

UNIVERSITY OF
BIRMINGHAM

Centre for Urban and Regional Studies

Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments

Perceptions of Progress

Findings from Workshops

September 2008

Facilitated by:
Pat Niner

**GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION
ASSESSMENTS**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The first round of Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) is nearing completion in England. For the first time, in most parts of the country, members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities have been asked about their current accommodation and future needs. In many places, this has involved an unprecedented attempt to engage with communities often perceived as 'difficult' or 'hard-to-reach'. Those carrying out GTAAAs have then been involved – again normally for the first time – in converting survey and other information into quantitative estimates of requirements for additional Gypsy and Traveller site pitches and plots for Travelling Showpeople (and other forms of accommodation for the communities). Local authorities and other bodies are starting to make use of the findings from GTAAAs in formulating housing, planning and other strategies.

1.2 Not surprisingly for such a new venture, not everything has gone entirely smoothly and both the process of carrying out GTAAAs and their findings have been subject to some criticism.

1.3 I have personally been involved in GTAAAs from the start and am very keen that the lessons from the experiences of those involved both as GTAA contractors and as information users should be learnt in order to improve the robustness and credibility of future needs assessments. With financial support from the Building and Social Housing Foundation (BSHF), two workshops were held at the University of Birmingham for invited participants on 10 July 2008 (for GTAA 'contractors') and 21 July 2008 (for GTAA 'users'); participants are listed in the Annex. The aims of the workshops were to critically assess experiences to date, and to help develop proposals for improving GTAAAs in future. More specifically, they aimed to provide an opportunity to consider possible amendments to practice guidance on carrying out GTAAAs. The workshops followed the Chatham House rule of confidentiality, and material in this report has been checked and approved by all participants.

1.4 Section 2 summarises the main themes emerging from the workshops, emphasising particularly areas where change is recommended. Section 3 sets the background to the debate drawing on a presentation produced for the workshops. Sections 4 and 5 summarise the discussion and conclusions from each of the workshops.

1.5 I would like to thank all workshop participants for their contributions – and, of course, to thank BSHF for making it possible.

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2. MAIN THEMES EMERGING

2.1 In the course of the workshops a great many very useful points were made. The intention here is not to summarise proceedings, but to identify a small number of broad themes which emerged from both workshops. This is to some extent a personal reflection on the two days although I have, obviously, tried hard to avoid personal bias. The detailed notes from the workshops are fully reported in sections 4 and 5, including specific proposals for change in the future.

Overall Perceptions

2.2 Five years ago there were no 'Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments' (GTAAAs), and relatively little information about the size or characteristics of Gypsy and Traveller communities, their current accommodation circumstances or future needs. By mid 2008, GTAAAs were complete or nearing completion across all parts of England. The whole process of planning, commissioning, managing, carrying out and beginning to use GTAAAs has been a learning experience for everyone involved. Not surprisingly, there have been some issues and concerns as well as benefits.

2.3 Workshop participants identified a number of clear benefits from the GTAA process. Gypsy and Traveller communities have been brought into the mainstream of planning and housing policies. The studies have increased awareness of issues affecting Gypsies and Travellers and, in particular, the extent of their accommodation needs. Regional planning bodies and local authorities have indications of pitch requirements on which to base Regional Spatial Strategies and Local Development Frameworks; Gypsy and Traveller organisations have ammunition with which to press for greater site provision. Paradoxically, having much better information than previously appears to have drawn attention to the limitations and imperfections of that information relative to ideals.

2.4 Matters of particular concern to participants include:

- Inconsistency between GTAAAs in approach, survey methods and ways of estimating pitch requirements – and variations in quality of studies and their findings.
- Inadequate involvement of Gypsy and Traveller communities and local elected members within the GTAA process.
- Inability to say how many Gypsies and Travellers there are in an area, especially living in bricks and mortar housing but sometimes also on 'hidden' sites.
- Generally poor assessments of transient needs requiring some form of transit site or stopping place provision.
- Inability to quantify some important aspects of need, for example: the distinct requirements of different ethnic communities; how many of those in need could afford to provide their own sites and how many need social site provision; where people want to, or would be prepared

to, live if there was provision; or how many housed Gypsies and Travellers need site provision.

2.5 There were some contrasts between overall perceptions of the 'success' of GTAA's on the two days. The consensus among contractors was that the first round of GTAA's had gone as well as could reasonably be expected. Participants at the 'user' workshop thought this sounded complacent, and they were distinctly more critical. These differing perspectives appear to stem from two underlying factors:

- Contractors are very aware of the difficulties of carrying out research with Gypsies and Travellers – indeed with any marginalised social groups in a highly politicised context. They know at first hand the issues around building up a sample frame; selecting a 'representative' sample; wording culturally sensitive, unambiguous questions; gaining access to sites and encampments; getting people to talk to them; and making pitch requirement calculations without much precedent to build on. Experience inevitably colours expectations and perceptions. Users of the information are not so immediately aware of these issues and know only that the findings have not necessarily met their expectations.
- Inherent in the system itself is a tension between the precision/robustness and degree of disaggregation required for effective regional and local planning, and what responsible researchers feel able to deliver – especially in this first round with relatively tight budgets and short timescales.

While subsequent GTAA's will undoubtedly be better, these factors are unlikely ever to completely disappear.

Involvement of Gypsy and Traveller Communities

2.6 Gypsy and Traveller communities have been involved to differing degrees in the GTAA process, mainly through membership of project groups and acting as community interviewers. There was consensus across the workshops that fuller engagement is needed in future to achieve better, more robust and more credible studies which truly assess community needs.

2.7 It is true to say that neither workshop articulated how this engagement might best be achieved. A number of points are relevant:

- Effective GTAA's cannot be seen as one-off studies, carried out by contractors 'parachuted in' for the event and who then disappear. There must be a much longer-term engagement, probably involving some form of community development.
- 'Gypsies and Travellers' include diverse communities and all need to be engaged.
- There are resource implications. Fully inclusive GTAA's are likely to be both more expensive and time consuming. Gypsy and Traveller community individuals and groups will need funding and support to help them to participate equally.
- The chances of winning community trust will be greatly enhanced if something positive is seen to happen as a result of the first round of

GTAAs – that is, if more sites are provided. The corollary is also true – if nothing is seen to happen, generating engagement and trust will be harder in future.

GTAAs are Part of a Process

2.8 A very strong theme emerging from both workshops was the importance of what precedes and what follows the GTAA itself.

