



Comhairle Chontae Laoise
Laois County Council

Draft

Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025-2029
Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998

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Section 1: Introduction

Background

County Laois is an important and busy county in a prime location in the centre of Ireland occupying an area of 1720 square kilometres. The improved roads and motorway networks place the County at easy access to airports, major cities and provide residents with significant and diverse economic, social and cultural opportunities. Consequently, this creates a strong basis for the future successful development of the county and its main towns. County Laois has a population of 91,877 as of census 2022.

The number of usually resident Irish Travellers increased by 6% in census 2022 to 32,949. There were 812 Travellers in County Laois in census 2022 compared with 780 in 2016, an increase of 4%. This included 416 females and 396 males. The average number of persons per traveller household in Laois was 4.2% at census 2022.

The socio-economic profile of the Traveller population is an important factor in determining accommodation needs.

According to Laois County Council 2023 Traveller Families Annual Estimate 223 traveller households were residing in the county, 198 in standard local authority housing, group housing and owner occupiers, 2 families were residing in private rented accommodation, 13 were sharing with family/ friends, 4 on halting site accommodation and 6 on the roadside/ unauthorised sites.

In terms of Traveller Specific Accommodation, there are 2 Traveller Group Housing Schemes (in Mountmellick and Portarlinton) and one halting site in Clonminam, Portlaoise.

Laois County Council is the single local authority for County Laois. Since the implementation of the Local Government Reform Act 2014, County Laois has three Municipal districts for local government which are:

- Portlaoise Municipal District
- Portarlinton/Graiguecullen Municipal District
- Borris in Ossory/Mountmellick Municipal District

The local authority provides a broad range of services including housing provision, road design, construction, maintenance and improvements, water services, promotion of economic development and emergency services.

Public Sector Duty

This programme is committed to embedding the Public Sector Duty in the delivery of targets and accommodation. This involves the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty (“the duty”) which is a statutory obligation for public bodies in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission 2014.

Section 42 (1) requires public bodies, in the performance of their functions, to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides service and protect human rights of staff and people availing of their services. Section 42 (2) requires public bodies to assess, address and report on progress in relation to equality and human rights in this programme and annual reports in a manner that is accessible to the public.

Structure of Traveller Accommodation Programme

The programme is divided in seven sections and the contents of each section is described below.

Section 1

This section outlines some socio-economic facts about County Laois, deals with the legislative framework which governs the requirements for all Housing Authorities to develop a Traveller Accommodation Programme, and outlines progress under the previous Programmes.

Section 2

This section sets out Laois County Council’s Policy in relation to meeting the accommodation needs of Travellers.

Section 3

This section sets out a Strategy Statement which details Laois County Council’s approach to securing the implementation of the programme.

Section 4

This section deals with the assessment of existing and projected need for Traveller accommodation during the lifetime of the Programme.

Section 5

This section details the measures for implementation and the proposals for the forthcoming five years.

Section 6

This section outlines the purpose of LTACC and the requirement and importance of consultation.

Section 7

This section outlines the conclusions and summarises the significant information contained in the programme.

Legislative Background

The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 came into effect on the 10th of September 1998 and the primary purpose of the Act is to provide a comprehensive legislative framework which requires housing authorities to meet the accommodation needs of Travellers normally resident within their administrative areas. The provisions of the Act play an integral part in promoting social inclusion and equality and counteracting discrimination that may be experienced by members of the Traveller community.

A summary of the main provisions of the 1998 Act is outlined as follows:

- To provide that each housing authority must prepare and have adopted a programme of Traveller accommodation in their area.
- Adoption of a Programme is a reserved function. However, in the event of the members failing to adopt a Programme within the specified timeframe, the Chief Executive is required to adopt the Programme by way of Chief Executives Order.
- To provide for an extensive public notification and consultation process in respect of the preparation of a Traveller Accommodation Programme.
- To require housing authorities to take reasonable steps to secure the implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes.

- To provide for the establishment of a Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee to facilitate consultation with Travellers.
- The requirement of local authorities to include objectives concerning Traveller accommodation in County and City Development Plans and Local Area Plans.

