

**EVALUATION OF TRAVELLER
GROUPED HOUSING**

2005

**Housing
Executive**

C O N T E N T S

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FOREWORD

In early 1999 Lord Dubs, the then Department of Environment (NI) Minister, asked the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to take forward four pilot Group Housing Schemes for Traveller families in response to the Working Party report on Travellers Accommodation Needs.

I am pleased to report that in addition to the successful completion of the schemes in Omagh and Magherafelt, which were developed by Fold Housing Association, Clanmil Housing Association has commenced the scheme at Glen Road, Belfast. I look forward to the successful completion of this scheme and the commencement and successful completion of the proposed scheme at Monagh Road, Belfast which is currently at pre-development stage.

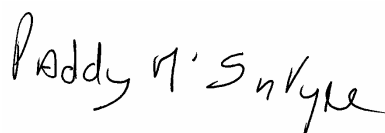
In 2002 the Housing Executive, in response to a recommendation contained in the Final Report of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers, carried out a comprehensive strategic needs assessment of the accommodation requirements of Travellers. As a first step in undertaking this needs assessment, the Housing Executive assembled a steering group to oversee the project.

This group, with representatives from Traveller Movement (NI), Equality Commission, N.I. Federation of Housing Associations, OFM/DFM, Local Government Partnership on Traveller Issues and Department for Social Development, put forward a number of recommendations following the completion of the needs assessment.

One of the recommendations was that the Housing Executive should carry out an evaluation of the 4 pilot schemes to determine best practice in respect of the delivery of future schemes.

I am pleased to present the findings and recommendations of this evaluation that has been carried out with the cooperation of Traveller families and partner agencies involved in the group housing process. I would like to take this opportunity to thank those who have contributed to the project and in particular the Traveller families on the four sites who facilitated the field work.

The information contained in the document will be used to inform the delivery of future schemes to address the inadequate living conditions of many Traveller families in society. There is still a long way to go in respect of meeting the accommodation needs of Travellers but I remain confident that through partnership working the various statutory and voluntary organisations will continue to tackle social disadvantage within the Traveller community.



Paddy McIntyre
Chief Executive

Pilot Group Housing Schemes in Northern Ireland – Evaluation 2004

BACKGROUND TO THE EVALUATION

The concept of group housing as an accommodation option for Travellers was initially proposed in 1998 by Lord Dubs, the then Department of Environment (NI) Minister, following the Working Party Report on Travellers Accommodation Needs. The Working Party, comprising representatives of a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies and Traveller support groups, met to discuss the accommodation needs of Travellers for the next 10 years and to consider the extent to which these needs were being met under the existing arrangements.

Following public consultation on this report, there was no support for the continuation of existing arrangements for Travellers, or for giving the task to District Councils. Many of the respondents to the consultation exercise held the view that one agency should be responsible for the provision of Traveller accommodation in Northern Ireland.

As part of the Government initiative 'Promoting Social Inclusion', Direct Rule Ministers in Northern Ireland then set up a Working Group with representatives of a wide range of statutory and voluntary agencies and Traveller support groups to consider difficulties which Travellers face and identify ways to tackle them. Promoting Social Inclusion (PSI) is a special initiative which seeks to develop a co-ordinated and multi-agency approach to tackling the problems of those groups and areas most at risk of social exclusion.

The Working Group report covered important issues such as Traveller accommodation, health, education, training and policing and in its report set out a number of recommendations.

The Government's response to the PSI Working Group Report on Travellers made specific recommendations in respect of future accommodation schemes for Travellers, including the following:

- preferences of extended family groups should be taken into account in planning who is to be accommodated in the schemes;
- close consultation with and participation of Traveller families is needed in terms of the specific design and layout of proposed accommodation, group housing and other accommodation schemes;

- accommodation should contain play and community facilities where needed;
- designs should incorporate space for economic activity alongside living areas if required.

The Government accepted the argument in favour of one strategic agency to deal with Traveller accommodation and concluded that the Housing Executive, as the comprehensive regional housing authority, was best placed for the role. It was envisaged that the provision of accommodation would be administered through the normal Housing Executive/Housing Association funding, programming and selection procedures.

To put the concept of group housing in context, the definition of this type of accommodation according to the DoE (1999) New Policy on Accommodation for Travellers is:

‘...residential housing developments with additional facilities and amenities specifically designed to accommodate extended families of Travellers on a permanent basis’.

PILOT GROUP HOUSING SCHEMES

As an interim step the Minister, Lord Dubs, announced early in 1999 that the Housing Executive would carry out four pilot group housing schemes, two in the Belfast area and two in rural areas (Omagh and Toome). Evaluation of these pilot schemes was a recommendation of the Housing Executive’s 2002 Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment. The objectives of this evaluation were:

- to investigate the process of providing group housing for Travellers, from commencement to completion and;
- to highlight measures of good practice for the development and delivery of future schemes.

HOUSING ORDER (NI) 2003

In December 2003, following the introduction of the new Housing Order (NI), the Housing Executive assumed new responsibilities for accommodating the Traveller community. The new Housing Order stated that ownership and responsibility for management of all District Council owned serviced sites for the Traveller community would transfer to the Housing Executive. Since 1st December 2003 local District Offices have been responsible for serviced sites in their areas.

PROGRESS TO DATE

At the time of writing (October 2004), construction has been completed on two rural group housing schemes for two extended Traveller families situated in Omagh (Tattykeel Cottages) and Toome (Hillhead Cottages). Construction work is under way on Phase 1 of the 16 dwellings for compatible Traveller families living on a 'co-operated site'¹ in West Belfast (Glen Road). Completion of Phase 1 is programmed for February 2005. However, construction work has still not started for those Traveller families living on the other West Belfast co-operated site (Monagh Bypass), although it is expected to begin during the current financial year (2004-05). Future schemes are planned for Traveller families living in Coalisland and Derry.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was to be based on the views of Travellers now living in the two completed, rural group housing schemes and those still living in the two Belfast 'co-operated sites' where group housing schemes have been proposed. In addition, a number of primary and secondary partners involved in the group housing process were invited to take part, along with a number of other organisations peripheral to the process.

Due to the nature of this project, it was decided that face to face interviews were required as it was envisaged that certain key groups would not attend focus groups. The Housing Executive's Research Unit, in consultation with the Traveller Project Team designed semi-structured questionnaires to gather qualitative information from a range of primary and secondary partners in the process, as well as other interested parties.

Areas to be covered in the research included:

- the involvement of partners in the process and how they communicated with each other;
- the consultation process;
- the obstacles and difficulties that had caused delay;
- interviewees' views on how to accelerate the process;
- perceptions of the partners' overall commitment to the delivery of group housing;
- assessment of pre-tenancy advice and assistance;
- Traveller families living in the completed schemes views on whether the aims of group housing and their accommodation needs had been met.

¹ See Glossary of Terms – p.48

Face to face interviews were carried out with the following people/organisations during January/February 2004:

- Omagh group housing residents
- Toome group housing residents
- Glen Road Traveller site residents
- Monagh Bypass Traveller site residents
- Housing Executive Traveller Project Team
- Department for Social Development (Housing Policy Branch)
- Fold Housing Association
- Ark Housing Association
- Clanmil Housing Association
- Traveller Movement (NI)
- Belfast Travellers Support Group
- Lee Hestia Association
- Belfast City Council
- Magherafelt District Council
- McCourt Construction

A full list of organisations who took part in the evaluation is in Appendix 1.

Interviews were taped and an abridged transcript of each interview underwent thematic content analysis². In some sections of the report, interviewees' comments are presented in bold italics to emphasise their views on key issues.

REPORT STRUCTURE

The evaluation report is structured in two sections: Section A deals with the rural and Section B with the Belfast schemes. A glossary of terms is included in the Appendix 2. The following themes are common to both sections:

- Background
- The partnership
- Involvement in the group housing process
- Communication
- The consultation process
- Obstacles and difficulties
- Commitment to group housing for Travellers
- Pre-tenancy advice
- Further comments

One additional theme is included in the rural section – Culturally appropriate accommodation.

