

Submission to Longford County Development Plan 2021

County Longford Traveller Primary Health Care Project

County Longford Traveller Primary Health Care Project is supported through the Traveller Health Unit structure in the HSE and is operating since 2003. The project is peer led initiative allowing primary health care to be developed based on the Traveller community's own values and perceptions to achieve positive outcomes with long-term effects. The project ensures that Travellers are central to their own care and delivery of health and personal interventions resulting in increased engagement and user satisfaction.

The project currently consists of seven Community Health Workers and two Community Development Workers; all members of the Traveller community, and a Project Coordinator. The overall aim of the project is to improve the health and well-being status of the Traveller community across the county of Longford.

The model of Primary Health Care for Travellers requires engagement with health service providers, and effective Traveller participation to address the specific and collective needs of the Traveller community. The work of the Primary Health Care Project is based on outreach work in the communities across county Longford with Traveller families and individuals.

The project contributed to the [All-Ireland Traveller Health Study](#). This document was published in 2010 and is a valuable guide to the health needs of Travellers in Ireland. Since the publication of this study some progress has been made, but the Traveller population in Ireland still face significant health inequalities and challenges. Traveller health inequalities have been well documented over the past few years, the ESRI (2017) publication '[A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland](#)', the [2017 National Traveller – Behaviour & Attitudes Survey](#) and the [National Traveller & Roma Inclusion Strategy \(2017\)](#). These publications identify that addressing the root cause of health inequalities, requires an understanding that health is determined by complex interactions between social and economic factors, the

physical environment and the individuals behaviours. Our project operates within the social determinants of health framework which recognises that many factors impact health including education, employment, accommodation and living conditions.

Traveller accommodation Issues

There is a crisis in accommodation nationally for Travellers. Travellers continue to live in poor conditions throughout Ireland on roadsides, in temporary halting sites and in overcrowded conditions in standard and Traveller specific accommodation, with associated health and safety risks.

In Longford the Traveller Primary Health Care Project experiences an increasing number of Travellers engaging with the project as a result of Traveller accommodation needs and issues. These include:

- rough sleeping;
- living on unauthorised sites on side of road leaving families without proper access to sanitation and electricity and at risk of their accommodation being impounded by the Gardaí;
- no access to the caravan loan scheme;
- energy poverty;
- discrimination in accessing accommodation particularly in the private rental sector;
- dilapidated caravans;
- unsafe, insecure and severe overcrowding housing conditions;
- homelessness and lack of local culturally appropriate provision of Traveller accommodation.

The Ombudsman for Children's Office '*No End in Site*' report highlights the deplorable conditions in which Traveller children are living in. Travellers are also significantly overrepresented within homeless figures nationally, accounting for as high as fifty per cent of the homeless population in some local authority areas. The budgets for the delivery of Traveller specific accommodation are continuously not drawn down and utilised nationally, which has augmented the crisis.

The Traveller Accommodation Expert Review, published in 2019 highlighted the need for Development Plans and Traveller Accommodation Programmes to be aligned, as one mechanism towards the improvement of the current crisis. Below we present recommendations to the County Longford Draft County Development Plan to ensure the accommodation needs, including culturally appropriate, Traveller specific accommodation, of Travellers in county Longford are met during the lifespan of the Plan.

Recommendations

- Traveller specific accommodation developments completed under the last development plan period should be outlined in the Development Plan.
- In order to properly assess the level of preference for Traveller Specific Accommodation amongst Travellers in County Longford, we recommend that Travellers ideal preference for accommodation be recorded, in addition to whatever form of accommodation is currently available to them.
- National-level planning guidelines for Development Plans set out that the range and type of housing required and the land use aspects of the TAP are incorporated into the Development Plan. The Guidelines also state that this should take the form of '*... objectives that clearly set out the approach of the Development Plan in addressing the accommodation needs of the Traveller community and an indication of the specific locations of known Traveller accommodation projects. To support the identification of additional locations for such projects, zoning policies should also be drawn up in a flexible manner to reflect the urgent need to secure additional Traveller accommodation over the lifetime of the plan.*' (Section 4.56 of Development Plans: Planning Guidelines for Planning Authorities, 2007).

Therefore, projects committed to under the 2019-2024 Traveller Accommodation Programme should be listed as objectives in the Development Plan with clear timelines as per the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 PART III (27) (10)

- Sites should be identified and zoning of land for Traveller specific accommodation, including transient accommodation, should be mapped and illustrated in the new County Development Plan, in line with the Planning and Development Act, (2000) as amended, particularly s10(2)(i). The legislation requires that a Development Plan shall include objectives for: 'The provision of accommodation for Travellers, and the use of particular areas for that purpose.'

Given the lifespan of the development plan, consideration should also be given for how sites will be identified for the next Traveller Accommodation Programme.

- All developments should be carried out with meaningful consultation at every stage of the process, including with children and young people.
- The Development Plan should identify Travellers as a priority group in its plans to address homelessness and identify what tangible steps will be taken to prevent Travellers becoming homeless in county Longford.
- Appropriate baseline studies on Traveller accommodation needs should be carried out as part of integrated Housing Need and Demand Assessments for Development Plans.
- The Development Plan should outline relevant objectives to implement the recommendations made by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission in their equality review of the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation by Longford County Council, published in July 2021.
- Travellers are disproportionately adversely affected by energy poverty as highlighted in National Traveller MABS 2019 report "Accommodating Ethnicity, Addressing Energy Poverty Among Travellers Living in Mobile Homes and Trailers". This report found that Travellers living in mobile homes spend on average between 26.1% (median) and 28% (mean) of their income on energy. This is five to six times higher than the corresponding figure of 4.6% of the general population. This should be considered in all efforts to improve the sustainability and energy efficiency of accommodation within the Local Authority area during the lifespan of the Plan. The

Development Plan should outline Longford County Council's plans for retrofitting Traveller accommodation, including timelines for this.

- The provision of good quality, well managed, transient sites are an imperative part of preserving Traveller culture, including nomadism. In line with the local authorities' statutory obligations under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998, we recommend that sites are identified for transient sites within the Development Plan, in consultation with the local Traveller community.
- The Development Plan should reference the work being done on a national level to implement the recommendations of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review and commit to incorporating the work and decisions of the programme board into its future processes.