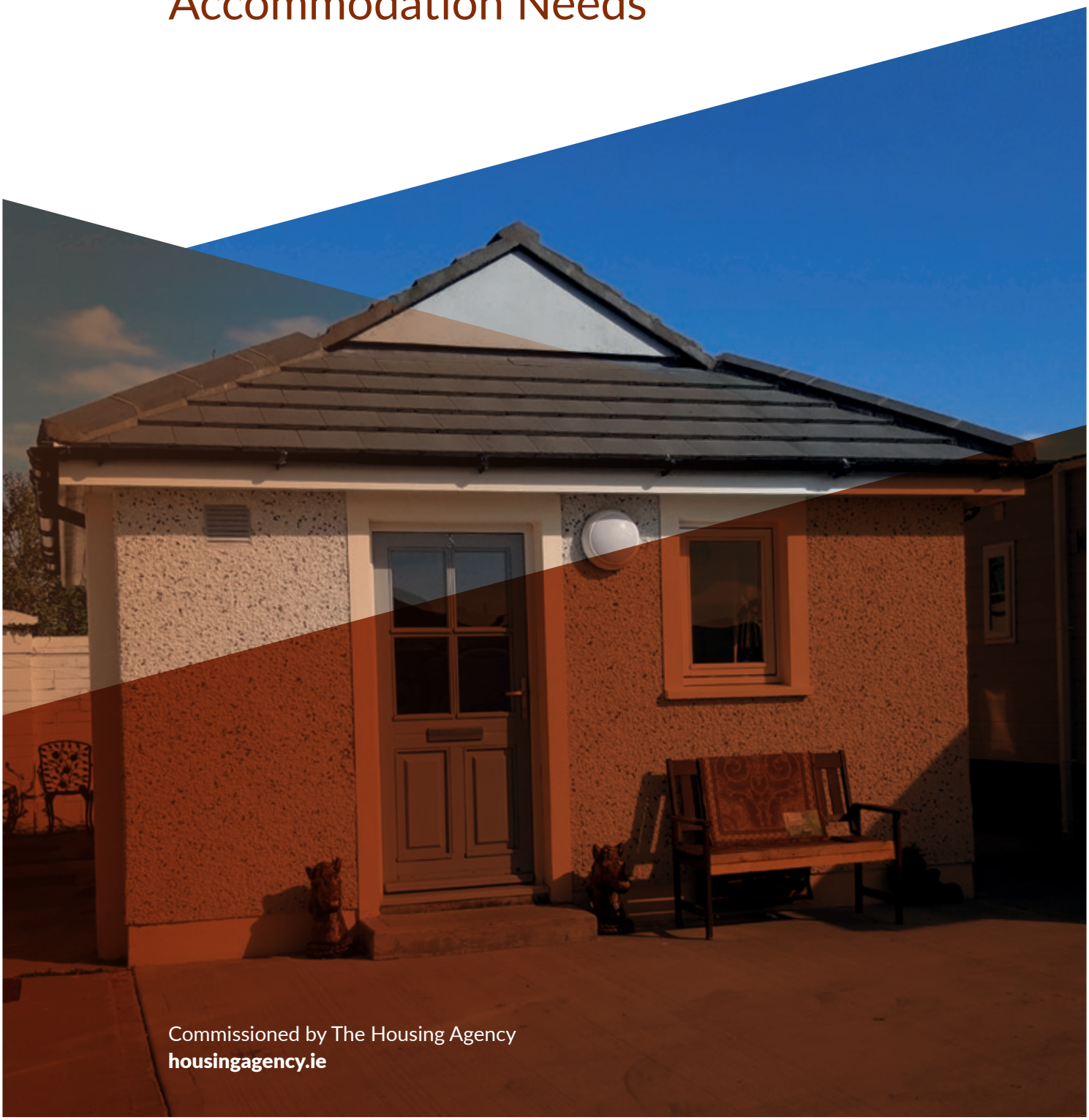
An Ghníomhaireacht Tithíochta
The Housing Agency

Review of Local Authority Social Workers and Personnel Employed to Assist Travellers with their Accommodation Needs



Commissioned by The Housing Agency
housingagency.ie

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Michelle Norris, Angela Palmer, Joanne Kelleher and Jim Campbell, School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice, University College Dublin.

The authors would like to thank everyone who agreed to be interviewed for this research for sharing their views. Thanks to the research advisory group for their advice on the project and help with its implementation. We are particularly grateful to Ann Gill from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Roslyn Molloy from The Housing Agency, Niamh Milliken from South Dublin County Council for her help in assembling a contact list of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers and Maria Joyce from the NTACC and National Traveller Women's Forum and Bridget Kelly from the NTACC and Galway Traveller Movement for their help with contacting Traveller representatives to interview. Thanks to Dr Maureen Lyons, research manager, UCD School of Social, Social Work and Social Justice for her help in managing the project implementation.

The Housing Agency

This review was commissioned by The Housing Agency on behalf of the Minister of State at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The Housing Agency would like to thank the team at University College Dublin for carrying out this review and all those who so generously agreed to be interviewed and/or provided submissions to the review. The review was co-ordinated by Roslyn Molloy of The Housing Agency.

The views expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of The Housing Agency, the Minister of State or the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Cover photo: Ardla Cottages © Fingal Local Authority

Date: December 2020

ISBN: 978-1-903848-72-2

Contents

Abbreviations and Specialist Terminology 04

Executive Summary 05

Chapter 1: Background & Methodology 14

Chapter 2: Context 24

Chapter 3: Literature Review 37

Chapter 4: Profile of Local Authority Social Workers and Related Staff 45

Chapter 5: Views of Local Authority Social Workers and Related Staff 59

Chapter 6: Views of Traveller Representative Groups 77

Chapter 7: Findings and Recommendations 89

References 97

Appendix I: Submission Framework & Submissions Received 101

Appendix II: Survey of Local Authority Social Workers 106

Appendix III: Frameworks for Social Work Practice 111

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Approach to conducting the review 17

Table 1.2: Characteristics of organisations which made a submission to the review 18

Table 1.3: Responses to online survey of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers 19

Table 1.4: Characteristics of key informants interviewed for the review 20

Table 1.5: Research Advisory Group members 22

Table 2.1: Number of Travellers by local authority area, Census 2011 and 2016 25

Table 2.2: Number of social workers and analogous staff employed by local authorities to assist Travellers in meeting accommodation needs, 2020 32

Table 4.1: Age, gender and ethnicity of local authority social workers and TLOs 47

Table 4.2: Local authority social workers' and TLO's qualifications, experience and access to CPD 49

Table 4.3: Percentage of working week which local authority social workers and TLOs spend working on Traveller-related issues 50

Table 4.4: Local authority social workers and TLOs' job description and views on how well these match their actual work 52

Table 4.5: TLO perspectives on which elements of their role require social work skills 53

Table 4.6: Social work and non-social work skills required by local authority social workers 54

Table 6.1: Number of interviews and submissions received from Traveller representatives groups, by province 78

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Annual estimate of Traveller families by accommodation type, 2006–2018 28

Figure 2.2: Number of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers per 100 Travellers resident in the local authority operational area 34

Figure 4.1: Local authority social workers' and TLOs' ranking of working time devoted to specific Traveller support tasks 51

Figure 4.2: Local authority social workers' and TLOs' ranking of working time devoted to specific tasks not related to supporting Travellers 52

Figure 4.3: Key professional challenges of role identified by social worker survey 56

Figure 4.4: Rewarding aspects of their role identified by social worker survey respondents 57

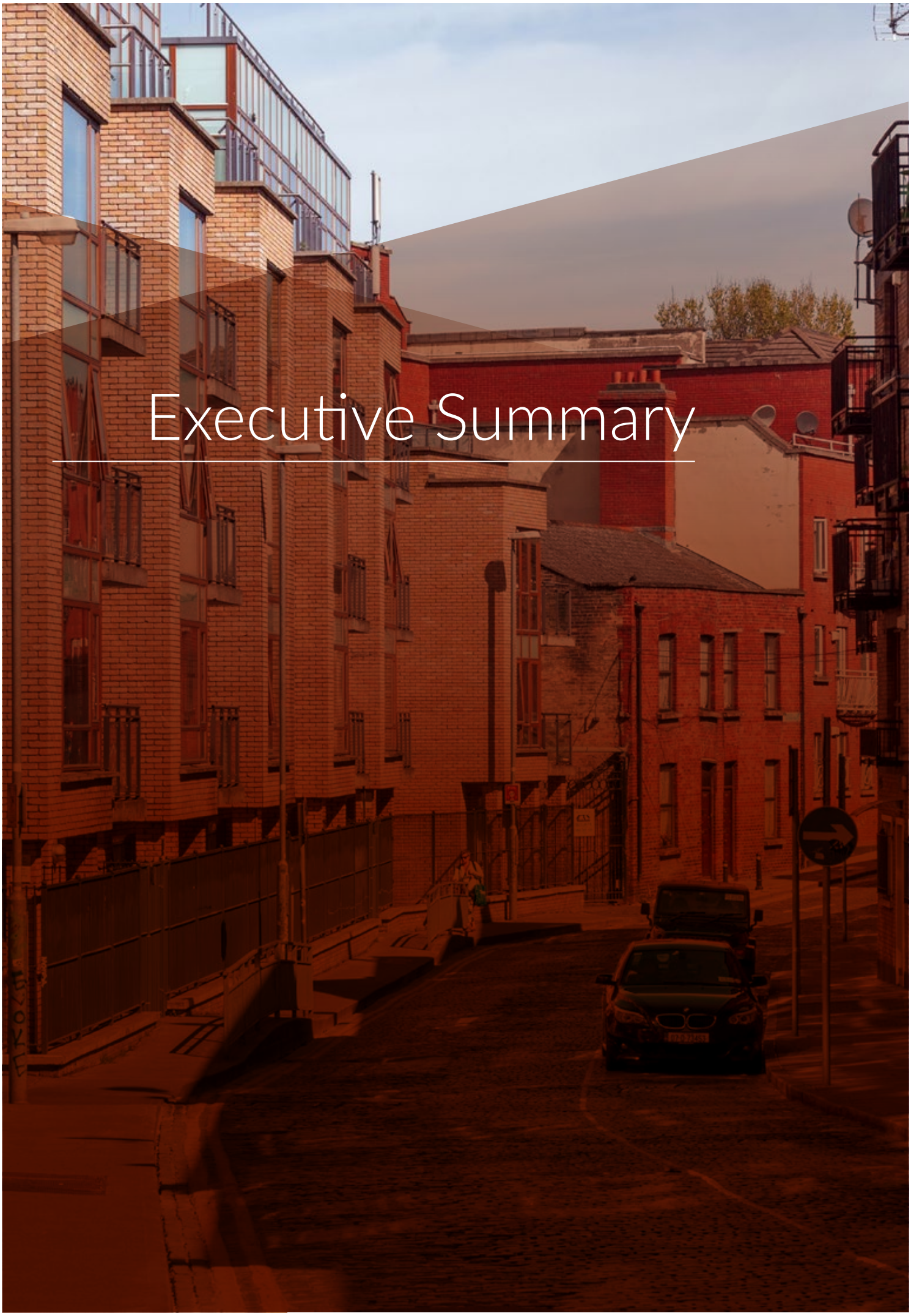
Figure 5.1: Social workers', local authority managers' and Traveller representatives' views on the effectiveness of the local authority social work service in meeting Travellers' accommodation needs, compared to all submissions received by this review (%) 62

Figure 5.2: Social workers' views on the issues which should be included in a national social work framework, compared to submissions received from other local authority officials (%) 70

Figure 6.1: Traveller representatives' views on the issues to be included in a national social work framework, compared to all submissions received by this review (%) 87

Abbreviations and Specialist Terminology

AHB	Approved Housing Body – a non-profit-sector social housing provider
ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
BAME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BSW	Bachelor of Social Work
CCMA	City and County Managers Association
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CORU	Health and social care professional regulator
DHLGH	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
DRHE	Dublin Region Homeless Executive
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
HAP	Housing Assistance Payment – an income-related housing subsidy for private renting households
LA	Local authority
LGMA	Local Government Management Agency
LTACC	Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
MSW	Master of Social Work
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NTACC	National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
TAP	Traveller Accommodation Programme
TAS	Traveller Accommodation Service – in this report this term is used as a shorthand to describe the accommodation service provided by local authorities to Travellers and its staffing and organisation
TLOs	Traveller liaison officers
Traveller-specific accommodation	Accommodation that reflects Travellers' cultural preferences group housing schemes or halting sites. It is almost entirely provided by local authorities in Ireland
Tusla	The state child and family care and protection agency



Executive Summary

Since the middle of the 20th century, local authorities have played a key role in supporting Travellers to access accommodation by providing social rented accommodation including both standard houses and apartments and 'Traveller-specific' accommodation, such as group housing schemes and halting sites. This work is currently governed by the 1998 Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act which requires each local authority to prepare and adopt a strategy called a Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP) every five years in consultation with Local Traveller Consultative Committees (LTACCs) which includes Traveller representatives.

Since the mid-1960s, local authorities have also employed social workers to support Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs (Delap and Kelleher, 2005). Most of these posts are co-funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH) which covers 90% of the salary costs and associated expenses. In 2020, the DHLGH funded 41 social worker posts. In recent years, some local authorities have also recruited other categories of staff to engage with Travellers and work either independently or alongside social workers. These related staff use a variety of titles but in his report, they are referred to as Traveller liaison officers (TLOs). In 2020, the DHPLG funded 13 of these staff in local authorities countrywide.

Research Aims

This report presents a review of the role of social workers and other personnel employed by local authorities specifically to assist Travellers with their accommodation needs. This review was commissioned by The Housing Agency and it aims to:

1. **Examine and review the current roles,** responsibilities, and functions of social workers (or equivalents) fundaed by the DHLGH to assist Travellers with their accommodation-related issues.

2. **Consider and review the effectiveness** of the social work service in local authorities as it relates to assistance provided to members of the Traveller community with accommodation-related issues.

3. **Make recommendations regarding future service delivery approaches** that would best serve the Traveller community in providing assistance with their accommodation needs.

4. **Consider whether there is a requirement to develop a National Traveller Accommodation Social Work framework.**

5. **To consult with all relevant stakeholders** including local and national Traveller organisations.

Research Methods

The following research methods were used to operationalise this research:

1. **A review of policies, memoranda, and administrative data:** including operational guidelines for, and data on local authority social workers and TLOs who work with Travellers on accommodation needs.

2. **Review of the research literature on social work with Travellers,** additional government supports for this community and Travellers' socio-economic characteristics, culture, and accommodation conditions.

3. **Online survey of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers:** the purpose of the survey was to collate information on their professional background, qualifications, job specification, routine duties, professional and career progression and satisfaction, and peer support.

4. **Request for submissions:** this was issued to local authorities and Traveller representative groups using an on-line survey platform. A small number of key questions were asked in the submission form, these related the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the local authority social work service and whether a national framework for this service should be introduced.

5. **Interviews with relevant stakeholders:** these interviews probed the themes that emerged from the results of the online survey.

Details of the numbers of interviews conducted and the numbers of submissions and survey responses received by the review are set out in Table A.

Table A: Methods used to operationalise this research

Individuals interviewed

Category of interviewee	Number
Local authority senior managers	4
Representatives of national Traveller organisations	3
Representatives of local and regional Traveller organisations	16
HSE	1
Non-profit sector social service provider	2
Department of Health	1
Irish Association of Social Workers	1
Local authority social workers	19
Local authority Traveller liaison officers	5
Total number of individuals interviewed	**52**

Submissions received

Category of organisation or individual	Number
Local Traveller representative organisation	12
National Traveller representative organisation (one joint submission received from three organisations)	1
Individuals (not part of organisation)	3
Local authority Social Workers Working Group	1
Local authority personnel	14
Total number of submissions received	**31**

Online survey of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers

Region	Number
Dublin	7
Rest of Leinster	13
Munster	8
Connacht	9
Ulster	3
Total number of survey responses	**40**

Findings

The local authority social work service was established to provide support for Travellers in the 1960s. The findings of this review indicate that since then levels of unmet accommodation need and disadvantage among Travellers and discrimination against this community have remained high but most other key aspects of the context in which this service operates have changed significantly. The size of the Traveller population has expanded, particularly in urban areas, Traveller community organisation and activism has increased, Travellers have been recognised as an ethnic group by the Irish government and discrimination against Travellers has been outlawed by the Equal Status Acts, 2000-2018. The policy framework for the provision of accommodation to Travellers changed radically following the enactment of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 and Traveller representatives are now recognised as partners in the implementation of this policy via their role in the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees. TLACs are consulted regarding the formulation and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes which each local authority is required to produce under the terms of this Act. The profession of social work in Ireland has also changed, the nature and scale of the demands on local authority housing departments have changed and local authorities have taken on new housing responsibilities.

However, the remit, resourcing and management of the local authority social work service has been reformed only minimally since its establishment. The most significant change being external to the social work service - the recruitment of alternative categories of staff such as Traveller liaison officers to provide support for Travellers. Lack of reform has meant that this service is not effective in providing the types of supports that Travellers and other clients of local authority require. Nor is the service providing a satisfactory employment or professional experience for local authority social workers and does not make best use of their expertise in the context of the growing demands on the wider local authority housing service.

It is notable in the findings of this review that most of the submissions received from Traveller organisations proffered more negative assessments of the service, than the submissions received from social workers or local authority managers. Many of the Traveller representatives interviewed raised concerns about the implication that their community should always require social work support which is inherent in the current design of the local authority social work service. Some Traveller representatives were also unclear about the remit of local authority social workers and suspicious about the exact nature of their role. Although Traveller representatives did recognise that social workers are often isolated and constrained within local authority structures, they also argued that the shortcomings in the accommodation service and the power imbalance between local authorities and Travellers and were evidence of institutional racism in local authorities' treatment of their community.

The local authority social workers agreed that the automatic referral of Travellers to social workers is neither appropriate nor necessary, and voiced frustration concerning their lack of influence in policy and decision-making and the inadequate supply of Traveller specific accommodation. Local authority social worker interviewees reflected on the evolution of their work in response to changing needs and requirements of the Traveller community and in light of the professionalisation and regulation of the social work profession. However, in many cases, job descriptions have not been updated or reviewed to reflect these contextual changes and social workers have been overloaded with non-social work-related tasks which is not an effective use of their specific skill set.

Some of the Traveller liaison officers (who are more likely to devote most or all of their working time to supporting Travellers) interviewed for this review raised similar concerns to those mentioned by their social work colleagues. Specifically the importance of providing training for all local authority staff on Traveller culture and anti-discriminatory practice; a clear job description because there is considerable variation in relation to the role within different local authorities and in the size of the client group they are expected to support. In addition, some had limited or no access to specialist social work expertise within

their local authorities, which raises concerns in relation to identification and appropriate response to vulnerable clients.

Many of these problems in the social work and liaison services for Travellers are related to shortcomings in the staffing and management of the broader accommodation service for Travellers. There was widespread concern among the Traveller representatives interviewed regarding understaffing and high levels of staff turnover in Traveller accommodation units (or similar sections within local authorities). These interviewees argued that this turnover inhibits long-term relationship building and the development of meaningful cross-cultural understanding and respect. The local authority social workers and TLOs interviewed shared these concerns. For social workers, professional supervision by another social worker is considered a critical requirement because these arrangements provide peer support and advice and promote accountability and effective working methods and are also requirements of their professional regulator. However, the low number of social workers in senior posts in local authorities and the large numbers of lone social workers, means that the vast majority of social workers must source professional supervision externally.

Limerick.

Recommendations

This review has identified certain recommendations for comprehensive and multi-level reform in order to improve the effectiveness of this service in meeting the needs of Travellers and also to provide a satisfactory employment and professional experience for these staff and make best use of their expertise in the content of the growing demands on the wider local authority housing service. These are:

1 A Vision for a Social Work Service in the Local Authority Sector

- The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should work with the appropriate City and County Managers' Association (CCMA) committee, chief executives, the Local Government Management Agency and senior social work representatives to formulate a joint vision for a new role for social work services in local government which is more strategic to the needs of this sector and the clients it serves.

2 The Establishment of a Generic Service Delivery Model for Local Authority Social Work

- The re-focussed social work service should be available to all local authority tenants, applicants for housing and other clients (such as people who are homeless and HAP claimants) who require a social work intervention. A clearly defined threshold and criteria for referral to this service should be established and referrals should be made solely on the basis of need.
- Travellers should have equitable access to the local authority social work services on the basis of need in the same way as any other client, but they should not be obliged to use this service. Current arrangements for the automatic referral of Travellers to the local authority social work service irrespective of their needs should be discontinued.
- These proposed changes in the focus of social work service are likely to require negotiation of a new agreement regarding the funding of social work posts between the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the CCMA and the local authorities. This agreement should take account of the critical need for a local authority social work service and therefore of ensuring that it is adequately funded going forward in all parts of the country where it is required.

3 A National Framework for Social Work in the Local Authority Sector

- On the basis of this visioning exercise a national framework for social work in the local authority sector should be devised with a view to establishing:
  - A clear threshold and criteria for referral to social work services based on identified needs and not on ethnicity,
  - The duties of social workers,
  - Consistency in professional practice and standards, and
  - Enhanced governance, transparency, and accountability for service users.

4 Grading Structure for Local Authority Social Workers

- To increase effectiveness of the social work service, the grading structure for this staff group should be reviewed and standardised at a national level.
- This grading structure should reflect the demanding nature of this important role, the professional qualifications required by social workers and arrangements for grading similar to other professionally qualified local authority staff.
- Decisions regarding grading should address the lack of influence many social workers currently have on operational and strategic decision-making processes in local government which impedes their ability to advocate effectively for clients.

5 Professional Supervision of Social Workers

- Professional supervision by another social worker are core requirements of CORU registration for social workers. All local authority social workers should be facilitated to engage in individual professional supervision on a regular basis. Competent supervision provides support to staff who regularly deal with complex social problems and ethical dilemmas and are also necessary for ensuring accountability and adherence to best practice standards. Such supervision is of particular importance in local authorities where social workers work alone. The National Framework should establish the necessary criteria for social work supervision and the quality of supervisors.
- To ensure that professional supervision is provided to all local authority social workers it will be necessary to ensure that senior social work posts are put in place.
- Where a local authority does not have a senior social work post or where service needs do not require such posts, supervision arrangements with a senior social worker in another local authority should be formally established. It some parts of the country it might be appropriate to designate one local authority as the regional lead for the social work service.

6 Education, Training and Continuous Professional Development

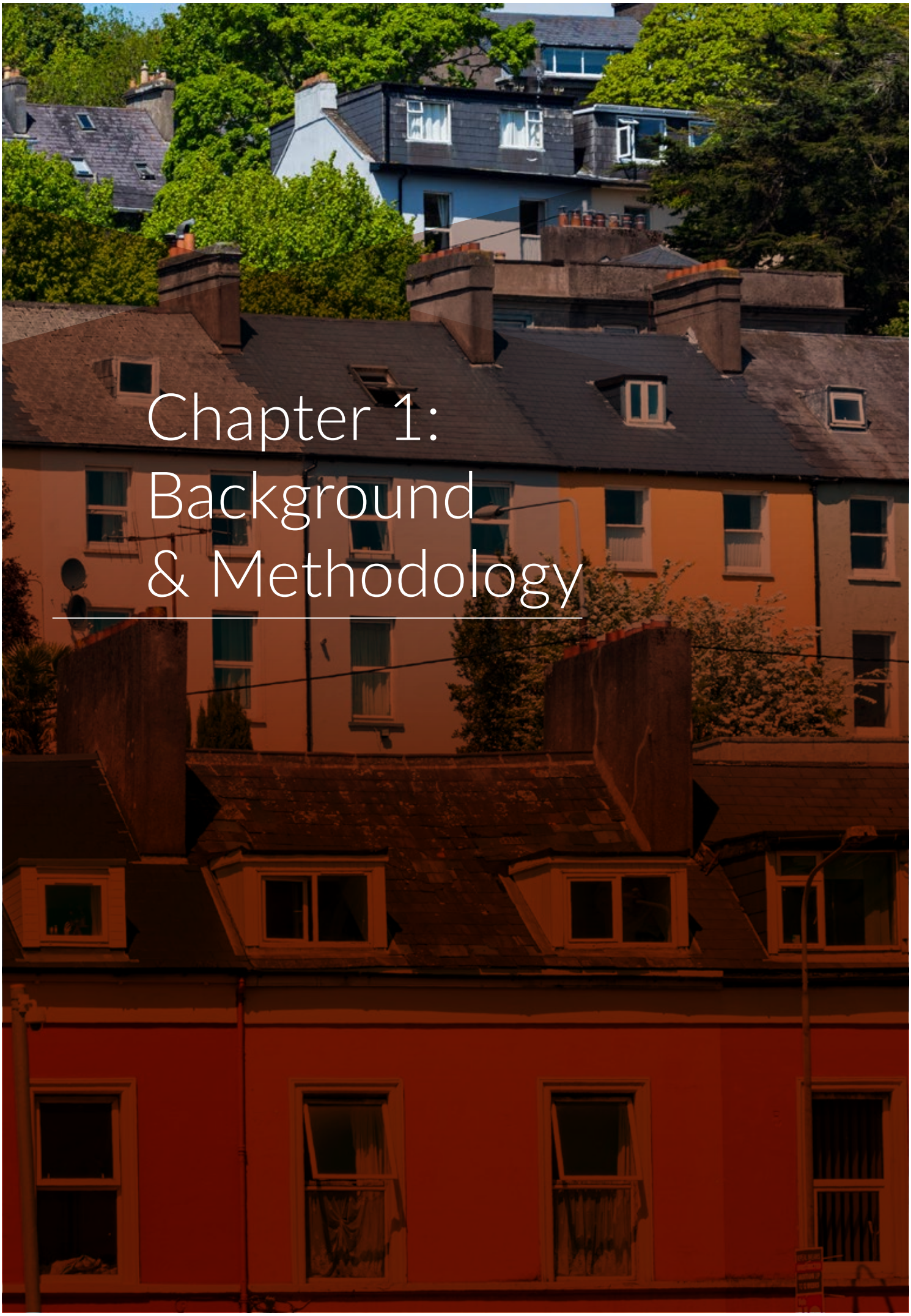
- Local authorities should regularly review their policies and practices to ensure that all staff are educated and trained in anti-discriminatory and anti-racist methods of working, with all service users, including Travellers. The DHLGP should explore the potential for providing funding for this training.
- Staff should be trained to constructively manage the frustration of those who are dissatisfied with services, to de-escalate aggression and to encourage appropriate use of complaints procedures. Staff who experience aggression or intimidation should be proactively supported by senior managers.
- The National Social Work Framework make provision for continuous professional development of social authority social workers as informed by best practice in Ireland and other jurisdictions and for the development of peer support structures.

7 Reform of Traveller Liaison Officer and Related Roles

- To ensure that Travellers are not disadvantaged in any way by the introduction of a generic social work service, the support service provided by Traveller liaison officers and related support staff should be reformed and strengthened.
- The role and function of TLOs and related staff should be reviewed and clarified in specific job descriptions to ensure consistency and transparency of service provision.
- Additional TLOs should be recruited in local authorities where the ratio of Traveller support staff to Traveller residents is low. This is a particular priority in those local authorities where the Traveller population has increased significantly in recent years.
- The establishment of regional peer support networks and a national group to provide a formal network of support and knowledge sharing for TLOs is a priority.
- As far as possible, TLOs should be integrated into appropriate teams within local authorities, with appropriate supervision and support.
- The potential for appointing Travellers to liaison officer posts and /or providing these posts in partnership with local Traveller representative groups should be explored.

8 Implementation of the Recommendations of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review, 2019

This review has demonstrated that the effectiveness of the local authority social workers and of related staff in supporting Travellers to meet their accommodation needs is undermined by wider problems in the accommodation service provided by local authorities to Travellers including under-provision of Traveller specific accommodation and poorly functioning Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees. Many of these wider problems could be addressed by implementation of the recommendations made by the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review in 2019 (Joyce, Norton and Norris, 2019). Significant progress in this regard has already been made, but this review underlines the importance of ensuring that this work is completed as soon as possible.



Chapter 1: Background & Methodology

Background

Travellers are an ethnic minority group with a long and distinct history and cultural characteristics associated with a tradition of nomadism. They make up a small but expanding proportion of the Irish population. The 2016 Census recorded 30,987 individuals who identified as 'White Irish Traveller' and 8,717 Traveller households (defined as including at least one Traveller) resident in Ireland. That accounts for 0.7% of the total population and 0.5% of all households in Ireland (Central Statistics Office, 2016). Since 1996, the number of Travellers recorded in the Census has increased by 185% (Visser, 2018). Levels of poverty and disadvantage among Travellers are very high compared to the settled Irish population. This means that securing affordable accommodation is a considerable challenge for many Travellers. These challenges are compounded by the difficulties in accessing accommodation that is appropriate to Travellers' ethnic identity, such as nomadism, and their strong tradition of extended family living (Joyce, Norton and Norris, 2019).

Since the middle of the 20th century, local authorities have played a key role in supporting Travellers to access accommodation by providing social rented standard houses and apartments and 'Traveller-specific' social rented accommodation, such as group housing schemes and halting sites (Norris and Winston, 2005). In recent years local authorities have also provided housing allowances such as the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) to enable increasing numbers of Traveller households to rent private housing. The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 established a framework for planning and implementing these arrangements for Traveller accommodation provision. It requires local authorities to prepare and adopt new Traveller Accommodation Programmes (TAPs) every five years. Within this programme, the 1998 Act also requires local authorities to assess and identify the distinct needs and family circumstances of Travellers. The Act then requires the relevant housing authority to implement a Traveller Accommodation Programme to provide a range of accommodation required to meet the needs identified; assist Travellers to provide accommodation for their own use, and to ensure the proper management, including assistance towards the management, of such accommodation for Travellers. This process is carried out in consultation with Local Traveller Consultative Committees (LTACCs) in each local authority, which include Traveller representatives (see Chapter 2).

Since the mid-1960s, local authorities have also employed social workers to support Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs. Most of these posts are co-funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH). It covers 90% of the salary costs and other expenses associated with these posts. In 2020, the DHLGH funded 41 social worker posts. In recent years, some local authorities have also recruited other categories of staff to engage with Travellers and work either independently or alongside social workers. These related staff use a variety of titles but in his report, they are referred to as Traveller liaison officers (TLOs). Positions of this type are less common in the local authority sector; in 2020, the DHLGH funded 13 of these staff in local authorities countrywide.

Research Objectives

This independent review of the role of social workers and personnel employed by local authorities specifically to assist Travellers with their accommodation-related issues was commissioned by The Housing Agency. The terms of reference of the review are:

1. **To examine and review the current roles, responsibilities, and functions of social workers** (or equivalents) funded by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government to assist Travellers with their accommodation-related issues.

2. **To consider and review the effectiveness of the social work service in local authorities** as it relates to assistance provided to members of the Traveller community with accommodation-related issues.

3. **To make recommendations regarding future service delivery approaches** that would best serve the Traveller community in providing assistance with their accommodation needs.

4. **To consider whether there is a requirement to develop a National Traveller Accommodation Social Work framework.**

5. **To consult with all relevant stakeholders** including local and national Traveller organisations.

On the basis of the above exercise, this report makes a series of recommendations to the Minister of State for Housing and Urban Development.