² See Glossary of Terms – p.48

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PARTNERSHIP

- Partnership arrangements in both the rural and the Belfast schemes consisted of a number of primary and secondary partners. Primary partners included the Housing Executive, Department for Social Development and a Housing Association chosen to deliver the schemes. Secondary partners included the Traveller families, Lee Hestia Association and the Traveller Movement (NI).

COMMUNICATION

- Generally, interviewees found communication between all partners in the process to be very good. However, in the Belfast schemes some interviewees thought communication between some of the partners could be improved.

CONSULTATION

- Consultation during the process was regarded as more than adequate for the rural schemes and adequate for the Belfast schemes. Operational and personnel problems encountered by Lee Hestia, the organisation contracted to carry out the consultation, were seen as detrimental to the quality of the consultation provided.

OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

- The rural schemes have been completed and were, at the time of this evaluation (early 2004), being managed on a live basis. Delays to the group housing process occurred in the rural schemes, most notably in the Toome scheme due to issues of land acquisition and in the Omagh scheme, the ownership of horses.
- At the time of the evaluation only one of the Belfast schemes (Glen Road) had progressed to the construction stage. The other Belfast scheme (Monagh Bypass) had completed the planning and consultation stages. North and West Housing Ltd was at an advanced stage of negotiations with the landowner over acquisition of the land.
- Delays had occurred in both Belfast schemes due to the decision of Ark Housing Association to withdraw from the group housing process.
- Further delays had occurred due to some Traveller families' requests to make late design amendments which subsequently were changed back to the original design.

- Issues concerning land acquisition in both Belfast schemes were viewed as the main obstacles to progress.

COMMITMENT

- Overall, interviewees agreed that all primary and secondary partners in the four pilot schemes had shown commitment to bringing the schemes to completion or to assisting the implementation of group housing.

PRE-TENANCY ADVICE

- Most interviewees were very positive about the outcome of pre-tenancy awareness and advice sessions in the rural schemes and all interviewees thought that delivery of these sessions would be a worthwhile exercise for the Belfast schemes.

CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION

- Interviewees involved with the rural schemes thought that the aim of group housing (i.e. to provide culturally appropriate accommodation) had been met fully. However, in Omagh there had been problems with the neighbouring settled community due to the Traveller family's ownership of horses.

SECTION A: THE RURAL SCHEMES

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The rural schemes are situated in Omagh District Council (Tattykeel Cottages near Omagh) and Magherafelt District Council (Hillhead Cottages near Toome). The Omagh scheme consists of eight dwellings and a number of non-housing facilities including stables, a fenced paddock, garages and a metal work shop for one extended Traveller family group who have been resident in the area for many years.
- 1.2 The Toome scheme consists of five dwellings and one serviced hard standing (with amenities for a caravan) for one extended Traveller family who have also been long established in the area.
- 1.3 The Traveller families in both schemes had been living in District Council owned serviced sites³ prior to the start of group housing construction on these sites. During the construction works the families decanted to other serviced areas of these sites to allow work to progress.
- 1.4 Construction of the Omagh scheme began officially in February 2001 and the housing element was completed in December 2001. The non-housing elements of this scheme were completed six months later. The reasons for the delay are explored later in the report.
- 1.5 The Toome scheme went on site in November 2001 and was completed in August 2002. In contrast to the Omagh scheme, once it had begun, the Toome scheme progressed without any significant delay.

2.0 THE PARTNERSHIP

- 2.1 The partnership arrangements in the rural schemes comprised several statutory and voluntary agencies and Travellers support groups. The primary partners responsible for the delivery of the rural group housing schemes were the Housing Executive, the Department for Social Development (DSD) and the landlord provider⁴, FOLD Housing Association.

³ See Glossary of Terms – p.48

⁴ See Glossary of Terms – p.48

2.2 In addition, a number of secondary partners assisted with the implementation of group housing and these comprised: Traveller families living in Omagh and Toome; Lee Hestia Association, which is an established provider of accommodation and support services working to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals, families and communities in Northern Ireland; Traveller Movement (NI) which is an umbrella group comprising Travellers, Traveller support groups and statutory and voluntary organisations, together supporting and co-ordinating work with Travellers and advocating Travellers' rights.

3.0 INVOLVEMENT IN THE GROUP HOUSING PROCESS

3.1 *The Housing Executive*

The Housing Executive set up a dedicated Traveller Project Team to provide a strategic context for the progression of the pilot group housing schemes. The remit of the project team included the assessment of the needs of the specific families, agreement of the housing mix of compatible Traveller families, consultation on the types of accommodation desired and consideration of requirements for supporting infrastructure.

3.2 A considerable amount of time was dedicated specifically to the scheme design stage. With the Omagh scheme (up to four days per week on site or in the office) there were ongoing issues to be resolved in relation to aspects of scheme design and the ownership of horses.

3.3 *The Department for Social Development (Housing Policy Branch)*

The DSD Housing Policy Branch was not directly involved in the planning/design or consultation stages of the scheme but was kept abreast of what was included in the plans. The DSD interviewee also attended a number of meetings that were set up to discuss issues concerning the cost of the schemes and the eligibility for funding. Other DSD technical staff also attended these meetings.

3.4 The DSD was responsible for inviting suitable housing associations to express an interest in providing group housing schemes and was ultimately responsible for the selection process. It was difficult for the DSD interviewee to estimate how much time was spent on the actual development of the group housing projects as the Department's role was mainly in the development and application of policies behind the group housing concept.

3.5 *FOLD Housing Association*

FOLD Housing Association became involved in the group housing process after consultation with the Traveller families and after the Housing Executive had agreed the scheme design brief. The DSD invited FOLD Housing Association to construct and manage the two rural group housing schemes. Initially, FOLD's Development Team was responsible for the development of the two group housing schemes. As the

schemes reached completion FOLD's Care Services Directorate played a more prominent role in the day to day management of the schemes.

3.6 *Traveller families*

The Traveller families in Omagh and Toome received weekly visits from the Lee Hestia consultation worker. The families' input into the layout and design of the schemes, provision of supporting infrastructure, selecting and agreeing compatible families and the setting of certain deadlines was vital.

3.7 *Lee Hestia Association*

In 1999 the Housing Executive commissioned Lee Hestia Association to carry out the consultation exercise with the Traveller families on the four proposed group housing scheme sites. Lee Hestia Association has extensive experience in meeting the needs of people who may feel excluded from statutory services and who may present unusual challenges concerning their accommodation and support needs. Lee Hestia consulted weekly with the Traveller families about the design and layout of the scheme, the living arrangements of compatible families and in some cases provided a support/advocacy service for the families in their dealings with other organisations.

3.8 *Traveller Movement Northern Ireland*

Traveller Movement Northern Ireland (TMNI) was brought into the partnership due to its extensive experience in dealing with Traveller families across Northern Ireland and for its commitment to working in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies in the field of accommodation.

4.0 COMMUNICATION

4.1 Interviewees were asked for their views on communication between the various partners in the group housing process. Generally, the interviewees found communication to be very good between all primary and secondary partners.

4.2 The Housing Executive had formulated a Communication Plan to engage with various statutory, voluntary and community groups interested in the group housing process. The aim of the Communication Plan was to raise awareness of Traveller issues and to

promote the concept of group housing and its benefits, not only to the Traveller families but to the wider community.

- 4.3 The Communication Plan included meetings between the Housing Executive and the other partners on an ad hoc basis at critical dates or when problems arose:

‘We established a good rapport; a system whereby we met on a regular basis to look at issues that were emerging from the two schemes and explored possible solutions to those jointly.’

- 4.4 Both the partners and the Travellers thought communication between the partners and the Traveller families was very good. Lee Hestia Association co-ordinated the communication/feedback between the Traveller families and the Housing Executive’s Traveller Project Team. This ‘supported’ arrangement was viewed as very beneficial for most of the process. However, it is accepted by most primary and secondary partners that the service provided by Lee Hestia Association faltered during the latter stages of the process.

- 4.5 While communication was seen as generally very good, some interviewees highlighted a number of areas for improvement. It was the opinion of a small number of interviewees that one of the drawbacks of partnership working was the large number of people from different agencies and backgrounds involved in progressing the schemes:

‘...with so many organisations involved it left the Travellers not quite sure who could make the final decision.’

