DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM SHAINCHEISTEANNA RÍTHÁBHACHTACHA A THÉANN I GCION AR AN LUCHT SIÚIL

JOINT COMMITTEE ON KEY ISSUES AFFECTING THE TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

Dé Céadaoin, 29 Aibreán 2026

Wednesday, 29 April 2026

Tháinig an Comhchoiste le chéile ag 6.30 p.m.

The Joint Committee met at 6.30 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	**Seanadóirí / Senators**
John Connolly,	Malcolm Noonan,
Dessie Ellis,	Joe O'Reilly,
Séamus McGrath,	Anne Rabbitte.
Naoise Ó Muirí,	
Maurice Quinlivan,	
Pádraig Rice.	

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Thomas Gould.

Teachta / Deputy George Lawlor sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

The joint committee met in private session, suspended at 6.45 p.m. and resumed in public session at 6.48 p.m.

Traveller Accommodation: Discussion (Resumed)

An Cathaoirleach: Apologies have been received from Deputy Barry Ward.

This meeting has been convened to discuss the issue of Traveller accommodation with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the County and City Management Association. From the Department, our witnesses are Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan, principal officer, and Ms Samantha Kenny, assistant principal officer. From the CCMA, we are joined by Mr. Eddie Taaffe, chair of the CCMA housing committee and, I am glad to say, CEO of Wexford County Council and a former colleague, and Ms Elaine Leech, director of services for housing, South Dublin County Council.

They are all very welcome.

I ask anyone attending remotely to mute themselves when not contributing so that we do not pick up any background noise or feedback. As usual, I remind all of those in attendance to ensure that their mobile phones are on silent mode or switched off.

As the witnesses are within the precincts of Leinster House, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of the presentations they make to the committee. This means that they have an absolute defence against any defamation action for anything they say at the meeting. However, they are expected not to abuse this privilege, and it is my duty as Cathaoirleach to ensure that this privilege is not abused. Therefore, if their statements are potentially defamatory in relation to an identifiable person or entity, they will be directed to discontinue their remarks. It is imperative that they comply with any such direction.

Members are also reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or entity outside of the Houses or an official of the Houses either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

I now invite Mr. O'Sullivan to make the Department's opening statement. He will be followed by Mr. Taaffe. We will then proceed with a questions and answers session.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I thank the committee for the invitation to address it. Addressing Traveller accommodation is a priority for the Government and the Department, and I appreciate the opportunity to update the committee on the delivery of accommodation for Travellers and the progress made to implement the recommendations made by the expert review group on Traveller accommodation. Besides Ms Kenny, assistant principal in the social inclusion unit, I am joined by Mr. Gary Coogan, also from the social inclusion unit.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's policy in respect of accommodation for Travellers is underpinned by dedicated legislation. The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act 1998 provides that housing authorities have a statutory responsibility for the assessment of the accommodation needs of Travellers and the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller accommodation programmes in their areas. In line with the statutory framework, the Department must ensure adequate structures and supports are in place to assist local authorities in providing such accommodation, including a national framework of policy, legislation and funding.

Under the new national housing plan, Delivering Homes, Building Communities 2025-2030, meeting Traveller accommodation needs continues to be a priority for the Government, with a commitment to continued investment in Traveller accommodation. Delivery of accommodation for Travellers is managed and tracked through the Traveller accommodation programmes, TAPs, with the current programmes running from 2025 to 2029. The TAPs set the individual local authority targets over a five-year period and inform the basis of all forms of Traveller accommodation delivery, including group housing schemes, halting site bays, acquisition of homes and housing assistance payment, HAP, and rental accommodation scheme, RAS, tenancies. Travellers have the right to choose any form of accommodation, and the TAPs are designed to reflect and support these preferences.

Local authorities are implementing the current TAPs and managing the delivery and allocation of all Traveller accommodation under these very important five-year rolling programmes, which are designed to meet the existing and projected accommodation needs of Travellers in their areas. The Department will continue to facilitate, encourage and support local authorities in the delivery of their TAPs. Traveller-specific accommodation funding has been fully drawn down by local authorities over the past six years from 2020 to 2025. This has resulted in capital investment in Traveller-specific accommodation of over €125 million, and almost €38 million in current expenditure in the same period, supporting local authorities in delivering high-quality Traveller-specific accommodation and in the management and maintenance of Traveller-specific accommodation, particularly halting sites. In budget 2026, increased capital funding of €26 million and current funding of €8 million was made available, demonstrating the ongoing commitment to the delivery of accommodation for Travellers.

A programme board established in 2020 continues to oversee implementation of the recommendations from the 2019 report of the expert group on Traveller accommodation. The programme board includes Traveller representatives, CCMA representatives and representatives from the Department, and it is chaired by the independent chair of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, Mr. Niall Crowley. Examples of the work completed to date by the programme board include: the continuing increases in Exchequer funding for Traveller-specific accommodation and new arrangements for disbursing funding since 2020; the amendment of the social housing assessment regulations with effect from March 2022 to provide for the inclusion of a Traveller identifier, which assists local authorities with data in planning their TAPs and setting targets; and research on best practice design of Traveller-specific accommodation, which is informing the preparation of revised design guidelines by the Department.

Active progress is under way on the remaining recommendations through the programme board. This includes: the development of an eviction protocol for use by local authorities in dealing with unauthorised occupation of sites and roadsides; a joint study with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to explore the feasibility of an all-Ireland approach to the provision of a network of transient sites; consideration of current governance arrangements at both national and local levels to better support delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation; and the preparation of new departmental guidance on the design of Traveller-specific accommodation.

Accommodation for Traveller households is provided across a range of housing options. The 2024 annual estimate of Traveller households shows that 78% of Travellers live in standard

housing, including local authority housing, approved housing body, AHB, housing and HAP- or RAS-supported tenancies in the private rented sector. Funding for these housing supports is provided through the respective programme budget lines.

The incidence of Traveller families in homeless emergency accommodation is recognised as a significant challenge. Together with local authorities, which have a statutory responsibility for the provision of homeless accommodation and for tackling homelessness, the Department continues to work to address this challenge in conjunction with the broader challenge of homelessness. The Minister has appointed a representative from a national Traveller organisation to the national homeless action committee, NHAC. Following a review of the earlier pilot scheme, a national preferential caravan loan scheme was launched at the end of 2024, which enables local authorities to offer preferential discounted loans, with increased loan limits, to Travellers to purchase trailers as their primary residence, significantly improving living conditions for those on halting sites.

We are working continually to build on the progress being made, because the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation is central to ensuring continued improvement in the lives of Travellers. Current progress demonstrates the drive and commitment that the Department, in conjunction with local authorities, continues to foster. This work relates to the provision of both social housing and Traveller-specific housing.

I welcome any questions the committee members may wish to raise.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: The Cathaoirleach has already introduced me and my colleague, Ms. Elaine Leech. Ms Leech is also a member of the CCMA housing committee and a CCMA representative on the national Traveller accommodation committee and the Traveller accommodation expert review group programme board. On behalf of the CCMA, we welcome the opportunity to appear before the committee.

Local authorities have a central statutory role in assessing housing need, planning and delivering accommodation, and supporting households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including members of the Traveller community. This work is carried out in partnership with a wide range of stakeholders, including Traveller representative organisations, approved housing bodies, the Housing Agency, and colleagues across government. It is also undertaken within a complex operational environment characterised by rising demand, capacity constraints and the particular challenges associated with Traveller-specific accommodation delivery.

Local authorities work with AHBs, the HSE, Tusla, local development companies, LDCs, and NGOs, including Traveller organisations, to support Traveller families' housing and wider needs. Dedicated staff, including social workers and Traveller liaison officers, TLOs, play a vital role in this effort. The CCMA supports engagement through the local Traveller accommodation consultative committee, LTACC, and in 2026 will work with this group to review the role of Traveller liaison officers to improve consistency and impact. In addition to accommodation provision, local authorities have continued to provide specific supports to the more marginalised families within the Traveller community in the context of tenancy sustainment support, housing first supports, and social care support.

Traveller accommodation is delivered through standard social housing, Traveller-specific accommodation, and other local authority assisted options, reflecting diverse needs and

preferences. A Housing Agency review of the 2024 social housing waiting list indicated that many Traveller households do not specify a requirement for Traveller-specific accommodation. Local authority experience suggests preferences vary by area and household type, with younger Traveller families more likely to opt for mainstream housing. A Department review of the current local authority Traveller Accommodation Programme 2025-2029 reported a total of 3,771 units targeted for delivery nationally over the course the programme. Based on a survey of local authorities carried out by the County and City Management Association, CCMA, last year, it is estimated that over 700 of these will be Traveller-appropriate accommodation units and the balance standard housing. The survey also asked about delivery during the previous Traveller accommodation programme, TAP, period of 2019 to 2024 and recorded 2,585 households accommodated in standard housing plus 773 in Traveller-specific accommodation for that period.