2.9 Contractors were particularly concerned over perceived inadequacies in planning for, commissioning and then managing some GTAAs. This led to briefs which were not necessarily understood and accepted by all client authorities, and which could change in the course of the GTAA. Some client authorities were less committed than others in a partnership. Contractors reported spending time ‘educating’ local authority officers when they expected to be collecting information. Other issues, in some places, include: poor initial information on sites and Gypsies and Travellers in housing, and poor links with the communities. Project management was sometimes seen as problematic, especially if things ‘got political’ when pitch requirement numbers emerged. Many of these issues are attributable to unfamiliar procedures for a novel exercise. The point was made that authorities should allow a long lead time to ensure that subsequent GTAAs are better planned and managed.

2.10 More significantly, both workshops highlighted issues around making sure that GTAA findings lead quickly into policy development and increased site provision. At present the local and regional processes are out of phase. Participants at both workshops felt that CLG should press all authorities to take action on site provision in advance of the full RSS review process. There was general agreement that : **IT’S TIME TO STOP TALKING AND START DOING!**

Improved Guidance – Yes!

2.11 There was consensus in both workshops that CLG *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments: Guidance* should be revised – and revised soon so as to allow time for planning the next round of GTAAs.

2.12 Participants proposed that the Guidance should refer more fully to some of the broad issues emerging from the workshops, namely: planning and commissioning GTAAs, managing GTAAs (project advisory groups etc), effective community engagement and moving forward from needs assessment to site provision.

2.13 Several proposals were made concerning how the studies should be carried out and how pitch requirements should be calculated:

- Guidance should be much more specific in terms of survey techniques and might include more on how samples should be drawn, how questions should be worded and so on.

- In particular, some of the more difficult areas – such as identifying ‘need’ rather than ‘demand’ or ‘aspiration’, or ‘cultural aversion’ to bricks and mortar – should be spelled out so that those carrying out GTAAAs know how to collect and analyse appropriate information.
- Guidance should quote illustrations of good practice.
- The way in which pitch requirements are to be calculated should be much more fully explained – there is no simple, automatic link between survey answers and need elements and this should be made explicit. Again, there should be examples.
- Much fuller guidance is desirable on how transient needs should be assessed.

2.14 Some participants suggested that Guidance should be prescriptive and that GTAAAs should become much more standardised both in terms of survey methods and the way in which pitch requirements are calculated, including standard formulae to use unless there is evidence that they would be inappropriate. Prescription was felt to be necessary to increase consistency and credibility, and to prevent the temptation to ‘massage’ figures for political reasons. However, there was not total agreement on this. Some contractors suggested a midway position in which the quantitative element of the GTAA would be based on a short tick-box questionnaire which would be standard in all areas. This would be complemented by more in-depth, qualitative work to explore particular local issues and to increase understanding of the communities and their needs.

2.15 Participants agreed that it is important to learn the lessons from the experiences of the first round of GTAAAs. It is hoped that this report will assist the process.

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 This section covers material assembled into a presentation given at the workshops to set a background and context for the debate. It is not intended to be a comprehensive account but rather to give a flavour of the wider position in mid-2008.

3.2 The Housing Act 2004 requires local authorities to carry out assessments of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers; this complements long-standing duties to assess overall accommodation needs. Any needs identified must be built into housing and other strategies. ODPM Circular 01/2006 *Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Sites* describes the new planning system. Accommodation need estimates from Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments (GTAAAs) are to form an evidence base for regional planning bodies which, in Regional Spatial Strategy revisions, will identify how many additional pitches for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople local planning authorities must provide for in their Local Development Frameworks. The pitch allocation is to be based on GTAA information, taking a strategic view. Local planning authorities must identify land in their Local Development Documents to accommodate the number of pitches allocated to them.

3.3 GTAAAs are not, therefore, an end in themselves but a central part of the planning process in place to meet the Government's policy objective of providing more sites and better services for Gypsies and Travellers within a community cohesion agenda. Ultimately the success of GTAAAs must be judged on how effective they are in policy terms at local and regional level. The process of using information in this way is just starting.

GTAAAs to Date

3.4 CLG estimates that about 95% of English authorities are covered by a completed GTAA, and the rest are nearing completion. There are now more than 50 completed GTAAAs:

- Almost all are on a sub-regional basis, often coinciding with county areas but sometimes on the basis of other groupings of authorities.
- A small number have been carried out in-house by local authority officers, but the great majority have been carried out by contractors, either from universities or other consultancies.
- Gypsy and Traveller communities have been involved in the GTAA process to differing extents and in different ways. Membership of project steering groups and acting as 'community interviewers' are the most common forms of involvement.

3.5 Following guidance¹ on carrying out GTAAAs, a fairly common methodology has been used which includes:

¹ CLG, *Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessments: Guidance*, October 2007 (first issued in draft form in February 2006)

- Analysis of secondary data, for example site waiting lists, planning applications or records of unauthorised encampments.
- Stakeholder interviews or focus groups.
- Face-to-face structured interviews with Gypsies and Travellers.
- (Sometimes) focus groups or in-depth interviews involving Gypsies and Travellers to provide more qualitative information.

Survey interviews are normally based around questionnaires which focus on accommodation issues (past, present and future) but also touch on education, employment, health and experience of discrimination. Very few questionnaires include any questions about income or savings.

3.6 Analysis of GTAA surveys is normally predominantly quantitative, and the key output is a numerical estimate of pitch requirements (always residential pitches, usually transit pitches; always years 1-5, sometimes subsequent periods). The model used to estimate pitch requirements broadly follows the example given in the guidance. Some GTAA reports include more qualitative analysis and build up a good picture of local Gypsies and Travellers and their circumstances.

3.7 There are some areas where GTAAs have particularly struggled to provide high quality information. These include:

- Building up comprehensive basic information on the numbers of Gypsies and Travellers in an area, especially on unauthorised sites and in housing.
- Dealing with nomadism and transient needs.
- Dealing with cross-boundary movement and migration.
- Identifying where people want to live given currently constrained choices.
- Distinguishing between 'need' and 'demand' or 'aspiration' and then deciding what implications any such distinctions have for pitch requirements. This particularly affects potential movement between sites and housing.

3.8 GTAAs have demonstrated a significant shortage of site accommodation in most parts of England. The table overleaf illustrates this in respect of 5 year residential pitch requirements in three southern regions and the West Midlands. Basically, the studies suggest the need to add at least half as many authorised pitches as currently exist over a five year period; in the South West double the current total is needed. This suggests the need for a major change in provision rates over what has been achieved over the past ten years.

Current Pitch Provision and Estimated Additional Residential Pitch Requirements Years 1-5			
Region	Current authorised pitches	GTAA additional requirements	Requirements as % of provision
East of England	1,850	1,220	66
South East	1,450	930	64
South West	1,140	1,150	101
West Midlands	1,160	650	56

Benchmarking GTAAs

3.9 GTAAs have been benchmarked as part of the Regional Spatial Strategy review process in several regions. These exercise were intended to assess the reliability of the evidence base provided by GTAAs, and followed the methodology developed in the East of England². This involves working through a series of questions intended to check the validity of the research methods used, the comprehensiveness of the elements of pitch supply and demand included and the internal logic of the calculations of pitch requirements. Benchmarking is a desk-based exercise and cannot check the accuracy of basic information included in studies.