- 4.6 In addition, one interviewee felt that while communication was good there was still some room for improvement in terms of the language used by organisations dealing with the Traveller families. This person felt that the primary partner organisations involved in the process tend to use ‘work related jargon that can at times sound alien to a Traveller.’ This interviewee felt that this led to misunderstandings between Traveller families in Omagh and the primary partner organisations in terms of what was on offer.

‘Partners should be very clear and concise in what is a promise and what is a maybe.’

5.0 THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

5.1 Interviewees were asked for their views on the consultation stage of the process, whether they thought it was adequate and how it could be improved.

5.2 Given the circumstances of the Traveller families, their physical isolation, marginalisation and distance from services and suspicion of government agencies, it was agreed that the consultation role should be given to an organisation with experience in assisting and supporting vulnerable or isolated communities. To this end, Lee Hestia Association was regarded as best suited to fill this role.

5.3 The majority of interviewees agreed that consultation in the rural schemes was more than adequate, but some highlighted areas for improvement. One interviewee who was directly involved in the consultation process said the early stages of the consultation were very difficult, because visits to the families had to be made at their isolated rural locations and in some cases this was considered to be quite intimidating. To remedy this in future schemes, this interviewee suggested it was crucial for familiar faces to be on both sides (i.e. Traveller and consulting organisation) to enable a trusting relationship to be built up between the Travellers and whoever is doing the consultation. This view is echoed by the opinion of one of the Travellers residing in a group housing scheme:

‘If you are doing any more of these schemes you should get people like the Traveller Movement to deal with the Travellers rather than someone from an office in a suit who just ticks boxes and never comes back again.’

5.4 Another interviewee thought that the intention behind the extensive consultation was good but felt that the level of consultation was greater than what would normally be the case for a general new build housing scheme.

5.5 Another interviewee furthered the notion of building relationships with the Traveller families. This person suggested that housing associations should become involved earlier, at the scheme initiation stage, in order to develop the landlord-tenant relationship:

‘...more face to face contact at that point and a niche within the wider consultation process. That way we could maybe avoid some of the issues that we are now still dealing with.’

- 5.6 Traveller families in both schemes were confused about the role of Lee Hestia Association. This is largely due to the fact that, when the Housing Executive’s consultation period ended in the rural schemes, FOLD Housing Association retained Lee Hestia in a support role. At this point, FOLD entered into a joint management arrangement with Lee Hestia Association whereby they would assist with their day to day housing management functions. The Traveller families, therefore, were very satisfied with Lee Hestia during the consultation process, but their views became increasingly negative after the schemes had been completed and started to be managed on a ‘live’ basis. In addition, the confusion about the dual roles of Lee Hestia was compounded further by this organisation’s turnover in personnel throughout the consultation process.

6.0 OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

- 6.1 The interviewees were asked in detail about the main obstacles or difficulties that had delayed the commencement of the rural schemes and how, if possible, they thought these could have been overcome.
- 6.2 In Toome, the only significant delay had been concerning land acquisition from a private vendor who disagreed with the Valuation and Land Agency's original valuation of the land. The situation was eventually resolved but it delayed the building work by approximately six months. However, once construction on this scheme started it progressed to completion even quicker than the Omagh scheme.
- 6.3 In Omagh, land acquisition was not a problem as Omagh District Council owned the land, which was transferred without difficulty. Most interviewees agreed that scheme approval was the first stumbling block. As this was the first of the pilot schemes to commence it was also the first to encounter problems with funding. The Department for Social Development had indicated initially that group housing schemes would receive 100% funding from the Department. However, when it came to approving the scheme design, including stables, workshop and paddock area, the Department then clarified their position by advising that only the housing elements of the scheme were eligible for 100% funding. The funding for the non-housing elements was eventually borne solely by FOLD Housing Association, who as a result incurred additional costs of over £62,000 more than the Total Cost Indicator (TCI)⁵. The non-housing elements of the scheme in Toome incurred additional costs of over £59,000 more than TCI.
- 6.4 Another obstacle in the Omagh scheme cited by the majority of interviewees was the issue of the keeping, husbandry and management of horses. The Traveller family in Omagh considered provision of facilities for horses as an essential element and integral to the development of the group housing scheme. Tattykeel Cottages is the only social housing scheme in the UK with add-on facilities such as stables. Numerous interviewees held the view that the owners of the horses, the Omagh Traveller families, have historically refused to accept responsibility for these horses and have allowed them to trespass on neighbouring land for grazing. In response, the owner of this land has taken FOLD through two court hearings and served FOLD with a civil bill to stop the building of the stables. The work on the stables was eventually

⁵ See Glossary of Terms – P.48

completed following assurances about the keeping of the horses from the Traveller families but the issue of trespassing is ongoing and FOLD is still involved in legal proceedings.

6.5 In addition, some interviewees said that there had been periodic hold ups to the building work in Omagh due to the Traveller families preventing construction progressing because design issues had not been resolved to their satisfaction. A number of partners commended the intervention of the Traveller Movement during these impasses.

6.6 *Accelerating the process*

The Traveller families in both rural schemes believed that nothing could be done to accelerate the process; that planning, scheme design, consultation, land acquisition and the associated red tape are facets of all new build schemes. The other interviewees' views on accelerating the process were mixed.

6.7 One interviewee maintained that to accelerate the process it would be essential to have the earliest possible involvement of the landlord to develop the landlord-tenant relationship. This interviewee believed this would help overcome some of the housing management issues that the landlord is still (at the time of this evaluation – early 2004) attempting to resolve with some of the Traveller families, for example in relation to eligible repairs.

6.8 Another interviewee thought completion times could be accelerated if it was made clear to the Travellers in future schemes that there were clear boundaries to the building contract and that major changes cannot be made to the contract once the construction work has started, as was the case in Omagh.

6.9 Further to this, a number of interviewees thought the process could have been accelerated if everybody had been clear on the sources of funding and what elements the funding would cover. They thought that the concept of group housing could be 'better packaged', so that no one would be in any doubt about what the scheme would entail and what their responsibilities would be.

7.0 COMMITMENT TO GROUP HOUSING FOR TRAVELLERS

Interviewees were asked if they thought the primary partner agencies had shown commitment to bringing the Omagh and Toome schemes to completion. Where the partner agency was a secondary partner, interviewees were asked if they thought that agency had been committed to assisting the primary partners, where necessary, with the implementation of the schemes. In all cases, the interviewee was asked to rate the partner's commitment on a scale of 1 to 5.

7.1 Housing Executive

The vast majority of interviewees agreed that the Housing Executive had shown commitment. Some cited the fact that the Housing Executive had created a dedicated Traveller Project Team to take the schemes forward as a sure sign of their commitment. The majority of interviewees awarded the Housing Executive 5 out of 5 for commitment.

7.2 Department for Social Development

While a slight majority of interviewees said that they had had no contact whatsoever with the Department for Social Development, most interviewees were able to give an opinion on their commitment. One interviewee said that the fact the DSD had sponsored the new policy in relation to Travellers' accommodation well in advance of the 2003 Housing Order was indicative of their commitment. The majority of interviewees awarded the DSD 4 out of 5 for commitment.

7.3 FOLD Housing Association

The majority of interviewees thought that FOLD had shown commitment to the concept of group housing for Travellers and in bringing their schemes to completion. A number of interviewees said this was clearly demonstrated by their financial commitment to the projects and the fact that they have defended their tenants and their right to live at Tattykeel through two court cases and an ongoing legal dispute over the trespass of Traveller horses. All interviewees awarded FOLD 5 out of 5 for their commitment.

7.4 *Lee Hestia Association*

Several interviewees said that Lee Hestia Association had significant operational difficulties towards the end of the rural group housing process but they nevertheless achieved a satisfactory rating from other interviewees involved in the rural schemes.

