



Joint Oireachtas Committee on Key Issues Affecting the Traveller Community.

Opening Statement by Mr. Tom Gilligan, Director of Services, Mayo County Council

1st February, 2024

Cathaoirleach, Members of the Committee, my name is Tom Gilligan, Director of Services with Mayo County Council and I am joined here today by my colleagues, Eileen Corcoran, Traveller Accommodation Officer and Derek Walsh, Traveller Accommodation Liaison Officer. We thank you for the invitation to attend today's meeting to discuss policy matter relating to accommodation for Travellers, including matter relating to the Caravan Loan Scheme for the Traveller Community and implementing the recommendations featured in the Final Report of the Joint Committee on key issues affecting the Traveller Community.

Local Authorities have general responsibility for the provision of housing, including the provision of Traveller Accommodation and are governed by the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998. The preparation, adoption and implementation of a Traveller Accommodation Programme is a key requirement of Mayo County Council.

Mayo County Council, as a housing authority, provides a range of supports and homes to people with a housing need, including Traveller specific accommodation. Mayo County Council works in partnership with Approved Housing Bodies, Ireland's charity sector and other stakeholders to assist Traveller families to ensure their accommodation needs are met via standard local authority or AHB housing, group housing and halting sites. Mayo County Council also supports accommodation provided through subsidisation via the Rental Accommodation Scheme(RAS) or Housing Assistance Payment(HAP).

No. of Traveller Households in the County

Mayo County Council annual count for 2023 of traveller households and their accommodation form indicated that there were 472 traveller households in the County, 297 of which were in standard accommodation.

297 in standard accommodation is broken down as follows: -

- 220 in either local authority accommodation or approved housing body tenancies
- 76 are in supported tenancies in the private sector – through HAP or RAS
- 1 living in longterm leasing.

The remaining 175 traveller households are broken down as follows: -

- 11 in specific accommodation
- 25 in emergency accommodation
- 36 are sharing
- 48 in private ownership
- 31 in private rented accommodation
- 24 in Other

Mayo County Council Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 places a statutory obligation on Local Authorities to prepare and implement a Traveller Accommodation Programme. Our programme specifies targets to be met during the period 2019 - 2024.

Policy

It is the Policy of Mayo County Council to provide for the accommodation needs of Travellers, as far as is reasonable and feasible, using the full range of housing options available to the Council. In the provision of accommodation, priority will be given to members of the Traveller community who were born in Mayo and who have lived in the county continuously, or who, having returned to the county, have lived here for a continuous period of one year, or who, having moved into the county, have lived here for a continuous period of not less than three years.

Equality Action Plan

On the 30th June, 2023 pursuant to Section 32 (1)(B) of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014 in relation to traveller accommodation, Mayo County Council submitted its Equality Action Plan.

The Council has identified actions to be progressed at this time pursuant to the Plan. Implementation of same is a matter for the Council. The Commission welcomed timely implementation to be undertaken in a transparent manner.

On 28th November, 2023, the Commission advised us that they are now at an advanced stage of consideration of the Equality Action Plan and will provide feedback in respect of the Plan in early 2024.

Corporate Objectives

Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024

In Mayo County Council's Corporate Plan 2019-2024 advancing the implementation of the provisions contained in the Traveller Accommodation Programme is listed as a Corporate Strategy. This Strategy is included to ensure the delivery of a Corporate Objective, which is *'to ensure that every Mayo family can live in a dwelling of good standard, located in an acceptable environment, at a price or rent they can afford.'*

Adopted County Development Plan 2022 – 2028

The County Development Plan states that *'it is an objective of the Council to take reasonable steps to secure the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme in the County.'*

Accommodation Policy

Mayo County Council's Policy in relation to the accommodation matters is as follows;

Accommodation

The Council recognises and will have regard to the distinct cultural identity of Travellers in the provision, maintenance and management of accommodation for the Traveller community.

Accommodation in Social Housing is allocated transparently and equitably on the basis of need and in accordance with the Council's scheme of Letting Priorities and having regard to; good estate management practice, achieving a social mix within areas, compatibility of families, anti-social behaviour, social and previous accommodation history and house size requirement.

In relation to achieving good estate management and achieving a social mix, the Council, in keeping with the wishes of the vast majority of Traveller families, avoid an overconcentration of traveller families in any one housing estate. It is considered by the Council that a reasonable balance in this regard currently exists within social housing estates in the County. It is the policy of the Council to ensure that this balance is maintained.

Casual Vacancies

Casual vacancies in social housing and transfers within the existing Council housing stock are assessed on the basis of the Council's Scheme of Letting Priorities.

Design

The Council have regard to the specific housing needs of Travellers in the design of Social Housing Schemes in as far as is practicable.

Horses

It is recognised that the keeping of horses is a tradition, which continues to be practiced by some Traveller families. Such families are required to make their own arrangements for the acquisition of land for grazing purposes and be prepared to pay for the rent or purchase of this land. It is not the policy of Mayo County Council to provide land for the accommodation of horses, and, the keeping of horses on local authority housing developments.