Traveller-specific delivery is widely recognised as more complex and time-intensive than mainstream housing, with enhanced consultation requirements, planning and regeneration challenges, particularly on occupied sites, and longer and less predictable timelines. Even where funding and approvals are in place, Traveller-specific proposals can have a lower success rate than comparable mainstream housing proposals. A recent CCMA survey of local authorities identified that 792 units were provided for Traveller accommodation in 2025 through standard social housing, Traveller-specific accommodation and other local authority assisted options. Of the 792 units provided by local authorities, 446 were standard housing allocations. The survey requested information from local authorities using data where individuals self-identified as Traveller or were engaged through local authority support services, recognising that not every Traveller wishes to identify as such.

Looking forward, the mid-term review of TAP is due in 2027 and will provide information about progress being made in accommodation delivery. In addition, the Housing Agency's Good practice in the development and design of Traveller-specific accommodation is being used to inform guidelines that will issue from the Department and will be an important support in promoting consistent, high-quality provision across all local authorities, along with clarity on what constitutes Traveller-appropriate accommodation. The role of social workers in local authorities has expanded far beyond its original remit, responding to increasingly complex societal needs and supporting some of the most vulnerable individuals and families in our society. Travellers have equitable access to social work services based on assessed individual or family need, in line with the findings of the 2020 independent review of the role of social workers in local authorities. The role of Traveller liaison officers and social housing staff is pivotal in advancing equitable social outcomes for members of the Traveller community. These professionals serve as vital bridges between local authorities and Traveller families, fostering trust, cultural understanding and effective communication. Their work ensures that housing services are delivered in a culturally appropriate and inclusive manner, while also addressing broader social determinants such as health, education and community participation. By advocating for the needs of Travellers and supporting their access to secure, suitable accommodation, these staff contribute significantly to reducing inequality and promoting social cohesion. Their efforts are essential to the implementation of national accommodation programmes and to the realisation of local government's commitment to equality, human rights, and social inclusion.

Working alongside Traveller liaison officers and housing staff, social workers play a vital role in liaising, assessing, advocating and co-ordinating with health, social care, community and voluntary services, thereby supporting integrated, culturally appropriate housing responses, contributing to the reduction of inequality, and the promotion of social inclusion for Travellers.

With regard to Traveller homelessness, the CCMA and local authorities have strengthened Traveller accommodation data capture, including a new national annual data framework. As referenced earlier, the CCMA data capture examines not only individuals that have self-identified as Traveller but also those individuals who were engaged through local authority support services, including social welfare support, Traveller liaison officers, outreach workers and homeless prevention officers. This is the first time that data regarding this cohort has been reported on by the CCMA. Traveller homelessness remains a serious concern in several local authority areas, especially for larger family groups.

The Traveller identifier introduced in 2022 has improved data and the Housing Agency's capacity to review social housing assessments. Local authorities have reported that, during the year 2025, 462 Traveller households accessed emergency accommodation at a particular time. The 2025 local authority data has identified 175 Traveller households exiting emergency accommodation, of which 52 were single Traveller exits in 2025. This figure equates to 7% of the total number of households exiting emergency accommodation in 2025. Also, local authorities have reported that, through prevention measures utilised, including tenancy sustainment and homeless HAP officer support, an additional 85 Traveller households were prevented from entering emergency accommodation in 2025. Operational experience indicates that Traveller homelessness may be under-recorded where households do not use the identifier. Longer stays in emergency accommodation for some Traveller families often reflect larger household size and limited availability of four-bedroom and larger homes.

Between 2021 and 2025, national capital investment in Traveller-specific accommodation totalled over €110 million. Expenditure can fluctuate year to year due to project sequencing, planning and consultation timelines, and the complexity of regeneration projects. Management and maintenance costs for Traveller-specific accommodation are recouped annually, averaging approximately €2 million to €3 million per year, with local authorities also meeting additional costs from their own resources.

While it is acknowledged that there are notable challenges in the delivery of accommodation, local authorities continue to work in partnership with stakeholders to assist Traveller families to ensure their accommodation needs are met. Traveller-specific accommodation delivery is inherently more complex than mainstream housing, requiring sustained engagement, realistic timelines and flexible delivery models. These challenges have been recognised nationally, including in the Traveller accommodation expert review, which identified persistent structural and delivery constraints. However, the Department's guidelines on the development and design of Traveller-appropriate accommodation, strengthening the role of Traveller liaison officers, and clarity about what is to be funded for Traveller-appropriate accommodation should enhance accommodation quality and engagement services. The CCMA welcomes the opportunity to engage in dialogue and we are happy to answer any questions.

An Cathaoirleach: I thank Mr. Taaffe. We will now go to questions and answers. However, deferred divisions have just been called in the Dáil and Deputies must attend. This causes the

difficulty. Do Seanad Members want to continue on? Yes. Perhaps Senator Noonan will step in for the Chair. Apologies. We now have the deferred divisions, which is the weekly vote. We suspected it might come a little bit later but it has come now.

Senator Malcolm Noonan took the Chair.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Apologies for that. We will take a round of questions.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I welcome our guests. In the content of their documents and their introductory remarks, they have responded. However, virtually every set of witnesses we have had in here throughout the year, from Travellers themselves to interest groups to advocacy groups, has made the allegation, and we could even go through the records, that councils are not drawing down their allocation and are not using the Traveller allocation that is specifically for Travellers. Do the witnesses want to comment on that again? I am sure they are aware of the allegation. The documentation here would suggest it is not the case, but will they go back on that? My colleagues here can tell me if I am wrong. Unless I misunderstood them, every group in here has said that the local authorities are not using the allocation. Perhaps the witnesses will take that first and then I will go through a couple-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Mr. O'Sullivan and Mr. Taaffe might respond separately.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: It is important to recognise that, historically, there was a very significant problem with the drawdown of funds because of the way the Department would have allocated funds to local authorities. That allocation would have remained with that local authority for the year and could not be re-spent in another local authority because we had to understand whether they were going to spend it. The Department changed the process in 2020, so it is open to any local authority to draw down at any time and we will provide that funding in line with the demand and with the provision made available by the Oireachtas in the context of the budgetary and Estimates provisions.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Will Mr. O'Sullivan explain again the policing mechanism the CCMA has to ensure that is happening, say, at central government level? I am well aware, by the way, as all of us in the room are, of all the difficulties around these questions, but that is not the agenda now.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: From my perspective, and as regards my team's responsibility and all my staff, we are working daily, engaging directly with the local authorities in the context of processing and activating applications. We will also then bilaterally meet them at a strategic level where we will meet the senior team on an ongoing basis but probably over a period of time before we would meet all local authorities.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: We have an excellent set-up in Cavan town, but that is not today's agenda. Mr. O'Sullivan would be confident that there is an evenness around the country such that he does not think there are lacunae, I do not mean of homelessness but of effort or of-----

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I agree with the Senator. What I am talking about is what is drawn down, but that does not necessarily meet the entire need that is out there in any one year. There is significant need that is identified now and has been through previous Traveller

accommodation programmes. Local authorities identify the need and there are plans to match that need. There are massive challenges out there.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: But there is no evidence of opting out, basically. Mr. O'Sullivan is confident that council X is not deciding not to apply for an adequate amount-----

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: That is arguably a very specific question and I cannot respond in detail with regard to each local authority. In broad terms, local authorities are statutorily obliged to produce Traveller accommodation programme plans. We are reporting into the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee on those plans. It is not that any of those plans are not planning for the need that is out there. They are.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Mr. O'Sullivan says 78% of Travellers are in housing, and that is good. Obviously, the question arises about the 22%, but the 78% is good for a start. How many of those are on HAP and RAS? Would Mr. O'Sullivan have an idea, roughly?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We publish the data on the basis that local authorities undertake an annual estimate towards the end of each year. We collate that data centrally, and it is those percentages I am identifying, that 78% in standard housing. I have the data in front of me now. To answer the Senator's question, according to the data for 2024, 1,233 Traveller households are accommodated through HAP and RAS. That is 1,233 households out of a total of 12,707 households.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: That is an interesting figure. I got the impression, if I understood both sets of introductory remarks properly, that the homeless figures for Travellers are not necessarily a consequence of a lack of available housing but that they are a consequence of other-----

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: No. The homelessness will only ultimately be addressed through supply of housing. That is the homelessness-----

Senator Joe O'Reilly: So there is a supply issue there.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Absolutely. There is a housing crisis.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: May I keep going for a moment?

