



Laois County Council

Traveller Accommodation Programme

2014-2018

March, 2014

CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 3
Section 1 ~ (Programme 2009 – 2013)	Page 4
Section 2 ~ (Legislation & Policy)	Page 5
Section 3 ~ (Policy Statement)	Page 6
Section 4 ~ (Assessment of Need/Projected Need)	Page 9
Section 5 ~ (Performance, Monitoring & Measurement)	Page 17
Section 6 ~ (Strategy)	Page 18
Section 7 ~ (Implementation Measures)	Page 20
Section 8 ~ (Summary)	Page 22

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 approximately one hundred and sixty-nine families residing in Co. Laois and seventy-three residing in permanent accommodation provided by Laois County Council.*

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998, requires that each Housing Authority adopts a Traveller Accommodation Programme for its functional area. On 26th January, 2009, Laois County Council adopted a Five Year Programme for the period 2009 – 2013.

Laois County Council, in preparing the Programme for 2014 – 2018, 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 and other groups that have an interest in the provision of Traveller Services.

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 the Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2014- 2018, which, it is hoped, will address some of the accommodation needs of Travellers in County Laois.

*Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government Annual Count of Traveller Families and their Accommodation position – 29th November, 2013.

SECTION 1

Programme 2009 - 2013

The Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2009 – 2013 was adopted on 26th January, 2009 and was reviewed, pursuant to Section 17 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998, in 2011.

Summary of Targets and Output for 2009-2013 Programme to date

<u>Year</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Achieved</u>
2009	4	5
2010	5	5
2011	7	6
2012	12	0
2013	9	12
Total	37	28

The above represents 75.68% of the total targets set out in the 2009-2013 Programme.

The 6 no. Group Housing Scheme at Ballymorris, Portarlinton, Co. Laois was completed and occupied in November, 2013.

SECTION 2

Legislation & Policy

The Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period 2014 – 2018 has been prepared in accordance with the provisions set out in the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 and all relevant Housing Legislation to date.

Directions under the Act in relation to the preparation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme are contained in Circular 26/2013, together with a Memorandum on the Preparation, Adoption and Implementation of the Local Traveller Accommodation Programmes, 2014-2018 issued on 2nd August, 2013. The Minister has specified that the latest date for the adoption of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes is 30th April, 2014.

The plan will be implemented having regard to all relevant housing and 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.

The proposals outlined in this Programme and the successful delivery of same are subject to a number of considerations; site procurement, suitable housing becoming available in the area, planning considerations, the availability of the necessary financial resources, legal requirements and restrictions, co-operation from applicants and Community support and Health and Safety legislation and regulations.

SECTION 3

Policy Statement

- ❖ It is the policy of Laois County Council to endeavour to provide accommodation for members of the Travelling Community who apply for it, and who, pursuant to generic housing legislation to date 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 Allocation Scheme and the Points System adopted in 2011. Applications must be made by means of the standard form for Social Housing Support. 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.
- ❖ 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 on two occasions 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 suspend their application.
- ❖ 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.

- ❖ All applicants have a right of appeal to the designated Appeals Officer.
- ❖ 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 2012 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 tenancy training to all families who take up the offer of accommodation. On-going 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.
- ❖ Laois County Council and their tenants will be required to meet their responsibilities as outlined in the tenancy agreement and the “Tenants Handbook”.
- ❖ The requirements of National Guidelines will be considered in the construction, maintenance and management of Traveller Accommodation.
- ❖ It is the policy of Laois County Council, if the tenants fail to comply with the requirements of the tenancy agreement, to initiate appropriate legal proceedings to seek possession of the house or to make an application for an excluding order. In anticipation of an amendment to S.62 of the Housing Act, 1966 and related legislation, Laois County Council will comply with any amendments in relation to anti-social behaviour and amend Laois County Council’s Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy, 2010, as necessary.
- ❖ Travellers who present as homeless will be afforded the supports and services contained in the Midlands Regional Homelessness Action Plan, 2013.

- ❖ 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

Pursuant to Section 21 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009, Laois County Council prepared a summary of the social housing assessments carried out in their administrative area as at 7th May, 2013, including an assessment of need for permanent residential caravan parks for Travellers.

The result of this assessment showed:

- 41 – Standard Local Authority Housing
- 3 – Traveller Specific Accommodation

In September, 2013, in accordance with Section 6 (1) of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, Laois County Council carried out a further 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. In making this assessment, Laois County Council had regard to:

- The estimate of the number of Traveller families for whom accommodation will be required during the period 2014-2018.
- Summary of Social Housing Assessments prepared under Section 21 (c) of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009.
- The need for transient sites.
- The view of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee.

Laois County Council contacted approximately one hundred and fifty families in relation to establishing the existing and projected needs. Submissions were also invited from local Traveller organisations and statutory and voluntary bodies.

