



National Traveller Accommodation
Consultative Committee

An Coiste Comhairleach Náisiúnta
um Chóiríocht don Lucht Siúil



Why Travellers leave Traveller-specific Accommodation?

A RESEARCH REPORT

KW Research & Associates
(with data analysis by Simon Williams)
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KW Research & Associates

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Traveller-specific Accommodation – Comments and Recommendations from the NTACC

Introduction

In 2013, the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) commissioned research to understand why Travellers leave Traveller-specific accommodation, and to make recommendations to inform future policy and practice. The research focused on the reasons Travellers leave Traveller-specific accommodation, and also possible approaches to addressing the issues arising. Given the considerable investment of human and financial capital in the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation, and in some cases the protracted processes involved in establishing schemes in the first instance, allied to the on-going demand and need for Traveller-specific accommodation, understanding why voids had arisen is crucial to future planning.

The NTACC, having reflected on the report and its recommendations, are cognisant of the statutory provision that the Committee may advise the Minister on general matters concerning the preparation, adequacy, implementation and co-ordination of Traveller accommodation programme. The Committee wishes to elaborate on a number of issues highlighted in the research. In addition to commenting on the specific issues raised by the research, the Committee also offers some further recommendations in relation to improving the delivery and management of Traveller accommodation.

Context

Census 2011 enumerated 29,573 persons who identified themselves as Irish Travellers, or 0.6 per cent of the total population, an increase of 32 per cent on the 2006, when 22,435 Travellers were enumerated.¹ Of these, the majority, 28,498 people, comprised of 7,765 households,² were living in private dwellings. A near doubling of the number of Traveller households is observed between 2000 and 2013 based on the annual count conducted by Local Authorities, with an estimated just under 9,899 Traveller families in November 2013. Indeed, a continuous increase in the number of Traveller families is evident from the early 1960s, when it was estimated that there were just over 1,000 Traveller families.³

In the context of the 5-year Traveller Accommodation Programmes, where Local Authorities are required to adopt a programme to meet existing and projected accommodation needs for the period 2014-2018, this substantial increase in Traveller households, allied to family formation patterns that start relatively early amongst the

Traveller community, by in itself will pose considerable implementation difficulties.⁴ Between 2002 and 2013, the number of Traveller families increased from 6,289 to 9,899, an increase of 3,610 families, however the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation could not absorb this increase in Traveller families, not to mind accommodating existing Traveller families living in unsuitable accommodation.

When these demographic drivers are set in a context of limited capital funding for all forms of social housing supports, including Traveller-specific accommodation, it is clear that radical new ways of delivering, managing and financing appropriate accommodation supports for Traveller households that respect choice and culture will be required.

Census 2011 reported that two-thirds of Traveller households were renting their dwelling, either from a public landlord, a not-for profit landlord or private for-profit landlord. While the number of households renting from public landlords increased in absolute terms between *Census 2006* and *Census 2011*, due to the rapid increase in the number of Traveller households, the per cent share only increased marginally, with the private for profit rental sector emerging as the most significant tenure after public renting as shown in table 1.

Table 1 Housing Tenure of Irish Travellers, 2002-2011

	2002	2006	2011
Own with mortgage or loan	7	13	8
Own outright	12	17	12
Rented from a Private Landlord	7	7	29
Rented from a Local Authority	59	42	43
Rented from a AHB	-	5	3
Living Rent Free	1	3	2
No Stated	13	13	4
	100	100	100

(Source Census 2011)

This broad increasing trend of Travellers residing in the private rented housing sector is also identified in the annual count of Traveller families conducted by Local Authorities each November. Whereas only 2.6 per cent of Traveller families were identified as living in private rented housing in 2002, this had increased to 27.4 in 2013. Of the Traveller families residing in private rented accommodation in November 2013, it is estimated that nearly 95 per cent were either in receipt of a rent supplement, or in a rental accommodation (RAS) scheme.

In 2013, nearly 85 per cent of all Traveller families identified by Local Authorities were accommodated in rented accommodated or living in Traveller-specific accommodation, with a significant decrease in the number of families living on unauthorised sites, from 15 per cent of Traveller families in 2002 to 3.6 per cent in 2013 as shown in table 2.

¹ Central Statistics Office (2012) *Religion, Ethnicity and Irish Travellers* (Dublin: Stationery Office).

² 1,874 of the 7,765 households enumerated, contained some persons who indicated they were not Irish Travellers.

³ Dempsey, M. and Geary, R.C. (1979) *The Irish Itinerants: Some Demographic, Economic and Educational Aspects* (Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute).

⁴ *Census 2011* noted that the average age of Irish Travellers was 22.4 compared with 36.1 for the general population, and over half of all Irish Travellers (52.2%) were aged under 20. One-third of Travellers aged between 15-29 were married compared to 8.2 percent of the general population.

Table 2 Accommodation Status of Traveller Families

	2002	2006	2010	2011	2012	2013
Accommodated by or with assistance of Local Authority	71.9	68.3	59.5	58.7	56.2	56.3
On Un-authorised Sites	14.9	8.2	4.7	3.4	3.3	3.6
Own Resources	6.6	6.3	5.9	5.9	5.9	5.9
Private Rented	2.6	12.2	25.1	26.8	28.5	27.4
Sharing Housing	4.0	5.1	4.8	5.2	6.1	6.1

(Source Annual Count of Traveller Families)

Of those Traveller families accommodated by, or with the assistance of local authorities, 60 per cent were residing in standard local authority rental dwellings, approved not-for-profit housing rental dwellings or in private dwellings. The number of Traveller families residing in local authority halting sites has declined, both in absolute numbers and relative to other forms of accommodation, from 29 per cent of families accommodated in 2002, to 16.3 per cent in 2013. In 2002, 2,253 Traveller families were residing in either local authority provided halting sites or on unauthorised sites. By 2013, the number of families had declined to 1,272.

Table 3 Traveller Families Accommodated by, or with the Assistance of Local Authorities

	2002	2006	2010	2011	2012	2013
Local Authority Standard Housing	53.0	56.0	58.6	59.3	58.7	58.8
Local Authority group housing	10.9	12.2	12.6	13.2	13.0	13.1
Local Authority Halting Site Places	29.1	21.5	17.6	16.4	16.3	16.3
Private Housing With LA Assistance	5.7	8.2	8.5	8.4	9.2	8.9
Housing Association	1.3	2.0	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.9

Between 2002 and 2011, 1,675 Traveller-specific accommodation units were provided, in the form of new or refurbished halting site bays or group homes. The Traveller Accommodation Programme target for 2012 was for the provision of 523 accommodation units comprising 276 standard local authority housing, 109 units of group housing, 59 halting site bays and other forms of accommodation.

Table 4 Provision of Traveller-specific Accommodation

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
New Halting Site Bays	80	76	39	51	41	75	47	4	20	1
New Group Houses	39	58	59	42	48	48	61	60	12	22
Refurbished Halting Site Bays	73	45	50	4	95	37	55	46	26	46
Refurbished Group Houses	18	42	36	53	15	29	21	23	51	27
Total	210	221	184	150	199	189	184	133	109	96

The output was only half the target figure in the aggregate, but the target was met for halting site bays. However, only 46 per cent and 21 per cent respectively of the standard local authority housing and group-housing target was met.⁵ However, some Local Authorities reported *high vacancy levels in Traveller-specific accommodation and the NTACC commissioned KW Research and Associates to explore this issue.*

Vacancy rates in Traveller-specific Accommodation

The overall aim of the research was to explore why Travellers leave Traveller-specific accommodation, and to make recommendations to inform future policy and practice. The research focused on the reasons Travellers leave Traveller-specific accommodation and possible approaches to addressing the issues arising.

In terms of the provision of Traveller-specific accommodation, the research found that 94 per cent of local authorities provided permanent halting sites, while 88 per cent provided group-housing schemes. Half of all local authorities provided basic service sites, while only 15 per cent of local authorities provided transient sites. Accommodation included in the category of other by local authorities included:

- Unofficial halting sites
- Sites without services
- Houses purchased out of the Traveller Accommodation budget for Travellers
- Temporary bays (in place pending the provision of permanent accommodation).

Of the total Traveller-specific sites identified nationally the survey found that almost one-third of the 596 sites were more than 25 years old.

The survey found an overall Traveller-specific accommodation void rate of 19 per cent. The highest void rate was 32 per cent in basic service sites, followed by permanent halting sites, which had 24 per cent void rate. For group housing schemes the void rate was 10 per cent, for transient sites it was 7 per cent, while just 2 per cent of sites described as “other” were void, nationwide.

Half of the Local Authorities consulted identified internal tensions and lack of compatibility between Traveller families as the primary reasons for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation, resulting in the void rates noted above. There was also a view expressed by Local Authorities that some younger Travellers vacated Traveller-specific accommodation as they had a preference for standard private rented accommodation. Travellers and Traveller organisations identified a variety of reasons for why Traveller families leave Traveller-specific accommodation, including: feuding, the location and design of sites and schemes, and the poor condition and lack of maintenance and management of certain locations. In broad terms, Local Authorities and Travellers agreed that Traveller families are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation, and the key triggers for their departure included: inter and intra familial conflict and intimidation; particular personal circumstances (related to bereavement, domestic violence, ill health etc.). Travellers and Traveller organisations also noted that the poor management, layout and design of sites have contributed to anti-social behaviour evident in some sites.

⁵ Reasons for local authorities not meeting their targets for Traveller-specific accommodation were explored in an earlier research report commissioned by the NTACC, where local authorities identified site availability and change of mind by parties as key reasons for non-commencement of projects.

Some local authorities were of the view that they had an over-provision of Traveller-specific accommodation in their functional areas. On the other hand, Travellers and Traveller organisations consulted did not believe that there is over provision of Traveller-specific accommodation. The research noted that there was a need to *clarify and agree on the demand for Traveller-specific accommodation*.

Current Accommodation Needs

The Housing Needs Assessment, which is a count by housing authorities of households qualified for social housing support within their functional area, carried out under Section 21 of the *Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2009*, identified 1,632 households, or 2 per cent of all households qualified for social housing support in 2013, who sought Traveller-specific accommodation.⁶ While a strict comparison cannot be made with the 2011 Assessment, a modest decrease of just fewer than 200 households is observed.

The tenure of those identified as seeking Traveller-specific accommodation shows 63 per cent of these households residing the private rental sector, with the majority in receipt of a rent supplement, and nearly 20 per cent involuntary sharing with immediate or extended family members.

Table 5 Housing Tenure of Irish Travellers, 2002-2011

Tenure Type	Traveller	%
Rough sleeper with no accommodation	4	0.2
Emergency accommodation/none	8	0.5
Living with friends	15	0.9
Owner occupier	65	4.0
Living with relatives	99	6.1
Living with parents	187	11.5
Other	227	13.9
Private rented accommodation <i>without</i> rent supplement	272	16.7
Private rented accommodation <i>with</i> rent supplement	755	46.3
Total	1,632	100.0

Nearly 70 per cent of households qualified for social housing support and seeking Traveller-specific accommodation were residing in a house or apartment, with 12 per cent residing in a caravan and in excess of a third-of such families were on a local authority waiting list for more than four years. The geographical distribution of those Traveller households shows 20 per cent in Galway city and country council, and 20 per cent across the four Dublin local authority areas.

Travellers, and Traveller organisations have argued that Travellers have been forced into private rented accommodation and standard accommodation through lack of choice, and

⁶ Therefore, this figure is not inclusive of all Traveller families who qualified for social housing support, rather it counts only those who indicated a demand for Traveller-specific accommodation.

that this has contributed to the erosion of Traveller culture. Local Authorities have stated that Traveller families are asked to state their accommodation preference, and significant numbers have exercised their preference for standard local authority housing.

In light of the above, the current mechanism for ascertaining the accommodation need of Travellers should be reviewed. An agreed Annual Count and National Assessment of Need for the planning of local Traveller Accommodation Programmes should be developed. This would necessitate Travellers and Traveller representative organisations working with the local authority to undertake both the Annual Count and the bi-annual Assessment of Housing Need (in particular). The 2010 All Ireland Traveller Health Study provides a methodology that could be adopted for the purposes of the Assessment of Need.

