



Laois County Council

Traveller Accommodation

Programme

2009 ~ 2013

26th January 2009

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INTRODUCTION

Laois County Council is committed to providing quality services to all citizens of the County. The provision of Traveller Accommodation and associated support services is a central part of the Housing Services Programme. There are currently 91* families residing in permanent accommodation provided by the Local Authority in County Laois.

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 requires that each Housing Authority adopts a Traveller Accommodation Programme for its functional area. On April 25th 2005 Laois County Council adopted a Four Year Programme for the period 2005 – 2008.

Laois County Council in preparing the programme for 2009 – 2013 undertook a comprehensive consultation process with all stakeholders, including meetings with Travellers themselves, the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, the Housing Strategic Policy Committee and members of the Council. Contact was made with other relevant bodies including the Health Services Executive, adjoining Local Authorities, Traveller & Local Development Organisations & other groups that have an interest in the provision of Traveller Services. By way of advertisements in the local press, written submissions were sought from members of the public and other groups that might wish to make a contribution towards the preparation of the programme.

The active involvement of Travellers and other agencies on the Traveller Interagency Group for County Laois also assisted in the development of this programme.

This process has resulted in the development of an accommodation programme for the period 2009- 2013 which it is hoped will address the accommodation needs of Travellers in County Laois.

*Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government Annual Count of Travellers – November 2007 – 79, plus 12 houses allocated in 2008 = 91.

SECTION 1

Programme 2005 - 2008

The Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2005 – 2008 was adopted on April 25th 2005 and was reviewed, pursuant to Section 17 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 in 2007. This programme identified an existing need of 50 and a projected need of 7.

During the period 2005 to October 2008

- ❖ 55 families were accommodated in Standard Local Authority Housing
- ❖ 3 families were housed in Single Instance Housing
- ❖ The provision of Traveller Specific Accommodation in the Programme, i.e., Group Housing, has proven to be a significant challenge.
 - A proposal to convert the existing permanent site in Portlaoise into a 9 No. Group Housing Scheme (the delivery of which was dependent on a number of variables, in particular changing family circumstances) was not required due to circumstances changing for the families concerned.
 - A target of a 6 No. Group Scheme also for Portlaoise was reduced in the lifetime of the plan to a 4 No. Group Scheme. A site was offered to the four families concerned at the Portlaoise Halting Site and was rejected.
- ❖ A target of a 5 No. Group Scheme was set for the Mountrath area. However, due to difficulties with site procurement this target has not been achieved.
- ❖ In 2008 the Halting Site at Portarlinton was closed for Health & Safety reasons.
- ❖ Improved Traveller participation & representational structures were established via the Inter Agency Strategy for Traveller Services.

SECTION 2

Legislation & Policy

The Accommodation Programme for the period 2009 – 2013 has been prepared in accordance with the provisions set out in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998.

The plan will be implemented having regard to all relevant housing & other legislation and will take into consideration the requirements of relevant policies and departmental guidelines and circulars. Implementation targets must be realistic and achievable.

It is the intention of Laois County Council when implementing the accommodation programme, that where possible agreement by all stakeholders will be achieved. In any event actions implemented will be on the basis that they meet the accommodation needs of families having regard to local community needs and circumstances.

