Tyne and Wear Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople Accommodation Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

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The Study

1. Recent legislation and guidance from the government has indicated a commitment to taking steps to resolve some of the long-standing accommodation issues for members of the Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople communities. This legislation has an overarching aim of ensuring that members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities have equal access to decent and appropriate accommodation options akin to each and every other member of society. As a result, Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs) have been undertaken across the UK, as local authorities respond to these new obligations and requirements.

2. This research and report was commissioned by the Tyne and Wear Housing Partnership in November 2007. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford, assisted by staff at the Centre for Urban and Regional Research at the University of Birmingham. The study was greatly aided by research support and expertise from members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. The study was managed by the Partner Authorities and other key stakeholders including representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

3. The assessment was undertaken by conducting:

    - a review of available literature, data and secondary sources;
    - a detailed questionnaire completed by housing, planning and environmental health officers;
    - consultations with key stakeholders; and
    - a total of 139 interviews with Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople from a range of tenures and community groups.

Background

4. Following the Housing Act 2004 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, local authorities have been preparing to develop and implement strategies to respond to the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller communities living in their areas as part of their wider housing strategies, planning policies and the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) and Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAs) are designed to provide the evidence needed to inform these strategies. However, as well as presenting evidence and information on accommodation needs at an immediate local level the evidence collected and analysis produced has a wider regional role. The assessment of accommodation need and pitch requirements are also to be fed into the Regional Planning Body (RPB), in this case the North East Assembly (NEA), for inclusion into the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS then specifies pitch numbers required (but not their location) for local planning

authorities (LPAs) in light of the GTAAs produced, and a strategic view of need, supply and demand across the region is taken. The local planning authority's Local Development Framework (LDF), composed of Development Plan Documents (DPDs), then identifies specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS or outlines criteria against which future sites can be assessed.

Main Findings

Local Gypsies and Travellers and accommodation provision

5. There is no one source of information about the size of the Gypsy and Traveller population in the Study Area. Our best estimate is that there are at least 983 local Gypsies and Travellers.

6. Since the closure of a socially rented site in Newcastle there is now **1 socially rented site** in the Study Area, situated in Gateshead. This site provides 14 double pitches which accommodates 58 individuals. All residents have access to amenity blocks, WC, a water supply, showers and space for cooking and laundry. All residents had touring caravans as opposed to static caravans or chalets. The majority of residents interviewed thought the facilities were good and all viewed the management of the site in a positive light.

7. There is **1 authorised private site** in the Study Area situated in South Tyneside. This site currently has temporary planning permission and is currently occupied by 7 households on 7 pitches. The site has permission for 11 pitches in total. Residents on this site were very happy with the location of their site but currently had problems accessing a range of facilities such as water.

8. There were no **unauthorised developments** (land owned by Gypsies and Travellers but developed without planning permission) within the Study Area as such, although a number of people who were occupying either the driveways or gardens of friends or family in bricks and mortar housing were found. Such households could be seen as a version of unauthorised development. Some of these households were looking for a place to stay in the Study Area; others were staying in the area en route to elsewhere.

9. There is a good deal of provision for **Travelling Showpeople** in the Study Area. There are 3 yards in Sunderland which accommodate approximately 127 households. There is 1 yard in South Tyneside that accommodates 25 households. The Sunderland yards are all in private ownership and are either owner-occupied or privately rented. The site in South Tyneside is provided by the local authority and leased on the basis that pitch occupiers engage in work on the adjacent South Shields Amusement Park. A total of 54 interviews were conducted with yard-based Travelling Showpeople. The majority of people provided positive comments about their accommodation; some did express concerns about health and safety. In turn, a number of people were concerned about potential overcrowding/underprovision of sites as members of the families got older.

Unauthorised encampments

10. The Caravan Count in January 2007 recorded 0 caravans on unauthorised encampments (on land not owned by Gypsies and Travellers). The Caravan Count however has been criticised for its inability to provide an accurate picture of unauthorised camping. Records kept by the local authorities show that the Study Area experienced around 52 encampments over the previous full calendar year (2007). The average encampment size was just over 7 caravans. Most encampments stayed for a relatively short period of time with the average duration being 6 days. Most of the encampments occurred in Gateshead and Sunderland.

11. A total of 21 interviews were carried out with people on unauthorised encampments. The average number of caravans owned by households on unauthorised encampments was 1.4 with around 3 people living in each caravan. Most households felt that they had enough living space for their needs apart from one household who required more/bigger trailers.

12. Access to facilities was largely restricted for households on unauthorised encampments with respondents commenting that they obtain water from nearby garages and used the toilets in local supermarkets. Just a fifth of respondents had access to some form of waste disposal/collection.