Laois County Council is therefore required to prepare and adopt a new Traveller Accommodation Programme and the Minister directed in Circular 46/23 that the next Traveller Accommodation Programme should be for the period 2025 to 2029.

Summary of Key Actions and dates in Implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programme

Date	Summary of Action in Implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programme
Dec 23	Give 1 months' notice to stakeholders before making an assessment of need. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjoining housing authorities • HSE • Approved bodies engaged in provision of accommodation • Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) • Such other community bodies as the housing authority considers appropriate including Local Traveller Organisations
Jan/Feb 24	Conduct assessment of need. The assessment of need in summary will include assessment of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An estimate of existing and projected accommodation needs during the period of TAP, and • The types of accommodation that are required e.g. group housing, halting sites, transient sites To ascertain this estimate account should be taken of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The views of LTACC • The Summary of Social Housing Assessment 2023 and any other information gathered by local authorities through consultation with stakeholders
Mar/Apr 24	Analysis of results of assessment of need
May/Jun 24	Preparation of draft Traveller Accommodation Programme. The programme should: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be in summary form but in sufficient detail to show the needs for all categories of Traveller accommodation and the general area in which it is required • Include a policy statement and strategy for securing implementation • Include measures for implementing the programme
01 July 24	Publish notice in newspapers that draft programme is available for inspection and circulate draft programme to all stakeholders
30 Aug 24	Latest date for receipt of written submissions on draft programme
1 oct 24	Submission of draft to Council members for adoption (3 months before date Minister specifies as date for adoption of programme)
31 Dec 24	Latest date for adoption of programme
21 Jan 25	Latest date for adjournment of council meetings
21 Feb 25	If there is a failure to adopt by elected members a further 1 month is allowed before the programme, as may be modified, is adopted by managers order
Following adoption	Publication and submission to the Minister of adopted programme

Implementation of previous Programmes (2000 - 2024)

The first five Traveller Accommodation Programmes have mainly included provision of standard social housing. The 2019 – 2024 programme had a target for the provision of 37 units of SLA Housing and the construction of 3 additional bays at Oak Park Halting Site Portlaoise.

The implementation of the first five programmes is summarised in the below table;

Traveller Accommodation Programmes 2000 – 2024										
Programme	SSH		GHS		HS		Total			
	Target	Provided	Target	Provided	Target	Provided	Target	Provided	Target	Provided
2000 – 2004	17	72	5	0	5	32	27	104		
2005 – 2008	35	58	5	0	0	0	40	58		
2009 – 2013	31	22	6	6	0	0	37	28		
2014 – 2018	41	48	0	0	0	0	41	48		
2019 – 2024	37	91	0	0	3	3 (under construction)	40	91		
Total	161	291	16	6	8	32	185	329		

Section 2: Policy Statement

The overall aim of Laois County Council housing policy is to enable every household, where a housing need has been established, to have available to them an affordable dwelling of good quality, in a good environment as far as possible, at tenure of their choice, and in location of their choice, in so far as possible.

Laois County Council recognises Travellers' identity as an indigenous minority ethnic group. It is the policy of the local authority, within the resources available, to directly provide accommodation to Travellers in accordance with the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998.

Provision of Accommodation

Applicants seeking social housing accommodation, including Traveller Specific Accommodation, are required to submit housing applications and relevant documents in accordance with Housing Regulations. Where the applicant has particular family circumstances or a disability, the Council will consider such issues when assessing the

housing need. It is the policy of the Council to consult with Traveller applicants regarding their accommodation needs and requirements to provide, where appropriate, Traveller Specific Accommodation. However, this may not always be available to each applicant and therefore other available options will be explored and offered.

The allocation of properties will be based on the Council's Allocation Scheme 2024 which sets out the priorities and procedures for allocating social housing units. The Allocations Scheme recognises the need to achieve a balance in allocating housing units between the accommodation needs and preferences of applicants, good estate management and in the best interest of the and the need to make best use of publicly funded resources.

