



# Irish Traveller

ACCOMMODATION STRATEGY

2020-2025

**Housing**  
Executive

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# Foreword

## Introduction by the Chairman and Chief Executive

The Irish Traveller community is long established in Northern Ireland and its history and traditions stretch back many years. However, Irish Travellers are also among the most disadvantaged and marginalised people living in Northern Ireland and can face multiple deprivations in relation to health and well-being, housing, education, racism, mortality and discrimination.

The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 identifies the Irish Traveller community as an ethnic minority thereby making it unlawful for members of the community to be discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity.

In 2003, the strategic role and responsibility for the provision of accommodation for Irish Travellers was transferred from local District Councils to the Housing Executive under the Housing (NI) Order 2003.

The Housing Executive supports the right for everyone to have access to decent adequate housing. Our corporate vision is that **“Everyone is able to live in an affordable and decent home, appropriate to their needs, in a safe and attractive place”**.

We are therefore pleased to present the **Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025** (the Strategy) which sets out how we plan to provide Irish Travellers with access to good quality, culturally appropriate housing accommodation which fosters a sustainable, vibrant Traveller community and promotes inclusion, a sense of belonging and security.

We wish to express our sincere gratitude to those organisations, services users and our own staff within the Housing Executive who took the time to work with us in the development of this Strategy. Their input was invaluable and, we hope, has resulted in a Strategy which will lead to improved housing outcomes for Irish Travellers.

In addition to those who worked with us in the development of this Strategy we also wish to thank those individuals and organisations who submitted consultation responses.

The Strategy proposes a number of key actions and includes an implementation plan laying out a work programme over the next five years to achieve these.

The success of this Strategy goes beyond ‘bricks and mortar’ and the task ahead will not be easy but we are confident that we can work with our partners across all sectors to face the challenges required to ensure the provision, and sustainability of suitable, culturally

sensitive Irish Traveller accommodation which addresses housing need and protects and promotes Irish Travellers' cultural identity in NI.

Professor Peter Roberts, Chair

Clark Bailie, Chief Executive

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# Executive Summary

## What's the issue?

Planning for, providing and managing culturally sensitive Irish Traveller accommodation is both complex and challenging. Accommodation is linked with a range of deprivation factors experienced by Irish Travellers such as health and well-being, education, racism, mortality and discrimination (see Section 2.0).

There is no one single solution to the many challenges experienced by Irish Travellers. However, by improving the condition of the accommodation in which they live, where this is possible, and seeking to provide additional accommodation where it is needed, we can help reduce some of these problems and contribute to improved overall outcomes for the Irish Traveller community.

## Background

The strategic role and responsibility for the provision of accommodation for Irish Travellers was transferred from local District Councils to the Housing Executive in 2003 under the Housing (NI) Order 2003.

The Housing Executive has conducted research into Traveller accommodation in NI since 2002 which has helped inform the development and provision of Traveller accommodation over this period.

The 4th **Irish Traveller Accommodation Survey 2018/19** was completed in January 2020 and is the supplementary evidence used to inform this **Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025**.

## The Strategy

This Strategy aims to:

- Address the range of accommodation needs of Irish Travellers;
- Ensure the provision of adequate and suitable accommodation for Irish Travellers that meets their needs, promotes their equality of opportunity and promotes good relations among Traveller households and between Travellers and other members of the community.

The Strategy has four objectives:

- 1) To develop a Traveller Specific Accommodation Needs Assessment;

- 2) To provide safe and culturally appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers to reside and travel to;
- 3) To support the Irish Traveller community to remain in their accommodation of choice through easily accessible housing services;
- 4) To create mechanisms that foster good relations for the Irish Traveller community.

### Key Actions

The Strategy contains 12 key actions:

1. To review our housing application and housing solution processes to ensure Travellers are aware of the full range of Traveller-specific accommodation options;
2. To continue to develop our ethnic monitoring and record keeping systems, including the collection of data on Irish Traveller communities, to better understand the impact of housing services and to help inform future planning and service provision;
3. To adapt our Housing Needs Assessment methodology to facilitate the assessment of Traveller-specific accommodation needs;
4. To undertake a review of transit sites to establish, through a generated needs assessment, the existing and future demand for transit sites in NI within the Irish Traveller community;
5. To undertake a strategic review of all our Traveller sites to identify options for their future improvement or replacement. We will also review the current emergency halting, transit or serviced site classifications for each of our sites to ensure they reflect how the sites are being used in practice;
6. To investigate the potential to work with our stakeholders, in particular DfI, DfC and Councils, on how fitness standards for caravans might be defined and enforced for the benefit of Travellers;

7. To work with Housing Association partners and other stakeholders to promote compatibility<sup>1</sup> within the Traveller community as a means of maximising existing and future Traveller-specific accommodation;
8. To undertake a review of floating support funding for Traveller support groups working to improve housing outcomes for the Traveller community;
9. To look at ways to promote our housing services to raise awareness among Irish Travellers of the levels of service they should expect to receive and to support them in making a complaint if they are not satisfied;
10. To keep the training needs of our staff in respect of the Traveller community under review, including the development of an eLearning package for all our staff, to further raise Irish Traveller cultural awareness;
11. To introduce proactive approaches to ensure Travellers are safe and welcomed within their choice of accommodation;
12. To seek to expand our partnerships working with relevant stakeholders to effectively implement this Strategy.

The key actions will be delivered through a 5 year implementation plan with measurable milestones and outcomes. An update on progress of the Strategy will be produced on an annual basis demonstrating our outcomes achieved

## Conclusions

The Strategy recognises the many issues and challenges that exist in the provision and management of Irish Traveller-specific accommodation together with the need to improve support for the Traveller community in their chosen form of accommodation and to give them a voice in decisions that affect them through enhanced participation and engagement.

The Strategy seeks to go beyond the provision of accommodation and will require that the Housing Executive works with our partners across all sectors to achieve its aims and if it is to be successful. It is, however, an essential step forward in the provision of sustainable, culturally sensitive accommodation for the Irish Traveller community in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> This is where Travellers are unable to or do not wish to live together due to tensions, feuds or lack of family ties. Some Travellers have also refused to avail of the pitches, even when there is no one else on the site. This is due to the cultural belief that a family that previously lived on the site has a territorial claim to that site, even if they have no intention of returning – [Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission \(2018\) Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in Northern Ireland](#) ) [accessed March 2020] p29.

It is recognised that fulfilment of these actions depends on a number of critical factors; they require budget availability, partnership working and endorsement by the Irish Traveller community.

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# Overview of the Strategy: Vision, Outcomes, Aims and Objectives

## VISION

**“To provide safe and sustainable accommodation that meets the housing and cultural needs of the Irish Traveller community”**

## OUTCOMES

- Irish Travellers have increased opportunities to support their housing and cultural needs;
- The cultural needs of Irish Travellers are respected and valued within our housing services;
- Social inclusion for Irish Travellers, both within and between communities, is enhanced.

## AIMS

This strategy aims to:

- Address the range of accommodation needs of Irish Travellers;
- Ensure the provision of adequate and suitable accommodation for Irish Travellers that meets their needs, promotes their equality of opportunity and promotes good relations among Traveller households and between Travellers and other members of the community.

## OBJECTIVES

- 1) To develop an objective, robust, evidence-based assessment of Irish Traveller-specific accommodation requirements, which reflects best practice;
- 2) To provide safe and culturally appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers to reside in and travel to;
- 3) To support the Irish Traveller to remain in their accommodation of choice through easily accessible housing services;
- 4) To create mechanisms that foster good relations for the Irish Traveller.

## Acknowledgements: Stakeholder Engagement

The Housing Executive is grateful for the engagement and input of a number of external stakeholders as part of the consultation exercise undertaken to inform the drafting of the Strategy:

- Department for Communities;
- STEP;
- Craigavon Traveller Support Committee;
- Community Restorative Justice Ireland;
- Bryson Intercultural;
- Social Justice Trust;
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission;
- Western Travellers Action Group;
- Newry Traveller Support;
- Apex Housing Association;
- Radius Housing Association;
- Clanmil Housing Association;
- The HEART Project;
- Housing Rights;
- Monaghan County Council;
- Equality Commission for Northern Ireland;
- Western Health Traveller Action Group;
- Executive Office Race Equality Unit.

The views and opinions of the stakeholders on Traveller issues were wide and varied and have been used to inform and structure the Strategy.

The Housing Executive recognises that our Strategy cannot be delivered in isolation, and the requirement for a holistic approach that takes into account the important contribution that health, education, and well-being, in addition to other factors, have on the lives of the Irish Traveller community.

Taking our lead from the Executive Office's Race Equality Strategy we recognise the need to engage with each organisation that has a part to play in promoting equal opportunity and challenging racism for Travellers. Full and effective implementation of this Strategy will only be achieved by working together and, where appropriate, in partnership with the voluntary and community sector and other elements of civic society.

## 2.0 Strategic Context

The Irish Traveller community is long established in Northern Ireland and its history and traditions stretch back many years. However, Irish Travellers are also among the most disadvantaged and marginalised people living in Northern Ireland and can face multiple challenges in relation to health and well-being, housing, education, racism, mortality and discrimination.

In its 2014 publication on *Racial Equality Policy Priorities & Recommendations*<sup>2</sup>, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland highlighted evidence on a range of issues experienced by the Irish Traveller community in Northern Ireland, including: negative attitudes held by the wider population; poor literacy and low levels of educational attainment; high levels of unemployment; poverty; lower than average life expectancy; and higher than average mortality and suicide rates. Similar findings were collated in a report produced for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2013.<sup>3</sup>

The wider links between the quality, security and affordability of housing/accommodation and a range of other issues such as health, poverty, educational outcomes and social inclusion have been highlighted and demonstrated for the population as a whole<sup>4</sup> and are also relevant where the experiences of, and outcomes for, Irish Travellers are concerned. We have been mindful, in drafting this strategy, that accommodation and living conditions are linked to, and influence, a number of the other issues faced by Irish Travellers.

In addition, this strategy has been developed within the context of a range of existing policies, strategies and frameworks that, either directly or indirectly, relate to the needs of, and provision of services for, Irish Traveller households in Northern Ireland.

### 2.1 The Northern Ireland Executive and the Programme for Government

The Northern Ireland Executive comprises the First Minister, deputy First Minister and the Ministers of Northern Ireland's eight government departments. The role of co-ordinating

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<sup>2</sup> Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (2014) *Racial Equality Policy Priorities & Recommendations* available at: [Equality Commission for Northern Ireland \(2014\) Racial Equality Policy Priorities & Recommendations](#). [accessed April 2020]

<sup>3</sup> Wallace, A., McAreavey, R. and Atkin, K. (2013) *Poverty and Ethnicity in Northern Ireland: An Evidence Review* available at [Poverty and Ethnicity in Northern Ireland: An Evidence Review](#). [accessed April 2020]

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Archer, P., Murie, A., Turkington, R. and Watson, C. (2016) *Good Housing, Better Health* available at: [Good Housing, Better Health](#). [accessed April 2020]; Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (2008) *Good Housing Leads to Good Health: A toolkit for environmental health practitioners*; and Housing Learning and Improvement Network (2011) *Public health and housing: we can get it right* available at: [Housing Learning and Improvement Network \(2011\) Public health and housing: we can get it right](#). [accessed April 2020]

Executive policies and programmes to deliver a peaceful, fair, equal and prosperous society lies with The Executive Office, which is itself a government department. One of the key objectives of the Executive Office is **to tackle disadvantage and promote equality of opportunity**:

*By driving a programme across Government to reduce poverty; promoting and protecting the interests of children, older people, people with disabilities, victims and survivors, and other socially excluded groups; addressing inequality and disadvantage; and, drive the delivery of Government responsibilities in a sustainable manner.<sup>5</sup>*

The Draft Programme for Government 2016-21 set the direction for the Northern Ireland Executive over a five-year period and adopted a framework of wellbeing outcomes which expressed the ambitions of the Executive for everyone in society. Following the collapse of the power-sharing government in early 2017, the draft Programme for Government Framework became the basis for what was initially a one-year Outcomes Delivery Plan. The 2018-19 delivery plan<sup>6</sup> did not specifically refer to Irish Travellers, but retained an outcome related to promoting tolerance and building resilience by removing barriers to participation that arise for people as a result of particular aspects of their identity, including their racial group:

***Outcome 9: We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity***

An updated plan, which was published in December 2019 with the intention of being retained as a live document rather than covering a fixed time period, also continued to include this outcome<sup>7</sup>. More recently, the *New Decade, New Approach*<sup>8</sup> agreement set out the immediate priorities for the restored Executive. They included *Delivering a Fair and Compassionate Society* and *Developing a new Programme for Government*, but it was noted that the Outcomes Delivery Plan would provide the basis for an Executive work programme of priority actions to be taken in the coming months.

