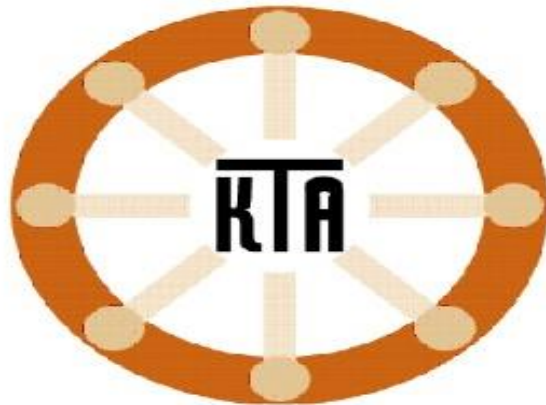


Kildare Traveller Action

Traveller Accommodation Plan (2024-2029)

Submission February 2024



Kildare Traveller Action Ltd.

Kildare Traveller Action welcomes the opportunity to submit comments and recommendations to the Kildare County Council draft Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP) 2024-2028. KTA's submission does not include all Travellers living throughout Kildare, it only includes the Travellers that are currently engaged with the organisation. Population: The population in Kildare consists of 365 families with 1480 individuals, about 500 are children under 15 years. KTA currently is working with approximately 200 plus families. This number is increasing with our outreach plans.

This submission includes recommendations in the following areas:

1. Travellers living on the side of the road/unofficial sites
2. Those in Emergency Accommodation in the county
3. Official Sites
4. Group Housing Schemes
5. Standard Housing
6. Young Couples & New Families
7. Racism
8. Mental health
9. Conclusion

We are hopeful that if the recommendations contained in this submission are accepted, there will be benefits for the wider community in Kildare, all the agencies that work in Kildare, the Traveller community themselves and those charged with responsibility to provide culturally appropriate accommodation for them.

1. Travellers Living on the Side of the Road/unofficial sites 2024

Regardless of the reasons why families find themselves living on the roadside, these families are in an extremely vulnerable position. In response to the

situation that these families find themselves in, there is an onus on the local authority to provide emergency accommodation and/or facilities where appropriate.

This is a crisis situation for KTA and in line with current research which outlines that the national homeless crisis impacts more negatively on disadvantaged communities such as Travellers.

KTA are in no doubt that the number of families taking to the roadside will continue to increase year on year during the lifetime of the plan and in particular young and newly married families due to a lack of accommodation in the county. It is imperative that the families on the side of the road/ in unofficial sites in the county are prioritised for appropriate accommodation and that in the interim sufficient services are put in place to ensure these families can live safely with dignity and respect as a basic human right.

KTA is concerned with the high number of children who are currently on the roadside over 40. We recommend that safe zones need to be designated by Kildare County Council; where Travellers in caravans can go temporarily while awaiting more secure accommodation provision. These zones should have the basic facilities that are needed such as toilets, showers, electricity and refuse collection. It would ensure that services operating in Kildare can access these vulnerable families easily and ensure the appropriate supports are put in place to try to minimise the long-term negative impact on people's physical and mental health.

We believe that if these safe zones are designated this will be welcomed firstly by the Traveller families themselves, and secondly by the residence in the towns in Kildare who are understandable frustrated and concerned with the number of Travellers on the side of the road. We believe this will also be welcomed by all the statutory agencies, not least An Garda Síochána and the County Council executive who are spending time and resources consistently moving people on, while knowing they have nowhere to go. KTA recommends that the TAP 2024-2028 represents the crisis situation that we are currently in and addresses it with urgency.

The health and safety of Travellers on the roadside needs to be prioritised in providing basic human rights and facilities to prevent health outbreaks.

There are a number of Traveller families who travel to Kildare for work during the year. This is historical and these families while travelling temporarily need

to have consideration within the accommodation plan with provision of temporary services.

KTA recommends: A Full needs assessment of the Traveller families on the side of the road be carried out and provision in the TAP 2024-2028 to accommodate them in suitable and appropriate accommodation.

Safe Zones: which are fully serviced be set up in Kildare where Travellers are roadside, in areas like Maynooth, Kildare, Monasterevin. These would provide safe serviced spaces for families especially those with children while more suitable accommodation is sourced.

2. Emergency accommodation

KTA is concerned at the number of Travellers who are in emergency and temporary accommodation and are homeless. The families we work with have reported to us that this situation is having a detrimental impact on their mental health with overcrowding, lack of facilities and the length of time they are having to stay in this situation. KTA feels that priority should to be given to Travellers who are homeless, or in emergency accommodation to find more suitable accommodation especially where

- their mental health is impacted
- Where domestic abuse is present and families are fleeing danger
- for those who have children with additional needs such as autism ADHD and
- When they have been in the emergency accommodation for 12 months.

KTA Recommends that a more holistic wraparound support should be provided to these families with priority given to ensure more secure accommodation is provided. Currently KTA is working with 7 families in emergency accommodation all who have young children and who have identified that their mental health has suffered as a result. Two of the families have children with additional needs such as ADHD, Autism and the need to respond to the accommodation need for children with additional need is vital. This needs to be considered by the local authority when prioritising families for accommodation. It is known that Travellers tend to have larger families and this needs to be considered when providing suitable emergency accommodation.

