



Office of the
Deputy Prime Minister
Creating sustainable communities

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments

Draft practice guidance

Gypsy &
Traveller Unit

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Telephone 020 7944 4400
Web site www.odpm.gov.uk

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The purpose of this draft practice guidance is to provide advice to local authorities on carrying out an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. Its present status is that of a working draft document which is likely to be subject to further change.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1. The assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need is a statutory requirement under s.225 of the Housing Act 2004, which amends s.8 of the Housing Act 1985 and is due to come into force in 2006. S. 225 also requires local authorities to produce a Gypsy and Traveller accommodation strategy. This will need to be informed by a full understanding of their accommodation needs. A Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment will be required either as part of a housing market assessment in respect of the local community generally, or separately where a housing market assessment is not being conducted at that time.
2. The Government's policies on Gypsy and Traveller accommodation and enforcement are set within a framework of rights and responsibilities, in which everyone's rights must be respected but where, at the same time, equal standards of behaviour are expected from all. Creating and sustaining strong communities is at the heart of the Government's Respect agenda and will have benefits for the settled and Gypsy and Traveller communities alike.

Aim of the guidance

3. The guidance aims to provide advice on carrying out an Accommodation Assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers. It is not exhaustive or prescriptive. While it is recommended that the basic principles outlined here should be followed, the exact approach will need to be adapted to local circumstances.
4. This guidance sets out:
 - Why the Accommodation Assessment needs to be done
 - What it should produce
 - Whom it should survey
 - Key differences between the Gypsy and Traveller community and others, and the practical implications of these differences
 - How 'accommodation need' for Gypsies and Travellers differs from that for the settled community
 - Timescales for carrying out and updating the assessment.
5. In addition, it provides advice on carrying out the assessment, including:
 - Partnership working
 - Deciding who should carry out the assessment
 - The use of existing data sources
 - The use of specialist surveys, including survey techniques and questions
 - How to identify and communicate with the Gypsy and Traveller community.

6. This supplements the current ODPM draft practice guidance on housing market assessments published on the ODPM website in December 2005 and should be read in conjunction with it.

Who should use the guidance?

7. The guidance is provided for those within local authorities who have responsibility for ensuring that s.225 of the Housing Act 2004 is acted upon, and who will be undertaking, arranging or commissioning the Accommodation Assessment for Gypsies and Travellers.
8. It is also recommended that local councillors are made aware of the requirement to conduct an Accommodation Assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need, and of this guidance. Gypsy and Traveller accommodation can be a sensitive issue within communities and it may be helpful to ensure that Council members are fully briefed at an early stage.

CHAPTER 2

Assessing the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers

Why assess Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs?

9. In the past, the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (especially those who live in caravans or mobile homes) have not routinely formed part of the process by which local authorities assess people's housing needs. The consequences of this have been that the current and projected accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers have often not been well understood.
10. The introduction of the new planning system provides for an evidence-based, strategic and regional system, in which the needs and wider demand of the Gypsy and Traveller communities for suitable accommodation can be considered and met equally and fairly alongside other sectors of the community. This guidance is intended to support that approach.
11. Gypsies and Irish Travellers are distinct ethnic groups under Race Relations case law and all the duties on public bodies under Race Relations legislation apply. The accommodation needs of all Gypsies and Travellers, including the above groups as well as "New Travellers", should be identified, understood and addressed through the planning framework and housing strategy on the same basis as other sectors of the community. Only in this way can the needs of each sector of the community be understood and appropriate allocation of resources be ensured. This will help to ensure that future planning and investment decisions are based on well informed and accurate data, that they gain acceptance from local communities, and are defensible if challenged.
12. An understanding of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation issues is essential to make properly planned provision and avoid the problems associated with ad hoc or unauthorised provision. A comprehensive Accommodation Assessment and strategy to meet the need which is identified will greatly strengthen the ability of local authorities to respond swiftly and firmly to inappropriate unauthorised developments and encampments.

What is 'accommodation need' for Gypsies and Travellers?

13. In the current ODPM draft *Planning Policy Statement 3*, housing need is defined as 'households who are unable to access suitable housing without some financial assistance' and housing demand 'the quantity of housing that households are willing and able to buy or rent'.

14. In many cases, this definition will also be appropriate for Gypsies and Travellers, particularly those living in bricks and mortar housing. However, the distinctive accommodation requirements of some Gypsies and Travellers will give rise to similar types of need, but in a different context, for example:

Caravan dwelling households:

- who have no authorised site anywhere on which to reside;
- whose existing site accommodation is overcrowded or unsuitable, but who are unable to obtain larger or more suitable accommodation;
- who contain suppressed households who are unable to set up separate family units and who are unable to access a place on an authorised site, or obtain or afford land to develop one.

Bricks and mortar dwelling households:

- whose existing accommodation is overcrowded or unsuitable ('unsuitable' in this context can include unsuitability by virtue of proven psychological aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation; although local authorities will wish to satisfy themselves that this is of sufficient severity to constitute a need rather than a preference);
- that contain suppressed households who are unable to set up separate family units and who are unable to access suitable or appropriate accommodation.