Approach to Achieving Research Objectives

Research Team

This review was conducted by Professor Michelle Norris, Professor Jim Campbell, Dr Joanne Kelleher, and Dr Angie Palmer, who all work at the School of Social Policy, Social Work and Social Justice at University College Dublin. They are experts on social work, Traveller accommodation and local authority social housing provision and policy and have researched and published widely on these topics.

Research Methods

The broad approach adopted to conducting this review and how this was achieved in practice is summarised in Table 1.1. As this table shows, a mix of qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to operationalise the research. These were implemented in seven steps:

Step 1: Review of Policies, Memoranda and Administrative Data

Relevant policies and memoranda/operational guidelines on the role of local authority social workers and associated staff who support Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs were reviewed, together with policy on providing accommodation and other support services for Travellers. In addition, administrative data on the numbers of local authority social workers and associated professionals, funded through the DHLGH, who work with Travellers was collated, along with the location and contact details of these staff and related expenditure data.

Table 1.1: Approach to conducting the review

Approach	Details of how this is achieved
Evidence-based	Review of the existing evidence by describing and analysing relevant policies, memoranda, circulars and operational guides; research literature on Traveller accommodation and the role of the local authority social workers and associated local authority personnel in supporting Travellers' accommodation needs; relevant data on the numbers of social workers and other relevant staff working in local authorities who assist Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs
Systematic identification of gaps in evidence	Generation of new evidence to fill identified gaps in knowledge, using the following research methods: – Survey of local authority social workers and associated staff, followed up by in-depth interviews – Interviews and one-to-one interviews with key stakeholders, including Travellers, policymakers, local authority officials, advocacy groups and other relevant stakeholders, external social work agencies such as the HSE and voluntary sector organisations – Requests for submissions from other stakeholders
Relevant	– Review of relevant policies, memoranda, circulars, and operational guides – Consultation with policymakers to identify their priorities – Consultation with Travellers, Traveller representative groups and the other aforementioned stakeholders to identify their priorities
Best practice-informed	Review of the research evidence and guidelines on best social work practice in this field; best practice in meeting Travellers' accommodation and support needs and relevant equality and human rights legislation that informs best practice (Condon et al, 2019)
Tailored	To reflect the requirements of urban and rural operational contexts and particular staffing needs of large and small local authorities, an appropriate mix of local authorities is examined. These include authorities with urban and rural operational areas; large and small Traveller populations which have had different levels of success in implementing Traveller Accommodation Programmes
Inclusive	Ensuring that the views of stakeholders are adequately represented and that the interests of the Traveller community are central
Useful and practicable	Devising recommendations to policymakers that meet key policy objectives and can be implemented in practice

Step 2: Review of the Research Literature on social work with Travellers, other government supports for this community, and Travellers' socio-economic characteristics, culture, and housing and accommodation conditions.

Step 3: Design of Consultation Programme

Steps 1 and 2 informed the design of a comprehensive programme of consultation with relevant stakeholders.

Step 4: Request for Submissions

Requests for submissions to the review were issued to relevant stakeholders by email and publicised using social media. Provision was made for submitting through an online facility (SurveyMonkey), and the individuals and organisations who made submissions were asked to respond to a small number of key questions, to elicit open-ended responses. A total of 31 organisations and individuals made a submission to the Independent Review. Their characteristics are summarised in Table 1.2. (Details of the questions asked in the submission tool and of the individuals and organisations who made submissions are included in Appendix I to this report.)

Table 1.2: Characteristics of organisations which made a submission to the review

Type/name of organisation	Number of submissions
Local Traveller representative bodies	12
National Traveller representative bodies (one joint submission received from three organisations)	1
Individuals (not part of organisation)	3
Local authority Social Workers Working Group	1
Local authority personnel	13
Local authority elected member	1
Total	**31**

Step 5: Online Survey

This targeted local authority social workers and associated staff who work with Travellers. It was administered online, again using SurveyMonkey, to the 53 local authority social workers and analogous staff funded by the DHLGH to work with Travellers in local authorities nationwide. A total of 40 of the staff responded, which is a response rate of 75%. The survey focused primarily on gathering factual information on these staff, including (but not limited to) the following:

- Their academic and professional qualifications and experience, including registration with CORU (the social work registration body),
- Length of time in the post, grade, and history of promotion in the role,
- Scope of duties and whether they have a formal job description,
- Access to training and continuing professional development,
- Location in the organisational structure of their local authority, line management and professional social work supervision arrangements, and types of co-working arrangements between colleagues tasked with similar responsibilities,
- Details of day-to-day activities and of major 'one off' activities conducted during the working year.

A copy of the online survey is included in Appendix II to this report and the details of the location of respondents is set out in Table 1.3 below.

Table 1.3: Responses to online survey of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers

Region	Number of responses to online survey	Total number of social workers and Traveller liaison officers in each region (funded by DHLGH)	Survey response rate %
Dublin	7	9	78
Rest of Leinster	13	15	87
Munster	8	12	67
Connacht	9	14	64
Ulster	3	3	100
Total	**40**	**53**	**75**

Step 6: Individual Interviews with Local Authority Social Workers and Traveller Liaison Officers

As shown in Table 1.4, 19 interviews were conducted with the former category of staff and five with the latter. Interviewee selection took account of (a) the need to include staff working in both urban and rural operational areas and with both large and small Traveller populations; of (b) total populations, and of (c) different levels of success in implementing their Traveller accommodation programmes. These interviews, carried out using a semi-structured format, probed the themes that emerged from the results of the survey conducted during Step five. This approach enabled more in-depth exploration of these themes. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. In this report the views of these interviewees are anonymised and the social workers interviewed are identified using the abbreviation SW and the interview number (eg. SW 2), similarly the Traveller liaison officers are identified using the abbreviation TLO and interview number (eg. TLO 2).

Step 7: Individual and Group Interviews with Traveller Representatives, Service Users and Other Stakeholders

36 interviews were held with other stakeholders, including 19 interviews with Travellers involved in national and local Traveller groups. Details of these are summarised in Table 1.4. These interviews followed a similar format to the individual interviews conducted during Step Six. These interviews were also anonymised and interviews with Traveller representatives are identified using the abbreviation TR and the interview number (eg. TR 2), while interviews with other key informants are identified using the abbreviation KI and interview number (eg. KI 2).

Table 1.4: Characteristics of key informants interviewed for the review

Category of interviewees	Number of people interviewed from each category
Local authority senior management	4
Members of Travelling Community (national Traveller organisations)	3
Members of Travelling Community (regional organisations)	16
HSE	1
Non-profit sector social service provider	2
Representative of the Dept of Health	1
Representative of the Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW)	1
Local authority social workers	19
Local authority Traveller accommodation/liaison officers	5
Total	**52**

Dunsink Lane, Dublin. © Derek Speirs

Data Analysis

Several different techniques were used to analyse the varied data generated during Steps 1 to 7 of the research implementation. Data analysis encompassed the following tasks:

- Identification of key themes from the review of memoranda and administrative data and of the research literature conducted during steps one and two of the research implementation process.
- Identification of the key findings of the online survey of local authority social workers and other personnel conducted during Step five. These data were analysed using statistical data analysis software (SPSS).
- Analysis of submissions and individual interviews with social workers, local authority staff, Traveller representatives and other stakeholders, collected during Steps four, six and seven. The MAXQDA qualitative data-analysis software package was used. The analysis focused on identifying the most common themes in these submissions and interviews and the relationships between these themes and relevant contextual issues (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

Research Ethics Review

Before the data collection for this project commenced, the project was reviewed by University College Dublin's Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The highest research ethics standards were adhered to in implementing the research. To this end:

- Information about the interview process was provided to all interviewees prior to interview, and their informed verbal consent to participating in the interviews was obtained.

- The information provided to interviewees explained that:
  - Involvement in the research was entirely voluntary and the right to withdraw at any point was made clear.
  - Interviews would be recorded and transcribed verbatim. At transcription stage, all names would be replaced by pseudonyms, to de-identify all participants. Recordings of interviews would be destroyed after transcription.

Research Steering Group

The implementation of this project was overseen by a Steering Group, of which the membership is detailed in Table 1.5. The Research Team met with the Steering Group during the following stages of the project implementation:

- At project initiation to confirm the project methodology,
- At key stages during the project implementation, specifically:
  - The design and implementation review of literature, policy, and best practice
  - The design and distribution of the online survey of social workers and related local authority staff
  - The design interview schedules used in individual interviews and interviewee selection,
- At the closing stage of the project, to review the draft and final project report.

Table 1.5: Research Advisory Group members

Organisation	Individual
The Housing Agency	Roslyn Molloy
The Housing Agency	Ursula McAnulty
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Ann Gill
Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Alan Ryan
NTACC and National Traveller Women's Forum	Maria Joyce
NTACC and Galway Traveller Movement	Bridget Kelly
South Dublin County Council	Niamh Milliken
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council	Liam O'Donovan
NTACC Chair	Professor Eoin O'Sullivan

Outline of Report

The remainder of this report is organised into six chapters. These examine the following issues:

Chapter Two explains the background to the appointment of local authority social workers tasked with supporting Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs and details the characteristics and location of the professionals who currently hold these posts and similar positions. To contextualise the discussion presented in the remainder of the report, this chapter also examines the history of policy on providing accommodation for Travellers, and profiles the type of accommodation currently occupied by Travellers and the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of this community.

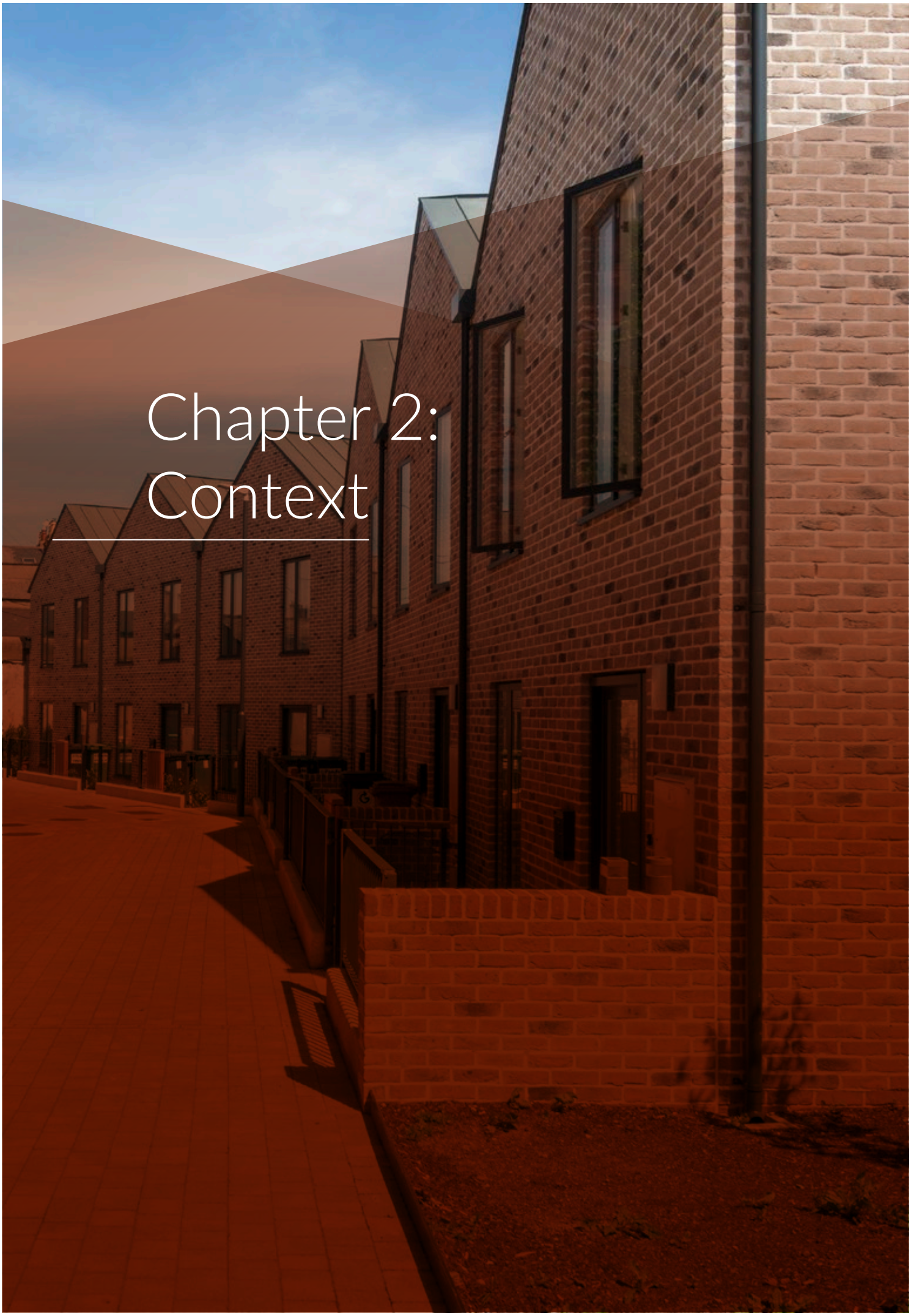
Chapter Three: reviews the Irish and international research on social work with Travellers and identifies the key features of good practice in this social-work field, as identified in this literature.

Chapter Four: profiles the local authority social workers and related staff tasked with supporting Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs. This profile draws on the survey conducted of these staff and details their qualifications and continuing professional development opportunities, and their co-working and supervision arrangements and responsibilities.

Chapter Five draws on the interviews carried out for this review and the submissions received to examine the views of local authority social workers and related staff employed to assist Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs, of analogous local authority staff and of managers in the local authority sector.

Chapter Six employs the same methodology to examine the views of Travellers and Traveller representative groups.

Chapter Seven sets out the conclusions to the review and the recommendations.



Chapter 2: Context

Introduction

This chapter clarifies the context for the in-depth analysis of the role of local authority social workers and other staff tasked with supporting Travellers that is set out in the chapters that follow. To this end, it examines the policy and organisational context in which the staff operate and the socio-economic and demographic characteristics of the Traveller community.

The first half of the chapter outlines the evolution of policy on the accommodation and housing of Travellers, and profiles the Traveller community in terms of the size of the population, spatial distribution around the country, socio-economic characteristics, and accommodation types. The historical evolution of local authority social work with Travellers and the appointment of related staff in recent years is also outlined. The closing section of the chapter details the numbers of social workers and analogous staff currently employed by local authorities to support Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs and examines their spatial distribution around the country.

Socio-Demographic, Spatial and Accommodation Profile of Travellers in Ireland

The Introduction to this report explained that Census 2016 recorded 8,717 Traveller households (defined as households containing at least one Traveller), which included 30,987 individuals who identified as 'White Irish Traveller' and, accounted for 0.7% of the total population of Ireland. The numbers of Travellers and Traveller households has increased in recent years (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

Table 2.1 details the spatial distribution of Travellers and reveals that this community is more urbanised than the Irish population-at-large.

Table 2.1: Number of Travellers by local authority area, Census 2011 and 2016

Local authority operational area	2011	2016	% change 2011–16
Carlow	419	507	21
Cavan	425	475	11.8
Clare	870	910	4.6
Cork City	764	882	15.4
Cork County	1,082	1,255	16
Donegal	724	588	-18.8
Dublin City	1,856	2,057	10.8
Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown	403	421	4.5

Local authority operational area	2011	2016	% change 2011–16
Fingal	1,351	1,315	-2.7
Galway City	1,673	1,598	-4.5
Galway County	2,481	2,647	6.7
Kerry	875	968	10.6
Kildare	870	743	-14.6
Kilkenny	491	554	12.8
Laois	661	761	15.1
Leitrim	264	211	-20.1
Limerick City and County	1,476	1,658	12.3
Longford	753	1,049	39.3
Louth	659	772	17.1
Mayo	1,404	1,303	-7.2
Meath	977	977	0
Monaghan	251	271	8
Offaly	1,057	910	-13.9
Roscommon	381	514	34.9
Sligo	418	384	-8.1
South Dublin	2,241	2,208	-1.5
Tipperary	1,155	1,235	6.9
Waterford City and County	419	520	24.1
Westmeath	859	1,008	17.3
Wexford	1,510	1,508	-0.1
Wicklow	726	778	7.2
Total	**29,495**	**30,987**	**5.1**

Source: Central Statistics Office (2011, 2016)

A total of 78.6% of Travellers lived in cities or towns in 2016, compared to 62.4% of the general population. Dublin City and County (i.e. Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal and South Dublin County Council) had the largest Traveller population in 2016 (19.4% of Travellers lived in Dublin in 2016), followed by Galway City and County (13.7%), Cork City and County (6.9%) and Limerick City and County (5.3%). Longford recorded the greatest increase, in percentage terms (39.3%) in Travellers between 2011 and 2016, followed by Roscommon and Waterford City and County (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

The Census also reveals that Traveller households are larger than the rest of the population on average and the age structure of the Traveller population is much younger. In 2016, the average Traveller household size was 5.3 persons (compared to 2.75 persons for the general population) and more than one in four Irish Traveller households had six or more persons, compared with less than one in twenty households in the State overall. A total of 60% of Travellers were aged under 25 years (compared to 33.4% of the general population) and only 3% of Travellers were aged 65 years or older compared to 13.3% of the general population (Central Statistics Office, 2016).

The young age structure of the Traveller population reflects the very high number of children it includes, compared to the Irish population at large, but also Travellers' life expectancy, which is considerably lower than that of the general Irish population. The All Ireland Traveller Health Study found that the life expectancy of a male Traveller born in 2008 was 15.1 years less than among the general population, while the equivalent life expectancy deficit for female Travellers born in that year was –11.5 years (Abdalla et al., 2013). These life expectancy differences reflect higher levels of disease and mental and physical ill health among Travellers, which are in turn related to higher rates of disadvantage, discrimination and poor living conditions (Abdalla et al., 2013).

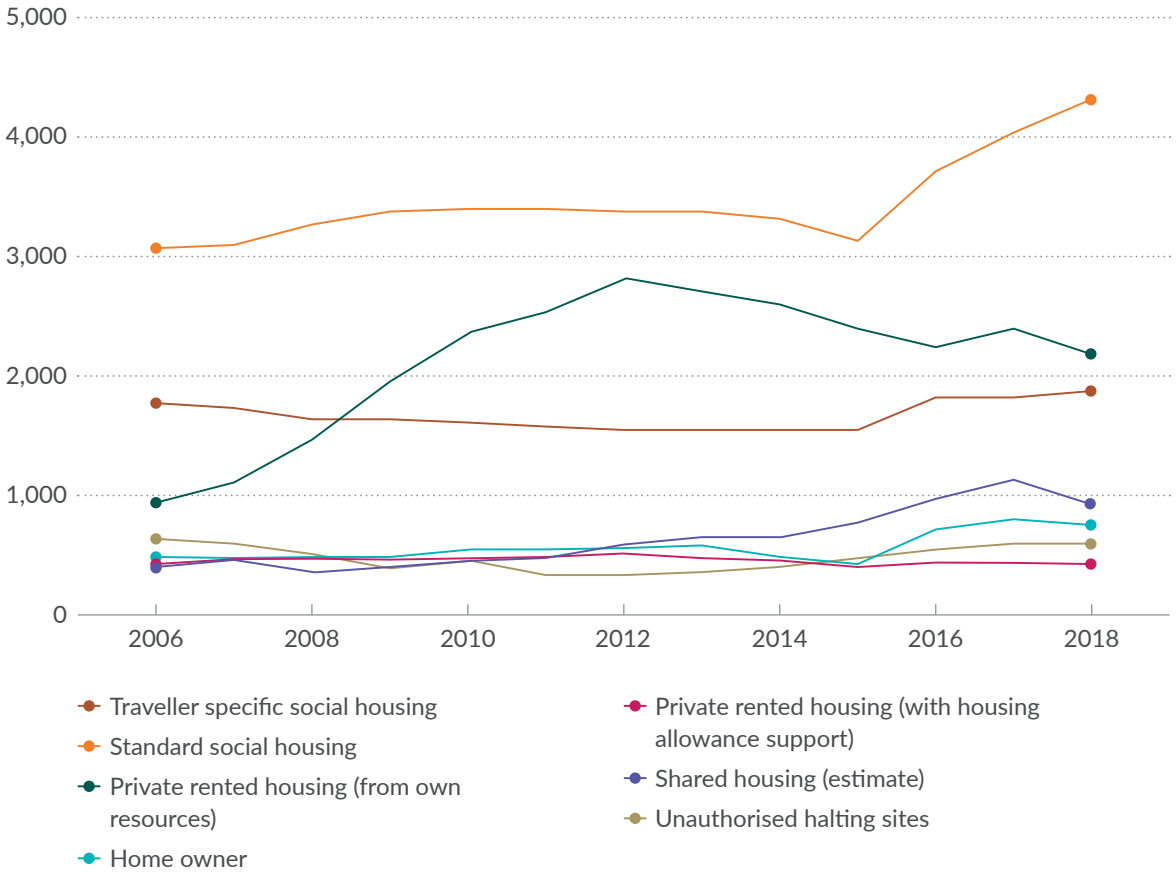
For instance, the 2016 Census reveals that:

- Travellers' unemployment rate was 80.2% in that year.
- 11.3% of adult Travellers were unable to work due to a disability, compared to 4.3% of the general population.
- 57.2% of Traveller men and 54.4% of Traveller women had no formal education or were educated to primary level only, compared to 13.6% of all males in Ireland and 11.7% of females.
- 1% of male Travellers and 1.5% of female Travellers had a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 25.5% of all men and 30.8% of all women.
- 20.0% of Traveller households were home-owners compared to 67.6% of all households (Central Statistics Office, 2016; see also: Watson, Kenny and McGinnity, 2017).

Difficulties in accessing accommodation – in particular, accommodation that is culturally appropriate for Travellers' nomadic traditions – is a key reason for Travellers' poor living conditions. The most detailed and up-to-date data on Traveller accommodation can be found in the estimate of Traveller families (which are broadly, though not always exactly, equivalent to households) carried out annually by local authorities. Figure 2.1 summarises the results of the annual estimates conducted since 2006. Standard social housing (i.e. a house or apartment provided by a local authority or Approved Housing Body {AHB}) was the most common type of accommodation used by Traveller families in 2018. A total of 39% lived in this form of housing and a further 17% lived in Traveller-specific social housing (i.e. a halting site or group housing scheme, usually provided by a local authority). A further 30.2% of Traveller families lived in private housing in 2018 and 5.4% lived in unauthorised encampments, many without basic sanitary facilities.

These data also reveal that the number of Traveller families living in standard social housing increased by 29.1% between 2006 and 2018; the numbers in private housing increased by almost 90%, and the numbers sharing accommodation increased by 57.8% concurrently. Notably, the proportion of all households living in social housing has contracted marginally in recent decades (from 11.0% to 9.7% of households between 2006 and 2016) (Central Statistics Office, various years). However, despite their relative success in accessing social housing, Travellers have experienced a more acute version of the housing and accommodation access and affordability problems seen in the population at large over this period.

Figure 2.1: Annual estimate of Traveller families by accommodation type, 2006–2018



Source: Department of Housing Planning and Local Government (various years)

An Expert Group recently appointed by the Housing Minister to examine Traveller accommodation issues reported that Travellers were significantly over-represented in homelessness. They found that Travellers accounted for 9% of homeless families and children in Dublin in 2018 (Joyce, Norton and Norris, 2019). Murphy's (2016) research on Travellers in Offaly found that 19.1% of people who presented themselves as homeless to the local authority in 2015 were Travellers. The Expert Group linked these high rates of homelessness to the particular difficulties Travellers face in securing private rented accommodation due to discrimination by landlords and difficulties in finding dwellings to rent that are large enough for their family size while also affordable within the limits of the government subsidies available under the Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) and other supports for low-income private renting households (see also: Grotti et al., 2018).

Historical Evolution of Traveller Accommodation Policy and Local Authority Social Work with Travellers

The origins of social work in the local government sector in Ireland can be traced to voluntary-sector social services organisations such as the Alexandra Guild and the Social Service Tenements Company, which took over management of tenement dwellings in the early 1900s and provided intensive social supports for residents. Dublin City Council became involved in these activities in the 1930s when it asked the Civics Institute of Ireland to provide similar supports for residents of tenements before their planned demolition. The institute recommended that Dublin City Council employ similar staff and, in 1948, the council appointed its first housing welfare officer (HWO). By 1973 the number of HWOs employed by Dublin City Council expanded to 12. Since then this service has been provided by some other local authorities but has remained concentrated in city councils; it is rarely provided by local authorities with rural operational areas (Delap and Kelleher, 2005).

The Report of the Commission on Itinerancy, established by central government in the early 1960s to examine policy on Travellers, lay the groundwork for establishing a separate local authority social work service targeted specifically at this community. The first explicit policy statement on Travellers, it recommended that social workers, funded predominantly by central government, be appointed to local authorities, and envisaged that they would fulfil the following remit:

... to identify the accommodation needs of traveller families, to advise local authorities on meeting these needs, to liaise with voluntary bodies involved with travellers, to help families adjust to living in a house or chalet and in general to help travellers avail of various statutory services (Commission on Itinerancy, 1963: 128).

This initial focus of the social work roles reflected the strong emphasis which the Commission on Itinerancy placed on 'assimilating' Travellers into the culture of the general Irish population. This was to be achieved primarily by encouraging Travellers to abandon nomadism and settle permanently in standard houses. In view of the low average incomes of Travellers, the Commission envisaged that this standard housing would primarily take the form of social housing provided by local authorities (Norris and Winston, 2005).

The role of the local authority social workers tasked with supporting Travellers was reviewed in the next major government statement of policy to be published: the 1983 Report of the Travelling People Review Body. The policy context in which social workers operated also changed from this time (Travelling People Review Body, 1983). This policy statement adopted a different analysis of the objectives of social policy on Travellers to that of its predecessor, arguing that: 'the concept of absorption is unacceptable, implying as it does the swallowing up of the minority traveller group by the dominant settled community and the subsequent loss of traveller identity', instead it recommended that 'it is better to think in terms of integration between the traveller and the settled community' (Review Body, 1983: 6). Delap and Kelleher (2005) suggest that local authority social workers played a key part in challenging policymakers' traditional ideas regarding assimilation of Travellers into settled society.

The Review Body's report also raised concerns about the structure and organisation of the local authority social work role, and about social workers being isolated from processes of decision-making on Traveller accommodation issues. It was noted that social workers were burdened with excessive caseloads while working in environments devoid of peer support, competent office facilities, supervision and administrative assistance (Delap and Kelleher, 2005). In response to these concerns, in 1984 the National Social Workers and Community Workers Vocation Group recommended that the structure of the local authority social work service for Travellers be reformed to establish a tiered system of senior regional social workers, managing a team of social workers and overseen by a government social work advisor. However, these recommendations were not acted upon (Delap and Kelleher, 2005).

The context of local authority social work with Travellers changed further in 1995 following the

publication of the latest major government statement of policy on Travellers: the Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995). The Task Force argued that government should adopt a multi-culturalist approach to Travellers which recognised their rights as a minority ethnic group, including the centrality of nomadism to Traveller identity, and also acknowledged discrimination against and exclusion of Travellers in areas such as accommodation, health, education and childcare (Norris and Winston, 2005). This report also included detailed recommendations regarding local authorities' planning for and providing accommodation and housing for Travellers. The Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 established a legal framework for implementing these recommendations (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995). This Act requires local authorities to prepare, adopt and implement every five years Traveller Accommodation Programmes which assess the current and projected level of accommodation need among Travellers in their operational area, and specify how this need will be met. Each local authority is also required to establish a Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (LTACC), which includes Traveller community representatives and local authority officials and councillors, to advise on providing and managing accommodation for Travellers and the implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programme. In addition, the 1998 Act required central government to establish a National Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee (NTACC) to advise the Housing Minister on the Traveller Accommodation Programmes and Traveller accommodation provision more generally.

In relation to the local authority social workers tasked with supporting Travellers, the Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995: 11) acknowledged the contribution which the social worker plays as 'advisor, negotiator, co-ordinator and support/enabler' of Travellers, and recommended that:

the formal duties of the local authority social worker for Travellers be revised at national level by a Committee… [which] should take account of the need to shift the social workers' role from a rehabilitative focus to one of intercultural respect, and consider and make recommendations in relation to, inter alia, the following issues:

- *Job description and selection criteria*
- *Career structure*
- *In-service training*
- *Management reporting structure*
- *Liaison with other relevant agencies*
- *Harassment*
- *Case load size (Task Force on the Travelling Community, 1995: 32).*

Delap and Kelleher (2005) argue that the strong focus which the Task Force placed on social workers' roles and function reflected the broadening of these roles in the years before the report's publication. However, they point out that, unlike the Travelling People Review Body, the Task Force on the Travelling Community did not devote in-depth attention to social workers' job description or structures and conditions of employment. Rather it proposed that a committee be established to review these issues. This was never done.

Delap and Kelleher (2005) acknowledge that the implementation of the 1996 structural and staffing reform plan for the local government sector, Better Local Government, led to some useful reforms of the local authority social work service for Travellers, including the upgrading of some social work posts to more senior levels (Government of Ireland, 1996). However, they argue that these reforms were inadequate because: 'Upgrading appears to be happening on a county-by-county basis, and to be more dependent on local, potentially fickle, goodwill towards social work than any nationally co-ordinated plan' (Delap and Kelleher, 2005: 68). Their analysis of the situation of the local authority social workers tasked with supporting Travellers in the mid-2000s highlighted significant problems, including:

- The relatively small numbers of social workers employed by local authorities, most of which employ just a single practitioner to work with Travellers,
- The associated problem of missing opportunities for professional supervision and risk of isolation,
- Pay levels, because social workers are often employed at basic grades, the lack of opportunity for promotion and the underdeveloped career structure,
- The limited access to continuing professional development and training in organisations which employ very few social workers,

- The fact that the role can be stressful, not least because of the contradictions between social workers' responsibility for supporting Travellers and the negative impact on Travellers that wider local authority policy sometimes has,
- Uncertainty created by the increasing tendency to recruit other specialist staff, such as tenant liaison officers to work with Travellers.

There is no evidence that the situation of local authority social workers has changed significantly since then. The Local Authority Social Workers' Group and their trade union engaged with the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA – which provides human resources support for local authorities) between 2006 and 2009 to discuss anomalies in social workers' responsibilities and grades. However, at the end of this process the LGMA concluded that these issues are the responsibility of the heads of individual local authorities and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. Social workers have had their job descriptions reviewed in several local authorities since then, in many cases to assign them additional responsibilities, but no further posts have been regraded. The Department of Housing Planning Community and Local Government's (2014) Implementation Plan on the State Response to Homelessness 2014-2016 referred to the role of social workers and their transferrable skills which could be utilised to address some of the needs of homeless people. However, this report did not acknowledge that in many areas, local authority social workers are the primary resource assigned to assessing the needs and supporting homeless people.

Both independent research on the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 conducted in 2017 and a review by a central government-appointed Expert Group in 2019 found that the effectiveness of these arrangements, in terms of providing adequate accommodation for Travellers, was uneven across the country (RSM Consultancy, 2017; Joyce, Norton and Norris, 2019). Some local authorities were exceeding their targets in this regard, while others were spending only a small fraction of the money allocated to them by central government to provide accommodation for Travellers. The Expert Group proffered similar findings in relation to the effectiveness of the LTACCs and this finding is supported by research commissioned by The Housing Agency and conducted by RSM Consultancy (2017: 33), which found that Traveller representatives thought that some politicians were 'involved in LTACCs for the purposes of opposing Traveller accommodation'. However, the Expert Group also highlighted the important role played by local authority social workers in supporting the formulation of TAPs and the work of the LTACCs by, for instance, collating data on the local Traveller population (as part of the annual estimate of Traveller families collated by local authorities) and in consulting Travellers about the TAP proposals (Joyce, Norton and Norris, 2019).