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Senator Malcolm Noonan): Yes. Maybe Mr. Taaffe wants to come in on that particular issue.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: To come back to the Senator's earlier point about the evenness of effort and whether there are lacunae in the system-----

Senator Joe O'Reilly: Mr. Taaffe knows about the allegation.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Yes, and there are a couple of factors to that. The first is that different local authorities have different demands, different needs and different ways of addressing that demand and that need. For example, transient halting sites would not be a big issue for some local authorities at all, so they probably do not provide that because there is not much of a demand for it, or there is very reduced demand. There is a big demand for permanent halting sites, and councils try to meet that demand. Everybody is trying to do slightly different things because there is a different need in each area. In addition, the reality is that there would be

different numbers of members of the Travelling community in different local authority areas. As I said, the majority across the country are opting for mainstream social housing, so there is that difference. The long and the short of it, however, is that the change to a kind of global, national budget has meant that those local authorities that have an increased demand and have projects lined up have been able to draw down that funding such that the ones that do not have as much of a demand do not hold up the others and that we are able to access and draw down-----

Senator Joe O'Reilly: They will get a bigger allocation.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: No, they will be able to get access to more funding because it is a global-----

Senator Joe O'Reilly: That is good.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Absolutely.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: As regards the division between Traveller-specific housing and regular social housing and then the HAP scheme, where does all that fall in rough terms? The Traveller-specific housing is popular, is it not, among the Traveller community? I am just wondering how it breaks between the three.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: In rough terms, as regards the overall figures, as I mentioned, there are 12,707 Traveller households in total accommodated, and 2,800 of those households are in Traveller-specific accommodation, which is about 22%, roughly.

Senator Joe O'Reilly: I think I am good with that for the moment.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: What is the line within the Department as to where policy sits in relation to Traveller accommodation?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I am responsible for the policy on Traveller accommodation. We also have the funding line for Traveller-specific accommodation.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Is there a Secretary General or an assistant secretary general or is it at PO level?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: No, the same structure works right up to the Minister.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Right, but there is no Secretary General responsible for Traveller accommodation.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: There is. The Secretary General is responsible for Traveller accommodation, as is the Minister.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Yes, but how many Secretaries General are there in the Department of housing?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: One.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: And how many assistant secretaries?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: That is a good question.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Twelve or 13?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Six or seven.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Right, so is there an assistant secretary general who works with Mr. O'Sullivan?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Yes. My immediate manager is responsible.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I am asking the question because it is such an important topic. No disrespect to Mr. O'Sullivan, but I would like to have seen the assistant secretary accompany Mr. O'Sullivan here. I am not saying he or Ms Kenny cannot respond to the questions, but we need to see where the policy line sits. Is that a fair comment? It is not a criticism. It has been clarified that there is an assistant secretary.

I listened to both the opening statements very keenly and I thank both Mr. O'Sullivan and Mr. Taaffe for them. What I noticed missing from both statements was reference to older Traveller persons or Travellers with disabilities.

These were in neither statement, believe it or not. Where does the changing need for the older person come in? What is the mechanism or understanding between the CCMA and the HSE for people who are being discharged or presenting with behavioural sensory needs? It is a policy question. Mr. O'Sullivan has come across me asking questions such as these before. It is a fair question to ask. How are we accommodating these? Do we look at them separately in policy?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Older people and disabled people are-----

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I am looking specifically at Traveller disabled people and Traveller disability. Their needs are different from the mainstream cohort.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We take account of it in the context of our Traveller-specific accommodation programme provision, particularly the caravan loan scheme. Outside of this, all older people and all disabled people fall within the broader policy position.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: There is a broader policy position and I accept this. In the broader policy position, are memorandums of understanding in place for interdepartmental working together? This is with regard to the Departments of health and disability and the Minister of State with responsibility for older people. Is there a memorandum of understanding in place?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: There is a strategy in place. There is a national housing strategy for disabled people. The Minister of State for health and older people is bringing forward an action plan and has committed to delivering homes and building communities for older people.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: What about Travellers within this? Do they have their own chapter in the strategy? Perhaps Mr. O'Sullivan has not seen it yet.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: No more than any other group has a chapter in the strategy.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: That is interesting.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: To add to this, the Traveller accommodation programme that each local authority is statutorily obliged to prepare has reference to the very issues Senator Rabbitte is raising. They are specific issues and, as the Senator has said, there is an additional level of need and an additional level of complexity. The Traveller accommodation programmes have

this referenced in them. In terms of the HSE, I cannot remember the name of it but there is a local group in each local authority where disability issues and providing housing for people with disabilities of any group is considered. These groups are up and running. There is a structure put around this to identify housing needs, numbers and solutions. This is in terms of housing and the supports that may be needed once people are housed. This is where the two areas are considered and this is the structure put around it.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I will focus on this and I thank Mr. Taaffe for his reply. There is a cohort of larger families. When a family presents to a local authority and there is a child with behavioural and challenging needs, and I am speaking specifically about Travellers, they are looking for a sensory room and additional space. Is there provision in what we do? Is it looked at?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Absolutely it is. All of the needs of the family as they present in totality will be looked at, and this would be a key issue. Our scheme of letting priorities has very specific references to children with special needs and breaks down what those needs are. We engage with the HSE and look for specialist assessments to see what the solution to the issue is. We will try to meet that need. The difficulty is that they are very complex cases. A four-bedroom house might be required and there might have to be an extra bedroom. It is in trying to source and find this accommodation in a timely manner that the difficulty arises. In some cases we have a particular issue with Traveller homelessness for larger families because of the shortage of this type of accommodation. To answer Senator Rabbitte's question, it absolutely is looked at. This is why we have Traveller liaison officers and social workers to work hand-in-glove and try to come up with solutions. Sometimes it takes time because it is very complex.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: I acknowledge the work of the social workers and the liaison officers in my local county council area. They are absolutely fantastic and they do a phenomenal amount of work. It is important to acknowledge this. We cannot underestimate their value in ensuring how the system gels. If we stay focused on larger accommodation, and I do not know whether Mr. O'Sullivan has the figures, do we have a breakdown when it comes to larger families in homeless circumstances at this moment? I am not looking for prioritisation but asking whether we have a mechanism to track these larger families and how long they are in homeless accommodation?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Ultimately, people in homeless accommodation are on housing waiting lists. The local authorities manage their housing waiting lists according to the needs arising and prioritisation, and they have the flexibility to identify and deliver for the needs of larger households in particular, as mentioned. The plan under Delivering Homes, Building Communities is to deliver more four-bed and larger properties, along with one-bed and two-bed properties. It is at both ends of the spectrum. Arguably, we have been very good nationally at delivering the three-bed standard house but it is about the other ends of the spectrum, and this is being worked on by local authorities.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Local authorities are acutely aware of it. The homeless teams that work in local authorities are acutely aware of larger families with complex needs in particular and they get priority for allocations. As Mr. O'Sullivan has referenced, if we look at the new social housing that is coming on stream, in the case of Wexford, 80% of the need on the housing list is for one-bed and two-bed accommodation. There is a relatively small number, but a very important number, for four-bed accommodation. They are the ones we are targeting. We have

a targeted acquisition programme to look for four-bed accommodation. The difficulty we face is that four-bed accommodation through developers or the private sector, through Part V or acquisitions, is very hard to get. It is very hard to get in the right location. One of the issues we face is that for families with complex needs, and I will be blunt here, there is no point in buying them a four-bed house ten minutes outside the town because they need to be in town and close to services. These are very hard to get on the market. We end up building them and this takes time.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Did Storm Éowyn do much damage to halting sites? What was the repair bill?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: There was definitely an impact. I recall claims coming in from local authorities, especially in the context of emergency replacement mobiles.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Did we go with emergency mobiles or more structured modular builds on the halting sites? Is there a policy shift on this?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Let us be very clear on this; a caravan trailer is a caravan trailer. Outside of this, we are talking about modern methods of construction and a group housing scheme or a halting site bay.

Deputy George Lawlor resumed the Chair.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: Does Mr. Taaffe have an opinion on this?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Unfortunately, I do not because, thankfully, Wexford escaped the worst of Storm Éowyn. I know local authorities have put in claims and are pursuing claims through insurance or with the Department for repairs and to put things back as they were before Storm Éowyn.

Senator Anne Rabbitte: We have not achieved all of this, have we?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: I am not at the coalface of it because I was not affected so I do not have the detail. My suspicion is probably not at present. Perhaps we will get there.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: I thank the witnesses. Mr. Niall Crowley of the national Traveller accommodation programme was before the committee recently and I asked him about transient sites, which were mentioned in the opening statements.

