

**Report of the 4th North/ South Roundtable on Traveller
Accommodation Policy held in Ballybot House, Newry, Co.
Down on 3rd November 2006.**

Present

Joe	Lenaghan	NCCRI
Rose	Smith	Louth Travellers Support Group
Conor	Keyes	Omagh Travellers Support Group
Deirdre	Brady	Craigavon Travellers Support Group
Martin	Collins	Pavee Point
Caroline	Fawl	Donegal Travellers Project
Emma	Hoey	National Travellers Women's Forum
Thomas		
Barney		
Katie	Reilly	Louth Traveller Project

Apologies

Phillip	Watt	NCCRI
Siobhan	McLaughlin	Donegal Travellers Project
Hugh	Friel	Donegal Travellers Project
Derek	Hannway	An Munia Tober Belfast
Mark	Donohue	An Munia Tober Belfast
Seamus	Donnelly	An Tearmann Coalisland
Conor	McArdle	Craigavon Travellers Support Group
Mary	McDonagh	Leitrim Travellers Support Group
Rose	Smith	Louth Travellers Support Group
Mary	Harper	Louth Travellers Support Group

1.0 The aims of the Roundtable are:

- To exchange information on recent developments on Travellers, North and South
- To examine the gap between stated government policy and the implementation of policy on Travellers, North and South.
- To focus on Traveller specific accommodation as one example of such a gap and to identify possible future strategies.
- To provide a brief outline of policy implementation issues for presentation to the North South Intercultural Forum

2.0 Matters Arising from the Report of the Roundtable held on 21st September 2006.

2.1 Traveller Education Strategy 2005-2010

The Education Strategy will be launched on 21st November at 2.30 in Dublin. (Venue to be confirmed)

2.2 High Level Group

There are still no Traveller representatives on the High Level Group and Pavee Point are continuing their work with political parties on establishing a Traveller Agency.

2.3 Craigavon Update

- The new six-pitch site will be completed in mid-November 2006 and although it is currently too small for the families moving onto the 6 pitches, one family has been permitted to share a bay. It was agreed that the site is of a very high standard and that it meets the existing needs of the families, however, there are a number of young people who in four/ five years will have to leave the site when they marry as no provision exists for future needs. So whilst they are camping legally at present, there is concern that some of those will be camping illegally in the future.
- The two emergency sites are still in the planning stages, with one receiving over 400 objections from local residents. The need for these sites is immediate however, Craigavon Travellers Support Committee are concerned that it could take up to two further years before there is any provision.
- Craigavon Travellers Support Committee is working with the family evicted from their own land to appeal the decision. They have contacted NIHE for support, however, as the family are not NIHE tenants or on NIHE land, they have been unable to help. There was an indication that the reason for eviction centred on the poor access route to the land; however, a new private dwelling has been constructed beside the site. The Equality Commission have been contacted and were involved in the previous planning inquiry involving Craigavon Borough Council and a planned site. The Commission has a watching brief and investigative powers as well as the power to take the case to the County Court. It was agreed that the Roundtable be kept informed of this case and to remain on the agenda, particularly as the family had secured their own accommodation in the absence of any alternative provision and fact that a house could be built adjacent to the site.
- The issue of planning permission was again raised in the light of the Review of Public Administration which will give the new 'Super Councils' control of the issue. Concern was raised in relation to the fact Councils have generally not been responsive or supportive to the planning needs of Travellers.

2.4 All-Ireland Traveller Health Study

- The meeting of all the Traveller groups in the North to discuss the study and plan the actual research was cancelled last week. There remains concern that the work in the North is under-resourced and that certain geographical areas may not be covered. It was agreed that the meeting needed to be reconvened as soon as possible.
- Omagh Travellers Support Group is going to cover the Fermanagh area in the study. They have linked with Donegal Travellers Project and are working on the actual research.

