

Opening Statement David Joyce, Michelle Norris

Expert Review Group on Traveller Accommodation

6th November 2018

Chair, Members, thank you for the invitation to present to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government. As requested, I herewith provide an opening statement for the assistance of the Committee.

The Traveller Accommodation Expert Group

In 2018 the Traveller Accommodation Expert Group was established by Minister of State for Housing and Urban Renewal, Damien English, T.D. to review the Traveller Accommodation Act 1998, and other legislation that impacts the provision and delivery of accommodation for Travellers. The Expert Group met for the first time on the 15th of October and they have been tasked with thinking about the best way of approaching the delivery of Traveller accommodation, and providing the Minister with suggestions and key actions within the next six months.

The background to the establishment of the Expert Group was that the Programme for a Partnership Government committed to the establishment of a special working group to audit the current delivery and implementation of local authorities' Traveller Accommodation Programmes and consult with stakeholders on key areas of concern. On foot of this commitment, the Housing Agency commissioned a report, on behalf of the Department; an independent review of capital and current funding for Traveller-specific accommodation for the period 2000 to date. The review had regard to the targets contained in the local authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) and actual units delivered, the current status of the accommodation funded and the funding provided for accommodation maintenance and other supports. On foot of this report the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee advised the Minister to establish an Expert Group to review the Traveller Accommodation Act 1998 other legislation that impacts the provision and delivery of accommodation for Travellers. The terms of reference were drawn up in consultation with the NTACC.

Terms of Reference of the Expert Group

- To review the effectiveness, implementation and operation of the Traveller accommodation act, 1998 with a view to examining whether it provides a robust

legislative basis for meeting the current and future accommodation needs of the Traveller Community, which takes effective implementation into account in the context of the recognition of Traveller ethnicity in 2017¹

- To examine national and international best practice in the provision of accommodation for nomadic communities to inform the legislative basis for meeting the current and future accommodation needs of the Traveller Community
- To review other legislation that impacts on the provision and delivery of Traveller specific accommodation including transient accommodation
- Consult with all relevant stakeholders at local and national level, including Traveller representative organisations and other stakeholder groups represented on the NTACC and LTACCs. Such consultation will include an invitation for written submissions and a series of meaningful national, regional and local workshops/focus groups
- Draft and present report and recommendations to the Minister within 6 months of commencement

Composition of the Expert Group

The Traveller Accommodation Expert Group is composed of three members: David Joyce, Barrister, Mercy Resource Law Centre, Professor Michelle Norris, Head of the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, UCD and Dr. Conor Norton, Head of School of Planning, DIT

David Joyce formerly a Barrister at Law, and now a solicitor with Mercy Law Resource Centre, an independent law centre specialising in Housing Rights. Previously David was Legal Officer with Threshold and Interim Manager of LEAP (Legal Education for All Project). He also held positions as Co-ordinator of the Offaly Traveller Movement and as Legal Policy Officer with the Irish Traveller Movement.

Michelle Norris is the Head of the School of the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice. Her teaching and research interests focus on housing policy and urban regeneration. She has been a member of National Economic and Social Council (NESCC) and Chair of the Housing Finance Agency since 2011.

Conor Norton is Head of the School of Transport Engineering, Environment and Planning at

¹ On 1 March 2017, the then Taoiseach Enda Kenny stated in Dáil Eireann that he wished formally “to recognise Travellers as a distinct ethnic group within the Irish nation.”

Dublin Institute of Technology. He manages the range of teaching, research and engagement functions of the School. He has been active in planning policy research and formulation, and is currently active in research on urban centres, marine spatial planning, and renewable energy. He is Vice-President of the Irish Planning Institute.

Support for the Expert Group is being provided by Roslyn Molloy, Researcher with the Housing Agency.

Initial Agreed Focus of the Expert Review Group

The first step taken by the Expert Review Group was to gain an understanding of the key themes, challenges and issues to focus on. To this end the initial actions of the Expert Group were:

- A desktop evaluation of research papers and reports considering the findings and recommendations
- A desktop study and overview of planning code and planning issues and collation of planning statistics
- An understanding of current expenditure on Traveller Accommodation, Traveller accommodation broken down, annual count, Census figures and Traveller homelessness

Some initial themes and barriers to the effective provision of Traveller accommodation identified by the Expert Group to focus on are:

- land use planning and the interaction of the legislation and systems with the legislation on planning for Traveller accommodation provision.
- Social housing provision and particularly: the provision of Traveller-specific social rented accommodation (eg halting sites and group housing schemes), accurately measuring Travellers' preferences for Traveller-specific social housing compared to standard houses and apartments, and the role of Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) in provision of Traveller accommodation.
- The increased use of private sector accommodation by Travellers (rented and owned), the push and pull factors and advantages and disadvantages associated with this development and how Travellers who wish to secure private accommodation can be supported.
- Key gaps in data provision which impede effective policy design and implementation (eg. annual patterns of movement by Travellers)

The next step the Expert Group is to complete the desktop evaluation, including a review of

planning legislation and to commence a consultation.

The Expert Review Group are now planning face-to-face consultations. Later this month the Expert Group will meet with CENA, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, the Irish Council for Social Housing and Dr Anna Visser of the Oireactas Library. A member of the Expert Review Group will attend the next NTACC meeting with Offaly LTACC later in November.

Wider Stakeholder Consultation will take place in November and December, with written submissions being requested from Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACCs), Local Authority Social Workers and other key stakeholders.

We hope that this joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government will afford the members an opportunity to participate in this consultation and we are look forward to hearing your views on the Expert Review of Traveller Accommodation