- 7.4.1 During the consultation process for the rural schemes, Lee Hestia had several changes of personnel that resulted in three separate consultation workers being involved. The situation was further complicated at the latter stages of development when Lee Hestia's consultation worker was employed by FOLD Housing Association as part of a joint management arrangement. In this capacity Lee Hestia assisted with the day to day running of the tenanted schemes. It was the view of the majority of interviewees, Traveller families included, that the third consultation worker/joint management support worker did not have the necessary training or support to carry out the job effectively and there may even have been a clash of personalities with some of the Traveller families. However, despite Lee Hestia Association's difficulties regarding their turnover of staff, the majority of interviewees awarded Lee Hestia 4 out of 5 as they were satisfied with their overall performance and their commitment to assisting the implementation of group housing:

'Their operational performance was the bone of contention...I don't think that negated their overall commitment.'

7.5 *Traveller Movement Northern Ireland*

Several of the partners regarded Traveller Movement Northern Ireland (TMNI) as a key agency in terms of their influence within the group housing process. In addition, all interviewees commended their dedication and commitment to the implementation of group housing for Travellers in general. TMNI recognised the difficulties faced by the Housing Executive and FOLD Housing Association, especially in Omagh where there had been recurrent problems over scheme design and horses trespassing. Several interviewees said that TMNI acted as mediators and facilitators at times of crisis within the process and even went so far as to temporarily co-opt one of their staff to Lee Hestia Association when the latter organisation was experiencing operational difficulties. The majority of interviewees awarded TMNI 5 out of 5 for commitment to assisting the implementation of group housing.

'TMNI stepped into the breach on a number of occasions...they assisted the negotiation process and in some cases exceeded their brief in trying to help us.'

7.6 *Traveller Families*

Interviewees were asked if they thought the Traveller families were committed to assisting the implementation of the scheme. As each scheme is home to separate families, responses from the interviewees are reported separately.

7.7 *Toome*

All interviewees considered the Traveller families in Toome to be fully committed to assisting the delivery of the group housing scheme in their locality. As noted previously, this scheme had very few problems from commencement to completion of construction and the Traveller families have adapted well to the built environment. Several interviewees highlighted the tidy appearance of this new build scheme two years after completion. The fact that it was shortlisted for a National Housing Award in 2003 is proof of the success of this scheme and demonstrates the dedication and commitment of the Traveller families living there to group housing as a concept. All interviewees awarded the Toome Travellers 5 out of 5 for commitment to assisting the implementation of group housing

7.8 *Omagh*

A slight majority of interviewees said they thought the Omagh Traveller families were committed to assisting the implementation of group housing. While more than half of interviewees thought the Traveller families were fully committed in terms of their input into the layout, house type, supporting infrastructure and even in the creation of certain deadlines, others were more critical, citing the sometimes confrontational positions adopted by the Omagh Travellers families. This criticism related to the Traveller families' frequent demand for changes when the scheme was under construction and their threats to stop building work if these issues were not resolved to their satisfaction.

7.8.1 One interviewee said that some of the problems were the result of a personality clash between the Traveller families and some individuals involved in the process.

'Personalities came into it and not every person gelled or communicated well with the Omagh Travellers.'

The majority of interviewees awarded the Omagh Travellers 3 out of 5 for their commitment to assisting the implementation of group housing.

8.0 PRE-TENANCY ADVICE

- 8.1 Interviewees were asked whether they thought the Travellers involved in the two completed rural schemes had received adequate pre-tenancy advice and assistance. This question was asked to assess whether the pre-tenancy training and advice sessions provided by the Housing Executive and Lee Hestia had been worthwhile and to highlight areas for improvement in any future sessions. These sessions had been designed and planned following consultation with the families on the training required.
- 8.2 Not all interviewees were able to answer this question as some had not been as involved in the process as others. All interviewees who did answer this question were positive about the outcome of the pre-tenancy training and advice sessions. However, some suggested that the landlord should be involved in future sessions from the earliest stage, to discuss issues such as the tenant handbook, the tenancy agreement and repairs procedures and responsibilities. All Traveller families interviewed were very positive about the advice sessions.

'It was a benefit to us. They told us all about Income Support and Housing Benefit and how to fill in the forms. People like us who was never in a house before wouldn't know anything about that.'

9.0 CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION

- 9.1 Interviewees were asked if they thought the aim of group housing, i.e. to provide culturally appropriate accommodation for Travellers, had been met. All interviewees thought the aim had been met fully, especially in the scheme in Toome, although some interviewees thought the scheme in Omagh had worsened relations with the settled community nearby, due to the issue of horses trespassing on nearby land.
- 9.2 Some interviewees voiced their concerns about the provision of stables for the Omagh Traveller families, despite objections from local residents about stables before construction had started. Some interviewees claimed the provision of stables has consolidated the problem of horses trespassing on nearby land rather than removed it. FOLD is still involved in legal proceedings regarding these horses.
- 9.3 One interviewee raised the issue of ‘heightened expectations’ of future group housing schemes. This interviewee had concerns that the original group housing schemes were being designed and constructed to a standard and an ideal which might not be achievable in the future. The high costs associated with the pilot schemes had already given cause for concern and could impact on the priority awarded to future Traveller schemes because of the constraints within the Housing Budget and the Social Housing New Build Programme.
- 9.4 The Traveller families in both schemes responded very positively to the question of whether the aims of group housing had been met and they reported noticeable improvements to their standards of living. The main improvements cited by both families were in terms of security, comfort, heating, electricity and sanitation:

‘We’ve always lived here and now we’re set here. We don’t have anybody coming in and telling us what to do. I’ve no complaints about the scheme. We have all the space that we need. We have the comfort thing as well.’

10.0 FURTHER COMMENTS

10.1 All interviewees had the opportunity to raise issues of concern to them about the development or delivery of the schemes.

10.2 *Funding*

The main issue raised by interviewees was about funding for non-housing elements, especially in relation to the Omagh scheme.

10.3 This was a major obstacle at the time as there had been an initial understanding that the project costs would be funded entirely by the Department. As noted previously, this was not the case and the costs of the non-housing elements were subsequently borne by FOLD Housing Association.

10.4 The major partners in the group housing process (NIHE, DSD, Housing Associations) agree that, if future schemes are to include additional, non-housing facilities, a combined funding package from all the statutory bodies will be necessary. One interviewee expressed concerns about the Department's Total Cost Indicator (TCI). This interviewee thought that, unless TCI for group housing schemes increases, or the restrictions above TCI are lifted specifically for these type of schemes, there may be a risk that other potential landlords will not consider group housing for Travellers to be economically viable.

'They need to look again at TCI and waiving restrictions on some non-qualifying costs because there is no way that these dwellings and additional communal facilities can be favourably benchmarked against mainstream social housing.'

10.5 *Housing Management Issues*

One interviewee raised concerns about certain housing management issues which had caused problems after the group housing schemes had been completed and occupied. First, this interviewee thought the current allocations policy is restrictive as no landlord is exempt from allocating their properties through the Common Selection Scheme. In practice this meant that waiting list applicants for the completed group housing schemes could not be recorded as 'offered and accepted' because the group housing properties were not available for general allocation. The only way to resolve

this problem is for the Department to agree to a departure from the Common Selection Scheme and approve a generic local lettings policy⁶. In addition, this interviewee was concerned that individual group housing schemes would be provided to specific Traveller families in perpetuity, with relets only going to members of compatible Traveller families. This would be contrary to the rules of the Common Selection Scheme.

10.6 *Special Thanks*

Some interviewees took the opportunity to express their thanks to a number of partners in the group housing process. Traveller Movement Northern Ireland were singled out for special praise for their assistance in negotiating with Travellers during sensitive and critical periods of the process, for their understanding of the difficulties faced by Lee Hestia Association and subsequent co-opting of staff to help overcome these difficulties.

McCourt Contractors were commended, not only for the quality of their workmanship, but also for the friendliness of their builders and their patience and tolerance in sometimes difficult and confrontational circumstances.

⁶ See Glossary of Terms – p.48

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

11.1 PARTNERSHIP

The consensus among all interviewees was that the primary partners had had a good, working partnership arrangement, which was complemented by the efforts of the secondary partners, notably Traveller Movement Northern Ireland who were indispensable during some difficult periods in the process and in many cases exceeded their brief to resolve problems.

11.2 COMMUNICATION

In general, interviewees found communication among the partner organisations and all the relevant parties in the process was very good. The Housing Executive's formulation of a communication plan at the outset was seen as an important foundation for partnership working with statutory and voluntary agencies.