15. It should also be recognised that the shortage of sites and local hostility, as well as lack of income, may prevent Gypsies and Travellers exercising their free choice in the accommodation market – and that there may in fact be no 'local accommodation market' in sites.
16. Once the assessment of accommodation need has been carried out for Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised sites, it will be possible to identify whether their presence on those sites indicates a need for permanent site accommodation within that area, or for temporary accommodation there to help facilitate a desire to travel elsewhere for economic or cultural purposes. The lifestyles and cultural traditions of Gypsies and Travellers often give rise to patterns of nomadism or semi-nomadism. Some of those on unauthorised sites may have permanent bases elsewhere and hence not be 'in need' in the strict sense set out above. However, it should be recognised that there is a lifestyle and cultural tradition of travelling within these communities, and the need for transit or stopping place sites should be addressed to facilitate this, and minimise the disruption it can cause.

Why do Gypsies and Travellers need a separate assessment?

17. Gypsies and Travellers will typically form only a very small percentage of the population in any given area. (The total population is estimated to be about 0.6% of the total UK population, of which only a proportion are living in, or seeking, caravan site accommodation.) This means that the main assessment is unlikely to yield results that are statistically robust for Gypsies and Travellers as a separate group.

18. Cultural differences, a reluctance of some members of these communities to identify themselves as Gypsies or Travellers, or a disinclination to participate in a process with which they are not familiar, mean that the main housing market assessment process is likely to be markedly less successful in accessing this group than others. In addition, the particular lifestyle and culture of Gypsies and Travellers may give rise to distinctive accommodation needs, which the main assessment will be unlikely to pick up.

What should the Accommodation Assessment produce?

19. The aim of the assessment is to provide data which will identify Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need separately from wider demand and aspiration, in the same way as for the rest of the population. It should enable Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need to be quantified in terms of:
- site accommodation on private sites;
 - site accommodation on socially rented residential sites;
 - site accommodation on transit sites;
 - bricks and mortar housing for owner occupation by Gypsies and Travellers;
 - affordable bricks and mortar housing.
20. A key aim of the wider housing market assessment is to provide the basis on which to allocate resources, including for Gypsy and Traveller provision. An assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need will mean that, often for the first time, it will be understood and can be set alongside other needs. And just as for the rest of the community, needs assessments are primarily about understanding and meeting need, not wider demand or aspiration. They may also help to identify unmet need for Gypsy and Traveller access to wider service provision, through the information provided by the Accommodation Assessment process.

Whom does the Accommodation Assessment cover?

21. The precise definition of ‘gypsies and travellers’ for this purpose will be given in Regulations arising from the Housing Act 2004 after consultation. A draft definition is currently contained in the consultation document, *Consultation on the Definition of the term ‘gypsies and travellers’ for the purposes of the Housing Act 2004* issued in January 2006 which explains further the relationship between this definition and that to be used for planning purposes.
22. Until these regulations are in place local authorities should, for the purposes of the Accommodation Assessment process, use the draft definition as stated below:
- “Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their family’s or dependants’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism and/or caravan dwelling.”
23. The intention of this definition is to cover all those whose distinctive ethnicity, cultural background and/or lifestyle may give rise to specific accommodation needs, now or in the future, which need to be assessed and planned for.

24. A broad definition is necessary to achieve a full understanding of the accommodation needs of this community, and to put appropriate strategies in place to meet it. For example, Gypsies and Travellers, and their children and other relatives, in bricks and mortar housing may form part of the source from which future site need and aspiration may arise, and it will be essential to understand this. On the other hand assessing the needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers will also help identify the ways in which housing may be made to work better for them, and made more attractive to Gypsies and Travellers in general. This could reduce the numbers who leave or wish to leave housing for sites, and encourage some of those currently on unauthorised sites to move into, or back into, housing.
25. In some parts of the country ‘New Travellers’ form a substantial minority of the travelling population. Although these people have adopted a nomadic lifestyle relatively recently their needs should be assessed alongside those of the more traditional Gypsy and Traveller groups. To do otherwise would be to neglect the needs of part of the community, leading to practical problems and potential legal challenge. It should be noted that travelling showmen and circus people travelling together as such are not excluded from this definition, and where there is a need for winter quarters for this group, it may make sense for local authorities to assess this need as part of the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessment as many of the issues will be similar.
26. It may not always be clear-cut where a particular group falls within the definition. However local authorities are reminded that the accommodation needs of the whole community must be assessed under s.8 of the Housing act 1985. Therefore if the local authority decides that accommodation needs of a particular group should not be assessed under this guidance in the context of s.225 of the Housing Act 2004 they are nonetheless under a duty to assess those needs as part of the wider s.8 requirement.
27. The inclusion of someone within a survey as a ‘Gypsy’, ‘Traveller’, or ‘New Traveller’, within the definition set out in para 22 above, does not in itself imply that that person ‘should’ live on a site, or that they have ‘gypsy status’ for planning purposes, nor does it carry any presumption about how identified needs should be met. Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs may be met in a variety of ways, including:
- standard owner-occupied bricks and mortar housing;
 - affordable housing, or group lets of affordable housing;
 - provision of group housing (small groups of purpose-built bungalows designated for use by Gypsies and Travellers);
 - socially rented site accommodation of various kinds;
 - privately rented site accommodation;
 - Gypsies’ and Travellers’ own provision of authorised accommodation providing legal and licensed sites on their own land.
28. Inclusion within an assessment of accommodation need for Gypsies and Travellers does mean that the individual belongs to a group whose accommodation needs must be assessed by the local authority in accordance with s.225 of the Housing Act 2004. Once a need has been identified the local authority will feed it into the process set out in paras 81-87 below.

