

North West Regional Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and Related Services Assessment



Executive Summary

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

The North West Regional Assembly commissioned this assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation in July 2006. The assessment was conducted by a team of researchers from the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit at the University of Salford, assisted by staff from the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham and AVT-interventions, with research support from members of the Gypsy and Traveller community. The assessment was managed by a Steering Group composed of members from various stakeholders across the North West.

The assessment was undertaken by conducting:

- A review of available literature, data and secondary sources;
- A detailed questionnaire completed by housing and planning officers;
- Five sub-regional focus groups with key stakeholders; and
- A total of 182 household interviews with Gypsies and Travellers from a range of tenures and backgrounds.

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 (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 North West Regional Assembly (NWRA), 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 GTAAAs conducted and a strategic view of need, supply and demand across the region is taken. The local planning authority's relevant Development Planning Document (DPD) –

part of the Local Development Framework then identifies specific sites to match pitch numbers from the RSS.

Across the North West region a number of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments have been completed (Cheshire Partnership and Lancashire) while the remainder are on-going (due to complete late 2007/early 2008). Together these assessments provide coverage to the entire North West region having been commissioned by the local authorities within the region. The purpose of this more regional assessment was to provide the North West Regional Assembly with some findings around the broad accommodation and related service needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community and to provide an early indication of the requirement for further pitch numbers in order to meet Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need in the drafting of the Regional Spatial Strategy.

Main findings

Local Gypsies and Travellers

- At the time of the survey the study area had 299 pitches on 14 residential sites and 1 transit site, 2 of which are managed by the Gypsy Council the remainder are managed by the local authorities concerned. There are approximately 779 pitches on 57 'known' private authorised sites; a minimum of 11 unauthorised developments containing approximately 29 pitches; a minimum of 36 families on unauthorised encampments; and at least 109 households in bricks and mortar housing (a likely underestimate). In all there was a very minimum of 1252 Gypsy/Traveller families on sites, in houses or encamped at the time of the survey. The survey itself accounts for 926 members of the Gypsy and Travelling community. The average household size was a large 3.8 persons, larger than the average in the settled community. Based on this information it is estimated that the total Gypsy and Traveller population of the North West region is around 4,758 people.
- The average caravan to household ratio was 1.4 caravans per household.
- Survey responses suggested that in roughly a quarter of all Gypsy and Traveller households there was someone with either a disability and/or ill-health.
- Nearly, one in nine respondents thought that education was important for Gypsy/Traveller children; however, only just over half of the respondents reported that their children had regular attendance at school. Irregular attendance was particularly acute for those families living on unauthorised encampments.
- The Gypsies and Travellers consulted reported being involved in a wide range of jobs. Self-employment was a key feature with building,

groundwork, dealing, hawking, uPVC and roofing and gardening frequently mentioned. A small number of respondents worked in non-traditional Gypsy/Traveller trades such as healthcare and shop management. There may be a greater tendency, over coming years, for Gypsy and Traveller children to enter more non-Traveller trades more similar to those of the settled community. However, because of the influence of family roles and responsibilities, traditional Gypsy and Traveller trades remain an integral part of the community.

- One in seven of those interviewed considered themselves 'local' to the area in which the interview took place. Approximately two-thirds of respondents reported that they had travelled at some point, generally seasonally (i.e. travelling in late spring, summer and early autumn), in the last 12 month period.
- Many stakeholders were of the over-whelming belief that the mixing of Gypsy and Traveller groups on sites was a potential source of tension. English Gypsies and Travellers were seen to rarely co-exist harmoniously with Irish Travellers on the same site. This view was supported by a number of Gypsies and Travellers we consulted with; although there were a number of occasions where this was not seen as an issues

Gypsy and Traveller perspectives on accommodation

- The majority of those interviewed considered that their current site/accommodation was either OK, good or very good. In total, 32% described their accommodation as poor or very poor. The design and condition of local authority sites were a main concern to residents who commented upon issues around cleanliness and flooding. Private site occupants were the most happy with their accommodation.
- Although generally people were happy to stay on the site where they were, at the time of the survey, a small number were moving from local authority sites due to their perception of the poor condition and management of their current accommodation. A large number of people were unsure about whether they would remain in their accommodation forever. Bricks and mortar housing is attractive to a number of households, but a move into bricks and mortar housing is generally linked with either poor health, educational needs of children or lack of legal places to pull onto. These respondents may return to site accommodation if space became available.
- A third of people in bricks and mortar accommodation expected to live in their current accommodation indefinitely, while approximately a quarter thought they would leave at some point in the next 5 years. Nearly half of those households in bricks and mortar accommodation were unsure about their future intentions.