11.3 CONSULTATION

The majority of interviewees regarded consultation during the process as more than adequate. Interviewees' opinions varied on how consultation might have been improved, ranging from the appointment of a Traveller-friendly person to carry out the exercise, to involving the landlord provider at an early stage in the process to incrementally build up relationships with prospective tenants.

11.3.1 The operational and personnel problems experienced by the appointed consultant, Lee Hestia Association, served more to frustrate the other partners than to impede progress. A positive development came from these difficulties, in that it forced the Housing Executive and FOLD Housing Association to take a more 'hands on' approach to the consultation and day-to-day running of the schemes, thus building up good relationships with Traveller families in the process.

11.4 OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

The rural schemes had proceeded without any significant delays. A slight delay (approximately six months) had occurred in Toome due to a problem with land acquisition from a private vendor. In Omagh there had been a series of delays; first, due to a misunderstanding over funding criteria for the non-housing elements of the scheme; second, the Traveller family's horses trespassing on nearby land had resulted

in the threat of an injunction, delaying the completion of the stables element of the scheme.

11.5 ACCELERATING THE PROCESS

There were mixed views on how to accelerate the process. Some interviewees thought the process could have been accelerated if the sources for funding had been clear and unambiguous from the start. Others thought that faster progress could have been made if the Travellers themselves were made fully aware of the clear boundaries to planning permission and building contracts, and that major changes to design and layout cannot be made once construction work has commenced. The consensus among the Traveller interviewees was that, while the length of the process is frustrating, there is no way to speed it up as the consultation, planning, scheme design and land acquisition phases are essential components of all new build schemes.

11.6 COMMITMENT

Although perceptions varied concerning levels of commitment from each partner organisation, overall interviewees agreed that all primary and secondary partners had shown generally high levels of commitment to bringing the schemes to completion or assisting the implementation of the schemes.

11.7 PRE-TENANCY ADVICE

Pre-tenancy advice and assistance sessions were offered to all Traveller families involved in the rural schemes. Interviewees were very positive about the outcome of these sessions and the Traveller families who attended the sessions thought they had benefited as a result.

11.8 CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE ACCOMMODATION

All interviewees thought the aim of group housing (i.e. to provide culturally appropriate accommodation) had been met fully in both rural schemes

11.8.1 Some thought, however, that in Omagh, relations had deteriorated with members of the settled community nearby because of the continuing trespass of Traveller horses on adjacent land. This situation is currently the subject of a court appeal.

11.8.2 Traveller families in both schemes reported noticeable improvements to their standards of living and social well being.

11.9 FURTHER COMMENTS

11.9.1 Some interviewees expressed concern about housing management and funding issues that are yet to be resolved by clear housing policy guidance.

SECTION B: THE BELFAST SCHEMES

1.0 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The two Belfast group housing schemes are situated in West Belfast on the sites of already occupied 'Co-operated sites'⁷, on the Glen Road and on the Monagh Bypass. The Traveller families in these areas have been resident in their current encampments for more than 30 years and 10 years respectively and are well established in the locality.
- 1.2 The consultation exercise carried out by Lee Hestia Association identified 16 families comprising two separate family groups in the Glen Road area and a further 16 families from four separate family groups were identified in the Monagh Bypass area.
- 1.3 Construction started on the Glen Road scheme in February 2004 on 16 dwellings but has yet to start in Monagh. Numerous issues have delayed the commencement of both schemes, the reasons for which will be examined separately for each scheme.

2.0 THE PARTNERSHIP

- 2.1 The partnership arrangements in the Belfast schemes were identical to those in the rural schemes, apart from the landlord provider. The primary partners responsible for the delivery of these group housing schemes were the Housing Executive and the Department for Social Development (DSD). The initial landlord provider for these schemes was Ark Housing Association; however, due to unforeseen circumstances, Ark decided not to proceed with the delivery of the Belfast schemes and the Department subsequently appointed a further two Housing Associations to take the schemes forward - Clanmil Housing Association (the Glen Road scheme) and North and West Housing Ltd (the Monagh scheme).
- 2.2 In addition, a number of secondary partners assisted with the implementation of group housing in Belfast. These included the Traveller families, Lee Hestia Association and the Traveller Movement (NI).

⁷ See Glossary of Terms – p.48

3.0 INVOLVEMENT IN THE GROUP HOUSING PROCESS

3.1 Housing Executive

As with the rural schemes, the Housing Executive, through its Traveller Project Team, provided the strategic context and led the development of the Belfast schemes. This included agreeing the housing mix of compatible Traveller families, consulting on the types of accommodation desired and considering requirements for supporting infrastructure.

3.2 The Traveller Project Team spent a substantial amount of time (at least once or twice a week on site or by telephone) on the Belfast schemes trying to resolve problems. These will be examined in more detail later. In addition, following the decision not to proceed with the services of Lee Hestia Association as the consultation agent from March 2003, the Housing Executive's Traveller Project Team has extended its role to include direct consultation with the Traveller families.

3.3 Department of Social Development

As with the rural schemes, the DSD was kept informed of planning and design arrangements but was not practically involved, instead concentrating on the development of policies behind the group housing concept and how these should be applied.

3.4 Ark Housing Association

As noted previously, Ark Housing Association was the first association to be involved in the initial development of the Belfast schemes. Ark and the Housing Executive worked together to formulate the submission and planning approval stages for both Belfast schemes. Ark was involved in negotiations with the Roads Service for the acquisition of land at the front of the Monagh site and with Belfast City Council for the land at the rear of the Glen Road site. Throughout this period, several interviewees reported that Ark had built up excellent relations with Traveller families in both schemes and there was a special mention for key personnel in their development team.

3.5 *Clanmil Housing Association (Glen Road)*

Clanmil became involved with the Glen Road scheme at the end of 2002 and due to the withdrawal of Ark they basically inherited a designed scheme. Apart from some minor changes to scheme design, Clanmil was mainly involved in land acquisition issues and negotiating with statutory bodies regarding funding.

3.6 *North and West Housing Ltd. (Monagh)*

Unfortunately, at the time interviews were being carried out in early 2004, North and West Housing Ltd felt that they had not been involved sufficiently in the process for long enough to take part in this evaluation.

3.7 *Traveller families*

The Traveller families in Glen Road and Monagh were consulted each week and had a vital input into the content, layout and design of the scheme, supporting infrastructure, selecting and agreeing compatible families and the setting of certain deadlines.

3.8 *Lee Hestia Association*

As with the rural schemes, the Housing Executive commissioned Lee Hestia Association to carry out the consultation exercise with Traveller families on the Belfast sites. Their role entailed weekly consultations with the Traveller families about the content, design and layout of the scheme, the living arrangements of compatible families and in some cases a support/advocacy role for the families in their dealings with other organisations.

3.9 *Traveller Movement (NI)*

As mentioned previously, Traveller Movement was involved in the partnership due to its extensive experience in dealing with Traveller families across Northern Ireland and its commitment to working in partnership with statutory and voluntary agencies to bring about improvements in Travellers' accommodation. In practice this also meant explaining the incentives and advantages of group housing to statutory and voluntary agencies and local communities, informing the Traveller families of new developments and generally keeping them up to date.

4.0 COMMUNICATION

4.1 Interviewees were asked for their views on communication between the partner organisations in the process. The majority found communication was good but thought it could be improved.

4.2 Some interviewees commended the Housing Executive on its communication plan which was formulated initially to resolve problems during the critical period of the planning application process. The communication plan had three key objectives:

- to create an awareness of Traveller issues and life facts;
- to provide information on existing provision;
- to explain the content of the group housing schemes.

4.3 Within that context the communication plan identified and targeted the following groups, including:

- Travellers and Traveller Support Groups;
- the Northern Ireland Assembly, MLA's, Councils, local Councillors and council staff;
- tenant and community groups;
- influential local leaders (e.g. the Church and the press);
- Housing Executive personnel at local district level.

4.4 In Belfast this plan included such groups as the Upper Lenadoon Forum, West Belfast Partnership Board, local Councillors and council officials. The aim of the communication plan was to raise awareness of Traveller issues and to promote the concept of group housing and its benefits to not only the Traveller families but also the wider community.