Group Schemes / Single Houses

The programmes provides housing for Traveller families through the development of Group Schemes specifically developed for Traveller families and through the development or acquisition of single instance housing as appropriate, where funding is available. There are on-going developments with these Schemes at present.

Accommodation Alternatives.

The Council actively encourages and facilitates Travellers who wish to avail of privately funded accommodation through Incremental Purchase Schemes

Voluntary Housing

The Council promotes and support the provision of housing for Travellers by Voluntary Housing Associations through direct build and leasing options.

New Family Formations

As with all families, new families forming within the County are expected to make reasonable efforts to secure accommodation from within their own resources.

Returning Families.

As with all families, families returning to live in the County are also expected to make reasonable efforts to secure accommodation from within their own resources.

Private Rented Accommodation/Housing Assistance Payment (H.A.P)

Mayo County Council, through the Traveller Accommodation Liaison Officers continues to assist and support families in securing private rented accommodation where reasonable accommodation is available. The provision of private rented accommodation is one of the methods used by the Council to meet the targets set in this Programme.

Every effort is made to ensure the families have access to rent supplement and to sustain families availing of the scheme. As with all Applicants who are currently availing of RAS/HAP, they can go onto the Mayo County Council Transfer List.

R.A.S & Leasing

These schemes have made significant progress since the last programme. The Rental Accommodation Scheme (R.A.S) and Leasing is now accepted as a main stream social housing support offering a high standard of accommodation with medium term security of tenure and on a differential rent basis. The Traveller Accommodation Liaison Officers assist Families in accessing these schemes.

Refusal of Housing Offers

It is the policy of Mayo County Council to set a limit regarding the offering of local authority accommodation following refusals. Mayo County Council allows **Two** refusals of reasonable offers of accommodation, recognising and taking into account any personal issues.

Transient Accommodation

Mayo County Council continues to accord priority to providing for the accommodation needs of Traveller families within the County. Mayo County Council keeps under review the long term sustainability of transient accommodation in Mayo.

Homeless

Homelessness is now a common experience for many Traveller families, a particularly fast-growing trend across all local authorities. Mayo County Council is taking account of this in its current and future Plans.

Preparation of Draft Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025 – 2029

In accordance with Section 8 of the Housing(Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 (as amended by the Housing(Housing Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009 Mayo County Council gave notice of their intention to carry out an assessment of the need for Accommodation for Travellers prior to the preparation of the Traveller Accommodation Plan.

We invited submissions to be made, but to date no submissions have been received.

Programme Delivery

It is the intention of Mayo County Council to communicate the requirements of the Programme and to co-ordinate efforts within the County to ensure the success of the plan for the statutory period 2019 – 2024.

The Council promotes the provision of Traveller specific accommodation by Voluntary Groups operating in the County.

While the content of the Circular 26/2013 Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019-2024 from the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government regarding funding has been noted in the preparation of the programme, access to capital funding from the Department will be required to provide accommodation in circumstances where options such as private rented, RAS and Leasing are not appropriate to meet needs.

There will be an annual review of progress on the implementation of the Programme in addition to the statutory review after three years.

**Appendix 1 – TAP 2019 – 2024 – Basis of Projected Need*

**Appendix 2 - TAP 2019 – 2024 - Summary of position from 1st July 2019 – 31ST January 2024*

APPENDIX 1

Basis of Projected Need

T.A.P. 2019 - 2024

Municipal Districts	Location				Projected Target Over
		Road side	Private rented & Sharing	Projected Need (Coming of Age)	T.A.P 2019 - 24
Ballina	Ballina	9	7	13	29
Castlebar	Castlebar	6	5	19	30
Claremorris	Claremorris	3	1	1	5
	Ballinrobe	2	2	2	6
	Ballyhaunis	1	2	3	6
Swinford	Swinford	4			4
	Kilkelly				0
	Kiltimagh		1		1
	Charlestown	8	3	3	14
	Foxford				0
Westport/ Belmullet	Westport	1	1	3	5
TOTAL		34	22	44	100

APPENDIX 2

Mayo County Council Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024 (1/07/2019 – 31/01/2024)

TAP 19 – 25 1 July 2019 31 Jan 2024	Halting Site	Group Housing	Local Authority	Local Authority Acquired	Approved Housing Bodies AHB	Rental Accommodation Scheme/ Short Term Leasing RAS/STL	Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)	Long Term Leasing	TOTAL
July 2019 Forward			2	1	-	5	3	-	11
2020	1	-	8	1	1	5	6	-	22
2021	-	1	7	5	8	4	6	1	32
2022	-	-	9	7	3	3	9	-	31
2023	-	-	13	11	4	1	1	-	30
Total	1	1	39	25	16	18	25	1	126

**Summary of position from 1st July 2019 – 31ST January 2024*

The above figures include transfers to meet the changing accommodation needs of the families concerned,