Housing Authorities, Voluntary Bodies as deemed appropriate, and published in the local press and on the Council's website. Submissions were received from nine parties, listed in appendix 1. These submissions were considered in the preparation of this plan and have been incorporated into the plan as appropriate.

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

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.

Offaly County Council will seek to provide accommodation to Travellers in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 and having regard to the provision of accommodation for Travellers as provided in a number of statutory policy documents of Offaly County Council, in particular the following: -

- Offaly County Council County Development Plan 2014–2020
- Offaly Local Authorities Corporate Plan 2014 – 2019
- Offaly Local Economic and Community Plan 2016 - 2021

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 2014–2020 contains the following statements in relation to the Traveller Community:

- HS-10 It is Council Policy to respect the distinctive culture of the Travelling Community and assist in the process of integration with the settled community.
- HS-11 It is Council policy to provide a good and well-managed living environment for the Travelling Community including recommended standards of accommodation, sanitary facilities, and pre-school education facilities, where feasible and on sites approved by the relevant housing authority only.
- HSO-02 It is an objective of the Council to provide adequate accommodation for Travellers in accordance with the Council's Traveller Accommodation Programme for County Offaly. Further it is an objective of the Council to take a flexible approach to the location of this accommodation for Travellers.

2.2 Provision of accommodation

Applicants seeking social housing accommodation, including Traveller Specific Accommodation, are required to submit housing applications and relevant documents in accordance with the Housing Regulations.

It is the policy of the Council to consult with Traveller applicants regarding their accommodation needs and requirements 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
- Private House Ownership
- Private Rented Accommodation with support of Housing Assistant Payments (HAP)
- Leasing / Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)

2.3 Provision of Support

Offaly County Council employs a Social Worker with specific responsibility of working with members of the Traveller community. The Council also works closely with other statutory agencies including the Health Service Executive, Midlands Area; local voluntary organisations and Traveller support groups 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 for appropriate action so as they can be dealt with in an appropriate manner.

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

As per recommendation of the LTACC, Offaly County Council will seek to re-establish the Traveller Interagency Group to address the issues that were highlighted in some of the submissions to this Programme but are external to the purpose of this Programme. However, the recommendations made will be presented to the Traveller Interagency Group for consideration. It is recognised that a collaborative approach to responding to Traveller issues is required for long term gain for the Traveller Community and Agency involvement.

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 the Housing (Miscellaneous) Act 1992 as amended by Section 32 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998
- 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 the 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 be put 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.

The Council will support and promote the involvement by 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 Horses

Offaly County Council will not include provision of accommodation for horses in proposals regarding Traveller accommodation. It is the opinion of the Council that horses are the responsibility of the owner and as such it is for the owner to arrange suitable accommodation. Offaly County Council will implement the provisions of the Control of Horses Act, 1996 and Offaly County Council Control of Horses Byelaws 2014.

The policy proposes in line with the Offaly County Council Control of Horse Bye-Laws 2014 which state:

- that the owners of horses seized by Offaly County Council must comply with the following requirements when reclaiming their animals:
 - Evidence of identity of person claiming horse/s – Driver’s License / Passport, etc.
 - Proof of ownership of horse – Valid Horse Passport
 - Payment of all fees in respect of the detention of the horse
 - Proof of availability of sufficient lands to keep horses (land deed, lease agreement)
 - Evidence of registration of Equine Premises under Diseases of Animals Act 1966.

It should be noted that the Council or the Superintendent may refuse to release the horse where they are not satisfied that adequate accommodation, sustenance and veterinary

attention will be provided for the horse or have reason to believe that the horse will be cruelly treated following such release.

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

Offaly County Council aims to provide accommodation that responds to the different needs of Travellers' 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 Government's Programme *Rebuilding Ireland - An Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness* is designed to accelerate housing supply in this country and is tackling the country's housing shortage.

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, Planning and Local Government. The Department currently provide full funding for the provision and refurbishment 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 are currently working with CENA in relation to the development of Group Housing Scheme at Chancery Lane, Tullamore.

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 the Housing, Planning and Local Government; 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 possible at all times 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, appropriate mediation services will be availed of.

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.

3.7 Review of progress

An annual review of progress on the Programme will be presented to the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee 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 Programme will be carried out after three years taking into account the most recent annual census and appropriate amendments incorporated into the Programme.

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, adopted on 21st March 2005, 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 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.

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 carry out an annual Traveller count each November and the returns for the November 2018 are detailed in Table 4.2.1 below. The count indicated that 320 Traveller families were living in County Offaly on that date and has informed the preparation of this current Programme.