How will it differ from assessing the housing needs of the settled community?

29. The aims of assessment for Gypsies and Travellers will be the same as for other sectors of the community. However, the shortage of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation, as well as the distinctive lifestyle and culture of Gypsies and Travellers, will mean that some aspects of the process may need to differ. Unlike other sectors of the community, Gypsies and Travellers reside in three main types of accommodation:
- bricks and mortar housing;
 - authorised local authority, RSL or private caravan sites;
 - unauthorised sites (either unauthorised encampments, on land they do not own, or unauthorised developments, on land they do own).
30. The accommodation needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities may differ from the rest of the population because of:
- their nomadic or semi-nomadic pattern of life;
 - the preference of some for caravan-dwelling;
 - movement between housing and caravans;
 - their presence on unauthorised encampments or developments.
31. Mobility between areas may have the following implications for carrying out an assessment:
- a need to work at a sub-regional level (although not necessarily the housing market level, which is the basis of the housing market assessment) both in carrying out assessments and delivering solutions;
 - the timing of the accommodation assessment for Gypsies and Travellers will need to be considered (see para 70);
 - different questions may need to be asked (see paras 74-75);
 - different data sources may need to be used.
32. It is important to consider:
- How you identify and engage with those to be surveyed (see paras 62-65).
 - How interviewers put questions (see paras 71-73).
33. If your authority has little knowledge of, or reliable data on, Gypsies and Travellers, the results of the initial assessment may be less precise than for other groups, and long-term forecasting may be more difficult. If this is the case, it will be important for the assessment to be regularly updated.

Timescales for carrying out the assessment

34. In line with ODPM Circular *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites*, ODPM 01/2006 Regional Planning Bodies will be preparing Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS) and local planning authorities will be preparing Development Plan Documents on the basis of pitch requirements identified by local housing assessments.
35. Local planning authorities were required to submit their Local Development Schemes, setting out local development documents (LDDs) they intend to produce, and what the policy content of these documents would be, by the 28 March 2005. Most authorities have now moved on to drafting LDDs which will need to contain policies and site allocations for Gypsy and Traveller sites. It is therefore essential that housing market assessments provide data on pitch numbers as soon as possible to inform the specific site allocations in these LDDs, and the pitch allocations for each local planning authority in Regional Spatial Strategies.

CHAPTER 3

Carrying out the assessment

Preparation

36. The degree of sensitivity that often surrounds Gypsy and Traveller issues will make it very important to achieve buy-in to the Accommodation Assessment process, from local politicians and the settled community. If the process is not seen as legitimate, it will be much harder to get support for the later stages of providing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation. It is essential also that the process has credibility and acceptance within the Gypsy and Traveller community.

Responsibility for the assessment process

37. The local authority will need to make early decisions on where leadership of the process should rest. This should be either in the Housing or Planning Department. Whoever is appointed should ensure that the Housing and Planning Departments work closely together, have suitable seniority to take ownership of the outcome and ensure that policies are adopted across the local authority as a whole.

38. While the responsibility to carry out the assessment rests with individual local authorities, it is strongly recommended that local authorities work in partnership with others. The potential benefits of such an approach are particularly relevant in relation to the Gypsy and Traveller community because of their mobility and travelling patterns, which are liable to cross local authority boundaries, and which must be understood if appropriate provision is to be made. For example, a network of transit sites along well-used routes will be far more useful than a single isolated transit site.

39. Partnership working should help to deliver:

- a bigger sample size, hence more accurate results, and a better understanding of the need across the administrative boundaries;
- a better understanding of travelling patterns, particularly where they cross administrative boundaries;
- a common approach and consistency across that area;
- economies of cost and scale;
- reduced risks of double counting;
- opportunities to work together to devise a concerted and strategic approach to Gypsy and Traveller accommodation shortages and enforcement against unauthorised sites.

40. Early discussions should take place with other local authorities in the region to identify the scope for partnership working, and the most appropriate areas to be involved. Some local authorities have already formed successful partnerships for assessing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need and demand.

41. The area to be covered will largely depend on travel and movement patterns within the region, and local authorities generally have a good understanding of these patterns. County Councils are often involved in Gypsy and Traveller provision, and if appropriate should be invited to be involved in the partnership.
42. Although partnership working is strongly recommended, it is essential that the data arising from jointly conducted assessments remain capable of disaggregation to the local authority level, to ensure each partner retains ownership of its own information base and can produce this information in circumstances involving a planning inquiry or appeal specific to the situation within that local authority area alone.
43. The picture of where Gypsies and Travellers live and want to live may have become distorted by different approaches to provision and enforcement adopted by different local authorities over the years. Where this is the case the local authority responsible for the area where the need is currently found will need to work closely with other local authorities in the region to find a shared solution. In some cases, local authorities which currently show a low level of need may need to accept that they will have to play a greater part in meeting regional need.

