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Brown, P, Scullion, LC and Condie, J

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Merseyside Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment

Executive Summary

Philip Brown, Lisa Hunt and Jenna Condie
Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit
University of Salford

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The Study

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 (GTAAs) are now being undertaken across the UK, as local authorities respond to these new obligations and requirements.

This research and report were commissioned by four authorities within Merseyside (Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, Liverpool City Council, Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council and Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council¹) in June 2007. The study was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford. 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 commissioning authorities.

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 72 interviews with Gypsies and Travellers from a range of tenures and community groups.

Background

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 (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 West Regional Assembly (NWRA), for inclusion into the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS then specifies pitch numbers required (but not their location)

¹ For ease, these are referred to only by the borough or city name throughout this document

for each local planning authority (LPA) in light of the GTAA's 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

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 396 local Gypsies and Travellers

There is only one form of accommodation provision, socially rented provision, for Gypsies and Travellers in the Study Area. There are no authorised private sites and no unauthorised developments. There were also no yards for Travelling Showpeople in the Study Area.

There are **2 socially rented sites** in the Study Area (Liverpool and Sefton) together providing 30 pitches. These sites accommodate 123 individuals. Residents on both sites have access to a water supply, electricity, rubbish collection, amenity blocks and WC. The sites have different management arrangements; the Liverpool site is owned by Liverpool City Council and managed by a dedicated site manager, the Sefton site is owned by Sefton Metropolitan Borough Council and managed by a warden, who is a member of the Gypsy and Traveller community, who lives on the site. Residents on the sites expressed ambivalent to negative views towards their sites, particularly in relation to the design and location as well as the size of pitches.

Unauthorised encampments

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 22-27 encampments over the previous full calendar year (2006). Most authorities saw this as broadly reflective of previous years with only Wirral stating that their number was unusually high as a result of an event that particular year. According to the authorities the average encampment size was just over 5 caravans. Most encampments stayed for a relatively short period of time with the average duration being just under 1 week. There was generally an even spread of encampments with around 4/5 encampments in each of the four authorities per year.

No authority currently has a formal written policy for managing unauthorised encampments.

The number of interviews which occurred with households on unauthorised encampments over the fieldwork period was incredibly low – with only 2 interviews achieved. This was due to an abnormally low number of unauthorised encampments featuring in the areas over the fieldwork period (June-October 2007). Both of these households wanted residential accommodation in the Liverpool area.

Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar housing

The inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in local authority housing and homelessness strategies is the exception rather than the rule at present. No local authority was able to reliably quantify the number of Gypsies and Travellers in social or private bricks and mortar housing. It is estimated that there are at least 70 Gypsy and Traveller households in bricks and mortar housing although it is also believed that this may be a significant underestimate.

A total of 49 households living in bricks and mortar housing across the Study Area were interviewed. Almost a fifth of respondents were owner-occupiers, more than half were council tenants, with the remainder either RSL or private tenants. Around two-thirds of households still retained a trailer. The vast majority of respondents viewed their home either positively or ambivalently. Almost a third of respondents had lived in their accommodation for 5 years or more, and half had lived there for between 1 and 5 years. Only one respondent was planning to leave their accommodation in the future.

A fifth of all respondents had lived in a house at some point in the past.

Characteristics of local Gypsies and Travellers

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

Household size is significantly larger than in the settled/non-Traveller population at 4 persons across the whole sample

A significant minority of the sample (18%) were households over 60 years of age.

Young families are the predominant household type in the Study Area as a whole. There are more couples in bricks and mortar housing than on site based accommodation – these couples tend to be older at 60+ years.

More than half of respondents 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 consists almost entirely of Irish Travellers (60%) and Romany Gypsies (English) (31%) with much smaller numbers of others who described themselves as Welsh Gypsies/Travellers, Scottish Gypsies/Travellers or the more generic 'Traveller'.

Around a fifth of respondents had school age children who did not regularly attend school or receive home education.

The Gypsy and Traveller population was largely sedentary. However, around two-fifths of households on sites travelled during the year – mostly seasonally – with two-thirds of bricks and mortar households travelling at some point every year.

Respondents tended to travel to numerous locations across the UK. Appleby Fair was a particular draw as was various destinations along the route of the M62.

Gypsies and Travellers and housing-related support

Both Liverpool and Wirral receive Supporting People funding for BME groups who can provide support to Gypsies and Travellers if needed – particularly around homelessness.

The kind of housing-related services Gypsies and Travellers expressed an interest in receiving assistance with included: services around harassment, accessing health care, accessing legal services, claiming benefits, support with planning, filling in forms, finding accommodation, and accessing legal services.

Accommodation preferences and aspirations

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, 20 households reported that there was, which equated to 29 individuals who will require their own accommodation by 2012.

There was support for the creation of additional long-stay residential sites within the Study Area with a quarter of respondents interested in moving to a new residential site – this included half of the households who were currently accommodated on sites within the Study Area. Respondents voiced a preference for residential sites with a pitch capacity of around 20 pitches.

Just over one in ten of respondents wanted to see the development of more transit/short-stay sites in the Study Area. Interest was mainly shown from households from bricks and mortar accommodation which suggested that the creation of more authorised short-stay accommodation would enable an increase in family visits to the area and help to maintain the tradition of travelling as well as providing support to individuals who are 'settled' in more permanent accommodation. It was said that such sites should be around 10-20 pitches in size with a large number of people expecting to use the site for between 1-4 weeks.

Respondents were asked to comment on a range of differing accommodation/tenure 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, followed by a site owned by the local authority. Living on a site owned by a private landlord or a Gypsy/Traveller was the least favoured option – this highlights the importance that good management plays in sites.

Accommodation need and supply

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.).

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.² 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 and consistencies from other GTAA’s.

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.³

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

² CLG (2007) *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments – Guidance*. London: HMSO.

³ 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 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

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.

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 across the Merseyside sub-regional area. The numerical results of this apportionment should not necessarily be assumed to imply that those needs should actually be met in that specific locality.

It is recommended that decisions about where need should be met be strategic, taken in partnership with local authorities, sub-regional bodies and the North West Regional 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.

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

Authority	Current provision	Additional residential pitch requirement (2007-2012)	Additional residential pitch requirement (2012-2016)	Total additional residential pitch requirement (2007-2016)	Total additional transit pitch provision (2007-2016)
Knowsley	0	4	1	5	10
Liverpool	14	11	3	14	
Sefton	16	12	4	16	
Wirral	0	9	1	10	
Study Area	30	36	9	45	10

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

Recommendations

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 number of recommendations have been made for the Partner Authorities – these can be found in the main report.