St Martins Park, Dublin. © Dublin City Council

Numbers and Location of Local Authority Social Workers and Other Traveller Support Staff

Staff Numbers, Type and Spatial Distribution

Table 2.2 details the number of social workers and other staff tasked with supporting Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs, who were employed by local authorities in 2020. It also details the distribution of these staff among the 31 local authorities countrywide.

As mentioned above, in 2020 the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage funded a total of 41 social workers. Table 2.2 shows that 74% of local authorities employed at least one social worker to support Travellers. Thirteen local authorities (Carlow, Cavan, Cork, Fingal, Kilkenny, Laois, Meath, Monaghan, Offaly, Sligo, Tipperary, Waterford, and Wicklow County Councils) employed only one social worker in 2020. Eleven local authorities employed more than one social worker. These local authorities are: Dublin and Galway City Councils, Limerick City and County Council and Clare, Kildare, Louth, Mayo, South Dublin, Wexford County Councils. While eight local authorities did not employ a social worker to provide accommodation support for Travellers, these are: Cork City Council and Donegal, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Kerry, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils.

These data indicate that the number of social workers employed by local authorities and the proportion of local authorities which employ social workers to support Travellers has declined in recent years. Delap and Kelleher's (2005) research indicates that in 2001 45 social workers were employed by local authorities nationwide to work with Travellers and 85% of local authorities employed staff of this type. This suggests that the number of social worker posts has declined by five over the last two decades and the proportion of local authorities which employ social workers has contracted by 11%.

Table 2.2: Number of social workers and analogous staff employed by local authorities to assist Travellers in meeting accommodation needs, 2020

County council	Social workers	Analogous staff	Job titles of analogous staff members
Carlow County Council	1	0	
Cavan County Council	1	0	
Clare County Council	2	0	
Cork City Council	0	1	Senior Staff Officer
Cork County Council	1	0	
Donegal County Council	0	1	Traveller Accommodation Officer
Dublin City	5	1*	Traveller Liaison Officer
Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown County Council	0	0	
Fingal County Council	1	0	
Galway City Council	3	0	

County council	Social workers	Analogous staff	Job titles of analogous staff members
Galway County Council	3	1	Traveller Liaison and Development Officer
Kerry County Council	0	2	Traveller/Community Liaison Officer and Housing Investigation Officer
Kildare County Council	2	0	
Kilkenny County Council	1	0	
Laois County Council	1	0	
Leitrim County Council	0	1	Traveller Liaison Officer
Limerick City and County Council	3	0	
Longford County Council	0	1	Housing Welfare Officer
Louth County Council	2	0	
Mayo County Council	2	2	Traveller Accommodation Liaison Worker
Meath	1	0	
Monaghan County Council	1	0	
Offaly County Council	1	0	
Roscommon County Council	0	1	Traveller Liaison Officer
Sligo County Council	1	1	Traveller Liaison Officer
South Dublin County Council	2	0	
Tipperary County Council	1	1	Community Liaison Officer
Waterford County Council	1	0	
Westmeath County Council	0	0	
Wexford County Council	4	0	
Wicklow County Council	1	0	
Total	**41**	**13**	

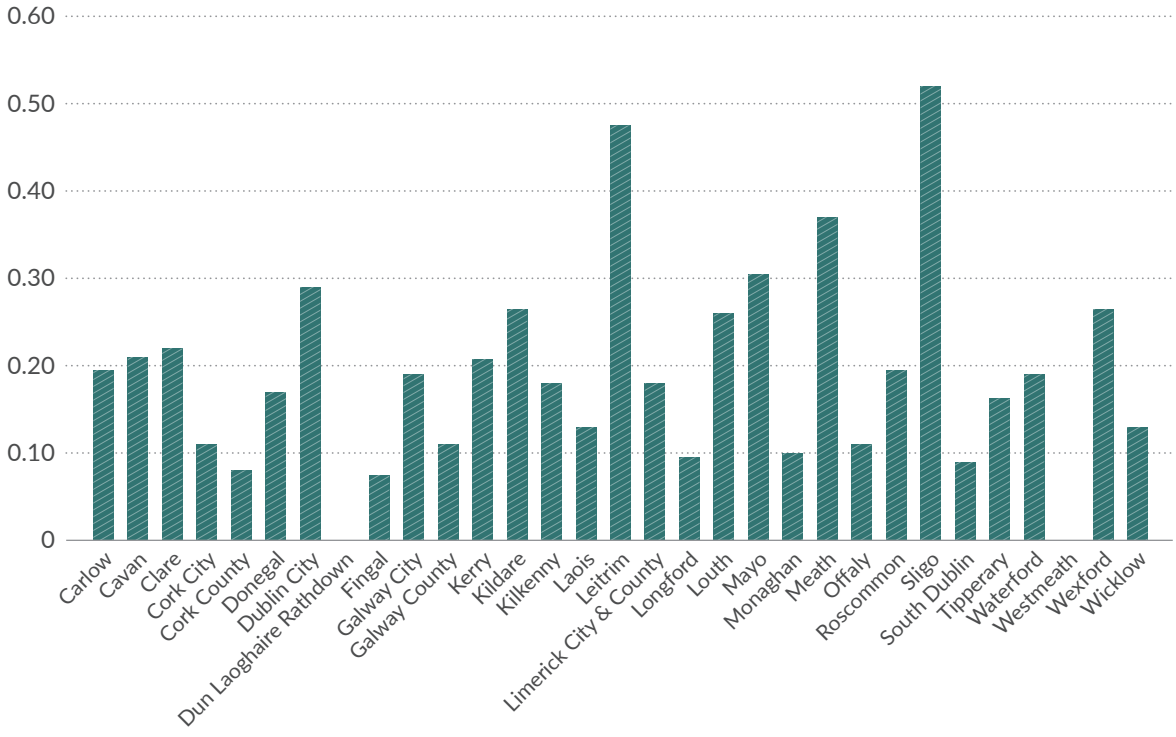
Source: information provided by the DHLGH, the Research Advisory Group and local authorities.
Note: * this staff member is based in an NGO.

In 2020, 13 other professionals were employed by local authorities to provide accommodation support for Travellers; staff of this type were employed in just over one-third of the 31 local authorities nationwide. As shown in Table 2.1, these other staff had a variety of job titles, including housing welfare officers, investigation officers, Traveller accommodation officers, community liaison officers and senior staff officers, but in this report they are referred to as Traveller liaison officers (TLOs). Delap and Kelleher's (2005) research indicates that this category of staff was recruited for the first time in the early 2000, which indicates that their numbers had expanded significantly since then.

Only two local authorities (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown and Westmeath County Councils) employed no specialist staff to support Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs in 2020.

Figure 2.2 compares the number of social work and other specialist support staff for Travellers in each local authority with 2016 Census data on the spatial distribution of the Traveller community. To provide a rough estimate of the maximum potential caseload of these staff, this graph details the numbers of staff per 100 Travellers resident in each local authority's operational area. This graph reveals marked variations. In some local authorities where the Traveller population is relatively small, the number of social work and other support staff members per 100 Travellers is relatively high (e.g. Sligo and Leitrim County Councils). In other local authorities, staff are responsible for a very large population of potential clients, including Fingal, Longford, Meath and South Dublin County Councils, which employed ≤ 0.10 specialist Traveller support staff members per 100 Travellers, and Laois, Offaly, Wicklow County Councils and Cork City Council, which employed between 0.11 and 0.13 staff of this type per 100 Travellers.

Figure 2.2: Number of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers per 100 Travellers resident in the local authority operational area



Note: This calculation draws on the data presented in Tables 2.1 and 2.2.

Dunsink Lane, Dublin. © Derek Speirs

Opportunities for Professional Supervision, Promotion and Team Working

Table 2.2 reveals that a large number of the social workers and Traveller liaison officers were the only specialist staff tasked with working with Travellers in their local authority in 2020; 10 of the 41 local authority social workers employed in 2020 fell into this category, as did two of the 13 other specialist staff of this type. This indicates that the number of Traveller support staff who are the only specialist staff of this type employed by their local authority has declined since 2001 when Delap and Kelleher (2005) reported that 37.8% of the local authority social workers tasked with supported Travellers were operating single-handedly within their local authority environment.

Where social workers have the opportunity to work with colleagues who are also responsible for supporting Travellers, those colleagues are also likely to be social workers. This was the case for 18 of the 29 social workers who were working in teams. A further 11 social workers worked in multi-disciplinary teams, most commonly alongside a community liaison officer or similar specialist. Other Traveller support staff were less likely to work in single disciplinary teams – only two of the 14 staff of this type did so in 2020.

The small numbers of social workers and other specialist Traveller support staff employed by local authorities and the large number of these staff who are 'single operators', without colleagues with a similar remit, obviously reduces the opportunities for professional supervision of social workers by other social workers and the opportunities for promotion of all categories of this staff. This is evident in their titles. Only six of the 41 social workers employed were 'senior social workers' and two of these were lone operators in their local authority, which indicates that social workers were supervised by senior social workers in only three local authorities: Galway City Council, South Dublin County Council and Dublin City (two senior social workers employed). This would indicate that there are no opportunities for social workers promotion to more senior grade in the vast majority of authorities who do not employ senior social worker staff.

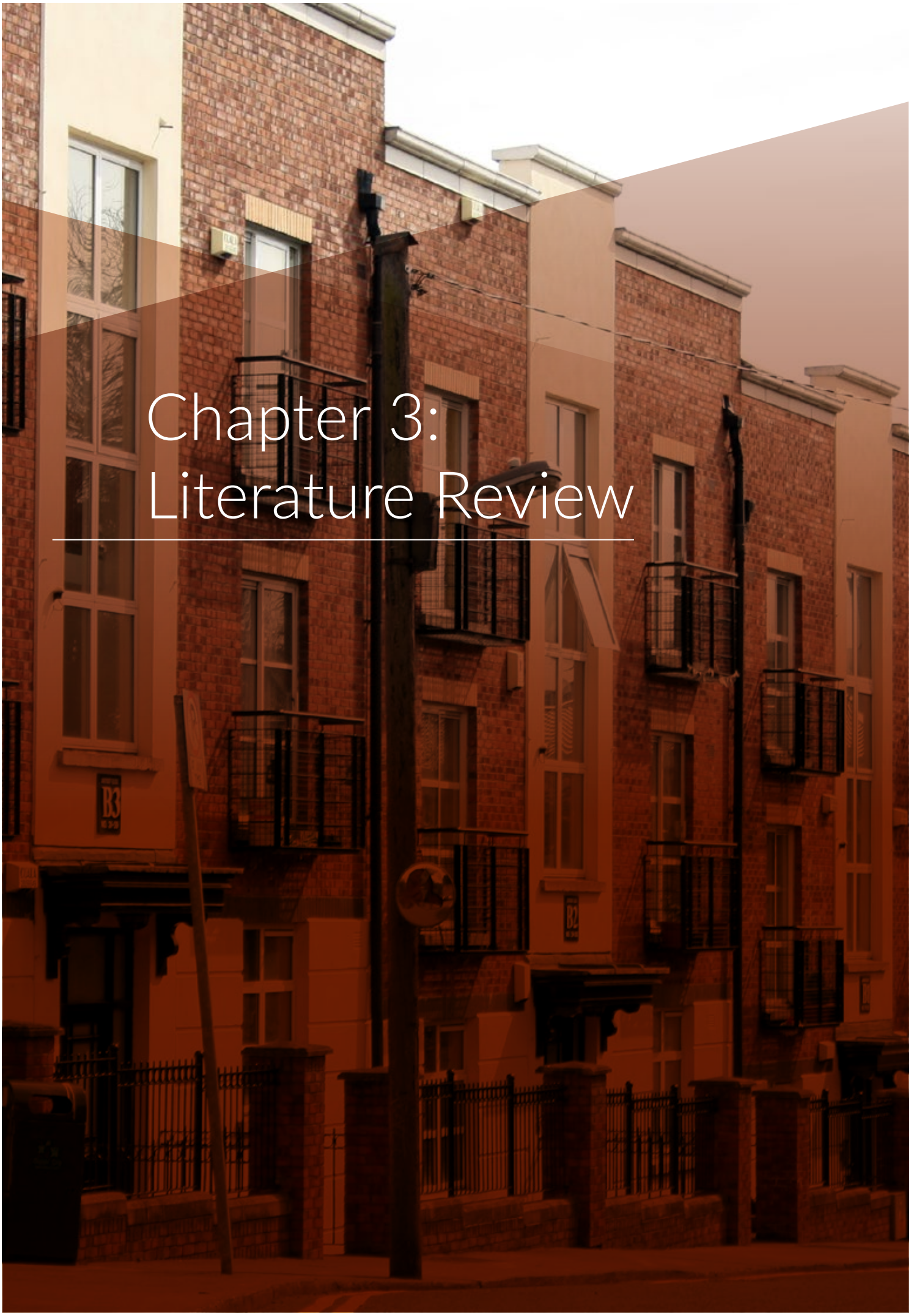
Conclusions

The analysis presented in this chapter has identified several important policy and socio-economic contextual issues that are relevant to the analysis of the role of social workers and other specialist local authority support staff for Travellers set out in the remainder of this report.

This analysis has highlighted a marked increase in the Traveller population in recent years and concentration of this population in cities and large towns. It has also illuminated severe levels of disadvantage among Travellers, as evidenced by low levels of education and high unemployment, which has resulted in heavy reliance on social housing as a source of accommodation. Travellers appear to have secured more tenancies for standard social houses and apartments in recent years than the Irish population-at-large, but the supply of and therefore access to Traveller-specific social housing remains very constrained. Furthermore, Travellers often have severe difficulty in securing private rented accommodation. As a result of these factors, this community is significantly overrepresented in the homeless population. All of these factors suggest that there is a need for intensive support for both Traveller tenants of local authorities and Travellers who are on the waiting list for social rented accommodation or in receipt of the Housing Assistance Payment.

In terms of the quality of the service response to these needs, the analysis indicates that the number of social workers employed by local authorities to support Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs has contracted slightly in recent years. Although the number of related staff such as community workers and Traveller liaison officers may have increased concurrently (no definitive data are available on the numbers of these staff employed in the past), the ratio of these staff to potential clients (in terms of the size of the local Traveller population) is very high in many local authority operational areas.

The demands on Traveller support staff are likely to have increased in recent years due to changes in national policy on the accommodation of Travellers. These changes have been very positive, given Travellers' rights as an ethnic minority and their right to maintain their distinct culture, together with the need to provide Traveller-specific accommodation to support this culture. In addition, comprehensive arrangements for implementing this policy were established by the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998. However, these implementation arrangements require each local authority to establish a Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee and devise and implement a Traveller Accommodation Programme every five years and local authority social workers and other Traveller support work are usually centrally involved in this work.



Chapter 3: Literature Review

Introduction

The following review of selected policy, practice and research literature helps to place this review in a range of relevant contexts. It begins with an overview of the history and development of the profession of social work. This overview includes an account of the early relationship with 19th century charitable organisations and how the profession emerged in its contemporary form. Included in this discussion are competing ideas about types of social work and its role in social service delivery, increasing government regulation and the growing importance of high-quality qualifying and post-qualifying education and professional development. The discussion includes findings from policy reports and empirical studies which highlight contemporary challenges and opportunities faced by social workers in their engagement with Travellers, and good practice in social work with this community.

The Origins and Nature of Social Work

The origins of social work can be traced back to the late 19th century and to the interventions of charitable organisations in the USA and Britain. However, development of the modern professional identity occurred after the Second World War, when the state become more involved in delivering services to children and families, to people with mental health problems, physical disabilities and learning difficulties, to older people and people convicted of crimes. Social work now has a legal title and is state regulated in Ireland, the UK, most of Europe and elsewhere in the developed world.

Debates about what constitutes social work practice are numerous and contested. There are a number of ways of defining social work, the most widely recognised one being the definition proposed by the International Federation of Social Workers (2014):

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. The above definition may be amplified at national and/or regional levels.

It can be helpful to consider social work in terms of models or paradigms. For example, social work practice can be thought of in the context of interventions with individuals, families, and communities. References are often made to political discourses or attitudes to issues of social justice. Thus, some social workers view themselves as radicals or activists who should challenge inequalities. Others use a range of therapeutic and communication skills in their practice; for example, with children and families (Ruch, 2014; Ferguson, Ioakimidis and Lavalette, 2018).

A common way of characterising social work practice is to describe aspects of knowledge, skills and values that are associated with the profession. For example, social workers need to know about the law, human development, and social work theories. They also need to demonstrate communication, assessment and intervention skills (Loughran, 2018). They should understand key ethical principles and engage in anti-oppressive practice when delivering services – an important issue in the context of this review (discussed further below) (Cocker and Hattford-Letchfield, 2014).

Where social workers are employed often determines how their practice is shaped. This may be in hospitals, community settings and residential care. They can also be employed by state, voluntary and community agencies, and to a lesser extent in private/commercial

settings. Most social workers have experience of multidisciplinary working in teams with other professionals.

A simple way of thinking about social work is in terms of the binary notions of care and control. Most social work practice involves helping citizens who are in need; for example, through forms of advocacy with a range of agencies (income support, housing, healthcare). Control functions are also carried out by social workers though, particularly in the context of childcare, mental health and criminal justice services (Campbell, 2010).

Social Work Education and Continuous Professional Practice

The development of social work education reflects the way in which the state has become involved in regulating the profession. In Ireland, six third-level educational institutions are accredited by the Social Workers Registration Board, which is part of CORU (which regulates health and social care professionals) to provide professional social work education. Essentially, there are two ways of becoming a social worker: by completing a four-year undergraduate degree (usually called a Bachelor of Social Work (BWS) or similar) or a two-year postgraduate degree (usually called a Master of Social Work (MSW) or similar). Unlike in North America and Australasia, the BSW and MSW in Ireland and the UK are viewed as professional, if not academic, equivalents. They are the entry-level qualifications required to practise as a social worker. Social work education programmes usually include modules which examine social work law, human development and behaviour, anti-oppressive practice and values, social work skills and social work theory and methods. Usually about half of the programme consists of two 14-week placements where students are rigorously supervised by qualified social workers, described as practice teachers.

For decades after social work professional education was first provided in Ireland in the 1960s, professional education programmes were accredited by the UK accrediting body, and the social work profession was not regulated in Ireland. However, since the late 1990s professional education accreditation and professional regulation arrangements for social work have been established. Since 2005, when CORU was established, students are required on completion of their studies to register with the regulator. The regulator sets educational and professional standards and maintains and publishes a register of qualified staff. The social worker must keep skills up to date through continuous professional development (CPD) opportunities, which are subject to a monitoring process. Where necessary the regulator also conducts fitness-to-practise hearings (see: **www.coru.ie/health-and-social-care-professionals**).

Limerick.

Contemporary Challenges Facing the Social Work Profession

In the last few decades in many countries, social work, like other publicly funded professions, has had to deal with the effects of fiscal retrenchment and new policy directions. Social work practice is increasingly regulated and bureaucratised, partly because of past failures in managing risk in childcare services. However, it has been argued that this has led to risk-averse practices that tend to narrow the scope of interventions social workers can use (Stanford et al., 2017). All social and care professionals are now subject to policies which give citizens a great say in their lives. In the case of social work, for example, the voice of the child must be heard, and the views of experts by experience (those who use services) must be more prominent in decisions regarding the provision of social work services for adults (MacDermott and Harkin-MacDermott, 2020).

Social work attracts diverse populations to the profession. Women are more likely to become social workers, while the educational system allows entrants from all adult ages. Increasingly, the profession attracts people from black and minority ethnic (BAME) communities and, in Northern Ireland, greater numbers of Catholics than Protestants are employed as social workers (Campbell et al., 2013). The literature suggests that social workers are more likely to have had adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) (Larkin, Felitti and Anda, 2013). These demographic characteristics are important when social work interventions take place with clients who may, or may not, share such identities.

Most social work practice involves the delivery of services to individuals, families and communities who experience discrimination. The concept of 'anti-oppressive practice' is used to equip professionals to critically analyse the experiences of all oppressed groups and work with clients' strengths to ensure good outcomes (Thompson, 2016). There is a growing literature on how well, or otherwise, social workers deal with the issues of race and racism. In a recent text, concerns have been expressed about how white social workers may not be culturally competent, or literate, when understanding the needs of BAME families (Singh and Masocha, 2020). The assertion is that practitioners should examine their identities and consider how these may affect their understanding of race and racism. When this critical self-reflection takes place, there is a better chance that interventions are appropriate and empowering for the clients with whom they work.

International Perspectives on Social Work with Travellers, Gypsies and Roma

As with general ideas on race and racism, the international literature on how social workers practise with Travellers (including Gypsies and Roma) suggests that, where consciousness-raising and self-reflection does not occur, it may be difficult to assess need and deliver appropriate services to these communities.

There are other possible explanations for problems with service delivery to BAME communities, including Travellers. It may be that the bureaucratised nature of services and resistance to change in organisations reduce opportunities to fully support Travellers' rights. There may also be pressures on practitioners to assume the norms of wider society; for example, in favouring assimilation of Travellers into mainstream culture. Cemlyn, Greenfields et al. (2009: 128) noted that Traveller communities often tend to distrust social workers and that this is generally matched by social workers' distrust in engaging with Travellers. This, they argue, is rooted in stereotypical misconceptions and ignorance of the cultural issues within the Traveller population, which are mirrored in wider society. Those Traveller families who are housed are often split from extended families, faced with poor-quality housing and having to deal with suspicion or harassment from 'settled

community' neighbours who do not value or respect Traveller culture. Travellers often feel that their way of life is demonised or ridiculed; as a result, cultural identity tends to be hidden as a way of dealing with assimilation issues and meeting the demands of the settled community (Lau and Ridge, 2011). Such issues have been recognised in Ireland. Bracken's (2014) study, for example, found that Travellers were 'posted into private town houses so that family's social infrastructure has gone'. Such policies appear to have led to increased substance abuse, mental health issues and more involvement with the criminal justice system (Bracken, 2014).

Cemlyn (2000) highlights the importance of social workers forming authentic relationships in culturally sensitive outreach work. It is crucial that everyday problems faced by Travellers be addressed using the key skills of communication; for example, in resolving site issues and planning applications, providing support in difficult family situations and advocating for Traveller rights in relation to housing requirements. Where trust can be established, social work interventions can be experienced positively and be empowering for Travellers. Key to service delivery are types of inter-agency liaison between social workers and education, health, housing, and other welfare professionals. A core principle is that Travellers should have equal access to services alongside other members of the population. Importantly, Cemlyn, (2008a: 167) argues that social work practice in this field needs to be informed by frameworks of human rights which can 'unsettle sedentarist assumptions, interrogate structures and policies that limit and distort Travellers' cultural rights, and potentially introduce a further paradigm shift in favour of marginalized people'. Social workers have to be cognisant of the 'oppression associated with enforcement actions relating to accommodation' for the Traveller community and the need for further development of a human rights approach, alongside the application of equality theory and practice in social work with the Traveller community. She notes an historical trajectory in the UK, with nomadism among Gypsy Travellers 'perceived as a threat to dominant economic and political interests' (Cemlyn, Greenfields et al., 2009: 135). In Scotland, Morran (2002) found that, once Traveller families had become assimilated, their identity was less likely to be recognised in official figures and policy responses.

Alongside professional decision-making, institutional and organisation policies are central to the delivery of good-quality services. Sweeney and Matthews (2017) recommend that local authorities develop approaches that are tailored to meet the needs of the Traveller community and not just simplistically apply those used for the settled population. Reciprocated trust can result when employees discuss the rules of engagement and agree on a communication strategy which makes decision-making as transparent and as well understood as possible for Travellers. Powell (2011: 26) however, highlights problems which arise when these processes fail. Too much mistaken emphasis is placed on policies that insist on an 'integrated future for the Gypsy-Traveller community unless they stop "being" Gypsy-Travellers'. His argument is that the state fails to recognise the central focus of family relations in Traveller socialisation, their traditional and alternative economy and (semi-)nomadism, all of which are deemed incompatible with the modern era. Such policy and political imperatives can undermine opportunities for change.

Despite these impediments, attempts have been made to use innovative approaches to empower Traveller and Roma communities in Europe. Larkins and Bilson (2016) have developed a range of pedagogical methods to engage with young people. Using a psychoanalytical perspective, Daly (2016) argues that UK child protection social workers could use more reflective approaches to understand potentially deep-seated prejudices and racist attitudes towards Irish Travellers.

Contemporary Irish Perspectives on Social Work with Travellers

As in other jurisdictions, and as explained in the preceding chapter, the Irish experience of social work with Travellers is complex, and historically problematic. Contemporary research indicates that has resulted in a legacy of mistrust of social workers among Travellers.

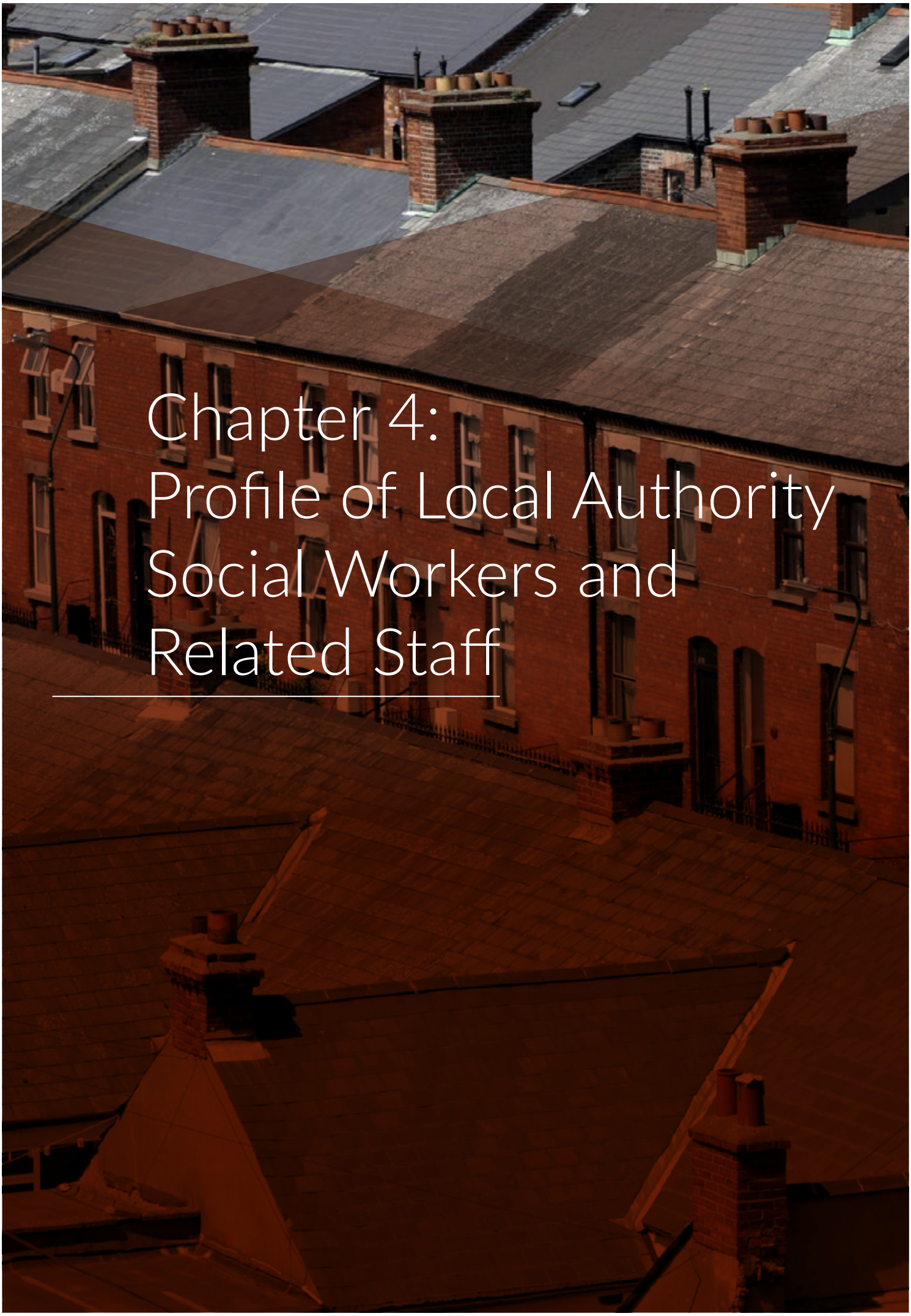
McDonagh (2018: 10) found that Travellers tended to 'mistrust services' and are often concerned about 'discrimination and a lack of cultural competence within services'. Where services are inadequate, an association has been made with alarming rates of mental health problems and rates of suicide in Traveller communities (Abdalla et al., 2013). Allen (2012) found evidence of Travellers' distrust of mainstream social and community services (social work service, gardaí and other professionals) in her study of support service provision for Traveller women experiencing domestic violence. She noted social workers' lack of awareness of the cultural context in which Irish Traveller women (who experience domestic violence) live, which exacerbated these victims' problems. Her findings also indicated that challenges faced by Traveller women in these situations are further compounded by long waiting lists for social and public housing. Bracken (2014) has highlighted forms of ethnic and cultural identification that affect probation officers (social workers employed in the criminal justice system) in their interventions with Travellers. It was found that Travellers were often suspicious of the Probation Service, which was viewed to be part of 'a highly biased and discriminatory system' (police, courts, media). It was considered essential, therefore, that the service found ways of building trust and confidence amongst communities (Bracken, 2014: 54). These findings mirror the UK Traveller and Roma communities' experiences of the criminal justice system (Power, 2003).

Daly (2016: 341, 342) has argued that, among some social workers, there is a reluctance to 'take risks and tolerate uncertainly and ambivalence', and suggests that, during interventions with Travellers, competent practice should not be based on 'highly defended and reactionary ways of thinking'. Social workers should be more flexible about the range of practices that can be used to meet the needs of Traveller populations. For example, Notcutt (2017) recommends long-term, community-based approaches which have been developed in the UK. These have been shown to build trust and increase self-esteem and confidence among the younger generations. Forms of group work and community development which focus on support, advocacy and outreach can also act as a bridge between statutory social work services and Travellers (Cemlyn, 2000a, 2008; Lau and Ridge, 2011). Ryder (2013: 23) argues that social workers should embrace forms of 'inclusive community development' that are asset-based and build community organisation through grassroots support.

Where social work provision is informed by human rights principles and sensitive, thoughtful relationship-building with Traveller communities, good outcomes are possible. McDonagh (2018) uses a case study of social work services in Offaly, which appear to have had a positive impact on members of the Traveller community. For example, professionals were able to provide a culturally appropriate family support structure and psychotherapeutic family interventions. Traveller organisations have identified several principles of good practice which should underpin social work with this community (Pavee Point, 2010). These include: provision of Traveller-friendly services which allow for authentic engagement and representation; policies and services which do not inadvertently discriminate against Travellers; social inclusion policies; cultural awareness and anti-racism training; employment of Travellers in service provision; Traveller consultation on service evaluation, and collection of data on the ethnic and cultural background of service users, to highlight any gaps or inequalities.