Working arrangements

44. A steering group for the work will help to ensure that the process is informed by all available expertise, and links in as far as possible with the housing market assessment for the rest of the community. It is important that key stakeholders are aware and involved, for example:
 - representatives from the Housing and Planning Departments;
 - representatives from the local Gypsy and Traveller community;
 - representatives from the Gypsy and Traveller Service and other services such as education who work closely with the Gypsy and Traveller community.
45. It may also be useful to include:
 - someone with detailed knowledge of the housing market assessment for the settled community;
 - someone with detailed knowledge of Gypsy and Traveller needs assessment in another geographical area.
46. As well as considering specific issues to do with the design of the assessment, this group will also have an important role in publicising the assessment within their respective constituencies and ensuring that its results are taken seriously and properly acted on. In particular local authority Housing and Planning Department representatives on the steering group will need to work closely together to ensure the outcome of the assessment process, and subsequent actions and policies arising from it, are closely co-ordinated across their respective Departments and across the local authority as a whole.

Stakeholder engagement

47. Wider consultation on the design and conduct of the assessment should also be undertaken with local agencies and the local Gypsy and Traveller community. Advice on how to assess the accommodation needs of ethnic minority groups in general is provided within the ODPM draft guidance on sub-regional housing market assessments (available on the ODPM website). It may be useful to trial draft questionnaires with members of the local Gypsy and Traveller community to ensure questions are appropriate and are best phrased to secure maximum response.
48. It is crucial that the purpose of the work is fully explained to the Gypsy and Traveller communities before the survey begins. This will help to secure support and buy-in for the process. Under data protection principles, the purpose of the data gathering, and the use to which information will be put should be made clear, and consent should be sought for the use of the data. It should be emphasised that in the completed accommodation assessment, no data will be attributable to individuals. It should also be made clear that while the information provided will be used to inform decisions on provision, and will provide a benefit to the community as a whole, it would not be realistic or appropriate to expect every individual need or aspiration expressed in the survey to be met. It is important that stakeholders are informed of the progress and outcome of the assessment.

Ensuring a high quality assessment

49. Given that the results of the assessment are a crucial aspect of the evidence base for both planning and housing purposes, it is essential that the exercise is conducted properly and contains high quality information. The process involved in conducting the assessment should be transparent, with clearly documented evidence of assumptions made, and decisions taken, to ensure that others can understand how the results have been reached. The results, conclusions or strategies arising from the assessment may become subject to challenge or judicial review during the LDF process or planning appeals. A properly conducted assessment process and clear policies to address the outcomes will help to ensure that the local authority's actions and decisions are defensible in these circumstances.

Carrying out the assessment

50. Once it has been decided what area the assessment should cover, the local authority or partnership will have to decide who will have overall responsibility for the conduct of the assessment. In addition, each local authority will have to appoint someone who will take ownership of the outcome and responsibility for securing agreement to it within that local authority.
51. The local authority or partnership will also need to appoint those who will be managing the assessment itself. There are several options for the latter, which include:
 - in-house staff, either within the Gypsy and Traveller section or the housing department of the local authority;
 - County Council staff, if they are leading an assessment across several districts;
 - consultants.

52. It may be sensible for different groups to be involved at different times – for example, in-house staff analysing the existing data, and specialists being brought in to do more detailed assessments.
53. Where consultants are employed, particular care should be taken to ensure that all parties have a clear and detailed understanding of what service the consultant is expected to provide, the methodology to be used and the outcome to be delivered. The ODPM guidance on housing market assessments gives further advice about the use of consultants.
54. In reaching a decision, local authorities or a partnership will wish to consider:
- the capacity and expertise of in-house staff;
 - the qualifications and track record of consultants;
 - how effective each option might be in reaching the target group (e.g. whether in-house staff are also responsible for enforcement action, and hence might be seen negatively by Gypsies and Travellers, or whether the use of Gypsies and Travellers themselves may be useful to obtain access to the community and secure the trust of those being assessed);
 - the perceived independence of the process, which will be vital for securing public acceptance of the results;
 - the credibility of each option with both Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community;
 - costs.
55. The next step will be to implement the assessment itself. This is likely to have two separate components:
- an analysis of existing data sources;
 - conducting a specialist survey.
56. Local authorities are reminded of their duties under the Data Protection Act 1998, which covers personal information provided to them as part of the Accommodation Assessment process. It is essential that the privacy of those who participated is safeguarded. No personal information relating to specific individuals should be made public, and no individual should be identifiable through the description of where or how they live or their other circumstances. Further information on data protection is available from the Information Commissioner's Office, on 01625-545745, or at www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk.

Existing data sources

57. Some information is currently held by local authorities or other agencies, and subject to data protection requirements, can be used to inform the assessment. For example:
- The number of Gypsy and Traveller caravans and type of site on which they are located are recorded by the local authority via the Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Count every January and July. Until January 2005, the Caravan Count also recorded numbers of families. This data is publicly available on the ODPM website.
 - Information should also be available from local authority site management records. These may provide information about site licensee households, pitch turnover or length of licences, and site waiting lists and transfer applications.

- Information relating to private authorised sites. This should include the number of caravans permitted on each site, whether the planning permission was granted on a permanent or temporary basis, and whether it restricted occupancy to named individuals.
- Local authorities should also gather data on unauthorised encampments and unauthorised developments in their area. This should include the number of caravans and family groups on each site, length of occupation, and the up to date position regarding planning applications, appeals and/or enforcement action, planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller caravan sites which have been refused planning permission by the local planning authority over the previous 5 years, the outcomes of any appeals, and those where enforcement action has been taken.
- A local authority may also have additional sources of data about local Gypsy and Traveller populations, subject to personal confidentiality safeguards, via service providers, such as health service providers, Supporting People staff, and the Traveller Education Service (TES). The TES will have information on Gypsy and Traveller pupil numbers via the Pupil Level Annual School Census but, as with all personal data, any transfer will need to comply with the Data Protection Acts.
- Gypsy Liaison Officers and others working with this community may well have much more detailed personal knowledge of the community, and local authorities or partnerships may want to draw on this when designing and carrying out their assessment.