56 families have been assessed as having an existing need. The projected need is **24**. The projected need was assessed on the following basis:

- The number of Travellers currently residing in the County under the age of 18 years but will attain the age of 18 years during the lifetime of the Programme.
- The Task force of the Travelling Community (July 1995) assertion that projections indicate an increase of 4% in the Traveller population.

- A percentage of the Travellers who reach the age of 18 years throughout the lifetime of the Programme will marry each other and some may move to another functional area.

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 Traveller 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.

The Traveller Accommodation Programme, as 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. 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 are contained in the Traveller Accommodation Programme with the intention of addressing their needs as far as is possible, but will depend on the availability of resources to do so, legal requirements and restrictions, financial restraints, land availability, co-operation from applicants, and, where possible, community support, Planning considerations, and Health and Safety legislation and regulations.

SECTION 4

Traveller Specific Accommodation

Fifteen separate submissions were received in relation to the provision of Traveller specific accommodation, namely Group Housing and Halting Sites.

The following is a breakdown of the submissions and the assessment of need for the family units concerned.

Group 1 – Portlaoise Area

- Submission on behalf of eleven families for Halting Site accommodation.
- Four families have no application with Laois County Council (two are tenants of Laois County Council).
- **Existing need - 7.** However, no appropriate site or financial resources available to provide such accommodation.
- **Projected need - 7**

Group 2 – Portlaoise

Submission on behalf of three families for Group Housing.

- Two tenants of Laois County Council - not deemed existing need.
- Not realistic and feasible to build a Group Scheme for one family.
- **Existing need – 1** Standard Local Authority Housing.
- **Projected need - 1**

Group 3 - Portlaoise

Submission by one family who are currently tenants of Laois County Council for Halting Site accommodation.

- No existing need.
- **Projected need - 2**

Group 4 – Portlaoise Group Housing

Submission on behalf of two current tenants. Assessed as having no existing need.

Group 5 – Portlaoise

Submission on behalf of three families for Halting Site accommodation.

- One family has no application submitted.
- **Existing need - 2**
- **Projected need - 2**
- No site availability or adequate financial resources.

Group 6 - Portlaoise

Submission on behalf of one individual for Halting Site accommodation to share with two siblings who have not yet attained the age of 18 years. Assessed as having adequate accommodation in the family home.

- **Projected need - 3**

Group 7 – Portlaoise

Submission for Group Housing for three families, two of whom are tenants.

- **Existing need for housing - 1.** Standard Local Authority Housing.
- **Projected need – 1**

Group 8 - Portlaoise

Submission on behalf of seven families for Halting Site accommodation.

- No application for five families.
- **Existing need - 2**
- **Projected need - 2**

No site availability or adequate financial resources.

Group 9 - Portlaoise

Submission on behalf of five families for Group Housing.

- Four are currently tenants of Laois County Council.
- **Existing need – 1** to be met by Standard Local Authority Housing.

Group 10 - Mountmellick

Submission by one family unit for Halting Site accommodation for three of their children.

- **Projected need - 3**

Group 11 – Portarlinton

Submission on behalf of seven family units for Halting Site accommodation.

- Three family units currently tenants of Laois County Council.
- **Existing need - 4**
- **Projected need - 1**

No site availability or adequate financial resources.

Group 12 - Portarlinton

Submission on behalf of four families for Group Housing.

- Two with no applications with Laois County Council.
- **Existing need - 2** (to be met by Standard Local Authority Housing).

Group 13 - Portarlinton

Submission on behalf of four families for Halting Site accommodation.

- Two families – no application with Laois County Council.
- One family unit with children will be appropriately accommodated at Woodlands Park Group Housing Scheme.
- **Existing need – 1** (to be met by Standard Local Authority Housing).

No site availability or adequate financial resources.

Group 14 – Borris in Ossory

Submission on behalf of one family for Halting Site accommodation. Due to site unavailability and lack of financial resources, not realistic/feasible to include this as target. Existing need of 1 to be met by Standard Local Authority Housing.

Existing need -1

Projected need - 2

Group 15 – Portlaoise

Submission on behalf of one extended family unit for the refurbishment of the Portlaoise Halting Site to include additional bays.

As the land is in the ownership of Laois County Council and the extended family wish to remain on site, this is a realistic target for inclusion in the Programme. However, the achievement of this target will be dependent on planning and legal considerations, co-operation of all parties and funding being made available by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government.

Existing need - 1

Standard Local Authority Housing

An existing need of 40 family units have been identified as in need of standard Local Authority housing in Co. Laois.

Transient Site

Submissions from eight of the groups included a request for a transient site in Co. Laois to “accommodate families passing by travelling in the summer, or with temporary accommodation needs”.

A transient site, as defined in S.13 of the Housing Act, 1988 and amended by the Housing (Traveller Accommodation Act, 1998), is not deemed to be the normal place of residence for a travelling family.

Consideration will be given to the provision of a transient site, where appropriate, if it is deemed necessary by Laois County Council, taking account of:

- Migration patterns in Co. Laois.
- Financial resources.
- Land availability.
- Proper Planning and Development.
- Laois County Development Plan, 2011-2017.
- Legal considerations.