There are a full range of housing options available in the provision of accommodation for Travellers, including:

- Standard Social Housing Accommodation
- Traveller Group Housing
- Traveller Halting Site Accommodation
- Private house ownership – Affordable housing and cost rental
- Private Rented Accommodation with support of HAP
- Long term leasing
- Loans
- Grants

Homelessness

Individuals or families who present as homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless can avail of the services of the Homeless Section. Individual cases will be monitored at the Homeless Action Team meeting (HAT) and care plans drawn up.

Estate Management

A well-maintained housing stock and the attractive appearance of a housing estate enhances the quality of life and the social well-being of tenants. All Council housing stock, including Traveller Specific Accommodation, is managed on the same basis.

A tenancy agreement outlining the terms and conditions is required for all tenancies and all tenancies are subject to the payment of differential rent. In the interests of all tenants living on the site or estate, the Council will rigorously enforce the contents of the tenancy agreement. Each tenant has a responsibility to ensure that the terms of the tenancy agreement are met in full. Estate management also includes securing the interest of the tenants in the enjoyment of the house and the avoidance, prevention and abatement of anti-social behavior in the housing estates. Laois County Council operates an Anti-Social Behavior Strategy for addressing anti-social behavior emanating from Council owned dwellings and estates. Anti-Social Behavior emanating from the privately owned dwellings or from tenants of the private rented sector is not a matter for the local authority. Complaints in this regard should be made directly to the landlord or An Garda Síochana.

Temporary Dwellings / Unauthorised Encampments

Temporary dwelling means any tent, caravan, mobile home, vehicle, other structure or thing (whether on wheels or not) which is capable of being moved from one place to another, and is or was used for human habitation, either permanently or from time to time or was designed, constructed or adapted for such use. Public place means any street, road or other place to which the public have access, whether as of right or by express or implied permission and whether is subject to or free of charge and any property or other land owned or occupied by or leased to a public authority.

The Council will investigate the circumstances of any household in a temporary dwelling and take action if appropriate to do so in accordance with the relevant legislation.

Section 3: Strategy Statement

Provision of Accommodation

The Housing for All Strategy for Ireland 2021 to 2030 is a multi-annual, multibillion euro plan which will improve Ireland's housing system and deliver more houses of all types for people with different housing needs.

The government's overall objective is that every citizen in the State should have access to good quality homes:

- To purchase or rent at an affordable price.
- Built to a high standard and in the right place
- Offering a high quality of life

The government's vision for the housing system over the longer term is to achieve a steady supply of housing in the right locations with economic, social and environmental sustainability built into the system. The plan has 4 pathways to achieving Housing for All:

- Supporting home ownership and increasing affordability.
- Homelessness, increasing social housing delivery and supporting social inclusion
- Increasing new housing supply
- Vacancy and efficient use of existing stock

Laois County Council aims to provide accommodation that responds to the different needs of Travellers utilising various forms of social housing delivery. These include direct provision through the capital programme and purchase by the Council and Approved Housing Bodies, re-letting of vacant units, houses sourced through private developers' "Part V" obligations, houses sourced through various leasing schemes and private rented accommodation supported by Housing Assistance Payment. The current Housing for All Strategy Plan for Ireland is aimed at tackling our country's housing shortage and will result in a dramatic increase in the delivery of homes nationwide. Laois County Council aims to provide 534 social housing units to applicants approved for social housing under this plan. To date, this target has been achieved.

The identification of suitable sites for the provision of Traveller Specific Accommodation is a challenge for the Local Authority. Sites owned by Laois County Council may be used for this purpose and additional sites may be acquired, if required, subject to availability of funding.

Travellers who wish to undertake the provision of their own accommodation may access supports such as home loans and grants.

Laois County Council will continue to work with and support Laois Traveller Action Group in relation to accommodation / Housing issues. Laois County Council witnesses first hand the work being carried out by LTAG and in particular their engagement in the Portarlinton area where they established a Men's shed which was co-funded by Laois County Council and monies received from the Traveller Accommodation Unit through Dormant Account Funding.

Implementing Authority

Laois County Council is the implementing authority for the Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025 – 2029. The housing section of the Council is responsible for the provision of suitable, cost effective and, quality accommodation and the implementation of the programme.