3.10 Benchmarking has identified a few GTAAs which have unsound pitch estimates because of obvious omissions or double-counting. Most GTAAs appear to be generally sound (within the scope of the benchmarking criteria) but are very variable in detail. Every GTAA is essentially unique in the precise way that estimates have been calculated. Methods, and therefore findings, are not consistent at this detailed level.

Relationships between Caravans and Residential Pitch Requirements

3.11 It seems probable that there is some sort of statistical relationship between numbers of Gypsy and Traveller caravans (as in the Caravan Count) and residential pitch requirements (excluding plots for Travelling Showpeople). This is because many of the needs being estimated arise among the population already living in caravans in the area. Other things being equal, we might expect the level of requirements to be higher in an area with 500 caravans than in an area with only 400 – generally, as numbers of caravans increase, we would expect pitch requirements to rise. There would not be a direct relationship because, for example:

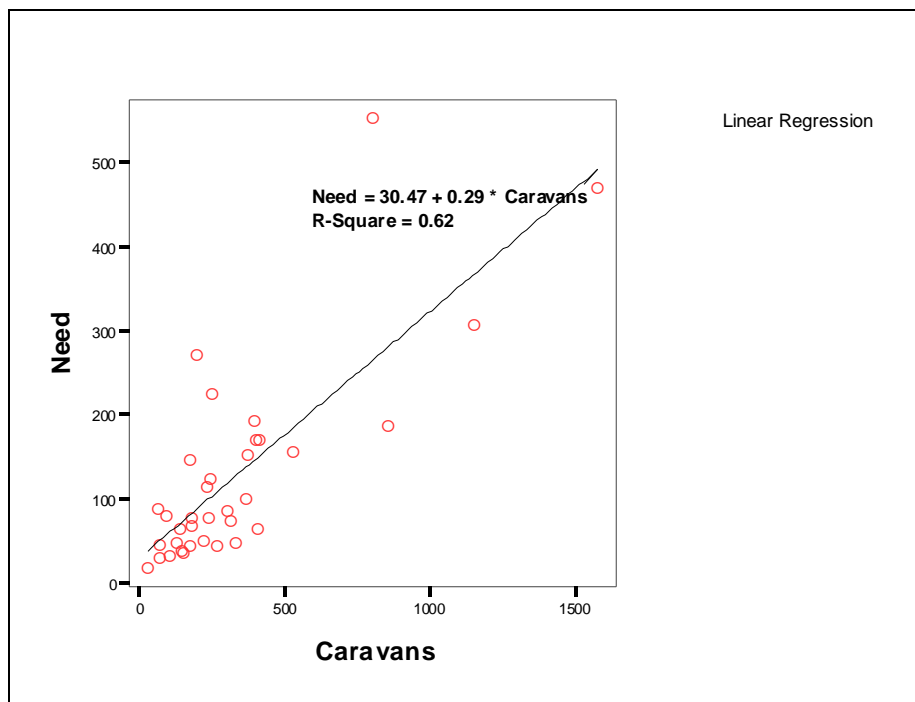
- GTAAs may have included sites which do not appear in the Caravan Count in some areas but not in others.
- Requirements relative to caravans would be higher in areas where higher proportions of those caravans were on unauthorised sites, since these contribute directly to needs.

² CLG, *Preparing Regional Spatial Strategy reviews on Gypsies and Travellers by regional planning bodies*, March 2007

- Requirements relative to caravans would be higher in areas where higher proportions of Gypsies and Travellers live in housing, but have expressed a need for site accommodation.
- Requirements relative to caravans would be higher in areas with local Gypsy and Traveller communities which include large numbers of young people likely to need independent accommodation in the near future.

3.12 From curiosity to see what the relationship looks like in reality, I analysed residential pitch requirements for Years 1-5 from 35 GTAA's in the southern regions, London and the West Midlands. The graph below is the result of plotting requirements (need) against caravan totals for the GTAA study areas from the January 2007 Count. The London figure plotted is for requirements *including* potential movement from housing to sites.

Scatterplot of Residential Pitch Requirements against Total Caravans January 2007



3.13 The graph shows that there is a relationship, in the predicted direction, between caravans and requirements. However, there is also variability in the relationships graphed. Some GTAA's fall below and to the right of the regression line where requirements are 'lower' than might be anticipated from caravan numbers alone. Rather fewer fall above and to the left of the line where requirements are 'higher' than might be anticipated.

3.14 Further analysis of the figures shows:

- Overall, residential pitch requirements are equivalent to 39% of caravans. There is a huge range at the level of individual GTAA's, from just 14% to 136%. In some instances at the extreme, it is hard to see 'real world' explanations for the variability.

- Regionally, requirements are higher relative to caravans in London (if movement from housing is included) and South West, than in East and South East GTAAAs. This probably makes sense because the South West Gypsy and Traveller communities include higher proportions of New Travellers who are particularly vulnerable to be missed in the Counts and the region has higher proportions of caravans on unauthorised sites contributing directly to need. Potential movement from housing is particularly high in London.
- If the Greater London GTAA is excluded, requirements relative to caravans are higher in GTAAAs carried out by universities than those carried out by other contractors. There do not seem to be any simple 'real world' factors to explain this.

3.15 It is not possible to draw firm conclusions from this exploratory analysis. Tentatively, there is evidence that GTAA pitch estimates appear generally rational and reflect, as might be expected, caravan numbers. However, it may be that, in this first round, pitch figures also sometimes reflect the precise methods used and perhaps who carried out the study.

South West Regional Spatial Strategy Examination in Public Panel Report

3.16 The review of the Regional Spatial Strategy in the South West has provided one of the first opportunities to see how GTAAAs stand up to challenge as 'evidence'. The Regional Assembly consulted on pitch numbers and distribution between local authorities within a single issue review process. An Examination in Public was held in March 2008; very broadly most local authorities supported the figures proposed by the Regional Assembly (normally based on completed or emerging GTAA findings) while Gypsy and Traveller groups challenged figures as being too low mainly because of incomplete inclusion of all communities and inadequate involvement of Gypsies and Travellers in the process. The Panel report was published in June 2008 and includes comments on GTAAAs and associated processes.