Is there much demand for transient sites around the country or does it vary from county to county? I know from trying to include an objective in the Kilkenny TAP that it was resisted by the time it got to the plenary meeting of the council. There are still many families who like to head out on the road for the summer. Is the opportunity for transient sites something that can be accommodated through the TAPs?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: In issuing our funding circular annually, we always make it clear that if a local authority wishes to approach us to deliver a transient site, we will consider an application. In the context of the programme board's work, we are working on a project with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to understand the need for transient sites. We certainly do not understand the need at a national level currently. That is why we are undertaking that study. I am sure that individual local authorities may give us a picture but we have to undertake that study.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Maybe the study will bear this out but does Mr. O'Sullivan think it might be because, intergenerationally, that part of their culture is just disappearing?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: As I mentioned, and it is a key statistic, Travellers in housing account for the majority of Traveller households. Therefore, if they are living in a general house, they are not opting to live a transient lifestyle. Then again, we recognise the challenge that some people may want Traveller-specific accommodation but have opted to take standard housing. We will understand better once we undertake the study.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: From some of the families I know, it seems to be a summer phenomenon. They like to go out on the road for the summer and it is more of a leisurely thing. It is not an accommodation requirement *per se*. It was for that reason we tried to put it into the TAP. I accept that it is probably a part of the culture that is disappearing.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We all know from experience in our own childhoods the context of the transient nature compared with today. Just at anecdotal level, it certainly it looks very different today than when I was a child or young person.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: Absolutely.

The second question on accommodation that meets the cultural needs of Traveller families is around keeping horses. Have there been discussions at CCMA level, but also departmental level, around developing design innovations that can incorporate horse projects into group housing schemes, for instance? Are there exemplars out there?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I have mentioned the design guidelines that we have to develop now on foot of the research project that was undertaken. The chair of the NTACC, Mr. Niall Crowley, is anxious that we at least look to see if there is something in there that we can give some direction or point to. We have to acknowledge that, from the Department's perspective, our focus is on the delivery of accommodation for people, that is, social housing. Local authorities can speak for themselves. Local authorities work with many Departments, including agriculture, in the context of wider policy delivery at the local level.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: There are two approaches to that. When they are designing a site, local authorities have cognisance of the fact that some of the families might want to keep horses and keep them close to them, and they see if that can be accommodated, given that it is culturally significant and an important thing to do. I might pass over to Ms Leech because South Dublin County Council has also done equine centres and clubs, if you like, where it provides a central facility for people who want to keep horses.

Ms Elaine Leech: We have two projects in south Dublin. We have a horse project in Fettercairn and an equine project in Clondalkin. Those centres are very near to where we have Traveller accommodation. It provides that balance between having access to a facility but it is also a good opportunity for both members of the settled community and for the Traveller community who have a love of horses. That is something we have in south Dublin that seems to be proving very successful.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: That might be worth a site visit for the committee some day. That is really good.

Across the country, in the witnesses' experience, are there mixed approaches to the development of TAPs in relation to the public engagement piece, the engagement with the Traveller community and, in particular, the capacity of members of the Travelling community to participate fully in the LTACCs? I sometimes feel that there is a barrier there. Sometimes, there is an inconsistency and quite a high level of support is needed to maintain participation in LTACCs at an equal footing with agencies and council officials. That is a general question.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: There is no consistency of approach, given the uniqueness of each local authority. We in the Department, working with the NTACC, have issued guidance. That is where the Traveller organisations and the CCMA are sitting around the same table and we are agreeing the substance of that guidance to drive consistency in developing the TAPs. It does not necessarily mean that you will ultimately get full consistency but you keep moving in that direction and engagement is key. It differs across areas. We have seen where engagement would differ but how to undertake engagement with local Traveller groups is at the discretion of the local authority.

Ms Elaine Leech: Our own LTACC has the TAP as a standing item on the agenda and at every LTACC meeting we report on the progress of the TAP. On the formation of the TAP, we had special meetings of our LTACC specifically to look at the content and location of new sites, sites that needed to be refurbished and where we might undertake feasibility studies for the refurbishment of sites within the TAP. It is very much around having a really active LTACC with the Traveller representatives on it. We also had a fantastic chair during that period who was very proactive. It is about always having it on the agenda and not only dealing with it at the time it comes to form a new TAP. In this way, you are constantly monitoring it. If there are difficulties or issues in terms of delivery, then it is flagged early to the members of the LTACC, which can then look at solutions for how you can overcome those difficulties. That is our experience in south Dublin.

Senator Malcolm Noonan: I thank Ms Leech. I appreciate that.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: I thank everyone. I hope I do not repeat some of the points. A lot of this is local stuff and I am looking to see what the witnesses thoughts are on some of these matters.

One of the big issues is overcrowding on Traveller sites. We can see it in Avila Park in Finglas and at St. Joseph's. There is also a situation where consultation with local people on these sites is not up to standard, in my opinion. We sent a letter to Fingal County Council about consultations with the Traveller community on Dunsink Lane, for instance, and we never got an answer. As the witnesses know, a massive amount of apartments are to be built there – around 2,000 to 3,000 – but there has been no consultation to date whatsoever. That is just not good enough.

Avila Park is right beside a development that will take place. Do we seek numbers of units for the Traveller community because of the proximity? Do the witnesses make any representations in regard to that? Recently, there was a situation in Avila where people took over land next door that was to be developed by Fingal County Council. For years, they have been highlighting overcrowding and so on. The council is very slow in terms of building – a number of units were supposed to be built there but it has not been done.

It has been going on for years. It is frustrating. In regard to Dunsink Lane, there are two sites there, St. Joseph's and St. Mary's. These are administered by Dublin City Council on Fingal County Council's lands. They have no idea where they stand at the moment. They have not even been talked to. That is not good enough. Could someone even get on to them about this? It does not make any sense.

Many halting sites are overcrowded. Looking at the TAPS plan for 2025 to 2029, we are talking about Traveller families that are in accommodation, including HAP, RAS, group housing, halting bay sites and acquisitions of homes. What it tells us is that the Traveller community is being split, left, right and centre into different places. We are not keeping Traveller families together. In many cases that is due to the fact that we are not building enough accommodation. Has anyone come across local authorities that have little or no input when it comes to Traveller accommodation? The feed we get is that some local authorities do absolutely nothing on Traveller accommodation. We can talk about how much money has been invested, but it is in a very narrow way and in certain areas. Are there any plans to expand that? Can some of the local authorities be brought to task over that?

The maintenance and upgrades of halting sites and otherwise was not mentioned here. I would like some input in regard to that because there are a lot of places that are not fit for purpose. In many cases they need upgrades. I do not know whether there is a plan across the board to look at each area, be it a halting site or group housing, to see what can be done. Are these looked at individually to see what can be done? Is the local authority contacted about that?

An Cathaoirleach: Before I bring in the next witness, in relation to the letter to Fingal County Council, we actually got a response from the county manager who referred it to the director of services for planning. The response might not have been as extensive as hoped----

Deputy Dessie Ellis: There was no mention of any communications or otherwise. That is the point I was making.

An Cathaoirleach: We did receive a response.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: Yes, but we did not receive any indication.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Unfortunately, we are not involved in the Dunsink issue the Deputy spoke about. We would not be familiar with this. We would not be able to answer his questions on that but we can certainly follow up and pass on his comments to Fingal County Council.

An Cathaoirleach: For clarity, Deputy Ellis is correct. There was absolutely no consultation whatsoever with the only residents of Dunsink Lane, who have been there for generations. The plan was announced.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: People have settled there on that lane and they have not been consulted. Yet, we are hearing all these plans that are coming out in the media.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Speaking generally, local authorities do consult and engage in extensive consultation with Traveller families and Traveller communities about all aspects of accommodation. To touch on a couple of points, as regards the preferences and moving people apart, which was the phrase the Deputy used, at the end of the day we would always encourage,

and our social workers and our tenant liaison officers, TLOs, in particular sit with, members of the Travelling community, when they are applying for housing or when they are considering housing, to identify as Travellers because that gives us better data and better visibility of the demand for Traveller accommodation. However, if they choose not to, it is a free world and they can decide not to.

As regards their choice of accommodation, it is ultimately their choice. They can opt for mainstream social housing or they can opt for Traveller-specific accommodation or they can opt for both. If a member of the Traveller community is in mainstream housing, they can also apply for a transfer to Traveller-specific accommodation. There are many different avenues. Hand on heart, I can say that our TLOs and our social workers want the person to make the right choice because it is counterproductive if somebody feels they have been shoehorned into making a decision. It does not work that way.

On the upgrades of halting space, there is a refurbishment programme and a number of halting site refurbishment projects that deliver new units and extensions throughout the country. They are complex projects because in a lot of cases you have to find a temporary location for people in order to get in and do the work. It is not safe for people to be in those areas when contractors are in, demolishing or putting in drainage, etc. That is an issue, there is no doubt about it, and that does take time. We have to find in some cases a temporary space, then go in and do the work and move people back in.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: We have projects right across my area and in Labre Park and St. Margaret's that we have been promised would be regenerated and done. This is going on for ten years and more. It is not as though it has only sprung up. Promises were made that these things would be done and the areas would be regenerated. I have been dealing with them for more than ten years. It is absurd.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Each project would have different difficulties and different aspects to it. There are other refurbishment projects that go ahead without any issue at all. We do not hear about those because there is not an issue with them.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: We have not got them in my area.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: We can assure the Deputy there is a strong refurbishment programme around the country. Could we do more? Could we do it quicker? Yes, no doubt about it, but that is a reflection of all the demands in terms of housing that local authorities face. It is not peculiar to that area. We can do more and do it quicker on everything we do, but the demands are just so high and we have limited capacity in everything we do.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: It is my experience that it is so frustrating. We have been promised these things. I went to meeting after meeting, plan after plan, and ten or 15 years later, I am still in the same boat, we are still talking about them and they still have not been done. That is just not good enough.