In relation to issues of Rights, language and identity, Annex E of the *New Decade, New Approach* document proposed a new framework recognising and celebrating Northern Ireland's diversity of identities and culture and promoting cultural difference. It is envisaged that a new Office for Identity and Cultural Expression will promote cultural pluralism and respect for diversity, including Northern Ireland's ethnic, national, linguistic and faith communities.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> [The Executive Office - About the Department - Key Objectives](#) [March 2020]

<sup>6</sup> [The Executive Office Outcomes Delivery Plan 2018-19](#) [March 2020]

<sup>7</sup> [The Executive Office Outcomes Delivery Plan Updated](#) [March 2020]

<sup>8</sup> [New Decade, New Approach](#) [March 2020]

<sup>9</sup> *New Decade, New Approach* p31

## 2.2 The Race Relations Order and Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland

The Race Relations (NI) Order 1997 defines Irish Travellers as:

*a community of people commonly so called who are identified (both by themselves and by others) as people with a shared history, culture and traditions including, historically, a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland.*<sup>10</sup>

The Order identifies the Irish Traveller community as an ethnic minority, thereby making it unlawful for members of the community to be discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity.

The Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025<sup>11</sup> also highlights the ethnic minority status of Irish Travellers. In general terms, the Strategy explains that:

*Racism manifests itself in a variety of ways, both subtle and overt. It can range from snubs and exclusion through to discrimination, the creation of barriers to inclusion that can emerge at all levels in public and private institutions, to acts of intimidation and violence. (p17)*

Where *discrimination* is concerned, the Strategy notes that:

*The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination defines 'racial discrimination' as follows: "any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life". (p18/19)*

The Strategy recognises that there may be a need to develop and implement specific programmes of work to address particular challenges and vulnerabilities facing specific groups such as Irish Travellers. To facilitate this, the Executive Office is establishing a Race Equality Sub Group looking at Traveller issues. The Housing Executive will be represented on this group at senior level.

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<sup>10</sup> Article 5(2)(a), Race Relations (NI) Order 1997

<sup>11</sup> OFMDFM (2015) *Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025* (available at: [The Executive Office Racial Equality Strategy 2015-25](#); accessed March 2020)

## 2.3 Reports and Recommendations produced by key stakeholders

### Equality Commission for Northern Ireland

The Equality Commission's **Statement on Key Inequalities in Housing and Communities in Northern Ireland** (2017)<sup>12</sup> reported on the Commission's assessment of inequalities and differences in housing experiences faced by groups in the Section 75 equality categories in Northern Ireland. With regard to Irish Travellers, the statement noted that:

*In respect to access to housing a key inequality is that **access to appropriate accommodation to meet the needs of Irish Travellers is limited**;*

*The provision of Traveller accommodation must therefore be such that it continues to cater for those with a nomadic lifestyle;<sup>13</sup> and*

*for some Irish Travellers, 'bricks and mortar'/'settled' accommodation may be inappropriate where it does not accord with their nomadic lifestyle.*

The statement also highlighted the need for consideration of the extent to which poor housing conditions for Irish Travellers persist, and any prevalence within certain types of accommodation and/or tenures.

### Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)

The NIHRC promotes and protects those human rights, which the United Kingdom is legally committed to at the national, regional and international levels. The Commission was established following the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement under the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and is empowered by Section 69 of the Act to conduct investigations and to compel evidence.

Following a scoping exercise in June 2016, which identified issues that required further examination, the NIHRC initiated an investigation into Travellers' accommodation in Northern Ireland the same year.

The resulting report, **Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in Northern Ireland<sup>14</sup>**, was published in March 2018 and highlighted 13 systemic issues. These included resource availability; provision of a sufficient level of culturally adequate Travellers' accommodation; and the adequacy of Travellers' accommodation in Northern Ireland, including a lack of adequate stopping sites. The foreword to the report commented:

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<sup>12</sup> [Equality Commission NI Statement on key inequalities in housing and communities in Northern Ireland](#) [March 2020]

<sup>13</sup> Based on evidence from the Travellers Needs Assessments published by the Housing Executive in 2002, 2008 and 2014, which recorded that around one-fifth to one-third of all Irish Traveller households travelled.

<sup>14</sup> [Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission - Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in Northern Ireland](#)

*The inexorable impact of public policy has been to leave many Travellers with an unpalatable choice of retaining their culture while living in poor housing conditions or move into social housing. While for some Travellers, social housing is their choice of accommodation, for others it is not. Traveller culture is rich and vibrant and should be nurtured, rather than eroded through housing and other policies.<sup>15</sup>*

## **The right to Housing**

The NIHRC investigation used a human rights based approach to consider the circumstances applying to Travellers' accommodation in Northern Ireland.

The Executive summary of the Commission's report<sup>16</sup> explains that, broadly defined, the right to adequate housing is "the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity" (UN ICESCR Committee 1991). This right refers to more than simply supplying and making housing available; the housing itself must be *adequate*, and the UN ICESCR Committee has established that the right to adequate housing requires adequate:

- legal security of tenure;
- availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure;
- affordability;
- habitability;
- accessibility;
- location;
- cultural adequacy; and
- freedom from forced eviction.

In implementing the right to housing, there is a duty on parties to progressively realise these rights and to ensure non-discrimination and equality, effective participation, effective monitoring, effective resources, and effective remedy.

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<sup>15</sup> Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission (2018) *Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in Northern Ireland* (available at: [Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission - Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in Northern Ireland full report](#)) [accessed March 2020] p1

<sup>16</sup> [Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission - Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in Northern Ireland Executive summary](#) [accessed March 2020]

## 2.4 The Statutory Responsibilities of the Housing Executive

The Housing Executive is responsible for assessing housing need in Northern Ireland. The Housing (NI) Order 1981(Article 6) provides that the Housing Executive shall:

- (a) regularly examine housing conditions and need;
- (b) submit to the Department for approval its programme for such years and in such form as the Department may determine for meeting housing need;

The Housing (NI) Order 2003 (Article 125) transferred ownership of and responsibility for Irish Traveller serviced sites from district councils to the Housing Executive. This included the provision of any new sites required.

Specifically, the Housing (NI) Order 1981 (Article 28<sup>17</sup>) provides that the Housing Executive:

- a) shall provide such caravan sites as appear to it to be appropriate for the accommodation of caravans of members of the Irish Traveller community, and
- b) may manage those sites or lease them to some other person.

Article 87 of the order provides that the Housing Executive may acquire land:

- a) on which to construct caravan sites,
- b) which is in use as a caravan site, or
- c) which has been laid out as a caravan site

## 2.5 Responsibilities of Local Councils

Local Councils are responsible for the determination of applications for planning approval for the improvement or redevelopment of existing Traveller sites and the provision of new sites. Councils are also responsible for the issuing of site licences under the Caravans Act 1963.

In addition, local councils have responsibility for leading the community planning process for their district. Community Planning aims to improve the connection between all the tiers of Government and wider society work, to jointly deliver better outcomes for everyone. Community plans identify long-term priorities for improving the social, economic and environmental well-being of districts and the people who live there.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> As amended by Article 125 of The Housing (Northern Ireland) Order 2003

<sup>18</sup> Department for Communities: 'Community Planning': [Department for Communities Community Planning page](#) [accessed March 2020]

The Housing Executive is a statutory partner in the Community Planning Partnerships established in each council area, and is actively engaged across the eleven Local Council partnerships to deliver on the outcomes of their respective Plans.

Housing, and the many issues related to it, is a key topic across the eleven Community Plans and, where possible, the Housing Executive will utilise its role in these partnerships to raise awareness of the Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy and to encourage partners to assist with its implementation.

In addition Local Development Plans have a requirement, contained in the Regional Strategic Planning Policy Statement, to include Travellers' Accommodation policies.

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## 3.0 Irish Traveller Accommodation

### 3.1 What is Irish Traveller Accommodation?

For the purposes of this Strategy and our service provision, 'Irish Traveller accommodation' is understood to refer to a home, regardless of what form that home might take, which, from a Traveller perspective, keeps the individual or household's Traveller identity intact.

We therefore recognise that Traveller accommodation will take a variety of forms, including nomadic provision.

Accommodation that would be considered specific to the Traveller community includes:

- **Grouped Housing:** A residential housing development with additional facilities and amenities specifically designed to accommodate extended families of Travellers on a permanent basis;
- **Serviced Site:** Site for a range of managed accommodation (chalets, trailers and caravans) where Traveller families have a permanent base to park their caravan or erect a structure as defined within the Caravans Act; where electricity, water and sewerage are provided and where other facilities such as communal or individual amenity buildings must be provided;
- **Transit Site:** A permanently operational facility with similar facilities to serviced sites where Travellers may park their caravans on a temporary basis (up to a maximum of 3 months) and where electricity, water and sewerage services are provided. Transit sites are not intended for use as a permanent lease for an individual household.
- **Private sites:** Sites typically owned and managed by a member(s) of the Traveller community with pitches rented out to Travellers.

Other forms of accommodation that Irish Travellers can access, but which are not specific to their cultural way of life, are:

- **Social housing:** Standard "bricks and mortar" housing provided by the Housing Executive or housing associations;
- **Private rented / ownership:** Standard "bricks and mortar" private rented/owned housing, chalets, trailers and caravans;

In addition to these types of *permanent* accommodation, *temporary* forms of accommodation used by the Traveller community include:

- **Unauthorised sites:** Sites not authorised by the Housing Executive, Councils or housing associations;
- **Co-operated sites:** Reactive provision that was originally an unauthorised encampment, but that has been agreed for very short term use (up to a maximum of three months) and is established under the Housing Executive’s Co-operation Policy. This allows for Travellers to camp on public land on a temporary basis and is considered only as a way of dealing with humane requirements;
- **Emergency halting sites:** A temporary (less than 28 days) place to park, with appropriate facilities, managed under Co-operation Policy principles. Emergency halting sites may not require planning permission if they are in use for fewer than 28 days.

### 3.2 Accessing general needs and Traveller-specific accommodation managed by social housing providers in Northern Ireland

#### Social housing

Irish Travellers wishing to apply for social housing must, in common with members of the settled community, complete a Housing Solutions Assessment (HSA) form which includes accommodation options specific to Travellers.

Housing Solutions Assessments are carried out by the Housing Executive to calculate the Applicant’s points entitlement and to discuss their preferred location and choice of accommodation. Allocations are made in accordance with the Common Selection Scheme<sup>19</sup>, to Applicants in highest need.

#### Traveller-specific accommodation

In addition to ensuring that members of the Traveller community have the same access to bricks and mortar accommodation as members of the settled community, the Housing Executive respects the right of Irish Travellers to choose to live in Traveller-specific accommodation.