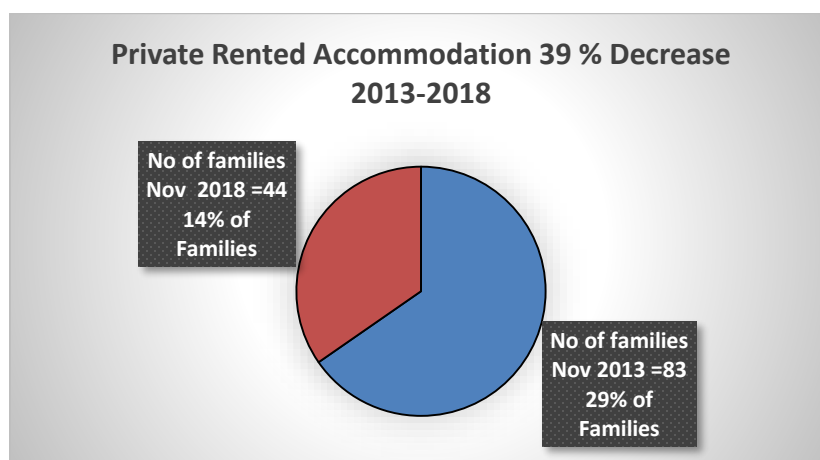
Table 4.2.1 Census of Traveller Families per Accommodation Type – Nov 2018

Type of Accommodation	No of Families at November 2018
Local Authority Housing	116
Local Authority Group Housing	4
Houses acquired or improved with LA Assistance	22
Privately Owned Houses	4
Private Rented	44
Voluntary Housing	26
Permanent Halting Sites	28
Shared accommodation in Standard LA/Group/AHB housing	19
Shared accommodation in private rented	5
Shared accommodation on Permanent Halting Sites	9
Roadside or un-serviced unofficial sites	31
Illegally occupying bays/footpaths on permanent Halting Site	4
Emergency Accommodation	8
Total	320

Of these 320 families, 244 families (76%) are deemed to have security of a tenancy either of housing or an official halting site bay. 76 families (24%) were found to be sharing accommodation in various accommodation types, with 35 of these families living on the roadside or on unofficial halting sites and 8 in emergency accommodation. Of these 76 families, 45 had an open Housing Application with Offaly County Council while 11 had no application with the authority and 20 had closed Housing Applications - 10 of these 31 had requested that their application be closed, i.e., were allocated a social housing unit or had previously been tenants and had left.

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 experienced a 39% decrease between 2013 (83 families in private rented) and 2018 (44 families in private rented). 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 - these were either not present at the time of preparing the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2014 - 2018 and/or have shown a significant increase in numbers (Pie Chart 4.2.2).

Pie Chart 4.2.2 Private Rented Accommodation – Impact on Traveller Community



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. Parking generally takes place on the roadside or on public areas.

The Traveller count in November 2013 recorded 277 families in the county. The Traveller count in November 2018 recorded 320 families in the county.

It is difficult to accurately predict the level of Traveller family formation in the county, based on these recent trends. Following consultation with local Traveller representatives and the LTACC it was agreed to estimate that over the lifetime of the programme the number of families will increase by approximately 32, i.e., 10% increase in the current Traveller population. Having regard to the foregoing, it is estimated that the housing supports required over the lifetime of the Programme will be 77.

4.4 Assessment of Accommodation Need

A detailed assessment of need by area and type of housing is outlined in Table 4.4.1. This assessment is based on the statutory assessment of social housing need as per the open Housing Applications and by consultation.

This assessment forms the basis for the targets to be provided for in the Accommodation Programme 2019 - 2024.

Table 4.4.1 Assessment of need based on the 45 Open Housing Applications

Area	Birr Town	Kilcormac	Shinrone	Banagher	Tullamore Town	Tullamore MD	Edenderry	Portarlinton	Total
Halting Site	1				4	1			6
Group Housing Scheme	3	1				1			5

Standard Housing	4	1	1	1	11	10	3	1	32
Isolated Rural Housing								2	2
Improvement Works in Lieu									
Total	8	2	1	1	15	12	3	3	45

4.5 Implementation Measures 2019 – 2024

A range of accommodation options will be required to meet the needs of Travellers over the lifetime of the 2019 – 2024 Programme.

The Council's Planning Department has seen an increase in the number of multi-residential unit applications granted in Offaly in recent times and as these new housing developments materialise, across the County, a significant increase in new private rented accommodation should be seen in the coming 2 to 5-year period. This should result in more affordable accommodation becoming available to rent across the county and accordingly the experience of the Traveller Community in recent years in sourcing private rented accommodation should be reversed and return to former levels during the lifetime of this plan.