An Cathaoirleach: That is an experience that has been echoed by a lot of people.

Deputy Dessie Ellis: It is not just in my area. It is echoed in other areas.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: We are talking about accommodation today, but since I have been on this committee, we have had discussions on health, mental health, Traveller health and

all this other stuff. I firmly believe that all that comes back to accommodation and the poor accommodation Travellers often live in.

Mr. O'Sullivan's said Traveller-specific accommodation funding has been fully drawn down by local authorities for the past six years from 2020 to 2025. Was all of that spent? Were projects built? Was it drawn down and none of it returned?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: It is drawn down on the basis that it is expended on delivering projects. I can provide statistics on that. It is all delivered.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Did that deliver any new Traveller site?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We have it on the basis of new units, new group housing units, major refurbishments, new halting site bays and major refurbishments. We have a unit for the entire expenditure overall.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Has any new site been done?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I am not aware of a new group housing site. We are looking at it more in the context of unit delivery. The local authority at the local level would come to us on a certain basis. I cannot say off the top of my head but we can certainly look at it to see whether there was any new group housing scheme overall.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I am not aware of one myself. Maybe somebody else knows.

Ms Elaine Leech: In recent years, South Dublin County Council has delivered three new group housing schemes, with two in the Adamstown strategic development zone, one in Fonthill and one in Newcastle, so there are actually four. I have another new group housing scheme with 15 new homes that include Traveller-specific accommodation. I know Senator Rabbitte mentioned age-friendly and universal design-plus accommodation. In my local authority area, we have benefited greatly from the Traveller accommodation fund in recent years. That is just an example of some of the new group housing schemes we have delivered in South Dublin.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: That is good to hear. I am not aware of any other ones outside of what Ms Leech just said. I am open to correction on that. What specifically, if anything, is the Department doing to address the causes of the high rate of homelessness and the need for emergency accommodation among Travellers?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Emergency accommodation is looked at for all people in homelessness, and obviously Travellers-----

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: They are overrepresented.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: There is a significant number, but the actual numbers are difficult to pin down because of the identifier being on a voluntary basis. It is a fair statement to make that they are overrepresented in homelessness, absolutely.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: During the last five-year TAP period, what target for Traveller housing was met?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I do not have the figures for the last period to hand. I am looking at the current period and looking forward to what the plan is.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Surely Mr. O'Sullivan would have expected that question, if we are talking about a current project, and that we would ask how successful or unsuccessful the last one was.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: We did a survey of local authorities for the TAP period of 2019 to 2024. The figures we got back would have to be verified because there might be a slight overlap. There were 3,358 accommodation units, a term which I use loosely, for Travellers. That would be houses and Traveller-specific accommodation. Roughly speaking, of that figure, between 700 and 800 would be Traveller-specific accommodation. The rest of it would be mainstream social housing. That split would be largely based on the preferences that Travellers would have put in on their social housing application form.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: As we well know, they do not all do that and they do not have to do that, and there is a good reason they might not do that. We do not know.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Correct. It is not a mandatory requirement. Our Traveller liaison officers and our housing officers are always encouraging Travellers to self-identify because there is no downside to that. It gives us better data and better sight of the demand, but the Deputy is right. For a variety of reasons, and it is anecdotal, there might be a reluctance to do that, but we would always encourage them to do it.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: The Department witnesses might come back to us on those figures if they do not have them with them, because some of the questions we would like to have asked the Department would be why we did not meet certain targets, if we did not meet them. I leave that open to the Department. I go back to the CCMA and Mr. Taaffe. This is our second time today. We were in a different committee this morning. He said in his statement that even where funding and approvals are in place, Traveller-specific proposals can have a lower success rate than comparable mainstream housing proposals. What needs to be changed so that is not the case anymore?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: There are a variety of reasons and it is very much case by case. The first issue is that because you are catering for a particular need and a lot of consultation is required to get the design, layout and needs right. That takes time. Sometimes, when family composition changes, that can change halfway through a project too. You have to give it every chance of success. That is an issue that causes a longer timeframe. The second is that there are issues with public acceptance of schemes and additional public consultation being required. The other side is that it can be hard to find available land that is suitable for the needs of the particular individuals and families we are trying to accommodate, in terms of location, size, and access to services. When all of that is put into the mix together, it can take a long time to get the right site, the right design, agreement and engagement, get planning approval under the Part 8 process or whatever it is, and then get a contractor on the ground. It takes that little bit longer.

The time from identifying a site to giving people keys for traditional social housing, with the best will in the world and everything going well, can be a four-year period by the time you spend 18 months building it and six months in planning. For Traveller-specific accommodation, there could easily be another year on the design process, the engagement process with the end users, and engagement with the community to gain that trust and acceptance. That is an issue. It takes resources. We are trying to speed it up. It is about

identifying as early as possible, through the TAP, what the needs are and raising with elected members and the public where we see a need, where the demand is and where we are looking for sites. We try to get that early engagement. The earlier we can engage with all parties involved, the better.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank Mr. Taaffe. I ask Ms Leech to comment. Well done to her council, because it seems to have done a good job delivering the four projects, which should be put on the record. I am sure the council does not get much praise, so I want to put that on record. Could she give any advice to the committee about how the council was able to do the four? I assume the Adamstown one is the one we pass on the train.

Ms Elaine Leech: Adamstown is obviously a strategic development zone. In the plan for that area, there were four Traveller accommodation sites, consisting of six units each, to be included in the development. Right from the very outset, those four new developments included four-bedroom homes, which we talked about having a lack of earlier. That was through the Adamstown SDZ. That project that we currently have on site is in the Clonburris SDZ, which is another 15 units. That was an existing halting site from which we have had to relocate the families. As Mr. Taaffe mentioned, an awful lot of consultation was required to relocate the families and agree a design for the new group housing scheme. I have another Part 8 scheme up before the elected members in May.

There is an awful lot of consultation with the families to agree the design and the needs of the family. We also work closely with our elected members. We are very lucky in South Dublin that our elected members are very supportive of our Traveller accommodation programme. That is key. At our local Traveller accommodation consultative committee, LTACC, we always have the progress of the TAP as a headed item on the agenda. We are always working through that. It is definitely about working with the households, the families, the Traveller representative groups, elected members and the wider public to ensure we are delivering. We were lucky with the Adamstown SDZ and Clonburris. We have had other developments where we have managed to work with developers and develop group housing schemes through Part V, which has proven very successful.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: Without going into specifics, were the people who were allocated those houses on the housing list or were there transfers from existing sites?

Ms Elaine Leech: We piloted Traveller choice-based letting. We devised a booklet for each of the new schemes. They are not the schemes where we were moving existing tenants, but for the new schemes in the SDZs, we actually piloted Traveller choice-based letting, where we produced a brochure for the scheme. Normal choice-based letting is online, but we did it in hard copy. We sent a copy to everybody on our Traveller accommodation list and anybody who, going back to Mr. Taaffe's point, had the Traveller identifier. We also worked with our homeless team, because we would have been aware of a number of larger families in homeless accommodation in need of four-bedroom properties. We piloted that in three places and managed to allocate all those homes through a combination of choice-based letting, our medical team and our homeless team.

Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: I thank Ms Leech. That sounds like good work.

An Cathaoirleach: Traveller choice-based letting is one of the recommendations we are----

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Deputy Maurice Quinlivan: My own council has not got around to doing ordinary choice-based letting. It tried it once and made a complete hames of that. In my opinion, it deliberately made a hames of that. We do not have that. I thank Ms Leech for that. If she has a copy of that booklet and she could send it on to the committee, that would be great to see.

Ms Elaine Leech: I can circulate a copy of one of our most recent schemes.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: Ten years ago, the European Committee of Social Rights, which is part of the Council of Europe, found that the State was violating Travellers' rights on the European Social Charter. It found that Travellers' human rights were being violated by the Irish Government's failure to provide enough accommodation and to maintain sites at an acceptable standard. What has changed since that judgment was made?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: What has changed, particularly since 2020, is the approach to how local authorities draw down funding. In those past five years, there has been full expenditure and a significant delivery of key outputs for Travellers. There has been a significant change in that respect. There is still obviously more progress to be made.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: If that case came before the European Committee of Social Rights today, does Mr. O'Sullivan think it would still find the State in violation of the human rights of Travellers in relation to accommodation?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: It would find it very different and that the dial has shifted. The question is whether the dial has shifted significantly enough. That would be for the committee to determine.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I put these same questions Mr. Niall Crowley, who was with us last week. He is an expert in the area of equality and human rights and has a good track record. He said that Traveller accommodation remains a huge equality and human rights issue. "A huge human rights issue" was the evidence we heard last week. It is a human rights issue in the lack of provision and an equality issue in the lack of appropriate provision. It remains a huge equality and human rights issue. It is kind of remarkable as well that the human rights violations rarely get discussed, aired, addressed or mentioned when they come before us. They are things that should be addressed. Alarm bells should be going off in the Department in terms of its continued violation of the rights of Travellers and the State's failures to provide accommodation.