Conclusions

This literature review has traced the origins of social work in Ireland and the evolution of the profession to its current, government-regulated status. It has explained that social workers carry out complex tasks across a range of client groups, often entailing holistic interventions and in the midst of many challenges. In particular, practitioners have to assess need, often when resources are limited, and make difficult judgements about risk and the use of mandated functions. The literature review then explored ways in which social workers intervene in the lives of Travellers, internationally and then in the Irish context. It described how policy initiatives in the 1960s and 1980s shaped the social work service for Travellers, further explored in a number of studies. Key to the social work role is the need for sensitive, culturally competent interventions and a recognition of the types of inequalities that Traveller communities often face.



Chapter 4: Profile of Local Authority Social Workers and Related Staff

Introduction

This chapter presents a profile of the social workers and related local authority staff (who are referred to as Traveller Liaison Officers (TLOs) in this study) who support Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs. This profile draws on the results of an online survey of these staff which was conducted in June 2020. It examines the demographic characteristics, qualifications, skills and experience, job descriptions and responsibilities of these staff. It also examines the scale and nature of their work with Travellers and the rewarding aspects and challenges of this work.

As explained in the introduction to this report, the survey was issued to all 53 staff of local authorities nationwide who are funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to support Travellers (see Table 2.2). This staff group comprises 41 professionally qualified social workers and 13 related staff. Responses to the survey were received from 24 of the 31 local authorities nationwide. A total of 40 responses was received which is an overall response rate of 80%. 33 responses were received from social workers (which accounts for 82% of all of the local authority social workers who were surveyed) and seven TLOs (53 % of all TLOs surveyed) completed the survey. It should also be noted that some local authority employees chose to make a submission to this review, rather than complete the survey (see list of submissions to this review which are included in Appendix I to this report).

Demographic Characteristics of Survey Respondents

The demographic characteristics of survey respondents are outlined in Table 4.1. This reveals that the majority of the social workers who responded to the survey were female (85%), and of Irish ethnicity (94%). The majority of TLO respondents were male 71% and all were of Irish ethnicity (100%). The survey recorded no members of the Travelling community employed in either of these roles. Most survey respondents were over 40 years old – this was the case for 60% of social workers and 86% of TLOs. A significant proportion of both categories of staff were aged between 50 and 65 years which points to a significant risk of the loss of many experienced staff through retirement.

Table 4.1: Age, gender and ethnicity of local authority social workers and TLOs

Characteristics		% of social workers	% of TLOs
Age group (years)	20-30	9	14
	30-40	30	0
	40-50	24	43
	50-66	37	43
Gender	Male	15	71
	Female	85	14
	Other	0	15
Race/ethnic group	Irish	94	100
	Irish Traveller	0	0
	Any other White background	6	0
	African	0	0
	Any other Black background	0	0
	Chinese	0	0
	Any other Asian background	0	0
	Other (including mixed background)	0	0

Source: generated from the online survey of local authority social workers and TLOs.

Qualifications, Experience and Access to Continuous Professional Development

Respondents to the survey were asked to detail their qualifications and experience in the local government sector and their answers to these questions are detailed in Table 4.2 below. These data indicate that social workers were generally better qualified than Traveller liaison officers. All of the social workers surveyed held third level qualifications and 39% were master's degree holders. The survey also asked whether social workers were registered with CORU (the social work registration body). CORU registration is mandatory for social workers and all of the local authority social workers surveyed were CORU registered.

Almost half of the social workers surveyed had worked in the local authority sector for more than 15 years. In addition they all had gained professional experience elsewhere prior to being employed by a local authority in areas such as child protection, domestic abuse, disability service, refugee service, community care service, mental health service, support for care leavers. In contrast, some of the TLOs had no previous experience or previous relevant experience before commencing their post.

Seniority, Supervision and Co-working

The grades of the workers surveyed generally ranged between grades five to seven on the local authority grading structure, with a small minority reaching grade eight. 18% of the social workers who responded to the survey held the title 'senior social worker'.

Despite respondents' relatively long average duration of service in the local authority sector as highlighted above, only 21% of all the survey respondents had been promoted since taking up employment in this sector.

The survey also asked about supervision arrangements and revealed that only 18% of social worker respondents reported directly to a more senior social worker. Most social workers and TLOs reported to senior administrative officers (grades 6 or 7 in the local authority grading structure). A small minority of senior social workers reported directly to a director of service (usually a director of housing services) or to the local authority chief executive.

With regards to opportunities for team working, 73% of the social workers surveyed had co-workers and the remainder did not have this support. A range of co-workers in the different local authorities were mentioned including other social workers, Traveller liaison officers, HAP placement finders, caretakers and anti-social behaviour officers, maintenance staff, housing finance staff and administrative officers. By comparison, three out of the seven TLOs who replied to the survey mentioned other co-workers including social workers, administrative staff, and other Traveller liaison officers.

Table 4.2: Local authority social workers' and TLO's qualifications, experience and access to CPD

		% of social workers	% of TLOs
Highest level of education	None	–	14
	Leaving certificate	–	14
	Undergraduate certificate/diploma	–	28
	Undergraduate degree (such as BA. BSocSc)	42	44
	Postgraduate diploma	18	–
	Master's degree (such as MA, MSW)	40	–
	PhD or other doctoral degree	–	–
Years spent working in the local authority sector	1-5 years	40	21
	5-10 years	6	–
	10-15 years	6	–
	15-20 years	21	28
	20+ years	28	–
Rating of access to Continuous Professional Development	Quite insufficient	15	–
	Mildly sufficient	18	–
	Sufficient	27	71
	Highly sufficient	40	29

Job Descriptions, Responsibilities and Time Devoted to Supporting Travellers

Those surveyed were also asked what percentage of their working week they spent working on Traveller related issues. Among all those surveyed, an average of 64% of their week was spent working with Travellers. However, when the data was disaggregated, significant variations between occupational groups were evident (see Table 4.3 below).

All seven of the TLOs who responded to the survey reported that they spent between 80-100% of their time working on Traveller related issues; whereas for social workers, the percentage of time spent on these tasks varied – 10 of these respondents reported spending between 80-100% of their time working with Travellers, while five respondents estimated spending less than 20%.

To explore these issues in more depth, respondents were requested to rank the proportion of time spent on various tasks between 7 (= most time) and 1 (=least time). The results of this exercise are summarised in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 below. These graphs summarise the average ranking for different tasks and different categories of staff.

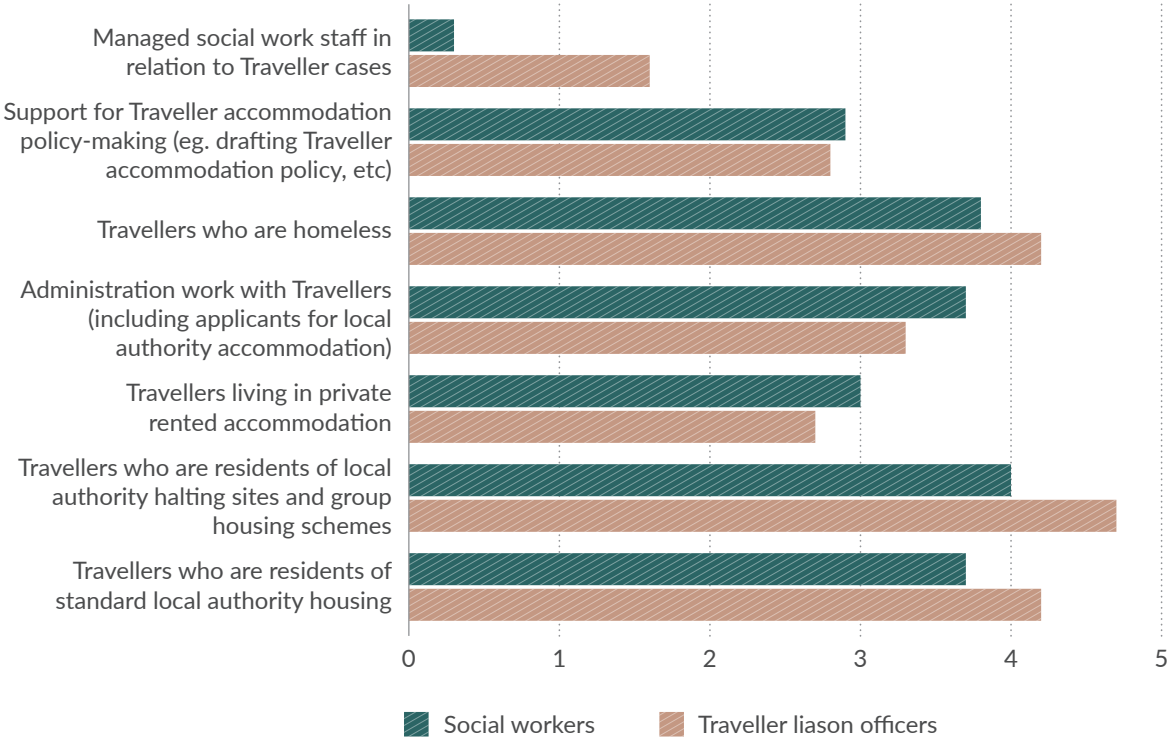
Figure 4.1 examines respondents' ranking of the time devoted to Traveller support related tasks. It reveals the TLOs survey ranked working with Traveller tenants of standard and Traveller specific local authority housing and working with homeless Travellers as the tasks to which they devoted most of their working time on average. These tasks were ranked 4.7, 4.2 and 4.7 respectively out of a possible 7 (= most time devoted to this task). Whereas social workers reported that their time was spread more evenly across all of the various support tasks and also administration work with Travellers (including supporting Traveller applicants for housing and accommodation).

The large proportion of time which both categories of staff devote to supporting homeless Travellers is a significant finding, however. TLOs ranked the time devoted to this task at 4.2 on average (out of a maximum 7) and social workers ranking was 3.8. It indicates that the high rates of Traveller homelessness, highlighted in Chapter 2, is having a significant impact on the work of the local authority staff who are tasked with supporting this community.

Table 4.3: Percentage of working week which local authority social workers and TLOs spend working on Traveller-related issues

% of working week spent on Traveller-related issues	Number of social workers in each category	Number of TLOs in each category
80-100	10	7
60-80	4	0
40-60	6	0
20-40	8	0
0-20	5	0

Figure 4.1: Local authority social workers' and TLOs' ranking of working time devoted to specific Traveller support tasks (1= least time, 7= most time)

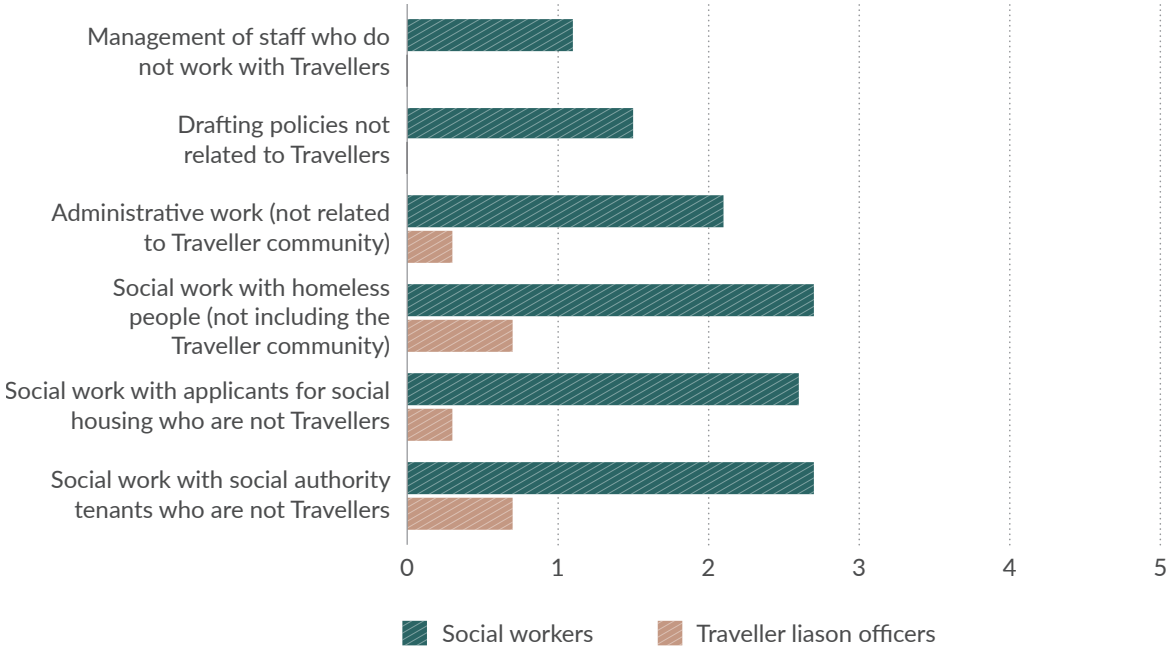


Note: respondents were asked to rank tasks between 7 (= most time) and 1 (=least time). This graph presents the average ranking for different tasks and different categories of staff.

Figure 4.2 (overleaf) details survey respondents' rankings of how much of their working week to tasks which are not related to supporting Travellers. This graph reveals that, many of the TLOs surveyed indicated that they don't devote any time to tasks of this type. Whereas this was not the case for social workers. They reported that they devote a significant minority of their time to social work with local authority tenants (ranked on average 2.8 out of a maximum of 7), homeless people (ranked 2.7) and applicants for housing who are not Travellers (2.6).

Notably, particularly in the case of social workers, the survey indicates that tasks to which they are required to devote their working week do not always accurately reflect their job description. The vast majority of social workers and TLOs surveyed reported that they have been provided with a job description by their employer and the vast majority of TLOs reported at least a 70% match between their actual day-to-day duties and their job description (see Table 4.4 below). However, 30% of the social workers who responded to the survey reported that 40% or less of their actual work matches those outlined in their job descriptions. Social worker survey respondents mentioned that the additional duties carried out but not listed in formal job descriptions include: case management of homeless services, homeless assessments and working with other vulnerable groups, child safeguarding, representation of the local authority in meetings with social care/ work agencies and, making representations to the local authority housing department.

Figure 4.2: Local authority social workers' and TLOs' ranking of working time devoted to specific tasks not related to supporting Travellers (1= least time, 7= most time)



Note: respondents were asked to rank tasks between 7 (= most time) and 1 (=least time). This graph presents the average ranking for different tasks and different categories of staff.

Table 4.4: Local authority social workers and TLOs' job description and views on how well these match their actual work

		% of social workers	% of TLOs
Do you have a job description?	Yes	88	86
	No	6	14
	Don't know	6	0
How well does your job description match your actual work?	100% match	34	29
	70% match	24	57
	40% match	27	0
	10% match	3	0
	No job description	12	14

Skills Required

The survey also asked respondents to list the specific social work skills and non-social work-related skills which they felt their job required. Respondents were free to mention any skills of their choosing.

TLOs' responses to this exercise are summarised in Table 4.5 below and social workers' responses are summarised in Table 4.6. Not surprisingly the former identified relatively few duties which require specialist social work skills, while the opposite was the case for the latter. However, the social workers who responded to the survey also identified a very large number of tasks they are required to do which do not require specialist social work skills and therefore could presumably be assigned to other local authority staff. This issue is explored in more depth in the chapter which follows.

Table 4.5: TLO perspectives on which elements of their role require social work skills

Social work skills required	Social work skills not required
Complex accommodation and family situations	Liaising with landlords and subcontractors in relation to setting up properties
Understanding safeguarding and what concerns need to be noted in relation to forwarding any safeguarding concerns to TUSLA	Accommodation maintenance issues
	Ability to assess and investigate needs and communicate effectively with applicants to clarify information and record accurately information received
	Signposting applicants to relevant services i.e. social welfare, citizens advice, family resource centres
	Day to day interaction with families

Table 4.6: Social worker perspectives on skills required by social workers

Duties which require social work skills	Duties which do not require social work skills
Complex housing assessments and report on housing transfer applications	Administrative work frequently mentioned
Grant assessments	Illegal caravan parking and control of horses
Supervision of social work staff	Administrative work
Safeguarding of children, vulnerable clients and clients with complex needs	Control of horses and estate
Court reports and other related legal work	Homeless assessments
Tenancy sustainment	Routine housing applications
Suicide and bereavement support	Updating databases, records etc.
Provision of housing advice and information as part of targeted social work service	Dealing with ESB bills
Comprehensive psychosocial assessments	Caravan loans
Utilizing strengths based and solution focused interventions	Clerical administrative duties
Addressing issues impacting on social, emotional and economic wellbeing	Routine housing needs assessments
Crisis intervention and supporting families in crisis	Messenger service between clients/members of the Traveller community and higher management
Promoting respect for rights, social justice and social inclusion	Reporting and counterbalancing unsafe practices and behaviours from departmental staff to clients – having to mop up someone else's mess or lack of professional or lack of service provision
Advocating for fair distribution of resources based on identified levels of risk/need	Working on the homeless rota
Use of theoretical, factual and practice knowledge	Sourcing emergency accommodation
Anti-discriminatory practice and respect for diversity in cultures and values	Answering queries from customers of the council who are frustrated but the work could easily be done by another section, e.g. liaising with maintenance or encouraging clients to pay rent
Use of problem solving and decision-making skills	
Interviewing skills; mediation	
Containing anxiety, de-escalating with hostility, aggression and violence	
Use of purposeful directive and nondirective intervention	

Duties which require social work skills	Duties which do not require social work skills
Participating in policymaking and assessment and development of TAP	
Antisocial behaviour issues	
Engaging with vulnerable and complex clients	
Inter-agency working, policy analysis, trauma informed practices	
Supporting administrative staff in dealing with clients who have complex needs	
Supporting Travellers at inter-agency meetings	
Supervising and supporting the Traveller social work team	

Challenges and Rewarding Aspects of the Role

The social workers and TLOs surveyed were also asked about the challenges and rewarding aspects of their roles. Due to the smaller number of TLOs surveyed the total number of responses to this question from this occupational group was also smaller. They identified the following key challenges of their job:

- Sourcing suitable accommodation for Travellers
- Managing expectations, where there is a view that there is money readily available to spend on Traveller housing
- Lack of trust that some Travellers have of local authority officials
- Anti-social behaviour complaints
- Homelessness
- Clients who get aggressive and threatening
- Managing client demands

Conversely, the TLOs identified the following aspects of their roles which were particularly rewarding:

- Challenging the stereotypes experienced by members of the Travelling community when communicating with landlords or third parties to access housing
- Being thanked for the work you have done by those who you are trying to help
- When an allocation is made, and keys of new home given to a family
- Finally getting a family a place to call home

The challenges identified by the social workers who responded to the survey are summarised in Figure 4.3 on the next page. Some of the challenges mentioned by survey respondents concerned their conditions of employment such as employment contracts, lack of resources and lack of respect for the profession in the local government. Others related to challenges Travellers face such as homelessness and institutional racism. Respondents also highlighted some challenges associated with their relationship with Traveller clients, including managing expectations; imbalance between Traveller rights and responsibilities and perceptions that local authority social workers are agents of control.

The social workers surveyed also mentioned numerous rewarding aspects of their work with Travellers. These are summarised in Figure 4.4 on the next page.

Figure 4.3: Key professional challenges of role identified by social worker survey

Figure 4.4: Rewarding aspects of their role identified by social worker survey respondents

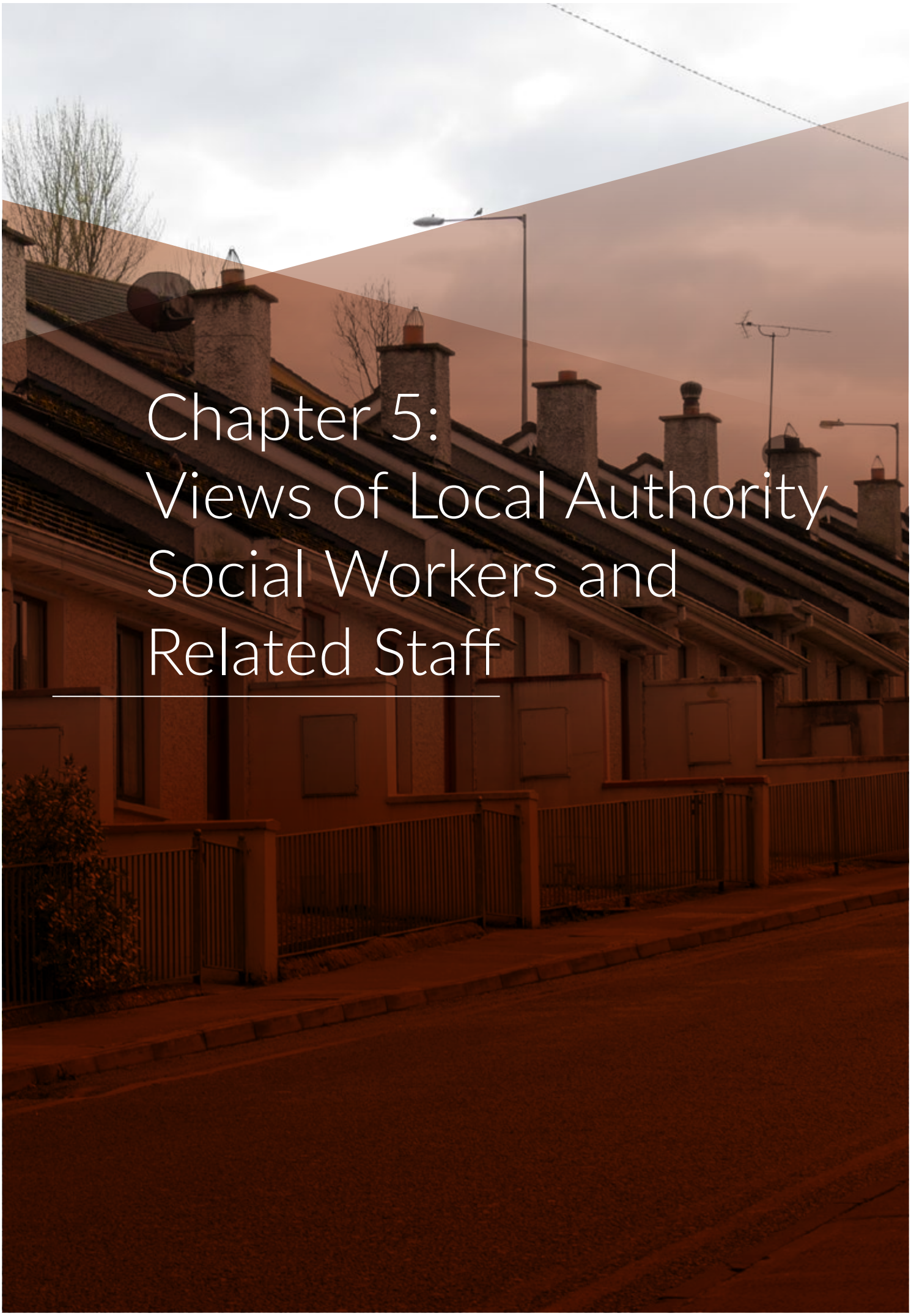
Conclusions

This chapter has presented a profile of local authority social workers and TLOs who are responsible for supporting Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs, This profile is based on the results of an online survey of these staff which generated a very high response rate. The survey revealed some important differences between these two categories of local authority staff in terms of qualifications and experience, the nature of their day to day responsibilities and the extent to which their working week is devoted solely to working with Travellers.

The social workers surveyed generally had more professional experience and higher levels of academic qualifications than TLOs. The social workers were all registered with CORU and all had at least a degree-level qualifications and 57% had post-graduate qualifications, by comparison the highest level of academic achievement for TLO's was an undergraduate degree. In rating their access to CPD, all of the TLO's rated this as either sufficient or highly sufficient compared to 66% of social workers 54% of the social workers surveyed had 10+ years' experience working in the local authority sector compared with 28% of TLOs. A significant proportion of social workers had also gained experience in other fields prior to taking up their current position. The fields mentioned included: mental health services, the care system, refugee services and disability services. Whereas the TLOs surveyed were less likely to have gained specialist experience prior to commencing their posts.

The TLOs surveyed reported that they spent a vast majority or all their week working on Traveller specific issues. In contrast, the social workers who replied to the survey reported multiple demands on their time which could include social work with Travellers or social work with local authority clients who were not members of the Traveller community. A total of 88% of social workers had a formal job description, however, many of these respondents reported that this did not closely match their actual day-to-day duties - 66% estimated that the match between the two was 70% or less. Social work respondents flagged that their job involves tasks which require social work skills, such as bereavement support and crisis intervention skills, but a substantial proportion of their duties did not require these specialist skills social workers are tasked with, they felt did not require social work expertise such administrative work, and processing routine applications for housing. 86% of TLOs had a formal job description and 86% estimated that the match between this and their actual daily work was 70% or more.

Survey respondents identified many rewards gained from their work with the Traveller community. The rewards most commonly mentioned were: as providing positive support to Travellers, improving living conditions, getting results for people, enabling a homeless person to find a place to call home and empowering clients to fight for their rights. All respondents also identified challenges in their roles such as dealing with racism and discriminatory attitudes to Travellers within local authority setting, a lack of influence, work overload and burnout and for social workers there was a reference to the lack of understanding amongst senior local authority management of the social work role. Dealing with unrealistic demands, hostility, anti-social behaviour and aggression from the Travelling community was also commonly identified as a challenge, as well as trying to manage client expectations within the resources available.



Chapter 5: Views of Local Authority Social Workers and Related Staff

Introduction

This chapter examines the views of local authority social workers and Tenant liaison officers responsible for supporting Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs. It draws primarily on 19 in-depth interviews with social workers and five interviews with related staff which were conducted by the authors. To protect their anonymity, the social workers interviewed are identified by an abbreviation and number – SW1 to SW19. Similarly, because the other staff interviewed most commonly used the job title 'Traveller liaison officer', their views are identified by the abbreviation TLO and numbered one to five.

Social workers' views are examined in the first two-thirds of this chapter. This discussion is organised around the themes raised most commonly in the interviews with these staff: their role and caseload, relationships with Travellers, treatment within the local authority sector, and job satisfaction and stresses. The latter part of the chapter examines the experiences of Traveller liaison officers and other local authority staff who work in similar roles.

Views of Social Workers

Service Effectiveness, Role and Caseload

As explained in Chapter 2, the role and function of social work in Irish local authorities has evolved over time in response to the changing needs of the Traveller community and the way in which the social work profession has developed. The social workers interviewed for this review acknowledged this change, and those who had been in post for a long time reflected on how they had seen these changes emerge during their career. **SW 19** pointed out how the early Traveller-specific social workers were employed in a particular role – '…to support people to get off the roadside, to get into accommodation and sustain the accommodation'. **SW 19** also suggested that changes in attitudes and knowledge within the Traveller community meant that they have a greater awareness of and access to services:

…I think perhaps what they needed from social workers way back in the early stages has changed. In addition the social work profession has developed… we are all registered with CORU [the state regulator] and I suppose what we want to deliver has changed from the origins of the service as well but I suppose the funding stream has remained the same and is focused on providing support around Traveller accommodation.

A senior local authority manager offered similar reflections regarding the changing support needs of Travellers over recent decades and the implications of this for social workers' role:

The school attendance, the transfer to secondary school is much greater now than it was. Travellers' accommodation, even though there isn't enough of it, is still a little better than it was in general. So I think the literacy levels are much better than they were too. We used to spend a lot of time helping to fill out social welfare forms, advocating for social welfare. We don't need to do that so much now… …So I suppose the demand has changed and the service delivery's changed, but the issues are probably a little more complex now than they were. The Travelling community isn't as isolated from the settled community anymore. Now a lot of the things that impact on the settled community, like drugs, impact on Travellers as well ***(KI 6).***

However, many of the social workers interviewed argued that changes in policies and organisational practices in relation to Travellers and societal change in this community had not been accompanied by amendments to social workers' job descriptions, which tend to be outdated and sometimes bear little resemblance to current roles. As **SW 11** put it:

I think it [job description] could have been even written in the '60s… And one of the things was to advise people on how to dress… It was a description of somebody that

would be working with a family that was so dysfunctional they didn't know how to do any basic task whatsoever… So, the families have changed, the issues that they face have changed, and our roles will continue to change.

It became evident from many interviews that local authority social workers are occupying a challenging space between these organisational and societal changes, and continually work to find ways to adapt their practice to meet the changing needs of Travellers. Some were conscious that the funding stream that supports their posts appears to relate to past expectations about the role, which do not reflect contemporary issues. For example, many Travellers are extremely competent in self-advocacy and navigating systems of support, but this may have not been the case in the past. Most respondents felt that a historical key assumption, that all Travellers require a social worker, is now outdated. As **SW 11** explained, '…when I started, it was just assumed that every single Traveller needed a social worker. Like how insulting is that? Like it's appalling when you think about it.' Another interviewee **(SW 3)** stated:

You don't need to go to a social worker because you are a Traveller. You go to a social worker if there's a need for it. And there's a lot of Travellers that don't need social worker service. They're very capable people. They live their lives. They might phone for advice. They go to maintenance themselves. They deal with their rent issues themselves. If there's a challenge that they can't overcome, then they would turn to us.

As confirmed by the survey of social workers outlined in the preceding chapter, several of the social workers reported that nearly all of their activities were directly related to engagement with, and the delivery of services to, the Traveller community. In some local authorities, the role had become more diverse; some social workers reported less direct involvement with Travellers, which could be as low as around 20% of workload depending on circumstances. **SW 3** described the flow of work as follows:

Well, it fluctuates from, let's say, week to week, month to month. If I would say the time when we do assessments and prepare the new Traveller programme, it would be three, four months hundred and twenty percent work related to Travellers. Then there could be times that it's less and then it's times that it's more. It depends on the needs in the Traveller community as well.

In this case, as with other respondents, a great deal of time is spent on a range of interventions, and referrals to other services to deal, for example, with issues of housing, disability, mental health, addiction, domestic violence or child protection. The following example described by **SW 10** illustrates the generic nature of the role:

So, it could range from engaging with people around their mental health. It could be engaging around child protection. It could be engaging around disability, advocating for external services, working with them to get them services, various things like that. So that's where I see social work.