Funding Traveller Accommodation

Between 2002 and 2013, the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government allocated, on average, a budget of nearly €30m for Traveller accommodation - a substantial increase on the budgets allocated in in 1990s.⁷ However, for most years the amounts allocated were not fully recouped by local authorities, and as funding progressively increased from the early-2000s, with €45.5m allocated in 2006, this underspend grew. By 2010, only 46 per cent of the budget allocation was recouped. The level of recoupment varies considerably by local authority, with an average recoupment rate of just over 60 per cent between 2009-2012.

However, considerable caution needs to be exercised in interpreting this data. In most cases, the budget allocation for individual local authorities for a specific year incorporates budgets rolled over from a previous year or years, as schemes that were approved, but for various reasons were not initiated, were brought forward into the following years budget.

Thus, the funds allocated each year are not necessarily discrete budgets and cannot be simply added to provide a cumulative budget over a set period of time. The funds are available to local authorities each year, but each budget incorporates a portion of the previous years allocation. Thus, what may appear to be a significant under-spend by local authorities reflects both an accounting practice, and that a number of Traveller-specific accommodation schemes have been in preparation over a number of years and the budget allocation has been rolled over – in some cases for a number of years.

The NTACC recommends that in the presentation of financial data on budget allocations to, and recoupments by Local Authorities, that the data clearly shows the existing allocations that are rolled over into following fiscal year, and the new allocations.

To date, an unnecessary and unproductive discussion has taken place on this issue. A shared understanding of this issue can contribute to a more productive discussion on the financing of Traveller-specific accommodation in the context of the substantial retrenchment in funding in recent years.

The sum of €283m was recouped by Local Authorities for Traveller accommodation between 2002 and 2012, but tapered off sharply from 2008, with €35m recouped in 2008 compared to €4m in 2012. Notwithstanding the inadequate and inappropriate accommodation that some Traveller households occupy, between 2002 and 2008, on average of €4,500 was expended on Traveller accommodation per Traveller household

⁷ Silke, D. (2005) Accommodating the Traveller Community, In Norris, M. and Redmond, D. (eds) *Housing Contemporary Ireland: Policy, Society and Shelter* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration).

through recoupment by Local Authorities, and this figure does not include current expenditure on rent supplement or other housing supports for Traveller households.

Given that not all Traveller households are in need of housing support in that they own their accommodation outright or have already been provided with accommodation by Local Authorities, it is difficult to sustain an argument that expenditure per se is the issue, rather it is what outputs were derived from the expenditure and how that investment was managed.

The capital budget allocation for Traveller accommodation is €3m in 2014, in comparison with €35m in 2010. The broadly mirrors the decrease in general social housing capital funding from which the Traveller accommodation budget derives, with €80m allocated in 2014 in comparison with nearly €900m in 2009.⁸ Current expenditure for Traveller accommodation and support was €6.4m in 2011, down slightly from €7.2m in 2008 – this current expenditure funds 90 per cent of the salaries and expenses of social workers employed by the local authorities to work with Traveller households; 75 per cent of the salary of caretakers time on maintaining halting sites or group housing schemes and 50 per cent of expenditure on routine repair and maintenances costs and skip hire in relation to halting sites.

Thus, while cognisant of the specific issues relating to Traveller accommodation, the broader picture is that social housing provision for the next decade is going to take a very different form than prevailed for the past 50 years. A review by the Department of Finance in 2010 of Infrastructural Investment Priorities noted the on-going justification for supporting social housing programmes where they stated “In terms of the economic justification for intervention, the social housing programme can be viewed as a straight forward redistributive measure in favour of low income households, the homeless and Travellers. A case for addressing the central market failure persists where beneficiaries have insufficient income to provide for their own accommodation needs.” However, the review then went on to state, “the environment in which housing policy operates has been transformed in recent times and so the scale and nature of supports in this sector must now be reconsidered.”⁹

Traveller Accommodation and Housing Policy

The Housing Policy Statement, published in 2011 states that “The centrepiece of the approach is to chart a way forward for housing policy in Ireland by placing greater emphasis on choice, equity across housing tenures, and delivering quality outcomes for the resources invested. Central to this statement is the policy objective of ensuring equity across housing tenures, in particular ensuring that the private rented sector provides real security of tenure and high standards of accommodation.”

The *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) took the view that ‘the accommodation which is provided to Traveller families must be appropriate to their needs, and must be met through the provision of a range of accommodation types’.¹⁰ To ensure such provision was made the Task Force stated that this strategy on accommodating Traveller households

⁸ It should be noted that while Capital Expenditure on housing is in sharp decline, current expenditure is on the increase due to a shift from new construction and refurbishment to leasing and renting (via the Rental Accommodation Scheme).

⁹ Department of Finance (2010) *Infrastructural Investment Priorities 2010-2016: A Financial Framework* (Dublin: Department of Finance), p.32.

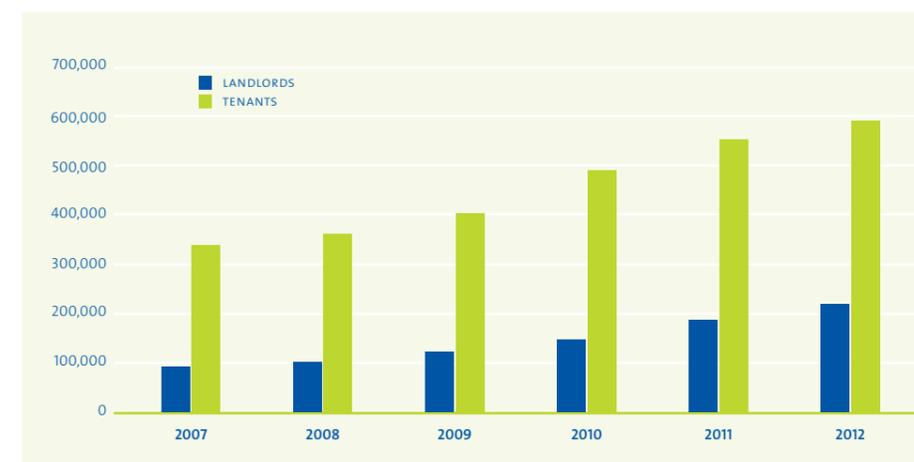
¹⁰ Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) Report (Dublin: Stationery Office), p.101.

‘is based on a recognition that all individuals of the Traveller and ‘Settled’ communities have rights and responsibilities which, when observed, enable both communities to co-exist in harmony (p.107).¹¹ The right of Traveller households to protection from an Garda Síochána in Traveller-specific accommodation is deserving of further investigation to achieve the objectives outlined in the Strategy. Traveller communities have been described as over-policed, but under-protected and that ‘the ‘fear’ that many commentators suggest exists in relation to Travellers and crime appears not to include the fears that Travellers themselves may have of being victimised, whether by other Travellers or settled people’.¹²

The NTACC notes that a significant number of Local Authorities employ social workers to assist Traveller families in securing accommodation. The provision of specialised local authority social work services to work with Traveller households has its origins in the *Commission of Itinerancy*, where social workers would assist in the process of assimilating Traveller households into local authority accommodation.¹³ While their role has evolved and expanded over time, at this juncture, given the current accommodation profile of Traveller households, *the NTACC recommends that the role of local authority social workers working with Traveller households be comprehensively reviewed, and proposals for the reconfiguration of services developed.*

Nationally, it is expected that 630 new social housing units will be built over the next two years and as of 2013, 89,872 households qualified for social housing support, of whom 1,632 were identified as seeking Traveller-specific accommodation. Census 2011 noted that nearly one-fifth of the total housing stock was now privately rented, compared to less than 10 per cent some 20 years earlier and by the end of 2012, the Private Residential Tenancies Board¹⁴ recorded over 200,000 private landlords registered with them who were accommodating nearly 600,000 tenants – see figure 1 below.

Figure 1 Number of Landlords and Tenants, 2007–2012



¹¹ Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) Report (Dublin: Stationery Office), p.107.

¹² Mulcahy, A. (2012) ‘Alright in their own place’: Policing and the Spatial Regulation of Irish Travellers, *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, 12(3), pp.307-327.

¹³ Delap, C. and Kelleher, T. (2005) Local Authority Social Work in Ireland: Origins, Issues and Developments, in Kearney, N. and Skehill, C. (eds) *Social Work in Ireland: Historical Perspectives* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration), pp.51-75.

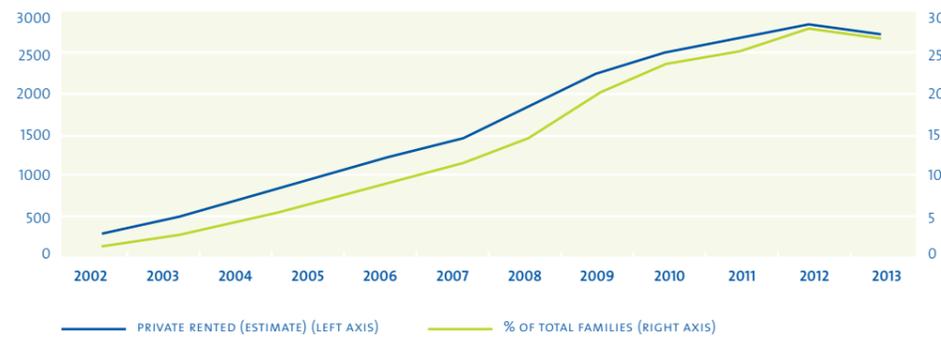
¹⁴ The principal functions of the Board are to provide for the resolution of disputes between landlords and tenants; the registration of all private residential tenancies, carrying out of research and the provision of information and policy advice regarding the private rented sector.

A greater reliance on the private rented sector for all households is evident over the past number of years – for some the result of push factors arising from very limited standard social housing options; for others, pull factors with greater choice of location, allied to enhanced security of occupancy in the sector and higher standards. However, the range of housing choices envisaged by the *Task Force on the Travelling Community* is increasingly restricted, in that while different rental options are in place, such as RAS, or will be in place, such as Housing Assistance Payment (HAP), which was approved in July 2013,¹⁵ they are all choices only within the private or quasi-private rental market.

Travellers and the Private Rented Sector

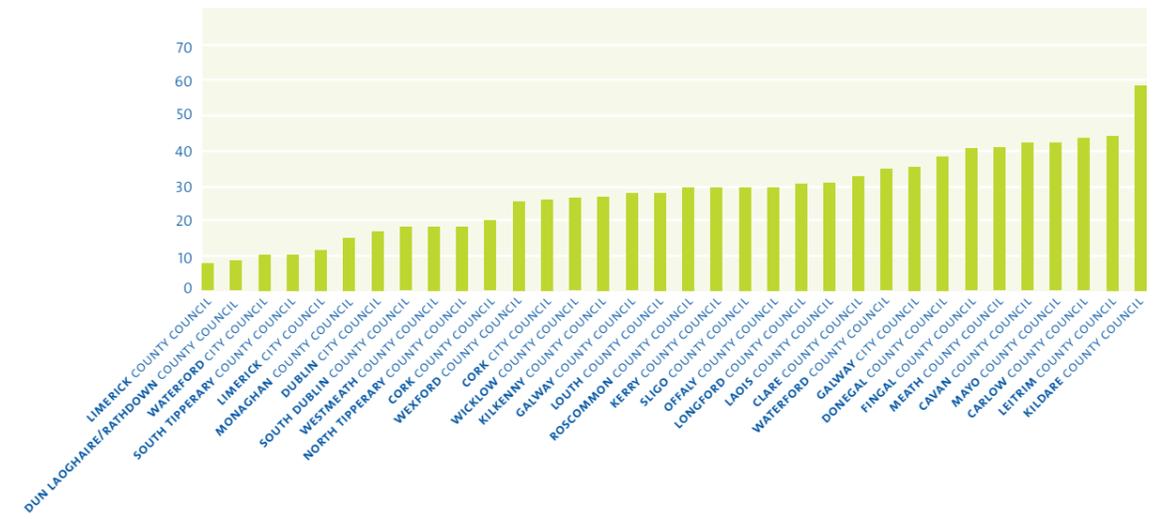
In 2002, the annual count of the accommodation situation of Traveller families estimated that 162 Traveller families were living in the private rented housing sector. This represented the housing situation for 2.6 per cent of all Traveller families. By 2013, local authorities estimated that 2,717 Traveller families, or 27.4 per cent of all Traveller families, were living in the private rented sector (see figure 2).