2.5 An Munia Tober Strategic Role

- Work is ongoing on the development of *An Munia Tober's* strategic role in the absence of a regional body. It was reported that ITM had been contacted over the summer period as *An Munia Tober* wanted to meet all the Traveller groups to discuss the relationship with the Traveller support groups and clarify reporting and feedback mechanisms. ITM are still willing to support this work if required.
- The impact of having no regional policy support is ongoing, particularly in relation to the Control of Unauthorised Encampments legislation and recurrent accommodation issues.

2.6 National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee

- It was reported that there has still been no Chairperson appointed to the *National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee* despite the fact that Traveller Support Groups have been written to asking for nominations. Nominations have been made yet there is still no movement on the issue and planned conferences and other work have had to be put on hold.
- It was reported in the previous Roundtable that there is concern with regard to the annual count of Travellers in each local authority as there is overcrowding as Travellers share accommodation. It was also stressed that the lack of Traveller-specific accommodation available means the only option for many is housing.

3.0 Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups

NCCRI have now published the research on *Improving Government Service Delivery to Minority Ethnic Groups*. The report has been accepted by three governments/ administrations (Dublin, Belfast and Scotland) with recommendations for service delivery to BME groups including Travellers. The report was circulated to the Roundtable and more can be obtained by contacting NCCRI.

4.0 NIHE Traveller Consultative Forum

The Roundtable received copies of the Minutes and Draft Terms of Reference from the first meeting of the Housing Executive's Traveller Consultative Forum held on 9th October 2006. A number of concerns were discussed:

- In terms of Traveller membership, there are no Travellers and there is only one Traveller organisation represented on the Forum despite the fact that a number of critical accommodation issues are ongoing in Craigavon and other areas. It was noted in the previous Roundtable meeting that no other groups had been invited to attend. It was felt that the membership needed to be open to more groups or that some form of effective reporting mechanism be developed with An Munia Tober. It was agreed that this once again highlights the need for a regional driver of Traveller issues and the need for a structure and process to be implemented.
- It was also noted that the other members, with the exception of the elected member for Carrickfergus Council, the PSNI and the Equality Commission, it is almost entirely represented by government departments. Individuals on the roundtable were concerned that some of the representatives have not supported Traveller needs and issues in the past. It was agreed that the membership of this Forum needed to be opened up as it did not afford Travellers real representation and left the one Traveller Support Group represented in a vulnerable position.
- It was also noted that Derek Hannway is listed as representing the now defunct Traveller Movement (NI). The organisation has not existed for over a year and it was agreed that the Housing Executive are aware of this and that it reflects negatively on the Traveller Unit at NIHE.
- It was also noted that there was no mention in the minutes of issues outside of Belfast which has been a cause for concern for the Traveller Support Groups based outside of Belfast. It was also suggested that the Forum should rotate the location of meetings to ensure they actually see the impact of their discussions and also to allow other Traveller Support Groups to participate.
- The Roundtable also noted the discussion in relation to 'Irish' Travellers and agreed that more important issues in relation to Travellers needed to be considered.
- It was agreed that the draft Terms of Reference were not, in fact, a terms of reference. It is more a list of actions as opposed to outlining the membership, how decisions will be made etc.
- It was agreed that whilst the NIHE had appeared to already decided what it issues it would discuss at the Forum, there were

pressing issues that needed to go on their agenda including the implementation, monitoring and review of the 5 year accommodation plan, the management of Group Housing Schemes and updating the Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment from 2002. There also needs to be consultation with Traveller Support Groups on all of these issues.

- It was agreed that NIHE have done more in relation to Travellers in three years than the local Councils did in thirty years and that an Accommodation Forum needed to be retained when the responsible is transferred back to the 'Super Councils'. It was agreed that this issue needs to be placed on the OFMDFM Race Forum. This issue also highlights the need to gain the support of other organisations such as NCCRI, the Equality Commission, and NIHRC etc. in relation to concerns on the transfer of responsibility for Traveller accommodation back to Councils.
- It was agreed that the meeting with An Múinte Tober needed to be re-convened as a matter of urgency.