- 3.17 Important points about GTAAAs made by the Panel include:
- GTAA estimates in the South West were not accepted or credible in the eyes of the Gypsy and Traveller communities.
 - (Some) South West GTAAAs were flawed, but not so flawed as claimed by Gypsy and Traveller groups; overall, GTAAAs are likely to under-count requirements.
 - The benchmarking commissioned by the Regional Assembly was felt to have been useful, and in most cases any suggestions made by the benchmarking team for improvement on GTAA estimates were accepted.
 - Some detailed evidence of need not reflected in GTAAAs which was presented by Gypsy and Traveller groups at the EiP was also accepted

and resulted in the pitch allocations for a few authorities being increased beyond the Regional Assembly proposals³.

3.18 The Panel made specific recommendations about GTAA's, including:

- There is scope for improvement in future.
- It would be desirable for there to be greater consistency between GTAA's and their methods in future.
- There should be greater openness in the process of carrying out GTAA's and making the pitch estimates.
- The process should be more independent of local authorities to increase credibility among Gypsy and Traveller communities.
- Greater efforts should be made to fully engage all Gypsy and Traveller communities in the process to increase its cultural sensitivity and to generate greater trust between communities in order to improve response.
- GTAA's should be more comprehensive in their coverage of all communities; given the diversity of communities, the Panel questioned whether a sample survey approach was appropriate (or by implication said that the scale of surveys should be greater).
- Great care should be taken in choosing interviewers for surveys to ensure a high response rates and honest answers.

Many of these points seem likely to increase the resource costs of GTAA's in future.

3.19 Other issues raised by the Panel with implications for GTAA's were:

- It is important to recognise the nomadic aspects of the Gypsy and Traveller lifestyle, and thus to include transient as well as residential needs.
- GTAA's should seek to identify certain basic questions better than they do now, such as:
 - where do people want to live?
 - how many Gypsies and Travellers living in housing want to live on sites?
- Diverse communities have diverse needs, and these ideally should be explored more fully in future.

3.20 The Panel did not refer to an issue which is being raised elsewhere, namely a distinction between 'need' and 'demand' or 'desires'. By implication at least, the Panel accepted that evidence of where people 'want' to live or how many 'want' to leave bricks and mortar should be seen as evidence contributing to requirements rather than, for example, trying to apply a strict measure of 'cultural aversion' in estimating movement from housing to sites.

³ This raises issues around 'level playing fields' and resourcing for Gypsy and Traveller groups to enable them to assemble such evidence if the GTAA is thought to be inadequate.

4. WORKSHOP FOR GTAA CONTRACTORS

4.1 The workshop programme included five sessions: general impressions of the GTAA process; project management and involvement of stakeholders; survey and fieldwork issues; estimating pitch requirements; and recommendations for future guidance. The main points raised are presented below under these headings.

General Impressions

4.2 The consensus among participants was that the first round of GTAAs had gone as well as could reasonably have been expected. The main achievement was expressed: we now have some pitch figures which we never had before. Factors lying behind the qualification 'as well as could reasonably be expected' included:

- Having to operate a process which was new to both local authority clients and contractors. Draft guidance emerged only when some very early studies were well advanced.
- Working in an area where the target population is small and diverse, and where there is no background data on demographics, accommodation characteristics or trends – and where the data that do exist (Caravan Counts) are known/suspected to be incomplete, inconsistent (between authorities and over time) and widely mistrusted by Gypsies and Travellers.
- Lack of basic understanding about how the 'accommodation market' works for Gypsies and Travellers, especially for private sites and housing. However, the mainstream bricks and mortar housing market is only just being understood, so this is hardly surprising and may not matter anyway.
- Unrealistic expectations about the extent to which findings and estimates can be disaggregated by Gypsy-Traveller group and local authority, and still remain robust.
- Perceptions of success probably depend on viewpoint – Gypsy and Traveller communities and local authorities may be less impressed.

4.3 Participants found it hard to say categorically if pitch requirements emerging from GTAAs were 'correct'. Comments included:

- We're getting it in the neck from everyone – so it must be about right!
- Certainly figures are in the right direction after many years' neglect.
- We've followed the Guidance, so they should be able to withstand attack.
- It is really impossible to predict beyond the first 5 years – which is out of step with planners' requirements.
- It probably doesn't matter too much, since delivery will depend on politics as much as the detailed figures.

4.4 Other issues mentioned at this preliminary, overview point in the workshop included:

- Problems experienced in project commissioning and the contractor/client relationship (see below).
- A tendency for clients to sometimes want to 'manipulate' figures which they do not like, leading to multiple drafts and reluctance to sign off reports. Clients who do not like the figures may criticise the methods, even though they approved them step by step in the course of the project. Because of this many contracts have over-run and have proved to be under-funded and extremely stressful. 'Things get political at the end when you get to the figures.'
- The 'obsession' with pitch requirement figures and site provision has a tendency to squeeze out other valuable elements, e.g. issues facing Gypsies and Travellers in housing, more qualitative methods and findings which can help understanding of the bald figures, and wider community engagement work.
- Uncertainty about how the GTAA figures are going to translate into policy.

Project Management and Involvement of Stakeholders

4.5 This proved to be the area of GTAA work which participants had found most problematic, and on which they expressed the strongest opinions. Problems were not universal, but equally were not just isolated examples. This is, of course, an area where perceptions will differ – the views expressed here are those of the contractors.

4.6 Areas discussed were:

- Commissioning processes – participants felt that local authority clients did not always know what they wanted from the study when letting the tender. There could be differences of opinion between planners and housing people and little evidence of joint working/shared understandings between departments or authorities in a sub-region. Clients sometimes seem to have changed their minds in the course of the project
- Local authority clients do not always appreciate the demands that will inevitably be made on them for data and information from records etc, and can sometimes prove reluctant or slow to provide what is needed for the study.
- Project management arrangements were sometimes not very helpful to the contractor. The ideal is a single point of contact between the contractor and the project group as a whole, and named contact people for each district. Even when apparently established at the start of the project, such arrangements could unravel quite quickly.
- Project advisory groups are important and helpful for both the authorities and the contractor (if well run), and should provide continuity into the implementation stage. From the contractor viewpoint, a well run project group meets regularly and members have sufficient seniority and authority to make decisions in the course of the project without always having to refer issues upwards. The project group

should also accept and support figures which emerge from processes, assumptions and calculations which they have themselves agreed.

- There were mixed views, based on experience, about whether Gypsies and Travellers should be part of the project group, or should be engaged in some other way such as a separate reference group. If Gypsies and Travellers are part of a project group, they must be clear about the group's role and responsibilities to meet planning and strategic requirements. Representatives of Gypsy and Traveller organisations might be more appropriate than interested individuals.

Positive arguments:

- inclusion sends a very strong message to the communities.
- those involved can be very helpful in arranging access and looking at questionnaires from a community standpoint.