SECTION 3

Policy Statement

- ❖ It is the policy of Laois County Council to endeavour to provide accommodation for members of the Travelling Community who request it, and who pursuant to generic housing legislation and the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, are considered to be in need of accommodation.
- ❖ All applications will be considered in accordance with the Laois County Council Scheme of Letting Priorities and the Points System adopted in July 2006. Applications must be made by means of the standard social housing application form. Advice and assistance will be provided to applicants and/or their representatives, if requested by the applicant, to address any difficulties that may arise in completing the application process.
- ❖ Only completed applications will be considered.
- ❖ The Council may from time to time, determine as they see fit to set aside for persons of such category or categories as the Council may decide a particular number or a proportion of the dwellings becoming available for letting in new developments only. Where such a number or proportion is set aside priority should be afforded to the specified categories in the letting of those dwellings. The specified categories include members of the Travelling Community. A minimum of 10% of all new developments will be set aside for this category. This provision is subject to the accommodation being appropriate to the needs of particular individuals. This provision does not prevent particular schemes being dedicated for specified categories e.g., housing scheme for the elderly.
- ❖ Where feasible, the preferred option in terms of the type of accommodation requested will be considered. If this is not possible, other accommodation options will be considered and may be offered to individual families. If this is refused by individual families, without good reason, their application for accommodation may be given a reduced priority. Where two offers of accommodation including an offer of Voluntary Housing Accommodation have been refused the Council may reduce the priority of the applicant.
- ❖ Laois County Council will implement this programme based on proper consultation with individual families, members of the public and community based voluntary organisations where appropriate, other statutory agencies, the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, the voluntary sector and other relevant bodies. Regard will be had at all times to Laois County Council's statutory responsibilities and to the feasibility of recommendations and suggestions made in relation to the implementation of the Programme.
- ❖ In circumstances where families vacate Local Authority accommodation, Laois County Council will only consider a new application for housing where they are satisfied that the reasons given for vacating previous accommodation are reasonable, in the family's best interest, independently verified and were not for the sole purpose of securing alternative accommodation.

- ❖ All applicants have a right of appeal to the Director of Service.
- ❖ Consideration will be given to the provision of a transient site where appropriate and is determined necessary by Laois County Council.
- ❖ It is the policy of Laois County Council that Travellers themselves must take primary responsibility for their economic activities including horse husbandry and care.
- ❖ Persons who own horses are obliged to comply with the requirements of the Control of Horses Act 1996, Laois County Council Bye-Laws 2008 and Animal Welfare legislation in general.
- ❖ It is the policy of Laois County Council to adopt an inter-agency approach in the delivery of Traveller Services. New accommodation provision and/or support services will be provided as part of the inter agency strategic approach to service delivery.
- ❖ It is the policy of Laois County Council to provide pre-tenancy training to all families prior to the allocation of accommodation. Ongoing support will be provided through the Tenant Liaison Service. If required further support will be provided through the Tenancy Sustainment Service provided by Midlands Simon, **Laois Traveller Action Group or other appropriate agencies.**
- ❖ Traveller accommodation will be managed on the same basis as the Council's policy for the maintenance and management of its Housing stock.
- ❖ The requirements of National Guidelines will be considered in the construction, maintenance and management of Traveller Accommodation.
- ❖ Tenants will be required to meet their responsibilities as outlined in the tenancy agreement entered into between themselves and the Council and the "Tenants Handbook".
- ❖ It is the policy of Laois County Council, if the tenants fail to comply with the requirements of the tenancy agreement, including the provisions relating to anti-social behaviour, to initiate appropriate legal proceedings to seek possession of the house or to make an application for an exclusion order.
- ❖ Travellers who present as homeless will be afforded the supports and services contained in the Homeless Strategy for Laois County Council.
- ❖ Unauthorised encampments will be dealt with in accordance with the requirements of the relevant legislation, as appropriate. Each case will be handled on an individual basis.
- ❖ Nothing in this section shall prevent consideration being given to any application for accommodation where the need arises in emergency or exceptional circumstances.

SECTION 4

Assessment of Need/Projected Need

An assessment of accommodation needs was undertaken in March 2008 as prescribed under Section 9 of the Housing Act 1988. The 2008 Housing Needs Assessment indicated that the total number of units of all accommodation required arising from this estimated growth in Traveller households for the period up to 31st December 2011 was 48.

In September 2008 Laois County Council carried out a further assessment of the needs of the travelling community in the preparation of this programme. One hundred and twenty travelling families were contacted in relation to establishing the existing and projected needs.

Submissions were also invited from the local traveller organisations, and statutory and voluntary bodies.

37 Travelling families have been assessed as having an existing need. The projected need is estimated to be 18. The projected need was assessed on the following basis;

- a) The number of Travellers currently residing in the County under the age of 18 years but who will attain the age of 18 years during the lifetime of the programme.
- b) The Task Force on the Travelling Community (July 1995) assertion that projections indicate an increase of 4% per annum in the Traveller population.
- c) A % of the Travellers who reach the age of 18 years throughout the lifetime of the Programme will marry each other.