Figure 2 Number of Traveller Families Living in the Private Rented Sector, 2002–2012



The distribution of Traveller households in private rented accommodation varies by Local Authority area, but shows a growing dependence on private rented accommodation in some areas.

Figure 3 Percentage of All Traveller Families in the Private Rented Sector, 2013



Given the increasingly limited provision of social housing and Traveller-specific accommodation over the next decade, the role of the private rental sector to meet the housing needs of Travellers is likely to grow.

Accessing private rented accommodation can be difficult for Traveller families for a number of reasons. Landlords may not always be prepared to have Travellers as tenants, and they often require payment of up to three months' rent in advance. It is also the case that Travellers who are used to living in larger family groups in Traveller-specific accommodation, often find it difficult to adapt to living away from families, while neighbours may not be very accepting of having Travellers as neighbours. The national Traveller organisations report that there are an increasing number of Traveller families leaving private rented accommodation, particularly as the cost of renting continues to rise, and many younger Travellers find themselves needing the support of others to get established.

Rising rents in the private rented sector over the last two quarters, based on the quarterly PRTB rent index, will increase the difficulties that households dependant on rent allowances have in accessing the private rented sector.

The NTACC recommended that, in partnership with the Private Residential Tenancies Board, that research be conducted into the experience of Traveller households in the private rented housing sector. In particular, the research should ascertain the degree to which reported difficulties experienced by Traveller households are generic to private rented accommodation or to what degree are they Traveller-specific.

¹⁵ HAP will transfer responsibility for recipients of rent supplement, with an established social housing need from the Department of Social Protection to housing authorities. Rent supplement was designed to be a short-term income support but its use as a long-term housing support has distorted both the social and private housing markets and led to an employment trap for many households. HAP is being designed so as to bring all of the social housing services provided by the State together under the local authority system, with local authorities being responsible for all households with an established housing need.

Traveller Accommodation and Approved Housing Bodies

It also of note that only 162 Traveller families were accommodated by Approved Housing Bodies up to the end of 2013. On the basis that Approved Housing Bodies have a stock of housing in the region of 25,000 units, less than 1 per cent their stock was allocated to Traveller families at November 2012, whereas 2.5 per cent of the stock of local authority standard housing was allocated to Traveller families. In this context, the recent establishment of a Traveller Led Approved Housing Body, CENA, and its approval under the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 1992 in October 2013 is welcomed by the NTACC. CENA aim, in the short-term, to develop two pilot projects – the development of a group-housing scheme in an urban area and the development of a halting site in a rural area.

In the long-term, with the necessary supports from all stakeholders, *the NTACC recommends that CENA should aim to become both a key provider of culturally suitable accommodation within sustainable community settings that meet the needs and respects the choice of Traveller households, but also, where appropriate, take on responsibility for the management of Traveller-specific accommodation currently managed by Local Authorities.*

In a small number of cases, responsibility for the management of local authority housing stock has been transferred to Approved Housing Bodies, and given that Travellers and Traveller organisations consulted for the research noted above, commented negatively on the management of Traveller-specific accommodation, a pilot scheme should be developed whereby responsibility for the management of Traveller accommodation be transferred from a local authority to CENA (with ring-fenced funding to support the initiative). Detailed guidelines on the management and maintenance of Traveller-specific accommodation have been developed,¹⁶ but it is evident that while the specifics of good practice have been identified, for multiple reasons, an implementation deficit has arisen.

Conclusion

In the space of a decade, a structural shift has occurred in the accommodation pattern of Irish travellers. Of the 9,899 Traveller families in 2013, 12.8 per cent were living in authorised or unauthorised halting sites, compared to 36 per cent in 2002. The majority of Irish Traveller families are now residing in standard rental housing, with slightly more in public rental housing rather than private rental housing. However, the growth trajectory of Traveller families in private rented housing in the past 6 years, allied with the reduced output of local authority rental housing and limited budgets for Traveller-specific accommodation, suggests that by the end of this decade, the private rental sector will accommodate the majority of Irish Travellers. The implications of the structural shift for the traveller community, in terms of economy, culture, extended familial relations; family formation etc. has yet to be evaluated.

It is of note that the housing outputs for Traveller families over the past 50 years have broadly been at variance with professed Government policy. Thus, following the *Commission on Itinerancy* report of 1963, while advocating an assimilationist policy via

settlement¹⁷, accommodation provision for traveller families in the aftermath of the report was the widespread provision of Traveller-specific accommodation in the form of serviced halting sites. In the post *Task Force on the Travelling Community* (1995) period, which advocated a broadly multi-cultural approach to traveller accommodation, provision has primarily been in the form of standard local authority¹⁸ or private rented housing rather than the mix of accommodation options envisaged by the Task Force.

These trends reflect in part, broader trends in housing provision in Ireland. Our research on Traveller-specific accommodation, in a context where there is limited capital funding for all forms of social housing supports, including Traveller-specific accommodation, demonstrates that radical new ways of delivering, managing and financing appropriate accommodations supports for Traveller households that respect choice and culture are required.

¹⁶ Kane, F., Treadwell Shine, K. and Coates, D. (2008) *Good Practice in Housing Management – Guidelines for Local Authorities: Management and Maintenance of Traveller-specific Accommodation* (Dublin: Centre for Housing Research).

¹⁷ See Crowley, U.M. (2005) Liberal Rule Through Non-liberal Means: The Attempted Settlement of Irish Travellers (1955-1975), *Irish Geography*, 38(2), pp.128-150; and Gmelch, S.B. and Gmelch, G. (1974) The Itinerant Settlement Movement: Its Policies and Effects on Irish Travellers, *Studies*, 63(249), pp.1-16.

¹⁸ See Norris, M. and Winston, N. (2005) Housing and Accommodation of Irish Travellers: From Assimilation to Multiculturalism and Back Again, *Social Policy and Administration*, 39(7), pp.802-821, and Coates, D., Kane, F. and Cotter, N. (2009) Housing the Traveller Community: From 'the problem of itinerancy' to a Multicultural Perspective, *Administration*, 57(3), pp.87-107.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Research Background

Traveller-specific accommodation provided at state expense has in a number of cases around the country been left vacant and subject to subsequent dereliction and vandalism as a result of Travellers leaving. In cases where efforts have been subsequently made by local authorities to accommodate other Traveller families in such accommodation these activities have been subject to opposition in many cases. Driven both by the necessity to protect state investment (particularly at a time of significant economic austerity) and the need to provide suitable accommodation for the increasing¹ number of Traveller Families, the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC)² decided to commission a time bound piece of research to explore this issue and related issues and make recommendations for future policy. Following a competitive tendering process KW Research and Associates (with Adele McKenna) were appointed to undertake this study.

1.2 The Research Aim

The overall aim of the research was to explore why Travellers leave Traveller-specific accommodation and to make recommendations to inform future policy and practice. The research was expected to focus both on the reasons Travellers leave Traveller-specific accommodation and also possible approaches to addressing the issues arising. A crucial outcome of the research is a practical checklist for key stakeholders (local authorities, Travellers and the DECLG) of actions to prevent and respond to vacancies on sites. It was envisaged that these guidelines will consider the role of, for example: design and layout of Traveller-specific sites, allocation policy, pre-tenancy training, tenancy agreements, conflict resolution and mediation, management and maintenance, void management, potential reuse by local authorities of sites that can no longer be used to provide Traveller Accommodation and the options open to the Local Authority to utilise the said asset.

1.3 Local Authority Involvement in the Provision of Traveller Accommodation

Individual local authorities (in accordance with the provisions of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998) (in their role as the local housing authorities) are responsible for a) the assessment of the accommodation needs of the Travellers and b) the preparation, adoption and implementation of multi-annual Traveller Accommodation

¹ According to the 2011 Census there were 29,573 Irish Travellers. This represents a 32% increase from the 2006 Census, the increase was recorded across the country and in all counties except Waterford (where the population fell by 7%). According to some Traveller organisations these figures, while increasing (an increase which they attribute to an increase in people identifying themselves as Travellers) still under-represents the number of Travellers in the Republic, which they maintain, are closer 36,000 with people not identifying as Travellers due to the potential racism and discrimination Travellers face in Irish society. The All Island Traveller Health Study –Our Geels (2010) estimated that there was a total Traveller population of 36,224 (representing approx. 1% of the total population) in the Republic of Ireland.

² The Role of the NTACC as outlined in the 1998 Housing Act is ‘to advise the Minister in relation to any general matter concerning accommodation for travellers and any matter referred to it by the Minister. Included in this are: 1) the most appropriate measures for improving, at local level, consultation with, and participation of, travellers in the provision and management of accommodation, 2) general matters concerning the preparation, adequacy, implementation and co-ordination of Traveller accommodation programmes.

Programmes (TAP) to address these needs. Under the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 (Number 33 of 1998) Local Authorities must also appoint a committee known as the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC) to advise on the provision and management of accommodation for Travellers in the local authority area. Membership of the LTACC includes 1) local elected representatives, 2) officials from the local authority, 3) representatives of local Travellers and Traveller bodies and 4) where relevant one elected representative from each relevant housing authority within the county concerned. The Act also specifies the number of elected representatives should not exceed one half of the membership of the LTACC and that the number of Travellers and Traveller bodies representatives should not be less than one quarter of the membership of the LTACC.

Travellers³ have a number of different accommodation options available including:

- Standard local authority housing
- Traveller-specific accommodation (halting sites, group housing, etc.)
- Private rented accommodation (assisted by local authority or voluntary organisations)
- Private rented accommodation (which Travellers fund through their own resources)
- Home ownership

The first two of these options are financed by capital allocation from the Dept. of Environment, Community and Local Government (DECLG). Travellers can opt for any of these forms of accommodation and the local authority Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAP's) are intended to reflect these preferences. See Table 1.1 for a breakdown of the accommodation types used by Traveller families over the period 2010-2012.

Table 1.1 Analysis of Traveller Families by Accommodation Type

Specific Accommodation Type	2010 No	2010 %	2011 No	2011 %	2012 No	2012 %	Trend ⁴ 2010-2012
Accommodation provided by/with local authority assistance	5634	59%	5595	59%	5568	56%	Decrease 1%
Unauthorised sites	444	4.5%	327	3.3%	330	3.3%	Decrease 26%
Own resources (estimate)	561	6%	563	5.9%	580	6%	Increase +3%
Private rented (estimate)	2468	26%	2558	26.8%	2829	28.5%	Increase +15%
Sharing housing	451	4.5%	492	5%	604	6.2%	Increase +34%
Totals	9558		9535		9911		

(Source DECLG Annual Counts 2010-2012)

³ Coates, D. Kane, F. & Treadwell Shine, K (2008) Traveller Accommodation in Ireland: Review of Policy and Practice. Centre for Housing Research, Dublin.

⁴ Trend is calculated as follows: 2012 figure – 2010 figure/2010 figure * 100 = % trend over the period 2010-2012.

An analysis of Table 1.1 indicates over the period 2010-2012 that there has been a small decrease in the number of Traveller families living in accommodation provided by local authorities and an increase of 15% in the number of Traveller families living in private rented accommodation. There is also a large (40%) increase in the number of families sharing, which in turn can lead to problems associated with overcrowding. In overall terms it would appear that over this period the trend has been a significant move away from the use of unauthorised sites and a small move away from the use of accommodation provided/ supported by the local authority and an increase in the use of private rented and shared housing in particular.

Within the category of 'accommodation provided by or with the assistance of local authority' there are a number of changes over the period 2010-2012 see Table 1.2 for details.

Table 1.2 Analysis of Traveller families whose accommodation is provided by/or supported with local authority assistance

Specific Accommodation Type	2010 No	%	2011 No	%	2012 No	%	Trend ⁵ 2010-2012
Local authority standard houses	3304	58.6%	3320	59.3%	3269	58.7%	Decrease -1%
Local authority group housing	709	12.6%	739	13.3%	722	13%	Increase +2%
Private houses (assisted by local authority)	481	8.5%	470	8.4%	511	9.2%	Increase +6%
Provided by voluntary bodies (with local authority assistance)	149	2.6%	146	2.6%	156	2.8%	Increase +5%
Local authority halting sites	991	17.6%	920	16.4%	910	16.3%	Decrease -8%
Total	5634		5595		5568		Decrease -1%

(Source DECLG Annual Counts 2010-2012)

Analysis of Table 1.2 indicates that there has been a fall (8%) in the number of families living in local authority halting site, and an increase (6%) in the number of families living in private houses (assisted by the local authority) as well as small increases in the number of families living in other local authority supported accommodation types.

