

TITLE/ORGANISATION	Traveller Thematic Group
VENUE:	MS Teams, Online
DATE/TIME:	6 November 2025, 10.30am – 12.00pm
List of Attendees:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deirdre McAliskey (STEP NI) • Kieran Shields (Education Authority NI) • Lisa Hogg (Craigavon Travellers Support Committee) • David Glasgow (NI Housing Executive) • Jonathan Wilgenbus-Lamb (Housing Rights) • Carol Folis (Omagh Traveller Interagency Forum) • Marie McLaughlin (Western Trust Traveller Health and Wellbeing) • Paul Noonan (Equality Commission Northern Ireland) • Paddy McEldowney (Public Health Authority) • Judith Searle (Barnardo's NI) • Robert Irvine (NI Local Government Partnership on Traveller Issues) • Colin Caughey (NI Human Rights Commission) • Claire Fordyce (Belfast Health & Social Care Trust) • Aisling Walsh-Papageorgiou (Toybox) <p><u>TEO</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Naylor • TEO Officials
Declined/Apologies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hannah Russell (NI Human Rights Commission)
KEY POINTS DISCUSSED:	
<p>1. Welcome and Apologies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul Naylor (TEO) opened the meeting confirming that he will sit as temporary Chair while Martin McDonagh takes on his traineeship with the Council of Europe. • Chair welcomed Carol Folis (Omagh Traveller Interagency Forum), Claire Fordyce (BHSCT) and Aisling Walsh-Papageorgiou (Toybox). No conflicts of interest were declared. 	

2. Minutes and Action Points

- A member requested specific naming of Traveller sites under development by NIHE to be included in the previous minutes. TEO to amend the relevant item of the previous minutes [**AP1**].
- AP2 of the previous meeting: TEO highlighted constraints due to changes. Members stressed importance of early engagement and planning for consultation and maintaining a policy loop via agenda items. TEO to request departments share any upcoming Traveller-related policy developments at SPG for this information to be shared with TTG [**AP2**].
- AP4 of the previous meeting: A written update has not been possible for NIHE due to workload and capacity.

3. Chair's Update

Race Relations Integration Update

- A submission has been provided to Ministers on the draft Framework for Race Relations Post-2025 for their consideration.
- Member asked whether progress has been made on the Census Microdata paper previously discussed. Chair/TEO advised that engagement with statisticians continues in order to progress this.
- Member asked whether progress has been made on the Race Riots Review. Chair/TEO advised that the report is now with Ministers for their consideration, and that TEO is committed to sharing the report with the Racial Equality Subgroup, RTG, TTG as soon as this is possible.
- Member queried what will happen with the Minority Ethnic Development Fund (MEDF). Chair advised that options are with Ministers for their consideration and TEO have advised on timelines so that funding gaps are avoided and sector groups should be made aware as soon as possible on what is happening. Discussions have taken place with SpAds to aid in decision making. Another member raised that there was an understanding in the sector that there would not be non-provision. Chair reiterated that advice to Ministers makes clear the pressure and issues a gap in funding would cause.

Action Plan

- Chair opened this item reminding members of the discussion that took place at the last meeting on forming smaller working groups to take forward the development of the action plan. Output summary from the TTG workshop will aid in providing some high-level concepts to take forward.
- ECNI shared a draft populated with positions on Health, Education, Accommodation, and Employment.
- After discussion on the way forward, members agreed TTG should take a thematic approach, identifying asks for the departments and arms-length bodies, as well as its

own contribution to collective understanding of the issues and actions setting direction of the group for the year ahead. Secretariat to transfer workshop outputs into the template, add additional headings, and circulate for member input [AP3].

- Members stated that any action plan should be ambitious, rights based and has clear deliverables.
- Discussion took place on a review of the group's Terms of Reference. It was ultimately agreed by members that this will be resumed once the draft Framework for Race Relations is agreed and published.