- By far the most preferred form of accommodation was a private site owned by either themselves or their family, followed by the maintenance of a travelling way of life by staying on a network of transit sites. A form of 'Group Housing' was seen as broadly favourable, but there appeared a lack of understanding as to what this actually meant in practice, probably due to lack of experience with this kind of accommodation. Living in a local authority or RSL bricks and mortar house was the least favoured accommodation option presented to them.

Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised encampments and unauthorised developments

- According to data held by the local authorities there was a total of just under 650 incidents of unauthorised encampments over the period 2005/06. However, only 59% of authorities held comprehensive records on the number of encampments occurring within their districts. The 'top' four authorities which experienced more than 40 encampments during 2005/06 are Salford, West Lancashire, Allerdale and Wigan. The five authorities which experienced no encampments during the year are Chorley, Preston, Pendle, Ribble Valley and South Ribble.
- According to the survey of Gypsies and Travellers, around six out of ten households on unauthorised encampments were actively looking for somewhere more stable and secure to live within the North West.
- Half of all those Gypsies and Travellers who were encamped at the time of the survey considered the place where they pulled on as inappropriate for their needs, largely due to feelings of insecurity and environmental considerations (i.e. industrial areas, near roads, near waste grounds).
- Those households on unauthorised encampments had very poor living conditions, lacking access to water, toilets, showers or waste disposal; under one in two unauthorised encampments had access to electricity.
- According to the survey of local authorities, there were 11 unauthorised developments at the time of the assessment comprising of approximately 29 pitches. Further unauthorised developments were found during the fieldwork with Gypsies and Travellers.

Accommodation need and supply

Nationally, there are no signs that the growth in the Gypsy and Traveller population will slow significantly. Although the supply of authorised accommodation has declined since 1994, the size of the population of Gypsies and Travellers does not appear to have been affected to a great extent. Rather, 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.).

There is every indication that the North West region will share in this national growth, as a result of its long-standing Gypsy and Traveller community; key transport links; and, attractive urban and rural localities. In turn, this survey has indicated that in many Gypsy and Traveller families, older children will want to form new households, preferably near their families across the North West.

Given the presence of unauthorised encampments, household concealment, and future household formation, the current supply of appropriate accommodation appears to be significantly less than the 'need' identified. It is the conclusion of the project team that there is a need for more site accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers within the North West region.

Residential accommodation

It has been identified that over the next five years (2006-2011) there is a need for at least **332 - 386 additional permanent residential pitches** across the North West.

Table i: Summary of estimated need for residential pitches at a North West regional level 2006-2011¹

Driver of pitch need/demand	Pitch need 2006-2011
Concealed/doubled-up household	30
Unauthorised developments	44
Unauthorised encampments	22-47
Household formation	139
Waiting lists	64
Total residential pitches required (as identified by the North West assessment)	299-324
Total residential pitches required (adjusted to include the more specific pitch needs identified in the Cheshire Partnership and the Lancashire sub-region GTAAs)	332-386

Transit accommodation

There is a need for the development of between at least **55-139 transit pitches** to accommodate Gypsies and Travellers in transit.

Accommodation need 2011-2016

It is estimated that there will be a need for around **209-213 permanent residential pitches** to be developed to cover the period 2011-2016.

¹ As a result of the range of factors already considered, this table does not include a population growth multiplier over the period 2006-2011.

Travelling Showpeople accommodation 2006-2016

It is estimated that there will be a need for around 190 permanent residential pitches to be developed to cover the period 2006-2011; with a further 59 pitches required in 2011-2016.