Summary

	<u>Existing Need Standard Local Authority Housing</u>	<u>Traveller Specific Need</u>	<u>Projected Need</u>
<u>Standard Local Authority Housing</u>	33	—	—
<u>Traveller Specific Accommodation</u>			
<u>Group 1 Portlaoise H.S.</u>		7	7
<u>Group 2 Portlaoise G.H.S</u>	1	0	1
<u>Group 3 Portlaoise H.S.</u>		0	2
<u>Group 4 Portlaoise G.H.S</u>		0	0
<u>Group 5 Portlaoise H.S.</u>		2	2
<u>Group 6 Portlaoise H.S.</u>		0	3
<u>Group 7 Portlaoise G.H.S.</u>	1	0	1
<u>Group 8 Portlaoise H.S.</u>		2	2
<u>Group 9 Portlaoise G.H.S.</u>	1	0	0
<u>Group 10 Mountmellick H.S.</u>		0	3
<u>Group 11 Portarlington H.S.</u>		4	1
<u>Group 12 Portarlington G.H.S.</u>	2	0	0
<u>Group 13 Portarlington H.S.</u>	1	0	0
<u>Group 14 Borris in Ossory H.S.</u>	1	0	2
<u>Group 15 Portlaoise H.S.</u>		1	0
<u>TOTAL</u>	40	16	24

H.S. Halting Site
G.H.S. Group Housing Scheme
S.L.A. Standard Local Authority Housing

SECTION 5

Performance, Monitoring & Measurement

Accommodation Provision

It is planned that forty-one Traveller Families will be offered 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 lifetime 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, Community 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 targets as outlined in Section 7. 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 Traveller 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 will be considered 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
- ❖ Relevant Tenant Purchase (if new scheme is introduced)
- ❖ Annuity Loans/Traveller Grant for purchase of a house
- ❖ Rural Housing
- ❖ Improvement Works in Lieu of Housing
- ❖ Voluntary Co-operative Housing
- ❖ Rental Accommodation Scheme (RAS) and Social Leasing
- ❖ Mobility Aids Housing Grant Scheme
- ❖ Housing Aid for Older People
- ❖ Housing Adaptation Grant for People with a Disability
- ❖ Housing Assistance Payment (if scheme is introduced)

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 will ensure that applications for funding to the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government will be made, where appropriate.

The delivery of the targets outlined in this Programme will be subject to:

- (a) The appropriate levels of Capital Funding being made available.
- (b) Site procurement.
- (c) Planning consideration.
- (d) Legal restrictions and requirements.
- (e) Co-operation of all parties concerned including the applicant and local communities.
- (f) Health and Safety legislation and regulations.

SECTION 7

Implementation Measures

Fifteen separate submissions, involving **54 families** were made in relation to the provision of Traveller specific accommodation. Following examination of all submissions and taking account the number of families who are adequately accommodated currently by Laois County Council and the number of applications on hand. An existing need of **16** was identified for Traveller specific accommodation (see summary on page 13). However, as clearly stated in Circular Housing 26/2013 – Traveller Accommodation Programmes 2014-2018, page 3, implementation targets must be realistic and achievable.

Taking account of the current financial situation (nationally and locally), land availability and planning issues and co-operation between all parties, it is unrealistic to expect to meet this existing need within the lifetime of the Programme, 2014-2018.

The refurbishment and extension of the existing Portlaoise Halting Site is potentially the only realistic and achievable Traveller specific target at this time. However, during the lifetime of the Programme, active consideration will be given to the remaining existing need of **15**. This Programme may be reviewed at any time in the lifetime of the Programme as directed by the Minister. A review must be carried out not later than 31st December, 2016.

Standard Local Authority Housing existing needs will be met through Laois County Council's Local Authority housing, voluntary housing, RAS Scheme and Social Housing and the Housing Assistance Payment, if introduced in the lifetime of this programme.

The following is a summary of the annual targets which Laois County Council proposes to meet through forty offers of Standard Local Authority Housing and one offer of Traveller Specific Accommodation through the refurbishment and extension of Portlaoise Halting Site.

Accommodation Type	Proposed Targets/Offers	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Standard Local Authority Housing	40	4	7	9	10	10
Group Housing	-	-	-	-	-	-
Single Instance Housing	-	-	-	-	-	-
Halting Site	1	-	-	-	-	1
Total	41	4	7	9	10	11

Projected Need

A projected need of **24** has been identified for the duration of the Programme. All new applicants will be assessed and will be considered for accommodation if considered to be in need of accommodation.

Laois County Council has overall responsibility for the implementation of this Programme. The Local Government Reform Bill, 2013, provides for the replacement of Town Councils by Municipal Districts. Due consideration to this proposed development and its implication has been given in the preparation of this Programme.

SECTION 8

Summary

This Programme outlines the existing and projected need for Traveller Accommodation in County Laois for the period 2014 – 2018. 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 and Health and Safety legislation and regulations.