4. Irish Traveller Accommodation

NIHE Update

- NIHE member updated the group on redevelopment sites, where there has been back and forth between consultants and planners. Craigavon and Derry planning applications have been submitted. Legahory Close delayed due a checklist of assessments, including a flood risk assessment. Ballyarnett application does not have the same issues regarding a checklist.
- NIHE's Irish Traveller Policy Unit and Placeshaping teams are engaging with councils and community planning partnerships to identify suitable land for Irish Traveller use; 8–9 councils involved so far.
- An Tearmann site improvement scheme pending due to irregular connections. Options appraisal complete in terms of finding an appropriate way forward to regularise connections on the site.
- Successor to the 2021–2026 strategy is being drafted. An extended timeframe has been granted for consultation following feedback and concerns raised on the consultation process.
- Approval is being sought to publish the annual reports.
- Accommodation Survey, which NIHE research colleagues conduct, was delayed due to budget constraints, though work to commence has begun with workshops are being planned to discuss proposed questionnaire.
- Member asked whether the Hate Harassment Toolkit is still in operation. Member to follow up with NIHE separately as an answer could not be provided [AP4].
- Member asked for an update on research work taking place in conjunction with the South on nomadic sites. NIHE advised that this piece of research went out for tender but was unsuccessful. ROI have committed to going back to some of the organisations that expressed interest but didn't apply to garner their feedback.
- Member asked about the response NIHE is receiving from councils. NIHE advised no Community Planning Partners have come forward with available land to date. A site identification study is ongoing in Belfast, but it has been challenging to find suitable land. NIHE will continue to keep the conversation going, and any surplus land that comes up under D1 will be considered.
- Members raised their concerns regarding lack of engagement, transparency, and cumulative failures to involve communities and advocacy organisations in their duties

to Irish Travellers. Member highlighted disappointment that NIHE couldn't provide a written update for the meeting.

- Members discussed and raised their concerns surrounding planning delays and historic issues with site developments (Legahory, Burnside, Greenbrae, Daisyfield). Members expressed their opinion that the planning and development process is being treated like a compartmentalised process, when each part is contingent and dependant and should be operating together rather than by piecemeal.
- NIHE advised of issues unique to sites, such as Greenbrae being closed due to proposed A5 scheme and since so much time has elapsed the site lost its classification as a Traveller site and it has been more complicated than first envisioned to reopen the site. NIHE confirmed commitment to progress developments within its remit and resources.
- Members raised their concern that strategic documents of the NIHE are relying on data collection that isn't taking place on the needs of communities, as well as the perceived disharmonious relationship between development plans, community plans, and needs assessments. NIHE advised that the needs assessment process is being developed. Evidence of need currently comes from a number of sources such as the Irish Traveller Accommodation survey, NIHE takes their assessment of need to the councils, and this is often challenged by the councils. NIHE took on board the concerns and agreed that greater collaborative work is required.
- Member emphasised that NIHE, as a duty bearer, has a statutory duty to cooperate, that there is failure to effectively use the Child Service Cooperation Act for children who are vulnerable, and that mechanisms are needed in place to improve this.
- Members emphasised that these issues are significant, and the impacts on tenants and communities are significant, and that the NIHE team is a layer in the fulfilment of Traveller accommodation rights. Members agreed to continue this conversation at a meeting scheduled between sector organisations and NIHE next week which was arranged due to the insistence of these organisations.

5. Scottish Government's response research on historic policies affecting Gypsy/Traveller communities.

- Members discussed whether this is something that could feed into the action plan, as the document lends to accountability, recognition, transparency, and the groups asks.

6. Update on Omagh Traveller Inter-Agency Forum's engagement with ITM and Pavee Point

- Carol Follis provided an update to members, saying an exploratory meeting around support available to Omagh Travellers Forum took place between these organisations. ITM and Pavee are keen to work with all organisations here. All Island Fund or Change Makers could be avenues to work together. Formulating an all-island Traveller support group was discussed.

- Member advised that work being done on the ground already here by a WHSCT worker who has been supported by HSC for 3 years. Member suggested that responsibility for infrastructure/funding for Traveller groups should sit with TEO.
- Member flagged that issues have existed during past iterations of regional councils for Travellers.
- After discussion, members agreed that while advice and support is welcome from other groups, local structures should first be secure and any funding that is available should go towards delivering services over another layer of engagement between groups.

7. AOB

- Member asked if in-person meetings can be considered for the future [AP5].
- Member raised a potential concern regarding the review of the Traveller Education Framework, which has come to a halt. STEP NI have contacted Department of Education following a cancelled meeting but have not had a response. TEO will follow up with colleagues in DE on this [AP6].

8. Next Meeting Date

- TBC

ACTION POINTS/OFFICIAL RESPONSIBLE/TARGET DATE:

AP1 – TEO Secretariat to amend the relevant item of the previous minutes.

AP2 – TEO to request departments share any upcoming Traveller-related policy developments at SPG, for this information to be shared onward with TTG.

AP3 – TEO Secretariat to transfer workshop outputs into the action plan template, add additional headings, and circulate for member input.

AP4 – A member asked whether the Hate Harassment Toolkit is still in operation. NIHE to follow up with this member separately as an answer could not be provided.

AP5 – TEO Secretariat to note preference for in person meetings.

AP6 – TEO to follow up with DE on a cancelled meeting between the sector and the department regarding the review of the Traveller Education Framework.

Minutes written by:
TEO Secretariat

Date:
6 November 2025