58. However, for some groups there is likely to be very little secondary data. Although more than half of the Gypsy and Traveller community is thought to be residing in bricks and mortar, housing records are unlikely to identify who or where they are. Ethnic monitoring categories often do not identify Gypsies and Travellers separately, and where they do, Gypsies and Travellers in housing may be reluctant to identify themselves as such. Similarly, housing waiting lists are unlikely to identify Gypsies and Travellers. The records held by other service providers cannot be assumed to be comprehensive either, as they will only record those accessing the service, and it is known that Gypsies and Travellers frequently do not take up available services, for a variety of reasons.

59. It is unlikely that existing data alone will be sufficient in carrying out an Accommodation Assessment, as such data is not likely to be comprehensive or detailed. For example, while the Caravan Count data can provide a proxy for the amount of unmet need for authorised pitches, it will be a crude proxy, as it says nothing about the number of households or individuals in those caravans, the adequacy of their accommodation, their needs, their preferences, their travelling patterns or their reasons for living where they do. It will not establish the need for pitches among those housed in bricks and mortar, or whether some of those on unauthorised sites would prefer to live in bricks and mortar if they could access it.

60. Fuller information is needed to ensure that Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need is adequately identified and plans put in place to address it. It is therefore recommended that the local authority or partnership conduct a specialist survey and/or qualitative research to obtain further more detailed information.

Conducting a specialist survey

61. Appendix A of the ODPM draft practice guidance on housing market assessments gives general guidance on commissioning a survey. However, there are several aspects unique to Gypsy and Traveller assessments which will need to be borne in mind.

Identifying the community

62. To ensure that the sample surveyed is as representative of the population of Gypsies and Travellers as possible, existing data about the community should be used to inform the selection of sites and the households visited. It is likely that the best quality data will be held about Gypsies and Travellers on authorised sites, and these are likely to be the easiest group to identify and approach.
63. The survey will need to cover a sufficiently representative sample of each type of site accommodation existing in each of the partner authority areas. Ideally those sites selected for survey interviews should include both the more and less popular sites, where this can be ascertained by occupancy, waiting lists and local experience.
64. Gypsies and Travellers on unauthorised developments can be identified via the appropriate local authority planning department. Those on unauthorised encampments may be well known to the local authority, as regular and perhaps tolerated visitors, or may be less well known, and less easy to identify.
65. Existing data about Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar housing is likely to be incomplete. Techniques which are used to contact other ‘hard to reach’ groups may be adapted for use with this community. In these cases, Gypsy Liaison Officers, Traveller Education Services, Health workers or other voluntary agencies may be able to assist with identification of these groups.

Difficulties in accessing the community

66. Even where the local Gypsy and Traveller community has been identified, approaching the community to undertake a specialist needs assessment survey may not be straightforward. There may be a reluctance to provide information, or a suspicion about the purposes to which the information will be put. Some Gypsies and Travellers may be unwilling to co-operate. Gypsy Liaison Officers and other service providers who have the trust of the community, along with Gypsy and Traveller representatives can play an important role in preparing the ground, explaining the purpose of the survey and introducing researchers.

Managing expectations

67. In conducting the survey it should be emphasised to those taking part that this exercise is designed to gain a clearer understanding of the scale of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need (as defined in paras 13-16 of this guidance note) which is to be addressed by the local authority, and to help it develop a strategy to meet it. However, there is no obligation on the local authority to address the needs identified in precisely the way the respondent would prefer.

Cultural sensitivities

68. Cultural sensitivities should be carefully researched and considered during the design of the survey. They may affect both the questions asked, and the way the survey is administered. Questions should be carefully phrased to avoid those which could cause offence, while at the same time secure necessary data in the same way that it is from others in the population generally. Advice should be sought from the communities themselves and those who work with them about the cultural sensitivities or language which may be problematic.

69. There may be cultural sensitivities to do with age and gender. Women may not wish to speak to male researchers about some issues. Family members should be given the opportunity, where extended families are interviewed together, to respond separately and in confidence if they wish.

Timing of the survey

70. Careful consideration should be given to the appropriate timing for the survey. The Caravan Count consistently shows higher numbers on unauthorised encampments, and lower numbers on permanent residential sites, in the summer. It is likely that numbers in housing will also be lower in the summer. These seasonal changes should be taken into account when deciding the timing of the survey. The local authority or partnership will need some knowledge of travelling patterns and the local Gypsy and Traveller population before a decision can sensibly be made. For example, if Gypsies and Travellers moving during the summer come from the local area, they may be easier to access during the winter in their permanent residential bases. If on the other hand they come from outside the area, the survey will need to be carried out during the summer if their needs are to be assessed – and account should also be taken of the fact that some Gypsies and Travellers normally resident in the area may be away travelling themselves.

