

Dealing with the Accommodation Needs of Gypsies & Travellers in RSS



Commissioning the Evidence Base

1.1 The North West Regional Assembly, has commissioned a 6 month long research project (due to be complete in December 2006) into assessing Gypsy & Travellers accommodation and other service requirements & provision in the North West in the period up to 2016. This is being complemented by 2 more detailed sub regional studies in Cheshire & Lancashire which are being commissioned concurrently in partnership with local authorities in both those areas.

1.2 The overarching objective of all 3 studies is to inform the future reviews of Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS), Regional Housing Strategy (RHS) and Supporting People Strategies, Local Development Frameworks (LDF) and Local Housing Strategies across the North West.

1.3 This research is designed to inform planners and other officers working in a range of regional and local stakeholder organisations in the North West, about the current and future accommodation needs and demands of Gypsy and Travellers, and the need for the provision of other services to support Gypsy and Travellers. The studies will provide a definition of Gypsy and Travellers and an understanding of the wider context (i.e. guidance / policy and data / evidence).

1.4 The regional study will focus on 5 phases

- Phase 1: Collation and review of existing information & literature.
- Phase 2: focus groups with site owners, site managers, wardens, housing and planning staff, local authority legal services staff, enforcement staff, supporting people team managers, health & education staff as well as Police Gypsy & Traveller Liaison Officers
- Phase 3: The Traveller study
- Phase 4 – development of regional methodology for undertaking more detailed survey work at a local or sub regional level
- Phase 5 – Seminar to disseminate research findings

1.5 The 2 sub regional studies will follow the same format except phase 4 will not take place.

1.6 Following a competitive tender process, the contracts to undertake all 3 studies has been awarded to a partnership lead by the Salford Urban Studies and Housing Unit (SHUSU) at Salford University, who are working with CURS at Birmingham University, Policy Studies Research Centre from Lincoln University and AVT interventions.

National Policy Context

2.1 A raft of new national policy guidance was published by ODPM in early 2006.

- **Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites** – ODPM Planning Circular 01/2006 which replaces DoE Circular 1/94 “Gypsy Sites and Planning”. This explains how the planning system operates in relation to site accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers.

- **Conducting Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments** – Interim guidance for local authorities on undertaking an assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation need as required by s225 of the Housing Act 2004. The guidance discusses a range of methods which might be used to assess the accommodation needs of these communities and the particular issues which need to be taken into account in respect of caravan and site accommodation. It reflects methods used by some local authorities which have been particularly successful in addressing these issues so far.
- **Consultation paper on the “housing” definition of ‘gypsies and travellers’** – linked to the enactment of the provisions in the Housing Act requiring local housing authorities to undertake an assessment of the accommodation needs of ‘gypsies and travellers’. The consultation will enable us to finalise the definition and commence the provisions in s225 of the Housing Act.
- **Local authorities and Gypsies and Travellers – A guide to responsibilities and powers** – an information booklet which explains the new policy framework and the roles and responsibilities of local authorities in the process, both in terms of site provision and enforcement.
- **Effective enforcement against Unauthorised Encampments** – a joint ODPM/Home Office publication providing a step-by-step guide on how to enforce effectively against problematic unauthorised encampments by Gypsies and Travellers.

Developing a Policy Approach

3.1 RSS is now required to set out the number of pitches required (but not their location) for each local planning authority in the light of Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAA's) and a strategic view of needs across the region. Given that the evidence base is still being collected, the assembly intends to deal with this issue in a future review of RSS. The timescale for this future review is still to be determined¹.

¹ Pending the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR07) no funding currently exists beyond 31st March 2008, to support the Assembly's RPB function (including the employment of staff). Therefore the Assembly is only able to commission new research that will be completed by 31st March 2008.

Until the medium - long term funding situation is resolved, the Assembly is also unable to give a firm timescale commitments on undertaking a future review of RSS, as it may not be possible to comply with all the procedural process requirements of PPS11 over next 18 months, to ensure submission of a Draft RSS to Government before 31st March 2008.