

## **Executive Summary**

*“Decent homes are an essential part of creating thriving and sustainable communities and are vital for the health and wellbeing of those living in them”*

(Homes and Communities Agency, 2009)

## **Aims & Objectives**

This report investigates progress that Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) across London are making towards involving Gypsies, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities and identifying and providing for their accommodation needs. Evidence for the report was gathered through surveys of LPAs and sub-regional focus groups with GRT communities. The high response to the survey of LPAs was outstanding, and gives a useful picture of the current situation across the capital.

The objectives are:

- To determine whether Local Authorities have integrated the findings of the GTANA into their Local Development Frameworks and/or Local Area Agreements.
- To establish how Local Authorities have consulted with or involved GRT in the identification of appropriate sites, and more widely on their accommodation needs, in order to identify best practice in consultation practices.

## **Background**

*“When we first moved onto the site 25 years or so ago, we got petrol bombed. Now that the settled community has got to know us, their kids come onto the site to play with our kids”.*

(Resident from authorised site in Southwark)

GRT are among the most disadvantaged people in society. There is inadequate provision of sites; from 1997 to 2008 no new sites were built and several sites were closed in London<sup>1</sup>. Where sites are provided they often have unacceptable living conditions, are inappropriately located, overcrowded, have poor facilities, and are poorly managed<sup>2</sup>.

The Government is committed to meeting the accommodation needs of GRT. In order to meet these needs, the Government has required that accommodation needs of GRT are assessed, and that evidence from this assessment is integrated into Planning Policy as established in Circular 01/2006.

The London Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA) was published by Fordham Research in May 2008. This showed that the estimated need for accommodation in London is 768 additional sites by 2017. This figure is subject to consultation and will be finalised in the next review of the London Plan. Meanwhile, LPAs must ensure that GRT accommodation needs are included in their Local Development Framework (LDF). Critically, Circular 01/2006 para 43 states; “Where there is clear and immediate need... local planning authorities should bring forward DPDs [Development Plan Documents] containing site allocations in advance of regional consideration of pitch numbers, and completion of the new GTANAs”.

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<sup>1</sup> DCLG (2008a) Gypsy sites provided by Local Authorities and Registered Social Landlords in England 21 July 2008

<sup>2</sup> Commission for Racial Equality (2006) *Common Ground: Equality, good race relations and sites for Gypsies and Irish Travellers*, p12.

## Key Findings & Recommendations

- The majority of LPAs who responded have regard to GRT accommodation needs in their **LDF** or state they will do in the near future. However, there is some evidence to show that some Boroughs are waiting for the regional and local planning policy process to run its course before actively seeking sites. This is unacceptable where there is evidence of an immediate need.
- Only one of the LPAs that responded stated that they intended to develop a specific Gypsy and Traveller **DPD**. Greater consideration should be given to production of a specific Gypsy and Traveller DPD where appropriate. At the least, GRTs should be included in Site Allocations DPD.
- No LPA who responded had explicit mention to GRTs in **Local Area Agreements** (LAAs). There is potential for greater use of LAAs to further the provision of new sites, and a new National Indicator specific to provision of **GRT** sites
- Overall, four respondents make specific reference to GRT in their **Statement of Community Involvement** (SCI), and twelve respondents stated that they include GRT organisations in the list of consultees. Where boroughs do not explicitly refer to GRT they should do so; inclusion in the SCI can encourage transparency about consultation arrangements, and engender trust between the Local Authority, GRT communities and the wider community.
- Nearly half of respondents stated that there were no measures or gave no response to the questions regarding **consultation** beyond inclusion in the SCI, or measures to increase social inclusion. There are a range of ways in which LPAs can involve GRT communities, including Traveller Inter-agency Forums and employment of dedicated staff. Appropriate consultation techniques, such as the use of audio-visual media, should be used when involving GRT communities. Targeted support exists through the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain which works directly with GRT communities, and Planning Aid for London which provides independent professional town planning advice and support to individuals and communities across London. Both can bring their areas of expertise to assist LPAs to actively consult, inform and involve GRT communities.
- Findings from the focus groups show that GRT communities value the extension to existing **site provision** to relieve some of the overcrowding; however there is clearly an urgent need for new sites. New sites should not be in dangerous or unhealthy locations. Existing CLG guidance on site design, layout and forthcoming CLG guidance on management should be widely promoted and acted upon.
- The survey revealed that two respondent boroughs were considering or involved in additional **research** into GRT living in 'Bricks and Mortar' accommodation. The GTANA only ascribed a need for a pitch when residents stated both a negative psychological effect of living in bricks and mortar accommodation, and dissatisfaction with their current home. This methodology may have led to an underestimate of actual need. Any LPA must acknowledge this when undertaking research into accommodation.

This report is available online for comments and contributions at:

[www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk](http://www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk) or [www.irishtraveller.org.uk](http://www.irishtraveller.org.uk)

## Conclusions

It is essential that the accommodation needs of GRT communities are embedded into local, regional and national planning systems. Consultation with GRT communities should be central to this process. Involving them in Planning Policy, site identification, design and management will be critical to ensuring that sites are appropriate and sustainable and community cohesion secured. Strong political leadership from all levels of government will be essential in

guaranteeing that needs are met, and Central Government should use powers to direct recalcitrant local authorities.