Survey techniques

71. Traditional survey techniques, such as sending a mailshot to random addresses, are very unlikely to deliver sound results. Levels of literacy within the community are generally lower than among the settled community, and given the need to build trust, interview surveys will yield much higher response rates and more reliable data.
72. Once on a site it would be best to interview as many residents as are present and willing to be interviewed. Where possible it is useful to achieve as even a gender split as possible among interviewees. Given that male members of the families are often away during working hours consideration should be given to some surveying later in the day.
73. One possible approach is to organise detailed discussions or consult with a group of individuals believed to be representative of a particular group. Studies of this type have been used successfully in this area and can often produce useful insights and additional information. Group interviews may need to be facilitated by someone who has a good understanding of the research objectives, the Gypsy and Traveller community and the issues involved. These groups should be small and care is needed with composition because of age/gender hierarchies.

Survey questions

74. Where possible, the questions asked of Gypsies and Travellers, both on sites and within housing, should be the same as those asked of the settled population, to ensure that results are comparable. To be most effective questionnaires should be developed, in consultation with representatives of the local Gypsy and Traveller communities. They may include a mix of tick-box closed questions and more open questions where respondents are encouraged to expand their answers.

75. Questions will need to be adapted in some ways:

- Questions about facilities and current accommodation need to reflect the differences between living in a house and living in a caravan (both on an authorised site, where there will be separate pitches and amenity blocks, and on an unauthorised site, where there may not be).
- Questions about needs and preferences for type of accommodation should cover a range of options: standard bricks and mortar housing, group housing, permanent residential sites, transit sites or stopping place sites.
- Questions about accommodation needs should ascertain whether there are different needs at different times of the year – travelling is usually concentrated during the summer.
- Where travelling forms part of the lifestyle of a household, it will be important as far as possible to find out travelling patterns. Respondents should be asked what areas they travel to and where they tend to seek accommodation. If this is in another area they can be asked whether they are prevented from doing so by shortages of suitable accommodation in that area. Where this is the case, it should be recorded in the Accommodation Assessment, and the relevant local authority should also be notified so that the data can also be included in their assessment.

CHAPTER 4

Making use of the assessment

Current and future need

76. The data collected through the Accommodation Assessment process should enable the local authority or partnership to derive overall figures by which to identify accurately the current levels of Gypsy and Traveller households and accommodation need in that area.
77. From the results of the Accommodation Assessment of Gypsy and Traveller households in a given area it should be possible to identify:
- the number of Gypsy and Traveller households that have or are likely to have accommodation need to be addressed, either immediately, or in the foreseeable future;
 - a broad indication of where additional pitches and sites are needed;
 - the level and types of accommodation required for this need to be suitably addressed (eg socially rented/private site provision, transit sites or stopping places, bricks and mortar housing);
 - the level of unauthorised development which, if planning permission is not approved, is likely to swell the scale of need;
 - the intentions of those households planning to move which may free up spare pitch or bricks and mortar capacity;
 - the likely rate of household formation and annual population increase.
78. Accurately projecting future needs is likely to be more difficult. Key sources of information recognised as necessary for forecasting the future housing needs of the settled community are not available or appropriate in the context of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need. Census figures for example do not record details specifically in respect of Gypsy and Traveller households.
79. In the case of Gypsies and Travellers, therefore, it will probably not prove realistic to try and forecast need for up to 15 years ahead, as is recommended within the housing market assessment guidance. However, the most accurate projections possible covering the next 5-10 years should be made. Information on the likely rate of household formation will be obtainable by looking at past patterns of household growth in the ODPM caravan count and the current demographic profile of the community. In addition, current levels of satisfaction with existing accommodation will provide some indication of whether households are likely to stay in that accommodation. Analysis of changing demand (which may be expressed through unauthorised sites, or low demand for authorised sites) will provide further information.

80. An illustration of how current and future need might be calculated is set out below.

An estimate of need for residential site pitches: 2005 – 2010

For example, on the basis of need identified from a survey of Gypsies and Travellers in a local authority or partnership area, the following approach could apply.

a. Current residential supply (based on 1 pitch per household)

Current supply of occupied local authority residential site pitches in local authority/partnership area	300
Current supply of occupied authorised privately owned site pitches in local authority area/partnership area	200
Total Households	500
Number of unused local authority pitches, and vacancies on privately owned sites available in local authority/partnership area ⁽¹⁾	15
Number of existing pitches expected to become vacant in near future (L/A and privately owned) ⁽²⁾	5
Number of households in site accommodation expressing a desire to live in housing	3
<i>[New local authority pitches already planned in year 1]</i>	10
<i>[Existing applications for private site development/extension likely to gain planning permission during year 1]</i>	20
Total pitch provision available	553

b. Current residential demand

Households	
– seeking permanent site accommodation in the area ⁽³⁾	12
– on unauthorised encampments	5
– on unauthorised developments for which planning permission is not expected	30
– currently overcrowded ⁽⁴⁾	15
– new households expected to arrive from elsewhere ⁽⁵⁾	5
i. new family formations expected to arise from within existing households ⁽⁴⁾	4
ii. in housing but with a need for site accommodation ⁽⁵⁾	2
Current shortfall	20 pitches
iii. family formation 2005 – 2010 = 88 households ⁽⁶⁾	
thus extra pitch need 2005 – 2010	108 pitches