The regional accommodation need can be broken down by sub-region on a need where it is seen to arise basis, as follows:

Table ii: Residential accommodation need arising from existing district level Gypsy and Traveller populations 2006-2016

Authority	Current authorised provision ²	Total additional residential need 2006 – 2011	Total additional residential need 2011-2016	Total additional residential need 2006-2016 ³
Cheshire Partnership ⁴	300	79 -112 + 17 pitches for Travelling Showpeople	61-66	140-177 + 17 pitches for Travelling Showpeople
Cumbria ⁵	224	12 + 16 pitches for Travelling Showpeople	30	42 + 16 pitches for Travelling Showpeople
Greater Manchester ⁶	610	87 + 149 pitches for Travelling Showpeople	54	141 + 149 pitches for Travelling Showpeople
Lancashire ⁷	403	126-147 + 7 pitches for Travelling Showpeople	79-84	205-231 + 7 pitches for Travelling Showpeople
Merseyside ⁸	30	28	9	37

² These are approximations of the provision (public and private) based on information obtained from the authorities during the course of the assessment. These approximations include pitches for Travelling Showpeople as received from the Lancashire Section of the Showmen's Guild.

³ This figure is less 'known' supply of pitches in the case of the Cheshire Partnership and Lancashire sub-regional GTAA's

⁴ Taken from the Cheshire Partnership GTAA from more local data and evidence – see this assessment for more details. The Cheshire Partnership includes all Cheshire authorities as well as Halton, St Helens and Warrington.

⁵ As the sample sourced within Cumbria was small, it is difficult to translate findings from a regional level to a sub-regional Cumbria level. This need is based on 9 households forming from current private provision and 3 households on unauthorised encampments in need of residential accommodation.

⁶ This need is based on 18 households who are currently doubled-up; 2 households on unauthorised developments; 53 households forming from current authorised provision; and, 14 households on unauthorised encampments in need of residential accommodation.

⁷ Taken from the Lancashire sub-regional GTAA from more local data and evidence – please see this assessment for more details.

These estimates are made on a 'need where it arises' basis and reflect the current uneven distribution of pitch provision and population of the Gypsy and Traveller communities. The results of this apportionment should not necessarily be assumed to be an assessment that those needs be actually met in that specific locality. A 'need where it arises' basis is perceived as an equitable approach for some authorities and inequitable for others. Decisions about meeting the need, as identified in this assessment, between the authorities across the North west will need to be taken at a regional, sub-regional and local level, informed by this assessment of need.

Key regional issues and recommendations

In addition to a quantifiable figure on the development of Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision the main points arising from the assessment are presented as a series of 'key regional issues' covering: equity and choice; social inclusion and sustainability; and, accommodating Gypsies and Travellers in transit. In addition, a total of 25 recommendations are made to the North West Regional Assembly under six broad themes: strategy, systems and policy framework; accommodating Gypsies and Travellers in transit; communication and engagement; developing accommodation; health and housing-related support issues; and, Travelling Showpeople accommodation.

Strategy, systems and policy framework

1. The North West Regional Assembly and partners should seek to address the under provision of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation by working across administrative boundaries both sub-regionally and regionally.
2. The North West Regional Assembly should support local authorities in establishing sub-regional groups, which could help facilitate cross-authority strategies and accommodation allocation across the region.
3. There is a need for a standardised and centralised method of recording occurrences of unauthorised encampments, and the needs of those households on these encampments. Steps should be taken to produce a regional Caravan Count in order to take a much more strategic and accurate view of accommodation need, travelling patterns and trends. It may be appropriate to consider an independent, but experienced, group/network to administer such a count
4. The North West Regional Assembly should ensure that principles of equality, in relation to Gypsies and Travellers, are embedded in relation to the wide range of services local authorities provide. In particular this includes:

⁸ This need is based on 5 households who are currently doubled-up; 2 pitches on unauthorised developments; 18 households forming from current authorised provision; and, 3 households on unauthorised encampments in need of residential accommodation. Merseyside excludes St Helens.