Laois County Council acknowledges that 1 family grouping of 5 wishes to be considered for Group Housing in either the Mountrath or Portlaoise area. **In the lifetime of the Programme, Laois County Council will consider the option of a Group Housing Scheme for the 5 families should an appropriate site become available in their area of choice.**

Summary: Current (Existing) Need – 37 families
Projected Need – 18 families

SECTION 5

Performance, Monitoring & Measurement

Accommodation Provision

It is planned that 37 Traveller Families will be provided with permanent accommodation over the period of the Programme. In relation to projected need consideration will be given to all new applicants who apply during the life time of the programme. All new applicants will be assessed and will be considered for accommodation if deemed to be in need of assistance.

Targets will be monitored quarterly by the Housing Department and will be returned annually as a National Performance Indicator.

Returns will be submitted to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government as requested.

Annual progress reports will be presented to the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative and the Housing Strategic Policy Committee. At least four meetings of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee to be held annually.

SECTION 6

Strategy

Laois County Council will, within the time frame of this Five Year Programme, endeavour to meet the accommodation needs of Travellers who are approved accommodation applicants. Accommodation, Social Work services and accommodation supports such as Tenant Liaison Services, and tenancy sustainment service will be provided in an integrated manner that is inclusive and reflects the needs of the Traveller Community.

The Accommodation Programme will be implemented in conjunction with the Inter-Agency Strategy for Traveller Services for County Laois.

Tenant support, tenancy and community sustainment is a guiding principle in the delivery of social housing/social accommodation in County Laois and will be central to the implementation of this Programme. The requirements of local and national policies, most notably “Delivering Homes – Sustaining Communities” will be pivotal in the delivery strategy of the Traveller Accommodation Programme.

The full range of social housing options set out hereunder, will be actively promoted by Laois County Council

- ❖ Standard Local Authority Housing
- ❖ Group Housing
- ❖ Residential Caravan Sites
- ❖ Tenant Purchase
- ❖ Caravan Loan & Grant Scheme
- ❖ Annuity Loans/Traveller Grant for purchase of a house
- ❖ Shared Ownership Scheme
- ❖ Affordable Housing Scheme
- ❖ Rural Housing
- ❖ Improvement Works in Lieu of Housing
- ❖ Voluntary Co-operative Housing
- ❖ Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS)
- ❖ Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme
- ❖ Housing Aid for Older People
- ❖ Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability

The Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee will meet at least four times annually and its business will be regulated by the method of operation adopted in 2004. Policy issues pertaining to Traveller Accommodation will be considered by the Committee and where necessary reports will be presented on these issues to the Housing Strategic Policy Committee.

Laois County Council Officials will ensure that applications for funding from the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government will be made and that Traveller Accommodation needs will be included in the Housing Action Plan for County Laois.

In the preparation of Laois County Council's Housing Strategy, the County Development Plan and Local Area Plans, consideration will be given to the accommodation needs of Traveller families and the provisions of this programme will be taken into account.

Laois County Council will develop and deliver its accommodation programme in an integrated manner and will consult and liaise with other service providers via existing structures such as the County Development Board (Inter-Agency Group), Traveller Health Unit etc.

Laois County Council will encourage and support the provision and management of accommodation for Travellers by the voluntary housing sector.

Needs will be assessed and prioritised on a geographical basis within the County.

The Traveller Accommodation Programme adopted by Laois County Council will be reviewed within three years from the time it has been adopted or at any other time as directed by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government. A review of the programme can be carried out at any time if considered necessary by the Housing Authority.

Community based initiatives which facilitate travellers and the settled community to work more closely together will be supported by Laois County Council. Laois County Council will seek additional resources to enable Travellers to have an active role in their local communities and to assist meaningful Traveller participation in their living communities.

On the basis of assessment of need and projected need, proposals will be contained in this accommodation programme with the intention of addressing their needs as far as is possible, bearing in mind the availability of resources to do so, legal requirements and restrictions, financial restraints, planning requirements, co-operation from applicants, and, where possible, community support.

SECTION 7

Implementation Measures

Portlaoise

Group Housing – Existing Need

Four Families have been assessed and deemed in need of Group Housing in the Portlaoise area. The delivery of this target will be dependent on site procurement, planning considerations, financial restraints and agreements between parties. **Alternatively the option of Single Instance Housing will be considered as appropriate.**

The accommodation needs of these families will be addressed by the provision of Group Housing **or Single Instance Housing** in the Portlaoise area during the lifetime of this plan.

