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North Housing Market Area Gypsy and Traveller 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 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, a number of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) are now being undertaken across the UK, as local authorities respond to these new obligations and requirements.
2. A number of local authorities across the North Housing Market area (East Staffordshire Borough, Newcastle under Lyme Borough, Stafford Borough, Staffordshire Moorlands District and Stoke-on-Trent City) commissioned this assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in November 2006. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford and 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 a Steering Group composed of members representing the Partner Authorities.
3. The assessment was undertaken by conducting:
 - A review of available literature, data and secondary sources;
 - A detailed questionnaire completed by housing and planning officers;
 - Consultations with key stakeholders; and
 - A total of 128 interviews with Gypsies and Travellers from a range of tenures.

Background

4. Following the Housing 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 and the Regional Housing Strategy (RHS). Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) 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 West Midlands Regional Assembly (WMRA), for inclusion into the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS then specifies pitch numbers required (but not their location) for each local planning authority (LPA) in light of the GTAAs conducted and a strategic view of need, supply and demand across the region is taken. The local planning authority's Development Planning Document (DPD) then identifies specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS.

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 664 local Gypsies and Travellers
6. There are **3 socially rented sites** in the Study Area (Stoke-on-Trent, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Stafford) together providing 68 pitches. These sites accommodate 193 individuals. All residents have access to amenity blocks, WC and a water supply. The sites have varied management arrangements: the Stoke-on-Trent site is managed by a self-employed Gypsy, the site in Newcastle-under-Lyme is managed by a housing association, and the site in Stafford is managed by the local authority. Most of the residents had ambivalent views towards their site (neither good nor poor). The site in Stoke-on-Trent, at the time of the assessment, was under-going a continuing process of refurbishment.
7. There are **8 (developed and in use) authorised private sites** (excluding one site where planning permission has not yet been implemented) together providing an estimated 85 pitches. The provision of authorised pitches is sporadic across the Study Area with the bulk of provision found in Stafford, followed in turn by East Staffordshire, Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordshire Moorlands. There is no private site provision in Newcastle-under-Lyme. Over half (56%) of the pitches on private sites are rented. All respondents on private sites reported access to an amenity block and access to WC and bath/shower. Respondents on private sites had, on average, 1.3 caravans per household with the vast majority commenting that this gave them enough space. Respondents on private sites were generally more satisfied with their accommodation than households on socially rented sites.
8. There are **3 unauthorised developments** (land owned by Gypsies and Travellers but developed without planning permission) within the Study Area. These developments accommodated approximately 18 separate households. Households on unauthorised developments reported high levels of overcrowding but also reported high levels of satisfaction with their general accommodation, neighbours and location. Due to their undeveloped nature access to facilities on these

sites was poorer than on authorised sites. All households had access to WC and rubbish collection with fewer having access to water and even less having access to an electricity supply. Just two households had access to an amenity block. The tenure arrangements on these sites were unclear.

9. There are at least **5 Travelling Showpeople** yards which are all privately owned or privately rented. Three yards were for residential and storage use with the remaining 2 used for storage only. Just one interview was achieved with site dwelling Travelling Showpeople. This respondent reported significant over-crowding in their current accommodation but reported that access to facilities was appropriate.

Unauthorised encampments

10. The Caravan Count in January 2007 recorded 0 caravans on unauthorised encampments (on land not owned by Gypsies and Travellers). Records kept by the local authorities show that the Study Area experienced around 39 encampments over the previous full calendar year (2006) which was seen by the local authorities as a similar level for previous years; and 31 encampments over the period of assessment (April-September 2007). The average encampment size was just under 7 caravans. Most encampments stayed for a relatively short period of time with the average duration being just under 3 weeks. Most of the encampments occurred in Stoke-on-Trent, East Staffordshire and Newcastle-under-Lyme.
11. Only Stafford and Staffordshire Moorlands do not have formal written policies for dealing with unauthorised encampments.
12. A total of 15 interviews were carried out with people on unauthorised encampments between March and September 2007. The average number of caravans owned by households on unauthorised encampments was 1.2 with around 3 people living in each caravan. A lack of living space was a main issue for these households but affordability provided a major barrier to achieving more space.
13. Access to facilities was largely restricted for households on unauthorised encampments with just one respondent able to access basic facilities such as water and WC. A quarter of the respondents on unauthorised encampments had a base elsewhere.

Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar housing

14. The inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in local authority housing and homelessness strategies is the exception rather than the rule at present. Only Staffordshire Moorlands reported that Gypsies and Travellers are identified in ethnic records and monitoring of social housing applications/allocations. No local authority was able to quantify the number of Gypsies and Travellers in social or private bricks and

mortar housing. The Stoke-on-Trent Citizens Advice Bureau estimated that there were at least 40 families in housing within the Stoke-on-Trent area alone.

15. We interviewed 29 households living in bricks and mortar housing across the Study Area. Just under 4 in 5 Gypsy and Traveller households were tenants (council, private or RSL), the remaining households were owner-occupiers. Just over a third of households still retained a trailer. The vast majority of respondents viewed their house positively. Two-thirds of respondents had lived in their accommodation for a number of years. Just 2 respondents were planning to leave the house in the near future. One in ten thought they would remain in the house indefinitely. The remainder did not know.
16. Family reasons, health, education and a lack of sites were all given as major reasons which stimulated a move into housing.
17. A quarter of all respondents had lived in a house at some point in the past. Nearly half of these viewed it as a positive experience, with a quarter viewing it negatively. Respondents tended to cite feelings of being enclosed and constrained as reasons for their negative view of bricks and mortar housing.