More problematic issues include:

- how do you cope with 'diversity within diversity' and ensure the group reflects the communities?
 - must avoid cherry picking individuals or always using the 'usual suspects'.
 - it must not be tokenistic.
 - the Gypsies and Travellers involved could end up being perceived as the tools of the authority by others in their communities.
 - if things go wrong, or expectations are not met, it could have a bad effect on relations between the Travelling and settled communities.
 - community empowerment and education should come first – it should not be part of the GTAA contractor's job unless specifically part of the brief.
- Lack of familiarity with Gypsy and Traveller communities can mean that contractors in practice move into an (unfunded) educative role with local authority officers. Focus groups convened to provide information and guidance to the GTAA have, on occasion, turned into seminars where local authority officers rather than the contractor ask the questions and seek information. This is useful – but often not built into the brief and study costs.

Participants recognised that the GTAA process had been a learning experience for local authorities as well as contractors. Some of the basic issues should have been resolved by the first round itself, but good practice should be stressed in guidance.

4.7 Participants were asked whether the current balance in favour of GTAAs being carried out by **external contractors** rather than in-house was appropriate. Perhaps not surprisingly, participants thought that it was.

External contractors were thought to bring:

- Independence: it was thought essential that whoever carried out the study was outside the direct political sphere of influence – this is easier for contractors than local authority officers. Perceived independence may also be more demonstrable.
- Resources, skills, experience and capacity which many local authorities simply lack at this time. Contractors should be rigorous in their methods and should press for the most appropriate methods to be used.

- Knowledge of the issues and non-prejudiced, non-enforcement attitudes towards the target populations.
- Authority and perceived expertise giving weight to the figures and conclusions.
- Greater acceptability to Gypsy and Traveller communities who might not always want to talk honestly to local authority officers.
- Provides a scapegoat and someone the authority can 'blame' for unpopular conclusions.

4.8 Participants recognised that there are also disadvantages. For example, outsiders can harm positive relationships between good officers and the communities. More seriously, use of contractors can lead to the authorities being disengaged from the process and not 'owning' the results. It can harm organisational and individual learning which is needed for policy development and implementation. There was a feeling that the process should be more inclusive generally, and that local authorities might be more directly involved in future GTAA's, having learnt from the first round.

4.9 Another specific question was the appropriateness of the **sub-regional approach** to GTAA's recommended in the Guidance. One rationale given there is that the larger study area means that there can be a larger sample, but this advantage is effectively lost when results have to be disaggregated again to local authority level. On the basis of experience, the view was that the sub-regional approach works in some areas and not in others. Points to stress are that:

- The sub-region should ideally make some sense in Gypsy and Traveller accommodation terms, or in the context of travelling patterns.
- It is important that there is a history of partnership working and some prospect of future policy and implementation involving the sub-region too. Partnerships are unlikely to work well if brought together **only** for GTAA purposes. In this case an 'artificial' grouping can actually hinder policy development and invite buck passing.

4.10 Participants recognised that GTAA's had tended to treat study areas as islands. GTAA boundaries are likely to present challenges to regional planning bodies when taking a 'strategic' view of where need should be met if this involves shifting requirements between as well as within study areas.

Survey and Fieldwork Issues

4.11 A session of the workshop discussed sampling and other survey issues involved in GTAAs. Main points are noted under three headings: base population and sampling; questionnaires; fieldwork and interviewers.

Base Population and Sampling

4.12 Establishing the base population and achieving a sound sample was identified as one of the most challenging tasks in carrying out a GTAA. There was some sympathy with the view expressed that it is not possible to get a fully robust sample in such a fraught social and political context.

4.13 In terms of ***establishing the base population/sample frame***, participants thought it important to use as many approaches as possible. Planning consents, for example, were found to be good in identifying sites not included in the Counts. Experiences of working with Traveller Education Services (TES) were mixed. Some (but not all) contractors had found TES workers very useful in introducing interviewers to Gypsies and Travellers on sites or in housing, but most sounded a note of caution over using TES records in estimating base populations – they relate only to families with children, but on the other hand sometimes appear to over-state numbers, perhaps because children enrolled for one or two classes only are included. Generally, baseline information on numbers and locations of Gypsies and Travellers was found to be imperfect and inconsistent between areas. Initial estimates of numbers can be very wrong. In this context two further points emerged:

- Because of poor initial information there can be difficulties with target numbers of interviews set at the tender stage to cost a project. There can be subsequent problems in achieving ‘targets’ which, in the event, prove unrealistic but this can be seen as ‘failure’ on the part of contractors. An elaborate sampling frame based on poor initial information can lead to distortions. There was consensus that, in the first round of GTAAs at least, flexibility was desirable in setting targets.
- Base population estimates (and sample) depend on people identifying themselves as Gypsies or Travellers, especially in housing. People may adopt different identities depending on the context, and may be unwilling to identify if there is mistrust over how the information will be used. Self-identification will be greater if there are perceived benefits.

4.14 Participants noted that there was often pressure to maximise ***sample size***, and to interview as many people as possible – but at the same time, there were cost constraints and time pressures to work within. It is important in responding to pressure to maximise interviews not to:

- Bias the sample too much by taking a lot of ‘easy’ interviews on, for example, council sites.
- Interview more than one person from the same household which, if not recognised, could have the effect of inflating apparent need through double counting. However, participants thought that it was valuable to interview young people in their own right rather than relying on parents’

perceptions of the sort of accommodation they might like. GTAAAs have not done this very successfully to date.

4.15 Participants agreed that it is important to use a range of approaches to **sample selection**, including setting targets (in terms of absolute numbers or percentages) where there is good base information. Targets should be relatively higher on unauthorised than authorised sites because these contribute more directly to need. Some form of snowball sampling is probably inevitable. It is acknowledged that this can lead to bias, so it is important to start 'snowballs' from as many points as possible in terms of gender and ethnicity in order to tap into a range of social networks. Selecting/persuading a representative mix of people to take part in focus groups is also challenging.

4.16 In reality, regardless of sample selection approaches, who is interviewed depends on their willingness to participate. Participants recognised the importance of maximising **response rates**. Two main points were made:

- Contractors have been very reliant on 'gatekeepers' or agencies with prior knowledge of the communities for introductions and more general publicity and reassurance about the survey. Private site owners can act as powerful gatekeepers and getting their co-operation is very important. There has to be community buy-in.
- There were some reports of hostility or apathy at individual level towards taking part in the survey. This was particularly apparent on unauthorised encampments or where Gypsies and Travellers felt they were adequately accommodated and could see not direct benefit from participating. A view was expressed that hostility is likely to increase in a subsequent round of GTAAAs if nothing is seen to have happened in the way of additional site provision.

