

Report on	To advise Elected Members on the NIHE's Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy for 2020-2025 and the draft correspondence from the Traveller Working Group and officer team.
Date of Meeting	8 th September 2020
Reporting Officer	Fiona McClements

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To advise Elected Members of the NIHE's Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy for 2020-2025. The NIHE strategy outlines an overview of the strategic context, types of Irish Traveller accommodation, outlines what NIHE and partners have done to date and includes a review of data and evidence.
1.2	The strategy outlines the NIHE's main aims, 4 objectives, 12 key actions and how these will be implemented and monitored. The MUDC Travellers Working Group meeting which was convened on 5 th August 2020 requested comments to be forwarded to the NIHE.
2.0	Background
2.1	The Irish Traveller community is long established in Northern Ireland. 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's 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" .
3.0	Main Report
3.1	The Irish Travellers Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025 (the Strategy) sets out how the NIHE 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. 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.
3.2	The NIHE strategy states that "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."

3.3	<p>The Strategy aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
3.4	<p>The Strategy has four objectives:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 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.
3.5	<p>An update on progress of the Strategy is to be produced on an annual basis demonstrating the outcomes achieved.</p>
3.6	<p>Responsibilities of Local Councils</p> <p>The Council's responsibilities are outlined within the document and are stated as follows:</p> <p>"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.</p> <p>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."</p>
3.7	<p>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.</p>
3.8	<p>Comments made at the Traveller Working Group meeting on 5th August were as follows:</p>

Objective 1

To develop an objective, robust, evidence-based assessment of Irish Traveller-specific accommodation requirements, which reflects best practice.

NIHE have carried out a needs assessment. This strategy aims to reflect on the strategic needs of Irish Travellers.

According to the strategy, 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.

The report states awareness of one unauthorised encampment, in Magherafelt, and states that NIHE 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.

Elected Members would be aware that last autumn NIHE acknowledged that there was a need for a small site in the Mid Ulster area. These particular Mid Ulster issues require to be addressed in any strategic plan.

It was noted that this document is about strategic assessment, NIHE have carried out a survey, and have reviewed its findings but haven't specified the quantitative need as yet. The document should provide much more detail on what should be done to address issues that already exist and the mechanisms that will be used to fast track the necessary actions where there is already housing stress due to unsatisfactory living arrangements.

It was also noted that this document needs to address both the issues arising from increased needs at the more settled community in Coalisland as well as the situation at Ballyronan and Hill Head Road, Toome.

Objective 2

To provide safe and culturally appropriate accommodation for Irish Travellers to reside in and travel to.

The issues referenced in Object 1 apply.

Site licensing has been referenced within the document and MUDC can advise that following discussion with NIHE, the site operator, the site has now been licensed.

It was noted that there had been a series of unauthorised land takes in Coalisland adjacent to the existing site in recent years which has proved very contentious with local residents. The NIHE require to take a much more strategic approach in managing their sites and identifying housing stress and taking action to secure additional lands as necessary as opposed to illegal activity by their site residents.

	<p><u>Objective 3</u> <u>To support the Irish Traveller to remain in their accommodation of choice through easily accessible housing services.</u></p> <p>Working Group members reflected that Traveller support mechanisms need to be vastly improved to ensure that appropriate support processes were available to travelling families both in settled and other sites. It was felt that a more structured support network would go some way to addressing some of the local tensions that arise between settled and travelling communities.</p> <p>It was raised that the local travelling families situated in the northern section of the Mid Ulster district would benefit from additional support mechanisms.</p> <p><u>Objective 4</u> <u>To create mechanisms that foster good relations for the Irish Traveller.</u></p> <p>Council as part of the local area good relations plan, supported by the NI Executive Office under their Together Building a United Community provides £10,000 of funding to the Belong project which seeks to support Travellers. The project Belong is led by STEP Mid Ulster and is part of a wider programme of engagement and development funded directly by the Executive Office, DFC and Southern Health and Social Care Trust. The project has a “drop in” location on Main Street Coalisland and provides a range of development support for Travellers in education, health, skills and cultural awareness and development.</p> <p>Council as a partner within the Neighbourhood Renewal programme is involved in a number of DFC led programmes supporting greater inclusion and development in the areas of Dungannon and Coalisland. This includes outreach for BME communities including Travellers. Specific programmes for Travellers include homework clubs and education support programme. These are DFC programmes and Council is a partner.</p> <p>Council Good Relations Plan also promotes messages of diversity across the region and supports BME inclusion through cultural awareness.</p>
4.0	Other Considerations
4.1	Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications
	Financial: None
	Human: None
	Risk Management: None

4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/a
	Rural Needs Implications: N/a
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the NIHE Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025 and endorse the draft correspondence to be forwarded to NIHE.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1 – NIHE Irish Traveller Accommodation Strategy 2020-2025.
6.2	Appendix 2 – Draft correspondence from MUDC to NIHE in response to the strategy.