13. Three respondents on unauthorised encampments had a base elsewhere. All three respondents lived in either London or in Northern Ireland. Two respondents owned a house and the other lived on a private transit site. This highlights the complex nature of unauthorised camping and the people who tend to do so.

Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar housing

14. All authorities make specific reference to Gypsies and Travellers in local authority housing strategies. No local authority or stakeholder was able to estimate the size of the 'housed' Gypsy and Traveller population in the Study Area. For the purposes of this assessment the housed population is estimated to be at least 100 households across the Study Area – however, it is acknowledged that this is probably a significant underestimate.

15. A total of 50 households were interviewed who were living in bricks and mortar housing across the Study Area. Around a third of the Gypsies and Travellers interviewed were owner-occupiers; the remaining households were tenants of some kind (socially rented or private). Around seven in ten households still retained a trailer. The majority of respondents viewed their house positively and had access to all the basic facilities that we enquired about. Overall, most of the respondents had lived in their accommodation for a number of years. Around a fifth of respondents were considering leaving their house to move back into trailer-based accommodation in the near future. The remainder thought they would either remain in the house indefinitely or reported that they did not know what they would do.

16. A fifth of all respondents had lived in a house at some point in the past. Around two-thirds of people viewed living in a house as a positive experience.

Characteristics of local Gypsies and Travellers

17. The survey of Gypsies and Travellers identified some of the important characteristics of the local population.

18. Household size is significantly larger than in the settled/non-Traveller population at 3.9 persons across the whole sample.

19. A significant minority of the sample (20%) were households over 60 years of age.

20. Young families are the predominant household type in the Study Area as a whole.

21. The majority of Gypsies and Travellers in trailers and in housing can be seen to belong, in some way, to the Study Area.

22. The majority of respondents, nearly three-quarters, felt they were 'local' to the area they were residing in. 'Family connections' was the main reason given when respondents were asked why they were living where they were.

23. The local population includes diverse ethnic groups. Travelling Showpeople was the largest group (39%), followed by Scottish Travellers (28%), then by Irish Travellers (19%) with smaller numbers of others who described themselves as Romany Gypsy (11%) and Traveller (non-specified) (3%) or New Traveller (1%).

24. Overall 94% of school-age children regularly attend school or receive home education. Children on unauthorised encampments had the poorest attendance levels.

25. The Gypsy and Traveller population was largely sedentary. However, over half of settled or authorised households still travelled seasonally – with some travelling more often than this. Being 'fed up' with travelling, getting older and poor health were the main reasons that were cited for not travelling.

26. Of those households who still travelled, around eight in ten respondents tended to engage in travelling to other parts of the UK; just one in ten travelled to areas close to where they lived within the Study Area.

27. Self-employment was a major source of income for respondents with the type of work people engaged in including: gardening/tree work, landscaping, carpet-related trades, uPVC and guttering, roofing and tarmacing.

Gypsies and Travellers and housing-related support

28. Each of the five authorities mentioned Gypsies and Travellers in their Supporting People 5 Year Strategy. Reference is commonly made to the lack of services that are specifically provided for Gypsies and Travellers and also to the lack of evidence of the need for services for this group.

29. The kind of housing-related services Gypsies and Travellers expressed an interested in receiving assistance with included: support with planning, filling in forms, accessing a GP, accessing legal services, harassment issues and finding accommodation.

Accommodation preferences and aspirations

30. All households were asked whether there was anyone living with them who were likely to want their own accommodation over the next 5 years. Overall, 5 households reported that their accommodation contained concealed households (amounting to 11 separate households in total) with a further 8 households reporting that older family members (totalling 9 separate households) would need independent accommodation in the next five years.

31. There was support for the creation of additional long-stay residential sites within the Study Area with around a fifth of respondents interested in moving to such a site. Respondents voiced a preference for residential sites with pitch capacities of around 20 pitches.

32. Around a third of respondents wanted to see the development of more transit/short-stay sites in the Study Area. Interest in such sites was shown from households from all accommodation types. For households on authorised/settled accommodation the creation of more authorised short-stay accommodation would enable an increase in family visits and help to maintain the tradition of travelling. According to the views of Gypsies and Travellers who would use such sites, these should be around 10 pitches in size with a large number of people expecting to use the site for between 1 and 4 weeks.

33. Respondents were asked to comment on a range of differing accommodation types in order to ascertain their preferences. The clear preference was for a small private site which they/their family owned, followed by a family-owned house and then by ‘group housing’ (site with long-stay and short-stay provision). Travelling around often staying on authorised transit sites and living on a site owned by a social landlord were both rated reasonably favourably. Living in a local authority or RSL house was the least favoured option.