1.4 The Research Methodology

1.4.1 An overview

There were two different perspectives to be explored in the research: Local authorities and Travellers perspectives. These were explored at a national level and at a local level through:

- A survey of Local Authorities (to get an overview of the extent and nature of the problem nationally from a local authority perspective)

⁵ Trend is calculated as follows: 2012 figure – 2010 figure / 2010 figure * 100 = % trend over the period 2010-2012.

- Case studies (to explore the issues at a more local level with local authorities and with Traveller representatives and groups operating at a local level)
- Consultations with the National Traveller groups, to get a national perspective in the issues

See Table 1.3 for an overview of the various consultations undertaken.

Table 1.3 Overview of Research Consultations

Activity	Description
City and County Councils Survey	Online Survey of all 34 City and County Councils
Case Studies	South Dublin (7% Voids, Total No of Voids=15) Local authority perspective: Meeting with a representative from South Dublin County Council Local Traveller perspective: Meeting with three representatives of Clondalkin Travellers Development Group and a meeting with two representatives of Tallaght Travellers Community Development Project
	Clare (32% Voids, Total No of Voids=20) Local authority perspective: Meeting with a representative of Clare County Council Local Traveller perspective: With no local Traveller organisation operating in the county the researchers sought an invitation to attend a meeting of agencies ⁶ (who exchange information on their work with Travellers in the county) to seek their help and support for the consultation process. Ennis CDP and the Clare Local Development Company worker who runs the Traveller Advise Service agreed to host a consultation meeting. They invited a variety of Travellers to attend. Five individuals attended this meeting, which was supplemented by a phone call with another individual who was unable to attend the meeting.
	Wexford (19% Voids, Total No of Voids=13) Local authority perspective: Meeting with a Wexford Co. Council representative Local Traveller perspective: With no local Traveller organisation operating in the county the researchers met with representatives from the North Wexford Traveller Primary Health Care Programme and a number of Traveller women involved with a Local Traveller Women's Group.
Consultations with National Traveller Organisations	Exchange House facilitated the organisation of a focus group discussion for the research. This took place on 11th September 2013. A joint meeting with the National Traveller Women's Forum, Pavee Point and Irish Traveller Movement was undertaken on the 23rd Sept. In attendance were two representatives from ITM, two representatives from the National Traveller Women's Forum and a representative from Pavee Point.

⁶ The organisations involved in this grouping include Ennis CDP, Clare Local Development Company (& Clare VEC as well as a Traveller representative).

⁷ Wexford County Council reported that the level of voids in Co Wexford had fallen to 3 (4%) and was no longer a concern for Wexford County Council by the time the case study work was being undertaken (6/11/13).

1.4.2 The Local Authority Survey

A questionnaire was designed and piloted by the researchers, the main focus of which was to:

- Identify the number of vacant Traveller-specific units as a percentage of all Local Authority stock and trends at local level,
- Ascertain why (from a local authority perspective) Travellers were leaving Traveller-specific accommodation (where known)
- Determine what actions local authorities have/are taking to address any such vacancies.

The invitation⁸ and subsequent reminders to participate in the online survey were circulated by the DECLG⁹. The survey was circulated to the Traveller Accommodation Housing Officers in all of the local authorities across the state. Follow up telephone calls were made by the Housing Agency to local authorities where the survey was not initially completed and assistance in completing the survey was provided where necessary by the Agency. All local authorities had completed the survey by 14th May, 2013. There were anomalies in some of the data submitted and the researchers liaised with the local authorities to address these issues. Annual leave and reduced staffing levels in some local authorities meant that this process of addressing the anomalies was not completed until the end of July 2013. Once these anomalies had been addressed the survey analysis was conducted with the support of Simon Williams and finalised by the research team. The findings of this survey are detailed in Section 2.

1.4.3 The Case Studies

The research question was also explored at a more local level with local authorities and with Traveller representatives and groups operating at a local level through the use of three case studies.

The local authority areas selected (in association with the Housing Agency and the DECLG) to act as case studies, were selected on the basis that they represented a geographical spread and the range of local authorities, where

- a) voids seen as a very significant issue (Co. Clare),
- b) voids something of an issue (Co. Wexford)
- c) voids not a very significant issue (South Dublin)

These case studies were not intended to be representative nor indeed exhaustive. They were rather intended to give a flavour of the two perspectives on the question at a local level. The case studies in practice involved an interview with a local authority official involved in the implementation and delivery of the TAP as well a meetings/roundtable with the local representative Traveller group/s where they existed (South Dublin only) and where they did not or no longer existed with individual Travellers contacted and invited to attend a meeting/s with the researchers by individuals and organisations involved in/with Travellers in

⁸ The initial invitation from the DECLG was sent by email to all local authorities on the 20th March 2013.

⁹ The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government first emailed all local authorities on 20th March, 2013 to advise them that it had requested the Housing Agency to commission an independent piece of research on behalf of the National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee to examine why Travellers leave Traveller-specific accommodation and to make recommendations to inform future policy and practice. The questionnaire was issued on 21st March, 2013 with a requested return date of 28th March, 2013.

the local area. The local authority official's views from the case studies are included in Section 2, while the local Travellers' perspectives on the research question are incorporated into Section 3.

The interview template for the case studies was informed by feedback obtained as part of the survey. Issues explored in the interviews included views on the impact of various issues¹⁰ on the numbers of Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. Other issues explored as part of the interviews with local authority officials in particular included suggestions for potential reuse of empty sites

1.4.4 Consultations with National Traveller Organisations

A focus group was organised on the 23 Sept 2013 with a number of Dublin based National Traveller organisations including the Irish Traveller Movement (ITM), Pavee Point and Irish Traveller Women's Forum. Exchange House organised a focus group with Exchange House National Traveller Services staff. This was held on the 11 Sept 2013. Issues discussed at the focus group included organisations' perceptions of the reasons why Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation and more specifically their views of the importance of location, design and layout of accommodation sites, allocation policies, pre-tenancy training, tenancy agreements, site management and maintenance issues (including management of voids) as well as strategies deployed in relation to conflict resolution and mediation. The findings arising from these focus groups are explored in Section 3.

1.5 The Report Structure

Section 2 explores the nature and condition of Traveller-specific accommodation as well as the extent and nature of voids. Section 3 explores the reasons why from a local authority perspective they believe Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. Section 4 explores the reasons why Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation from the perspective of Travellers and Traveller support organisations nationally and locally. Section 5 makes recommendations to address the issue of voids and of Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation.

¹⁰ These issues include the location, condition, design and layout of accommodation sites; allocation policies, the role of pre-tenancy training; tenancy agreements, site management and maintenance including void management as well as the way in which conflict is managed and mediated.

2. Quantifying the Issue

This section draws exclusively from the findings of the survey of local authorities. Section 2.1 details the total number and location of Traveller families across local authority areas nationally. Section 2.2 details the different types of Traveller-specific accommodation provided by local authorities and the numbers of Traveller families living in these different types of accommodation. Section 2.3 provides details on the general age and condition of local authority Traveller-specific accommodation. The final section in this chapter (Section 3.4) explores the extent and nature of voids in Traveller-specific accommodation at a national and at a local authority level.

2.1 The total number and location of Traveller families

The total number of families identified (within the survey) by the local authorities as living permanently in their local authority areas was 9,095 (98% of all Traveller families) and the total living temporarily in local authority areas was 186 (2% of all Traveller families), giving a total of 9281¹¹ Traveller families, assuming no double counting of the families seasonally residing in the local authority areas. Of these 9281 Traveller Families, 7612 (82%) did not live in Traveller-specific accommodation, while 1669 (18%) did. See Table 2.1 for a breakdown of the 1669 Traveller families living in Traveller-specific accommodation.

Table 2.1 A breakdown of the number of Traveller families living in Traveller-specific accommodation

Accommodation Type	No	% of total Traveller families identified as living in this type of accommodation
Group housing schemes	768	8%
Permanent halting sites	644	7%
Basic service sites	161	2%
'Other' Traveller-specific accommodation	53	0.5%
Transient halting sites	43	0.5%
Totals	1669	18%

(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

See Figure 2.1 for a breakdown of these figures by local authority area and Figure 2.2 for a breakdown of these figures by county.

¹¹ This figure is lower than the 9,911 Traveller families identified in the 2012 annual count of Traveller families (See Table 1.1 for details). The exact reason/s for this discrepancy is not known but it may be that some local authorities have underestimated/undercounted. It was also suggested that with increasing numbers of Travellers living in private rented accommodation the total number of Traveller families local authorities have contact with, may have fallen.

Figure 2.1 No of Traveller families identified within local authority area

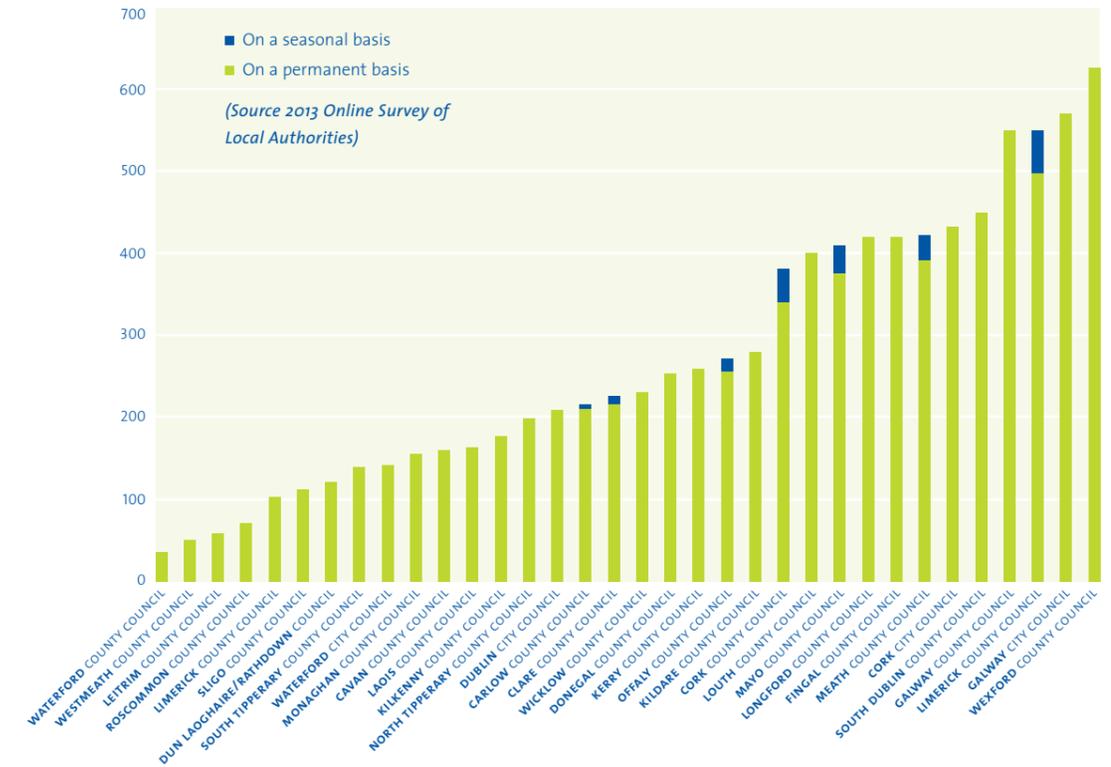
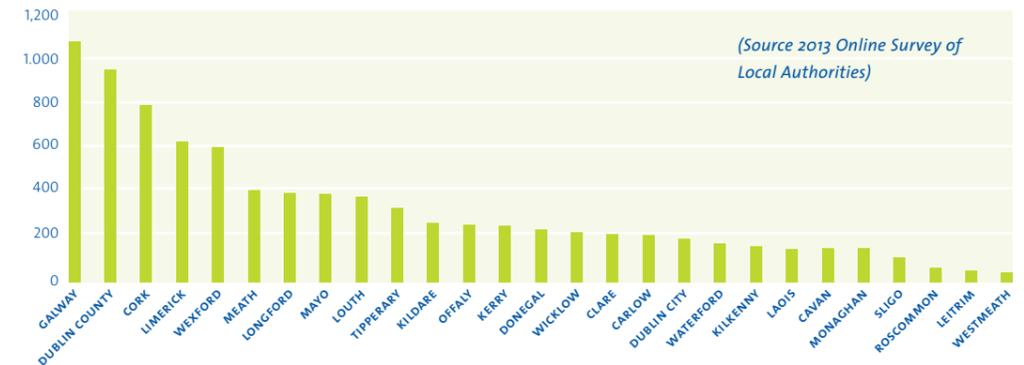


Figure 2.2 No of Traveller families by county¹²



The county with the highest number of Traveller families in the country was Co. Galway (1,120 families), followed by Co. Dublin (994 families), Cork (816 families) and Limerick (652 families). The numbers of Traveller families within local authority areas also varied considerably, from a low of 35 in Waterford County Council area to a high of 627 in Wexford County Council area. The vast bulk lived permanently in each area and only a small number of Traveller families lived seasonally¹³ in any county or local authority area.

