

Cheshire Partnership Area Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation and Related Services Assessment



Executive Summary

By

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May 2007

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.

The North West Regional Assembly, on behalf of the Cheshire Chief Executives Advisory Group, commissioned this assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation across the Cheshire Partnership Area in July 2006. The authorities which comprise the Cheshire Partnership are: Cheshire County Council, Halton Borough Council, Warrington Borough Council, Chester City Council, Ellesmere Port & Neston Borough Council, Vale Royal Borough Council, Crewe & Nantwich Borough Council, Macclesfield Borough Council, Congleton Borough Council and St Helens Metropolitan Borough Council. The study 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 communities. The assessment was managed by a Steering Group composed of members from the Cheshire Partnership 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;
- Five thematic focus groups with 28 key stakeholders; and
- A total of 155 interviews with Gypsies and Travellers from a range of tenures.

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) 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

- At the time of the survey the study area had 59 pitches on three residential sites all managed by the local authorities concerned; 222 pitches on private authorised sites; a minimum of 3 unauthorised developments containing 16 pitches; a minimum of 36 families on unauthorised encampments; and at least 109 households in bricks and mortar housing. In all there was a minimum of 442 Gypsy/Traveller families on sites, in houses or encamped at the time of the survey. The average household size was 3.5 persons, significantly larger than the average in the settled community. The average caravan to household ratio was 1.4 caravans per household.
- Survey responses suggested that there was a small incidence of disability and ill-health with 12.0% of people reporting some form of disability or long-term illness. Experience of multiple incidences of ill-health was not uncommon
- Nearly three-quarters of the respondents thought that education is 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 Traveller households consulted reported being involved in a wide range of jobs. Self-employment was a key feature with building, groundwork, dealing, hawking, uPVC & roofing and gardening frequently mentioned. A small number of respondents worked in non-traditional Gypsy/Traveller trades including healthcare, hairdressing 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. Because of the influence of family roles and responsibilities traditional Gypsy and Traveller trades remain an integral part of the community.

- Nearly half of those interviewed considered Cheshire, or areas within Cheshire, as their 'home'. Just over a third of those interviewed reported that they had not travelled at all in the last 12 month period. Approximately a third of the sample had travelled in some form over the previous 12 month period. The vast majority of those that had travelled in the last 12 months had been engaged in seasonal travelling (i.e. travelling in late spring, summer and early autumn).

Gypsy and Traveller perspectives on accommodation

- The vast majority of those interviewed thought that their site/accommodation was either OK, good or very good. In total, a fifth described their accommodation as poor or very poor. The environment in which their site was located was a main concern as site accommodation was often near busy roads, waste ground or near train lines. Almost all of those we spoke to in bricks and mortar accommodation described their accommodation as OK, good or very good. Only a tiny minority of respondents described their home as poor or very poor, many of whom were Showpeople.
- Very few respondents expressed a desire to move from their accommodation within the next five years. It is clear that Gypsies and Travellers are afforded few accommodation options – any movement from sites is constrained by a perceived lack of space on other authorised sites. Generally speaking residents who have stable accommodation do not wish to return to travelling in the current climate. Bricks and mortar housing is attractive to a number of families, however at the same time, poor experience of bricks and mortar living has discouraged those that have already tried this from returning to this type of accommodation.
- Two thirds of people in bricks and mortar accommodation expected to live in their current accommodation indefinitely, while a small group thought they would leave at some point in the next 5 years.
- By far the most preferred form of accommodation was a private site owned by either themselves or their family, followed by staying on a site owned by the local authority. The possibility of maintaining a travelling lifestyle by staying on a network of transit sites was viewed positively. A form of group housing was seen as broadly favourable but there appeared a lack of understanding as to what this actual meant in practice, probably due to lack of experience with this kind of accommodation.

Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised encampments and unauthorised developments

- According to Police records there were a total of 258 incidents of encampments during 2005. These records showed a very consistent number of encampments over the 2005 period with particular peaks during the summer months and lows during the winter months. Analysis of the records held by local authorities on unauthorised encampments showed a total of 184 encampments from August 2005-August 2006.
- Six out of ten households on unauthorised encampments were actively looking for somewhere more stable and secure to live within the study area.
- There appears to be a clear relationship between land ownership and duration of encampment. The average duration of the 45 encampments with known duration on public land was ten days; on private land it was five days (85 encampments).
- According to the survey the areas in which Gypsies and Travellers were currently encamped were not their preferred stopping places. The majority considered these areas in negative terms 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; only half of unauthorised encampments had access to electricity.
- According to the survey of local authorities there were 3 unauthorised developments (all in St Helens) at the time of the assessment comprising of approximately 13 pitches. From the survey of Gypsies and Travellers the project team found further unauthorised developments in Chester, Congleton and Vale Royal.

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. 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.).

Residential accommodation

It has been identified that over the next five years (2006-2011) there is a need for around **79 - 112 additional permanent residential pitches** for Gypsies and Travellers across the Study Area. In addition, there is a need for **17 authorised residential pitches for Travelling Showpeople**. On current trends and policies, this need is unlikely to be met since the only source of supply is a low pitch turn over on the sites and a small number of vacancies arising on one local authority site in St Helens.

It is the conclusion of the assessment that there is a need for more accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers across the Study Area. The drivers of this need can be broken down as follows.

Table i: Summary of estimated need for residential pitches at a Cheshire Partnership Area level 2006-2011

Driver of pitch site need/demand	Pitch need 2006-2011
Concealed/doubled-up household	6
Household formation	23
Waiting lists	24
Unauthorised developments	16
Movement from bricks and mortar housing	11-36
Unauthorised encampments	22-30
Sub-Total	102 - 135
Driver of supply for residential pitches	No. of pitches 2006-2011
Current pitch turnover (1 pitch per year)	15
Vacant pitches	8
Sub-Total	23
Total residential pitches required	79-112
Total residential Travelling Showpeople pitches required	17

Transit accommodation

There is a need for the development of between **25-37 transit pitches** to accommodate transient Gypsies and Travellers.

Accommodation need 2011-2016

It is estimated that there will be a need for around **61-66 permanent residential pitches** to be developed to cover the period 2011-2016.

Local authority distribution of accommodation need 2006-2016

This need can be broken down by each district 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 ¹ (pitches)	Total additional residential need 2006-2011 (pitches)	Supply of pitches 2006-2011	Total additional residential need 2011-2016 (pitches)	Estimated supply of pitches 2011 - 2016	Total additional residential need 2006-2016 (less supply 2006-2016) (pitches)
Chester	26	4 – 7	Nil	5	Nil	9 - 12
Congleton	74	22 – 30 + 4 pitches for Travelling Showpeople	5	14 - 16	5	26 - 36 + 4 pitches for Travelling Showpeople
Crewe and Nantwich	27	5 – 11	Nil	5 - 6	Nil	10 - 17
Ellesmere Port and Neston	0	5 – 9	Nil	1	Nil	5 - 10
Halton	36	28 – 31	5	10 – 11	5	28 – 32
Macclesfield	0	0 – 1	Nil	0	Nil	1
St Helens	70	15 – 19	13	14	5	11 – 15
Vale Royal	42	11 – 16 + 4 pitches for Travelling Showpeople	Nil	6 - 7	Nil	17 – 23 + 4 pitches for Travelling Showpeople
Warrington	25	2 – 5 + 9 pitches for Travelling Showpeople	Nil	4	Nil	6 – 9 + 4 9 pitches for Travelling Showpeople

Note: For pragmatic reasons these figures have been rounded up 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 total of 30 recommendations have been made for the Cheshire Partnership authorities.

¹ 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.