As described in the review of literature presented in Chapter 3, a key role for qualified social workers is to assess and manage need and risk in areas such as child welfare and protection, mental health, adult protection, and criminal justice. A number of respondents explained how they were legally obliged to report any child welfare concerns about local authority tenants to Tusla (the state child and family care and protection agency), but also worked in preventive ways to support families in housing and other areas. All respondents provided advocacy services to Travellers where key vulnerabilities were evident, for example in terms of mental health problems. In these situations, the social worker plays a key role in liaising with other relevant agencies to support these individuals to help continue and sustain tenancies. Other examples which emerged in the interviews with social workers relate to their intervention when tenants are vulnerable but not linked or are refusing to engage with other health and social service agencies. An example of this is when elderly people live with adult children who are abusive or addicted to drugs. Additionally, many respondents were increasingly concerned about high levels of homelessness and drug use among Traveller clients. As described in Chapter 2, such issues have been exacerbated by many decades of poverty, discrimination, and poor living conditions. It appears that social workers seek to deal with these issues by carrying out holistic, interagency assessments and interventions', as summarised by one respondent **(SW 16)**: 'somebody who sees the big picture, somebody who can cross the professions'. They viewed the co-ordination of services in the community to be an important task: 'It is around interagency collaboration. It's around openness… so we build support plans in

relation to individuals, follow through on them, review them, case-manage' **(SW 8).**

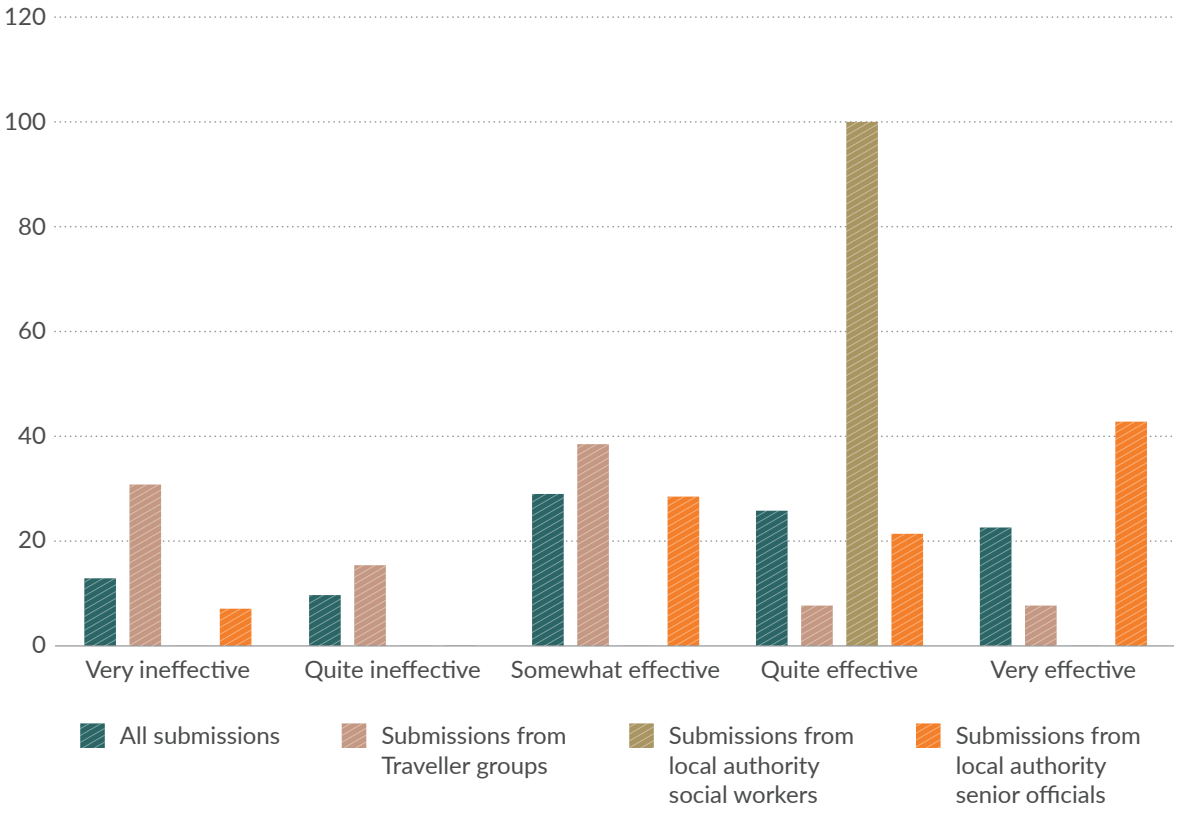
It is striking that despite their concerns about the challenges of their role all of the local authority social workers who made a submission to the review reported that their service was 'quite effective' in supporting Travellers (see Figure 5.1 below). Most of the other local authority officials who made a submission to the review offered similarly positive assessments of the effectiveness of the local authority social work service. In contrast, as is discussed in more depth in Chapter 6, the submissions received from Traveller representative groups indicate that their assessment of service effectiveness was less positive.

Relationships with Travellers

All of the social workers interviewed discussed how they had mostly warm relationships and respect for the Traveller community, although tensions and problems sometimes arose in their work. There are high retention rates among this group of social workers, as confirmed in interview and survey data, despite the challenges described in this report. Most spoke in affirmative ways about their work with family groups, across the generations. As **SW 5** stated: '...what I value most is my relationship with Travellers, just how I'm able to engage with them'. Another example illustrates the enduring nature of some of these relationships:

They might give me a ring when their kids turn 18 or they get married and it's lovely to hear from them again. It's that type of relationship... It's a very nice aspect

Figure 5.1: Social workers', local authority managers' and Traveller representatives' views on the effectiveness of the local authority social work service in meeting Travellers' accommodation needs, compared to all submissions received by this review (%)



Source: collated from submissions made to this review.

of my work when I get a phone call from somebody that I haven't heard from in eight years because their eldest child has got married. And they come in with this gorgeous-looking daughter or son and I'm delighted. It's nice, it's pleasant, and that's lovely ***(SW 11)****.*

Social workers appeared to play key roles on the Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees (LTACCs) in each local authority area, which tended to enhance their relationships with Traveller representatives. Their engagement with other Traveller representative and advocacy groups was a useful mechanism to link with the community as a whole and in providing a liaison between the community and the local authority – '…so you are opening up a different dialogue with the community' **(SW 8).**

Despite this sense of being committed to such relationships, many respondents acknowledged some of the negative views of the service expressed by many Travellers and Traveller groups, which was often dependent on how successful the social worker was in meeting personal needs or wishes. Relationships could deteriorate if these interventions were not successful:

I think that might be mixed. You know, it depends what circumstances are. I feel that I have good relationships with the Travellers in my area, that my support is appreciated. Then if we can't achieve the individual's wishes this can change' ***(SW 3).***

Another respondent sought to explain these problems because of a perceived lack of power and authority to deliver services: 'So basically I'm not a powerful person in the council, so if you asked me to fight your cause for a house and I do my best to do that but I fail or it doesn't happen for whatever reason… you're kind of seen nearly as not being any good' **(SW 5).**

The following example illustrates these practice dilemmas. Social workers are often among the most frequent visitors to halting sites or group housing schemes, yet can be unfairly blamed for local authority decisions which they have little influence over: 'I think it tends to get personalised as well. Sometimes it's very difficult for them to sort of separate the person who is the face from the body, you know, from the corporate body' **(SW 12).**

SW 6 also expressed this frustration: 'Often I feel I, the social worker, is the person that's impacted because there's no other professions going out, even though the situation may have really nothing to do with my decisions or anything I could get'.

Some respondents were particularly pessimistic about how Traveller Representative Groups viewed the social work role:

I think the national Traveller organisations think that we should be gotten rid of and that we shouldn't be in the post, and that it should be members of the Travelling community should be speaking on behalf of the Traveller community. So, I don't think we're well thought of. I don't think we're – yeah, I don't think so at national level ***(SW 1).***

Some attributed this to a historical lack of understanding or appreciation of Traveller culture in local authorities and employers' ignorance of the positive, advocacy role carried out by social workers on a daily basis:

Well, I think the national spokespeople for Travellers, I think they assume because we work in the Council that we're kind of anti-Traveller and that we're… that our whole raison d'être is to kind of get rid of the Traveller culture… which isn't actually true at all. I think if they actually saw… if they actually spoke to us and were willing to hear, I think they'd realise that we're much more of the same way of thinking – of their way of thinking than we are of the establishment's way of thinking ***(SW 1).***

Another referred to the approach of some groups as 'almost aggressive and very militant' **(SW 11).** Consequently, some individuals are reluctant to express their personal views as part of group consultation processes: 'There is a kind of a public or a national perception that… Travellers want to be in Traveller-specific-type accommodation… either in group housing on halting sites and want to live in the larger extended groups. My experience and the feedback from the Travellers that I work with [is that] they want out of that now' **(SW 1).** Another social worker, who agreed with this view, prefers to consult individually with Travellers: 'And I feel that we have made a special effort to consult Travellers individually – "What is your preference?"… If you bring in Travellers as groups, many times after the meeting

– "Well, I don't really want it, but I didn't want to say it in front of my family"' **(SW 3).**

Such problems in finding authentic ways of representation while maintaining individual confidentiality and recognition of the key advocacy role of social workers are frustrating for this and other respondents:

I don't think there's an understanding, say, particularly within the national Travellers groups that [advocacy] happens all the time, every day in small, subtle ways. Because I suppose what's different is that we also have to work within the system. And again, I know that's another big debate about, you know, how do you get change to happen. But I suppose my view would be there's those of us that work away and try as best we can to make the change happen from kind of within the system and then you have those that need to be trying to change the system from outside the system by the more political stroke… so I think there's a role for both, but sometimes I just wish that maybe it was an easier relationship. ***(SW 1).***

In order to improve this relationship, many respondents expressed a desire to work more collaboratively with these groups in order to achieve 'a better understanding, show we are thinking the same way and that we are not the enemy' **(SW 1).** A common theme was that social workers should play a key role in empowering Travellers to ensure that the communities can find ways of self-advocacy: 'Travellers should be determining the road and it's really, really important that they should be at the centre' **(SW 10).** This issue is discussed in the next section.

The Importance of Advocacy

Most respondents considered that a large part of their everyday practice involved forms of advocacy, particularly in bridging relationships of power and authority between communities and the local authority. Central to this was the use of professional skills, values, and knowledge to enable Travellers make sense of these experiences:

And sometimes I do say, you know what, I mightn't be the one who makes the decision, but I'm the one who's coming in here and telling your story, you know. And I suppose that's the way I look at it. Okay, to a certain extent I'm your voice in here ***(SW 12).***

As another respondent put it: 'Ah, I love the opportunity of being able to advocate for a very marginalised group and I like being able to do that. I like being able to do that well, I suppose. And as a social worker, I suppose I love the opportunity to challenge discrimination and oppression on a daily basis. That's obviously what the social workers kind of live for' **(SW 5).** These efforts are rewarding but sometimes draining:

Wow, like, if we weren't here… I would dread to think, in some respects. Because the organisation is big. Like you do need to keep the Traveller piece on the table in a certain way. You know, and it takes effort… like we agreed a monthly meeting in relation to Traveller accommodation. That takes huge effort each month to try and make sure that it becomes a priority ***(SW 8).***

An interviewee from an NGO which provides social work and social services in the Dublin region confirmed the value of local authority social workers' advocacy work:

I think we'd liaise with social workers quite regularly. Very often that's if we're having difficulty with communication with the council. Sometimes a social worker within the council, or a housing and welfare officer, can act as a bridge between ourselves and other staff within the housing section, and sometimes we will try, like, just to liaise with the social worker or the housing and welfare officer in the council as a way of getting in and making progress with communication, but trying to kind of get them to work collaboratively with us, that it's almost a joint advocacy piece on behalf of the individual or the family with the council ***(KI 4).***

However, a local authority manager contracted these views. He identified the focus on advocacy as one of the issues which causes tensions between social workers and other local authority staff:

Unfortunately, when you have a social worker, who by the nature of the social work it is a very difficult role, because the role is to do with the client and it's solely the client. And when something is pushed from that basis, County Council housing departments they don't think like that. They think community-wide. If a client-based recommendation is coming in, it's better to have a community-based recommendation coming in ***(KI 1).***

Most of the social workers interviewed felt that local authority staff had made important progress on the issue of consciousness-awareness initiatives about Traveller culture and experiences of discrimination. For others, however, local political attitudes and organisation cultures made this an 'uphill battle' **(SW 15).** There appeared to be an 'institutional lack of understanding' **(SW 14),** particularly among elected officials, who were more likely to listen to the views of the settled community:

'Well, I suppose the attitude to Travellers, the discrimination against them, their acceptance within the community is very much embedded in the local authority. I think it's very much embedded in the political side of the local authority in terms of the elected members because, you know, their voting comes in the main from… the settled community and they would speak on behalf of and act on behalf of the majority settled community' ***(SW 1).***

At times the local authority social workers interviewed struggled to adhere to professional values and principles when dealing with local authority issues:

Within the local authority you have to balance your social work kind of ethics with the council agenda, and to me that can be – that's obviously a challenge. But… I suppose that's where the advocacy skills come in and not being afraid to make your voice known. But trying to be diplomatic. Because you do get actually told quite on a frequent basis when you're doing something out of line or you're doing something wrong. So, it's about being very diplomatic as well ***(SW 5).***

One respondent felt that the housing welfare service should be given greater priority because, in their view, it appeared to be the most people-oriented provision in local authorities, more so than, for example, roads or water: 'With housing it's people's lives. It's not just about providing bricks and mortar, it's somebody's home. It's somebody's life. It's a huge part of their life. And if you forget about the people in the middle of it…' **(SW 12).** Some were concerned that local authority staff automatically assumed that all Travellers want the same form of accommodation, typically Traveller-specific group housing or halting sites. Although this may not be the preference of many individuals and their families, their views and requirements were often not heard. In such contexts, social workers should be independently minded, and a conscious effort was required to maintain professional integrity to ensure '…that you don't become too much subsumed into the ideology of the organisation… and you have to be willing to challenge some of the more negative kind of maybe stereotypical views that would be part of organisations' **(SW 16).**

Local Authorities' Understanding of the Social Work Role

A major issue that was repeated in many interviews was a perception that many local authorities do not understand the role and purpose of social work and that this lack of knowledge creates problems for practitioners in the delivery of services.

They don't know what a social worker does… They don't know. They have no idea. Even the types of referrals that have come my way from management now. It's like what has this got to do with social work? They don't come from social work backgrounds, they come from administrative backgrounds. They're very nice people, but they just don't really understand what a social worker can do and provide. …I've so much to bring to the table and I'm not getting the opportunity to ***(SW 13).***

As **SW 1** pointed out: 'It can be quite frustrating – like, there's a lack of knowledge about what social work is, what the training is… what the qualification is, what the core values and ethics and professionalism is'. The review of literature at the start of this report explains how Irish social work has developed to become a regulated profession, with expectations of a high-quality, educated, and trained workforce with the requisite skills, knowledge, and values. For one respondent, the management of their local authority did fully understand these attributes:

So, I feel more that it's a lost opportunity, that they haven't made use of the social worker, their professionalism, their assessment skills, their judgment, their knowledge, their practicality work. So, it's a bit of a waste. It's a wasted opportunity, I suppose. So, I guess there's frustration then around that ***(SW 13).***

Other respondents sought to explain such tensions in terms of competing professional ideologies: 'The social workers' thinking would be very different to the thinking of council officials. So, you know, it's really about toeing the line and it's about not having – it's about not having any impediment to their own agenda' **(SW 5).**

It was evident that such interface problems had the effect of discouraging and disheartening practitioners, and a worry for some was that their work was so undervalued that they believed, if they left their post, they would not be replaced.

All those interviewed stated that a crucial aspect to effective practice was the acknowledgement and support of line managers. This meant that, as in all organisations where there is frequent line-management turnover, opportunities for support were missing or interrupted. As **SW 14** put it: 'Now, just to give you context, I've had three directors – four directors of service, three senior executive officers [during my time in this post]… and not one of them understands social work'. The continual changing of personnel creates challenges for social workers who must attempt to forge new working relationships with ever-changing managers who do not understand their role. In addition, there appears to be considerable variation in the types and profiles of line managers, depending on the local authority. For example, some social workers report to senior executive officers while many others report to administrative officers.

Another source of frustration and a sense of wasted opportunity was that most social workers are not included in policymaking or strategy developments. As **SW 5** put it, 'I have absolutely diddly-squat to do with policy'. Most, however, believed they are well well-equipped and positioned to contribute in constructive ways to policy development, particularly because they are often at the front-facing side of service delivery. **SW 14** argued that '…social work is royally positioned, has the expertise to be part of these [services], but not just be part of it as – pardon the pun – to be the dumping ground, but to be part of the intellectual piece, the creative piece'.

An additional factor that appears to compound such issues is the grading system that informs the hierarchies of decision-making processes in local authorities. Every respondent was acutely aware of how this system can erode the social work role when compared to other professionals. For instance, **SW 12** argued:

You know, you've got your professional grades – which means engineers and architects, nothing else, from their point of view. Then there are two very clear areas of council. There is the admin side, which is very structured. You have your grades up to 7, and then senior management. And then you get a couple of – and excuse the language – bastard grades, and we're one of them.

Similarly, **SW 11** stated: 'Within the local authority, rank is very, very important – like bottom line: 6 beats 5, and 7 beats 6 – always'. This issue of professional status, or lack of it, is reflected in the fact that social workers do not manage and control a budget; this leaves many of them relatively powerless and ineffective within the system: 'and quite simply, to function in the local authority you have to have two things: control of a budget and decision-making power. We haven't got either' **(SW11).** Significantly, a senior local authority manager agreed with this analysis. He explained that:

…because your inhouse social worker is generally a grade 6 [on the local authority grading scale for administrative posts] and all they can really do is make recommendations. And really the ultimate power lies with the person who signs orders, and the person who signs orders are not inhouse social workers, they're senior executive officers ***(KI 1).***

On this basis he suggested that 'And my view is that a qualified social worker, if they were coming in at a Grade 7, they are now becoming a bit powerful in their recommendation because that's the key' **(KI 1).**

Where issues regarding grades and seniority had been ameliorated, more positive practices and interprofessional relationships were described by some respondents. One social worker welcomed the focus on professional opinions rather than on grades: 'I suppose it depends on who is in charge very much. And at the moment we have [senior management] that are very much whoever is the best for the job, whoever has the best idea, whoever has an idea, you contribute regardless if you are lowest-grade or highest-grade, it doesn't matter. So, you are involved naturally' **(SW 3).** Moreover, where local authorities established social workers at more senior levels in the organisation, they were more likely to be well integrated in decision-making processes that inform policy development. For instance, **SW 1,** who worked in a structure of this type, said:

I've always had a very kind of I suppose pivotal position in the council, and I think that very much is tied with the fact that I was appointed at a senior grade. So, I'm

very much at the senior management table in terms of… I'm part of her senior management team. So, I'm very much part of that group. So it means then that my work, the issues that I come across, particularly in terms of Traveller accommodation… the barriers and the difficulties and the challenges that are part of that… are very much heard. So, I suppose for me both professionally and personally I find that quite a positive.

Other Impediments to Practice and Work-Related Stress

As noted above, most social workers are generally enthusiastic and committed to working with Travellers, but problems often arise that can create stress and, in turn, lead to poor practice and service outcomes. Where social workers were disengaged from other local authority professionals and decision-making processes, adverse effects that affect health and well-being were highlighted by respondents. An issue which consistently emerged in interviews was incidents of aggression that were not always recognised in the organisation, as highlighted in this account by **SW 6:**

Other managers, they don't realise the level of aggression, the telephone calls, the threats, the intimidation and yet, you know, their staff are working with Travellers, but they are not on the ground… I suppose there isn't a lot of people that go into halting sites in general, and I find there's families that I have very difficult relationships with who would be extremely aggressive towards me and… it would be a difficult relationship… [the decision] wasn't my choice and… maybe other professionals may be disengaging with the – you know, other professionals may be disengaging and then me trying – I'm still trying to fulfil my role in the area and then I get the guff and the aggression, like, you know, high-level aggression for decisions that I have no part or play in.

Work-related stress is exacerbated for those who are the sole social work practitioner in a local authority. **SW 12** referred to being 'a lone voice in the wilderness'. **SW 15** concurred: 'In terms of trying to advocate as kind of a one-man band, you know, and against possibly a less progressive local authority, I could only imagine that it's a very difficult position to be in'. Others described difficulties in maintaining their social work values in the face of different perspectives at all levels in the local authority structures.

As a sole practitioner in an organisation that's not a social work organisation it can be very – I suppose it can be lonely, it can be challenging, and you're kind of a lone voice because there's only the one perspective in relation to social work and sometimes it can be difficult to kind of articulate that voice because it very much depends on the views of the other people around the table. And as you can imagine, that can often be very value-laden and, you know, the Travellers wouldn't have probably the… people wouldn't think the best of them most of the time! ***(SW 1)'***

A representative of a non-governmental social work and social service provider who collaborates regularly with local authority social workers confirmed that isolation is a widespread problem for these staff:

But the other thing that we will come across is very similar to what we're saying, where they become the only Traveller social worker in that area. And it can become a very lonely thing. And if you're not given the support, you're not given supervision, you're not given a sense of, you know, how to do that then that's not going to last, you know. And I think a similar thing happens when you get a social worker in an organisation that doesn't have support around them and other colleagues to bounce ideas off. That's what happens ***(KI 4).***

SW 10 also refers to the challenge of maintaining focus on social work values, especially without professional supervision (this issue is discussed further in the next section):

Yes, I think it's difficult to work alone with a local authority. I think you have to constantly remind yourself what your role is if you're on your own. You could easily merge into an administrative role and that's through no fault of the social worker. It's simply because you're on your own. You've no social-work line management. You've no peer other than your regional peers, you know. So, I think that's very difficult. I think it's more challenging.

Continuous Professional Development, Supervision and Career Progression

To practise effectively and to fulfil the requirements of their mandatory registration with CORU, Irish social workers have to complete a required level of continuous professional development (CPD), and there are expectations that practice is monitored and supervised by professionally qualified social work

staff. Most respondents were satisfied that they were able to access funding from their organisation to complete such education and training opportunities. It was apparent that social workers often availed of systems of peer support, which helped develop a network in which such opportunities could be discussed and shared. It was evident, however, that there is a great deal of unevenness in support and CPD opportunities, particularly where relatively few social workers are employed in particular local authorities. As one respondent put it:

Yeah, we find the whole CPD thing quite difficult because it is such an obscure area. And you can't even design something that kind of incorporates all local authority social workers and lets kind of – because everybody is doing different things… so we've not even really common ground that we can really develop training programmes that would really suit us ***(SW 19).***

All respondents spoke positively about the annual conference that is organised nationally to enable local authority social workers to process their concerns and showcase best practice. Good-quality, reflective supervision is core to professional development and growth, especially where there are small numbers of social workers across a number of local authorities. An arrangement has been developed whereby practitioners' source external professional supervision, which is paid for by their organisations. Most of those interviewed considered such external supervision to be very helpful. Some even considered this arrangement to be more satisfactory than conventional forms of supervision (if available). However, there can be a lack of organisational commitment to this crucial aspect of professional life. In this vein, **SW 12** said: 'But again, you see, it's again: "What the hell are you talking about, supervision? Nobody else wants that… engineers don't have that". Well, maybe they should'. Similarly, **SW 13** said: 'So, and people are going, "What register? CORU who? CORU what?" …So, they just don't even get that we're even bound by all these additional – just I suppose the professionalism of it. And they're, like, "Huh?"'.

On the other hand, some local authorities have established social work departments led by a senior social worker who supervises basic-grade practitioners and sometimes other professionals. In these circumstances, the senior provides professional supervision, although they themselves do not necessarily receive a commensurate level of supervision by another senior social work colleague, as required by their registration with CORU. One particular issue, that of a lack of career development, was evident in most interviews. As discussed earlier in this report, most social workers are employed at basic-grade level and are sometimes the only social worker employed in their local authority. In addition, it appears that the only option for promotion is to move to another local authority where one of the few senior posts exists. A concern for some respondents was that, rather than encouraging the development of the profession, some local authorities have frozen or removed such posts when not filled, or simply when the previous post-holder had vacated it.

Proposals for Service Reform

Many of the social workers interviewed, often based on extensive experience of the role, were strongly in favour of local authority social workers adopting a generic social work role, whereby they would be available to provide support for all local authority clients. This approach was viewed as the most effective for service delivery. As noted above, there was little support for a service defined as 'Traveller only', given the potentially discriminating nature of such a proposal, which now seems dated (as discussed in the review of literature). Such a service would not reflect, in particular, the evolution of Traveller identities, abilities, requirements and preferences. The following reflection captures such sentiments:

I just don't feel that it is right that, as soon as a Traveller presents that they're kind of syphoned off to one person… I feel that it should be the same front door for everybody… It should be certainly generic in nature. I feel very passionate about this, I think having a specific Traveller service actually creates a scenario, a get-out-of-jail for the local authorities in respect of engagements with Travellers because it's left to the social worker' ***(SW 19).***

One of the senior local authority managers interviewed expressed similar sentiments:

And I think in some way that isolates travellers as well. If everybody – if traveller services are always provided by travellers then it closes off the group a little more from the community. I'm more inclined to think that services should be integrated and travellers are treated the same as everybody else, rather than seeing services

for travellers aimed just at travellers. I don't know, I'm probably not explaining that very well ***(KI 6).***

Most respondents were convinced that Travellers should apply for local authority accommodation in the same way as every other citizen and that Traveller applicants should only be referred to social work services where particular needs or complexities arise: 'It should be the same front door for everyone' **(SW 19).** On this basis, most interviewees argued for a generic housing welfare service in all the local authorities. There was a strong belief that, within a generic structure, Travellers would still receive a very good social work service. **SW 6** argued for a generic service that is equitable for all:

Travellers – they're a small population, say, within the remit of applicants and tenants. Now, they have great need, I understand that, but we also have persons with disabilities, elderly that have such need as well, like there's such vulnerable people in our books who we have a duty of care towards and they need our support as well. And I think everyone… should be treated equally… that we should be working with Travellers and all the other disciplines and have big teams.

However, the importance of retaining a focus on and advocacy for Traveller needs within a generic service was also acknowledged and emphasised. For example, in the current context of the Covid-19 pandemic, the following respondent was concerned that services had become less accessible and relevant to these needs, suggesting a key ongoing role for social workers in bridging these gaps:

I have seen mainstream organisations pull away from Travellers and it's been frightening, really, really frightening to think that we're saying that in some respects that Travellers can access generic systems, but those systems really aren't in a space to respond to the actual place where Travellers are. It really kind of highlighted that you do need to protect this particular group as well by ensuring the services are there ***(SW 8).***

Overall, however, most respondents agreed that a generic service would be more beneficial and effective for all, including Travellers, other local authority service users and social workers themselves. Many agreed that the holistic nature of a generic service would ensure that practitioners could retain and develop a wider range of skills and knowledge, increase job satisfaction. As social worker **SW 8,** with a more generic caseload, stated: 'I think the variety is what supports me in my role'. Another asserted: 'I don't think the opinion of the social worker would be upheld as much as it is here if we weren't involved in all those other areas as well' **(SW 3).**

Notably, some of the local authority managers interviewed disagreed with this analysis and suggested that social worker posts should be replaced with TLO posts or additional administrative staff in Traveller accommodation units. For instance, **KI 1** outlined the following rationale for this view:

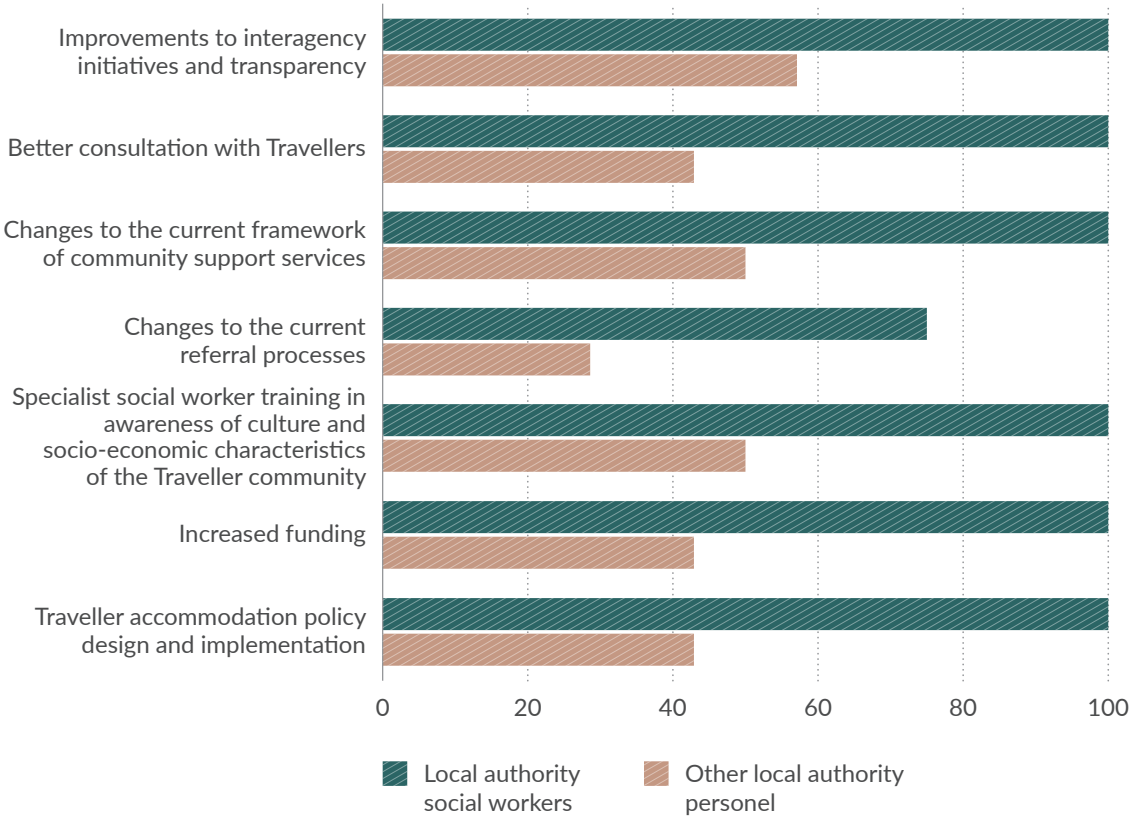
So what I'm trying to say.. I would prefer to have more staff. I don't need more social workers. The social workers are there and they're free as far as I'm concerned from the council perspective, because I can go to Tusla, HSE or I can go to Exchange House, or Pavee Point. I can also go to [local Traveller representative group and they]... will assist with key workers and project workers and they'll assist me with key work people to link in with Tusla. And I can go to Barnardo's. So, I have an abundance of that.

But the community worker side of it, working in a Traveller Unit would be far more useful and powerful than a social worker because he will be reporting to the likes of me who can get something done within the section. And all the social worker reports in the world they won't do that and I can tell you from experience they don't do that; it doesn't happen.

National Social Work Framework

Most of the local authority social workers interviewed were in favour of developing a national framework for social work practitioners in local authorities and this consensus was conformed by the submissions made by social workers to this review all of which supported this proposal. Notably only 61.5% of the other local authority officials who made a submission supported this option, as did an almost identical proportion of

Figure 5.2: Social workers' views on the issues which should be included in a national social work framework, compared to submissions received from other local authority officials (%)



Source: collated from submissions made to this review.

Traveller representatives who made a submission (the views of the latter are discussed in more depth in the chapter which follows).

As revealed in Figure 5.2, these submissions indicate that social workers' views on the content of the proposed national social work framework differ from those of other local authority officials. Almost all of the local authority social workers who made submissions to the review thought that the focus of this framework should be broad ranging and address all aspects of the social work service, including inter agency initiatives, consultation with Travellers, community support services and training for social workers. Whereas the submissions from other local authority officials (who were mainly senior managers) suggest that they favour a narrower focus on improvements in interagency collaboration, training for social workers and support services for Travellers.

However, given the social workers' preferences for a generic social work service, the interviews with these staff revealed that most considered that the framework should be not specific to social work with Travellers, and that other areas of need such as child protection, housing welfare and homelessness should also be included. As **SW 8** said:

Like, it's very clearly written here 'national Traveller accommodation social work framework'. That brings us back down, I feel… so I'd be saying, absolutely, local authority social work framework… the local authority social work framework should be generic enough, no matter what your client group. Because technically your client group is coming at it in the same premise. They're marginalised.

