

**Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local
Government**

8 March 2018

**Provision of Traveller Accommodation – ‘Review of Funding for
Traveller-specific accommodation and the implementation of
Traveller Accommodation Programmes’**

I would like to thank the Committee for inviting me here today to speak about the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes.

In accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, housing authorities are responsible for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) in their areas. My Department’s role is to ensure that there are adequate structures and supports in place to assist the authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

Under section 10 of the Act, housing authorities are required to prepare and adopt a TAP for their respective areas for a 5-year period or such shorter period as the Minister may direct. These programmes provide a road map for local authority investment priorities over the period. They also form the basis for the allocation of funding from my Department for Traveller-specific accommodation such as group housing and halting sites.

Section 10 of the Act also requires relevant housing authorities to review their TAPs at least once in each 3 year period, or at such time as the Minister with responsibility may direct. A local authority also has discretion to initiate a review at any time during the period of their TAP.

Over the past 10 years (2008-2017) my Department has recouped in excess of €105m to Local Authorities from a capital budget of €156.8m. This represents a 67% drawdown on capital funding by local authorities collectively. Capital funding of €12m has been provided by my Department for Traveller-specific accommodation in 2018, an increase of €3m on the 2017 allocation, and a similar increase on the 2016 allocation.

Given the increased capital budgets allowing for the provision of Traveller specific accommodation and also the fact that we are now approaching our fifth TAPs commencing in 2019, it was opportune to explore issues and barriers to the delivery of traveller specific accommodation. My Department is particularly concerned about the underspend in this area, given the demand of Traveller-specific accommodation from the Traveller community.

Rebuilding Ireland, the Government's Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness, committed the Housing Agency to undertake an expert, independent review of capital/current funding for traveller-specific accommodation to date. This review was to have regard to targets contained in the Local Authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) and actual units delivered, the current status of accommodation funded and funding provided for accommodation maintenance and other supports. The purpose of this was to provide factual information, analysis and identification of particular challenges, as a key platform to undertake an audit of implementation and delivery of the TAPs, with a focus on appropriate supply of accommodation

The Housing Agency submitted its report to my Department in June 2017. The report was subsequently considered by the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee. This committee has a statutory responsibility to advise me, as the responsible Minister, on matters concerning Traveller accommodation. The NTACC subsequently recommended to me that an 'expert group', independent from the NTACC be established to examine and make recommendations on issues regarding Traveller accommodation policy, strategy and implementation. I fully support this recommendation. I understand that the NTACC is meeting later today to consider the terms of reference for the work of the expert group. It is my intention to establish this group as soon as possible with a view to it concluding its work within a short time-frame.

I look forward to the report arising from the expert group's work which should provide an insight into issues while also providing a platform for a future plan for the delivery of safe and culturally appropriate accommodation. The Department will consider any recommendations made by the expert group to improve the delivery of traveller accommodation nationally and to ensure that full use is made of the

increasing level of funding available for investment in Traveller accommodation.

Thank you