

**The Development of Traveller Tenant  
Participation  
In  
The Management of Accommodation**

**ITM 2,001**

## **Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)**

The Irish Traveller Movement was founded in November 1990. It is a national network of organisations and individuals working within the Traveller community. The ITM consists of a partnership of Travellers and settled people committed to seeking full equality for Travellers in Irish society. This partnership is reflected in all ITM structures.

The Irish Traveller Movement was formed to be a national platform, through which Travellers and their organisations are enabled to:

- highlight the issues faced by Travellers and to press for real solutions.
- debate ideas and formulate and promote culturally appropriate initiatives.
- provide those active at a local level with support and solidarity.
- develop alliances at national level.
- Challenge the many forms of individual, structural and institutional racism with which Traveller have to deal.

The Irish Traveller Movement has in its membership over 80 Traveller organisations from all parts of the island of Ireland, and extends to contact with Traveller groups in Britain.

The ITM works specifically on accommodation issues. It provides a range of supports to Traveller organisations on accommodation issues and lobbies and campaigns on these to effect change in the accommodation situation of Travellers. The ITM develops a range of policy support initiatives on Traveller accommodation. This document is one such support.

### **For further information contact:**

David Joyce & Gràinne O'Toole,  
Accommodation Officers,  
Irish Travellers Movement,  
4-5 Eustace Street,  
Dublin 2.

Tel: (01) 679 6577  
Fax: (01) 6796578  
E-mail: itmtrav@indigo.ie

## **The Document**

This document is aimed at Traveller organisations and local authorities. It attempts to set the context and meaning of tenant participation from a Traveller perspective. It can be used as a resource by the local authority and Traveller groups to assist in the development of a shared understanding of Traveller tenant participation in accommodation management.

The first section will outline the background to Traveller tenant participation in accommodation management and the definition and key concepts underpinning it. Section two will set out the framework for Traveller tenant participation that is emerging and the key components needed to make the initiatives work. The third section will set out the stages in developing Traveller tenant participation approaches and the outcomes that can be achieved using this approach. The final section will outline what needs to happen to put in place these approaches.

This document will concentrate on Traveller tenant participation initiatives in Traveller specific accommodation. However, there is a real need to target Traveller tenants in local authority housing to participate in mainstream tenant participation forums. Many of the principles and practices referred to in this document are transferable to Traveller tenant participation in mainstream housing.

## **Section One**

### **Background to Traveller Tenant Participation**

In recent years there has been increasing emphasis placed on tenant participation in estate management by the government. 'Greater Involvement of tenants in the running of their estates is essential to ensure the delivery of the type and quality of housing services which tenants want. Tenants know better than anyone else the strengths, weaknesses and the problems of their estate'. (DOE, 1993, memorandum on the Preparation of a Housing Management Strategy). This has been reflected to some extent through local authorities developing an estate management approach to local authority housing estates and developing tenant participation strategies as part of this process.

Successive governments have highlighted the deficits in local democracy. Subsequently, the reform of local government is underway following the publication of 'Better Local Government- A Programme for Change'. Hopefully this will provide for greater involvement of people in developing local authority policy on a range of issues. This reform has led to a range of strategic policy committees being established. It is hoped that these structures will develop a synergy between participative democracy and representative democracy. Tenant participation in estate management is a key arena for the development of more participative structures at local level.

The first reference to Traveller tenant participation in accommodation management in government policy was the 'Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community', 1995. This has created the framework for the development of Traveller tenant participation strategies and has emphasised the importance of Traveller involvement in the design and management of their accommodation.

### **What is Traveller tenant participation in accommodation management**

Traveller tenant participation is the formal and structured involvement of Traveller tenants in decision-making related to the management and development of their own accommodation.