Many supported a framework as a means of achieving recognition for their professionalism and expertise:

By not having a national framework, it dilutes what we do, and it almost oversimplifies a complex situation… I think… the role of the social worker within the local authority has to be established on a firmer footing. It's carved in sand at the moment… ***(SW 15).***

Despite localised needs, a national framework was viewed as an essential tool to address fluctuations in the development of the role over time, along with very varied expectations in the different local authorities. One social worker talked about having an objective benchmark to measure her practice against and to assist in maintaining professional integrity in the face of local expectations: 'Some of us have perhaps grown into the local authority rather than grown around the local authority' **(SW 7).**

Most social workers acknowledged the requirement to have local flexibility but felt that the core social work interventions should be clearly defined:

I suppose my ideal thing would be a national framework so that we – I mean, I think that there has to be some variance between different local authorities because they have to – you know, local populations have different needs. But I think in general just a framework that says that every social work service has to have criteria, it has to have a referral system, it has to have the capacity to have a grading list rather than just everything being bombarded into us ***(SW 19).***

This view was echoed by one of the senior local authority officials interviewed who argued that a framework would clarify the responsibilities and boundaries of the role:

…there isn't a framework for local authority social work in the same way as that there's a framework for mental health social workers, for example, or Tusla social workers. I mean, everybody knows what a childcare social worker does and how they do it and where their role begins and ends. Mostly people have a reasonable idea where, say, mental health social work begins and end. But we don't have that framework in social work in local authorities… and I think because we don't have, each local authority is different ***(KI 6).***

Another was in favour of a framework as a tool to improve accountability and best-practice objectives. 'I'd love to see the standardised framework where you're actually able to measure how well you're doing or how effectively you're carrying out your job by just benchmarking it against your standardised framework' (SW 16). This in turn would improve the perception of the social work service: 'If we had some kind of structure behind it or sort of – I don't want to say legitimacy, because I think we've created that ourselves, but maybe institutional legitimacy' **(SW12).**

ETOUR

Views of Traveller Liaison Officers

Remit and Responsibilities

As mentioned above, five 'Traveller liaison officers' or similar personnel employed by local authorities to assist Travellers with accommodation-related issues were interviewed as part of the review. Their roles varied somewhat, but all were focused on Traveller accommodation. As **TLO 4** stated: 'But in this role I find you're nearly tasked with any Traveller issue that comes up'. **TLO 1** described their role as follows:

I deal exclusively with Travellers, their housing needs, from their housing application, recommendations for housing. I look after the halting sites. I do work with the architects, doing up proposals for upgraded sites. Any interaction between Traveller families and the council nearly come through me now… So, I kind of link with all the other sections as they're dealing with the Travellers. I do all the introductions and I just deal with everything.

Another interviewee referred to housing liaison, allocations and work with residents' groups and tenancy compliance **(TLO 2),** but highlighted a lack of clarity about formal job descriptions:

*…I wouldn't have a job description as such… there isn't kind of a set kind of list of what I do… It really… depends on what comes up, like, you know. Obviously, you know, working to try and help Travellers as best we can, like, in any case **(TLO 4).***

As explained in Chapter 4, this view is confirmed by the survey of TLOs conducted for this review.

In general, TLOs worked in collaboration with other local authority staff such as maintenance workers, caretakers, architects, and estate managers. This is evidenced by the following quotation from an interview with **TLO 1:**

So, we'd all support each other. So, if a Traveller homeless comes in, [name] from Homeless deals with them… if it's to do with the antisocial behaviour, I do so much and then it's handed on to the housing investigation officer. So, I don't have to do it all. I'm kind of the first point and then each team member takes over. If I can't get an issue resolved with antisocial behaviour or problems with the house, we'll pass it on to [name] and that. So, you know, we work it between us. So, it's kind of – there's plenty of support… which is great.

Some respondents felt that attendance at the LTACC and collaboration with local Traveller representative groups are integral to the post. For example, **TLO 3** considered that a functioning LTACC and positive engagement with Traveller groups were key to achieving objectives:

One is a functioning LTACC, so your Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee, and the other is a very functioning Traveller representative group. Those are two key things. I mean, I would have an absolutely just, you know, fantastic relationship with [the local representative group]… …I don't think I could do my job – and I'll go as far as saying that – I don't think I can do my job without [the representative group] and I daresay they probably would say something similar back. Like they have… there's just – we have a good understanding of what the issues are out there for the community.

TLO 1, however, explained how they had less positive experiences and described the relationship with the LTACC as 'strained' because 'we would be coming up with ideas and they'd be knocking them down too quickly and, you know, jumping on bandwagons. If a Traveller family says something, they're straightaway, "Oh, you're doing this wrong", without checking first, like, what we've done. You know, they're very quick to bat…'

Work-Related Stress

All of those interviewed referred to work-related stress in their posts, sometimes related to angry or frustrated Travellers. This is illustrated by the following quotation from an interview with **TLO1.**

Ah, shouting and roaring at me, but I just – you know, and I leave them, and I walk off. I'll hang up the phone and they'll ring back and apologise; they're having a bad day. That's fine, I say, I don't take it personally. You know, like, you shouldn't talk to me like that. We just leave it to 'what's wrong?' You know, I've never – thankfully, in three-and-a-half years I've never been threatened. I've never felt unsafe on any of the sites or going into any house or that, like. It's just – thankfully. touch wood, as they say.

TLO 5 also referred to threats and intimidation:

And I suppose Travellers being more aware of their rights and being able to articulate their rights is a very positive thing, but when you move away from being assertive to being aggressive, I mean, that is problematic no matter who you are, you know, not just Travellers… the attitude and approach has changed from Travellers. They were very appreciative back then. Now it's 'I'm entitled to'… and they'll come in and they'll put a camera, the phone in your face, recording you and filming you. It can be difficult, that, you know what I mean?

Some TLOs felt supported by senior managers. **TLO 1** described a senior manager as 'excellent, support all the way.' However, **TLO 2** described a different experience:

There is very little backup for staff, especially in a situation where you might be being challenged or threatened. I mean, I was in court once with a family and we were the last case being heard. I was left there on my own and all the family members were there. Now, bear in mind I'm taking them to evict them. I was left there on my own. One guard stayed with me because there was seven of their family members there. That's the backup you get, you know.

TLO 5 also described a lack of support:

You also have difficulties with the higher – some higher echelons – not all – that would not see eye-to-eye with you in relation to your recommendations. And, I mean, the difficulty in trying to – 'listen, I need –'… And, you know, you're walking on eggshells in there, putting in recommendations.

A lack of resources created stress for some.

To be honest with you, no, I haven't been intimidated. No, I couldn't say that. Probably the main stresses in the role really would be probably people kind of ringing multiple times about different issues, you know, and us not being able to resolve the issues because they're outside our control… I'd find that kind of a fairly – stress, alright, you know' ***(TLO 4).***

TLO 1 agreed with this perspective: 'We just don't have enough council stock, full stop. Not even for Travellers. You know, it's right across the board, like. It's "we don't have enough", and then as Traveller families get bigger – the majority of our housing stock are three bedrooms'.

Peer support was viewed as an important mechanism for addressing stress. **TLO 3** talked of a regional group which was helpful:

We used to meet up kind of maybe on a quarterly basis just like the Traveller accommodation officers in those posts. And that was really beneficial because what you find out is we're all in similar positions, we're all dealing with similar problems, we're all facing similar challenges, we're all dealing with the same accommodation-related [problems]… So, I find that a great network and a great support.

In this vein, **TLO 5** was in favour of setting up a national network to share knowledge and experience:

…maybe we should have something for Traveller liaison officers or Traveller accommodation officers so that we can – a national thing, so that we can look at concerns, look at issues that are coming up, a networking system, and that we could better learn from each other.

Cultural Awareness

TLO 4 referred to a day of training in cultural awareness and diversity, completed some years ago, but **TLO 1** was concerned about a lack of cultural diversity training: 'Besides child protection training and your normal dealing with – you know, the normal training that goes out to all council staff, dealing with irate customers and all that kind of stuff, no, there's been no Traveller culture-specific training I've done now since I started'.

There were some criticisms about council attitudes; as **TLO 1** put it: 'Another thing I think is people's perceptions within the council. Some people don't like Travellers!' **TLO 5** expressed dismay at some perceptions within the local authority: '… sometimes the approach isn't what you – I mean, you wouldn't expect the attitude and approach that you'd get from your own colleagues, you know what I mean – senior colleagues'. **TLO 2** expressed a personal view in relation to Traveller culture:

The problem is – this is my personal opinion – the problem is they have been told that they have a special culture. Well, I know they have a special culture. You know, they have their own culture. But I suppose people

are giving them the idea that we should all be – we should all be – not respecting, but we should all be taking that into account and giving them accordingly… In realistic terms, right, we are social housing [providers]. We have to house everybody. We cannot take specific, you know, people's cultures into account. Say, for instance, we had a load of – this is just an example, right – we had a load of Jewish people move into the area. We then wouldn't supply them with two kitchen sinks, one for their meat, one for their milk. We wouldn't do that, but that is their culture, you know.

There was some enthusiasm for the idea of Travellers becoming employees of local authorities:

Yeah, it'd be great to see Travellers working – you know, it would. It'd give people a different view of somebody if you had a Traveller working in the local authority, definitely… because it just changes people's mindset… and you're talking to somebody from a different culture, so you're learning off them rather than seeing them from a distance and judging them, you know' ***(TLO 1).***

Perceptions of the Social Work Role

Some of those interviewed worked with social workers in their organisation or had done so in the past. A lack of clarity about the role of social workers in local authorities was evident throughout the interviews. **TLO 4** had worked with a social worker in the past and believed that in some local authorities the tasks performed by the social worker were not actually social work-related:

I would have found probably a lot of her work wasn't actually social work-related as such. And I think you'll find this with a lot of social workers. You know, they're social worker by name, but I think they're also accommodation workers by nature as well, and I think you'll find that.

TLO 4 thought a social worker could be useful 'to do reports and stuff'. Another had negative perceptions of the role: 'I have never linked with [the social worker] regarding anything… I don't know if we are just lucky here but a lot of the issues, I come across a social worker wouldn't… the Travellers would be terrified… a social worker is bad news' **(TLO 1).**

The TLOs appeared to associate social work primarily with child protection issues, liaison with Tusla, and subsequent concerns that these interventions raised for some Travellers. One questioned the need for social work, partly because they were working with Tusla in relation to 'ninety per cent of cases' **(TLO 3).** Conversely, **TLO 1** explained that, although they had completed child protection training, this had been rarely used because reports about child protection concerns were rarely raised with this interviewee. In contrast, **TLO 5** believed that social workers were needed and outlined situations such as domestic violence, drugs, and other family issues which they were not equipped to deal with. They stated, however, that an onsite social worker was not needed as access to other social work services was available.

TLO 4 commented on the sometimes differing viewpoints between social workers and Travellers, but was positive about the potential for good working relationships: 'Yeah, I suppose anecdotally Travellers probably and social workers might have had kind of, shall we say, different views in the past, you know. But… I mean, if it's done constructively, I wouldn't see there should be an issue…'. However, **TLO 1** preferred not to engage with social work: 'I don't know… it's like they're – I don't know, they can complicate matters, so they can, you know, where sometimes things could be worked out easier without having to go to them'. **TLO 2** stated that they preferred to work with a social care worker [who provides one-to-one personal care to clients] rather than a social worker:

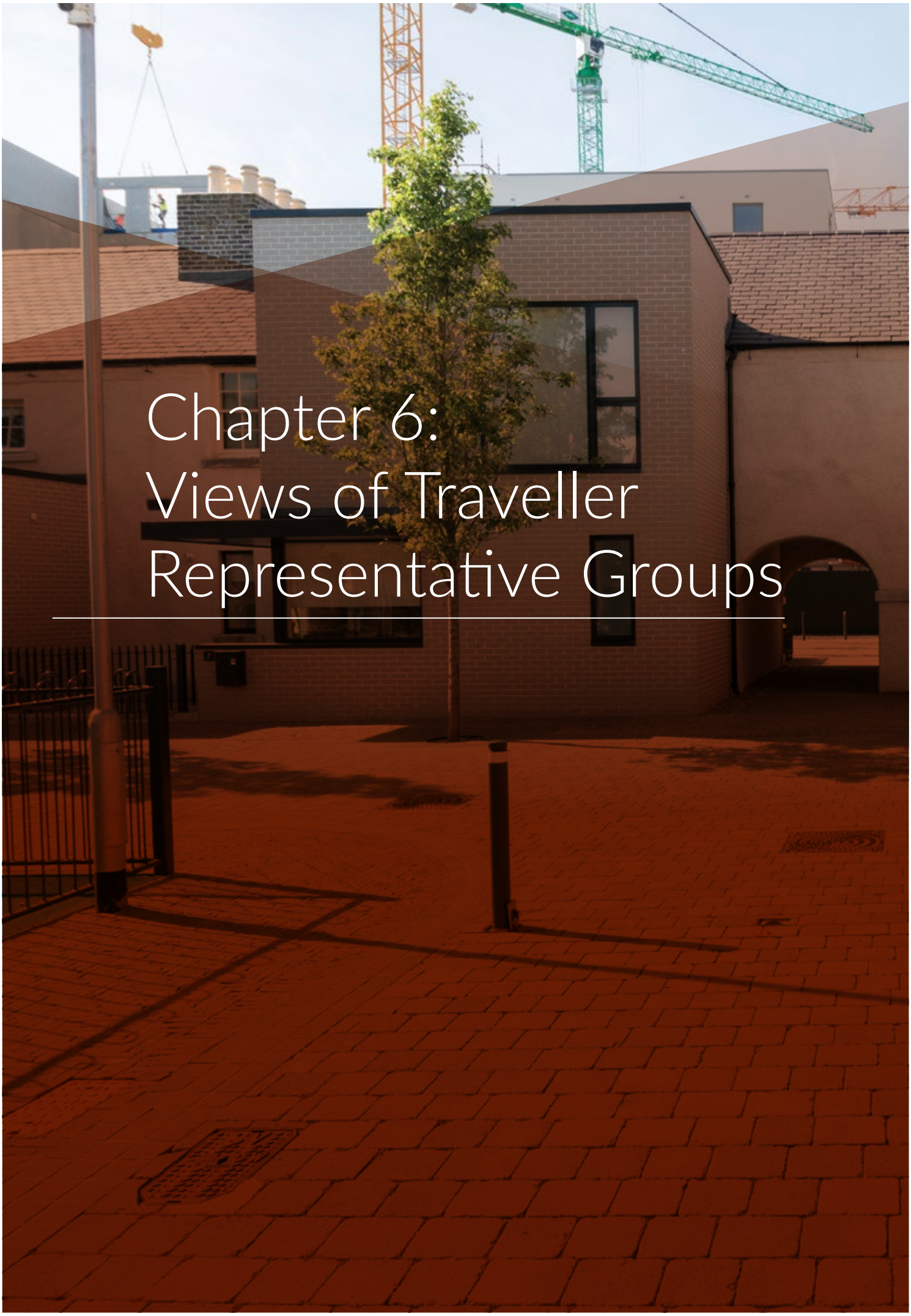
And social workers can be some of the worst. You know, they give these people unreal expectations, telling them that oh, no, you've got children, they have to do something… And then, you know, and then they get the social workers to come in and then you end up it's us against the social worker… But the reason we went for a social care worker rather than a social worker was because we felt that a social care worker would probably be less inclined to feel that they had to do something rather than, like, you know, make the people – excuse me – work on their behalf and let them see what was realistic, what was not.

Conclusions

The role and function of social work in local authorities has evolved considerably in recent years due to the changing needs of Travellers, and increased professionalisation driven by mandatory registration. The interview data highlight how job descriptions and expectations have often not kept pace with these changes in role. Social workers were spending varying amounts of time working directly with Travellers and sought to be strong advocates for Travellers in their relationships with local authorities. A consistent message was that social workers rejected the outdated, persistent notion that all Travellers require a social worker. The role had grown to become broader in dealing with wide-ranging service delivery that complements housing functions. This includes, for example, interventions when there are child welfare and protection concerns, disability and mental health issues and problems of addiction and domestic violence. At the core of this activity are complex interfaces with health and social service agencies. On this basis, most of the respondents were in favour of institutional recognition of the generic social work service, which is needs-driven, referral-based and equitable for all who require social work interventions.

Many social workers have a warm, positive, and respectful relationship with the Travellers they work with. However, concerns remain about a lack of understanding of their role and limited or no influence in strategic and decision-making levels in local authorities. This limits the effectiveness of their service delivery and can adversely affect relationships with Travellers and Travellers' representative groups. A common complaint was that social workers feel they are often unfairly blamed for decisions which they could not influence. The grading structure in the local authorities, and social workers' relatively junior place in this, was viewed to be problematic. There appeared to be limited forms of professional supervision and a lack of opportunities for promotion. The fact that there were few senior or team leader posts implies that issues of continuous professional development, effectiveness and accountability were not being fully realised in the context of areas of highly personalised and complex housing welfare, health and social care service delivery. Finally, there was strong support for the development of a national framework which would inform the consistent delivery of social work services for Travellers, but which are not Traveller-specific.

The Traveller Liaison Officers (TLOs) who participated in this study described a varied role which was exclusively dedicated to Traveller accommodation. Much of this work involved collaboration with other local authority staff such as maintenance workers and estate managers. The relationship of TLOs with social workers ranged from frequent interaction to no interaction at all. Overall, a lack of clarity about the role of social workers was evident. Some TLOs appeared reluctant to involve social workers in decision-making processes due to their belief that a social work perspective could complicate matters for them. TLOs also reported high levels of work-related stress due to factors such as lack of resources, and aggression and intimidation from service users. Limited or no support from local authority managers added to stress, as did poor cultural awareness and negative perceptions of Travellers in local authority structures. In response, some TLOs availed of peer support within their regions.



Chapter 6: Views of Traveller Representative Groups

Introduction

This chapter examines the views of Traveller representative groups on the role of local authority social workers and associated staff in supporting Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs, and also on the service housing and accommodation provided by local authorities, more broadly, to Travellers.

The analysis presented here draws on in-depth interviews conducted with 19 representatives of local and national Traveller representative groups (all of whom are Travellers), and submissions were received from 13 Traveller groups. Table 6.1 provides an overview of the location of these interviewees and of the Traveller organisations that made submissions to this review. To protect interviewee anonymity, only the province in which they live is mentioned, and they are identified by the acronym TR (Traveller representative) and numbered 1–19. Further details of the submissions received from Traveller representative groups can be found in Appendix 1.

The chapter is organised around the most prominent themes that emerged in these interviews and submissions. These obviously relate to Travellers' experiences in dealing with local authority social workers and other staff of local authority Traveller Accommodation Units, which are the key focus of this review. However, Travellers' views on the service they receive from local authorities more broadly and of participating in Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees and in the formulation and implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes are also examined here. This is because these experiences strongly influence Travellers' opinions about and experiences of dealing with the local authority social work service. Traveller representatives' view on how the local authority social work and accommodation and housing services for their community can be improved are examined in the closing section of the chapter. This chapter also examines Travellers' views on the proposal to introduce a national framework for local authority social work.

Table 6.1: Number of interviews and submissions received from Traveller representatives groups, by province

Province	Interviews with Traveller representatives	Submissions received from Traveller community groups
Leinster	6	5
Munster	6	5
Connacht	2	2
Ulster	2	0
National representatives/ organisations	3	1 (joint submission from three national organisations)
Total	**19**	**13**

Remit and Effectiveness of the Local Authority Social Work Service

All those who made a submission to the review were asked how effective the local authority social work service has been in supporting Travellers' accommodation needs. Over a third of the total submissions received were from Traveller organisations (13 out of 31). As noted in the preceding chapter (see: Figure 5.1) out of the total of 31 submissions received, 29% ranked the local authority social work services were 'somewhat affective', 26% rated them as 'quite effective' and 22% saw them as 'very effective', with a smaller percentage rating them 'quite ineffective' (10%) and 'very ineffective' (13%). Notably, the assessments of the Traveller organisation representatives who made submissions were much more negative than the average: 30.8% of Traveller representatives rated the social work service as 'very ineffective' and a further 15.4% rated the service as 'quite ineffective'.

These opinions on the effectiveness of the local authority social work service were explored in more depth in the interviews conducted with Traveller representatives. These interviews revealed complex and, in some cases, contradictory opinions, which reflected the distinct history and complexities of the social worker role and also Travellers' varying experiences of dealing with different social workers and other local authority support staff for Travellers, as well as different local authorities. These complexities were summarised by an interviewee from a national Traveller representative group as follows:

Like there's two schools of thought around the social worker. Why do Travellers have a social worker assigned to them or what's the role of a social worker? How do they work with the social work department in Tusla, you know, in the area? What's their role? Are they there to support Travellers or are they there to report Travellers, you know? ***(TR 1)***

Many of the national and local Traveller representatives interviewed and the submissions received from Traveller representative groups suggested that the local authority social work service is not an appropriate method of supporting Travellers.

This view was expressed, for instance, in a joint submission by three national Traveller representative groups. They maintained that 'social work is not the appropriate framework for Travellers to be supported to have their accommodation needs met by local authorities'. An interviewee from a national Traveller representative group echoed this view:

In terms of the level of racism and discrimination and stereotyping and oppression that's gone on and the kind of historical [context] piece around Travellers and the State, then, you know, no, I don't see a role for a social worker in the remit of Travellers accessing the local authority for accommodation ***(TR 6).***

A submission from a Traveller representative group from Muster maintained said: 'The Traveller social worker service is outdated and cannot be improved… It needs to be phased out and should be replaced by a Traveller Engagement Officer'.

Other Traveller community representatives acknowledged the need for the provision of a social work service by local authorities and for Travellers to avail of this service if appropriate, but they argued strongly that a Traveller should not be automatically referred to a local authority social worker on the basis of accommodation requirements. There was strong consensus that referral to a social worker should be on the basis of need rather than ethnicity. In this vein, one of the representatives of a national Traveller representative group said:

I just think it's wrong that there's an assumption that instinctively every Traveller has to be assigned a social worker, that every Traveller is a social work case, without any proper rigorous assessments of individuals or families… my basic understanding of social workers is dealing with crisis intervention, families and individuals who have issues, you know, problem-solving ***(TR 7).***

A submission from a local Traveller group echoed this view:

Traveller families should be empowered to take the mainstream route within LA regarding their

accommodation need. Only process families who have a particular vulnerability or families who look for social worker support in their housing process. That it would be a whole social work team approach and not just one social worker identified as the Traveller social worker.

This submission emphasised that: 'Individual members of the Traveller community should be able to choose whether to use the local authority social work service or not'.

Several of the Traveller representatives who made a submission to the review suggested that Travellers could be employed within the local authorities to work alongside a dedicated Traveller accommodation liaison officer. For instance, a Traveller group's submission from Leinster argued that this arrangement could 'make a stronger link to the Traveller community and identify arising concerns for the Traveller community.' Another submission from the same province echoed this view, suggesting that 'creating a position for a member of the Traveller community [to work in local authorities] would help alleviate some issues and concern, leading to better relationships and satisfaction. It may lead to a positive change in organisational culture and bridge existing gaps'.

The Traveller groups which made submissions to the review and the Traveller representatives interviewed also highlighted variations between local authorities, and therefore between different regions of the country, in the remit and effectiveness of the social worker role and the role of other Traveller support staff. For instance, an interviewee from a Traveller group from Connaught said:

I think maybe it's a question about how many social workers are in an area working with Travellers. Is it value for money? What are they delivering? And I think the context needs to be there as well and that's not knocking social workers… there are social workers that do brilliant work. There's others that are very laid back, you know. And they've got to realise that the Travellers are in crisis there. There's Travellers with young kids. There's wives that have depression. There's men that have depression. They need to be dealing with those issues ***(TR 4).***

This analysis was echoed by interviewees from a non-governmental social work and social services provider who reported that in his experience:

So there's a lot of variability and discrepancy from people who are employed as social workers but with different titles within local authorities. …I came across some who are really, really good at advocating and will do all they can to kind of break the barriers down and do what they can, but often get a lot of kickbacks from the local authority themselves for standing up for that. I also came across the really negative ones where I saw, you know, people who have kind of almost got ingrained in that structural discrimination piece and almost become a barrier themselves, because they'll be saying, oh, we've worked with this family for twenty years, there's no point in doing this, this and this, and become a blockage in the system for that family regardless ***(KI 4).***

On the basis of similar concerns, a submission from a Munster-based Traveller group emphasised the need for the 'development of a consistent framework and job description for a Traveller Accommodation Liaison Officer(s)'. They argued that 'the role should take into account the level of accommodation needs within the area, and sufficient staff should be resourced to meet that need'. Similarly, a Traveller group from Leinster commented in their submission that 'there doesn't seem to be a statutory remit or standard as to what the role of the local authority social worker should be' and argued that there was a need to set 'national standards and guidelines as to what the role and remit of the social worker should be'.

Challenges of Local Authority Social Workers' Role

Several of the Traveller representatives interviewed acknowledged that the role of local authority social workers is a very challenging one. Travellers involved in local groups, who were more likely to have high levels of interaction with social workers, were most likely to raise such points.

For instance, interviewees from several local Traveller groups highlighted the lack of respect with which social workers were treated by other local authority staff, management, and elected members. A representative of a Traveller group in Leinster suggested: 'I don't know if there's even much respect within the council for the role of the social worker sometimes' **(TR 16).** An interviewee from a Traveller group in Minster echoed this view: 'They're [social workers] told shut up. They're told shut up by the director of services. They're told shut up by the civil servants – or housing officers. And you can be sure they're challenged by local councillors as well' **(TR 11).**

A related point concerns social workers' lack of power in the local authority sector, as perceived by many interviewees from local Traveller representative groups. For instance, an interviewee from a Traveller group from Leinster commented:

So, the social worker that we have in this county she hasn't got the full authority of making decisions. She has to go through her so-called bosses, which happens to be the director of housing, which is negative, really negative around Traveller issues, and the senior housing officer ***(TR 15).***

This view was echoed by another Traveller representative from Munster who reflected that one local authority social worker with whom she worked:

…was a genuine person and he believed in people having rights and having, you know, equality and having Traveller-specific accommodation, and he really fought with me [i.e. supported me]. But he was often told by the civil servants, which were his bosses, to shut up – and this would be to embarrass him at Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees ***(TR 12).***

As a result, this interviewee said:

If you would give me ten million to do that job [social worker]… because you would get no satisfaction from it, you get no reward from it, you will get nothing from it. You'd be trying to break down a prison wall [local authority decision-makers] that you can't break' ***(TR 12).***

On this basis, several of the Traveller representatives interviewed suggested that local authority social workers often find themselves in a conflicted or even impossible position. One of the representatives of a national Traveller representative group argued:

I also think there's possibly a conflict. You know, I don't know how they [social workers] can advocate for and lobby for Travellers with the very organisation that they're employed by. I think they're constrained and restrained in doing that ***(TR 7).***

This opinion was echoed by an interviewee from a Traveller representative group:

I think personally I think that local authorities saw the Traveller social workers as being a problematic position. They were almost [seen as] troublemakers, you know. They were forcing their hand, or they were seen as not part of the team, working as part of the team inside in the local authorities, they're working for the community ***(TR 11).***

The one submission argued that social workers' lack of power creates conflict with Travellers, because the social worker 'can only go so far in the council with the application [for Traveller accommodation] and then action stops. This is often viewed by Travellers as the social worker not doing her job or not caring but this is unfair and certainly not true'. A representative of a local Traveller support group, based in Muster, suggested that these conflicts place enormous pressure on social workers. This representative remembered an incident when a social worker 'was actually crying. She said, "I know the conditions," she said, "you're living in", she said. "I know the amount of sick children," she said, "that's living in Third World conditions" **(TR 13).'** The representative further commented local authority managers are '…sending them [social workers] down all the time to meet the Travellers and they have to deal with the brunt of it' **(TR 13).**

Cultural Understanding and Mutual Engagement Between Social Workers and Travellers

Several of the Traveller representatives interviewed felt that social workers needed greater capacity for understanding Traveller culture. For instance, an interviewee from a Traveller organisation in Muster argued that their local social worker 'doesn't give us a sense of really understanding issues that people are facing from a low socio-economic background. And that's across the board… trying then to – trying to solve a problem, or not solve it, coming from the ideology – and I would say a middle-class ideology' **(TR 10).** However, a Traveller representative from Leinster acknowledged that this lack of understanding sometimes operates in both directions:

I think the thing is that we [Travellers] don't understand the [social worker] roles that they're being given by the local authority as well as them not understanding the cultural needs… you know, the cultural needs of [Traveller] people ***(TR 18).***

Understanding of Travellers' needs was viewed as vital to working effectively as a social worker by the Travellers interviewed for this study, because it is necessary to build strong relationships with the community and advocate effectively on their behalf. In this vein, a Traveller representative from Leinster said that a social worker they had previously worked with, who was now retired, had been very effective because she knew:

…the conditions that people were living in, she had that relationship. Almost like a GP and his client, you know. So, there was that personal connection there to that person. To be told go to the fourth floor and go to the housing desk, you know, it was a hard pill for Travellers to swallow ***(TR 11).***

This view was echoed by a Traveller representative from Leinster who suggested that, when the relationship between social workers and Travellers is based on respect, dialogue, and engagement, this could produce very positive results:

The social worker that we have, we engage in dialogue. We communicate on Traveller accommodation issues… the social worker is there at my beck and call. When we have an emergency, for example – and we've had a couple under Covid-19 – we will talk and communicate and get things done ***(TR 8).***

To resolve these problems, some Traveller representatives argued that the social workers in their areas needed to engage more with the local Traveller community. This engagement would increase social workers' understanding of the challenges faced by Travellers across the country. For instance, two Traveller representatives from Munster said:

I think social workers should make themselves known more if they're there… I don't know much about, now, the council social workers coming out to anyone. I've never come across them. Well, I've never heard it, now ***(TR 3).***

There are no outreach work in relation to your social workers in [name of county] onsite to Travellers… You miss part of the understanding if you don't go out to meet the families in their own environment ***(TR 2).***

Other Traveller Accommodation Service Staff

Some local authorities deliver their Traveller accommodation service via a dedicated section or unit in their housing department, and in recent years increasing numbers of local authorities have also employed specialist Traveller liaison officers or similar posts to work with Travellers in their operational area. However, many of the Traveller representatives interviewed for this review argued that overall staffing levels in the local authority Traveller accommodation service (TAS) were inadequate and this was creating problems of staff stress and high turnover.