Travellers wishing to live on a serviced site may apply under the “**Selection Scheme for Travellers’ Serviced Sites**” in cases where:

- 1) the Applicant is a member of the Irish Traveller community; and

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<sup>19</sup> [More information on the Selection Scheme is available on the Housing Executive website](#)

- 2) the Applicant complies with the Application Requirements; and
- 3) the Applicant complies with any of the following requirements:
  - a) the Applicant is a Full Duty Applicant pursuant to the Housing (N.I.) Order, 1988;  
or
  - b) the Applicant meets both Age Requirements and the Connection With Northern Ireland Requirements.

Under this Selection Scheme, applicants complete a specific Housing Application Form for serviced sites and, in general, must be aged 18 years at the date of application, although applications may be accepted from Applicants aged at least 16 who meet certain criteria.

Eligible applicants may be awarded points to reflect their circumstances in relation to some or all of four aspects of housing need:

- 1) Intimidation;
- 2) Insecurity of Tenure;
- 3) Housing Conditions;
- 4) Health/Social Well Being Assessment.

Having had their circumstances assessed, applicants are placed on a points-based waiting list for their preferred serviced site(s), with allocations managed by the Lettings Manager in the local Housing Executive office.

Travellers are not required to complete an application form for transit sites; instead, bookings must be made through the local Housing Executive office.

## 4.0 What we have done

The Housing Executive's last Travellers' Accommodation Needs Assessment was carried out in 2014<sup>20</sup>. Since then, we have continued to work closely with the Irish Traveller community and their representatives, local councils and a wide range of other stakeholders to identify needs and ensure the safety of existing provision, particularly at serviced and transit sites. Some of the activities undertaken are summarised below.

- We invested heavily in upgrading our sites by providing individual electricity metering points. These were provided at The Glen site Coalisland, Glen Road Heights Belfast, The Kelly site, Belfast (now owned and managed by Clanmil), and Daisyfield and Ballyarnett in Derry/Londonderry .
- We invested in reinstating two sites (at Daisyfield, Derry and Glen Road Heights, Belfast), both of which were unfortunately subsequently vandalised. Such was the damage that both sites had to be closed on health and safety grounds. Consultants have been appointed to assess the feasibility and costs necessary to, once again, reinstate the Glen Road Heights site.
- At Acorn Grove, Craigavon, we completed an external maintenance scheme, carried out adaptations to meet disability needs, and relocated the electricity sub-station off-site.
- Consultants have been appointed for additional works to the sites at Ballyarnett and Legahory Close; on site surveys have been completed.
- An application for site provision in Antrim and Newtownabbey was refused planning permission. The families for whom this application had been made were subsequently rehoused in North Belfast and indicated that they were satisfied with this arrangement. With no other identified need in the Antrim and Newtownabbey area, site provision at this location was removed from the programme of works.
- Work has been ongoing to secure additional serviced site provision in the Craigavon area. Following refusal of planning for a proposed site at Lake Road Craigavon, we reapplied for lands at Burnside Craigavon, and this application has been approved. We are also involved in discussions with stakeholders about the possibility of changing the use of the existing site at Legahory Close from transit to permanent provision.
- A comprehensive feasibility study of the seven Housing Executive-owned serviced and transit sites was completed by VB Evans Consultants in April 2018. The study looked at compliance with planning and licencing, health and safety and fire risk

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<sup>20</sup> [The report is available on the Housing Executive website](#)

issues and will inform future investment decisions around the development and improvement of our sites.

- Health and safety works have been carried out to all Housing Executive sites and all have been inspected by the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service and declared compliant with current fire safety regulations.
- We recently completed a Cultural Awareness Training Programme, delivered by Craigavon Travellers Support Committee to front-line staff and policy writers, aimed at giving staff a better understanding of Irish Travellers' cultural needs, help reduce stigma and improve service delivery.
- Health and Safety checks are carried out weekly, and fire checks quarterly, at all our sites.
- The Housing Executive continues to be represented on a number of inter-agency fora and cross-border bodies including:
  - Belfast Inter-agency Forum on Travellers
  - Regional Traveller Health and Social Wellbeing Forum
  - National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee

### ***Out of Sight, Out of Mind report and recommendations***

Many aspects of our Traveller Accommodation Strategy<sup>21</sup> had been under review when the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission informed the Housing Executive of its investigation in September 2016, and in early 2017 we had put in place a Director-led interdivisional group specifically to deal with the issues identified by our own review.

This resulted in an initial plan of action by the Housing Executive which pre-empted many of the priority recommendations made by the Human Rights Commission and meant that work was well under way prior to the launch of the NIHRC report. We accepted all but a small number of the recommendations made directly to the Housing Executive by the Human Rights Commission, and had discussions with the Commission on those that required further exploration or were not possible within existing legislation. We continue to work closely with the Human Rights Commission in relation to the needs of the Irish Traveller community, and value the collaborative approach that exists between stakeholders in Northern Ireland on this important policy area.

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<sup>21</sup> Issues under review included: Traveller needs assessment and research; rent policy with regard to Traveller sites; planning Traveller accommodation; site investigations and planning applications; managing and maintaining Traveller sites; and engagement and Participation

## 5.0 What we know: Reviewing Data and Evidence

The *Out of Sight, Out of Mind* report (NIHRC, 2018) commented that:

*There is a general lack of data and disaggregation of data regarding the Traveller population in NI, their current tenure and desired accommodation. This makes it impossible to assess whether Travellers' accommodation is sufficient and to strategically plan for the future.*<sup>22</sup>

The report also noted that, while the 2011 census indicated that Irish Travellers represented 0.07 per cent of the population at the time (a total of around 1,300 individuals<sup>23</sup>), this figure may have been an under-representation and *official statistics are lacking*<sup>24</sup>.

The difficulties associated with gathering accurate data on nomadic, semi-nomadic, marginalised and socially excluded groups, including Irish Travellers, have been documented by researchers including Condon et al (2019)<sup>25</sup> and Brown and Scullion (2010)<sup>26</sup>. They include problems in establishing a sample frame – particularly for large scale, quantitative surveys – for a variety of reasons such as possible unwillingness of groups who have experienced discrimination to self-identify in their day-to-day interactions with government agencies. Other issues that restrict the amount of data available on socially excluded groups such as Irish Travellers include mistrust, fear of harm, cultural beliefs and literacy levels.

This section summarises the key evidence available on the number of Irish Traveller households in Northern Ireland and their views on their current and future accommodation.

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<sup>22</sup> [Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission - Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers' Accommodation in Northern Ireland full report](#), p290

<sup>23</sup> Outputs from the 2011 Census indicate that 1,301 individuals were recorded as having 'Irish Traveller' ethnicity: see Census 2011 Key Statistics KS201NI – Ethnic Group (available at [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Census 2011](#))= [accessed March 2020]

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, p10

<sup>25</sup> Condon, L., Bedford, H., Ireland, L., Kerr, S., Mytton, J., Richardson, Z. and Jackson, C. (2019) 'Engaging Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities in Research: Maximising Opportunities and Overcoming Challenges' in *Qualitative Health Research* Vol 29(9) pp 1324-1333 (available at: [Engaging Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities in Research: Maximizing Opportunities and Overcoming Challenges Journal](#) [accessed March 2020])

<sup>26</sup> Brown, P. and Scullion, L. (2010) 'Doing Research' with gypsy-travellers in England: reflections on experience and experience and practice available at: [University of Salford - Doing Research with Gypsy - travellers in England: Reflections on experience and practice](#) [accessed March 2020]

## 5.1 Estimating the Irish Traveller population in Northern Ireland

### Northern Ireland Census 2011

The Census is designed to provide the most accurate possible picture of the population on the day the Census is taken<sup>27</sup> and is used by central and local government, health authorities and a wide range of other organisations to plan future service provision. The most up-to-date Census figures currently available were collated through the Northern Ireland Census 2011, which recorded a total of 1,301 Irish Travellers living in Northern Ireland at the time; this figure accounted for just 0.07% of the total population (1,810,863).

The Census also provided insights on the age profile and location of the Irish Traveller population. Table 1 shows that in 2011 the Irish Traveller population had a relatively young population compared with Northern Ireland overall, with higher numbers of children. A similar, relatively young age structure was apparent from the Housing Executive's 2018/19 survey.

**Table 1: Age structure of Irish Traveller population and Northern Ireland population (2011 Census)**

Age Group	Irish Traveller Population (%)	Northern Ireland Population (%)
Under 16	39%	21%
16-54	48%	54%
55 and over	13%	25%

The Census recorded 466 Irish Traveller households in Northern Ireland. Table 2 shows the geographical distribution of these households and indicates that in 2011 the largest concentrations of Irish Traveller households were in the Mid Ulster, Belfast, and Newry, Mourne and Down district council areas.

<sup>27</sup> OFMDFM (2012) *Census 2011 Key Statistics for Northern Ireland* (available at [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Census 2011 Key Statistics](#)) [accessed March 2020]

**Table 2: Distribution of Irish Travellers Households in Northern Ireland by local government district (2011 Census)**

<b>Council Area</b>	<b>Number of Irish Traveller Households (2011)</b>
Antrim & Newtownabbey	7
Ards & North Down	14
Armagh, Banbridge & Craigavon	51
Belfast	76
Causeway Coast & Glens	12
Derry & Strabane	38
Fermanagh & Omagh	40
Lisburn & Castlereagh	32
Mid & East Antrim	47
Mid Ulster	78
Newry, Mourne & Down	71
<b>Total</b>	<b>466</b>

### **All Ireland Traveller Health Study (2010)**

The All Ireland Traveller Health Study 2010 (AITHS) also adopted a census approach. In Northern Ireland the central field coordinator for the research enumerated a total of 1,562 Traveller families in the region, on the basis of which it was estimated that the total Traveller population in Northern Ireland was 3,905<sup>28</sup>. The figures captured by the All Ireland study may in part reflect the resource-intensive approach to the research.

## **5.2 Current and future accommodation preferences: 2018/19 Irish Traveller Accommodation Survey**

Through its ongoing operational engagement with Irish Travellers, the Housing Executive holds some data on the location of Irish Traveller households in Northern Ireland. However, it is recognised that this information is not exhaustive; customers may not disclose their ethnicity or it may not be recorded at the point of interaction with the Housing Executive, and there may be households who do not engage with the Housing Executive for any services. Furthermore, operational data may not necessarily provide detailed information on current accommodation, nor will it provide insights on behaviours and future aspirations.

<sup>28</sup> In both Northern Ireland and ROI, the Travellers count was based on the number of Traveller families enumerated at the census multiplied by the average family size. Thus, for Northern Ireland, the number of families enumerated (1,562) multiplied by average family size (2.5) resulted in a total estimated population of 3,905. (More information is available in the [Executive Summary](#) of the study findings (p43)

In order to address the current data gap and gather information on current accommodation and future aspirations to inform this Strategy and the associated Irish Traveller Housing Needs Assessment, the Housing Executive commissioned a survey of Irish Traveller households in Northern Ireland in 2018.

This was the fourth comprehensive survey examining Irish Travellers' accommodation in Northern Ireland produced by the Housing Executive since 2002, following on from Recommendation 5 of the *Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers* report (December 2000) which stated:

*'The NIHE should undertake a comprehensive strategic needs assessment of current and projected accommodation requirements of all Travellers in consultation with Traveller organisations, members of the Traveller communities and District Councils.'*

The research carried out every five years since 2002 has helped inform the development and provision of Traveller accommodation over this period, including Grouped Housing, transit and serviced sites. The fieldwork for the most recent survey was carried out for the Housing Executive by Perceptive Insight Market Research Ltd and the findings form the main basis of the supplementary evidence used to inform this Strategy. The research sought to:

- **fill a gap** in the absence of good quality, available administrative data;
- **gauge views** from Irish Traveller households regarding their current accommodation and the type and location of their preferred accommodation;
- **inform** the Irish Traveller Housing Needs Assessment to be undertaken by the Housing Executive; and
- **enable** the Housing Executive Land and Housing Analytics Team to use evidence to formulate the organisation's Irish Traveller Strategy.