#### **What it involves**

It can range from the activities such as:

- national structures which provide the basis for Traveller tenant participation in policy
- county level formal structures to design an overall Traveller tenant participation strategy

- formal structures to redevelop existing and develop new Traveller accommodation
- site/accommodation forums to develop Traveller accommodation agreements or action plans by Traveller tenants and the local authority setting out agreed plans for specific accommodation over a 2-3 year period

### **Central Concepts**

**Community Development Approach:** Community development is ‘enabling people to enhance their capacity to play a role in society of which they are part. It works towards helping groups and communities to articulate needs and viewpoints and to take part in collective action to influence the processes that structures their everyday lives’ (ADM, March 2000, The Interface between Community Development and Local Development) The use of community development is key to developing collective approaches to Traveller tenant strategies that are based on empowerment and real Traveller participation.

**Real Partnership:** The achievement of real partnership involves power sharing so that all the players have a key role in the decision making process. This involves respecting each other, establishing good communication lines, problem solving and implementing agreed actions.

**Anti-racism:** Anti-racist objectives are a central component to Traveller tenant initiatives. It is vital that the discrimination and racism being experienced by Travellers is tackled within the process. Appropriate training on intercultural skills and anti-racist practice for all parties should be implemented from the outset. This would contribute greatly to ensuring that quality Traveller tenant participation strategies can be developed.

**Diversity:** Building diversity in to the strategy at the beginning will ensure that the range of needs that exist within the Traveller community are catered for. This should ensure that the needs of Travellers with disabilities, Traveller women and older Travellers needs are addressed within the overall strategy.

**Consensus decision-making:** Agreement between all parties is essential to strengthen the outcomes of the work and ensure that all those involved in the strategy will be committed to ensuring the outcomes are implemented.

**Commitment:** The key players need to be committed to the process as this will ensure that decisions and actions are implemented as planned.

**Evaluation:** Structures and training developed by the Traveller tenant participation initiatives should be monitored and evaluated on an ongoing basis. The National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee has a role in monitoring this process to ensure that equality objectives are met.

**What it is not about**

- It is not a control mechanism, which can be used to keep tabs on tenants
- It is not a mechanism whereby Travellers and Traveller organizations will sort out management issues on sites.
- It is not about individual gain at the expense of the collective.
- It is not about shifting of responsibilities for poor maintenance or lack of resources to the tenant
- It is not about rubber stamping decisions already made by the local authority
- It is not a mechanism to only resolve maintenance issues.

## **Section Two**

### **Framework for Traveller Tenant Participation**

A framework for Traveller tenant participation is been consolidated at a national, county/city and local level as follows:

**National level** through the establishment of the **National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee** by the Department of the Environment and Local Government.

This committee comprises representatives of the:

- Irish Traveller Movement
- National Traveller Womens Forum
- Pavee Point
- The County and City Managers Association,
- County councilors
- Department of the Environment and Local Government
- Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform.

NTACC role is to monitor the preparation, adequacy and implementation of the local accommodation programmes and to advise the minister on the most appropriate measures for improving consultation with Traveller interests and Traveller tenant participation at a local level in the design and management of accommodation.

**County/City level**, through the **Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees operating in each local authority (LTACC) and Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs)**. These committees comprise elected representatives and officials of the local authorities, Travellers and Traveller organisations. The role of LTACC is to advise in relation to the preparation and implementation of a Traveller accommodation programme for the functional area of the appointing local authority concerned and to advise on the management of accommodation for Travellers. The experience of having an independent chair in the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee has proven to be very helpful, consideration should be given to the appointment of independent chairs for the LTACCs. The local government reform structures such as the Strategic Policy Committees, once fully operational, will provide additional structures for the development of tenant participation strategies.

**Local level**, through the implementation of the Pilot Initiatives for the Management of Traveller Accommodation. The aim of the scheme is to encourage initiatives, which bring about new relationships between Travellers and local authorities for the management of Traveller accommodation. It is envisaged that the scheme should encourage and promote greater participation of Travellers in management of their own accommodation.

## **Components needed to establish Traveller Tenant Participation**

### **Key Players**

- Local Authority Officials from the Housing, Community and Planning Departments whose role is to provide expertise on a range of issues such as planning, refurbishment issues, design features etc. and give clarity on their role as the landlord on issues of allocation and management. It is important that the personnel attending have the power and knowledge to make decisions as the need arises.
- Traveller tenants and prospective Traveller tenants whose role is to provide specific knowledge on issues as they arise in relation to their accommodation in a collective way.
- Traveller organizations are organised with a membership of Travellers and 'Settled' people seeking to work together as equal partners and can also be organized with a membership made up solely of Travellers. Their role is to create a forum where Travellers can come together to formulate their interests and needs and define a policy agenda that reflects these. They have a key function in the development of collective responses to Traveller tenant issues and representing the collective voice of Traveller on issues.