Survey Questionnaires

4.17 There was agreement that the balance might not be correct in the current survey methodology which normally involves structured interviews, potentially lasting over an hour, covering a range of topics and contributing to a predominantly quantitative analysis based on only three or four questions which contribute directly to pitch requirement calculations. Analysing open-ended questions from such interviews takes a very long time; participants then sometimes had experiences of clients not wanting too much 'soft' information or quotations in reports.

4.18 Points made included:

- The list of topics in the CLG Guidance is unrealistically long and detailed even if confined to the key issues.
- Very long questionnaires leading to lengthy interviews can create problems of refusals if word gets around.
- Current questionnaires can provide 'lip service' information on some topics by including them but not exploring them in sufficient depth to be useful.
- There was some support for the idea of restricting GTAA questionnaires to accommodation topics rather than trying to include health and education as well.
- There was also support for exploring the idea that the methodology be amended so that there would be a short, standardised quantitative questionnaire used to collect consistent information in all studies. This would provide the basic data for estimating pitch requirements. The standard survey would be complemented by explicitly qualitative work to **understand** more about communities, accommodation aspirations, travelling patterns etc. Such work could be tailored to individual local characteristics and concerns.
- Guidance should say more about how some of the important elements in 'need' are to be operationalised in questionnaires – for example 'overcrowding' (living units, pitches/plots and sites/yards) and 'psychological aversion to bricks and mortar'.

Fieldwork Issues and Interviewers

4.19 Participants noted that fieldwork had raised few health and safety issues – there were one or two examples of threatening behaviour towards interviewers especially related to unauthorised encampments. GTAAs were felt to have produced similar issues over lone working etc as any other social research. Dogs had proved the biggest problem.

4.20 There was quite a lengthy discussion on the pros and cons of working with interviewers recruited (and trained) from Gypsy and Traveller communities. Advantages included:

- Community interviewers can sometimes identify and gain access to Gypsies and Travellers who would not otherwise be included in the survey.
- Everyone who had worked with community interviewers had examples of excellent interviews and completed questionnaires.
- Their employment sends powerful signals to the communities.
- After a survey, it can be extremely valuable to discuss preliminary findings with community interviewers.
- Local community interviewers can help local authorities in the future in opening up lines of communication.

4.21 Disadvantages included:

- There is a perceived danger that people with a direct interest in the process carrying out interviews is likely to skew the results. This could reduce the credibility of findings.
- Experience suggests that community interviewers can sometimes be reluctant to ask questions they feel to be culturally sensitive whereas other researchers ask the questions without problems.
- Literacy issues can limit the amount of information possible from write-in answers.
- It is hard to understand and predict who will be able to interview whom in terms of ethnic or family groups.
- Reluctance on the part of some community interviewers to record respondents' names or telephone numbers makes it hard to apply normal survey quality control checks.

4.22 Participants (taking into account both those attending the workshop and those who contributed views by e-mail or telephone) differed in their opinions about the balance between advantages and disadvantages – some felt that access advantages outweighed potential problems, others that vested interest threats to credibility outweighed potential benefits. There was agreement that:

- Employing community interviewers does/must not preclude also using trained social researchers. Some felt that a mix was ideal.
- The emphasis should be on training, experience and personal skills for interviewing regardless of whether the interviewer comes from the Travelling or settled communities.
- Interviewers – whatever their background – must be treated well and not exposed to health and safety risks.
- Contractors must check quality of completed questionnaires, reinforce training and, if need be, stop using interviewers who cannot achieve the required standard, again regardless of their background.

4.23 Participants admitted that quality control procedures had proved challenging in this first round of GTAA surveys. This is an area where there should be improvements in future.

Estimating Pitch Requirements

4.24 Estimating pitch requirements was recognised as the core of the GTAA – some participants felt that the balance was too far towards quantitative findings to the exclusion of more qualitative material but understood that the planning system requires robust figures.

CLG Guidance and the Requirements 'Model'

4.25 There was some agreement that there should be greater consistency between models being used to calculate pitch requirements. The CLG Guidance was felt to be inadequate here for two related reasons:

- There is too little detail about where the figures to populate the 'model' in the example given (Guidance pages 24/25) should come from. There is an implication that figures emerge automatically from the survey – and they don't. There should be more explanation and worked examples of the way in which materials from surveys and other sources translate into model entries.
- There is also some confusion and potential for double-counting in the 'model' in the Guidance example. This should be re-visited and re-formulated.

4.26 It was recognised that estimates have included elements of professional judgement. This was felt to be inevitable given the nature of the basic information, small sample numbers etc. Even with more consistency in the model used, there must be room for, and acceptance of, pragmatism.

4.27 Participants thought that fuller guidance and a more standardised approach to estimating pitch requirements would help contractors withstand challenges to estimates, and particularly attempts to either raise or lower estimates for 'political' reasons. Contractors were clear that such attempts should be firmly resisted unless further evidence was provided to support adjustment.

Dealing with Uncertainty

4.28 Participants were very aware that client demands for precision and certainty in estimates conflict with imprecision and uncertainty inherent in new methods and the character of the source information. They had shared experiences of clients wanting to remove caveats from reports and cutting words such as 'might', 'should' or 'probably'. Figures need to be definite to get political support. Ranges were thought to be confusing and unhelpful – there is no point in having either a too narrow or a too wide range. Some thought that a traffic light system was useful when talking to clients and getting them to understand different levels of certainty. Others thought traffic lights simply undermined the figures. How to reconcile the need for certainty with a very uncertain area remains an unresolved issue.

Other 'Difficult' Issues

4.29 A number of 'difficult' issues arose which were mentioned rather than discussed in any detail. These included:

- Should GTAAs move beyond 'need where it arises' towards 'need where it should be met'? Participants thought this should be resisted since it was likely to include 'political' as well as 'technical' issues which could be evidenced by the GTAA itself. The planning system is the appropriate forum for such debates, but contractors have been

pressured to develop alternative distributions between authorities especially where the distribution of 'need where it arises' is very uneven.

- Should there be a distinction between 'need' and 'demand' or 'desire', and if so, how can this be made? There was some difference of opinion between participants over whether this is desirable – and considerable agreement that it is virtually impossible to do in practice.
- There are unresolved difficulties in estimating need for transient accommodation (transit sites and less formal stopping places). Clients differ in the importance they place on this. Ideally, estimates should be made for both permanent and transient needs. Barriers include reluctance to accept politically that, in order to facilitate a (semi-)nomadic lifestyle, families need both permanent and transient sites. There is also a degree of uncertainty about how transit sites and stopping places would function and how they would be used. Future guidance should say much more about how transient needs should be assessed.

Recommendations for Future Guidance and Messages to CLG

4.30 In the final session of the workshop, participants were asked to write down the two or three main messages they would like to send to CLG. These messages are noted in full below (slightly edited in some cases). It is clear that contractor participants were advocating improved guidance which is more specific about the process of carrying out GTAAs and making pitch estimates, but which also stresses the importance of preparing for the research at the start of the process and of using the information effectively at the end – and having realistic expectations throughout.