Notes

(1) Including closed local authority sites which could be brought back into use

(2) As identified in the assessment of Gypsy and Traveller need

(3) Based on waiting lists and results of survey

(4) Overcrowding – eg where family numbers have grown to the extent that there is now insufficient space for the family within its caravan accommodation and insufficient space on the pitch or site for a further caravan

(5) As identified in the survey, on a waiting list for site accommodation and trends from the ODPM Caravan count

(6) 553 families @ 3% year on year for 5 years. Based on details identified in the local survey, information from agencies working directly with local Gypsy and Traveller communities, and trends identified from figures previously given for the ODPM Caravan Count (in this example 3.% per annum)

Using the assessment

81. Once the Accommodation Assessment has been completed, the local authority will need to begin considering how to meet the accommodation needs identified in the Assessment. Needs can be met in a variety of ways, through the socially rented or commercially rented sectors, through private ownership of sites, or through bricks and mortar housing. The Assessment will provide the data on which decisions about the appropriate mix of provision can be made.
82. The local authority lead will therefore need to disseminate the results of the Assessment to all relevant people and departments within the local authority and partner organisations (such as RSLs), and begin the process of facilitating or providing the necessary provision. This could for example require the identification of land for sites, or an application for central government funding from the Gypsy and Traveller Sites Grant. As with the Assessment itself, it will be important to involve the right people at a sufficiently high level to drive the agenda forward.
83. The Assessment also fits in to more formal local and regional processes, as set out below, and the local authority lead will need to ensure that it is fed into these appropriately. However, these processes should not be seen as a substitute for urgent action where this is needed.
84. At a local level:
 - It will be an essential element in the preparation of the Gypsy and Traveller component of the local authority's housing strategy, which will itself inform investment decisions. The Housing Act 2004 requires local authorities to include the needs of 'gypsies and travellers' in any housing strategy they produce in line with s. 87 of the Local Government Act 2003. Draft guidance on this will be issued for consultation at a later date.
 - It will also form a key part of the evidence base underpinning the preparation of local development frameworks, which must set out policies to address the particular accommodation needs of specific groups such as Gypsies and Travellers and allocate land to meet those needs. One of the tests of the soundness of a draft Development Plan Document at its examination will be whether it is founded on robust and credible evidence. Further guidance on planning for Gypsy and Traveller provision can be found in the Planning Circular *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites*, ODPM 01/2006.
85. The Accommodation Assessment also has a key role in establishing regional needs and plans.
 - The Accommodation Assessment will feed into the Regional Housing Strategy, which identifies key priorities in each region, and provides a basis on which decisions on housing capital investment can be made.
 - It will also be a component in the overall assessment of need which informs the housing policies in the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The RSS should identify the number of pitches required (but not their location) for each local planning authority in the light of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment and a strategic view of needs across the region. Development Plan Documents must be in conformity with the RSS.

86. The Assessment will also inform the wider housing work of the local authority and its partners, by providing a clearer understanding of the accommodation issues faced by Gypsies and Travellers. These issues are not confined to the need for more sites. The assessment will help to show what support may be needed by Gypsies and Travellers to access and maintain stable accommodation, how homelessness may be prevented, and how bricks and mortar housing can be made to work better for the Gypsies and Travellers who live there.

87. In addition it may help inform wider work on improving Gypsy and Traveller access to services, for example in the field of health, education and employment. For example it should be possible to identify any aspects of existing accommodation provision which occupants consider to be leading to poor health problems, and Local Authorities may wish to consider whether provision of this information, subject to data protection principles, could assist local NHS bodies and Local Strategic Partnerships for health planning purposes. Similarly, evidence of difficulties experienced with access to education may assist local education providers target these problems.

ANNEX

Possible Topic List

In conducting Gypsy and Traveller surveys the general guidance given in Appendices A-D of the draft ODPM guide on housing market assessments should be followed.

Appendix D of that guide sets out a suggested list of topics to be covered when conducting a housing market assessment survey interview. Given the particular culture and lifestyle of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, some of these questions may need to be amended, and others added.

This list is not prescriptive. Local authorities or partnerships will wish to tailor their approach in the light of local circumstances and refine supplementary questions depending on initial answers given.

1. GENERAL HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION

a. In respect of individual members of the household

Ethnic origin (English Roma, Irish Traveller etc.)

Age

Gender

Marital status

Living arrangements (i.e. de facto marital status)

Relationship to the head of the household

Working status

Type of work and availability in the area

Location and distance of work place

Frequency of travel

b. In respect of the household generally

Size of household, number of dependent children (*but see note on cultural sensitivities, at paras 67-68 of this guidance*).

Occupations of wage earners

Household income and benefits received

Household savings

Rent payable (excluding council tax and bills, but including any rent currently met by housing benefit)

Whether housing benefit received

Service costs and payment arrangements – is your accommodation affordable?

What sort of work would they like their children to do when older?

Does anyone in your household have a disability or serious illness?

Does anyone in your household have health needs for special or adapted accommodation which need to be addressed?

Is the proximity of a hospital or doctor a reason why household lives where it does?

Any instances of harassment or neighbour disputes/discrimination, and were they dealt with satisfactorily?

2. INTENTIONS AND PREFERENCES

What would you consider to be the most ideal, and the least attractive, type of accommodation for your household?

A private site owned by you and your family?

A site owned by the local council, and if so what size?

A site owned by another Gypsy or Traveller?

A house or bungalow rented from the local council?

A house or bungalow that you own yourself?