As one Traveller representative put it: 'You've one individual working for 340 families, 350 families on a Monday and Wednesday' **(TR 9).** Another representative reported: 'In the last maybe four, five years is a huge turnover, staff turnover in the Traveller accommodation section. You have people come in; they may be six months to a year – gone' **(TR 11).**

In addition to stresses created by understaffing, the Traveller representatives attributed the high turnover of TAS staff to the powerlessness of these staff and also to lack of relevant experience and training. For instance, a Traveller representative from Munster said:

You get that impression that there's been a lot of internal stuff going on, you know, why people have moved around within [the council]… I've no kind of doubt that it is a difficult job, in that as a worker probably working for the local authority you're very limited in what you can, you know, what you can deliver for people ***(TR 11).***

One Traveller group representative reported that 'the last Traveller liaison accommodation officer that was employed, she moved from the water section in the council!' **(TR 9).** A Traveller activist from Leinster offered the following reflections on the staff of their local TAS:

…these poor fellas was like jack of all trades and jack of none trades, if you know what I mean. Not qualified. Just two poor fellas. They'd [the council] no other choice. So they [the council] could use and abuse them. They [new TAS staff] had no qualification in social work or whatever, so they [county council] could do whatever they want. And also you're paying my wages, so I'll do whatever you [county council] tell me to do. And that's it' ***(TR 12).***

This lack of power and inadequate levels of experience had consequences for service delivery for Traveller accommodation needs throughout the country, which emphasised their vulnerability as a community.

Cappagh Field, Dublin. © Derek Speirs

Travellers' Vulnerability when Engaging with Local Authorities

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Travellers' vulnerability when dealing with local authorities was a prominent theme in the interviews with Traveller representatives. This vulnerability reflects the imbalance of power primarily, because of the high levels of poverty among Travellers and the discrimination they often face when trying to secure private rented accommodation – most Travellers have no option but to rely on local authorities to access accommodation.

For instance, an interviewee from a Traveller representative group in Leinster said that getting a private rented tenancy was very challenging for Travellers: 'they might manage to pay it somehow, but, like, they're not getting it due to maybe a [Traveller] surname' **(TR 14).** A colleague from a Traveller representative group in Ulster said many Travellers felt they could not claim the Housing Assistance Payment subsidy for low-income private renting households because, if they did so, they would be removed from the waiting list for social housing:

It's one of the reasons why an awful lot of the young [Traveller] families won't sign up to HAP. And they're putting themselves through unnecessary poverty and hardship by living in small touring caravans without any heat and electricity or without any support in the hope that they're going to get a lifetime tenancy' ***(TR 10).***

Another Traveller representative from Munster raised concerns about Travellers being moved off land they had purchased, 'because it doesn't fit in line with planning laws in that area' **(TR 11).** An interviewee from a non-governmental social work and social service provider reflected that this history of discrimination and understanding feelings of vulnerability needs to be understood by social workers, TLOs and other local authority officials if they are to build successful relationships with Travellers:

And that perception can be a really, really important thing in working with the Traveller community because you're working with the community whose primary – a lot of the time their primary experience of working with people in power is one of a negative and being discriminated against. And they're always going to go in with that experience. So if you don't try and combat that and try and work around that perception, you're always going to be kind of coming at odds with them ***(KI 4).***

As a result of this vulnerability, several interviewees from Traveller groups complained that Travellers have no option but to accept whatever accommodation is offered even if it is not culturally appropriate (this issue is discussed further in the section which follows). An interviewee from a Traveller support group in Ulster also highlighted how this vulnerability can inhibit Travellers from seeking support when they need it:

Still to this day a lot of the women will say, you know, that you don't, whatever you do, don't tell the social worker if you're suffering any type of domestic violence and you need support, because that'll go against you in relation to your accommodation down the road ***(TR 10).***

Discrimination and Traveller-Specific Accommodation

Another prominent theme in the interviews with Traveller representatives related to difficulties in accessing Traveller-specific accommodation, such as halting sites and group housing schemes, due to lack of provision by local authorities and also inadequate management and maintenance of this type of accommodation when it is provided. There was a strong consensus among the Traveller representatives interviewed that this under provision of culturally appropriate accommodation is a form of discrimination against Travellers.

A Traveller representative from Leinster argued strongly that local authorities are not interested in providing Traveller-specific accommodation: 'They [local authority] don't want to see new group housing. They want to try and force Travellers into social, social, social housing and their excuse now is everyone is going through the same boat' **(TR 8).** He suggested that this was inspired by:

…a kind of a subtle hope that in a couple of years' time Travellers will eventually be completely assimilated and listen, we won't have to have a separate package ready for them, we'll just push them into houses when they become available.

A representative of a Traveller group in Munster echoed this view:

…government policy has changed if you see it on paper, but if you look at it in practice local authorities are carrying out the 1963 itinerant report, which has fixed 'the problem' of Travellers – assimilate them… constantly telling us how uncivilised we were, how we were bad citizens of Irish society, how we didn't contribute to society, how we were all criminals, how we were breeding – the influx of breeding, and how they were going to deal with us ***(TR 15).***

As a result of the lack of Traveller-specific housing, several interviewees from Traveller support groups raised concerns that families that wish to live in Traveller accommodation have to remain on the social waiting list for very long periods. A Traveller representative from Ulster cited an instance where one of their clients 'were on the housing list for twenty years because they ticked the option that they wanted Traveller-specific accommodation' **(TR 10).**

Alternatively, as mentioned above, many interviewees argued that Travellers have no option but to accept whatever accommodation is offered even if it is not culturally appropriate. For instance, a Traveller representative from Leinster argued:

The majority of Travellers are living in standard accommodation, standard houses, and I'm looking at the negative effects and I'm seeing the implications of that and I don't think it's working for Travellers… So, if a woman is offered a house in a housing estate where there's water and where there's facilities, she's going to take it. Regardless of the long-term effect on her and on her children, whether it be mentally or whether it be culturally. She's going to take it ***(TR 15).***

The representative also states that this type of discrimination undermines Travellers' mental health, because: 'people going into houses, closing doors behind them, losing all family contact, losing all – anything that kept us as a community together, and having to suppress all that' **(TR 15).**

Almost every Traveller representative interviewed raised concerns about poor design, management, and maintenance of Traveller-specific accommodation by local authorities and also about overcrowding, particularly, on halting sites. One interviewee from Leinster mentioned one halting site where 'If you go out there, the wires are running on the ground' and raised concerns that 'It's another Carrickmines waiting to happen' **(TR 14),** in reference to the tragic fire at a halting site in Dublin in 2015 in which 10 people died. This Traveller representative also raised similar concerns about other sites in the province:

There's a huge shortage of accommodation. So if you went down to one of these halting sites today and you would walk around the halting site – and it was built originally for twelve – I think it was twelve families – well, there's a minimum of thirty families in that halting site. A minimum **(TR 14).**

An interviewee from Munster suggested:

Traveller accommodation has been mismanaged and they've now become eyesores… and has led to some Travellers pulling away from the traditional lifestyle. And as well it doesn't really, as I said, it doesn't exist.

So we'll say if I was given the option to move into a small development of five or eight or ten houses with my extended family, I'd love that, but it doesn't really exist, you know ***(TR 11).***

Reform of Traveller Accommodation Policy and Service Provision

In addition to reforming the local authority social work service, the Traveller representatives interviewed for this review made recommendations for the reform of policy on Traveller accommodation provision and its implementation. These reforms would obviously have implications for the context in which local authority social workers and other support staff for Travellers work, and therefore are briefly summarised here.

To address these problems, some of the Traveller representatives interviewed suggested that the LTACCs need to be reformed to make them into decision-making, rather than solely consultative, bodies. For instance, a representative of a Traveller support organisation from Connaught said:

I suppose the biggest issue I find is that even when they liaise with us [name of county] Traveller Support Group, it seems the council still goes ahead and makes their own decisions even if sometimes what we [Traveller group] say might be – we might think it's the right thing ***(TR 19).***

Others concurred with the view of a representative of a national Traveller group who argued that 'there needs to be some kind of a sanction, that local authorities are held to account if they don't meet the targets within the timeframe of the Traveller Accommodation Plan' **(TR 5).** The key role that local authority councillors play in blocking the development of new Traveller-specific accommodation, because they are required to initiate land-use planning applications for this purpose, was also mentioned by several of the Traveller representatives. Bypassing this local authority planning process and referring applications for the construction of new halting sites or group housing schemes direct to An Bord Pleanála (the planning appeals board) was suggested as a suitable mechanism to deal with this (notably, the Expert Group on Traveller Accommodation which reported in 2019 made the same recommendation).

However, there was strong consensus among most of the Traveller representatives interviewed that more radical reform is necessary. Many shared the view expressed by a representative of a national Traveller organisation that the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 'needs to be ripped up now' **(TR 11)** and that the LTACCs, to quote a Traveller representative from Munster, are 'a waste of space' **(TR 12).** Most Traveller representatives interviewed felt that an independent national Traveller accommodation agency is the best way forward. Thus, a representative from Munster suggested that this would be 'an independent body that has the power to draw down on that money and use it appropriately' **(TR 8).** This representative went on to argue for the establishment of:

…[a] designated national Traveller [agency] which can be made of Department [of Housing] people, representatives from the national Traveller organisations, you can get some from local organisations that has a bit of experience, and that will feed into the one area, and that's the Department ***(TR 8).***

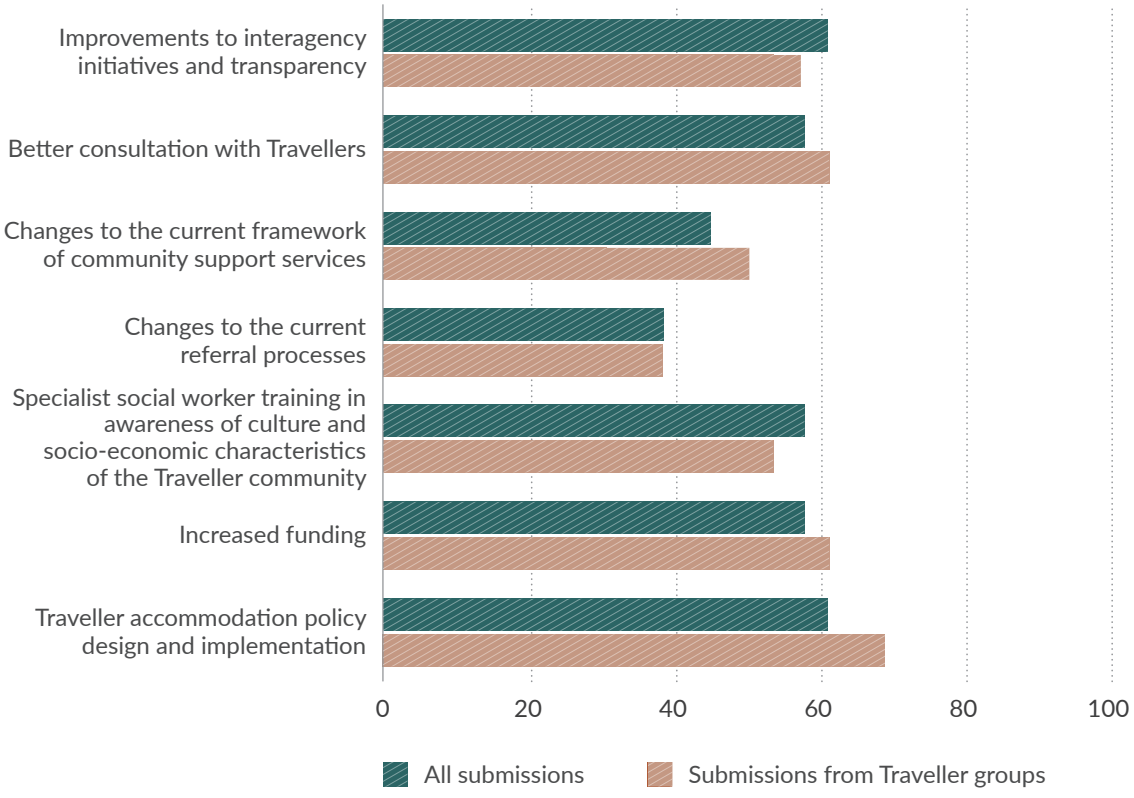
The head of a national Traveller representative organisation cautioned, however: 'We just need to be careful that we don't end up, you know, replacing one poor service with another…' **(TR 7).**

National Social Work Framework

Of the 13 Traveller organisation representatives who made a submission to the review, eight local organisations were in favour of a National Traveller Social Work Framework, whereas five Traveller organisations (including the three national groups which made a joint submission) were not in favour of such a framework being developed. Several of the Traveller representatives interviewed for this review also felt that a national framework would be helpful. Their view was epitomised in a comment by a local representative from Leinster: 'Most people would sort of think that [a national framework for social workers] would be a good thing because there's a lot of unevenness across the system in local authorities' (TR 16).

Those who made a submission to the review were also asked to specify which issues should be included in the proposed National Traveller Social Work Framework. Their views are summarised in Figure 6.1 below. This graph shows the proportion of Traveller group representatives who thought that this framework should prioritise 'Traveller accommodation policy, design and implementation' (69.2%) and 'increased funding' (61.5%). In respect of the priorities for this framework, the views of Traveller representatives who made submissions did not differ significantly from all of the submissions received, although Traveller representatives were less likely to take the view that 'Changes to the current framework of community support services' should be prioritised in the proposed framework, compared to all submissions received.

Figure 6.1: Traveller representatives' views on the issues which should be included in a national social work framework, compared to all submissions received by this review (%)



Source: collated from submissions made to this review

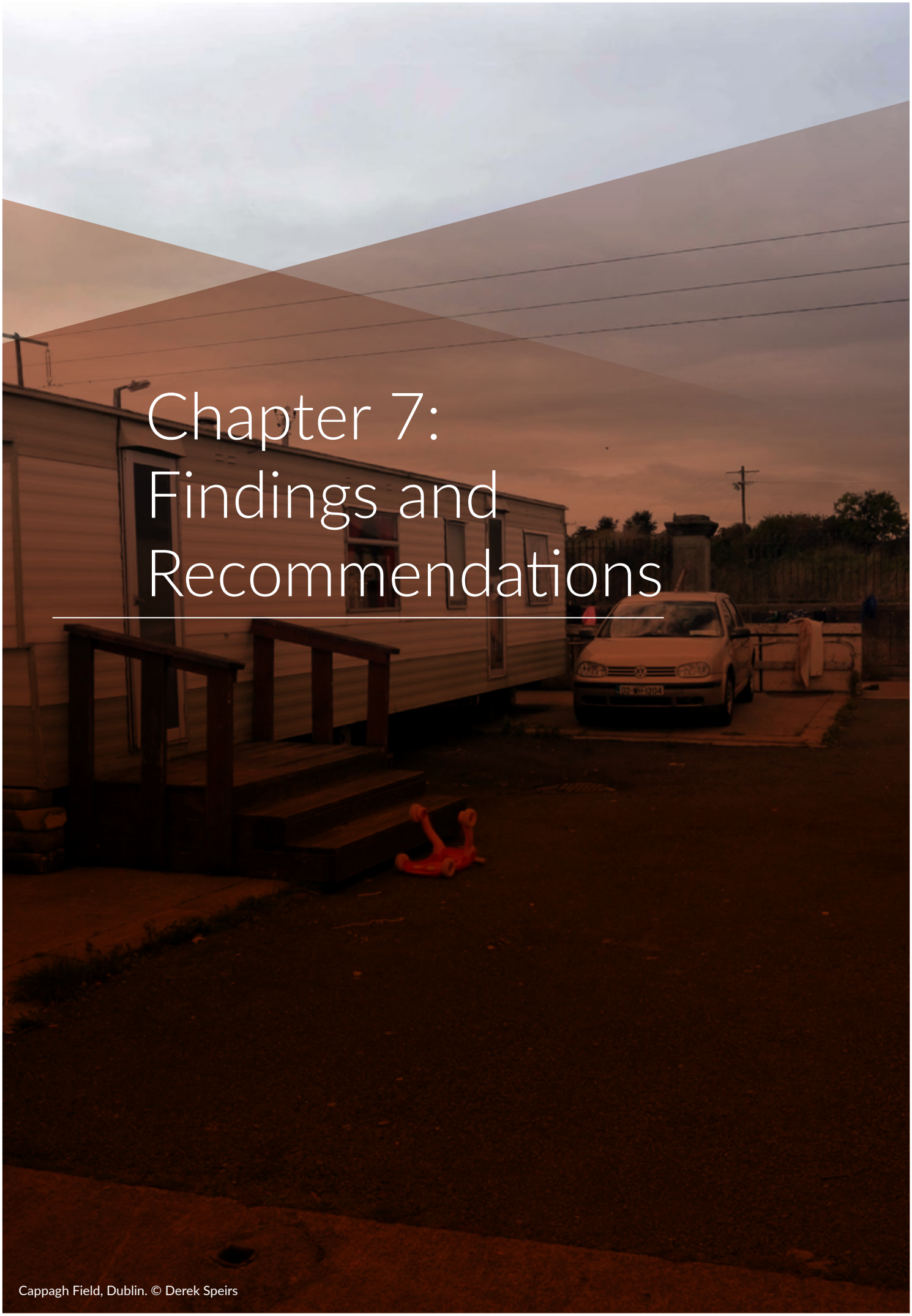
Conclusions

This chapter has examined the most prominent themes which emerged from the interviews with 19 Traveller representatives from national and local groups and the 13 submissions received from Traveller representative groups across the country. Many of these interviewees recognised the challenges inherent in the role of local authority social worker, such as excessive workloads and lack of decision-making power. However, the lack of understanding of some social workers of Traveller culture and socio-economic challenges was also seen as problematic. These concerns also applied to related local authority personnel, such as Traveller tenant liaison officers and to the staff of local authority Traveller Accommodation Units more broadly.

These concerns reflected the vulnerability which many Travellers feel when interacting with local authorities because of the poor service which, almost every Traveller representative interviewed argued, their community receives from city and county councils. Thus, the Traveller representatives interviewed raised concerns about substandard Traveller-specific accommodation provided by local authorities, and in particular about fire risks and overcrowding on halting sites, coupled with poor maintenance and insanitary living conditions. They also highlighted the low output by local authorities of additional Traveller-specific accommodation and argued that this failure means that a de facto policy of 'assimilation' of Travellers is still being applied. A lack of voice for Travellers within the LTACCs and the power of local authority councillors to block planning applications for Traveller-specific accommodation were seen by interviewees as an attack on Traveller culture and institutional racism. Interviewees also highlighted the high levels of poverty, mental health challenges, social exclusion and racism faced by Travellers as factors that compound the challenges, they face in dealing with local authorities.

The Traveller representatives interviewed for this review argued that Travellers need a voice to influence the content and implementation of the Traveller Accommodation Programmes. There were also widespread calls for the introduction of penalties for local authorities which do not implement their TAPs. The introduction of a National Traveller Social Work Framework was supported by Traveller representatives as a way of implementing consistent national standards and guidelines for the duties and responsibilities of local authority social workers responsible for supporting Travellers in different local authorities. In addition, ensuring that related staff, such as Traveller Liaison Officers and other Traveller accommodation service staff, have appropriate skills and training and knowledge of Traveller culture was regarded as fundamental to ensuring that all local authority staff are competent to fulfil their duties.

Chapter 7: Findings and Recommendations



Cappagh Field, Dublin. © Derek Speirs

Introduction

This review has comprehensively examined current roles, responsibilities and functions of local authority social workers and Traveller liaison officers who are funded by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to support Travellers with their accommodation related issues. This examination has drawn on an analysis of the relevant policy and research literature and consultation with all relevant stakeholders which was achieved by inviting submissions from interested organisations and individuals, conducting a survey of, and interviews with, local authority social workers and Traveller Liaison officers and interviews with Traveller representatives from both national and local organisations.

This final chapter sets out the key findings of this review regarding the effectiveness of these services. It also sets out recommendations regarding future service delivery approaches that would best serve the Traveller community in providing assistance with their accommodation needs and regarding the potential for developing a National Traveller Accommodation Social Work Framework.

Findings

The local authority social work service was established to provide support for Travellers in the 1960s on the recommendation of the *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy* (Commission on Itinerancy, 1963). Since then levels of unmet accommodation need and disadvantage among Travellers and discrimination against this community have remained high but most other key aspects of the context in which this service operates have changed significantly. As explained in chapters two and three of this review, the size of the Traveller population has expanded, particularly in urban areas, Traveller community organisation and activism has increased, Travellers have been recognised as an ethnic group by the Irish government and discrimination against Travellers in the provision of goods, services and accommodation has been outlawed by the Equal Status Acts, 2000-2018 (Watson, Kenny and Mcginnity, 2017). The policy framework for the provision of accommodation to Travellers changed radically following the enactment of the Housing (Traveller Accommodation) Act, 1998 and Traveller representatives were afforded the status of partners in the implementation of this policy through their participation in the Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees at national and local authority level.

The profession of social work in Ireland has also changed as social workers are now required to be qualified to at least honours degree level, to engage in continuous professional development and to register with CORU (which regulates health and social care professionals). In addition, the nature and scale of the demands on local authority housing departments have changed, as social housing need and also homelessness has expanded (including amongst Travellers) and local authorities have taken on new housing responsibilities such as administration of the Housing Assistance Payment allowance for private renting households.

However, despite these radical changes in operational context, and contrary to the recommendations of the key national policy statements on Travellers published in recent decades, the remit, resourcing and management of the local authority social work service has been reformed only minimally since its establishment. Indeed, the most significant relevant reform which has taken place is external to the social work service - the recruitment of alternative categories of staff such as Traveller liaison officers to provide support for Travellers. As a result of this lack of reform, despite the undoubted skills and

diligence of the vast majority of local authority social workers, the valuable work they carry out and their largely positive relationships with Travellers, as currently constituted this service is not effective in providing the types of supports that these clients now require. Nor is the service providing a satisfactory employment or professional experience for local authority social workers or making best use of their expertise in the content of the growing demands on the wider local authority housing service.

The Traveller representatives interviewed for this review expressed a variety of opinions regarding the effectiveness of the local authority social work service, but it is notable that most of the submissions received from Traveller organisations proffered more negative assessments in this regard, than the submissions received from social workers or local authority managers. Out of the total of 31 submissions received by this review, only 10% rated the service as 'quite ineffective' and 13% rated it 'very ineffective' (13%), but 30.8% of the Traveller representatives who made submissions rated the social work service as 'very ineffective' and a further 15.4% rated the service as 'quite ineffective'. Many of the Traveller representatives interviewed raised concerns about the implication that their community should always require social work support which is inherent in the design of the local authority social work service. They mentioned that in some local authorities Traveller clients are automatically referred to the social work service and are discouraged from raising queries at the reception desk like other clients and argued strongly that this approach is discriminatory. Some Traveller representatives were also unclear about the remit of local authority social workers and suspicious about the exact nature of their role.

However, Travellers representatives' views were strongly influenced by their concerns about the poor quality of the broader accommodation service provided to their community by local authorities and particularly about undersupply of Traveller specific accommodation and poor management and maintenance of halting sites (see chapters two and five) (RSM Consultancy, 2017; Joyce, Norton and Norris, 2019). They argued that the shortcomings in the accommodation service reflected the power imbalance between local authorities and Travellers and were evidence of institutional racism in local authorities' treatment of their community. The Traveller representatives interviewed valued respectful dialogue with social workers and the benefits of social work support which they acknowledged is needed by some Traveller families. They also recognised that social workers are often isolated and constrained within local authority structures and social workers also lack power and influence in decision-making processes regarding the provision of accommodation for Travellers which are largely controlled by senior local authority officials and councillors. However, this lack of power suggests supporting Travellers in meeting their accommodation needs, which is core to social workers' remit, is difficult or sometimes impossible for them to achieve in practice.

The local authority social workers consulted for this review shared many of the concerns expressed by Traveller representatives about their remit and about local authorities' track record in providing accommodation for Travellers. For instance, social workers agreed that the automatic referral of Travellers to social workers is neither appropriate nor necessary. Social workers were also frustrated by their lack of influence in policy and decision-making regarding Traveller accommodation provision and about the inadequate supply of accommodation particularly of halting sites and group housing schemes. Despite this lack of power, the social workers interviewed reported that they are often tasked by local authority managers with communicating unpopular or negative decisions to Travellers, which adversely affects their relationship with this client group and sometimes leads to incidents of aggression or intimidation. Local authority social worker interviewees reflected on the evolution of their work in response to changing needs and requirements of the Traveller community and in light of the professionalisation and regulation of the social work profession. However, they complained that in many cases job descriptions have not been updated or reviewed to reflect these contextual changes.

This is confirmed by the survey of these staff conducted by the authors which found day to day duties closely matched responsibilities in only one third of cases. This survey also revealed that just over half of local authority social workers devoted less than 60% of their working time to supporting Travellers and that many are also required to spend time providing social work support for other

local authority tenants, applicants for housing and homeless people and to a lesser extent to routine assessments of applicants for housing and administrative work. Although, the interviews conducted with social workers suggest that they are very conscious that the DHLGH funds them to work with Travellers and they always aim to prioritise appropriate Traveller referrals, pressure to engage in the social work with other local authority clients is a necessary response to the changing demands on local authorities and in particular the marked increase in homelessness which has occurred in recent years. Allocation of non-social work tasks to social workers is not an effective use of their time, however, and reduces the time available to devote to supporting Travellers and any other clients who require social work support.

The number of Traveller liaison officers and local authority staff in similar roles who are tasked with supporting Travellers appears to have expanded by much more than the number of social workers employed in this sector in recent decades. Delap and Kelleher's (2005) research indicates that these posts were introduced for the first time in the early 2000s and by 2020 13 of these professionals were employed by the local authorities nationwide. Furthermore, the survey of these staff conducted for this review suggests that TLOs are much more likely to devote most or all of their working time to supporting Travellers.

Some of the Traveller liaison officers interviewed for this review raised similar concerns to those mentioned by their social work colleagues, however. They emphasised the importance of providing training for all local authority staff on Traveller culture and anti-discriminatory practice. The survey of TLOs conducted for this review indicates that many do not have a clear job description and there is considerable variation in relation to the role within different local authorities and in the size of the client group they are expected to support. In many cases TLOs work effectively with vulnerable service users, however in some cases they have limited or no access to specialist social work expertise within their local authorities, which raises concerns in relation to identification and appropriate response to vulnerable clients such children at risk, domestic violence victims and people with disabilities, addiction concerns or poor mental health. Some TLOs work alone and therefore do not benefit from the opportunities peer support and advice associated with teamwork. Many of these problems in the social work and liaison services for Travellers are related to shortcomings in the staffing and management of the broader accommodation service for Travellers provided by local authorities. There was widespread concern among the Traveller representatives interviewed regarding understaffing and high levels of staff turnover in the sections of local authorities tasked with delivering the Traveller accommodation service. Data on the ratio of social work and other support staff members per 100 Traveller residents confirms that the former is a problem in some. Fingal, Longford, Meath and South Dublin County Councils, which employed ≤ 0.10 specialist Traveller support staff members per 100 Travellers in 2020 for instance and Laois, Offaly, Wicklow County Councils and Cork City Council, employed between 0.11 and 0.13 staff of this type per 100 Travellers. The Traveller representatives interviewed argued that that high turnover of staff in the local authority Traveller accommodation service turnover inhibits long-term relationship building and the development of meaningful cross-cultural understanding and respect.

The local authority social workers and TLOs interviewed shared these concerns. For instance, the TLOs interviewed felt that low levels of staff in the Traveller accommodation service in many local authorities negatively affects service effectiveness and social workers complained that constant internal movement of administration staff within local authorities requires them to repeatedly re-establish relationships with and explain their role to new managers. Line management of local authority social workers is generally carried out by administrative staff who, according to the social workers interviewed, do not always understand social work as a profession. As a consequence, they argued, the professional expertise, assessment skills, judgment and knowledge of professionally qualified social workers is under-utilised in the local authority sector thereby reducing the benefit to clients and to local authority housing service overall.

As explained in Chapter 3, for social workers, professional supervision by another social worker is considered a critical requirement because these arrangements provide peer support and advice and promote accountability and effective working

methods and are also requirements of their professional regulator. However, the low number of social workers in senior posts in local authorities and the large numbers of lone social workers, who are the only members of their profession working in their local authority, means that the vast majority of social workers must source professional supervision externally. Although most social workers also avail of informal peer support networks and the majority of respondents were able to access funding for CPD, most noted that training opportunities specifically related to local authority social work are limited. Several of the TLOs consulted for this review made the point that well-functioning Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees with constructive engagement from the local Traveller community are essential to the success of their role. Many of the Travellers interviewed held the view that the LTACC's lacked real influence on Traveller accommodation policy, planning and design; and argued that they need to be recast as decision making, rather than solely consultative, bodies.

Recommendations

This review of the role of social workers and personnel employed by local authorities to assist Travellers with their accommodation-needs has identified the need for comprehensive and multi-level reform in order to improve the effectiveness of this service in meeting the needs of Travellers and also to provide a satisfactory employment and professional experience for these staff and make best use of their expertise in the content of the growing demands on the wider local authority housing service. The specific reforms proposed are detailed in the recommendations which follow.

1 A Vision for a Social Work Service in the Local Authority Sector

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage should work with the appropriate City and County Managers' Association (CCMA) committee, chief executives, the Local Government Management Agency and senior social work representatives to formulate a joint vision for a new role for social work services in local government which is more strategic to the needs of this sector and the clients it serves. This vision should take account of:

- The skills, professional knowledge and competencies of social workers and the specific contribution they can make in the local government sector,
- The requirements of the social work regulator, and
- The context of the evolving needs and requirements of local authority tenants, Travellers, people who are homeless and other vulnerable or marginalised groups who receive services from local authorities.

2 The Establishment of a Generic Service Delivery Model for Local Authority Social Work

- The re-focussed social work service should be available to all local authority tenants, applicants for housing and other clients (such as people who are homeless and HAP claimants) who require a social work intervention. A clearly defined threshold and criteria for referral to this service should be established and referrals should be made solely on the basis of need.
- Travellers should have equitable access to the local authority social work services on the basis of need in the same way as any other client, but they should not be obliged to use this service. Current arrangements for the automatic referral of Travellers to the local authority social work service irrespective of their needs should be discontinued.
- Where Travellers meet criteria for referral, social workers should continue to provide targeted professional interventions to meet their needs; advocate on their behalf or facilitate Travellers to advocate on their own behalf.
- The extension of access to all local authority tenants and clients who require social work intervention is a necessary and timely response to rising number of vulnerable clients in this sector due to increased homelessness and additional legislative demands placed on local authorities particularly in relation to child protection and adult safeguarding.
- The social workers required in each local authority should reflect the number of potential service users and also service needs and demands.
- These proposed changes in the focus of social work service are likely to require the negotiation of a new agreement regarding the funding of social work posts between the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the CCMA and the local authorities. This agreement should take account of the critical need for a local authority social work service and therefore of ensuring that it is adequately funded going forward in all parts of the country where it is required.

3 A National Framework for Social Work in the Local Authority Sector

On the basis of this visioning exercise a national framework for social work in the local authority sector should be devised with a view to establishing:

- A clear threshold and criteria for referral to social work services based on identified needs and not on ethnicity,
- The duties of social workers,
- Consistency in professional practice and standards, and
- Enhanced governance, transparency, and accountability for service users.
- These should reflect international best practice and information on social work frameworks employed in other countries is outlined in Appendix III.
- To maximise service effectiveness social workers' duties should as far as possible, encompass specialist social work tasks primarily and social workers' involvement in general administrative work should be minimised.

While minor variations in the framework may be required at local level, the objective of the framework should be to ensure consistency in professional standards and practice across all local authorities which in turn would increase governance, accountability and effectiveness for the Travelling community and other stakeholders.