4.5 However, Traveller interviewees in both Belfast schemes were quite vocal about the fact that *'there was too much communication and not enough action'*.

4.5.1 'Too much communication and not enough action' was a common theme throughout interviews with the Belfast Traveller families whose sense of frustration about the perceived inaction of statutory bodies was enough to make some families lose hope and move off the sites into settled accommodation in the public and private sectors. A related complaint from Traveller interviewees was that they did not feel well enough informed about the procedures involved in such a scheme and this had contributed to the sense of frustration when things were not moving due to 'red tape'. The reasons

for this 'perceived inaction' will be explored in the section "Obstacles and Difficulties".

- 4.6 Some interviewees thought communication could have been improved. One interviewee thought there was no reason for Lee Hestia to be involved at all in the consultation process because of the good relations built up in the early stages between the Travellers, Ark Housing Association and the Housing Executive. Several interviewees thought communication between the Housing Executive and Lee Hestia could have been better, and cited the operational difficulties and changes in personnel in the latter organisation the main reason for this. The Housing Executive dispensed with Lee Hestia's services in March 2003 and since then has been engaged in direct consultation with the Traveller families:

'In the past the Travellers from both sites would only have phoned the Traveller Movement, however now they have progressed in that they wouldn't think twice about phoning the Housing Executive. Communication has built up good lines.'

- 4.7 Similar to the rural schemes, one interviewee thought that communication from the DSD could have been better in terms of funding information. Problems had arisen when it became apparent that funding would not be available for the non-housing elements. In addition, this interviewee thought that communication within the DSD was poor and that the different departments within this organisation were not co-operating with each other. This interviewee felt that, despite the fact that their sources of funding had been from separate departments within the same organisation, they had still encountered problems in regard to communication:

'Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) and the Department for Social Development are both part of the same department with two pots of money yet they weren't talking to each other.'

- 4.8 Some interviewees said there seemed to be a breakdown in communications over funding when group housing for Travellers was still just a concept. These interviewees said that everyone had wanted to be part of the process because it was perceived to be the politically correct thing to do. One interviewee said government organisations like the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (NI) were interested in group housing from the perspective of giving Travellers an opportunity to

be economically viable and the Department of Education were interested in it from the perspective of providing facilities and community houses for educational purposes. However, this interviewee stated that when money was needed for these non-housing elements, apart from Belfast Regeneration Office, none of these other organisations had been prepared to give anything at all.

- 4.9 Another interviewee was critical of the lack of communication between the primary partners and Belfast City Council throughout the group housing process. This interviewee stated that, rather than being kept informed, he had to try repeatedly to keep abreast of developments and was not 'kept in the loop'. This interviewee stated that his organisation was *'very much a willing partner in the development of these schemes.'* On the other hand, a number of primary partners said they had found communication with Belfast City Council difficult at official management level, especially in regard to negotiations over the acquisition of Council owned land:

'In terms of negotiating the land it was very difficult. We always encountered problems in regard to planning and changes in design. We always had to go through a long drawn out process and red tape.'

5.0 THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

- 5.1 Interviewees were asked their views on the consultation stage of the process, whether they thought it had been adequate and how it could have been improved.
- 5.2 As outlined previously, Lee Hestia Association was engaged at the outset to consult with the Traveller families because of its experience in assisting and supporting vulnerable and isolated communities.
- 5.3 Some interviewees had been more involved in the consultation process than others but most were nevertheless able to express an opinion on the process itself. Interviewees had mixed views on whether the consultation process had been adequate. The majority of interviewees said that the consultation for the Belfast schemes had been a lengthy process. Most felt that the earlier stages of the consultation had been adequate.
- 5.4 A major criticism of the consultation process cited by the majority of interviewees was in relation to the operational difficulties experienced by Lee Hestia Association. The latter stages of the consultation had been characterised by increasing apathy on the part of the Traveller families towards the Lee Hestia consultation worker and a general unwillingness to co-operate with the third Lee Hestia representative in as many years.
- ‘It got to the stage near the end [of Lee Hestia’s involvement] that the Travellers didn’t want to speak to the Lee Hestia representative; they only wanted to speak to the Housing Executive. They lost confidence in Lee Hestia at that stage.’***
- 5.5 Opinions on how consultation could have been improved were varied. A majority of interviewees felt that one organisation should have had direct contact with the Traveller families. They also thought there should have been continuity in personnel throughout the process and these personnel should have had experience of dealing with the Traveller community.
- 5.6 Some interviewees thought the consultation stage was ‘over the top’ and that options were presented to the Traveller families in terms of design issues that, in their opinion, should never have been on the table as they would not have been funded. This resulted in arguments over what could be included in scheme design which in turn only served to delay the process further.

- 5.7 Some interviewees thought that consultation could have been improved from the start by giving the Traveller families more realistic timetables in terms of key stages of the project. One interviewee gave the example of how waiting for planning approval had delayed the Monagh project by 16 months and that the Housing Executive should have been *'more up front by telling the Travellers it could take years'*.
- 5.8 One interviewee thought the process could have been improved if the Local Government Partnership on Traveller issues had been involved. This body (comprising representatives from the various District Councils) previously had responsibility for Travellers' accommodation and the interviewee felt they had a wealth of knowledge to offer and share from their own experiences with Travellers.
- 5.9 Another interviewee highlighted two elements to the consultation process: consultation with Traveller families and consultation with local residents. This interviewee recommended that the high level of consultation should continue but that there should be no need to bring in an external organisation to carry this out.

6.0 OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

- 6.1 The interviewees were asked in detail about the main obstacles or difficulties which they perceived had delayed the commencement of the schemes and how, if possible, these could have been overcome.
- 6.2 The reasons cited by interviewees for the obstacles and difficulties experienced during the development of the group housing process in Belfast were numerous and varied. The majority of interviewees saw difficulties relating to land acquisition as the main reason for the delays. From interviews it emerged that the area required for the Monagh scheme consisted of land owned by two separate bodies, i.e. the Roads Service and the Catholic Church. The complexity of acquiring land from these two bodies and also of acquiring planning permission for the scheme served to delay the process significantly in Monagh.
- 6.3 Similar land acquisition problems arose in the Glen Road scheme. Belfast City Council owned most of the land required for the development of the scheme. However, on the part of land that was currently occupied by the Travellers as a 'co-operated site', adverse possession⁸ had been granted to some resident Travellers as a result of a landmark High Court judgement in 1993. Some families considered this gave them ownership and negotiating rights regarding the land. A number of interviewees said the complexity of the circumstances relating to real and perceived ownership of the land and protracted negotiations with Belfast City Council over the value of the land delayed the process further.
- 6.4 A large number of interviewees cited the changes to the scheme design as another reason for delay in the Glen Road scheme. This refers to the series of amendments to the scheme design and content throughout the duration of the project. As this encampment comprises two separate family groups it was prone to disagreements among families over the design and layout the housing would take. As a result a number of changes were made to the design, some of which were reversed later to the original design. From the interviews it emerged that the reasons for this indecisiveness/reluctance on the part of some of the Travellers was due to a feeling of *'unrest within the wider Traveller Community...it was felt at the time that no*

⁸ See Glossary of Terms – p.48

scheme could go ahead while these families were feeling vulnerable with regard to this unrest’.

- 6.5 The decision of the landlord provider, Ark Housing Association, to withdraw from the Belfast schemes was considered by a significant number of interviewees to be another reason for delay. From interviews it emerged that a changeover in personnel at chief executive level and serious concerns by Ark’s board of management over issues around funding, housing management policy and to a certain extent, the perceived unrest within the Traveller community, all contributed to Ark’s decision to withdraw.
- 6.6 As previously mentioned, Lee Hestia’s operational difficulties and high turnover of staff were considered to have contributed to some extent to the delay. However, this turn of events had a positive effect as it helped cement relationships between the Traveller families and the Housing Executive, which has since taken on a direct consultation role:

‘Links have been established and things are moving well. We have ownership of the consultation process and what is coming back is no longer through a third party. We now have a specific resource within the Executive to carry out the consultation in those schemes and future schemes.’