Resourcing the Programme

The delivery of social housing units is subject to the appropriate level of funding being made available by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Funding is currently available through the Social Housing Capital Investment Programme (SHCIP) which provides funding for capital projects, acquisitions including Part V and Compulsory Purchase Order acquisitions.

The Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage currently provides full funding for the provision and refurbishment of Traveller Specific accommodation.

Laois County Council will continue to engage with the department to secure funding for the provision of the various social housing options.

Laois County Council will continue to source Dormant Account Funding to assist with the following:

- Training and support to assist Travellers in tenancy sustainment and development of their community in Traveller-specific group housing schemes and Traveller Halting sites.

- To help raise awareness and acceptance of Traveller culture to enable development of accommodation.
- To seek resolutions where conflicts arise e.g. mediation and community building.
- The introduction of play areas in Traveller-specific accommodation that will improve the environment in which children are living.

The Council utilises the expertise of its staff such as technical and administrative staff, housing finance staff, tenant liaison officers, housing welfare officer, HAP Place Finder and Social Workers in housing provision, maintenance and management of accommodation, as required.

The HAP Place Finder will continue to work with travellers seeking private rented accommodation and availing of homeless HAP.

Co-operation with Approved Housing Bodies

Laois County Council has a strong working relationship with the various Approved Housing Bodies operating in the county for the delivery of social housing options. The approved housing bodies deliver social housing, in partnership with the Council, through capital projects, acquisitions and leasing and are funded through Social Housing Current Expenditure Programme (SHCEP), Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) and Capital Advance Leasing Facility (CALF).

Allocation of Accommodation

Social housing accommodation is allocated in accordance with Laois County Council's Allocations Scheme 2024. The Council also nominates applicants from the Council's housing list for the tenancies of the Approved Housing Bodies.

Special needs dwellings and older persons dwellings are allocated to housing applicants based on their specific needs. Traveller Group housing is provided, within the available resources of the Council, to Travellers who have requested and agreed to be accommodated together.

Estate management

Maintenance is a fundamental aspect of estate management principles. The Council is responsible for the maintenance that is required to sustain the main structure of the property such as structural, plumbing and electrical and heating repairs and for some estate infrastructure such as internal roads, footpaths and alleyways. The maintenance is carried out through reactive maintenance and planned maintenance. Tenants are expected to take care of the property and gardens and be responsible for all day-to-day minor repairs.

Whilst the Council has the primary responsibility for maintenance and management of its housing stock and estates, the tenants of the Council are encouraged to develop a sense of ownership and where feasible to actively participate in estate management through resident committees. Successful tenant participation can bring about vast improvements in the quality of life for residents of local authority housing estates and can help to prevent the deterioration of an estate. The Council's Tenant Liaison Officers are tasked to manage the tenant and landlord relationship and enhance tenant participation.

Laois County Council employs two Tenant Liaison Officers to investigate complaints of anti-social behaviour emanating from Council owned dwellings and estates and to address incidents of anti-social behaviour. Laois County Council also co-operates with An Garda Síochana and other agencies in addressing anti-social behaviour. The Tenant Liaison Officers also provide support to residents associations to enhance their estates and build their communities, including the provision of grants to residents associations and painting grants.

Rents are calculated based on the Differential rents scheme taking into account the total household income and household composition. Tenants are encouraged to use Household Budget Deduction, Bank Standing Order, Direct Debit or An Post Payment Card as their rent payment method. Laois County Council expects all tenants to have a rent account without arrears at all times. All rent accounts are monitored and tenants with rent arrears are encouraged to meet with the rents section to discuss how the matter can be best resolved.

Tenants' responsibilities and obligations are outlined in the Tenancy Agreement and further information is provided in the Tenant's handbook. All new tenants are required to attend pre-tenancy training where tenants' rights, responsibilities and the Council's obligations are clarified. Where Tenancy Agreements are not adhered to repeatedly, Laois County Council will issue the appropriate warnings and initiate legal proceedings if appropriate and required.

Monitoring Arrangements

The implementation of the programme will be continuously monitored, and the below monitoring arrangements are in place.