There was a question earlier about the numbers. I have some in front of me, which I know the Department does not. From 2019 to 2024, under the national Traveller accommodation programme, there were 774 Traveller-specific outputs. This is data from a parliamentary question that was published. Of that, just 96 were new units. In a five-year period, there were just 96 new units out of those 774 Traveller-specific accommodations. A total of 571 were reported as refurbishments, emergency replacements, adaptations, fire safety and health or other upgrades. It is a drop in the ocean in terms of the need, because we do know that there are 1,700 Traveller families, approximately 6,840 individuals, living in unsafe, inadequate conditions on unauthorised sites or sharing housing, over half of whom are under 24. We are getting 96 new units in a five-year period when we have 6,800 individuals living in unsafe and inadequate conditions. Mr. O'Sullivan may say there has been a change in the dial, but I would say it is by a factor of 1% in terms of what is needed and where we need to get to in this.

In 2024, the Housing Commission made four recommendations on Traveller accommodation, including a national Traveller accommodation authority. What is Mr. O'Sullivan's view on that? Do we require a national Traveller accommodation authority to deal with it?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: That is currently one of the recommendations that is being considered within the programme board. Mr. Niall Crowley is the independent chair. Research on that is under way with a national governance approach, taking account of the existing governance approach under the national Traveller accommodation consultative committee. That research is with the Housing Agency, and we expect it to be back within the programme board later this year. It will be considered at that point.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: What is the Department's perspective? Do we need to establish a new authority? Does the Department have a perspective?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I am not in a position to say without the research emerging in the first instance and that it is discussed in the programme board. I am not going to pre-empt those discussions under the independent chair.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: The Housing Commission report was published in 2024. It has been a number of years since we got the Housing Commission report. We still do not know if we want to do the recommendations recommended by the Housing Commission. It is three years later. How many more years until we-----

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: The expert group report was 2019. It is actually a number of years earlier that this recommendation was in place. It was very advanced under the previous chair, Professor Eoin O'Sullivan. He brought the consideration of that recommendation to a point where he felt that he had consensus in moving forward. Eventually, there was no consensus. The new chair came into place. He established an approach to give it meaningful consideration from his perspective. As I mentioned, that approach is in process now. We have to let that process proceed.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: It seems that we have years and years of delay and no substantial change and we are not moving the dial. Thousands of people are living in inadequate situations. How long more will it take for a decision to be made on this?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We have to recognise that we are working in a dynamic environment. We are not waiting for recommendations to be fully considered in advance. We are constantly improving the approach and the delivery in the context of Traveller-specific accommodation. I fully agree with the Deputy that we are still not meeting as much as we should, but we are working in that direction to deliver more. There are significant commitments from the local authorities under the TAPs adopted by the elected members for the period 2025 to 2029. Looking at that and the delivery of that over the coming years and supporting and driving that delivery from the centre with the funding will be critical. It is not a question that the work is going on the programme board and nothing is happening in parallel with that. We are proceeding in parallel to deliver.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: The facts show that there is a failure to deliver when we have 6,840 individuals living in unsafe, inadequate conditions across the State and 90-odd new units in a five-year period. I do not think that is delivery on any scale. The State is in serious violation

of people's human rights. We need a radically different approach and make decisions on some of these key strategic changes more quickly. What has changed since the-----

An Cathaoirleach: Sorry, Deputy. Mr. Taaffe wanted to come in there on that point.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: It is important to clarify that, in that period, 773 allocations were made. A total of 773 Traveller households were housed in Traveller-specific accommodation. A further 2,500 were housed in standard social housing, which was what their preference was. In the totality of the picture, whether it is a refurbished unit or not, that is an allocation. It is a household being housed. The origin of the unit is another issue, but it is important. It is not just that 20 new allocations were made. A total of 773 allocations were made in that period in Traveller-specific accommodation, and 2,500 made in social housing.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: The point was that 96 new units were provided, and the rest had been refurbished of existing stock.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: The important point is that, when somebody-----

Deputy Pádraig Rice: There was a growing population in that time as well.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: -----when somebody is housed, whether it is a new unit, a refurbished unit or social housing, they are housed. That is the point. If the Deputy looks at the wider social housing piece, local authorities built 9,000 new social houses along with AHBs. If the Deputy looks at the total number of allocations into a social house, that would be a multiple of that. We have re-lets and casual vacancies that turn up. When the Deputy adds those in, it becomes a multiple of the new units. That is where the 773 is. A total of 773 Traveller families or Traveller households were accommodated in that period with a new tenancy.

Deputy Pádraig Rice: It certainly is not enough and there are not enough new units, especially in the context of a growing population and the scale of need. It is not meeting the scale of need.

My next question was in relation to ethnicity. What has changed since the State recognised Traveller ethnicity? Is there any change in approach in terms of housing?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: In the context of when the Traveller community was identified as an ethnic group, it is exactly as we have been outlining. Particularly from the Department's perspective in the Traveller-specific funding, that has been a seismic change that we are spending the funding that the Oireachtas is making and that local authorities are delivering the units. That is a significant change.

Equally, the social housing more broadly that is being delivered-----

Deputy Pádraig Rice: It should not be remarkable that local authorities are spending the money that was allocated to them to spend on housing when there is this scale of need. It should not be remarkable that the money is being drawn down and spent when it has been allocated by the Oireachtas. That should not be considered an achievement.

I want to push back on the narrative around the requirements as regards Traveller-specific accommodation. There are many people who opt to not take Traveller-specific accommodation because it is not being maintained properly and because of the conditions. We need a review through a human rights lens, particularly now that we have recognised Travellers as a ethnic

minority. We need to respect those rights and make the accommodation a viable, attractive option because many people will choose not to accept that option because of how poorly such housing and halting sites have been maintained.

A point was raised by a Traveller we spoke to. Why do we call it the "caravan loan scheme" when Travellers refer to them as trailers?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: It is referred to as the "caravan-trailer loan scheme". It is trailers as well. It just happened to be called "caravan".

Deputy Pádraig Rice: If the community we are serving calls them "trailers", should it not be called the "trailer loan scheme"?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We certainly have no objection to changing it to "trailer".

Deputy Pádraig Rice: It is a small point but it is a reflection of an attitude, an approach and a lack of engagement and understanding that need to change. A cultural change is needed on behalf of the State.

Deputy John Connolly: I thank the witnesses for their presentations and contributions. A lot of the questions have been asked regarding figures and digits that I had intended to ask. On the point made by Deputy Rice in relation to Ms Leech's earlier responses in terms of her work and her local authority, I have one query around terminology. I recognise that there have been 773 new tenancies, irrespective of the source, be that refurbishment or new. In terms of the Traveller-specific accommodation, the term Ms Leech used frequently was "group housing scheme". Of the 96 units Deputy Rice spoke about, how many were in group housing schemes? I am assuming that is a new term in contrast to the term "halting site".

Ms Elaine Leech: A Traveller group housing scheme is houses only. There are other schemes that can be a mix of houses, bays and day units. When I am referring to a Traveller group housing scheme, they are six houses.

Deputy John Connolly: How many of the 96 units Deputy Rice referred to are in group housing schemes? How many are new sites or additions to sites?

Ms Elaine Leech: I do not have that data. I am only familiar with my county. I am saying six houses because a lot of the new schemes we have delivered have six units but it can be four units. The one I am doing next month is four units, and that is a mixed scheme.

Deputy John Connolly: That is a mixed scheme.

Ms Elaine Leech: Yes. After consultation with the family, some members of the family indicated that they would like a house while others advocated for a bay with a day unit while still being able to provide for their mobile homes to be on the site as well.

Deputy John Connolly: Mr. O'Sullivan's contribution referred to 78% of Travellers living in standard housing. Strangely enough, that would nearly correlate with the figures in the review of the most recent plan, with 76% or 78% accommodated in standard housing and approximately 22% in Traveller-specific accommodation. Is that 78% in keeping with the preferred choices of the members of the Traveller community who apply for housing?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: My understanding is that it is. The options are explained. As I have said a few times, our Traveller liaison officers and our social workers always encourage Travellers to identify because there is no downside for them and it gives us a better picture of the reality of the demand. It allows us to plan better, assess that demand and try to meet that demand. It is a matter of choice, though. If they choose or do not choose a mainstream social house, for want of a better term, that is their choice. That is the reality of it. To be straight up, to do otherwise would be an infringement of their human rights. It is a choice-based thing.