¹² Co. Dublin is divided into two: Dublin City and Dublin County (which includes, Fingal, South Dublin and Dun Laoghaire Local authority areas).

¹³ Seasonal is defined in terms of not being a permanent resident within the county.

According to the local authorities, the average number of Traveller families living permanently in each local authority area was 268 and the average number of families living in an area on a seasonal basis was 5.6. See Table 2.2 for a breakdown of the seasonal Traveller population by local authority area.

Table 2.2 No of Traveller Families living on a seasonal basis in local authorities¹⁴

Accommodation Type	No	% of total Traveller population within the Local Authority area	Total No of Traveller Households within the Local Authority area
Cork Co. Co.	40	10	383
Limerick Co. Co.	50	9	550
Mayo Co. Co.	30	7	410
Meath Co. Co.	30	7	424
Offaly Co. Co.	13	5	272
Clare Co. Co.	10	4	228
Carlow Co. Co.	6	3	217
Kildare Co. Co.	7	3	279
Total	186	7	2763

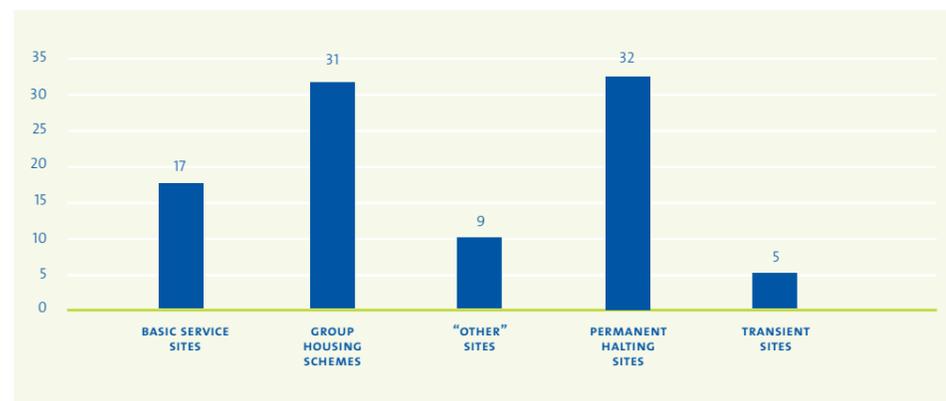
(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

Cork County Council had the highest percentage of Traveller families living in the area on a seasonal basis – with 40 (10%) Traveller families. Limerick City had the second highest percentage. Limerick City also had the largest absolute number of Traveller families living seasonally of all local authorities.

2.2 The nature of local authority Traveller-specific accommodation

Figure 2.3 provides a breakdown of the different types of Traveller-specific accommodation provided by local authorities nationally.

Figure 2.3 Traveller-specific accommodation types provided by local authorities



¹⁴ These figures were provided by the local authorities through the survey. The National Traveller organisations and other believe that this is a significant underestimation of the numbers.

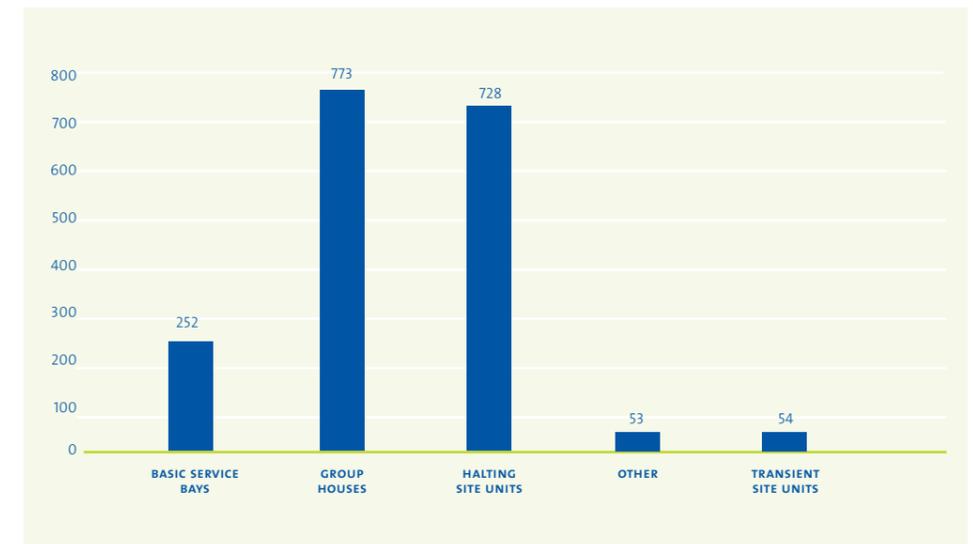
The survey found that 32 (94%) of local authorities provided permanent halting sites, while 31 (88%) provided group housing schemes. Half (17) of all local authorities provided basic service sites¹⁵ while only 5 (15%) of local authorities provided transient sites.

Accommodation included in the category of 'other' by local authorities included:

- Unofficial halting sites,
- Sites without services,
- Houses purchased out of the Traveller Accommodation budget for Travellers
- Temporary bays (in place pending the provision of permanent accommodation).

Figure 2.4 provides a breakdown of the total number of units available for each Traveller-specific accommodation type, as reported by local authorities.

Figure 2.4 Number of units available for Traveller-specific accommodation type



The survey found:

- 44 basic service sites with 252 basic service bays
- 144 group housing schemes with 773 houses
- 102 halting sites¹⁶ with 728 bays or units
- 7 sites described as "other" with 53 available bays or units
- 6 transient sites with 54 bays or units

¹⁵ Basic service sites are according to the Dept. of Environment Memorandum on the preparation, adoption and implementation of local authority Traveller accommodation programmes 2009 – 2013 'sites for Traveller caravans that are put in place pending the provision of suitable permanent accommodation,'..... 'with local authorities expected to provide water, toilets and waste removal provided there are no significant legal, planning, environmental, social, technical or other restraints in so doing'.

¹⁶ This excludes units in Fingal County Council area which the Council has deemed uninhabitable.

2.3 The age and condition of local authority Traveller-specific accommodation

See Table 2.3 and Figure 2.5 for details of an analysis of the age of Traveller-specific accommodation stock across the country as reported by local authorities in the survey.

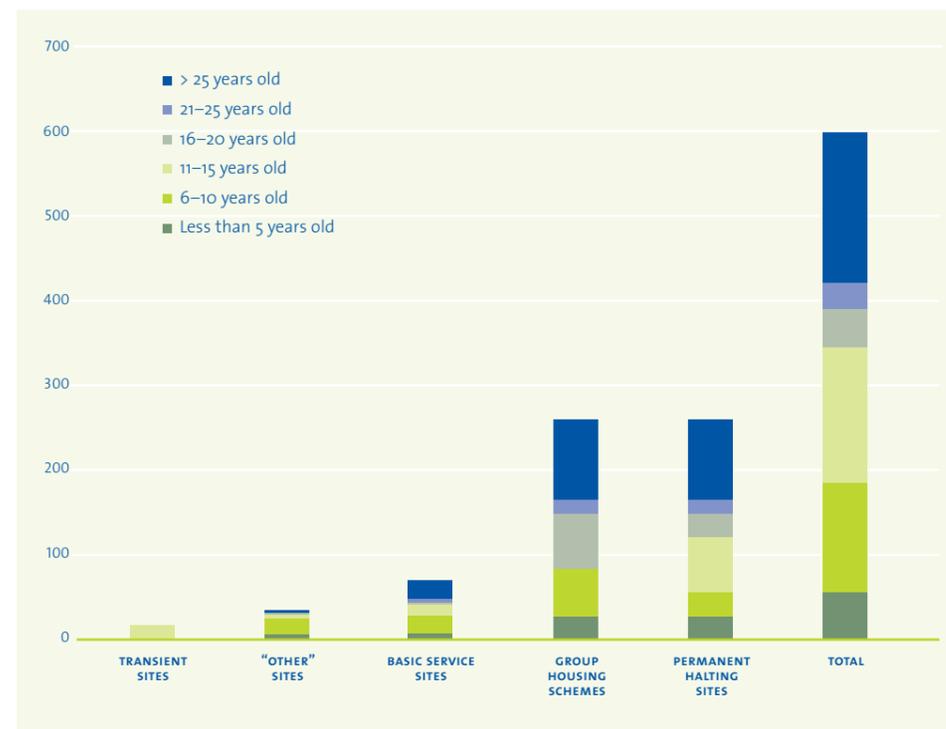
Table 2.3 Traveller-specific accommodation stock by age

Age Category	Basic Service Sites	Group Housing Schemes	Permanent Halting Sites	Transient Sites	"Other" Sites	Total
< 5 years	6	17	17	1	3	44 (7%)
6-10 years	23	63	32	1	16	135 (22%)
11-15 years	10	66	66	14	3	159 (27%)
16-20 years	1	18	28	0	2	49 (8%)
21-25 years	1	3	17	0	0	21 (4%)
> 25 years	25	73	92	0	2	192 (32%)
Total	66 (11%)	240 (40%)	252 (42%)	16 (3%)	26 (4%)	600*

(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

*This figure is more than the total number of sites because some sites contain a mixture of newer and older stock and were counted more than once by some local authorities.

Figure 2.5 Analysis of the age of Traveller-specific accommodation stock



(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

The survey found that almost one third of the total stock (32%) was more than 25 years old, while transient sites and sites described as "other" had the lowest age profile, with the most common age categories being 6-10 years for sites described as "other" and 11-15 years old for transient sites. For basic service sites, group housing schemes and permanent halting sites the most common age was greater than 25 years.

The survey also explored the extent and nature of refurbishment work which had taken place in these locations over the period 2010 and 2013. It found that a third of the sites had some sort of refurbishment work carried out over that period. See Table 2.4 for details of the extent of refurbishment work carried out.

Table 2.4 Analysis of the refurbishment work (including site design, unit structure, insulation etc.) which had taken place over the period 2010-2013

Level of Refurbishment carried out 2010-2013	Basic Service Sites	Group Housing Schemes	Permanent Halting Sites	Transient Sites	"Other" Sites	Total No.	% of Total Sites Refurbished
Some/moderate refurbishment	14	36	56	2	0	108	57%
Extensive refurbishment	6	19	24	2	3	54	29%
Completely redeveloped	7	5	12	2	0	26	14%
Total	27	60	92	6	3	188	

(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

The survey also identified 136 (23%) sites that needed refurbishment, see Table 2.5 for details of the level of refurbishment required in the short to medium term in relation to the different accommodation types. According to the local authorities, 20% (27) of these sites required complete redevelopment.

Table 2.5 No. of sites with refurbishment requirements

Level of Refurbishment required	Basic Service Sites	Group Housing Schemes	Permanent Halting Sites	Transient Sites	"Other" Sites	Total No.	% of Total Sites Identified
Some/moderate work required	0	41	22	0	0	63	46%
Extensive work required	4	14	25	0	3	46	34%
Complete redevelopment	8	5	14	0	0	27	20%
Total	12	60	61	0	3	136	

(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

2.4 The extent and nature of voids in Traveller-specific accommodation

Table 2.6 provides details of the levels of occupancy and voids for different Traveller-specific accommodation types across the country.