- Records for the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation programme are kept by the housing section and progress reports are provided in the monthly Housing Team meetings and monthly management reports to Council.
- Progress report will be presented at each meeting of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- Progress report will be presented to the Housing Strategic Policy Committee at the end of each year of the programme
- Annual returns to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage are provided through the Local Government returns system
- Review of the Traveller Accommodation Programme will be carried out in accordance with section 17 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998

Section 4: Assessment of Accommodation Needs

Assessment Methodology

Existing Need

A review of the Social Housing Waiting list was carried out to determine the requirements of all applicants who wished to identify as a traveller.

At the 12/06/2024 there were 16 open applications on the waiting list for members of the travelling community. Contact was made with all applicants on the waiting list by Laois County Council and Laois Traveller Action Group and they were invited to participate in an assessment process. Laois Traveller Action Group was invited to be part of the process in order to provide an advocacy service and act as an Independent/ Third party. Laois Traveller Action Group also contacted those not on the waiting list and invited them to participate in the assessment process.

Laois County Council also gave prior notice of their intention to carry out an assessment of the needs of travellers in their administrative area to:

- Adjoining Local / Housing Authorities
- HSE
- Approved Housing Bodies
- Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- Such other Community Bodies as the Housing Authority consider appropriate including Local Traveller Organisations

Only 5 families attended for assessment despite being given several opportunities to do so. All the families who attended for assessment were very clear in their preference for standard local authority housing. The majority of the families on the waiting list share accommodation with their extended family.

Only two households remain on unauthorised sites who have applied for housing. One of the roadside families has requested the provision of Standard Local Authority Housing and the other family has expressed the wish to be provided with traveller specific accommodation but to date has not identified the families with whom they wish to share this type of accommodation. Also, to date, no other family has made an application to share accommodation with this family. If and when they do, this matter can be reviewed, and amendments made to this programme if appropriate to do so.

When assessing the need, Laois County Council also had regard to the

- 2023 Traveller Families annual estimate and previous annual counts.
- 2023 Housing Needs Assessment
- Information available to Laois Traveller Action Group
- The views of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- Progress made in the 2019 – 2024 Traveller Accommodation Consultative Programme
- Transfer applications
- Census 2022 Data

Transfer Applications and Disability Need

There are 21 open transfer applications from travelling families for the following reasons:

- Disability/Health/Compassionate – 11

- Overcrowding – 5
- Downsizing – 2
- Anti-social/Family feud – 3

Looking at health status, 67% of Irish Travellers in census 2022 stated that their health status was good or very good, compared with 83% of the total population. While 4% of Travellers stated they had bad or very bad health, compared with 2% of the total population.

Laois County Council, in considering the health status of travellers in the county has appointed a traveller representative to the Housing Disability Steering Group (HDSG).

The existing need is 37, that is 16 open applications for standard local Authority housing and 21 transfer applications.

Projected Need

This assessment of need was also carried out in co-operation with Laois Traveller Action Group. The projected need was estimated based on the available information regarding household composition and ages of the household members of housing applicants, tenants of Local Authority, Approved Housing Bodies and owner occupiers.

Much of this information was garnered from i-House (Local Authority IT system) and following consultation with Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, Laois Traveller Action Group and previous assessments of needs and annual estimates and census data from 2022.

The following table shows the number of persons who will reach the age of 18 during the lifeline of this programme.

Age	Number of Persons
14	19
15	13
16	28
17	31
18	19
Total	110

In determining projected need, Laois County Council had regard to the following:

- Every person over 18 years will not apply for housing/accommodation
- Some will leave the county
- A number of the 110 may marry or form relationships with each other

It is not possible to accurately predict the projected need during the duration of this programme. However, a proportion of the 110 persons reaching the age of 18 during the lifeline of this programme will apply for accommodation. It is not possible to establish the accommodation preference of these individuals. However, it is envisaged, based on the current housing status of the majority of travelling families in County Laois the preference will be for standard Local Authority housing.

Transient Sites

The records for temporary dwellings for the past five years were reviewed to establish if there was a need for a transient site. It was established that the provision of such a site in the county is not currently required.