Do you want to live in this area – if not where?

Any members of the household likely to want independent accommodation in the next 1-5 years?

If so will they wish to live in the same area or elsewhere?

Will they wish to live on a permanent residential sites and/or travel, or live in bricks and mortar housing?

Residing in current accommodation by choice or because nowhere else to go?

Have you had to stay in an unauthorised camp in the past, if so in which area?

Was this just for the short term, would you have chosen permanent site accommodation if it was available?

Would you have stayed in bricks and mortar housing if it had been available?

What are your likely travel patterns –

For employment and for what type of work?

Would relatives living nearby travel with you?

Does the household plan to move to another location in the next 1-5 years?

If so, main reason for moving

Do you know if there is accommodation available there?

Would you wait until it was available if not?

Are you on a local authority, private or RSL site waiting list, or a housing register in that area?

To live in the new area would you be prepared to move to site accommodation/bricks and mortar housing, instead of what you already have (as appropriate)?

Area preferred – elsewhere in the neighbourhood or further afield?

Likely to be a short term/long term move?

Would this involve a change of accommodation type and/or tenure eg private to public site; caravan to housing; authorised to unauthorised development or site?

What steps taken or planned so far? Have you experienced problems in finding accommodation there? Will you know whether new accommodation is available on arrival?

Is there a need for extra sites to be developed? If so

Where needed?

What sort (permanent or transit)?

What facilities required?

What size, in terms of numbers of caravans and/or pitches?

Do you wish to develop your own site, and could you afford to?

If so, where? Will you/have you sought planning permission?

What size, in terms of numbers of caravans and/or pitches?

If transit sites needed

Where and why needed?

Would you use them if available?

If not, why not?

Restrictions which impact on employment, need to travel further for work?

3. SPECIFIC ACCOMMODATION CIRCUMSTANCES

Gypsies and Travellers currently residing in caravan accommodation on authorised sites

General household information etc as for sections 1 and 2 above, plus the following additional question areas –

Type of accommodation eg caravan, mobile home

Type of tenure of present home

Length of residence in caravan accommodation

Length of residence on present site/pitch

If moved into present site within last year –

reasons for move

location of previous home (within present local authority boundaries?)

was this from caravan or bricks and mortar accommodation?

Any relatives living on site nearby, would you wish to all live on the same site if possible?

AMENITIES AND CONDITIONS

Essential services availability (eg water, electricity, heating etc)

Separate amenity block (with toilet, bathroom kitchen) – or shared facilities

Is there convenient access to the site?

General site conditions satisfactory?

Worried about health and safety aspects?

Is the site underused or too crowded?

Need for repairs? Are there difficulties in getting these done?

Is size of site and of pitch too big/too small/sufficient to accommodate family needs eg desired number of trailers?

Sufficient parking facilities?

Are there facilities for keeping animals?

Are there working restrictions on site?

Is there room for storage of equipment?

Room for visiting caravan?

Is there overcrowding in the caravan?

Are meeting/social rooms available?

Provision for children (on-site play areas)?

Effective management and security on site?

Sufficient outside lighting?

Better fencing?

Refuse collection?

Access to GP, hospital services and specialist treatment?

Good access to schools?

Access to training or adult education desired? Are there barriers to this?

Good access to other services eg public transport, shops/leisure facilities – would you use them if available?

Do you and your household plan to move again from the site eg within one, three or five years?

If yes, why?

What would you hope to move to in terms of type, size or location of accommodation?

Would you stay where you are if there were improvements made to your existing site or accommodation. If so what improvements are they?

Pitch location eg urban/rural location; near industrial areas, dumps, sewage works.

Potential health hazards arising from contaminated land, noise levels, fumes, close vicinity of traffic on motorways or major trunk roads.

Are there any other aspects or shortcomings which are leading to instances of ill health?

Layout of site spacious or cramped, state of security arrangements, fencing, adequate site management arrangements.

Gypsies and Travellers residing on unauthorised private sites

General household information as for sections 1 and 2 above, plus the following additional question areas –

Have moves been taken by the local authority, to move you on?

Are you en route to another area or looking for permanent accommodation in the area?

Would you accept site or bricks and mortar accommodation as a temporary or permanent solution?

What sort of accommodation respondents had before their current home?

Where was this?

Why left it?

Gypsies and Travellers residing on unauthorised encampments, roadside etc

General household information as for sections 1 and 2 above, and those for unauthorised private sites above, plus the following additional question areas –

Do you travel throughout the year or would you prefer to have settled accommodation, if so what type and where?

What areas are you planning to travel to?

If there were a network of authorised transit sites would you use them and where should they be?

Did you previously live in bricks and mortar housing or on a residential site?

Where residing; on roadside, in lay by, on playing fields, private or public land.

Do you have access to electricity, water and WCs?

Do you have access to local services, including doctors and education facilities?

Gypsies and Travellers currently residing in bricks and mortar housing

General household information as for sections 1 and 2 above, recommended topic list as for Annex D of the draft ODPM guide on housing market assessments plus the following additional question areas –

Do you live in a house by choice or only in the absence of suitable site accommodation?

If site accommodation was available in another area would you be happy to move there, or must it be in the near vicinity?

What do you like about living in a house, and this house in particular?

What do you not like about living in a house and/or this house?

Have you suffered harassment from your neighbours or other members of the settled community?