We take time to encourage them and say that there is no downside to this and there is only going to be an upside. We also encourage them so that once they are in a social house, they can apply for and avail of a transfer. Again, that gives us a better oversight of the demand out there and we can plan better. There is probably an underestimated demand there. There is also an underestimate of the number of members of the Traveller community who are in emergency accommodation.

Deputy John Connolly: Just so I am explicitly clear, are the group housing schemes considered Traveller-specific accommodation rather than standard housing?

Ms Elaine Leech: Absolutely. They are recorded as Traveller-specific.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: On choice, we introduced a Traveller identifier in the social housing application form. The Housing Agency collates the data for the summary of social housing assessment. Interestingly, there is a greater choice for standard housing. That is what is coming through. The Traveller organisations we work with will say we need to do more work in the context of Travellers understanding what their choices are and that they give their proper preferences when completing their forms. However, there are Travellers who choose not to identify, and that is their right.

Deputy John Connolly: I want to ask about the funding for Traveller-specific accommodation. Mr. O'Sullivan said that the Traveller-specific accommodation funding had been fully drawn down by local authorities over the past six years. Is that the same as saying that every local authority in the country has fully drawn down the Traveller-specific accommodation funding that has been made available to it from 2020 to 2025?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Not every local authority would necessarily have drawn it down because it has changed. We do not allocate to them. The local authority comes to the Department now and we will provide the funding on the basis of need. Of the numbers delivered in the period of 2021 to 2025, there were 138 group housing units alone, both new and refurbishments. It must be said that, by and large, a refurbishment is where the house has effectively been abandoned and the local authority has to come in and provide what is essentially a new unit. We have to recognise that local authorities are making good investments for new households in Traveller-specific accommodation. Of course, I fully appreciate that we can improve.

Deputy John Connolly: With the local authorities, is there any oversight for the standards? Deputy Rice mentioned that 6,000 members of the community were living in substandard or unsafe accommodation. Are the local authorities fully responsible for regulating that and for oversight of that? Is there any other body that has an oversight remit in that area?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Local authorities are independent under the Constitution but the Department works hand in glove with local authorities to ensure that the policy and funding programmes are in place so that they can deliver for the needs of all in their respective communities, including Traveller households.

Deputy John Connolly: Going back to the question, are there some local authorities that have not drawn down any funding?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: There may be very few within that. However, it depends on the number of Travellers that are residing in their local authority areas. Invariably, the funding drawn down correlates with demand.

Deputy John Connolly: The figure of €125 million over five years is €25 million a year. Across 31 local authorities, that is less than €1 million per local authority. When Mr. Niall Crowley was here last week, he talked about the emphasis being on refurbishment rather than new development. Is that because of budgetary constraints? Are they a factor? I have seen it frequently mentioned throughout both opening statements. I fully appreciate that we are talking about a complex issue.

However, are we providing enough funding in that area?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: There have been no budgetary constraints. In fact, there was a Supplementary Estimate within that period a couple of years ago of, I believe, approximately €8 million. We are meeting the demand but the process is much slower in delivering Traveller-specific accommodation than it is in delivering-----

Deputy John Connolly: I appreciate that the Department is meeting the demand, but should it be pushing the supply?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Absolutely. We engage bilaterally with the local authorities in the context of a number of issues. That engagement is key with regard to their TAPs. This committee will be watching very closely the delivery of their TAPs in the coming years and whether they are meeting what they planned. It will be challenging but we will be ready to provide the funding to support them.

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: By way of example, if we take my own county of Wexford, we have one group housing scheme that we are designing at the moment. We are not drawing any funding for that because our own team is working on it. However, that will go to site next year, subject to planning, and we will have a significant demand, so while it looks as if we are not going to draw down any money this year, we do have a scheme. All of our need this year will be met through standard social housing allocations because that is what the preference is as we work through our list. The challenge for us is maintenance of our halting sites and keeping those up to standard. We have a budget. We pay for that out of our own revenue at a cost of approximately €600,000 a year. That does not appear in the Department's figures because it is the local authority's own resource. On the face of it, it looks as though there is nothing happening in Wexford but we do have a scheme and we will be drawing on that funding when the scheme goes to construction, hopefully next year. That is just an example.

We have no demand in Wexford for transient sites. It is not a feature of the community we are working with, so we are not developing any of those sites. Straightforward social housing

schemes will actually meet all of our demand this year, and we will access funding next year and the year after to build the group housing scheme.

Deputy John Connolly: Regarding Wexford's TAP from 2025 to 2029, what is the demand like for group schemes?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: Off the top of my head, it only identifies that one scheme. Another was identified, which I believe we have delivered. We met that demand through a cluster of houses that we bought under Part V or that were turnkey properties. We have met most of our demand. Our demand was relatively small and related to isolated families and specific instances. We met it through the social housing scheme because that was their preference. We have a demand for one group housing scheme. It is a particular instance of a family cluster and we will put the scheme to the Department shortly for funding.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: I have a question arising out of that. If Wexford County Council finds through its TAP that the preference of the members of the community is for standard housing, is additional funding available from a source other than the standard fund for housing provision that can be accessed via the Department?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: We can use a targeted acquisition to buy a property to meet a particular need.

Deputy John Connolly: Could the council have used any of the funding over the past five years that has been outlined at this meeting?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: We could use the acquisition specifically for Traveller accommodation, but we use our mainstream social housing funding for that, too.

Deputy John Connolly: If Travellers have a preference for social housing, can the council access Traveller-specific funding from the Department to provide it?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: No. The issue is that any proposals we have for social housing are funded because we have a target. We have actually exceeded our targets. With any proposals that we put to the Department for social housing projects, even those that would bring us over our target, funding is not an issue. We are funded.

Deputy John Connolly: When are the new design guidelines expect to be published?

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We are working on them. It will be later this year when we have a draft. The National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee stated in our meeting yesterday that it wanted to see a draft of it so that it could influence and be satisfied with it. When we have it later this year, it will go to that committee.

An Cathaoirleach: Deputy Gould is very welcome to address the witnesses.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I thank the committee for having me.

Last week at the housing committee, which I sit on, we had the Department and the CCMA in. In the second session, we had Traveller advocacy groups in. What they were saying does not correlate with what the witnesses are saying. They say that a lot of Travellers are taking social housing because there is no choice. Mr. Taaffe made a point that if a Traveller family accepted social housing, they would go on the transfer list. I am not sure what the transfer list

is like in his constituency, but in Cork, it is ten years. If a person takes accommodation in Cork, they might not even be granted a transfer because Cork City Council or County Council considers them adequately housed. Unless there has been a change to the legislation on how local authorities manage tenancies, I have never heard of a Traveller family being allowed to transfer out because they wanted Traveller accommodation. Maybe the witnesses should be sitting down with these Traveller advocacy groups.

I have a few questions. The first is for Ms Leech. How does the Traveller choice-based letting, CBL, work? In Cork city and county, we have one CBL. If a family applies for the house - houses went up today in Kerry Pike in Cork. My phone has been bouncing all day. They will go based on housing need, whether the family is suitable for that size of house, how long they have been on the list and whether they are in homeless accommodation. How can a council run a separate list parallel to that?

Ms Elaine Leech: In our county, we have two housing lists: a Traveller-specific housing list and a standard social housing list. As mentioned earlier, Travellers have the option of being able to be on both lists. A person can be on both the Traveller-specific list and the standard social housing list.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I know some Traveller families who say to me that they have been on the list for too long because they are Travellers. Let us say I apply for a house with Cork City Council and Deputy Rice's Traveller family applies for a house. If I am ten years on the list and they are eight, do they jump over me? If I have eight years and they have ten, do I jump over them? The one thing that we have to be careful about is ensuring that everyone is treated equally and that Traveller families, or settled families, are not discriminated against. Ensuring that there is no discrimination has to be at the heart of this.

Ms Elaine Leech: In terms of choice-based letting, a person only expresses an interest in a property he or she is interested in. We can have people with different times on the list. Somebody might have less time on the list, but the person above them on the list did not apply for a property in that area.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Where do people apply? At my clinic on Monday, I had 17 people and 12 of them were there about housing. There is not an issue of the housing CBL that I do not get raised with me. Houses went up in Kerry Pike today and there will be 1,000 people - there will definitely be 700 or 800 families - applying for those three houses. Allocation will be based on the time that they have been on the list and on their housing needs. How is there a difference between the two lists?

Ms Elaine Leech: In terms of the Traveller list, people will indicate a preference for particular areas, the same as anywhere else. Regarding the choice-based letting pilot, we had a scheme of priority within that. Since they were four-bedroom homes, we had to ensure that they were being used to the maximum in terms of household size and so on. We also looked at where we had developments and we were planning to refurbish those. If somebody felt that they wanted to move out of that refurbished development, we gave them priority because they were moving out of a scheme that we had planned and they had opted to relocate. I have agreed to send a copy of the Traveller choice-based letting to this group, and that will explain how the priority is worked in terms of those units.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I have to get my head around it but I thank Ms Leech. She mentioned something about four- and five-bedroom properties.