6.7 *Accelerating the process*

Interviewees were asked for their views on how to accelerate the process and how the roles of the partners could be improved. The Traveller families in both schemes were quite vocal on this issue, suggesting that if the partners really wanted to show their commitment to a scheme in their locality, the first thing to be done would be to purchase the land and acquire planning permission in advance, if not during the early stages of the consultation period.

- 6.7.1 Interviewees were asked their opinions on how the roles of those partners involved in the group housing process could be improved. Their opinions are summarised below:
- Housing Executive: a significant majority of interviewees thought that in future the Housing Executive should carry out its own consultation; one interviewee thought the Housing Executive should appoint someone with whom Travellers can identify.

- Department for Social Development: opinions on how to improve the DSD's role were varied. One interviewee thought the DSD should identify and appoint housing associations to progress the schemes from the beginning, instead of waiting until the scheme design stage has been completed. Another interviewee thought the critical issue of funding of the schemes should be packaged better. This interviewee also thought that, if Belfast Regeneration Office (BRO) or other organisations were going to fund the non-housing elements, it should be involved from the beginning of the process.
- On the same issue of funding, another interviewee thought the DSD should cooperate better in future with other divisions within the DSD (such as BRO), to secure funding, and should be more flexible to accommodate a unique project such as group housing.
- Clanmil: some interviewees thought Clanmil (and in fact, all landlord providers) could learn from previous group housing schemes by involving their housing management department in the process from a very early stage. They felt it would benefit both the landlord and the tenant if relationships were built up from the beginning, so that each party would understand the other's needs and responsibilities.
- Lee Hestia: the vast majority of interviewees thought Lee Hestia had served their purpose and that there is no longer a need for them to take part in a consultative role. Some acknowledged that there was a continuing role for Lee Hestia with group housing schemes and commended the success of their joint management arrangement with FOLD Housing Association in relation to the completed group housing schemes in Omagh and Toome.
- TMNI: one interviewee thought the Traveller Movement could be put to better use if it were used to carry out future consultations with Traveller families.
- Travellers: some interviewees thought the Traveller families' role could be improved by agreeing at the beginning of the process which families are compatible. One interviewee thought their role could be improved further if the implications of the process were explained to the Travellers at the outset, in terms

of their responsibilities as tenants. This interviewee also thought it would be beneficial to all parties if the Travellers in future do not continually make changes to their choices of scheme design after the design stage has ended and should *'sign off on what they have agreed as planning is not a flexible system'*.

7.0 COMMITMENT TO GROUP HOUSING FOR TRAVELLERS

Interviewees were asked if they thought the various partners had shown commitment to the delivery of the Belfast schemes. Where the partner was a secondary partner, interviewees were asked if they thought that partner had been committed to assisting the primary partners with the implementation of the schemes. In all cases, interviewees were asked to rate the partners' commitment on a scale from 1 to 5.

7.1 Housing Executive

The majority of interviewees thought the Housing Executive was committed to the delivery of the schemes and awarded them 5 out of 5. One interviewee thought the fact that the Housing Executive had installed an interim mains electricity supply for the families in the Monagh site indicated their long term commitment.

7.2 Department for Social Development

The majority of interviewees thought the DSD was committed to the delivery of the schemes. One interviewee cited the fact that DSD had persuaded its then minister, Lord Dubs, of the benefits of building four pilot schemes instead of the initial two schemes proposed in rural areas. The majority of interviewees awarded DSD 4 out of 5 for commitment.

7.3 Clanmil Housing Association

The majority of interviewees thought Clanmil was committed to the delivery of the Glen Road scheme. The majority of interviewees gave Clanmil a rating of 5 out of 5 for their commitment.

7.4 Ark Housing Association

As noted previously, Ark withdrew their interest in the Belfast schemes for reasons outlined earlier. Therefore, interviewees were not asked to rate Ark's commitment.

7.5 North and West Housing Association

As North and West Housing Ltd's senior management felt it had not been involved long enough in the group housing process to be included in the evaluation, interviewees were not asked to rate its commitment..

7.6 *Lee Hestia Association*

Opinions were divided on the commitment of Lee Hestia Association to assisting the implementation of the Belfast schemes. As noted previously, operational difficulties at senior level and frequent changeovers in personnel involved in the day-to-day consultation had an adverse impact on Lee Hestia's involvement in, and contribution to, the process. The Housing Executive did not renew the contract with Lee Hestia for consultation after March 2003. However, despite these problems, most interviewees agreed that the earlier stages of consultation were more than adequate and Lee Hestia's operational difficulties did not reduce their commitment as an organisation. The majority of interviewees rated Lee Hestia 3 out of 5 for their commitment.

7.7 *Traveller Movement (NI)*

All interviewees said they thought Traveller Movement Northern Ireland (TMNI) had shown total commitment to assisting the implementation of the schemes. As outlined earlier, TMNI was instrumental in progressing the consultation stage of the process when the difficulties experienced by Lee Hestia became apparent. All interviewees awarded TMNI 5 out of 5 for their commitment.

7.8 *Traveller families*

Interviewees were asked if they thought the Traveller families were committed to assisting the implementation of the Belfast scheme. As each scheme accommodates several distinct family groups, responses from the interviewees will be dealt with separately for each scheme.

7.8.1 *Glen Road*

The majority of interviewees thought the Glen Road Traveller families were committed to assisting the delivery of the scheme and rated their commitment as 4 out of 5. However, as this scheme accommodates 2 separate family groupings, a few interviewees considered some families to be more committed to group housing than others.

7.8.2 Monagh

A majority of interviewees thought the Monagh Traveller families were committed to assisting the delivery of the scheme and rated their commitment as 5 out of 5. One interviewee cited the fact that the Traveller families had waited so long and were still interested as evidence of their commitment.

8.0 PRE-TENANCY ADVICE

- 8.1 Interviewees were asked if they thought the Travellers involved in the Belfast schemes would require any pre-tenancy advice and assistance. All interviewees thought this would be a worthwhile exercise.
- 8.2 Some interviewees pointed out that training and advice of this nature had already been delivered to the rural group housing residents and that this exercise had been very well received.
- 8.3 One interviewee said advice provided in Omagh and Toome on interior design, benefits and tenancy agreements, household and budget management and health and safety should be expanded to include any advice or needs highlighted by the Traveller families themselves. Some interviewees suggested holding an induction day for Travellers to highlight areas of interest to them and one interviewee said any sessions of this nature should have the close co-operation and involvement of the housing association.
- 8.4 One interviewee thought pre-tenancy advice and assistance sessions should not be restricted to families entering group housing, but that they should be available to all Traveller families moving into social housing and delivered in partnership with other agencies, such as health and education providers.

9.0 FURTHER COMMENTS

9.1 All interviewees were given an opportunity to raise issues of concern about the development or delivery of the schemes. A wide range of responses is summarised below.

9.2 Housing Management Issues

Some interviewees expressed concern over certain housing management issues, most notably regarding allocations, relets and house sales. One interviewee thought there was a perception among some housing associations that the DSD was not adequately addressing these housing management issues. This interviewee felt that landlord providers would ultimately find themselves in difficulty if these issues were not addressed and if housing associations did not receive proper guidance on these matters.

9.3 Miscellaneous Areas of Concern

One interviewee was concerned about the lengthy delays experienced in the Belfast schemes and suggested that the Housing Executive should purchase land and secure planning permission before or during scheme design consultation.

Another interviewee was concerned that Belfast City Council had not been invited to be a 'partner body' in the group housing process.

One interviewee suggested that the Housing Executive should plan a Traveller conference for all the statutory agencies, to promote a more positive image of the concept of accommodation for Travellers.

10.0 CONCLUSIONS

10.1 PARTNERSHIP

Partnership arrangements in the Belfast schemes were identical to those of the rural schemes, with one exception - the landlord provider. The initial landlord provider for the Belfast schemes had been Ark Housing Association. However, Ark decided to withdraw from the process and the DSD appointed a further two associations, namely, Clannmil (Glen Road) and North and West Housing Limited (Monagh Bypass).