Section 5: Measures for Implementation

Standard Social Housing Accommodation

The majority of standard social housing vacancies are allocated through the Allocations Scheme 2024 based on the points allocated to the applicant.

Traveller Group Housing

As only one family has expressed an interest in group housing, and they have not identified their preferred family grouping and Laois County Council has received no other applications for group housing, it is therefore not envisaged that there will be any additional Traveller Group Housing Schemes over the lifetime of this Programme. However, this matter can be reviewed, and amendments made to this programme if required.

Halting Site Accommodation

The Traveller Accommodation Programme 2019 – 2024 set a target for the refurbishment of Oak Park Halting site, Portlaoise. This refurbishment will increase the capacity of Oak Park from 1 to 4 families. At the time of assessment, construction work was not complete and if not completed by 31st December 2024, this target will carry over into this programme.

Additional Accommodation Supports

In addition to social housing provision there are various housing supports available to Travellers, for example:

- **Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)**

HAP is a form of social housing support provided by local authorities. Under HAP the housing applicant will be required to find their own accommodation in the private rented sector. Where the applicant is eligible and approved for HAP, their local authority will pay, on their behalf, their monthly rent to their landlord. In return the applicant will be required to pay a contribution towards rent to the local authority. This will be a differential rent based on their household weekly income, in a similar way to the differential rents charged for all local authority housing.

The HAP Place Finder can assist in securing private rented accommodation and liaise with private landlords.

➤ **Homeless Services**

Travellers who are homeless or are at risk of becoming homeless can avail of the services of the Council's Homeless Section. These services include provision of emergency accommodation and direct allocation of housing through the various schemes. Supports will also be provided by referrals to the Regional Tenancy Sustainment Service, Housing First Service, Housing Welfare Service and other appropriate referral to other agencies.

➤ **Local Authority Home Loan**

A person that is unable to get a loan from a building society or bank, may be eligible for a local authority

mortgage. A Local Authority Home Loan is a Government backed mortgage for first time buyers. It is available nationwide from all local authorities. A first time buyer can apply for a Local Authority Home Loan to purchase a new or second-hand property, or to build their own home. The loan is a normal Capital and Interest-bearing mortgage which is repaid by direct debit on a monthly basis. A first time buyer can borrow up to 90% of the market value of the property. Maximum market values of the property that can be purchased or self-built in county Laois is currently €275,000

➤ **First-time House Purchase Grants for Travellers**

A Traveller, who has purchased or constructed a private house for themselves, for the first time, can apply for a grant of €3810. The Grant is paid by the local authority and must be claimed within 3 years of the purchase. The grant is not awarded to Travellers who seek to purchase their local authority house or any other house where the Local Authority has provided assistance by way of discounts, for example, affordable housing, incremental purchase scheme.

➤ **Tenant (Incremental) Purchase Scheme**

From time to time Council operates a scheme that gives local authority tenants the opportunity to buy their homes and get a discount on the price of the house based on their income. However, some properties do not qualify for sale, for example houses designated for older people or people with a disability, Traveller Group Housing, long-term leased and Rental Accommodation Scheme units, apartments and flats.

➤ **Adaptations to a Council House for a person with a disability**

A tenant can apply for adaptations to a Council house for the purposes of carrying out works that are reasonably necessary to render a house more suitable for the accommodation of a person with a disability. The Council will always consider the most cost-effective option to address housing needs of the disabled person, which includes transferring to a more suitable dwelling. Provision of adaptation works is subject to survey, feasibility, and budget.

➤ **Disabled Persons Grant for private house owners**

Grants are available for people with a disability, who are private house owners, to assist in the carrying out of works which are reasonably necessary for the purpose of rendering a house more suitable for the accommodation of a person with a disability. Grant assistance is means-tested and will be provided on a priority basis and is subject to budget.

➤ **Housing Aid Grant for Older people**

Housing Aid for Older People, who are private house owners, is available to assist older people living in poor housing conditions where works are deemed necessary to make the house habitable for the applicant or weather proof in extremely urgent cases. Grant assistance is means-tested and is provided on a priority basis, which will be determined from information supplied on the application form and following an inspection from a Council official. Grant assistance is subject to budget.