It is a huge issue in Cork. There must be 20 families who are waiting on four- or five-bedroom properties. Whether settled people or Travellers, it does not matter; the need is there. When we are looking at delivering specific sites, do we always include four bedrooms? Is it a mixture of two-, three- and four-bedroom units? Earlier, someone mentioned older Travellers and Travellers with disabilities. We are trying to have mixed tenure to keep the community together if possible. Are four-bedroom units always part of the plans?

Ms Elaine Leech: The scheme we currently have under construction involves 15 units. That is for the relocation of a number of families from an existing Traveller accommodation site. We worked with those families to identify their household needs so within that development we have two-, three- and four-bedroom homes. Some of them are age friendly and some are universal design for families who have members who may have wheelchair accessible issues and so on.

Deputy Thomas Gould: In my constituency, we have Spring Lane halting site. Children have been raised in it for years in unbelievably deplorable conditions. There was a big furore at the time because it was in every newspaper and on every television station. Every news programme dealt with the conditions in Spring Lane. Cork City Council went away and looked at applying for planning permission for it. We engaged with the council and made a very detailed submission. I met with the Traveller families on the site, the wider community and the Traveller advocacy groups on that submission. Planning permission was granted two years ago, but nothing has happened since. I could be wrong, but as far as I know the project is valued at €18 million. Planning permission was obtained in respect of the site. It went through Cork City Council, and everything is done. Who is responsible? Where is the accountability? For me, the buck stops with the Department and the Minister. Is there any timeline for that project? It is said to be one of the worst, if not the worst, sites in the State. This case was brought to Europe. We have been condemned in Europe and by the Ombudsman for Children, and still those children are in the same place. Some of them are now adults. This has been going on for so long.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: The Deputy is absolutely right. We would have given the approval almost two years ago for the €18 million development of both sides, Ellis Yard and Spring Lane, but, as he knows, there is also a need for a third site because, as he highlighted, it is overcrowded. Therefore, we have to develop three sites at the same time, and that is where the challenge has been. We actually met with Cork City Council only yesterday. We would meet the council on a regular basis and they told us that the elected members are bringing a lot of pressure to bear on the council now. There are challenges with regard to the third site, but the council is going to make a decision, I believe, about advancing Spring Lane and Ellis Yard independently of the third site if possible. The council will have to look at that possibility in the coming months.

Deputy Thomas Gould: I am from Knocknaheeny, which is in regeneration. The Department made a decision, which was completely wrong in my view, to develop one part of it, move the people from the next part into the first part when it was finished and so on, but that has taken 26 years and is ongoing. For places like Ellis Yard and Spring Lane, if the council cannot do the whole lot together, it should at least go in and do half the site and then move to

the other half. In that way, the council could house half of the families straight away. If one more person tells me that things are complex, I will scream. Everything is complex, but we are dealing with children and with people's lives and the State has a responsibility.

I made a comment in the Dáil recently in relation to children with disabilities not having access to education because of a lack of school places and school transport. Traveller children surely have the right to access clean, safe living conditions. That situation at that site is shocking. People should go down and see it. The conditions there have a direct negative effect on the children's lives and their health but it also has a negative effect on the wider community. It is like a black hole. It is good to hear that the Department is talking to Cork City Council, but we need to be moving on this. That project is going to take a couple of years. I cannot see it being finished in the next three or four years. That cannot be right. Europe has slammed the State. The Ombudsman for Children said that the children are at risk and it is wrong. The Department must act.

I go back to the question of who is responsible for delivering Traveller accommodation. St. Anthony's Park in Hollyhill was developed. The council moved the original site and built a new site across the road near the Apple building. That was full to capacity the day it opened. The site on Straight Road is full to capacity. St. Michael's is full to capacity. The Spring Lane project is only increasing the capacity of an already existing site.

I was a councillor before I became a TD. I was elected to the council in 2009. In the intervening 17 years, there has been no new site in Cork. What we have now is illegal halting sites on Nash's Boreen. We have illegal halting sites popping up around the place. What is happening is that the Traveller community is pitted against the settled community because the local authority, the Department and the Minister have not delivered. Many politicians avoid the issue of Traveller accommodation because they see it as a way of losing votes but there are people in positions in Government whose job it is to deliver it. For Spring Lane, I would ask the Department to do everything in its power to get that project delivered. The other matter I would like a response on relates to the fact that there has been no new halting or housing site developed in Cork in the past 17 years. How can that be right?

An Cathaoirleach: I will just make a few comments before going to the witnesses. I know from the last census and from sitting on the Traveller accommodation committee in Wexford County when I was a councillor that there was a huge difficulty and disparity between the numbers in the census and what the council identified. That is an issue that we have to work on because there is no downside to doing it. In fact, there is an upside to getting the accurate, up-to-date numbers on the Traveller population within our communities because then we know what we have to work with in terms of working towards satisfying the need.

On the trailer and caravan loan scheme, I made the point previously that trailers and caravans are a form of social housing within the Traveller community, in terms of being a choice made by Travellers. Yet, Travellers are the only social housing applicants who are asked to borrow the money to acquire their accommodation. Is that something that we need to look at? I have a difficulty with the notion that Travellers have to borrow under a loan scheme because they choose Traveller-specific accommodation in the form of caravans or trailers. I invite Mr. O'Sullivan to give his views on that.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: We have been working on a pilot for a number of years, and we now have a national preferential caravan loan scheme. Given that it is preferential, it actually works out very well economically for Travellers if they choose to buy because once they repay the loan and the preferential element of it, there is no rental after that.

An Cathaoirleach: I know that but as Mr. O'Sullivan will appreciate, the depreciation on a trailer that goes on to a site is pretty high in comparison with a social house.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Yes, absolutely.

An Cathaoirleach: If we, as public representatives, told social housing applicants that they would have to buy their social house, the reception we would receive would not be too kind.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: Yes, absolutely. The Cathaoirleach is raises a valid issue.

The Traveller community is asking why the Government cannot provide the caravan and then we rent it from it. We all know there is a big difference between a caravan trailer and a social house that is built and lasts 60-plus years. A caravan's lifespan is probably one third of that.

An Cathaoirleach: It may even be less.

Mr. Patrick O'Sullivan: It is all about sustainability and getting value for taxpayers' money. There is also energy retrofitting, and where we are going. A caravan can never achieve the energy abilities of a standard house that has to comply with building regulations and meet energy efficiency standards.

An Cathaoirleach: Yes, we are asking Travellers to take out loans. We are impressing on them that we are facilitating them with loans. That is something we need to look at more seriously.

We are about to publish a report on our module on health and mental health in the Travelling community. To be quite honest, the findings are, at best, extremely stark. A large portion of those findings reflect the poor accommodation that Travellers live in. We are not just talking about accommodation. Their mental health and that of the community in general suffers greatly as a result of living in poor and substandard accommodation. Much of the accommodation could be refurbished to a standard. I was interested in Mr. Taaffe's point about the €600,000 that Wexford County Council paid out of its maintenance budget. Is there not a case to be made for that to come directly from the Traveller accommodation fund, given that we are refurbishing Traveller accommodation? The benefit would be that we have a further €600,000 in our standard housing maintenance budget. Is there not a case to be made because it is Traveller accommodation and we are refurbishing it that we go directly to the Traveller accommodation funding for that, rather than a council's central funding?

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: We do both. I think €300,000 is for the management and services that we provide, including utilities, bills, sometimes security and things like that on halting sites and Traveller accommodation. The other €300,000 goes on what we would call day-to-day maintenance, which would comprise actual physical work and incidentals. The Department would then come in on major refurbishments and the bigger end works that you would only do once every five or ten years. That is where we would draw on the Department's funding.

An Cathaoirleach: As someone who served on the council of which Mr. Taaffe is the chief executive, I know that housing maintenance is always an issue. If there is a facility for us to carve out resources-----

Mr. Eddie Taaffe: We do. The challenge is that we need to move to a more planned maintenance programme for Traveller accommodation and draw on the planned maintenance money and refurbishment money from the Department.

An Cathaoirleach: Ms Leech's county council must be congratulated on the level of development it has done in this area. We will certainly visit some of its programmes. I noted that Senator Noonan expressed an interest in the horse programme. If Ms Leech has anything she can divvy out in terms of knowledge and how the council went about it, that would be a most welcome and productive procedure.

I thank the witnesses. This meeting has been most informative. I hope they found it interesting. We will probably be back and forth with them in the coming months and over the duration of this committee's lifetime.

The joint committee adjourned at 8.44 p.m. until 12.30 p.m. on Thursday, 7 May 2026.