Fieldwork was completed in January 2020 and involved 540 social interviews with Irish Travellers, which identified a total of 1,628 individuals, of whom 99.6% were Irish Travellers. Numbers identified by other sources are set out in Table 3, for comparison.

**Table 3: Estimated number of Irish Travellers (individuals) in Northern Ireland - various sources**

Source	Individuals Identified
2001 Census	1,715
2010 All Ireland Health Study <sup>29</sup>	3,905

<sup>29</sup> More information available at: [All Ireland Traveller health study](#) [accessed March 2020]

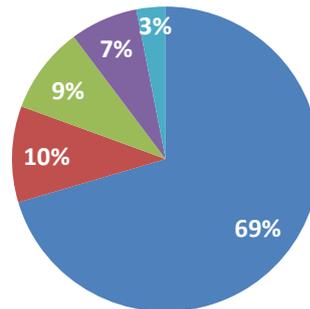
Source	Individuals Identified
2011 Census	1,301
2014 Housing Executive Irish Traveller survey	1,262
2018/19 Housing Executive Irish Traveller survey	1,628

More information on the survey, including details on the methodology, engagement and consultation process, and the strengths and limitations of the data is set out in the full report on the key survey findings, which is available on the Housing Executive website: [Northern Ireland Housing Executive Irish Traveller Accommodation Survey 2018/19](#)

### Survey Findings at a glance: Current Accommodation

#### Current Accommodation Type

- 69% social housing
- 10% privately rented
- 9% permanent/serviced site
- 7% grouped housing
- 3% owner occupied



- Social Housing
- Privately Rented
- Permanent/ Serviced Site
- Grouped Housing
- Owner occupied

#### Other aspects of current accommodation

- 89% had lived in their current accommodation for more than one year and 83% expected to remain for more than one year.
- 87% felt very or fairly safe in their current accommodation, while 9% felt fairly or very unsafe.
- Only 7% of respondents expected that they or a member of their household would travel within the next three years

### Satisfaction with current accommodation

- 71% stated that, overall, they were satisfied/very satisfied with their current accommodation
- 87% of those who lived in **grouped housing** were satisfied
- 75% of those who lived in **social housing** were satisfied
- 56% of those who were living on **sites** were satisfied.
- 72% said that, overall, they were happy with their current accommodation
- 27% said they would prefer different accommodation



### Findings at a glance: Future Accommodation

**27% of respondents, representing 154 households, indicated that they would prefer different accommodation. They comprised:**

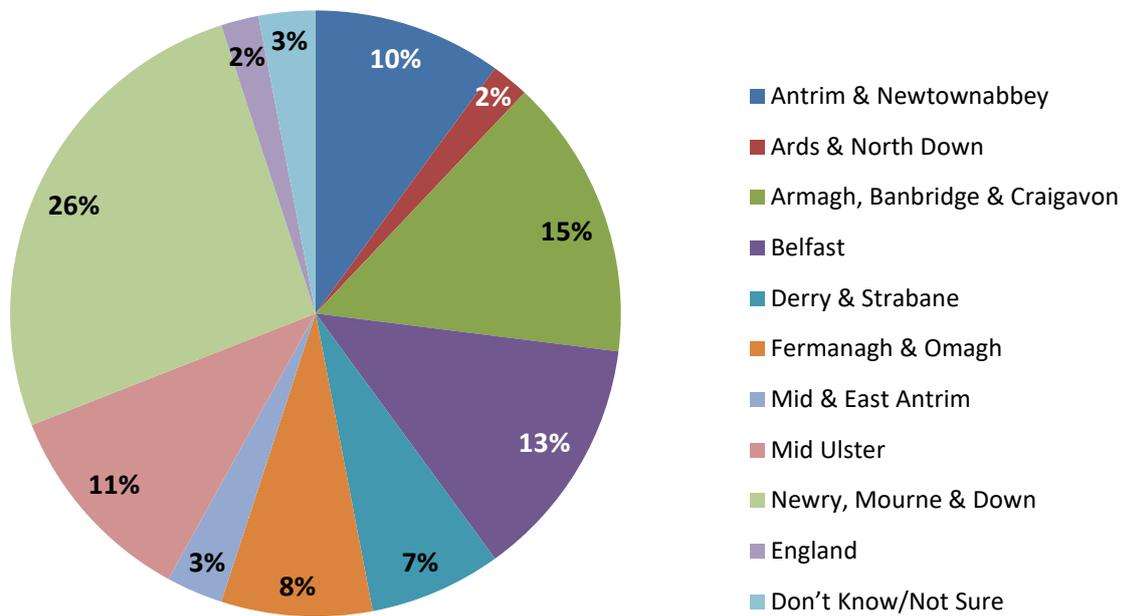
- 16% who said they would prefer **social housing**
- 6% who said they would prefer to live at a **serviced site**
- 3% who said they would prefer to live in **grouped housing**
- 0.2% who said they would prefer to live at a **transit site**



*3% of respondents expressed other preferences (e.g. for a bungalow/ground floor accommodation), or were not sure what type of alternative accommodation they would prefer.*

Respondents who indicated a preference for alternative accommodation were also asked about the preferred location (district council area). The most commonly-cited preferred locations were Newry Mourne and Down (26%); Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon (15%) and Belfast (13%) (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Preferred future location of respondents who stated a preference for alternative accommodation**



### New Household Formation

**19% of respondents (representing 102 households) expected one or more household members to seek their own accommodation within the next five years. Of these, it was expected that:**

- 78% would seek **social housing**
- 14% would seek to live at a **serviced site**
- 6% would seek to live in **grouped housing**

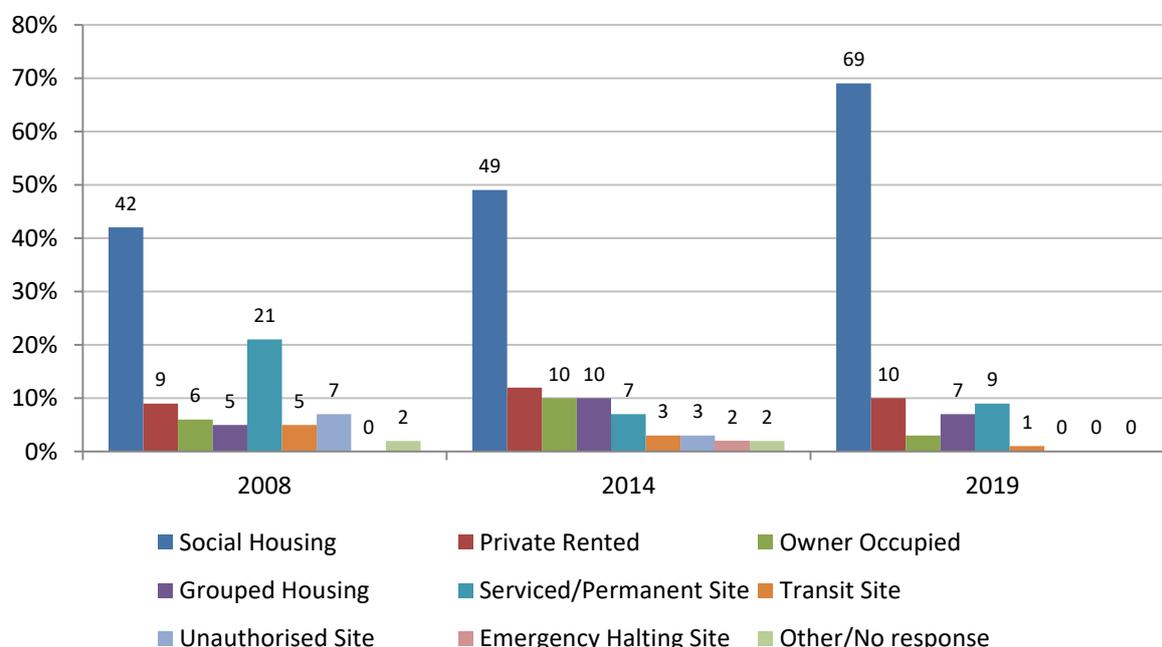
*In total, 2% of the respondents expected their household members to seek some other form of accommodation, or were not sure what type of accommodation they might seek.*



The data from the Irish Traveller research surveys since 2002 suggest a substantial increase in the proportion of Traveller households living in settled bricks and mortar and a reduction

in the proportion living in traditional Traveller-specific accommodation (Figure 2 illustrates the changes between 2008 and 2019).

**Figure 2: Proportion of Irish Traveller Households by Accommodation Type (Housing Executive surveys, 2008-2019)**



More than two thirds of respondents interviewed in 2019 (69%) lived in social housing, compared with 49% in 2014 and 42% in both 2002 and 2008. This is contrasted with a decline in the proportion of households living on serviced or transit sites, which fell from 21% in 2002 to 9% in 2019. Similarly, the proportion of Travellers living on transit sites has declined steadily, from 5% in 2008 to just 1% in 2019.

It is not known whether the increase in both the number and proportion of Irish Travellers living in settled bricks and mortar accommodation is a result of a general move away from their more traditional way of living or simply a result of there being no other housing option. The research does, however, suggest that the majority of Travellers living in bricks and mortar are generally satisfied with their current accommodation and have no expectation of wishing to move back to more traditional Traveller-specific accommodation.

### Conclusions on survey findings

The number of households taking part in the Housing Executive’s five-yearly Irish Traveller surveys increased substantially between 2002 (316) and 2008 (531), reduced slightly in 2014

(480)<sup>30</sup> and stood at 540 in 2018/19. While the planning and preparations for Housing Executive surveys have had a strong emphasis on engagement with the Irish Traveller community and its representatives, and have generated figures that are broadly in line with the Northern Ireland Census, it is known that not all Traveller households participated in the most recent research.

Nevertheless, the research data gathered for the Housing Executive during 2018/19 provide the most comprehensive and up-to-date insights available on the housing circumstances and preferences of Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland. In terms of current and future housing needs, they indicate that in 2018/19:

- 86% of respondents were living in some form of 'bricks and mortar' accommodation;
- The propensity to travel appears to be low, with only 7% of respondents expecting that they or a member of their household would travel within the next three years;
- 65% of respondents said they or a member of their household had a disability or long term illness which limited their day-to-day activities;
- 89% had lived in their current accommodation for more than one year and 71% were satisfied with their current home;
- The rate of satisfaction with current accommodation ranged from 87% among respondents living in grouped accommodation to 56% among tenants living on sites managed by the Housing Executive;
- 72% of respondents were happy with their current home while 27% said they would prefer different accommodation;
- 19% of respondents (accounting for 102 households) said that they expected one or more members of their household to seek their own accommodation within the next five years. Respondents thought that the majority of these newly forming households (85%) were likely to seek permanent bricks and mortar accommodation.

While the circumstances and plans of individuals and the households within which they live may change, the scale of this survey means that the evidence gathered is sufficiently robust to inform future plans.

