

Joint Committee on Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

Opening Statement by Michael Walsh, Chief Executive Waterford City & County Council and Seamus Hanrahan, Senior Architect, Limerick City and County Council representing the City and County Management Association

In relation to Provision of Traveller Accommodation – Review of funding for Traveller-specific accommodation and the implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes

Introduction

Chairman, Members,

I am pleased to be here this morning to assist the Committee in its examination of the issues facing us in relation to Traveller Accommodation. My name is Michael Walsh and I am here in the context of my role as Chair of the Housing Sub-committee of the CCMA, along with my colleague Seamus Hanrahan, Senior Architect in Limerick City and County Council.

We welcome the publication of the review of funding for Traveller Specific Accommodation and the implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes and concur with the key findings of the review. I would address a number of these findings and other issues hereunder and would hope that we can expand on them further in dialogue.

Drawdown of Funding and Overall Targets

It is a matter of record that funding drawdown in recent years has been below budget, even though the overall available funding has been relatively small. There are a number of reasons for this the most of which are addressed in the review but perhaps on the whole result from the fact that there remains an inherent resistance to traveller specific accommodation within the community at large and the overall process for the development of traveller accommodation is complex and time consuming. The scale of budget availability is also pertinent as many of the solutions for traveller specific accommodation are expensive and individual projects could consume a large proportion of the National budget.

It is also the case that as the stock of housing for travellers increases and ages, the cost of refurbishment and maintenance is eating into the overall budget. In the round therefore the performance since the inception of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes has been reasonably good and it needs to be viewed in the context of the difficulties outlined and in the longer term. It is somewhat ironic that smaller budgets seem to be more difficult to expend than larger ones in the past but there may well be a lesson in this in the context of budgetary provision for future Traveller Accommodation Programmes. The overall experience across the country varies greatly in respect of Traveller Accommodation provision. As a member of the National Traveller Accommodation Committee, I have met along with my colleagues with many Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees and representatives of the different stakeholders. Without revealing any secrets the most striking aspect is that no two are the same in the different local authorities areas and the one constant would appear to be that the best outcomes are achieved where partnership genuinely prevails.

What then are the things that could be done to improve matters for the future delivery of Traveller Accommodation Programmes?

The overall aspiration has always to be that we seek to provide traveller accommodation in the most normalised fashion possible with the acquiescence of all elements of the community. Anything other than this is failure and in particular delivery through imposition will only lead to increasing resistance and greater failure.

- 1. We need to improve the reality and perception of the settled community in respect of the impact of Traveller Accommodation on the local area.**
 - Resources need to be committed on a performance basis to Community Development Programmes focused on capacity development and the management of Traveller Specific Sites.
 - We need to generate a reasoned dialogue on the management of horses by travellers in the urban environment and the provision of facilities for same.
 - We need to meet the real needs of the traveller community, not the perceived needs.

- 2. We need to remove complexity from the funding and approval processes.**
 - A multi-annual funding programme for local authorities would remove uncertainty and conservatism from the system.

3. We need to develop template specifications for different traveller specific accommodation types at National level.

- The creation of standard specifications would fast-track dialogue on accommodation types, without removing core design input from local level.

4. We need to develop mechanisms or structures so that Traveller Accommodation Proposals can be progressed through the non local authority development planning approval processes.

- The greater involvement of AHB's for example or the generation of additional traveller led AHB's for example would facilitate different delivery mechanisms.

Chair, the above are just a few practical suggestions that we would make in respect of the improvement of traveller accommodation delivery on foot of the Housing Agency Review. We welcome the opportunity to engage on dialogue on these very complex issues and will do our best to answer any questions you may wish to address to us.