4 Grading Structure for Local Authority Social Workers

- To increase effectiveness of the social work service, the grading structure for this staff group should be reviewed and standardised more at a national level.
- This grading structure should reflect the demanding nature of this important role, the professional qualifications required by social workers and arrangements for grading of other professionally qualified local authority staff.
- Decisions regarding grading should address the lack of influence many social workers currently have on operation and strategic decision-making processes in local government which impedes their ability to advocate effectively for clients.

5 Professional Supervision of Social Workers

- Professional supervision by another social worker are core requirements of CORU registration for social workers. All local authority social workers should be facilitated to engage in individual professional supervision on a regular basis. Competent supervision provides support to staff who regularly deal with complex social problems and ethical dilemmas and are also necessary for ensuring accountability and adherence to best practice standards. Such supervision is of particular importance in local authorities where social workers work alone. The National Framework should establish the necessary criteria for social work supervision and the quality of supervisors.
- To ensure that professional supervision is provided to all local authority social workers it will be necessary to ensure that senior social work posts are put in place.
- Where a local authority does not have a senior social work post or where service needs do not require such posts, supervision arrangements with a senior social worker in another local authority should be formally established. In some parts of the country it might be appropriate to designate one local authority as the regional lead for the social work service.

6 Education, Training and Continuous Professional Development

- Local authorities should regularly review their policies and practices to ensure that all staff are educated and trained in anti-discriminatory and anti-racist methods of working, thereby ensuring equitable and non-judgemental service delivery for all service users, including Travellers. Such education and training should be mandatory and delivered at regular intervals to all employees at every level in the organisation. The DHLGP should explore the potential for providing funding for this training.
- Staff should be trained to constructively manage the frustration of those who are dissatisfied with services. This training should include techniques to de-escalate aggression and to encourage appropriate use of complaints procedures. Staff who experience aggression or intimidation should be proactively supported by senior managers.
- The National Social Work Framework make provision for continuous professional development of social authority social workers as informed by best practice in Ireland and other jurisdictions.
- The National Framework should identify mechanisms that to enable social workers to maintain and further develop peer support structures to enhance their practice. To this end, membership of the Irish Association of Social Workers and establishment of a Special Interest Group within this association is recommended. This group should work to identify and organise peer learning opportunities and to advocate for group priorities on an ongoing basis.

7 Reform of Traveller Liaison Officer and Related Roles

- The very high levels of disadvantage and homelessness among Travellers and large proportion who are local authority tenants means that Travellers would likely account for a significant number of clients of a generic local authority social work service.
- To ensure that Travellers are not disadvantaged in any way by the introduction of a generic social work service, the support service provided by Traveller liaison officers and related support staff should be reformed and strengthened.
- The role and function of TLOs and related staff should be reviewed and clarified in specific job descriptions to ensure consistency and transparency of service provision.
- Additional TLOs should be recruited in local authorities where the ratio of Travellers support staff to Traveller residents is low. This is a particular priority on those local authorities where the Traveller population has increased significantly in recent years.
- The establishment of regional peer support networks and a national group to provide a formal network of support and knowledge sharing for TLOs is a priority.
- As far as possible, TLOs should be integrated into appropriate teams within local authorities, with appropriate supervision and support. Team working with social workers should also be facilitated and encouraged.
- The potential for appointing Travellers to liaison officer posts and /or providing these posts in partnership with local Traveller representative groups should be explored.

8 Implementation of the Recommendations of the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review, 2019

This review has demonstrated that the effectiveness of the local authority social workers and of related staff in supporting Travellers to meet their accommodation needs is undermined by wider problems in the accommodation service provided by local authorities to Travellers including under provision of Traveller specific accommodation and poorly functioning Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committees. Many of these wider problems could be addressed by implementation of the recommendations made by the Traveller Accommodation Expert Review in 2019 (Joyce, Norton and Norris, 2019). Significant progress in this regard has already been made and this review underlines the importance of ensuring that this work is completed as soon as possible.

References

References

Abdalla, S. et al. (2013) 'Social inequalities in health expectancy and the contribution of mortality and morbidity: The case of Irish Travellers', *Journal of Public Health*, 35(4), pp. 533–540.

Allen, M. (2012) 'Domestic Violence within the Irish Travelling Community: The Challenge for Social Work', Source: *The British Journal of Social Work*, 42(5), pp. 870–886.

Bracken, D. C. (2014) 'Probation Practice with Travellers in the Republic of Ireland.', *Irish Probation Journal*, 11(1), pp. 44-62.

Campbell, J. (2010) 'Deciding to Detain: The Use of Compulsory Mental Health Law by Social Workers', *British Journal of Social Work*, 40(1), pp. 328–334.

Campbell, J. et al. (2013) 'Social work education and political conflict: preparing students to address the needs of victims and survivors of the Troubles in Northern Ireland', *European Journal of Social Work*, 16(4), pp. 506–520.

Cemlyn, S. (2000a) 'Assimilation, control, mediation or advocacy? Social work dilemmas in providing anti-oppressive services for Traveller children and families', *Child and Family Social Work*.

Cemlyn, S. (2000b) 'From Neglect to Partnership? Challenges for Social Services in Promoting the Welfare of Traveller Children', *Child Abuse Review*, 9(1), pp. 349–363.

Cemlyn, S. (2008) 'Human rights and Gypsies and Travellers: An exploration of the application of a human rights perspective to social work with a minority community in Britain', *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(1), pp. 153–173.

Cemlyn, S., Greenfields, M. and et al (2009) *Inequalities experiences by Gypsy and Traveller communities: A Review*. Equal Opportunities Commission.

Central Statistics Office (2016) *Census 2016 Profile 8 – Irish Travellers, Ethnicity and Religion*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Central Statistics Office (various year) *Census of Population of Ireland*. Dublin.

Cocker, C. and Hattford-Letchfield, R. (2014) *Rethinking Anti-Discriminatory and Anti-Oppressive Practice Theories for Social Work Practice*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Commission on Itinerancy (1963) *Report of the Commission on Itinerancy*. Dublin: Stationery Office.

Corbin, J. and Strauss, A. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Daly, J. (2016) 'Thinking About Internal Prejudice And Anti-Oppressive Practice In Child Safeguarding Social Work With Irish Travellers In The UK', *Journal of Social Work Practice*. Routledge, 30(4), pp. 335–347. doi: 10.1080/02650533.2015.1116438.

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 Ireland: Historical Perspectives'*. Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, pp. 51–75.

References

Department of Housing Planning and Local Government (no date) *Traveller Accommodation Statistics.* Dublin: DHPLG.

Department of Housing Planning Community and Local Government (2014) *Implementation Plan on the State Response to Homelessness2014-2016.* Dublin: DHPCLG.

Ferguson, I., Ioakimidis, V. and Lavalette, M. (2018) *Global Social Work in a Political Context: Radical perspectives.* Bristol: Policy Press.

Government of Ireland (1996) *Better Local Government: a programme for change.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Grotti, R. et al. (2018) *Discrimination and Inequality in Housing in Ireland.* Dublin.

International Federation of Social Workers (2014) *Global Definition of Social Work.* Available at: www.ifsw.org/what-is-social-work/global-definition-of-social-work (Accessed: 9 September 2020).

Joyce, D., Norton, C. and Norris, M. (2019) *Traveller Accommodation Expert Review Independent Expert Review Traveller Accommodation.*

Larkin, H., Felitti, V. J. and Anda, R. F. (2013) 'Social work and adverse childhood experiences research: Implications for practice and health policy.', *Social work in public health*, 29(1), pp. 1-16.

Larkins, C. and Bilson, A. (2016) *The Magic 6: Participatory Action and Learning Experiences with Roma Youth Training Manual.* Cluijeană: Presa Universitară.

Lau, A. Y. H. and Ridge, M. (2011) 'Addressing the impact of social exclusion on mental health in Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities', *Mental Health and Social Inclusion*, 15(3), pp. 129–137.

Loughran, H. (2018) *Counselling Skills for Social Workers.* London: Routledge.

MacDermott, D. and Harkin-MacDermott, C. (2020) 'Co-Producing a Shared Stories Narrative Model for Social Work Education with Experts by Experience.', *Practice*, 32(2), pp. 89-108.

McDonagh, S. (2018) 'Family Based Interventions: Advancing Recovery for the Traveller Community in Ireland', *Irish Social Worker*, 30(1), pp. 4–13.

Morran, D. (2002) 'Negotiating marginalized identities: Social workers and settled travelling people in Scotland.', *International Social Work*, 45(3), pp. 337-351.

Murphy, N. (2016) *Travelling Through Homelessness: A Study of Traveller Homelessness.* Offaly: Offaly Traveller Movement.

Norris, M. and Winston, N. (2005) 'Housing and accommodation of Irish Travellers: From assimilationism to multiculturalism and back again', *Social Policy and Administration*, 39(7), pp. 802–821.

Notcutt, H. (2017) 'Gypsy Roma and Traveller Women: How Community Work can both challenge and contribute to gender inequalities', in Craig, G. (ed.) *Community Organising Against Racism: Race', Ethnicity and Community Development*. Bristol: Policy Press, pp. 46–76.

Pavee Point (2010) *Submission to the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection on the Draft General Scheme of an Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2013 – 31 October 2013.* Dublin: Pavee Point.

Powell, R. (2011) 'Gypsy-Travellers and Welfare Professional Discourse: On Individualization and Social Integration', *Antipode*, 43(2), pp. 471–493.

Power, C. (2003) 'Irish Travellers: Ethnicity, Racism And pre-Sentence Reports.', *Probation Journal*, 50(3), pp. 252-266.

RSM Consultancy (2017) *Review of Funding for Traveller-Specific Accommodation and the Implementation of Traveller Accommodation Programmes.* Dublin: Housing Agency.

Ruch, G. (2014) ''Helping children is a human process': Researching the challenges social workers face in communicating with children.', *The British Journal of Social Work*, 44(8), pp. 2145-2162.

Ryder, A. (2014) 'Snakes and ladders: Inclusive community development and gypsies and travellers', *Community Development*, 49(1), pp. 21–36.

Singh, G. and Masocha, S. (2020) *Anti-Racist Social Work International Perspectives.* London: Macmillan.

Stanford, S. et al. (2017) *Beyond the Risk Paradigm in Mental Health Policy and Practice.* London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sweeney, S. and Matthews, Z. (2017) *Friends, Families and Travellers: A guide for professionals working with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers in Children's Services.* Brighton: FFT Community Base.

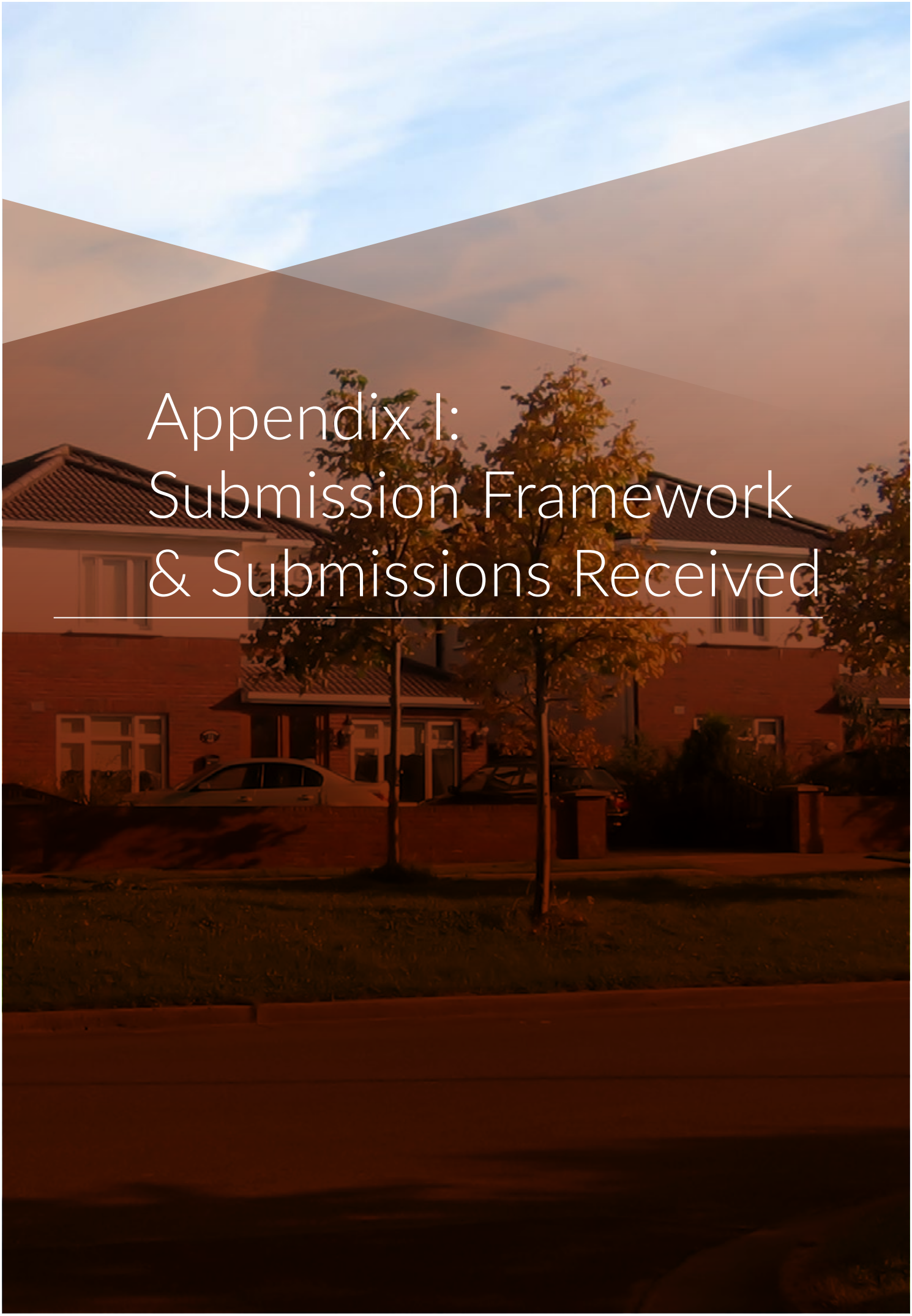
Task Force on the Travelling Community (1995) *Report of the Task Force on the Travelling Community.* Dublin: Stationery Office.

Thompson, N. (2016) *Anti-discriminatory practice: Equality, diversity and social justice.* Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Travelling People Review Body (1983) *Report of the Travelling People Review Body.* Dublin.: Stationery Office.

Visser, A. (2018) *Spotlight. Traveller Accommodation.* The Challenges of Policy Implementation. Dublin: Oreachtas Library and Research Services.

Watson, D., Kenny, O. and Mcginnity, F. (2017) *A Social Portrait of Travellers in Ireland, Economic Social Research Institute Research Series.* Dublin.: ESRI.



Appendix I: Submission Framework & Submissions Received

Submission Questions

Please note: All comments, observations and submissions will be subject to the Freedom of Information Act, 2014. The onus is on persons making the submissions and comments not to include material of a private nature in the body of their submission.

Following is a list of questions which you might find useful to structure your response. Some questions may be more relevant to you than others, feel free to skip a question if it is not relevant.

1. **Please provide contact information**
   - Name
   - Email Address
   - Phone Number

2. **Are you making this submission as an individual or on behalf of a group (please name)?**
   - As individual
   - Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
   - Local Authority social worker
   - Local Authority CE or Director of Housing
   - Traveller Representative Body
   - Local Authority elected member
   - Local Authority strategic policy committee member
   - Other (please specify)

3. **Name of organisation (if appropriate)?**

4. **If your comments/submission reflect practices in a particular local authority operational area, please specify the local authority below.**

5. **Over the past 20 years how effectively do you think the local authority social work service has been in supporting Travellers regarding accommodation needs?**
   - Very effective
   - Quite effective
   - Neutral
   - Quite ineffective
   - Very ineffective
   - Don't know

6. **What aspects of the local authority social work service do you think have worked well in supporting Travellers regarding accommodation needs?**

7. **What aspects of the local authority social work service do you think have not worked well in supporting Travellers regarding accommodation needs?**

8. **What do you think are the main barriers, if any, which prevent local authority social workers working effectively with Travellers to meet their accommodation needs?**

9. **How, in your view, could these barriers be overcome and the local authority social work service be improved?**

10. **Do you think a National Traveller Social Work Framework should be developed?**
Yes/ No

11. **If you do think a National Traveller Social Work Framework should be developed, which of the following do you think would be essential elements to incorporate in such a framework? Please tick all that apply.**
- Traveller accommodation policy design and implementation
- Increased funding
- Specialist social worker training in awareness of culture and the socio-economic characteristics of the Traveller community
- Changes to the current referral processes
- Changes to current framework of community support services
- Better consultation with Travellers
- Improvements to interagency initiatives and transparency
- Other

[Additional comment box inserted here]

12. **Are you aware of any international good practice in social work for the accommodation needs of nomadic communities or ethnic minorities? If so, please provide details here.**

13. **Please use this space to provide any additional comments and suggestions which you feel are relevant.**

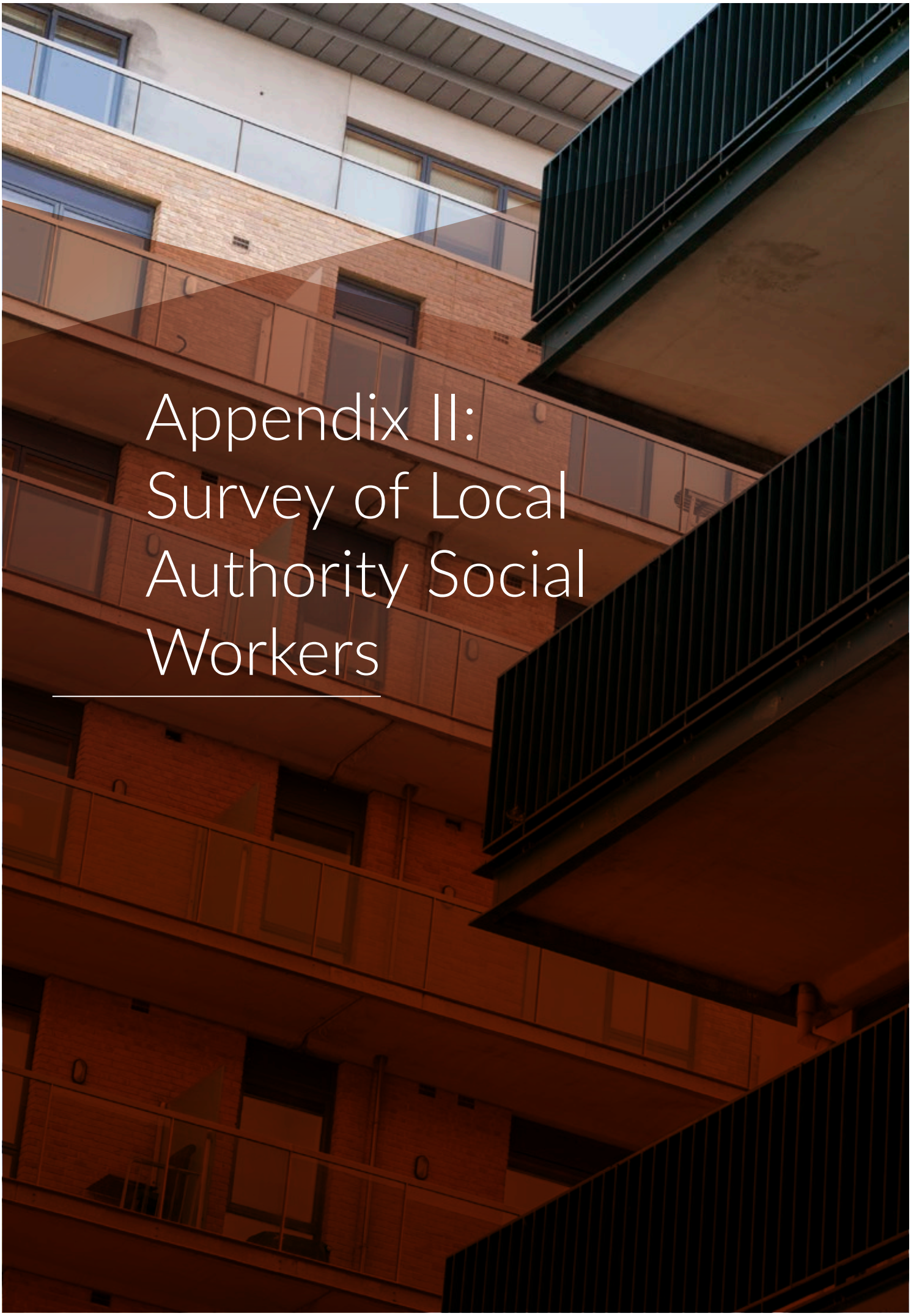
14. **Would it be okay to contact you should we need clarification on any of your answers?**
Yes/No

Thank you for your submission.

List of Submissions Received by Review

Total received	Name of organisation or individuals who made submission
1	Galway Traveller Movement
2	Chief Welfare Officer, Dublin City Council
3	Joint Submission from Irish Traveller Movement, Pavee Point and National Traveller Women's Forum
4	Submission as Individual, Longford County Council
5	Kerry Traveller Health & Community Development Project
6	STAG (Southside Travellers Action Group)
7	Traveller Visibility Group (Cork)
8	Cork Traveller Women's Network
9	Longford Community Resources & Longford Primary Health Care Project for Travellers
10	Kildare Traveller Action
11	North Tipperary Development Company
12	Wicklow Travellers Group
13	Mayo Traveller Support Group
14	St. Catherine's Traveller Programme, Carlow
15	Waterford Traveller Community Development Project
16	Local Authority Social Workers Working Group comprising representatives from the following local authorities: Carlow, Clare, Dublin City , Galway County, Kilkenny, South Dublin and Wicklow
17	Submission as Individual, Cork County Council
18	Submission as Individual, Dublin City Council
19	Submission as Individual, Wicklow Area
20	Traveller Accommodation Unit Manager, Dún Laoghaire/Rathdown
21	Local Authority Accommodation Manager, Dublin City Council
22	Administrative Officer, Housing Section, Kildare County Council
23	Housing Welfare Officer, Longford County Council
24	Local Authority Strategic Policy Committee Member, Clare County Council

Total received	Name of organisation or individuals who made submission
25	Local Authority Chief Executive (CE) or Director of Housing, Kilkenny County Council
26	Local Authority CE or Director of Housing, Carlow County Council
27	Local Authority CE or Director of Housing, Tipperary County Council
28	Local Authority Senior Executive Officer, Housing Directorate with responsibility for Traveller Accommodation Programme, Wicklow County Council
29	Cllr., Tipperary County Council
30	Local Authority Social Worker, Tipperary County Council
31	Dublin City Council Social Work Team



Appendix II: Survey of Local Authority Social Workers

1. **Thank you for completing this online survey. If you would be interested to participate in a follow-up interview for this research study please provide your email address in the box below. Please note that the details provided will only be accessed by the UCD research team for initial contact purposes. Participant details will be anonymised and it will not be possible to identify individuals or their views in the final report.**

2. **What is your gender?**
   Male
   Female
   Other

3. **In which local authority do you work?**
   (drop down menu provided listing all local authorities)

4. **Who do you report to in your local authority?**

5. **Do you have a formal job description?**
   Yes/No
   Don't know

6. **How well do the duties you perform match your formal job description?**
   – N/A, I have no formal job description
   – 100% match
   – 70% match
   – 40% match
   – 10% match
   – Does not match at all

7. **If applicable, briefly explain the key differences between your formal job description and the duties you perform?**

8. **Please indicate your highest level of academic achievement?**
   - Leaving certificate
   - Undergraduate certificate/diploma
   - Undergraduate degree (such as BA. BSocSc)
   - Postgraduate diploma
   - Master's degree (such as MA, MSW)
   - PhD or other doctoral degree

9. **Are you on the CORU register of social workers?**
   Yes/No
   N/A
   Please state your job title and local authority grade in the box below

10. **How many years have you worked in your current position?**
    - 1-5
    - 5-10
    - 10-15
    - 15-20
    - 20+

11. **What, if any, social work experience have you had prior to your current position?**

12. **Have you been promoted since taking a position with your current employer?**
    Yes/No
    If yes, please state previous grade (including job title) and the promotion grade

13. **How would you rate your access to training and continuing professional development?**
    - Highly sufficient
    - Mildly sufficient
    - Sufficient
    - Quite sufficient
    - Extremely sufficient

    Briefly explain why

14. **On average what percentage of your week do you spend working with Travellers?**
(percentage slider scale from 0 to 100 inserted here)

15. **Of the time you spend working with Travellers, please rank how much time is devoted to each of the groups and tasks listed below from most (7) to least (1) time?**
(option for N/A also provided in survey)
- Travellers who are residents of standard local authority housing
- Travellers who are residents of local authority halting sites and group housing schemes
- Travellers living in private rented accommodation
- Administration work with Travellers (including applicants for local authority accommodation)
- Travellers who are homeless
- Support for Traveller accommodation policy-making (eg. drafting Traveller accommodation policy, etc.)
- Managing social work staff in relation to Traveller cases

16. **If you do not spend 100% of your week working with Travellers on accommodation related issues, from the list below please rank from most (6) to least (1) what the remainder of your work time is devoted to?**
(option for N/A also provided in survey)
- Social work with local authority tenants who are not Travellers
- Social work with applicants for social housing who are not Travellers
- Social work with homeless people (not including the Traveller community)
- Administrative work (not related to Traveller community)
- Drafting policies not related to Travellers
- Management of staff who do not work with Travellers

17. **In your current work, what tasks do you carry out which a) require social work skills and b) do not require social work skills?**

18. **What are the most rewarding aspects of your work supporting Travellers?**

19. **What are the most challenging aspects of your work supporting Travellers?**

20. **Are there other support workers for Travellers employed in your workplace?**
Yes/No
If yes, please list how many, including their job title and grade.

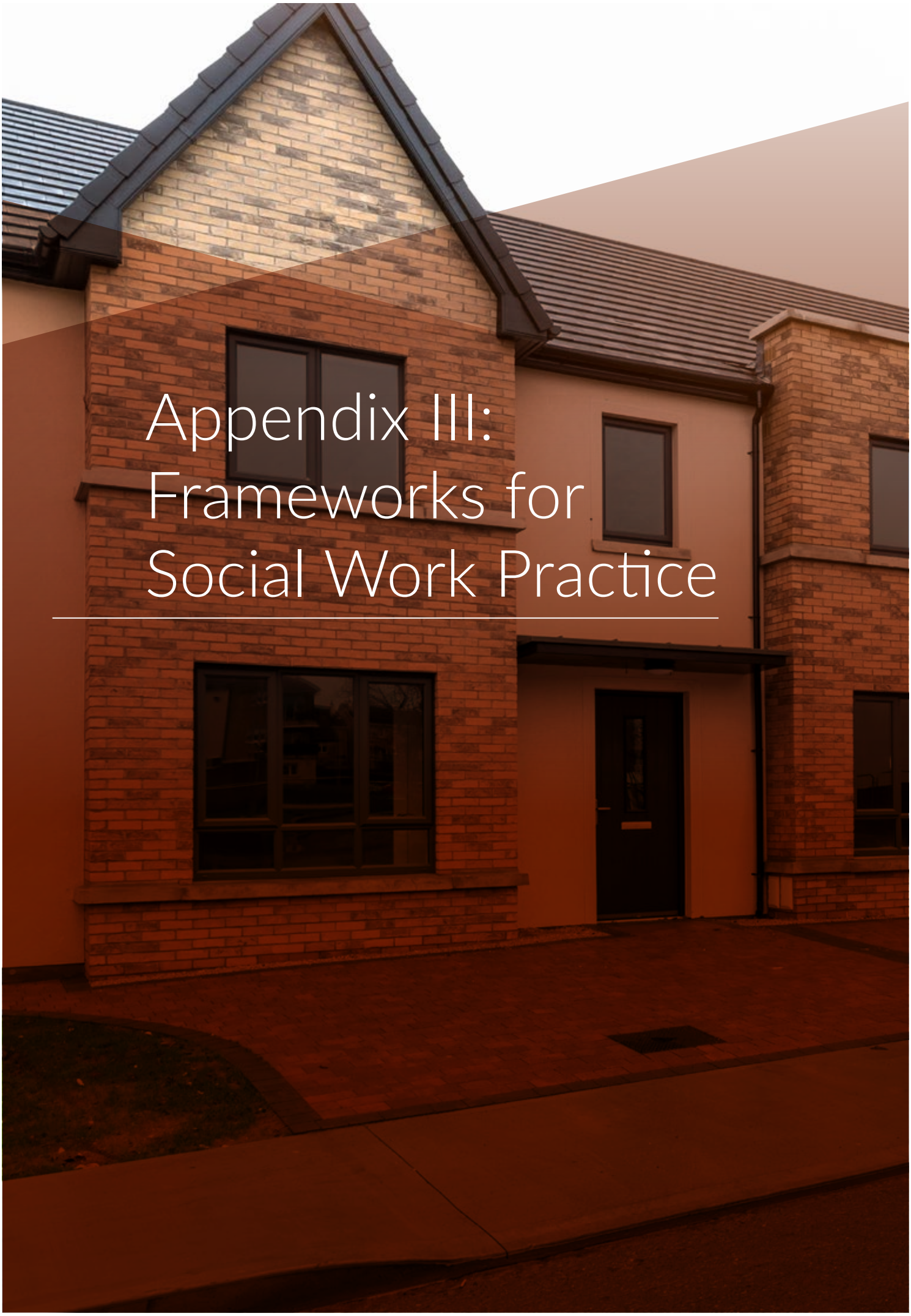
21. What is your racial or ethnic origin?

- Irish
- Irish Traveller
- Any other White background
- African
- Any other Black background
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background
- Other (including mixed background)

22. What is your age group?

- 20-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-66

Thank you for completing this survey.



Appendix III: Frameworks for Social Work Practice

Professional organisations regularly create frameworks to inform issues of policy, practice and education. They have become increasingly used by government and social work agencies, particularly in jurisdictions where the profession is regulated by the state or other authorities. Such frameworks tend to perform a number of functions, for example in establishing standards of practice as described in terms of knowledge, values and skills. These tend to balance between issues of accountability and development; practitioners are required to adhere to agreed standards, capabilities or performance criteria but this is conditional upon supports and developmental opportunities provided by employers. It is often the case that frameworks are envisaged and constructed through stakeholder discussions involving government departments, employers, professional bodies, service users and carers/supporters (www.professionalstandards.org.uk/docs/default-source/publications/research-paper/literature-review-roles-and-issues-within-the-social-work-profession-in-england-2015.pdf)

Examples

1. College of Social Work (England)
   www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw_115640-9_0.pdf
2. Standards Guidance (Social Work England)
   www.socialworkengland.org.uk/standards/standards-guidance
3. Professional Capabilities Framework (England)
   www.basw.co.uk/social-work-training/professional-capabilities-framework-pcf
4. Local Government Framework (England)
   www.local.gov.uk/standard-1-strong-and-clear-social-work-framework
5. Social Care Institute for Excellence (Northern Ireland)
   www.scie.org.uk/northern-ireland/reflections
6. Role of the registered social worker in statutory interventions: guidance for local authorities (Scotland)
   www.gov.scot/publications/role-registered-social-worker-statutory-interventions-guidance-local-authorities/pages/2

An Ghníomhaireacht Tithíochta
The Housing Agency

Housing Agency
53 Mount Street Upper
Dublin, D02 KT73

(01) 656 4100
info@housingagency.ie
housingagency.ie