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<sup>30</sup> In 2014, Travellers in the Ballymena area expressed strong vocal opposition to the research. In addition, a site in Derry/Londonderry was vacant throughout the duration of the fieldwork period, of spite of repeated visits from interviewers. For more information, please see the [full report on the 2014 survey](#)

## Objective 1: Develop a Traveller-Specific Accommodation Needs Assessment

A key objective for the Housing Executive in fulfilling its vision to provide safe and sustainable accommodation that meets the housing and cultural needs of the Irish Traveller community is to **develop an objective, robust, evidence-based assessment of Irish Traveller-specific accommodation requirements, which reflects best practice.**

The varying figures generated by Census and survey data highlight the difficulty in determining, with any accuracy, the actual total number of Traveller households living in Northern Ireland at any given time. The data gathered in the 2018/19 Irish Traveller Accommodation Survey provide the most comprehensive information available on the current housing situation and future aspirations of Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland, but these data alone do not constitute an accommodation needs assessment.

An essential component of overall needs assessment is the collection and aggregation of data on those applying for accommodation, in the first instance. Section 3.0 of this document outlined the types of accommodation available for Irish Traveller households in Northern Ireland – including general needs and Traveller-specific accommodation managed by social landlords – and the processes by which Travellers are required to apply for this accommodation.

The survey carried out among Traveller households for the Housing Executive in 2018/19 indicated that while the vast majority of respondents (95%) were aware that settled/bricks and mortar social housing was available for Irish Travellers, lower proportions of respondents were aware of the availability of Traveller-specific accommodation such as permanent/serviced sites (72%), grouped accommodation and transit sites (both 53%) and emergency halting sites (45%).

We will therefore work to ensure that members of the Traveller community who wish to apply for accommodation are aware of the full range of Traveller-specific accommodation options in addition to bricks and mortar accommodation.

**STRATEGY ACTION 1: We will review our housing application and housing solution processes to ensure Travellers are aware of the full range of Traveller-specific accommodation options.**

We note that the Executive Office Race Equality Strategy places a high priority on the issue of Ethnic Monitoring practices where organisations can use the analysis this provides to

highlight inequalities, address performance and remove any unfairness or disadvantage. Our monitoring approach is based on Equality Commission guidance and includes “Irish Traveller” as an ethnicity choice and we currently produce regular monitoring reports looking at the performance of our housing selection scheme and allocations.

We are continuing to develop and improve our ethnic monitoring systems as part of our overall equality monitoring system. We recognise the importance of improving our data and knowledge of our customers, including Irish Travellers, to ensure that we fully understand the impact of our policies and services. On occasion, this data, which is collected directly from housing and other applications, will be supplemented by primary research programmes including the Irish Traveller Accommodation Survey.

**STRATEGY ACTION 2: We will continue to develop our ethnic monitoring and record keeping systems, including the collection of data on Irish Traveller communities, to better understand the impact of housing services and to help inform future planning and service provision.**

### **Irish Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment**

Our 2018/19 survey of Irish Traveller households clearly indicates a growing number of Travellers living in “bricks and mortar” accommodation. The survey also indicated that there were relatively high levels of satisfaction among those living in bricks and mortar accommodation (ranging from 75% satisfied or very satisfied with social housing to 87% satisfied or very satisfied with Grouped accommodation).

While the Housing Executive has processes in place for Irish Travellers to apply for social housing and serviced sites, we have relied on our periodic Traveller Surveys to inform the planning and delivery of future Traveller accommodation provision. We recognise there is a need for a robust Irish Traveller housing accommodation needs assessment, to provide evidence for the planning and delivery of future Traveller accommodation provision.

An assessment of Irish Traveller accommodation needs over the next five years will require close examination of trends in supply and demand for Traveller-specific accommodation. It is also important that any assessment is strongly evidence-based and is monitored and reviewed annually and adjusted as required.

Evidence from good practice models, and stakeholder engagement, suggests that Irish Traveller accommodation needs assessment should be mainstreamed with existing general housing need models rather than through the development of a separate Traveller housing need methodology and waiting list.

We will ensure that our current Housing Need Assessment (HNA), for social and affordable housing, is adapted to incorporate a housing needs assessment for Irish Travellers.

The mainstreaming of an Irish Traveller needs assessment with the existing general HNA methodology will ensure the data required for the needs assessment is properly captured for the development of an Irish Traveller specific sub- section for the assessment of future Irish Traveller accommodation needs on which to base future investment plans.

Arrangements for the collation of much of this data are already in place, however, these will be reviewed to ensure the full extent of Irish Traveller data is being captured, that will improve trend analysis over time, leading to a more sophisticated and robust housing needs assessment for Irish Traveller accommodation provision.

We envisage that the work to adapt our general HNA methodology to assess Traveller housing need will involve a number of activities including:

- **Mainstreaming:** a review of our existing housing application and allocation processes, together with a review of staff guidance and associated literature, to ensure awareness and promotion of Traveller-specific accommodation options among all relevant staff;
- **Data capture:** a review and validation of the data we currently capture on Travellers as a unique group, through housing management, stock records and IT systems; and an annual analysis within our HNA reports that determines future need;
- **Gap analysis:** following on from the data capture review, the identification of new, additional Traveller data collection requirements;
- **Specific Need:** consideration of the *additional* needs of certain groups of Travellers, e.g. persons with disabilities, older Travellers, children;
- **Programme Development:** translating the accommodation needs assessment into a Travellers' accommodation programme;
- **Hidden Need:** considering how we can use our Housing Solutions approach to capture "latent" or "hidden" demand for Traveller-specific accommodation.

The mainstreaming of the Irish Traveller housing needs assessment will seek to build on the findings of the **Irish Traveller Accommodation Survey 2018/19**, and any other available data sources, to produce a robust and accurate projection of the type and location of future Traveller accommodation in Northern Ireland.

The establishment of an evidence-based Traveller needs assessment will, in turn, support the formulation of programmes for the investment in both new and existing Traveller

accommodation that is required to meet need and improve accommodation outcomes for the Irish Traveller community as a whole.

**STRATEGY ACTION 3: We will adapt our Housing Needs Assessment methodology to facilitate the assessment of Traveller-specific accommodation needs.**

DRAFT

## Objective 2: To provide safe and culturally appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers to reside in and travel to

### Our Duty

The Housing Executive has a duty under Article 28A of the Housing (NI) Order 1981 to:

**“Provide such caravan sites as appear to it to be appropriate for the accommodation of caravans of members of the Irish Traveller community, and may manage those sites or lease them to some other person”.**

Article 28A (4) of the 1981 Order states that:

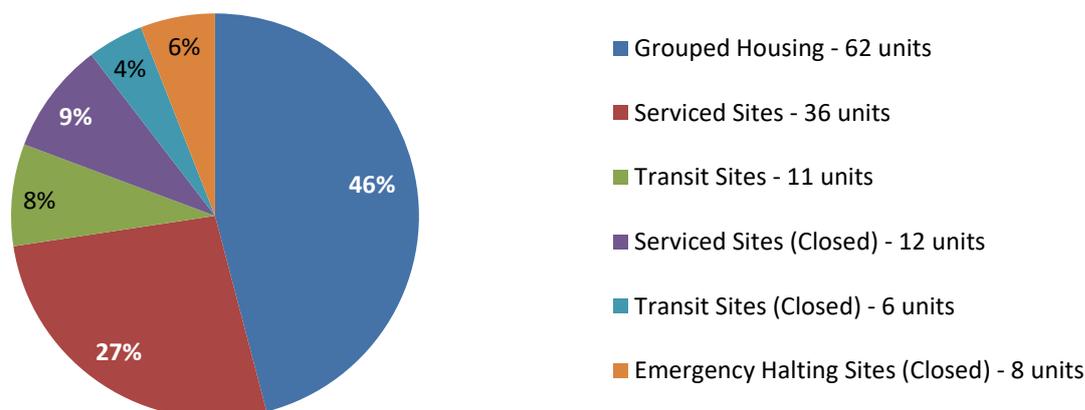
**“In exercising their powers under this Article, the Executive shall have regard to any model conditions specified by the Department of the Environment under section 5(7) of the Caravans Act (Northern Ireland) 1963”.**

### Current Provision

Figure 3 shows the Traveller-specific accommodation provided by housing bodies in Northern Ireland at spring 2020. Grouped housing accounts for the greatest number and proportion of units (62 units; 46%), with around one quarter (27%) of units taking the form of serviced sites.

As the chart illustrates a number of units on serviced, transit and emergency halting sites were closed at the time of writing, for health and safety reasons. The Legahory Close and Daisyfield sites were both closed after being extensively vandalised. The Greenbrae site was initially closed for redevelopment but has a number of identified constraints, including its location on a flood plain, presence of Japanese knotweed and proposals for the new A5 road, which mean that planning approval is unlikely. At the time of writing, work is ongoing to identify an alternative site.

**Figure 3: Traveller-specific accommodation provided by housing bodies in Northern Ireland (2020)**



No reliable statistics are currently available on the number of Traveller families residing in settled social or private housing; however, research would indicate that around 87% of Irish Traveller households in Northern Ireland live in this type of accommodation.

### Transit Sites

Transit sites are a permanently operational facility where Travellers may park their caravans on a temporary basis, up to a maximum of three months. The sites have similar facilities to serviced sites and are intended to support the nomadic lifestyle of the Traveller community.

The Housing Executive owns and manages two officially classified transit sites at Ballyarnett, Derry/Londonderry (11 pitches) and Greenbrae, Strabane (6 pitches). There are also four transit pitches on The Glen (An Tearmann) site in Coalisland. The Greenbrae site was closed in May 2015 for health and safety reasons; however, we are working with Derry City & Strabane District Council to identify alternative site options in the Strabane area.

Opinions vary on the demand for transit sites in Northern Ireland and, in practice; it is our experience that they are generally used by Travellers as a *permanent*, rather than temporary, location at which to live.

In addition, the findings of the survey undertaken for the Housing Executive in 2018/19 suggest there is very little future demand for transit sites in Northern Ireland. The survey respondents who were most inclined to travel lived on sites, and indicated that the most common time to travel was in the summer months between June and September. However, the research also points to a general decline in nomadism, with 83% of Travellers interviewed in 2019 expecting to stay at their current accommodation for more than one year.

Anecdotal evidence would further suggest that Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland tend not to travel within the region, preferring rather to travel to the Republic of Ireland or elsewhere in the UK.

Transits sites can also be a source of tension within the Traveller community, particularly where issues in relation to the compatibility of different families on sites result in significant anti-social behaviour and inter-community feuds.

However, the NI Human Rights Commission report “**Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Travellers’ Accommodation in Northern Ireland**” suggested that a lack of transit sites in Northern Ireland makes it difficult for Travellers to travel to and within the region, particularly for those Travellers wishing to maintain the nomadic tradition. The NIHRC report also asserts a need to ensure that both transient and emergency halting sites are available in Northern Ireland, particularly as unauthorised encampments are the only alternative option and are currently illegal.

**STRATEGY ACTION 4: We will undertake a review of transit sites to establish, through a generated needs assessment, the existing and future demand for transit sites in NI within the Irish Traveller community.**

### **Unauthorised Encampments**

Our “**Co-operation Policy**” provides guidance on engagement with public landowners in cases where Irish Travellers are encamped on a temporary basis. The policy allows Travellers to remain on *public* land subject to the following conditions:

- Occupation does not constitute a measurable public health hazard;
- Occupation does not create a traffic hazard;
- Occupation does not create a right to long-term use of the site;
- There is no current or immediate use for the land;
- Travellers behave in a reasonable and orderly manner.

The numbers of unauthorised encampments operating in Northern Ireland have drastically reduced over the years as the propensity to travel has diminished and the use of technologies such as Facebook, Skype and Instagram, which allow families to remain in touch without the need to travel, have increased.

At the time of writing, we are aware of one unauthorised encampment, in Magherafelt, and are working locally through the Mid Ulster Community Planning Partnership on a resolution to this encampment. This includes consideration of the potential for a new transit site on publically-owned land.