### **Resources**

- the local authority should be in a position to restructure its existing staff and resources to best engage with the partnership and tenant participation approach.
- Traveller organisations should be in a position to employ at least one accommodation worker in each county and city area to support the participation of Traveller interests in the process.
- A budget for in programme costs including meeting costs, training courses, information costs should be available
- The Department of the Environment and Local Government in consultation with the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee should ensure that a scheme is put in place to make available the level of resources needed to implement the initiatives.

## **Section Three**

### **Stages for Building Traveller Tenant Participation**

#### **Pre-development Phase:**

This phase involves:

- confidence building measures to establish trust between the players such as resolving longstanding maintenance issues.
- pre-training initiatives involving all the key players to tease out a programme for Traveller tenant participation initiatives. This would facilitate the development of the skills necessary for all to participate in the process and the development of a positive relationship between all those involved.

#### **Short-term:**

The Pilot Initiatives for the Management of Traveller Accommodation can be used to build up partnership arrangements between all the key players and respond to issues should as location of sites, design features, refurbishment and allocation issues. The key players should come together to plan their approach. In this initial stage it is important that these players work out a shared vision of what needs to be achieved and how they will work to together.

#### **Medium to long term:**

Structures such as estate management forums or committees can be established to oversee the management of Traveller accommodation. This can involve overseeing the development of the following:

- sites or schemes being built,
- sites or schemes being refurbished
- ensuring the inclusion of Travellers in mainstream housing initiatives.

This process can lead to the development of a site agreement which include targets to address key issues such as site or refurbishment completion, the provision of services and addressing problems over a specified period of time.

#### **Long-term:**

The framework for Traveller tenant participation as outlined above needs to be constantly refined to ensure that real partnership and consensus decision-making is achieved. This work should lead to the development of written policy of Traveller tenant participation within the local authority along guidelines as set out in the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community.

**The outcomes of using Traveller tenant participation strategies:**

- Better decision making
- Anti-racist models of practice
- Commitment to implementation
- Improved quality of design and service to Travellers
- Better ways of working in a partnership structure based on consensus decisions making.
- A redefining and clarification of the roles and responsibilities of both employed staff and the key players involved in Traveller accommodation.
- Value for money as quality accommodation designed and managed in partnership with tenants leads to cost effectiveness.

## **Section Four**

### **Recommendations**

- Funding needs to be made available to Traveller organisations to employ a Traveller accommodation worker in each county.
- The local authority needs to ensure that personnel working on the Traveller tenant initiatives have the power to make decisions in relation to the project.
- The local authority may need to make staff available to successfully implement Traveller tenant participation strategies who have the expertise in this area of work and the time to follow through on these initiatives
- Evaluation and review procedures for the Traveller tenant participation initiatives need to be put in place by the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- Anti-racist training modules need to be developed and implemented by the key players which can be quality proofed in association with the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- Specific inservice days for local authority staff, Travellers and Traveller organisations to engage in anti-racist training need to be timetabled for each year to ensure that the development of intercultural skills and anti-racist ways of working is given priority
- Models of good practice should be circulated to facilitate exchange of learning

### **Conclusions**

There is a real opportunity to develop new ways of working which have the capacity to deliver real change in the accommodation situation of Travellers. Given the backlog of provision of Traveller accommodation there is a history of tension in the relationships between the local authority, Travellers and Traveller organisations. However, a commitment to working in partnership and developing a clear vision and new ways of working can be achieved.

Traveller tenant participation is not the answer to everything but it is a potential progressive strategy, which can begin to address some of the issues in relation to Traveller accommodation. In many ways the next period can be viewed as an opportunity to build real partnership between all the key players. It is important that these opportunities are utilised in the interests of addressing the accommodation situation of Travellers.