Table 2.6 Level of occupancy/voids across by Traveller-specific accommodation types

Level of Refurbishment required	Basic Service Sites	Group Housing Schemes	Permanent Halting Sites	Transient Sites	“Other” Sites	% of Total Sites Identified
No. of occupied units	172	695	550	40	52	1509
No.(& %) of voids	80 (32%)	78 (10%)	178 (24%)	14 (26%)	1 (2%)	351 (19%)
Total No of Units	252	773	728	54	53	1860¹⁷

(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

The survey found an overall Traveller-specific accommodation void rate of 19%. The highest void rate was 32% in basic service sites, followed by permanent halting sites which had 24% voids. For group housing schemes the void rate was 10% and transient sites was 26%, while just 2% of sites described as “other” were voids, nationwide.

The highest number of voids were found in Dublin City Council, while the highest percentage void rates were found in Co Longford (88%), followed by Co Monaghan (58%) and Co. Donegal (48%). See Table 2.7 for a breakdown of the level and percentage of voids across the 34 city and county councils.

2.5 In summary

Local authorities (within the survey carried out as part of this research) identified a total of 9,095 Traveller families living permanently and a further 186 families living temporarily across the country. The numbers of Traveller families living within each county varied considerably, from a low of 35 in Waterford Co. Co area to a high of 627 in Wexford Co. Co area. In relation to Traveller-specific accommodation 94% of local authorities provide permanent halting sites and 88% provide group housing schemes. Half of all Local Authorities provide basic service sites, while 15% provide transient sites. The local authorities estimated that 18% of all Traveller families living in the State lived in local authority provided Traveller-specific accommodation. The survey found 1860 Traveller units throughout the country¹⁸. Of these, almost one third (32%) were more than 25 years old. A total of 196 sites (33%) were refurbished (to some extent) during the period 2010-2013. The average void rate across all accommodation type, was 19%. The highest void rate is found in basic service sites (32%), followed by permanent halting sites (24%). The void rate for group housing schemes was 10%.

¹⁷ This total excludes uninhabitable units.

¹⁸ This figure excludes uninhabitable units.

Table 2.7 Voids¹⁹ by local authority area

Local Authority	Voids in Basic Service Sites		Voids in Group Housing Schemes		Voids in Permanent Halting Sites		Voids in Transient Sites		Voids in “Other” Sites		Overall No. of Voids in LA Area	Overall % of Voids for LA Area
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
Westmeath County Council	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	0	0%
Laois County Council	-	-	0	-	0	-	0	-	0	0%	0	0%
Wicklow County Council	0	-	0	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	0	0%
Cavan County Council	-	-	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0%
Dun Laoghaire /Rathdown Council	0	-	1	4%	1	4%	-	-	-	-	2	4%
Waterford City Council	-	-	1	14%	0	-	-	-	-	-	1	5%
South Dublin County Council	3	9%	2	2%	10	13%	-	-	-	-	15	7%
Limerick County Council	0	-	0	-	3	15%	-	-	-	-	3	7%
North Tipperary County Council	-	-	0	-	2	15%	-	-	0	0%	2	8%
Cork City Council	0	-	4	33%	0	-	-	-	-	-	4	8%
Limerick City Council	4	13%	3	25%	0	-	-	-	-	-	7	11%
Kilkenny County Council	-	-	0	-	2	22%	-	-	-	-	2	12%
Meath County Council	-	-	0	-	8	27%	-	-	-	-	8	12%
South Tipperary County Council	-	-	0	-	4	29%	-	-	-	-	4	13%
Galway County Council	9	56%	5	9%	0	-	-	-	-	-	14	18%
Wexford County Council	5	45%	3	6%	5	42%	-	-	-	-	13	19%
Sligo County Council	-	-	-	-	3	18%	-	-	1	33%	4	20%
Carlow County Council	-	-	1	8%	3	33%	1	100%	-	-	5	22%
Dublin City Council	2	9%	8	7%	42	41%	-	-	-	-	52	22%
Fingal County Council ²⁰	20	54%	18	24%	6	12%	-	-	0	0%	44 plus 80	23%
Galway City Council	17	57%	7	26%	1	3%	3	3%	-	-	28	24%
Roscommon County Council	6	43%	1	6%	6	32%	-	-	-	-	13	25%
Kerry County Council ²¹	-	-	0	0%	7	26%	-	-	-	-	7	26%
Leitrim County Council	-	-	1	8%	7	47%	-	-	-	-	8	30%
Mayo County Council	-	-	2	14%	4	67%	-	-	-	-	6	30%
Clare County Council	5	33%	15	31%	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	32%
Kildare County Council	-	-	4	29%	7	35%	-	-	-	-	11	32%
Louth County Council	0	0%	0	0%	12	86%	-	-	-	-	12	34%
Cork County Council	0	0%	0	0%	6	67%	-	-	0	0%	6	35%
Offaly County Council	9	64%	0	0%	8	27%	-	-	-	-	17	35%
Waterford County Council	-	-	-	-	3	38%	-	-	-	-	3	38%
Donegal County Council	0	-	2	14%	0	-	10	100%	-	-	12	48%
Monaghan County Council	-	-	-	-	14	70%	-	-	0	0%	14	58%
Longford County Council	-	-	-	-	14	88%	-	-	-	-	14	88%

¹⁹ This information was compiled based on the survey returns provided by the local authorities over the period March–May 2013.

²⁰ The 80 units (43 Basic Service Units and 37 permanent halting sites) Fingal Co. Co. identified separately as uninhabitable are not included in these figures. Were these to have been included the overall void rates for Fingal would have been increased from 23% to 42%.

²¹ Including Tralee, Listowel and Killarney Town Councils figures.

3. Local Authority Perspectives

This section is based on the findings of the survey of local authorities, as well as the findings emerging from the consultations with local authority officials in the case study areas. Section 3.1 explores why voids are an issue for local authorities. Section 3.2 explores some of the reasons why local authorities believe Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. Section 3.3 explore ways in which local authorities believe that voids can be addressed, while Section 3.4 examines the extent to which there is overprovision of Traveller-specific accommodation. Section 3.5 reviews (in the case of overprovision) alternative uses for Traveller-specific accommodation.

3.1 Why voids are a concern for local authorities?

Over fifteen (44%) local authorities identified voids as a particular concern for them within the survey, and of some concern. See Table 3.1 for details of the reasons given. It is also the case that voids were at least of some concern for 25 (73%) of all city and county councils.

Table 3.1 Reasons why voids are of specific concern for local authorities

Issues with compatibility of various family units. It can be difficult to identify families suitable to fill particular voids. This can be linked to Traveller feuds.
Vandalism/Recurring fire damage which can ultimately lead to the closure of sites on health and safety grounds.
Security of vacant accommodation. Unoccupied units can deteriorate (while other families have a need for accommodation). Voids are expensive to secure and maintain.
Traveller families preference for social housing and/or private rented.
Traveller feuding and anti-social behaviour including intimidation and illegal occupancy of bays by Traveller families Health and safety concerns.
Voids leading to dumping of rubbish and areas to keep horses.
Lack of funds not available to carry out repairs therefore units cannot be re-let.
Extensive damage to 8 bays at a particular permanent halting site with; Current vacant bays on basic service site, adjacent to permanent site, exist as these bays are not being allocated when occupants vacate this site as it is planned to close this site.
Voids represent lost revenue to the local authority. Voids represent issues in relation to family unrest.
Voids can contribute to and portray a negative image of the Traveller Community and the Local authority to the wider community.

It was also noted that voids are expensive to secure and maintain with vandalism (examples were cited of copper piping being removed leading to flooding) and arson seen as threats when voids are not secured quickly.

'Firstly an alarm is installed and steel shutters are fitted over the windows and doors to deter vandals and prevent break in's. This costs between €600 and €800 per unit'... We also now have a policy of draining and removing the tank to avoid the issues associated with flooding which have in the past cost us up to €1000 to repair (local authority consultee).

3.2 Local authority views on the reasons for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation

See Figure 3.1 for details of some of the reasons why local authorities believed Travellers leave Traveller-specific Accommodation. Reasons included within the category of 'other' are detailed in Table 3.2.

Figure 3.1 Reasons for voids/Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation

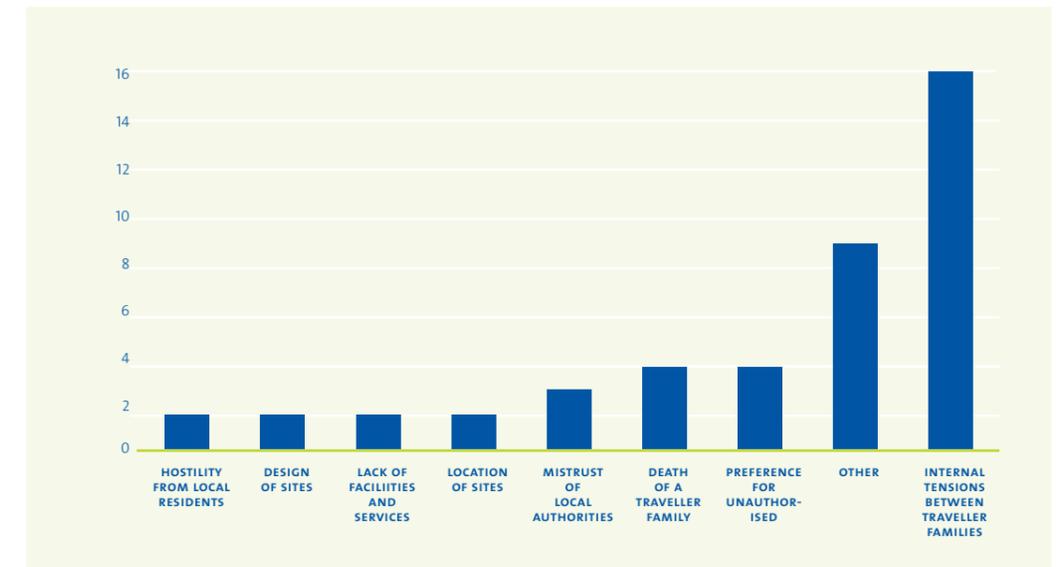


Table 3.2 Reasons for voids/Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation

Only one extended family currently live in a particular halting site and as a consequence other families do not wish to live there.
Vandalism, feuding and serious anti-social behaviour on site.
No definite reasons for vacating units.
Families want to live in standard housing. Even most of the families on the site want standard housing if it was available.
Traveller families move to other housing options (e.g. RAS or Local authority Housing) or Traveller families leave the area.
Some vacancies have arisen where families have been accommodated in housing, either private-rented or local authority housing, from permanent caravan site accommodation and it is important that the vacant bay be allocated to a family who is compatible with the existing residents of the site.
In other instances bays have been extensively damaged following a feud and it was necessary for tenants to vacate the site for their safety. If it is not possible to repair the bays and they are left vacant for a length of time they are subject to vandalism and it is very difficult to prove who is responsible for the damage. This further damage compounds the cost of carrying out repairs in order to reallocate the bay.
Reduced demand for halting site accommodation.
Families may wish to leave the area. Where couples separate, the party remaining on the site may feel isolated from a location point of view (may not drive and site may have inadequate public transport facilities in place).
Funds not available/uneconomical to carry out the repairs necessary to re-let a number of units.

(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

Internal tensions/compatibility issues between Traveller families were identified by 16 (50%) of local authorities as the most frequently occurring reason for voids/for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. There was also a view that some younger Travellers move in order to meet their preference for private rented accommodation.

3.3 Local authority strategies to address voids/the issue of Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific Accommodation?

See Table 3.3 for details of how the local authorities consulted believed the issue of voids within Traveller-specific accommodation could be addressed.