Person 1

- Need a clearer methodology for the Guidance 'model' (step by step) + new equations to account for overlap between need elements.
- Need guidance to enable authorities to bring about change before the RSS process is finalised so that buy-in won't be affected next time round [i.e. Gypsies and Travellers are not alienated by lack of progress].
- Guidance on how authorities should use other information from GTAAs, e.g. what strategies, in addition to housing, GTAAs should feed into.
- Education for officers so they know beforehand what the research is about.

Person 2

- The main thing I've learnt from 3 years of GTAAs is how limited social research can be for such a complex, diverse community. CLG should examine the expectation of providing a robust evidence base on which the planning system should hang.
- Although the Guidance should be just that, local authorities rely on it and often want it to be followed to the letter. Please make the terms

used in it precise and possible to quantify/define within the constraints of a social survey.

Person 3

- I have real issues with the community involvement aspect, however I don't know how this can be resolved!
- Steering Groups must have most important people on (i.e. decision makers) from the start, not coming in at the end.

Person 4

- To develop an understanding that, with a 'hard-to-identify' population where there is a lack of data and knowledge about their size, spread and diversity, it is impossible to expect a 'robust and reliable' numerical assessment of need.
- Following and reflecting a mainstream housing needs assessment approach will over-simplify and provide less useful information than an agreed tailored methodology will.

Person 5

- Clarify and achieve some core standardisation of the methodology, using model questions that should be asked by all contractors.
- Reduce the scope of surveys to matters relating to accommodation with other dimensions being addressed through other types of commissions.

Person 6

- GTAA's have produced an important evidence base for provision of sites. The crucial need is for clearer and more robust guidance on implementation and delivery timescales and sanctions.

Person 7

- Qualitative research is as important as quantitative. Culture, lifestyles, traditions, context etc have to be understood and taken into consideration when designing sites.

Person 8

- GTAA's require an understanding of the community and context on the part of the local authority (and researchers, of course). They need to be clearly linked to action and not just a means of putting off doing something about the problems and needs. Authorities need to get their act together and show leadership on this issue – more sanctions for those that don't.

Person 9

- Need for greater education of local authority officers and members on:
 - reasons for carrying out a GTAA.
 - more detail on commissioning GTAAs including basic data requirements to be prepared prior to contract letting.
 - issues surrounding the sampling frame and interpretation of results.
 - need to deliver on the ground via RSS, LDF, Housing Strategy and alignment with other regional and sub-regional capital allocations.
 - include delivery in planning Annual Monitoring Reports.

Person 10

- Link GTAA findings to implementation (LDF and DC policy).
- Allow local variation in approaches, provided there is reasoned justification.
- Increased training at local authority/community level on practical ways forward and attitude change.
- Recognise scope for supplementary studies on local issues, e.g. transit needs and housed Gypsies.
- Close monitoring and strategy review.

Person 11

- CLG needs to take a more pro-active approach in the GTAA process in terms of clarifying the duties of authorities and the rights of Gypsies and Travellers.
- Guidance should be more explicit in acknowledging that the GTAA process is a pragmatic one including uncertainties and assumptions.
- There need to be consequences for local authorities that do not fulfil their obligations.
- Timescales need to coincide with grant funding and RSS timescales.

Person 12

- Make clearer that GTAAs are only part of the process, and that preparation before and policy making after are vital too.
- Temper expectations on the precision of estimates which can come from GTAAs. These are **estimates** to be fed into subsequent policy processes.
- Qualitative information for understanding is vital as well as quantitative pitch requirement estimates.

5. WORKSHOP FOR USERS OF GTAA FINDINGS

5.1 In order to get different perspectives on the use and usefulness of GTAA findings, workshop participants were invited from five broad groupings: CLG Gypsy & Traveller Unit, the Planning Inspectorate, Regional Assemblies, local authorities and Gypsy and Traveller representative organisations. So that all delegates could participate fully in the discussion, the workshop ran mainly on a group basis. There were three discussion sessions:

- General impressions of GTAAs, their strengths and weakness : mixed groups
- Use made of GTAAs and perceived adequacy of findings : 'constituency' groups (regional, local authority and Gypsy and Traveller organisations)
- Recommendations for the future : mixed groups

5.2 Participants obviously had very different interests and viewpoints, and had had different GTAA experiences. Not surprisingly, a wide range of opinion was expressed and, although there was broad agreement in many areas, some of the points made were contradictory. Not all differences of opinion were along 'constituency' lines – for example, people from local authorities sometimes disagreed on a particular issue. At a small scale, this illustrates the challenge in making GTAA information relevant and useful to the diverse interests who might want to use it.

5.3 The main points from the workshop are presented for each session under the questions set in the discussion briefs. I have edited the workshop notes a little, and have sometimes put points under another heading where they seem to fit better. There is still repetition which I have left as a partial indication of some of the most important points which participants kept returning to.

General Impressions of GTAAs So Far

5.4 The first discussion session asked three main questions about general impressions, perceived strengths and shortcomings. The overall feelings can perhaps be summed up along the lines of *'it's a start, but we hoped it could have been better'*. Some participants were more critical and clear that, given the resources applied, it **should** have been better.

The consensus from the 'contractors' workshop was that the first round of GTAAs has been 'as good as might reasonably be expected'. Do you agree?

5.5 Participants were quick to note that any evaluation of the first round of GTAAs depended fundamentally on expectations. It was clear that these had differed. On the one hand, many (perhaps most) participants broadly shared a view that yes, it had been as good as could be reasonably expected:

- You can't expect much first time round.
- Useful information has been gained which we wouldn't otherwise have.
- It's OK so long as lessons are learnt for next time.

For some in this camp, things could have been a lot worse with more arguments over figures; others had hoped that things would have been a bit better than they were. There was recognition of the difficulties faced in lack of basic information and short timescales imposed nationally.

5.6 Other participants, including representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller organisations, felt that GTAAs really had not lived up to their expectations. Factors mentioned included the quality of studies themselves, their questionable independence, lack of trust generated with both Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities and – most seriously – the length of time it is taking to work through the planning system and provide sites.

5.7 All participants, regardless of their view on how successful GTAAs had been, recognised that the major challenge is in the future; as someone noted *'the hardest part will be delivery'*. The priority is to move outside the 'bubble' of the GTAA into the real world of prejudice against site development.

What are the main strengths/benefits so far?