The Housing Executive maintains close working relations with the PSNI and DfC to monitor new unauthorised encampments; however, it is possible that some such encampments may remain undetected.

### **Private Sites**

Private sites are a permanent base, typically for mobile homes and caravans, which are neither publically owned nor managed. The sites are typically owned and managed by a member of the Traveller community. The services and facilities on private Travellers' sites are generally considered to be basic and, in some instances there is no electricity supply.

We have no statutory duty in relation to private Travellers' sites and, in the absence of any relevant legal powers, are unable to influence how such sites are managed. Travellers on private sites are, in common with those living on publically-owned sites, entitled to claim Housing Benefit to cover accommodation rental payments.

The Private Tenancies (NI) Order 2006 applies an equivalent minimum standard of fitness, to those set out in the Housing (NI) Order 1981, to private landlords. This legislation covers a dwelling-house, including a caravan or trailer; however, enforcement of fitness standards by Councils or DfC is likely to be problematic.

At the time of writing, we are aware of four privately-owned halting sites in Northern Ireland. However, the exact number in existence is not known and there are likely to be many more that are not known to us.

### **Standard of Fitness – Publically-owned Traveller Sites**

The Housing (NI) Order 1981 places a statutory duty on public housing bodies to provide a minimum standard of housing and requires the Housing Executive to “regularly examine housing conditions” to ensure that minimum standards are maintained.

The minimum standard of fitness for human habitation in Northern Ireland is set out in Article 46(1) of the Housing (NI) Order 1981 which requires that a dwelling:

- a) is structurally stable;
- b) is free from serious disrepair;
- c) is free from dampness prejudicial to the health of the occupants (if any);
- d) has adequate provision for lighting, heating and ventilation;
- e) has adequate piped supply of wholesome water;
- f) has satisfactory facilities in the house for the preparation and cooking of food, including a sink with a satisfactory supply of hot and cold water;
- g) has a suitably located water-closet for the exclusive use of the occupants (if any);

- h) has, for the exclusive use of the occupants (if any), a suitably located fixed bath or shower and wash-hand basin each of which is provided with a satisfactory supply of hot and cold water; and
- i) has an effective system for the draining of foul, waste and surface water.

These standards apply to “housing accommodation”, which includes houses, but also extends to: “a hut, tent, caravan or other temporary or movable form of shelter which is used for human habitation and has been on substantially the same site or enclosed within the same area for a period of not less than one year”.

We regularly inspect Traveller sites in our ownership to ensure they remain compliant with health and safety and fire safety requirements. Notwithstanding, we acknowledge the need to go further to ensure sites remain habitable and, where possible, to have regard to the Department for Communities’ **Design Guide for Travellers’ Sites in Northern Ireland**<sup>31</sup> and the Department for Infrastructure’s **Model Licence Conditions 2019**<sup>32</sup>.

A comprehensive feasibility study of the seven Housing Executive-owned serviced and transit sites was completed by VB Evans Consultants in April 2018 and looked at compliance with planning and licencing, health and safety and fire risk issues.

In considering the requirements for the sites, account was taken of the following documentation:

1. The Draft *Design Guide for Travellers’ Sites in Northern Ireland* (Department for Communities, 2017);
2. *Guide to Fire Safety in Existing Traveller Accommodation* (Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, Ireland, 2019)<sup>33</sup>;
3. *Outlining Minimum Standards for Traveller Accommodation* (Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, 2009)<sup>34</sup>;
4. The Caravans Act NI 2011;
5. The Mobile Homes Act 2013.

Health and safety works have been carried out to all Housing Executive sites and all have been inspected by the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service and declared compliant with current fire safety regulations.

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<sup>31</sup> The draft Design Guide for Travellers’ Sites in Northern Ireland 2019 is currently awaiting Ministerial approval pending publication on the Department for Communities website

<sup>32</sup> The Department for Infrastructure consulted on proposals to revise and update the Model Licence Conditions for Caravan Sites 1992 and Model Licence Conditions Residential Caravan Sites 1994 between 31 May and 31 August 2019. [More information is available on the Department for Infrastructure website](#)

<sup>33</sup> Government of Ireland National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management (2019) Guide to Fire Safety in Existing Traveller Accommodation ([available from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government website](#))

<sup>34</sup> [Full report available on the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland website](#)

The feasibility report will inform future investment decisions around the development and improvement of our sites.

### Site Licences

Northern Ireland is presently the only part of the UK where it is a requirement to seek a licence for Travellers’ sites under the Caravans Act 1963.

As the owner of a site, the Housing Executive, must make an online application to the relevant Council and is required to provide an outline map of the site along with other details including information on site services, inspection regimes and the number of pitches.

Councils have the power to attach conditions to site licences, usually referred to as “the model conditions”. The *Model Licence Conditions 2019*, published by Department for Infrastructure, specify the conditions to be met with respect to the lay-out and the provision of facilities, services and equipment for caravan sites or particular types of caravan site and any other conditions reasonably specified by the Council. The Council may not issue a licence until conditions are met.

Table 4 below shows the current status of licences for Housing Executive-owned Travellers’ sites.

**Table 4: Status of Site Licence Applications (Housing Executive-owned sites) at spring 2020**

Location	Type of Site	Date of Licence Application	Date of Issue
Acorn Grove, Craigavon	Serviced	May 2017	June 2019
The Glen, Coalisland	Serviced	May 2017	Decision Pending
Ballyarnett, Derry/Londonderry	Transit	May 2017	Held - pending site works
Glen Road Heights, Belfast	Serviced	No application made	Held - pending site works
Legahory Close, Craigavon	Emergency halting site - Closed	September 2016	Site currently closed Held - pending review of site
Daisyfield, Derry/Londonderry	Serviced - Closed	No application made	Site currently closed
Greenbrae, Strabane	Transit - Closed	No application made	Site currently closed

The main difficulty faced by the Housing Executive in obtaining licences is that most of the sites transferred to it from Councils cannot feasibly be improved to meet the current model conditions without significant redevelopment. The most common problem experienced is

that some sites are physically constrained and the number of occupied pitches would have to be reduced in order to meet the model conditions required for a licence to be issued.

We are nevertheless committed to meeting our obligation under the Caravans Act 1963 to obtain licences for sites in our ownership, and will continue to seek solutions and engage and build relations with Councils at an operational level and through Community Planning Partnerships to address this.

### Site Investment Programme

Many of the sites fall below the current recognised design standards and lack certain amenities or facilities. Physical constraints are a significant barrier to improving the sites to current recognised standards. We are also aware that sites currently officially classified as *transit* or *emergency halting* sites have, in practice, fallen into *permanent* use by the Traveller community and, consequently, would not have the same facilities or services normally provided on serviced sites.

While these issues present challenges for us, it remains the case that we support the rights of Irish Travellers to have access to a range of culturally appropriate accommodation options, including stopping sites, and that such accommodation should be adequate (in terms of availability of services, materials, facilities and infrastructure) and designed to recognised standards. We are committed to working towards improving the condition of our sites.

**STRATEGY ACTION 5: We will undertake a strategic review of all our Traveller sites to identify options for their future improvement or replacement. We will also review the current emergency halting, transit or serviced site classifications for each of our sites to ensure they reflect how the sites are being used in practice.**

As far as is possible, we will seek to ensure that any proposed significant redevelopment of existing sites, as well as any provision at new developments, is to the Department for Communities' **Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in Northern Ireland** standards and meets the Department for Infrastructure's **Model Licence Conditions for Caravan Sites 2019** for the issuing of site licences by local councils. In doing so, however, it is possible that the application of these standards may result in a reduction in the number of pitches on some Traveller's sites.

As statutory partner in Community Planning, we will seek to secure a multi-agency approach to the provision of Traveller accommodation to ensure it is located in areas that allow

access to employment options, healthcare services, schools, childcare centres and other social facilities.

We will seek to ensure that, where appropriate, land is identified and zoned for Traveller's accommodation through the Local Development Plan process.

Any future site / scheme proposals for specific locations will be progressed locally by the Housing Executive and we will seek to ensure there is effective participation by, and consultation with, Travellers, their representatives and support groups and the local community to secure broad support for our proposals, with clear benefits for the Traveller community.

### **Caravan Accommodation**

The majority of caravans on transit and serviced sites are privately rented and their condition varies. The caravans are typically owned by other members of the Traveller community and the rental payments are often met through Housing Benefit, which is administered by the Housing Executive.

The Caravans Act (NI) 2011 requires occupiers to:

**“Keep the caravan in a sound state of repair” and to “maintain the outside of the caravan and the pitch, including all fences and outbuildings belonging to, or enjoyed with it and the caravan, in a clean and tidy condition”.**

We believe that all Irish Travellers have the right to have access to accommodation that is fit for habitation, adequate and maintained to a suitable standard.

**STRATEGY ACTION 6: We will investigate the potential to work with our stakeholders, in particular DfI, DfC and Councils, on how fitness standards for caravans might be defined and enforced for the benefit of Travellers.**

### **Compatibility**

Compatibility issues arise where Irish Travellers are unable, or do not wish, to live together due to tensions, feuds or lack of family ties. Feuds within the Traveller community can also result in segregation, with families less likely to mix.

Some Travellers may also refuse to take up available pitches, even when there is no one else on the site, due to the cultural belief that a family that previously lived on the site has a territorial claim to that site, even if they have no intention of returning.

Compatibility issues within the Traveller community can, therefore, create difficulties in the provision of accommodation, which may result in resources not being fully utilized.

The DfC “**Design Guide for Travellers in NI**” states that sites should support harmonious relations, both within the Traveller community and between Travellers and the settled community. Research by the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (*Outlining Minimum Standards for Traveller Accommodation, 2009*) highlighted the issue of compatibility as a key factor in the success of developing sites.

We believe that, where accommodation is available at a site already occupied by members of one family, Irish Travellers from other families should be given the choice, and supported, to move into the vacant properties if they are willing to do so. However, we accept that, in some instances, it will not be possible to place members of different Traveller families in close proximity to each other.

We believe meaningful engagement and consultation with Travellers is critical to addressing the issue of compatibility in the design of new sites and in the management of existing sites and bricks and mortar housing.

**STRATEGY ACTION 7: We will work with Housing Association partners and other stakeholders to promote compatibility within the Traveller community as a means of maximising existing and future Traveller-specific accommodation.**

## **Objective 3: To support the Irish Traveller community to remain in their accommodation of choice through easily accessible housing services**

### **Irish Traveller Support Services**

Irish Travellers who require support, advice and/or assistance when in accommodation have the same level of access to a range of housing services as members of the settled community. This support includes:

- Tenancy support advice and assistance;
- Housing advice and assistance;
- Repairs and maintenance services;
- Complaints Services;
- Financial and welfare services advice;
- Anti-social behaviour and managing conflict.

Our services are delivered through a network of Regional and local offices by staff in a variety of roles, including Patch Managers, Housing Advisors, Neighbourhood Officers and Traveller Liaison Officer.

Our staff are available daily during working hours to support Travellers living in social or on sited accommodation, and through our emergency out-of-hours phone service.

The NIHE Supporting People Programme currently funds Bryson Intercultural to provide a Floating Support service.

Bryson provides dedicated housing related support services to 31 Irish Travellers and their families living in their own homes across Belfast and the North West area. Access to these services is free of charge for up to two years for all clients who are tenants or owner occupiers and includes support to:

- Establish independent living;
- Access relevant welfare benefits;
- Maintain their tenancy;
- Manage their physical/mental health;
- Feel more secure in their own home;
- Contribute to wider society and enhance social networks.