- Housing policies
- Homeless policies
- Harassment
- Communication and engagement
- Statement of Community Involvement
- Site management
- Housing-related support
- Choice-Based Lettings
- Allocation policies
- Planning policies

Accommodating Gypsies and Travellers in transit

5. The North West Regional Assembly should ensure that there is a variety of transit provision in order to cater for the variety of needs.
6. There is a need to work across districts, with private landowners and key Gypsy and Traveller groups in order to provide feasible and appropriate options for mass gatherings. Mechanisms will be needed to accommodate this level of diversity.
7. The North West Regional Assembly should take a lead in providing a broad strategic view of accommodating Gypsies and Travellers when travelling.
8. The level of accommodation provision across the North West region should remain under constant review.

Communication and engagement

9. There should be a co-ordinated approach in engaging the local communities, raising cultural awareness, dispelling some of the persistent myths around Gypsies and Travellers and raising awareness about the process of developing accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers.
10. The North West Regional Assembly should take a lead in encouraging and supporting Gypsy and Traveller led and directed groups such as the Northern Network of Gypsy and Traveller groups and the 'We're Talking Homes' initiative; and Cheshire Gypsy and Travellers Voice, in improving the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
11. The North West Regional Assembly should take a lead in developing communication networks and tapping into already operating networks involving all key partners, in order to remain updated as to key issues. For instance, housing colleagues should be fully involved in all decisions relating to planning and site provision.

Developing accommodation

12. Those officers and agencies leading the planning, design and development of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation should involve the target Gypsy and Traveller population in all stages.
13. The North West Regional Assembly should actively promote guidance issued by Communities and Local Government about site design and management.
14. Those involved in Gypsy and Traveller site (both residential and transit) and 'housing' design should approach this in a creative and innovative manner. Preferences and aspirations of Gypsies and Travellers should be taken into consideration. Important things to consider include:
 - Location to local services and transport networks
 - Pitch size
 - Facilities
 - Amenity blocks
 - Management
 - Mixture of accommodation (chalet, trailer etc.)
 - Utility of outside space (driveways, gardens etc.)
 - Homes for life principles
 - Health and safety
 - Health and related support issues
 - Tenure Mix
15. The principles of promoting affordable accommodation to members of the non-Traveller communities should be adapted to the differing accommodation types used by members of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Health and housing-related support issues

16. It will be an important component, in order to produce sustainable solutions for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision that all relevant statutory departments engage with Gypsy and Traveller needs. This is particularly the case for Supporting People teams who should be embedded in the strategic planning and delivery of services.
17. The North West Regional Assembly should encourage the involvement of Supporting People in creating additional floating Gypsy and Traveller housing support across the sub-regions. Such officers could offer support and assistance to enable those people wishing to remain in bricks and mortar accommodation or live on sites, to do so.
18. Supporting People teams should network with Supporting People teams locally, regionally and nationally in order to share and disseminate good practice on meeting the housing-related support needs of Gypsy and Traveller community members.

19. The profile of Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) should be raised in relation to Gypsies and Travellers who wish to remain in their own homes. It is important that such agencies are able to engage with people living on private sites as well as those living in bricks and mortar accommodation.
20. There is a need for more research into the health needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the North West region.

Travelling Showpeople accommodation

21. When developing new site provision for Travelling Showpeople the North West Regional Assembly should take a strategic view of allocation of sites which accommodates logistical issues (i.e. travelling with large equipment) and the pattern of fun fairs across the area.
22. The North West Regional Assembly should consult with the local branch of the Showmen's Guild to discuss plans to increase and develop the accommodation provision for Travelling Showpeople.
23. The North West Regional Assembly should be aware of, and implement, the guidance issued by the CLG around planning and Travelling Showpeople sites.
24. In order to adapt to current working and living patterns of Travelling Showpeople, the North West Regional Assembly should move towards the establishment of permanent provision rather than temporary accommodation.
25. In order to understand the particular accommodation issues facing Travelling Showpeople in the region there is a need for a further in-depth study of their accommodation and related needs.