KTA is concerned that when Travellers who are homeless present to the service they are required to find their own accommodation when emergency accommodation isn't available to them. They are expected to search for hotels for their own accommodation and if the hotel is willing to accept payment from invoices, many hotels aren't willing accept them when a Traveller is presenting. We believe this is adding undue mental health difficulties stressors to Travellers a number of whom have contacted KTA for support in this area.

KTA recommends that where a Traveller is tasked with finding hotel accommodation support from the County council is provided to find a suitable space for the family. A list of hotels which the county council has built a relationship and is willing to provide accommodation should be provided and especially where children are concerned immediate support given. The majority of hotels contacted will not accept invoiced payments and will only accept pre-payment a more user friendly system will need to be found to support Travellers emergency accommodation needs in this regard. We would recommend that this needs to be resourced in a different way so that the impact on mental health is lessened and what is a stressful and difficult time in someone's life is not exacerbated further by having to source their own emergency accommodation.

Travellers often are refused entry to the very hotels they are trying to find for emergency accommodation in and this can often be extremely distressing for the family involved.

3.Official Sites

There are three official sites in County Kildare, Tankards garden, Newbridge, Andrew Athy, Blacklion Maynooth

KTA welcomes the completion of improvements to the Newbridge site and the proposed redevelopment of the Athy site. Improvements are needed in the Blacklion with residents worried about the mould and need for deep retrofit and upgrading of their homes there. This needs to be prioritised in the new Traveller accommodation plan.

The Andrew halting site in Athy is prone to flooding and needs remedial work to ensure that it is safe and healthy.

4.Group Housing

Evidence across the country has shown that when small group housing schemes are provided to Traveller families the results are positive and remove some of the issues of large groups of Travellers being housed together which has on occasion lead to conflict. When the immediate family are accommodated in this manner it can have positive outcomes. We have families who would like to avail of group housing as their preferred accommodation in Naas, Newbridge, Kildare and across the county.

KTA recommends that group housing schemes are developed as part of the new Traveller Accommodation Plan. KTA recommends that over the life of the plan that 6 such developments are identified, planned and implemented over the life of the Accommodation plan.

5.Standard housing

Most Travellers are in standard accommodation whether private rented or county council provided accommodation. The number of families that KTA have supported in these areas are coming from overcrowded accommodation and there are significant issues with the accommodation where cold damp conditions exist. KTA recommend that a deep retrofit be completed in the life of this plan. Given that there is evidence of poorer health outcomes for Travellers providing homes which are safe free from mould and damp and are warm should be a priority of the county council especially in an environment where being more energy efficient is important. KTA is constantly being asked to support families who are in substandard accommodation and often in overcrowded spaces. We currently work with 6 families with 4 or more children one family has 8 children in a three bedroom house and this overcrowding is an issue for those with larger families. This needs to be addressed in the development of accommodation plans and larger dwellings sourced for such families.

Accommodation: The KPI figures for 2023 showed that 39 individual Travellers were signposted to the local authority for accommodation issues. These issues include roadside, emergency, homeless and unsuitable accommodation. These families are vulnerable with many challenges including mental health issues, family support poor health and /or with special needs children.

6.Young Couples and new families

KTA currently have over 300 Travellers in Kildare in the 15 25 age category who are consented to work with the Primary Healthcare team. It is likely within the life of the plan that a majority of these young people will be getting married and starting their families. This will need to be considered in the housing need in the lifetime of the plan.

7. Racism

KTA works with over 200 families, and those who have sought support from us related to accommodation have all spoken about their feelings when having to engage with services. The feeling that Travellers express most to us when interacting with officials from county council departments in relation to accommodation are mostly negative. Being hung up on, spoken to abruptly, not communicated with in relation to their application, being spoken down to, being told to stay with friends and family when they are homeless and don't have this option open to them have all been identified to us in KTA as issues which are not helpful and antagonise. While these situations may arise because of pressure related to work the perception that Travellers have because of the racism they experience is negative and staff would need to be mindful of the duty of care they have in this regard.

8.Mental Health

The social determinants of health model identify the impact of poor accommodation on health and when responding to accommodation in the Traveller community this needs to be acknowledged and something needs to change so that the health impact on Travellers is lessened.

Our outreach work shows mental health as a major issue. The KPI showed 252 individuals received support for mental health issues while 40 individuals required referrals to the relevant services. Travellers who we have worked with in the last year have identified the impact that their living situation has been having on their mental health especially those in emergency accommodation or on the roadside.

The impact of poor mental health can have an impact on maintaining tenancies and KTA would recommend that if Travellers tenancies are being put at risk due to mental health issues that additional wraparound supports be identified to support these vulnerable tenants. KTA is willing to support the county council in these areas in identifying suitable solutions before evictions happen.

9. Conclusion

KTA and Travellers have for a long time raised the issue with Accommodation

- Homelessness, roadside families over 40 children living roadside
- Overcrowding, couch surfing
- Sub standard accommodation need to upgrade and make it more energy efficient.
- Need for building Traveller specific group housing 6 families who would avail of this.
- Young families over 300 young Travellers who in the lifetime of the plan will need accommodation.
- Supporting the families in homeless, emergency accommodation to access suitable long term accommodation

There is a need to implement the actions from the Traveller Accommodation Plan 2024-2028 and that the same issues do not emerge in the next plan. Solutions need to be found which are workable for all of the needs within the Traveller community.