At the time of writing there are also five Traveller support groups operating in three Council areas in Northern Ireland, which provide a wide range of general support services to the Traveller community:

**Support Group:** Armagh Travellers Support Group (ATSG) (Armagh Area)

**Council Area:** Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon

**Services:**

Mission is to work in partnership with the Irish Traveller community and other stakeholders to preserve, promote and develop Traveller culture and identity. Aims to improve the quality of life for Travellers living in or visiting the Armagh area. This includes health and social well-being, accommodation, education, welfare rights, capacity building, training and employment. ATSG ensures that in accordance with Traveller needs they enjoy equality of opportunity and equality of treatment in accessing and benefiting from public services.

**Support Group:** Craigavon Travellers Support Committee (Craigavon Area)

**Council Area:** Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon

**Services:**

Provides support to between 60 and 80 families (250 people) at any one time and works toward achieving integration and cohesion by undertaking focused work in the areas of Education, Community Development, Welfare Rights and Health. Also offers Family Support Service providing advice, information and advocacy on issues such as housing, benefits and health and run children and young people's programmes.

**Support Group** Bryson Intercultural (previously known as An Munia Tober)

**Council Area** Belfast

**Services:**

Traveller support organisation dedicated to the reduction of inequalities that affect the Traveller population in Greater Belfast and the North West through improvements in health, housing, education/training, economic, young people's outcomes and integration activities. Aims to promote good relations, integration and the building of community cohesion through developing and maintaining partnership approaches to working with Travellers, local communities, relevant statutory and voluntary bodies and other minority ethnic groups.

**Support Group** An Tearmann

**Support Group** An Tearmann

**Council Area** Mid Ulster

**Services:**

Provides advice and signposting to families in accordance with their needs. Establishes community links with other organisations to ensure that the Traveller community have access to a wide range of services, and group and educational opportunities. Also provides an afterschool homework club for primary school children aged 4-11 years old: children can receive help with their homework, and engage in educational activities. Refers families/individuals to other organisations/services as per identified need and advocates on behalf of the Traveller community to ensure their human rights are respected.

**Support Group** South Tyrone Empowerment Programme (STEP)

**Council Area** Mid Ulster

**Services:**

Not for profit community development organisation based in Dungannon. Seeks to enable those most vulnerable to marginalisation, disadvantage and exclusion, to develop the confidence and skills to be heard; to identify their own strengths and needs; to access the support and expertise to help them in finding solutions and advocating social change.

The absence, or decline, of support groups in some areas is, however, a matter of concern in relation to the advice, assistance and support available to Travellers to remain in their home, deal with public bodies or address issues within the Traveller community or with the wider settled community.

**STRATEGY ACTION 8: We will undertake a review of floating support funding for Traveller support groups working to improve housing outcomes for the Traveller community.**

## **Housing and Maintenance Services**

We have established arrangements for the management and maintenance of our Traveller sites which govern:

- Waiting list management;
- Allocation of site pitches;
- Licence agreements and sign-ups;

- Rent and rates charges;
- Repairs and maintenance;
- Health and safety;
- Anti-social behaviour and managing conflict.

Every effort is made to manage sites in a proactive way that builds trust and relationships; however, it is nevertheless acknowledged that the Traveller community may not always avail of housing services in the same way as the settled community due to:

- Fear or distrust of public authorities;
- Reluctance to self-report repairs;
- Reluctance to make complaints;
- Poor access to on-line services;
- Information not provided in an accessible and understandable format.

In addition, the survey carried out for us in 2018/19 indicates that while 75% of Travellers living in social housing were either very satisfied/satisfied with their current accommodation, the rate of satisfaction fell to 56% among Irish Travellers living on sited accommodation.

We are committed to ensuring Irish Travellers are fully supported in their chosen form of accommodation, particularly those living on sites, and that they feel able and confident to access all of the housing services currently available.

We are currently reviewing a number of our housing management policies and procedures and will continue to work closely with the Traveller community and our stakeholders to identify ways in which we can improve the housing services we provide and make them more accessible to the Traveller community.

**STRATEGY ACTION 9: We will look at ways to promote our housing services to raise awareness among Irish Travellers of the levels of service they should expect to receive and to support them in making a complaint if they are not satisfied.**

We recently completed the roll-out of a Cultural Awareness Training Programme, delivered by Craigavon Travellers Support Committee, to front-line staff and policy writers, aimed at giving staff a better understanding of Irish Travellers' cultural needs and helping to reduce stigma and improve service delivery.

**STRATEGY ACTION 10: We will keep the training needs of our staff in respect of the Traveller community under review, including the development of an eLearning package for all our staff, to further raise Irish Traveller cultural awareness.**

## Objective 4: To create mechanisms that foster good relations for the Irish Traveller Community

### Promoting Good Relations

Promoting Good Relations is a statutory duty and can be a particular challenge in relation to Irish Travellers due to attitudes often held by the general public. The Equality Commission's "**Equality Awareness Survey 2016**"<sup>35</sup>, for example, identified Travellers as the most negatively viewed racial group; 33% of respondents indicated that they 'would mind' having a Traveller as a neighbour or "in-law" and 25% said they 'would mind' having a Traveller as a work colleague.

Most Traveller-focused research and advocacy work at a national and international level is concerned with challenging inequality or enhancing rights but there is less research into what "good relations" means in the context of Irish Travellers.

Fostering good relations between Irish Travellers and the wider community can be challenging, as Travellers often live in parallel with, rather than as part of, the communities within which they reside. However, there are many examples of successful integration, which are often built on good intersectional working driven by a dedicated individual or representative group. This type of intersectional working can be enhanced by our community planning mechanisms, which reinforce joint working, funding and target setting.

While this Strategy is primarily accommodation-driven, it is underpinned by an ethos of valuing Travellers and their culture, and a commitment to embrace opportunities to foster good relations at both intra- and inter-community level.

It is our experience that relationships with Irish Travellers work best when there is effective representation in place, working in the best interests of the Traveller community. This can provide a platform for targeted programmes; joint working with key agencies; the reduction of stigma and the promotion of more positive attitudes; and ongoing research, monitoring and evaluation, and a central point for delivery of both core and complementary services.

While the Housing Executive is not the only organisation with responsibility for encouraging the development of, building the capacity of, and developing the confidence of representative groups, we will work through the Race Equality sub group and other localised groups (e.g. Western Traveller Action Group) to take this forward.

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<sup>35</sup> [The report: 'A Question of Attitude' is available on the Equality Commission website](#)

## Traveller Participation and Engagement

Effective participation provides people affected by particular policies with a genuine opportunity to input into the development of relevant legislation, policies, strategies and action plans.

Consultation and involvement in the decision-making process from an early stage is key to the success of Traveller-specific accommodation and to the improvement of community relations, both within Traveller communities and between Travellers and settled communities.

There are, however, barriers to meaningful participation by Travellers including:

- A perceived lack of trust in public bodies;
- The perceived lack of delivery against previous commitments;
- Patriarchal dominance on some sites;
- Lack of available data;

Our **'Equality Scheme for the Northern Ireland Housing Executive'**<sup>36</sup> identifies consultation as an important aspect of promoting equality of opportunity and good relations. It commits the Housing Executive to seek the views of those directly affected by a policy or any other matter as early as possible, for an adequate period, at an appropriate time and in an appropriate form. It also commits us: to make appropriate accessibility and format adaptations; to adequately train those facilitating consultations and to effectively raise awareness among consultees; and to take account of the consultation results in making decisions and provide feedback to consultees in a timely manner.

The DfC **'Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in NI'** encourages Travellers' site providers to "consult widely and meaningfully with the local Traveller population and Travellers who are regular visitors prior to, and during, identification and development of suitable sites". This involves the "active participation" of Travellers, including children, and Traveller support groups as early as practicable, including during the design process. It also requires "a systematic approach to consultation with the local settled community" to provide "objective information on the Traveller and to deal with irrational arguments inspired by prejudice and ignorance".

We recognise the value of effective participation and engagement, both in giving Travellers a voice on decisions which affect them, either individually or as a community as a whole, and as a means of building trust with Traveller communities.

**STRATEGY ACTION 11: We will introduce proactive approaches to ensure Travellers are safe and welcomed within their choice of accommodation.**

## Partnership Working

We also recognise and commend the invaluable work being carried out by a variety of statutory bodies and third sector organisations on behalf of the Irish Traveller community. The Housing Executive is currently represented on a number of inter-agency fora and cross-border bodies including:

- Belfast Inter-agency Forum on Travellers: established to provide strategic leadership, advice and support to improve the health and social wellbeing of Travellers across Belfast and to develop better coordination, share models of best practice and shape future services;
- Regional Traveller Health and Social Wellbeing Forum: includes representation from Health & Social Care Board, Health & Social Care Trusts, Education Authority; Equality Commission, Traveller Support Groups and relevant voluntary sector organisations. The Forum is committed to working collectively to address the needs of the Traveller community in order to improve outcomes in a broad range of social wellbeing settings;
- National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee: statutory committee of the Irish Government responsible for advising the Irish Minister for Housing, Planning & Local Government on general matters relating to Traveller accommodation.

We fully support the need for a holistic approach to providing accommodation for Irish Travellers and will continue to work at a strategic level, on a cross-border and regional basis, with partners on issues which are impacted by housing including health; education; employment; social inclusion; and good relations.

**STRATEGY ACTION 12: To seek to expand our partnerships working with relevant stakeholders to effectively implement this Strategy.**

## 6.0 Implementation and Monitoring

The Housing Executive will have overall responsibility for implementation of the **Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025**.

The Implementation Plan below has been developed for the actions to be delivered over the five-year planning period of the Strategy. Our Inter-Divisional Irish Traveller Forum will oversee the implementation of this strategy and we will seek to establish an external Advisory Panel for expert insight to support our work.

An annual update on progress of the Strategy will be produced to demonstrate the outcomes achieved.

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## Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025 Implementation Plan

**Note: The Housing Executive will work in collaboration with relevant stakeholders to effectively implement this Strategy. The partners listed in this Action Plan are indicative and not exhaustive.**

Objective 1: Develop a Traveller Specific Accommodation Needs Assessment					
What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
Raise awareness of Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy to relevant stakeholders	Develop Traveller Strategy Communication Plan	By March 2021	NIHE	Improved awareness of Irish Traveller accommodation needs and cultural issues to relevant stakeholders	Annual Report of number of participants engaged in Irish Travellers communication plan
	Workshop to engage on Irish Traveller Accommodation issues.	Annual	NIHE: Local Councils/Department for Communities (DfC)/ The Executive Office (TEO)/ Support Groups/NI Human Rights Commission (NIHRC)/Equality		Record of the number of stakeholders attending annual workshop organisations engaged with NIHE in relation to Traveller issues

## Objective 1: Develop a Traveller Specific Accommodation Needs Assessment

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
			Commission /Traveller Groups etc		
	Promote our housing services to relevant stakeholders through a range of communication channels	Annual	NIHE	New communication methods utilised	Increase in the range of communication channels to raise awareness of Traveller services
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 1: We will review our housing application and housing solution processes to ensure Travellers are aware of the full range of Traveller-specific accommodation options.</b>					
Ensure the range of accommodation options are identified to Irish Travellers	Review our processes to include specific housing needs for Travellers	December 2021	NIHE in partnership with NI Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA)	Irish Travellers offered accommodation options which meet their particular needs and aspirations	Satisfaction survey of housing service provision for Irish Travellers