10.2 COMMUNICATION

The majority of interviewees found communication to be good, but they also thought it could have been improved. Landlord providers cited communication problems with the DSD, especially over funding and guidance on future housing management issues. Suggestions for improvement were varied and depended on the nature of the organisation and their involvement in the process.

10.2.1 Several interviewees said communication could have been better between the Housing Executive and Lee Hestia. Reasons for the poor communication included the operational difficulties and high staff turnover of Lee Hestia. Many Traveller families felt there had been 'too much communication and not enough action'. This was in reference to the protracted period of consultation and land acquisition negotiations that delayed the Belfast schemes.

10.3 CONSULTATION

The majority of interviewees thought the earlier stages of the consultation process had been adequate. However, the quality of consultation had deteriorated as a result of Lee Hestia's high staff turnover. The latter part of the consultation process had been marred by increasing apathy towards Lee Hestia Association staff and management.

10.3.1 Suggestions for improving consultation included the need for continuity of personnel in future. Some interviewees felt that the Housing Executive would be best placed for this role. Some also thought that providing Traveller families with realistic timetables, in terms of key stages, at the outset of the project would improve the consultation process.

10.4 OBSTACLES AND DIFFICULTIES

The main reasons for delays in the two Belfast schemes concerned the acquisition of the land required. In Monagh, the complexity of acquiring land from two vendors, coupled with the decision of Ark Housing Association to withdraw from the project had significantly delayed progress.

10.4.1 Ark's withdrawal from the project and problems with land acquisition were regarded as significant factors delaying the development of the Glen Road scheme. The protracted negotiations with Belfast City Council over land costs and the legal issue of 'adverse possession' of the land were seen as major obstacles to progress. In addition to these delays, the unrest within the wider Traveller community impacted on the families at Glen Road and introduced an element of fear about living in more permanent 'bricks and mortar' accommodation. As a result of this a host of late scheme design amendments were requested. Lee Hestia Association's operational troubles were also cited as a reason for the delay in both the Belfast schemes.

10.5 ACCELERATING THE PROCESS

Planning permission and land purchase process should commence in advance of or at least during the early stages of consultation. This would remove the biggest obstacle from the outset and also send a clear message to the Traveller families that the partners are fully committed to the development of group housing in their locality.

10.6 IMPROVING THE ROLES OF THE PARTNERS

To improve the roles of partners in the process interviewees made a number of suggestions including:

- Housing Executive should carry out its own consultations and appoint a person with experience and background in dealing with Travellers.⁹
- DSD should appoint the housing association before scheme design consultation starts.
- DSD should clarify funding criteria and put together a funding package so landlord providers know exactly which funding options are available.
- There should be better co-operation and communication within the DSD.
- Clanmil (and landlord providers in general) should involve their housing management department at an early stage to build up the landlord-tenant relationship.

⁹ As of 1 April 2004 the Traveller Project Team has appointed new member specifically for this reason.

- Travellers themselves should respect the boundaries of contracts by not changing scheme designs and compatible family groups once these have been agreed.

10.7 COMMITMENT

While levels of commitment from each partner organisation were perceived as varied, overall interviewees agreed that all primary and secondary partners had shown commitment to bringing the schemes to completion or assisting the implementation of the schemes.

10.8 PRE-TENANCY ADVICE

Delivery of pre-tenancy advice and assistance sessions to Travellers families involved in the Belfast schemes would be a worthwhile exercise.

10.9 FURTHER COMMENTS

Future allocations, relets and house sales are likely to be problematic for group housing and DSD should review housing policy and provide clear guidance.

SECTION C: RECOMMENDATIONS

Having considered the information presented in this evaluation the Research Unit, in consultation with the Traveller Project Team, recommends the following:

- that the communication plan used for the pilot schemes is developed further to assist the roll out of future Traveller accommodation provision across N. Ireland.
- that land for group housing schemes should, where possible, be acquired at the earliest opportunity to demonstrate commitment and accelerate the development process.
- that consultation should be carried out by the Housing Executive directly and that a person with experience of dealing with Travellers should be appointed to this position.
- that housing associations and housing management staff should be involved with the Traveller families at the earliest opportunity to develop a good landlord-tenant relationship.
- that other government bodies such as The Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment are brought on board as partners to assist with the “add on” educational and economic aspects of group housing that could be provided.
- that policy and guidance on group housing management issues such as allocation, relets and house sales are defined within the context of the Common Selection Scheme by the Housing Executive.
- that funding for group housing schemes is ‘better packaged’ and potential sources of funding are clear and unambiguous.
- that more realistic project deadlines are set and that the reasons for potential delays are explained to Traveller families at the outset.
- that Travellers should be made aware of the legal boundaries of contracts to ensure that design issues and compatible family groupings can be agreed early on and are not changed once they have been agreed.
- that pre-tenancy advice and assistance should continue to be offered to Traveller families moving in to future group housing schemes to assist their transition into the built environment.
- that the partner organisations refrain from using work related jargon in their dealings with the Traveller community; and
- that the Housing Executive and other partners continue to use the offices of Traveller Movement NI.

APPENDIX 1

Glossary of Terms

Group Housing – This describes residential housing with additional facilities and amenities specifically designed to accommodate extended families of Travellers on a permanent basis.

Co-operated Site – This describes those sites (formerly known as Tolerated sites) on land owned by Government Departments where Travellers are located on a temporary basis.

Serviced Site – This describes a range of managed accommodation where Traveller families have a permanent base to park their caravan or erect timber framed Sectional Building (sometimes known as ‘Park Home’); where electricity, water and sewerage is provided and where other facilities such as communal or individual amenity units (providing toilet, washing and daytime living arrangements) may be provided.

Content Analysis - A method of analysis used in qualitative research in which text (notes) are systematically examined by identifying and grouping themes and coding, classifying and developing categories.

Total Cost Indicator (TCI) – TCI is the funding system used to achieve value for money in return for grant and to ensure the correct level of grant is paid. TCI represents the basis for a cost evaluation of housing association grant funded units. TCI are also used to calculate the maximum level of grant or other public subsidy available.

Local Lettings Policy – This is a lettings policy which takes account of the needs of the area as a whole as well as those of the individual. Tenants can be involved in setting allocations policies.

Adverse Possession – Adverse possession is the acquisition of title to land/property by continuous possession for a prescribed period of time

Landlord Provider – The housing association or registered social landlord chosen to undertake group housing schemes.

APPENDIX 2

List of interviewees for each Group Housing Scheme

Omagh

Omagh Group Housing Residents, Tattykeel Cottages, Omagh
NIHE Traveller Project Team
DSD Housing Policy Branch
FOLD Housing Association
McCourt Construction
Traveller Movement NI/Lee Hestia – This interviewee worked for both organisations

Toome

Toome Group Housing Residents – Hillhead Cottages, Toome
NIHE Traveller Project Team
DSD Housing Policy Branch
FOLD Housing Association
McCourt Construction
Traveller Movement NI/Lee Hestia – This interviewee worked for both organisations
Magherafelt District Council

Glen Road

Glen Road Traveller Site Residents
NIHE Traveller Project Team
DSD Housing Policy Branch
Clanmil Housing Association
Ark Housing Association
McCourt Construction
Traveller Movement NI/Lee Hestia – This interviewee worked for both organisations
Belfast City Council
Belfast Travellers Support Group

Monagh Road

Monagh Road Traveller Site Residents
NIHE Traveller Project Team
DSD Housing Policy Branch
Traveller Movement NI/Lee Hestia – This interviewee worked for both organisations
Belfast City Council
Ark Housing Association
Belfast Travellers Support Group

APPENDIX 3

OTHER SOURCES

Consultation Document: Working Party on Accommodation for Travellers (DOENI) 1998

New Policy on Accommodation for Travellers (DOENI) 1999

Consultation on the Final Report of the PSI Working Group on Travellers (OFMDFM 2000)

Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment in Northern Ireland (NIHE) 2002

An Evaluation of the Experiences of Fold Housing Association in the Provision of Group Housing Initiatives for the Irish Traveller community (FOLD Housing Association 2004)

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Northern Ireland Act 1998

Race Relations (N.I.) Order 1997

Housing Order (NI) 2003

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