➤ **Housing Transfers**

Tenants of the Council can apply for a transfer to more suitable accommodation in certain circumstances such as over-crowding, under-occupancy, and disability. Also, a tenant of an Approved Housing Body can apply for transfer within the AHB housing stock. In situations where the Approved Housing Body is unable to provide suitable accommodation the tenant can submit an application to the Council.

Section 6: Consultation

Accommodation Programmes are required to be prepared and implemented in consultation with other local public authorities, community groups and other bodies, Travellers both directly

and via the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC), Traveller Support Groups in the area, if any, and the public in general.

The purpose of this consultation process is to ensure that the interests of all concerned with or affected by proposals for Traveller Accommodation are considered and to facilitate a planned and comprehensive response by housing authorities to the accommodation needs of Travellers.

Notice of intention

Notice of the intention to carry out an assessment of need for the new Traveller Accommodation Programme for the period commencing 1st January 2025 was given to the bodies specified under section 8 of the Act.

Submissions were received from:

- LTACC
- National Traveller Health Implementation Group (NTHIG)
- National Traveller MABS
- CLUID Housing Association
- Irish Association for Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO)
- CENA
- Pavee Point – Irish Traveller Movement

Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC)

The role assigned to Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee is to

- Advise in relation to the preparation and implementation of any accommodation programme for the functional area of the appointing authority concerned,
- Advise on the provision and management of accommodation for Travellers, and
- Provide a liaison between Travellers and members and officials of the appointing authority concerned.

The membership of the Laois County Council's LTACC comprises 15 members: 6 elected members, 5 Travellers/representatives of Traveller bodies and 4 Council Officials (this includes the Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer). The LTACC was notified of the intention to

prepare a new Traveller Accommodation Programme and to carry out an assessment of existing and projected accommodation needs of Travellers and were also consulted in this regard. The assessment report and draft Traveller Accommodation Programme were submitted to LTACC for consideration.

Public Consultation

Section 9(1) of the Act requires local authorities to publish in not less than one newspaper circulating within the functional area of that relevant housing authority (a) stating its proposal to adopt, amend, replace the accommodation programme, (b) stating a draft of the accommodation programme, or a draft of the amendment to or a replacement of it, is available for inspection at the offices of the relevant housing authority or other such office may be specified, at specified times during a specified period and (c) regard will be had to any submissions in writing received by the relevant housing authority in relation to the draft programme, or the draft of the amendment to or replacement of it within two months, of the publication of the notice.

Within 7 days of the publication notice the relevant housing authorities shall send a copy of the notice and the draft accommodation programme to the bodies notified under section 8 of the act and to make arrangements for a copy of the notice to be displayed at such offices of the relevant housing authority to which the public can access and as the relevant housing authority considers appropriate.

Section 7: Conclusion

The majority of Travellers in County Laois have had a strong preference for standard social housing for a long time and this trend continues. Consequently, the past Traveller Accommodation Programmes have mainly included standard social housing provision and Laois County Council has well exceeded the targets in regard to provision of standard social housing during 2019 – 2024, that is 91 units provided.

The target for the provision of 37 units of standard social housing during the course of this programme (2025 – 2029) is envisaged to be achieved through allocation of newly built and casual vacancies of the Council and Approved Housing Bodies and where necessary acquisitions. The standard social housing will be allocated through our Scheme of Letting Priorities 2024. Currently refurbishment works are taking place at Oak Park Halting Site

Portlaoise and if not completed by December 2024, they will be included in this programme for completion in 2025. In total 37 units of standard Local Authority Housing will be provided over the lifetime of the Programme and the refurbishment of Oak Park Halting Site will be completed.

	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Completion of Oak Part Halting Site	1				
Standard Local Authority Housing	7	7	8	8	7

Only one household has expressed an interest in Group Housing. However, to date, they have not identified the families with whom they wish to share this accommodation and no other family has applied for Group Housing. If they do so within the lifetime of this programme, Laois County Council can review the programme and amend accordingly if appropriate to do so. However, there will be challenges in securing a suitable site and securing the necessary funding.

Laois County Council will review the accommodation programme in accordance with section 17 of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998.