Accommodation need and supply

34. Nationally, there are no signs that the growth in the Gypsy and Traveller population will slow significantly. The supply of additional authorised accommodation has slowed since 1994, but the size of the population of Gypsies and Travellers does not appear to have been affected to a great extent. Instead, the way in which Gypsies and Travellers live has changed, with increases in unauthorised accommodation, innovative house dwelling arrangements (living in trailers in the grounds of houses), overcrowding on sites and overcrowding within accommodation units (trailers, houses, chalets, etc.). In order to respond effectively and appropriately to the lack of suitable accommodation, to meet the needs of Gypsies and Travellers, the regional planning body (North East Assembly) has the role of ensuring that all local authorities contribute, by working together, to resolving the current shortage of authorised site accommodation in a strategic manner, which helps redress current imbalances in the pattern of provision, and enhances the sustainability of the Gypsy and Traveller site network.

35. The 'models' for assessing the numerical requirement for additional residential pitches have developed significantly over the past few years. The calculation used here is an adaptation of the example provided by the CLG[1] with input from other work around the testing of GTAA robustness.[2] These calculations are estimates based on information drawn from: local authority information, knowledge of key stakeholders, survey findings and assumptions based on the professional experience of the Study Team.

36. Additional requirements beyond 2013 are based on estimated household growth. This follows commonly accepted assumptions as to the growth of the population.[3]

37. Numerical transit requirements have not been provided although an indication of how to provide for short-stay households is detailed. This indicates that all local authorities should look to provide some form of provision for short-term users.

38. Requirements for the additional residential provision for Travelling Showpeople are estimated on the basis of survey findings and local authority information.

39. Because of the historical inequalities in pitch provision, Gypsies and Travellers have constrained choices as to where and how they would choose to live if they had real choice. So while choices for the non-Travelling

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[1] CLG (2007) *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments* – Guidance. London: HMSO.

[2] CLG (2007) *Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy Reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies*. Wetherby, CLG.

[3] Household growth rates of 2% and 3% a year were suggested as appropriate in Pat Niner, *Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England*, ODPM, 2003. A 3% growth rate was also used in the recent report from Communities and Local Government (2007) Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies. HMSO.

community are generally much wider, as there is social housing available in every authority in the country, there are no local authority sites in 138 of the 353 local authorities in England, and only in 71 authorities is there more than one site. Some authorities have no authorised private sites. Over time, this has inevitably meant that Gypsies and Travellers have generally moved to areas they see as offering the best life chances, for example, an authority which provides a site; an authority which is perceived as having more private authorised sites than others; or an authority that is attractive in some other way (slower enforcement, transport links, friends and family resident, etc.). Therefore, there is a tendency, when the need for additional accommodation is assessed, for the needs assessment to further compound these inequalities in site provision. For example, authorities which already provide Gypsy and Traveller accommodation (publicly or privately) are assessed as having greater need for additional pitch provision than authorities with little or no pitch provision. This is compounded further the longer-term the assessment is made (i.e. to 2018). However in order to assist in the long term planning of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision within emerging Local Development Frameworks pitch requirements are presented up to 2018.

40. Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs have been identified at a sub-regional and a local level on a '**need where it is seen to arise**' basis. However, the results of this apportionment should not necessarily be assumed to imply that those needs should be actually met in that specific locality. This distribution reflects the current uneven distribution of pitch provision for the Gypsy and Traveller population across the Study Area. Decisions about where need should be met should be strategic, taken in partnership with local authorities and the North East Assembly – involving consultation with Gypsies and Travellers and other interested parties – which will take into account wider social and economic planning considerations such as equity, choice and sustainability whilst being informed by the views of the Gypsies and Travellers who participated in this study. Table i below presents the 'needs where they arise' requirements.

Table i: Residential accommodation need arising from existing district level Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople populations

	Study Area Total	**Gateshead**	**Newcastle**	**North Tyneside**	**South Tyneside**	**Sunderland**
Current authorised residential provision4 (pitches)	173	14	0	0	32	127
Additional residential need 2008–2013 (pitches)	**74**	**9**	**7**	**8**	**11**	**39**
Additional residential need 2013–2018 (pitches)	29	4	1	1	5	18
Estimated total additional residential pitch need 2008–2018	**103**	**13**	**8**	**9**	**16**	**57**

Note: For pragmatic reasons these figures have been rounded up to the nearest whole pitch

[4] These are approximations of the provision (public and private) based on information obtained from the authorities during the course of the assessment. This includes Gypsy and Traveller and Travelling Showpeople sites.