Strategy, Systems and Policy Framework

1. It is important that the profile is raised of both the Cheshire Chief Executive Advisory Group for Gypsies and Travellers and the Area Wide Code of Practice for Unauthorised Encampments. Such mechanisms need to be embedded within the existing working practice of key stakeholders.
2. 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 Partnership wide Caravan Count in order to take a much more strategic and accurate view of accommodation need, travelling patterns and trends. This Count should also be able to take into consideration cross-border issues outside of the Partnership area. This Count would feed into a Regional Caravan Count.
3. In order to adhere to the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and to ensure the high quality of on-going monitoring, authorities should ensure that Gypsies and Travellers are recognised in all their ethnic monitoring forms, most urgently in relation to housing and planning.
4. Residential and transit site waiting lists should be:
 - Accessible to all resident Gypsies and Travellers in the Cheshire Partnership area
 - Available to be accessed in advance via telephone or ICT systems
 - Clear and transparent in terms of allocation policies
 - Formalised
 - Centralised
 - Standardised
5. Authorities should ensure that principles of equality, in relation to Gypsies and Travellers, are embedded in relation to the wide range of services provided. In particular this includes:
 - Housing policies
 - Homeless policies
 - Harassment
 - Communication and engagement
 - Statement of Community Involvement
 - Site management
 - Housing-related support
 - Choice-Based Lettings
 - Allocation policies
 - Planning Policies

6. Authorities should be sensitive to the different cultural and support needs of Gypsies and Travellers who may present as homeless and those who may require local authority accommodation.
7. All authorities should take a common approach to the Welfare Needs Assessment. This should be grounded in good practice and be pro-active in meeting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
8. Housing officers, site managers and other relevant personnel should liaise to ensure that advice on allocation policies and procedures is always up-to-date and that site managers or other liaison staff can assist people through the system.
9. The practice of licensing pitches should be discontinued and replaced by more formal tenancies. A tenancy would assure the resident of greater security and encourage feelings of ownership in their site/accommodation.

Accommodating transient Travellers

10. There needs to be a variety in transit provision in order to cater for the variety of needs. This might range from formal transit sites, through less-equipped stopping places used on a regular basis to temporary sites with temporary facilities available during an event or for part of the year;
11. 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.
12. The level of accommodation provision across the Cheshire Partnership area should remain under constant review.

Communication and engagement

13. The authorities should engage in efforts to raise cultural awareness issues and dispel some of the persistent myths around Gypsies and Travellers.
14. Authorities should develop their communication and engagement strategies already in place for consultation with non-Travelling communities and tailor these, in an appropriate manner, to Gypsy and Traveller community members. The experience and contacts achieved by the Community Interviewers who were involved in this study, in particular the Cheshire Gypsy and Traveller Voice, could provide one opportunity for the authorities to begin such dialogue and exchanges.
15. Planning departments should offer appropriate advice and support to Gypsies and Travellers on the workings of the planning system and the criteria to be considered in applications.

16. Each authority should identify a clear lead officer who manages each authority's response to Gypsies and Traveller issues.
17. Each authority should develop a working group within the authority involving all the partner agencies, in order to remain updated as to key national and local issues. For instance, housing colleagues should be fully involved in all decisions relating to planning and site provision.
18. A Cheshire Partnership wide co-ordination group on Gypsy and Traveller issues should be established to assist the authorities in developing a meaningful and co-ordinated approach to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation and related issues.

Developing accommodation

19. 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. In turn, site (both residential and transit) and 'housing' design should be approached 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
- Amenities
- Sheds
- Management
- Mixture of accommodation (chalet, trailer etc.)
- Utility of outside space (driveways, gardens etc.)
- Homes for life principles
- Health and related support issues
- Tenure Mix
- Space for short term visitors

20. Authorities should ensure that existing statutory guidelines and emerging good practice are used in relation to residential and transit site design management and health and safety issues.
21. The principles and methods used by authorities and RSLs of promoting affordable accommodation to members of the non-Traveller communities should be adapted to the accommodation used by members of Gypsy and Traveller communities.

Health and housing-related support issues

22. It will be an important component, in order to produce sustainable solutions for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision, for all relevant statutory departments to 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.
23. Authorities should work with Supporting People to create additional floating Gypsy and Traveller housing support workers. 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.
24. 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.
25. 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.
26. There is a need for more research into the health needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the Cheshire Partnership area.

Travelling Showpeople Accommodation

27. When developing new site provision for Travelling Showpeople authorities 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.
28. Authorities should consult with the local branch of the Showmen's Guild to discuss plans to increase and develop the accommodation provision for Travelling Showpeople.
29. Authorities should be aware of and implement the guidance issued by the CLG around planning and Travelling Showpeople sites.
30. In order to adapt to current working and living patterns of Travelling Showpeople authorities should move towards the establishment of permanent site provision rather than temporary accommodation.