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) Rebuilding Ireland 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 2019 – 2024 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 long term leasing arrangements. Those households who only recently joined the Council's social housing

waiting list will be assisted through the Housing Assistance Payment in the short to medium term.

4.6 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 exceeded its targets in the 2014 – 2018 Programme by 53%. 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.

Table 4.6 Annual Targets for Units of Accommodation to be provided:

Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 -2024		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	Sub-Total	Total
Municipal District of Birr	Standard/RAS/Leasing/AHB	2	2	2	2	2	2	12	19
	GHS		6					6	
	Halting Site			1				1	
Municipal District of Tullamore	Standard/RAS/Leasing/AHB	4	4	4	4	4	3	23	39
	GHS	4		4			4	12	
	Halting Site	4						4	
Municipal District of Edenderry	Standard/RAS/Leasing/AHB	1	1	2	2	1		7	7
	GHS								
	Halting Site								
								Total	65

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

The assessment of need, shown above in Table 4.4.1, identified applicants currently on the 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 a family to an Approved Housing Body. Approved Housing Bodies now play an important role in providing

housing throughout the county. The Council will continue to encourage and support any Approved Housing Body involved in the provision of Traveller Specific Accommodation.

Social Leasing and Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) provide those on the Housing List with a long-term housing solution and are an integral part of Social Housing Provision in Offaly. These Schemes provides additional, good quality accommodation for people. The security of tenure and protections offered by the Private Rented Tenancies Board make living in Leasing and RAS accommodation a realistic and attractive medium to long-term housing choice.

It is proposed that 42 units will be provided under this category during the lifetime of the Programme.

(b) Group Housing Scheme

A Group Housing Scheme, 4-unit development, at Chancery Lane, Tullamore, is currently being built and is scheduled to be completed with families taking up tenancies in Q3, 2019. A 6-unit Group Housing Scheme in Birr, included in the 2014 - 2018 Programme is currently being progressed by CENA and subject to a suitable site being secured; planning permission and funding being granted this Scheme should proceed during the lifetime of this plan.

The development of a further two Group Housing Schemes was provided for in the 2014 - 2018 Programme. While initial discussions were held with families neither have progressed. These have been retained in the current plan and may, should they meet the requirements of all parties, be considered in future Local Authority build programmes.

Upgrades to existing Group Housing Schemes will be considered during the lifetime of this programme subject to a need being identified, and resources including Department funding being made available.

(c) 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 this Programme. Consultation with the relevant stakeholders to explore the possibility of the conversion of these halting sites to accommodate group housing and to include additional living/sleeping spaces will take place.

The 16-bay Halting Site at Kilcruttin, Tullamore saw improvement works concluded in Q1 2014 and resulted in a number of tenancy allocations at that time. The Assessment of Need, shown in Table 4.4.1 above, shows a number of open applications seeking Halting Site accommodation and it is anticipated that these will be accommodated when the Group Housing Scheme at Chancery Lane is completed. It is proposed that there will be consultation with the residents at the site, and should certain conditions be agreed that further enhancement and improvement works may be progressed during the lifetime of this Programme.

Suitable families will be considered for accommodation as casual vacancies arise on the existing sites. The current Housing Need Assessment indicates that applications for Halting Site accommodation which are received for residential halting site accommodation may be accommodated 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 2019 - 2024 Programme.

(d) Housing Assistance Payment

Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) will represent a key form of social housing support provided by Offaly County Council to Traveller applicants during the course of this Programme. It is estimated that a number of Travellers will be supported through HAP and this aspect will also be monitored and reported upon to the LTACC.

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 may be required to meet any top-up payments to the landlord that may apply.) 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.

The Council through the HAP Placefinder will continue to work with families to secure private rented accommodation that can be supported with HAP. It is proposed that the number units supported under this category during the lifetime of the Programme will increase as the number of new housing developments materialise, across the County in the coming 2 to 5-year period.

(e) Other Housing Supports

Offaly County Council will continue to provide other supports as set outlined in 4.5 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:

- Minceirs Whiden (Cant for Travellers talking)
- Birr Traveller & Settled People's Group
- Offaly Local & Community Development Committee
- Family Support Services/PPS Manager, Midlands Area
- Offaly Traveller Movement
- Chaplain to the Travelling Community, Diocese of Meath and Tullamore Parish
- Community Development Officer, Health Service Executive, Health Centre, Arden Road, Tullamore
- St Vincent De Paul, Edenderry
- Youth Officer, Laois & Offaly Education and Training Board
- Midlands THU Coordinator, Health Service Executive, Midlands Traveller Health Unit, Health Centre, Arden Road, Tullamore

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.