5.0 **Update on the *Research into the Impact of the Troubles and the Border on the Traveller Community.***

Caroline Fawl from Donegal Travellers Project updated the Roundtable on the Building Ethnic Peace project, which is a pilot model of reconciliation and building positive relationships. The purpose of the research is to give the Traveller community an opportunity to tell their stories and experience in relation to the conflict and explore the impact on the relationship between Travellers and the settled community. The project was developed to address a number of issues including

- The lack of inclusion of Travellers and no analysis of the impact of the Troubles on the community
- The lack of recognition of Travellers needs in the Peace building processes
- The opportunity to Travellers voices to be heard
- Highlight commonalities between Travellers and the settled community and build relationships
- Develop a shared vision of Ireland
- Encourage an understanding of cultural commonalities and differences and to work towards the elimination of social exclusion.
- Get to know one another.

The Roundtable discussed a number of issues including:

- The invisibility of Travellers during the conflict and the link to the massive rise in racist attacks since the ceasefires,
- Segregated housing
- The location of Traveller Support Groups (largely Nationalist areas),
- Intimidation of Travellers by paramilitaries,

- The lack of community development infrastructure structure for Travellers along the border counties
- The Travellers who do not identify themselves as Travellers for fear of intimidation because of their perceived culture or religion
- Small number of Travellers previously engaged in the conflict.

It was also recommended that Travellers be employed to gather the information and collect stories.

For further information contact buildingethnicpeace@hotmail.com or Donegal Travellers Project on 00353 74 9129281 / 74 9129154 from the North or 074 74 9129281 / 74 9129154 from the South.

6.0 Events / Information Sharing

- 6.1** The National Traveller Women's Forum are hosting their first Traveller Women's Policy Forum on 15th November in Tullamore Court Hotel. They will look at the role and format of the forum, violence against women and have input by the National Network of Women's Refugees and Support Services. For further information contact Emma Hoey at 087 6200833
- 6.2** A conference on Community Development and working with Travellers will be held at the Carmelite Centre in Dublin on 15th November for Traveller Support Groups only. Further information from Martin Collins at Pavee Point.
- 6.3** A conference will be held in Dublin (possibly Kilmainham) on 7th December addressing Community Development and Working with Travellers. It is aimed at a cross section of organisations and agencies. Further information from Martin Collins at Pavee Point.
- 6.4** The National Traveller Women's Forum will host their Annual Forum Day on 20th November in Galway. There are normally 200-250 participants on the day and this year's theme will look at drug related issues.
- 6.5A** Minority community training programme commences in Castleblayney on 23rd November. For more information contact Emma Hoey on 087 629083
- 6.6** Irish Traveller Movement are meeting the regional groups in the City Hotel, Sligo on 7th November from 11am – 1.30.
- 6.7** Third North/ South Intercultural Forum 16th November Fairways Hotel, Dundalk, Co Louth organised by NCCRI/SYNERGY
The aim of the Third North/ South Intercultural Forum is to look at funding policy and the sustainability of groups involved in the BME sector, in the border counties of Ireland and Northern Ireland. A number of important funders have been invited including the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) who will outline their plans for the forthcoming Structural Funds 2007-2013, OFMDFM & DEJELR, Pobal and the Big Lottery, and other major funders. The forum will look

specifically at the barriers related to accessing funding for addressing issues such as racism and interculturalism.

- 6.8** Donegal Travellers Project is hosting a number of events for Anti-Racism in the Workplace Week 6- 11 November. For further information, contact the project on 00353 74 9129281 / 74 9129154 from the North or 074 74 9129281 / 74 9129154 from the South
- 6.9** Louth Traveller Women's Group are launching their Traveller calendar on 5th December. For further information, contact the group directly.
- 6.10** STEP/ANIMATE/NCCRI are publishing their conference report on Promoting the Rights of Migrant Workers today. For a copy of the report contact joe@nccri.ie.
- 6.11** The Traveller Education Strategy is being launched on 22nd November. For further details contact Pavee Point or ITM.
- 6.12** There are a number of events organised for Traveller Focus Week – for more information contact Pavee Point, ITM or the National Traveller Women's Forum

6 Date of Next Meeting

9th February 2007 at Ballybot House Newry.