Table 3.3 Solutions suggested by local authorities to address voids

Close particular sites/replace with group housing
Work through the Traveller-specific waiting list
Use the Units for other purposes (e.g. Homeless provision)
Re-location of extended families to particular sites
Extensive site specific work to ensure compatibility of tenants
Quick re-allocation
Seek funding for refurbishment
Sub groups of LTACC set up
Upgrade the site
Pre-tenancy programmes
Find ways to support great Traveller participation
Support tenant purchase

(Source 2013 Online Survey of Local Authorities)

Another suggestion made by a local authority official (based on a view that the management of Traveller-specific accommodation was about 25 years behind more general social housing management) was to find ways to facilitate enhanced levels of both:

- Meaningful Traveller participation at all stages in the design, development, management and refurbishment of sites and schemes. The organisation of tenant participation course was identified as a key support in relation to this.
- Tenant purchase

There was also a suggestion that where sites in particular were beyond repair local authority's preference was to replace them with group housing schemes.

Reference was also made within the local authority consultations to the fact where local authorities made the decision to evict a tenant because of anti-social behaviour this could take up to six months (going through the legal system), during which time the individual could continue to make the lives of other neighbouring Traveller families very difficult.

The establishment of a specialist agency to deal with the management of and delivery of Traveller-specific accommodation was another suggestion.

Finding ways to accommodate compatibility issues was also identified as an important strategy to tackle voids. There was a view that the current practice (which may or may not involve consultation with Traveller Families living in adjacent units) to offer the accommodation to the next family on the list (as they are deemed to be in greatest need) needs to be amended to take account of compatibility issues.

3.4 Overprovision of Traveller-specific Accommodation?

At the time of the survey eight²² local authorities reported over-provision of certain types of Traveller-specific accommodation within their areas. The reasons given by these local authorities for this over provision included:

'With 14 units unoccupied it would appear that there are more units than currently required.'

'We do not have many bays and families seem to prefer more standard accommodation in most instances.'

'With difficulties in maintaining good relationships between families on group housing schemes this suggests smaller schemes may work better.'

'The assessment of need does not identify a demand for halting site bays.'

'We have too many basic service bays with no assessed need for current provision.'

'The need for halting sites as transience from roadside to settling has been surpassed. Likewise there is no demand for Group scheme accommodation from young emerging families.'

3.5 Alternative Uses for Traveller-specific Accommodation (in the case of overprovision.)

The most popular alternative use for Traveller-specific accommodation (in the case of overprovision) cited by ten local authorities was housing provision (either sheltered housing (6), emergency accommodation (1), homeless accommodation (1), general local authority housing (2)), the next most commonly use cited by four local authorities was for the re-development of the sites as Traveller support centres.

3.6 In Summary

Fifteen (44%) of local authorities identified voids as a clear concern. Voids are an issue for local authorities for a number of reasons including: units that are empty for any length of time are prone to deteriorate and to vandalism; the cost of refurbishment of voids can be very high and in many cases the resources are not there or it is not economical to repair these units; it can be difficult to find compatible Traveller families to fill voids. Internal tensions between Traveller families was identified by 16 (50%) of local authorities as the most frequently occurring reason for voids/for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. Local authorities have adopted a variety of strategies to tackling voids, including filling the voids quickly and closing problematic sites. Eight local authorities believe that there is a degree of over provision of certain types of Traveller-specific accommodation. The most popular alternative use for sites (in the case of over provision) is social housing.

4. Traveller Perspectives

This section is compiled based on the findings of consultations with Travellers living in Traveller-specific accommodation at a local level, as well as Traveller support organisations working at both local and national level.

Section 4.1 explores why Travellers believe Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. Section 4.2 explores possible solutions to the issues identified in Section 4.1

4.1 Why Travellers believe Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation?

The Travellers consulted identified a range of reasons for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation including:

On-going tensions, conflict, intimidation and/or feuding within and between Traveller families in particular areas linked to

- i) The incompatibility of some Traveller families in some areas who would not, if given the choice, chose to live close to one another, but who are housed (often despite their protests) together by the local authority.
- ii) Families not registered with the local authority parking adjacent to legitimate sites and using the water and electricity supplies of legally resident families, creating imbalances on sites which can lead to feuding.
- iii) The dominance/bullying behaviour of a particular Traveller family/family group on a site.
- iv) The lack of a network of transient sites in the country that would enable Traveller families 'to take to the road over the summer months' as many would have done traditionally.

Interestingly some Travellers attributed the growth in feuding to the nature of current Traveller-specific accommodation which effectively precludes Traveller men in particular engaging in self-employment or keeping horses, which at time of high unemployment²³ is one of the few opportunities they might have to provide for their families. One Traveller representative described it in the following terms as an 'existential crises of identity exacerbated by the sites and schemes'. Some also linked the increased levels of feuding to the closure in July 2012 of all Senior Traveller Training Centres (STTC) which provided Travellers (aged over 18 years) with an outlet to access training and support to make the transition to work and adult life.

Burning of Houses/Units. In a small number of cases Traveller families have been forced to leave their homes because of arson with nobody yet prosecuted for these crimes.

Particular personal circumstances (including bereavement, domestic violence and ill health)

22. Carlow County Council, Clare County Council, Cork County Council, Longford County Council, Louth County Council, Monaghan County Council, and Wexford County Council.

23. According to Census 2011 Unemployment in the Irish traveller community was 84.3% in 2011 up from 74.9% in 2006.

Deaths within Traveller families (including suicides on sites and schemes²⁴).

'There are many different customs and rituals surrounding the experience of death in the Traveller community. Traditionally when someone died, the home and belongings were burnt. This custom of burning is not as common as it was'²⁵. Notwithstanding Traveller families may want to sell a caravan and/or indeed move to another location/site, because they are traumatised and grieving and their current location brings back too many painful memories.

Situations of domestic violence (where a woman and her children) for safety reasons may have to leave a particular site.

Health concerns. Some consultees reported experiences of ambulances and fire engines trying to access sites and schemes but being prevented by physical barriers placed on sites by local authorities and that this was a concern for the older generation in particular. The fact that electricity metres can run out and access to the key can be complex was also an issue for Traveller families who had a family member dependent on a nebuliser, etc.

Poor maintenance and sub-standard conditions on sites over an extended period of time.

There was a view among the Travellers consulted that the repairs and maintenance for Traveller-specific accommodation take longer that they would for more general local authority housing.

There was also a view that the rents charged were high relative to the quality of the services provided and that if a Traveller family was in rent arrears maintenance ceased. The Travellers consulted also gave examples of temporary sites that had over time become permanent but with conditions on the site remaining poor and often sub-standard (the absence of maintenance of on-site lighting was for example cited in a number of locations as an issue). This view is supported by the fact that the highest level of voids (32% compared with an average of 23 across all accommodation types) within Traveller-specific accommodation is found within basic service sites.

The issue of the citing, location and management of CCTV²⁶ cameras on some sites was also seen to raise issues for some Travellers who regarded it as an invasion of residents' privacy. The disembodied voice that is broadcast from the loud speaker located on the CCTV also has a negative impact on some residents making them 'paranoid and stressed'.

The issue of the enclosure of some Traveller sites by high walls was also identified as an issue for some families who found sites enclosed in this way isolating and claustrophobic. As one consultee described it 'it felt like living in a prison, is it any wonder I could not wait to get away from there, who in their right mind would want to live behind walls that high'.

Overcrowding on sites as families grow up and set up new families. With insufficient room on sites to accommodate the newly married couples starting families, they leave and in some cases re-locate to private rented accommodation.

The location of some sites in geographically isolated areas, poorly serviced by local transport links and far from amenities such as shops and health services.

Sites (with significant number of boarded up units) leading families to feeling isolated, lonely and forgotten and ultimately leading them to move from the site.

Informal buying and selling of sites within Traveller-specific accommodation (either unknown to the local authority/or 'with a blind eye turned by the local authority'), leading to a change in the composition of the families on a site, with some families becoming overwhelmed and choosing to leave.

Disillusionment with /distrust of the local authority

Consultees reported a great deal of disillusionment and in some cases distrust of local authorities among the Traveller community. The reasons for this were many and varied as examples of where this disillusionment came from several consultees reported cases of extended families requesting to live together on the same site (where there were voids) and waiting more than two years for an answer from the local authority, only to be told there is no budget to renovate and make the units habitable. Consultees also cited examples of local authorities for various reasons closing halting sites (that Traveller families have lived in for years and consider home) and re-locating Traveller families to other locations where they have no connections. This leads to Traveller families feeling isolated and vulnerable and leading them to distrust the local authority as a landlord and ultimately move out of local authority provided Traveller-specific accommodation.

The attitude of local authority staff dealing with Traveller accommodation was seen as key to how a particular Traveller family was treated. The view was that you could be lucky and find a staff member who had a reasonably open attitude to a particular family or you could equally be unlucky and find a staff member that had a very negative attitude. The view in general was that (local authority staff (including the Traveller Accommodation Officer, Senior Housing Officer and the local authority Social Worker) have a lot of power and discretion which they can use either positively or negatively and depending on their attitude to Travellers. There was also an consensus among the Travellers consulted that in their opinion within the local authority Travellers are conceived as a problem, this was evidenced by the fact that Travellers living in Traveller-specific accommodation are automatically assigned a social worker (whether or not there were issues) and the question was raised as to what other groups receive this treatment.

The culture of Traveller-specific accommodation

There was a view particularly at national level that the current culture of Traveller-specific accommodation was to constrain, rather than support and develop and that this culture needed to change to enable Travellers have more say in where and how they lived.

A preference for private rented?

Views on whether and to what extent Travellers had a preference for private rented accommodation over Traveller-specific accommodation provision varied. Some of the Travellers consulted were of the opinion that that older Travellers generally like living in Traveller-specific accommodation but that some of the younger generation would prefer to live in either social housing or private rented accommodation. Others argued that Travellers would generally prefer to live in Traveller-specific accommodation but when their options were limited they might settle for private rented accommodation.

24. The 2010 Study of Traveller Health found that suicide rates are nearly seven times higher in Traveller men compared with the general male population.

25. Customs at Time of Death – Parish of the Travelling People: <http://www.pttrav.ie/resources/the-light-within/53-customs-at-time-of-death> (accessed 24th October 2013).

26. According to the Local authorities consulted, CCTV cameras are in place to prevent dumping, vandalism anti-social behaviour, speeding, etc. They are not always in operation as recording is extremely expensive so their operation varies between recording and monitoring.

What was very clear was that assessing private rented accommodation can be difficult for Traveller families for a number of reasons. Landlords are not always prepared to have Travellers as tenants and where they are often require payment of up to three months' rent in advance.

It is also the case that Travellers who are used to living in larger family groups in Traveller-specific accommodation often find it difficult to adapt to living away from families, while neighbours may not be very accepting of having Travellers next door.

The national Traveller organisations report that there are an increasing number of Traveller families leaving private rented accommodation, particularly as the cost of living continues to rise and many younger Travellers find themselves needing the support of others to get established.

Views on the extent to which a preference for private rented accommodation was a contributory factor to Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation varied considerably among the Travellers consulted. Undoubtedly there are Travellers whose first preference would be private rented over Traveller-specific accommodation. Consultees argued that often a Travellers family's preference for private rented accommodation is however driven by a desire to escape the problems (identified above) associated with Traveller-specific accommodation.

Others argued that it was less of a preference and more of a choice of last resort when there are no Traveller-specific accommodation options available. Interestingly if (as a result of a lack of choice) Travellers find themselves living in private rented accommodation, the local authority do not consider the accommodation as an interim measure. Instead the local authority determines that the Traveller family is adequately accommodated and they are removed from the housing list (and ultimately not considered within the context of the Assessment of Need for the Traveller Accommodation Programme). The National Traveller organisations are very clear that encouraging Travellers to access and use private rented accommodation is not a long term solution to the accommodation issues of the Traveller community and that other ways need to be found to support and house the Traveller community.

A preference for unauthorised sites?

A preference for unauthorised sites was not identified by the Travellers consulted as a reason for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. When asked could a preference for unauthorised site be a contributory factor to Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation, the overwhelming answer was no. Travellers were very clear that locating themselves in an unauthorised site could only be a temporary measure as they were aware of the Criminal Trespass Legislation (2002). They would be quickly moved on from an unauthorised site and ran the danger of having their van impounded if they did locate in such a location.

Why more Travellers are not leaving Traveller-specific Accommodation?

For a significant number of the Traveller consultees the key question was less about why are Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation and more about why more Travellers are not leaving Traveller-specific accommodation? The reasons given by the consultees related to the lack of other options open to Travellers and the growing awareness that private rented accommodation was both difficult to access and challenging to sustain in the current economic climate.