Characteristics of local Gypsies and Travellers

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

Household size is larger than in the settled/non-Traveller population at 2.9 persons across the whole sample

A significant minority of the sample (16%) were households over 60 years of age.

Young families appear the predominant household type in the Study Area as a whole. However, there are a significant number of single households on the socially rented sites generally involving more older people.

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

The majority of respondents (6 in 10) 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.

The local population includes diverse ethnic groups. Romany Gypsy is the largest ethnic group (65%), followed by Irish Travellers (23%),

with much smaller numbers of others who described themselves as Traveller, Showmen or New Traveller.

Just over half of school age children attend school or receive home education. Children on unauthorised encampments had particular poor attendance levels. The more settled the children were the better their attendance levels. This is compared to the attendance levels of all school age children of around 90% – depending upon local authority area.

Around half of the Gypsy and Traveller population is estimated to have some form of health problem.

The Gypsy and Traveller population was largely sedentary. However, around half of settled or authorised households still travelled seasonally. A lack of places to stay was cited as a major reason why households did not travel.

Of those households who still travelled around a quarter of respondents intended to engage in quite local travelling (within the local area, Study Area, county or West Midlands region) with two-thirds planning to travel to other parts of the UK.

Someone was in work in just under half of respondents' families. The type of work people were engaged in was varied and included broad areas such as gardening/tree work, carpet related trades, uPVC and guttering, cars, and general market trades.

Gypsies and Travellers and housing-related support

19. There were no Supporting People funded services specifically for Gypsies and Travellers at the time of the assessment.
20. The kind of housing-related services Gypsies and Travellers expressed an interest in receiving assistance with included: accessing health care, claiming benefits, harassment issues, finding accommodation and accessing legal services.
21. A number of households also commented on problems with mobility (getting to and from places) and form-filling.

Accommodation preferences and aspirations

22. All households were asked whether there was anyone living with them who was likely to want their own accommodation over the next 5 years. Overall, 27 households reported that there was, which equated to 46 individuals who will require their own accommodation by 2012.
23. There was support for the creation of additional long-stay residential sites within the Study Area with 15% of residents on existing authorised

sites wanting to move to new site based accommodation. Respondents voiced a preference for residential sites with pitch capacities of between 10-20 pitches.

24. Nearly a quarter 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. Such sites should be between 5 -15 pitches in size.
25. 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 site owned by the local authority. Living on a site owned by another Gypsy or Traveller or living in a house owned by the local authority/RSL were the least favoured options.

Accommodation need and supply

26. 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.).
27. The 'models' for assessing the requirement for additional residential pitches, for Gypsies and Travellers, have developed significantly over the past few years. The calculation used here is an adaptation of the example provided by the CLG.¹ The calculation for years 1-5 (2007-2012) takes account of need arising from the following indicators: expiry of temporary planning permissions, household growth, need from unauthorised developments, movement between sites and housing, need from closing sites, and need from households on unauthorised encampments. On the supply side the calculation takes account of: pitch vacancies on socially rented sites, unused pitches, and known/planned developments of sites/pitches. 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.

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

28. Additional requirements beyond 2012 are based on estimated household growth. This is assumed to be a 3% increase each year following commonly accepted assumptions as to the growth of the population.²
29. Transit requirements (2007-2012) are calculated by the average number of households on unauthorised encampments seeking a transit/short-stay pitch in the area; an allowance for vacancies is included in order to manage their operation effectively. No further transit provision is estimated to be required beyond 2012 on the assumption that the level of travelling will not increase in the foreseeable future and other surrounding local authorities will also have developed appropriate transit options.
30. Requirements for the additional provision for Travelling Showpeople are estimated on the basis of survey findings on household growth.
31. The table below summarises estimated requirements. The split between local authorities is indicative only and based on evidence of **'need where it arises'** and this reflects the current uneven distribution of the Gypsy and Traveller population.

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

Authority	Current authorised residential provision ³ (pitches)	Current authorised socially rented transit provision (pitches)	Additional residential need 2007-2012 (pitches) ⁴	Additional residential need 2012-2016 (pitches)	Additional residential need 2016-2021 (pitches)	Additional residential need 2021 – 2026 (pitches)	Additional transit need 2007-2012 (pitches)
East Staffordshire	17	-	11	4	5	6	5
Newcastle-under-Lyme	19	-	20	4	6	7	5
Stafford	70	-	22	12	17	19	2
Staffordshire Moorlands	3	-	2	0	0	0	2
Stoke-on-Trent	42	6	29	9	13	15	10

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

² Household growth rates of 2% and 3% a year were suggested as appropriate in Pat Niner, *Local Authority Gypsy/Traveller Sites in England*, ODP, 2003. A 3% growth rate was 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.

³ These are approximations of the provision (public and private) based on information obtained from the authorities during the course of the assessment. This includes Travelling Showpeople sites.

⁴ Inclusive of plots for Travelling Showpeople

Recommendations

32. The overarching recommendation resulting from this assessment is that the authorities across the Study Area engage pro-actively to meet the accommodation needs that have been identified as a result of this assessment and that a strategic joined-up approach is taken. More specifically a total of 38 recommendations have been made for the Partner Authorities.