## Objective 1: Develop a Traveller Specific Accommodation Needs Assessment

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 2: We will continue to develop our ethnic monitoring and record keeping systems, including the collection of data on Irish Traveller communities, to better understand the impact of housing services and to help inform future planning and service provision.</b>					
Provide regular ethnic monitoring of Irish Travellers in accordance with our statutory duty	Ensure operational procedures and administrative systems capture relevant data on Travellers'	March 2022	NIHE in partnership with NIFHA	Improved information is provided on Travellers' issues via ethnic monitor reporting	Annual ethnic monitor report by Housing Executive
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 3: We will adapt our Housing Needs Assessment methodology to facilitate the assessment of Traveller-specific accommodation needs.</b>					
Develop methodology to facilitate the assessment of future Irish Traveller accommodation needs	A Traveller Housing Needs Assessment established	September 2022	NIHE	Robust evidence and data available to inform future planning requirements	Trend analysis using annual housing need assessment
Ensure the accommodation needs for Irish Travellers are taken into account within our housing policies	Checklist and accompanying statement by Traveller Strategy Officer	September 2022	NIHE	NIHE policies take account of the cultural and housing needs of Irish Travellers	All Housing Executive policies are subject to equality screening and will ensure "due regard" is paid to Traveller needs, priorities and other relevant issues

## Objective 1: Develop a Traveller Specific Accommodation Needs Assessment

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
Utilise Community Planning and central government structures to support the housing assessment needs of Irish Travellers	Ensure the needs of Travellers are included in Local Development Plans	Annually reviewed	NIHE as statutory partner in Community Planning	Irish Travellers' needs are considered at both strategic and local level	The accommodation needs of Irish Travellers are evidenced in local and central policy
	The housing needs and accommodation issues of travellers are fed into central and local policy	As required	NIHE	As statutory partner in community planning the traveller housing needs and accommodation issues are identified at land and central govt. levels	The accommodation needs of Irish Travellers are evidenced in local and central policy

**Objective 2: To provide safe and culturally appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers to reside in and travel to**

<b>What we will do</b>	<b>How we will do it</b>	<b>When we will do it</b>	<b>Who will do it?</b>	<b>What will happen?</b>	<b>How will we know?</b>
Undertake a strategic review of the range of culturally appropriate Traveller accommodation needs	Produce 3 year strategic development plan.	March 2022	NIHE in partnership with local Councils/ DFC and Housing Associations	The cultural housing needs of Irish Travellers are included within a new build development programme for traveller specific accommodation	Number of new sites to support suitable traveller accommodation needs identified

**STRATEGY ACTION 4: We will undertake a review of transit sites to establish, through a generated needs assessment, the existing and future demand for transit sites in NI within the Irish Traveller community.**

Review NIHE transit sites to establish existing and future demand for transit sites in NI specifically.	Review housing management policy of transit sites based on good practice examples	September 2023	NIHE in partnership with support groups	Transit sites are managed more effectively	Assessment of revised management arrangements
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**STRATEGY ACTION 5: We will undertake a strategic review of all our Traveller sites to identify options for their future improvement or replacement. We will also review the current emergency halting, transit or serviced site classifications for each of our sites to ensure they reflect how the sites are being used in practice.**

**Objective 2: To provide safe and culturally appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers to reside in and travel to**

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
Review all NIHE Traveller sites to identify options for their future improvement or replacement.	Implement a 5 year investment programme for NIHE Traveller sites	September 2021	NIHE	NIHE Travellers' sites meet the DfC quality standards in relation to site: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Location/Selection;</li> <li>• Design;</li> <li>• Facilities;</li> <li>• Services;</li> <li>• Health, Safety and Accessibility.</li> </ul>	Annual progress report of NIHE Caravan site investment programme
Review current NIHE Caravan site classifications.	Examine the length of stay on existing caravan sites and review the classification	March 2025	NIHE	Valid permissions and services are in place for Traveller sites, following consultation with Irish Travellers	All NIHE caravan sites are licensed when required.
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 6: We will investigate the potential to work with our stakeholders, in particular DfI, DfC and Councils, on how fitness standards for caravans might be defined and enforced for the benefit of Travellers.</b>					
Investigate potential to work with stakeholders on how fitness standards for caravans might be defined and enforced for the benefit of Travellers.	Engage with key stakeholders and legislators to examine solutions to address unfitness	March 2025	NIHE in partnership with TEO /Department for Infrastructure (DfI)/ DfC/NIHRC and	Caravans in traveller owner-occupation, and caravans leased to travellers meet an accepted fitness standard.	Standards of fitness for caravans occupied for Irish Travellers established.

**Objective 2: To provide safe and culturally appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers to reside in and travel to**

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
			local Councils		
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 7: We will work with Housing Association partners and other stakeholders to promote compatibility within the Traveller community as a means of maximising existing and future Traveller-specific accommodation.</b>					
Work with Housing Association partners and other stakeholders to promote compatibility within the Traveller community as a means of maximising existing and future Traveller-specific accommodation.	Establish Compatibility programme that enables respect between Irish Travellers	March 2025	NIHE with DFC/Local Councils/Support Groups/Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)	Improved relations within the Irish Traveller community	No of intimidation / anti-social behaviour cases

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**Objective 3: To support the Irish Traveller community to remain in their accommodation of choice through easily accessible housing services**

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
Work with the Traveller community and stakeholders to identify ways in which NIHE can improve the housing services delivered to the Traveller community.	Examine innovative approaches and examine potential for a 'Traveller Support Hub'.	September 2022	NIHE with TEO/DFC /Local Councils/ Groups/	Understanding of Travellers housing rights and responsibilities are improved	Level of satisfaction of housing services
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 8: We will undertake a review of floating support funding for Traveller support groups working to improve housing outcomes for the Traveller community.</b>					
Undertake a review of floating support funding for Traveller support groups working to improve housing outcomes for the Traveller community.	Complete evaluation of floating support service and provide revised service	September 2021	NIHE	Increased opportunities for Travellers to remain in their homes	Number of households engaged with floating support
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 9: We will look at ways to promote our housing services to raise awareness among Irish Travellers of the levels of service they should expect to receive and to support them in making a complaint if they are not satisfied.</b>					

**Objective 3: To support the Irish Traveller community to remain in their accommodation of choice through easily accessible housing services**

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
Look at ways to promote our range of housing services for Irish Travellers	Establish local traveller champions within NIHE structures	September 2021	NIHE	Trust and confidence built between Travellers and public bodies	Traveller evaluation of our housing service provision
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 10: We will keep the training needs of our staff in respect of the Traveller community under review, including the development of an eLearning package for all our staff, to further raise Irish Traveller cultural awareness.</b>					
Ensure Irish Travellers engaged with the NIHE are provided with a professional / culturally sensitive service.	Undertake a review of the Irish Traveller cultural awareness training for further roll-out	September 2022	NIHE lead ; NIFHA	Increased understanding of the Irish Traveller's culture and housing needs with the social housing professionals	Number of housing professionals completed training
	Develop an eLearning package for all NIHE/NIFHA staff to further raise Irish Traveller cultural awareness.	Sept 2024	NIHE		Cultural awareness training disseminated corporately

**Objective 4: To create mechanisms that foster good relations for the Irish Traveller Community**

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 11: We will introduce proactive approaches to ensure Travellers feel safe and welcomed within their choice of accommodation.</b>					
Develop opportunities for Traveller engagement and participation within our Housing Services	Establish bespoke capacity building training and practicable methods for Traveller participation	March 2023	NIHE lead: NIFHA/Supporting Communities	Traveller's voice represented at local and central levels	Number of Traveller groups represented within Housing Executive network
Implement proactive approaches to further build relations between Irish Travellers	Establish a good relations programme specific to the needs of Travellers	March 2024	NIHE lead: NIFHA/TEO/PSNI	Improved relations between Irish Travellers	Number of intimidation/ anti-social behaviour cases
Support Irish Travellers who wish to live within settled communities	Develop an Inter-cultural Programme with other agencies to ensure settled	March 2023	NIHE in partnership with Local Councils/TEO/PSNI/DE	Irish Travellers are welcomed and can contribute within the wider community	Evaluation of Traveller sense of belonging within the wider community settlement

**Objective 4: To create mechanisms that foster good relations for the Irish Traveller Community**

What we will do	How we will do it	When we will do it	Who will do it?	What will happen?	How will we know?
	Travellers are embraced within communities.				
<b>STRATEGY ACTION 12: We will seek to expand our partnerships working with relevant stakeholders to effectively implement our housing duties for Irish Travellers</b>					
Ensure we build our expertise and knowledge of traveller accommodation needs and issues	Establish UK and ROI partnership working for information sharing and good practice	March 2022	NIHE	New opportunities created with other partners	Range of partnership working and increased opportunities evidenced

# APPENDIX 1: Legislative Framework and Guidance

Legislation relating to Irish Travellers in Northern Ireland includes the following:

<p>i. The Housing (NI) Order 1981</p> <p>The Housing (NI) Order 1981 (Article 28)</p>	<p>Requires the Housing Executive to:</p> <p>(a) regularly examine housing conditions and need;</p> <p>(b) submit to the Department for approval its programme for such years and in such form as the Department may determine for meeting housing need.</p> <p>Enables the Housing Executive to make provision of caravan sites for members of the Irish Traveller community and make such reasonable charges as it may determine.</p>
<p>ii. The Race Relations Order 1997 (Article 5)</p>	<p>Identifies the “Irish Traveller Community” as a “racial group” i.e. “a community of people commonly so called who are identified by themselves and by others as people with a shared history, culture and traditions, including historically a nomadic way of life on the island of Ireland”. The Order makes it unlawful to discriminate, either directly or indirectly on racial grounds in the areas of employment and training; education; the provision of goods, facilities or services; the disposal and management of premises and advertisements.</p>
<p>iii. Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Section 75)</p>	<p>Places a statutory duty on public authorities in carrying out its functions to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation. Racial Group has the same meaning as in the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997.</p>
<p>iv. The Housing (NI) Order 2003 (Article 125)</p>	<p>Transferred ownership of and responsibility for Traveller serviced sites from district councils to the Housing Executive. This included the provision of any new sites required.</p>
<p>v. Caravans Act 1963</p>	<p>Requires caravan site owners to apply to local councils for site licences. Councils have the power to attach conditions to site licences, usually referred to as “the model conditions”, for example, restricting the number of caravans on site.</p>

vi.	Caravans Act 2011	Sets out security of tenure terms and conditions for pitch holders.
vii.	The Unauthorised Encampments (Northern Ireland) Order 2005	Provides powers to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) to remove trespassers on land in certain circumstances. If the trespassers are members of the Irish Traveller community the PSNI is required to consult with the Housing Executive as to whether there is a suitable pitch for the caravan(s) on a relevant caravan site and situated within a reasonable distance of the land where the trespass is occurring.

In addition to the legislation, other Guidance available in respect of Irish Travellers includes:

i.	Design Guide for Travellers' Sites in Northern Ireland	Published by the Department for Communities (DfC) and sets out minimum standards for site design. Recently updated and currently in draft awaiting publication.
ii.	Model Licence Conditions 2019	Published by Department for Infrastructure and specifies model conditions with respect to the lay-out and the provision of facilities, services and equipment for caravan sites or particular types of caravan site; and that, in deciding what (if any) conditions to attach to a site licence, the council shall have regard to any conditions so specified.
iii.	The Executive Office (Formerly OFM/DFM): Racial Equality Strategy 2015 – 2025	Re-enforcing the ethnicity of Irish Travellers' as defined by The Race Relations Order 1997, the Strategy recognises "...there may be a need to develop and implement specific programmes of work to address particular challenges and vulnerabilities facing particular groups such as Irish Travellers and the Roma."
iv.	Planning Policy Statement (PPS) 12: Housing in Settlements	Recognises that Travellers have distinctive needs and where a need is identified and a development plan is under preparation, the plan should identify a suitable site(s). Local councils have responsibility for Local Development Plans.
v.	NI Fire & Rescue Service: A Fire Safety Guide for Caravan Site Operators	Provides advice on complying with Fire Safety Law and contains a section specifically for Roma or Travellers' Sites.

This report can be found on the Housing Executive website: <https://www.nihe.gov.uk>

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