4.2 Possible approaches to tackling the issues

The Travellers consulted identified a range of approaches to tackling the issues identified in Section 4.1 as follows:

Dealing with conflict/feuding

The local authority and the Garda Síochána need to intervene and take action at an early stage to deal with issues of violence and conflict in Traveller-specific accommodations.

'The local authority needs to be more hands on in dealing with anti-social and bullying behaviour'

Traveller families who are the victims of this feuding should not be left to fend for themselves. While local authorities need to tackle the issue of informal buying and selling of sites within Traveller-specific accommodation.

More engagement by the local authority with the Traveller families on a site prior to the location of a new family on that site (in order to avoid incompatible families being housed together).

Development of clear protocols by the local authority to deal with the specific accommodation issues of Traveller families who

- request re-location because of the death of a family member
- request re-location because of domestic violence issues.

More engagement by the local authority with the Traveller community in relation to the selection and design/redesign of sites that are homes (capable of a certain level of expansion to accommodate growing family units). The Travellers consulted generally reported that smaller sites (accommodating a small number of compatible family groupings tend to work better).

Enhancing the conditions, maintenance and management of certain sites. Structures need to be established to enable better and on-going communication between the local authority and Travellers in relation to the maintenance and management of a particular site. Remedial work is needed as a matter of some urgency on some sites to bring them up to an acceptable standard.

Ensure implementation of the actions included and prioritised in the local Traveller Accommodation Plans (TAPS) by giving the NTACC the power to compel local authorities to implement the TAP actions with sanctions for non-completion.

4.3 In summary

The Travellers and Traveller organisations consulted for this study do not believe that there is over provision of Traveller-specific accommodation. They know that Traveller families are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation and have identified a variety of reasons for this including: feuding, the location and design of sites and schemes, and the poor condition and lack of maintenance and management of certain locations. Their question is not why Travellers are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation but why more Travellers are not leaving.

Their answer is that if a transfer to other Traveller-specific accommodation is not possible (and Travellers report that it is generally not available) then private rented accommodation is often the only other option open to Traveller families. It is difficult for Traveller families to access private rented accommodation and ultimately it is not well suited to Traveller culture in the longer term. Their preferred option would be to revisit and revamp the way Traveller-specific accommodation is developed and managed. This would encourage and enable Traveller families whose preference is to live in Traveller-specific accommodation to do so.

5. Conclusions, Recommendations and Good Practice Checklist

This section uses the findings of the survey and the consultations with local authorities and the findings of consultations with Travellers to develop a series of recommendations for policy and practice. The section also benefits from a review of the literature identified in the bibliography. Section 5.1 highlights the key reasons for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. Section 5.2 identifies how this can be prevented. Section 5.3 explores the question of overprovision. Section 5.4 details recommendations for national policy level while Section 5.5 contains a practical checklist to support good practice in relation to preventing and tackling voids.

5.1 Conclusions: Why are Travellers leaving Traveller-specific Accommodation?

Interestingly both local authorities and Travellers were in agreement in relation to the fact that Traveller families are leaving Traveller-specific accommodation and the main reasons for their departure are follows:

- Feuding and intimidation
- Issues related to site location, design and management
- Poor relations with the local authority
- Particular personal circumstances (related to bereavement, domestic violence, ill health etc.)

Local authorities also identified a preference for unauthorised sites and poor relations with the wider community as reasons for Travellers leaving (neither of these reasons were identified by Travellers as part of this research). While Travellers and Traveller organisations identified the draw, particularly for younger Travellers, of private rented (as a way of getting away from many of the issues identified above) as another reason for Travellers leaving Traveller-specific accommodation. They believed that if the issues they identified could be addressed the attractiveness of private rented accommodation would be significantly diminished.

5.2 Conclusions: How can this be prevented?

There was less agreement among Travellers and local authorities in relation to how this can be prevented.

- In relation to feuding and intimidation

Traveller organisations argued that local authorities and the Gardai had to play a much more significant role, and intervene at a much earlier stage to address the issue of feuding and intimidation on Traveller-specific sites. Traveller organisation also argued

that the current design of Traveller sites (which effectively eliminated any opportunities for Travellers to engage in self-employment) was contributing to a lack of occupation for Travellers living in Traveller-specific accommodation, increased stress levels on sites and ultimately feeding into feuding. Local authorities response in contrast was to isolate the ringleaders and close the site where the feuding, intimidation and violence become too much. In the most extreme cases sites were closed as a result of extensive vandalism and arson.

- Issues related to site location, design and management

Local authorities were clear that there would be limited resources to undertake the development and/or redevelopment of new Traveller-specific accommodation over the next number of years. Where resources were available the local authorities the preference was clearly for the development/redevelopment of smaller schemes and sites, that would accommodate a smaller number of family groupings but that would be capable of some expansion to accommodate the growth of families. The Travellers and Traveller representative organisations were also of the view that smaller was better but there was a great deal of concern about how and when the substandard conditions on particular sites and schemes would be addressed.

- Poor relations with the local authority

Both local authorities and Travellers believed that their relationships at local level were generally poor. Travellers reported feeling powerless in the current situation. Some indeed believed that things were being set up to fail in order to facilitate a process of assimilation and fragmentation of Traveller culture. Both groups agreed that there was a need to foster a culture of mutual respect and communication between the local authority and the Traveller families living in Traveller-specific accommodation, with a requirement for regular and on-going communication.

- Particular personal circumstances

Local authorities believed that where possible they did try to facilitate transfers within Traveller-specific accommodation because of changes/issues related to Travellers particular family circumstances. Traveller believed that this should not be a discretionary matter and that there should be clear documented protocols outlining how transfers/relocations should be dealt with.

5.3 Conclusions: To what extent is there overprovision?

Eight local authorities reported that (according to the assessments of need) there was overprovision of certain types of Traveller-specific accommodation within their areas. In contrast the Travellers consulted did not believe there was overprovision, given the overall rise in the total Traveller population, the level of overcrowding and sharing occurring within the Traveller community. The growing recognition is that private rented accommodation is not the answer, given that it was often not working out to be a long term option for Traveller families (where they were able to find a landlord that would be prepared to have a Traveller family as tenants).

The most popular alternative use identified by local authorities for Traveller-specific accommodation in the case of overprovision was social housing, while the next most commonly cited use was for re-development as Traveller support centres. Travellers in contrast believe that if a site/scheme was purchased/built with funding under the TAP it should be used to support Travellers and not be diverted to other purposes.

5.4 National Policy Level Recommendations

1. Clarify and Agree the Demand for Traveller-specific Accommodation

The national Traveller organisations and others contest the finding that 60% Travellers want standard housing arguing that Traveller families are so desperate they tick all housing options, not their preference. This view is supported by the finding of the 2011 ITM Study²⁷ for the NTACC of the operation and effectiveness of the LTACCs (2009-10) which found that 'nineteen (55%) of the LTACC Traveller representatives they consulted as part of their study were not in agreement with the process of assessment of need'.

Develop an agreed Annual Count and National Assessment of Need for the Development of the local Traveller accommodation programmes. This would necessitate Travellers and Traveller representative organisations working with the local authority to undertake both the Annual Count and the Assessment of Need (in particular). The 2010 All Ireland Traveller Health Study provides a methodology that could be adopted for the purposes of the Assessment of Need.

2. Develop a Charter for Traveller-specific Accommodation²⁸

Develop a charter that would include minimum standards that describe what the local authority should be achieving in all their Traveller-specific accommodation under a number of headings including

- Communication
- Participation
- Quality of accommodation
- Repairs, maintenance, improvements and management
- Accommodation options
- Tenancy sustainment
- Estate management
- Anti-social behaviour
- Tenancy disputes

A similar type charter is currently in place and would appear to be functioning effectively in Scotland.

27. ITM (2011) Summary Report on the Operation and Effectiveness of the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (June 2009-Dec 2010) For the NTACC April 2011.

28. Similar in style to that of the 2012 Scottish Social Housing Charter (<http://housingcharter.scotland.gov.uk/media/34241/the%20scottish%20social%20housing%20charter.pdf>).

3. Extend the powers of the NTACC

Extend the power of the NTACC to enable it monitor the annual implementation of TAPs and the charter with the introduction at national level of incentives (and where necessary sanctions) for local authorities who progress (fail to progress) the implementation of their TAPs and reduce their void levels.

5.5 Guidelines for enhancing practice at a local level

A crucial outcome of the research was to be a practical checklist for key stakeholders (local authorities, Travellers and the DECLG) of actions to prevent and respond to vacancies on sites. See Table 5.1 for details.

Table 5.1 Good practice checklist

Focus	Suggested Action
Dealing with feuding	– Early intervention and swift action by the local authority and Gardai to deal with the perpetrators where issues arise
Conflict resolution and mediation	– Where agreement cannot be reached there is an ability to bring in an independent mediation services to resolve issues
Location, design and layout of Traveller-specific accommodation ²⁹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Locate sites close to existing amenities – Focus on the development of good quality, culturally appropriate smaller sites – Provide for family growth in all Traveller accommodation – Sites/schemes should be of a sufficient size to enable provision on-site for spaces for caravans to enable seasonal travel and for 1-2 caravans of visiting families – Traveller engagement at the early stage of the site development/ re-development and during the development process – Establish a project steering group early in the development process to oversee the site/scheme development projects. This group should report to the LTACC – Membership of the project level steering group to be broadly structured. It could include: the HSE, local authority staff, Traveller representatives (proposed residents of the site if possible); Traveller organisations (primary health care workers etc.), elected representatives and others (e.g. community welfare offices, education professionals, employment agencies, Gardai, etc.) – Discontinue the practice of screening Traveller sites/schemes with high walls
Management and maintenance ³⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Ensure the Traveller Accommodation Unit is welcoming and information is provided in user friendly formats – Support a high level of involvement by Travellers in all aspects of the management and maintenance of their own accommodation – Support the establishment of Traveller tenant associations – Travellers are involved in the selection of caretakers on site and can be considered for the posts

29. Cena – the first Traveller Led Voluntary Accommodation Association (an initiative of ITM) may, once it is fully functioning, be an example of good design that others could follow.

30. Specific guidelines for local authorities can be accessed within: Kane, F., Treadwell Shine, K. & Coates, D. (2008) Good Practice in Housing Management Guidelines for Local Authorities – Management and Maintenance of Traveller-specific Accommodation. Centre for Housing Research.

Allocations policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Should be transparent (not discretionary) – Should take into account compatibility of Traveller families – Allocate units/houses during the construction where possible – Put mechanisms and clear protocols in place in consultation with Travellers and Traveller organisations to meet the emergency and temporary accommodation requirements brought on by changes in Traveller families personal circumstances
Relationship & capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Provide pre-tenancy training for Traveller families moving into Traveller-specific accommodation. The National Traveller Money Advice and Budgeting Service (NTMABS) have developed a Traveller-specific pre-tenancy programme that could be used for this purpose called ‘The Cost of Moving’ – Provide cultural awareness training for staff working with Travellers across the local authority (in order to increase awareness of the culture of Traveller families) – Travellers to provide cultural awareness training for the LTACC
Void management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Take into account the issues of compatibility between Traveller families when filling voids – Travellers are involved with the local authority in the selection of family groupings to go into sites – Where Traveller identify compatibility issues the local authority will treat the issue seriously and where necessary re-accommodate Travellers
Make the LTACC structure/s work better	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Encourage and facilitate more meaningful Traveller engagement in the assessment of need. This is best done with the involvement of Travellers (as is the case in Dublin City) – Encourage and facilitate more meaningful Traveller participation in the LTACC – Involve the LTACC fully in review and development of the TAP – Introduce sub-committee structures to progress particular aspects of the TAP (as is the case in South Dublin) – Introduce transparency and advise the LTACC on the budgets available and the plans to spend it – Encourage leadership at a local level from among the Traveller community by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Support and resource national Traveller organisations to establish local Traveller support groups (where they do not/no longer exist) – Resource existing local Traveller support groups to support Traveller participation in the LTACC – Create a system for Travellers to nominate their representative/s (the LTACC should not be able to veto Traveller nominations) – Meetings be rescheduled if there is no Traveller present

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