Single Instance Housing – Existing Need

One family has been assessed and deemed in need of Single Instance Housing in the Portlaoise area. This family will be accommodated in such accommodation during the period of this plan.

Standard Local Authority Housing – Existing Need

Ten families are deemed to be in need of Standard Local Authority Housing in the Portlaoise area. The accommodation needs of these families will be addressed during the life time of this plan by the provision of Standard Local Authority housing in their preferred area should suitable housing become available.

ACCOMMODATION TYPE	NEED IDENTIFIED	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Standard Local Authority Housing	10	2	2	2	2	2
Single Instance Housing	1	-	1	-	-	-
Group Housing	4	-	-	-	-	4

Projected Need

Having considered the projected need in this area there are a number of young Travellers who may seek assistance with accommodation over the next five years. All new applicants will be assessed and will be considered for accommodation if considered to be in need of accommodation. Advice and assistance will be provided if the applicants wish to seek private rented accommodation.

Portarlinton

Group Housing – Existing Need

The assessment of need for this area indicates that there are 6 families seeking Group Housing with Laois County Council. The accommodation needs of these families will be addressed by the provision of Group Housing in the Portarlinton area throughout the lifetime of the plan. The delivery of this target will be dependent on the procurement of a suitable site, planning and financial considerations and agreement between parties.

Standard Local Authority Housing – Existing Need

Seven families were assessed as in need of this type of housing in the area. It is planned to accommodate these families in Standard Local Authority Housing in their preferred area of choice throughout the duration of this Programme should suitable housing become available.

ACCOMMODATION TYPE	NEED IDENTIFIED	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Standard Local Authority Housing	7	2	-	2	2	1
Group Housing	6	-	-	-	6	-

Projected Need

All new applicants will be assessed and will be considered for accommodation if deemed to be in need of accommodation.

Mountmellick

Standard Local Authority Housing – Existing Need

The assessment of need for this area identifies 4 families as in need of housing accommodation. Laois County Council will provide 4 Standard Local Authority houses during the lifetime of the Programme to cater for the needs of those 4 families should suitable housing become available in the area.

ACCOMMODATION TYPE	NEED IDENTIFIED	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Standard Local Authority Housing	4	-	1	1	1	1

Projected Need

Laois County Council will endeavour to provide assistance to young Travellers who wish to apply for accommodation. All new applicants will be assessed and will be considered for accommodation if deemed to be in need of accommodation.

Mountrath

Standard Local Authority Housing – Existing Need

The assessment of need for this area has identified 4 families in need of Standard Local Authority Housing. Laois County Council will provide 4 no. Standard houses in this area should appropriate housing become available.

ACCOMMODATION TYPE	NEED IDENTIFIED	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Standard Local Authority Housing	4	-	1	1	1	1

Projected Need

All new applicants will be assessed and consideration given to their application if deemed to be in need of accommodation.

Borris-in-Ossory

One family was identified as having a housing need in this area. It is planned to accommodate this family in Standard Local Authority Housing in their preferred area of choice should suitable housing become available during the life time of the Programme.

ACCOMMODATION TYPE	NEED IDENTIFIED	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Standard Local Authority Housing	1	-	-	1	-	-

SECTION EIGHT

Summary

This Programme outlines the existing and projected need for Traveller Accommodation in County Laois for the period 2009 – 2013. Policies in relation to Traveller Accommodation, implementation strategies, targets and review process are clearly outlined in this Programme.

Laois County Council will work with Travellers, Traveller Representatives, the local communities and other relevant agencies to deliver the Programme whilst providing quality accommodation for members of the Travelling Community.

The Programme is based on consultations and a recognition of the needs of the Travelling Community, the views of the local settled communities and the statutory requirements placed on Laois County Council by various legislation.

The implementation of this Programme requires a commitment from all involved to work together and to commit to agreed proposals. The proposals contained in this Programme and the successful delivery of same are subject to a number of considerations, site procurement, suitable housing becoming available in an area, planning considerations, the availability of the necessary financial resources, legal requirements and restrictions, co-operation from applicants and community support.