5.8 Seven themes emerged from discussion here:

- There is now information on Gypsy and Traveller communities, current accommodation and needs; such information simply did not exist before.
- Planning for accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers has now been 'mainstreamed' rather than treated as something additional and special.
- GTAAs have increased awareness:
 - of Gypsy and Traveller issues in general.
 - of the extent of need and homelessness among the communities.
 - that accommodation does not only take the form of bricks and mortar housing and that all forms must be planned for, challenging 'housing' perceptions in departments and strategies.
 - among elected members that they have inescapable responsibilities towards Gypsy and Traveller accommodation provision.
- In some areas, the process of carrying out a GTAA has encouraged collaborative working between local authorities, and across departments within authorities.
- Good GTAAs which really involved Gypsies and Travellers have had an empowering effect for the individuals involved. Gypsies and Travellers have been members of project groups, read reports and generally been part of the process, in addition to acting as interviewers.
- Identification of needs in GTAAs has, in a few cases, already led to planning applications being approved.
- The GTAAs give something to work on next time, including some good practice.

And what have been the main shortcomings?

5.9 The invitation to discuss shortcomings resulted in a long list of concerns. These have been grouped around themes below. It is important to stress that

not everyone agreed with all shortcomings and it is hard to gauge how widespread the recorded views were.

5.10 There were failings with the **general approach and overall designs** adopted. For example views were expressed:

- There had been fundamental design flaws because of lack of community engagement/involvement right at the start.
- The methods adopted provided a straightjacket – as a consequence Gypsy and Traveller communities have not necessarily articulated their own needs in their own terms.
- Much community consultation has been tokenistic – consultation for the sake of consultation.
- Opportunities have been missed to involve politicians and generally generate political ownership and buy-in to the process and the findings.
- Local authorities have been engaged to differing degrees and there has been a tendency for those already committed to engage more fully, to provide more information and possibly, as a consequence, to end up with more apparent need. Less committed authorities have not necessarily been engaged.
- Consultants have sometimes been ‘parachuted in’ without understanding the issues.
- Some consultants may have over-committed and been unable to devote sufficient resources to all studies.
- There has been a general lack of openness in the process, especially debates over figures. There is a fear that political pressure has led to some estimates of pitch requirements being reduced. Lack of openness and transparency means that figures are hard to challenge.

5.11 Other perceived shortcomings relate to the **methods** used in GTAAs:

- CLG Guidance was issued far too late and was insufficiently prescriptive.
- In the North West, confusion was created because GTAAs were carried out at both regional and sub-regional scales.
- The timeframes of most GTAAs were too short to capture travelling patterns over time – they should ideally last at least 12 months.
- Good baseline information was not always collected or reported. In part, this reflects the inadequacy of the Caravan Counts which need to be revised and improved.
- Sample sizes were sometimes too small and there could be reliability/credibility problems where ‘snowballing’ was used.
- There were access problems on some sites which affect sample validity and may skew results.
- There was no sharing of information, for example on travelling patterns, between GTAAs.
- ‘Gatekeeper’ officers who introduced interviewers were sometimes present during interviews; this prevented respondents being open and saying everything they wanted to.
- There was a general failure to adequately include housed Gypsies and Travellers in the studies – there are issues around sample frames,

sample size and insufficient attention being paid to the needs of housed families.

- Above all, GTAA's are too variable in the methods they use and their quality. There is a lack of consistency which makes it hard to bring findings together at a regional (or national) scale.

5.12 Participants also identified shortcomings in the ***sort of findings*** emerging from GTAA's:

- The total Gypsy and Traveller population is still unknown. This is mainly – but not entirely – due to issues around identifying Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar. Gypsies and Travellers 'hidden' on their own sites are also liable to be missed in GTAA's, as they are in Counts.
- Some GTAA's fail to provide clear details of the present number of sites and pitches in their study area, and to distinguish between private and council sites.
- Pitch requirement estimates have normally dealt with overall numbers; GTAA's have provided too little guidance on the type, size and design of sites to be provided, or the characteristics, including ethnicity, of those in need.
- Affordability issues have been fudged.
- There is too little detail on site conditions, especially overcrowding and poor amenity provision, on some private sites.
- Not all Gypsy and Traveller communities have been fully included, for example, New Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.
- Transient needs have not been covered adequately.
- GTAA reports are sometimes badly written, make unwarranted claims and provide too little detail of the methods and assumptions used in estimates of pitch requirements.

5.13 The final shortcoming; identified related to the ***link with policy***:

- Some authorities are waiting for the Regional Spatial Strategy review to be completed before acting – contrary to Government guidance.
- There was a concern that some authorities may be treating interest in moving from housing to a site as aspirational rather than a genuine 'need'. Participants felt this was inappropriate given links between living in culturally-appropriate accommodations and mental health issues and general well-being.

Other issues arising

5.14 Other issues arising in the first discussion session included:

- It is important to develop contacts across communities and areas. Ongoing links with the communities are needed, with resource implications for both authorities and communities.
- GTAAs will not solve basic lack of understanding between communities, and there needs to be on-going work to change attitudes if site provision is to be successful.
- An issue is how to keep momentum going now the first round of GTAAs is over. If nothing happens on the ground because of the length of the planning process, there will be disillusionment and unhappiness.

Use Made of GTAA Information and its Adequacy

5.15 Discussion groups for this session were based on 'constituencies'. For convenience the main points are recorded under the headings: Gypsy and Traveller organisations, regions and local authorities. Overall, at present, GTAAs have been directly used mainly at a regional scale in Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS) reviews and indirectly by Gypsy and Traveller organisations seeking to press for site provision. Local authorities appear to have been less active 'users' to date.

Gypsy and Traveller Organisations

5.16 Gypsy and Traveller organisation representatives have used GTAAs:

- As ammunition in planning appeals and court cases relating to sites.
- In formal consultation exercises related to LDF processes at local authority level.
- To criticise regional figures (and to use the opportunity of the regional planning process to identify shortcomings of the GTAAs themselves).
- As a pressure tool and a lever for Gypsy and Traveller interests.
- In future, they should contribute directly to increased site provision.

5.17 Discussion about adequacy of GTAA information stressed the variability and quality of GTAAs and the need for improvements, especially in completeness of coverage. Particular points raised included:

- The weakness of GTAAs in respect of Gypsies and Travellers in housing creates an evidential void and will create problems in maintaining support for housed Gypsies and Travellers.
- There should also be better information on cultural aversion to bricks and mortar and need to move from housing to sites.
- GTAAs need to develop methods for asking questions about affordability. In terms of site design – would it be possible to provide large sites with some pitches for social renting, some for private renting and some to buy as affordable housing; this would bring site provision further into the mainstream.

- GTAA methods and findings need to be stronger and better able to withstand attempts to adjust requirements downwards.
- GTAAAs are weak in assessing the need for transient accommodation.

5.18 Additional information which would make GTAAs more useful to Gypsy and Traveller organisations included:

- A comprehensive estimate of the base population of Gypsies and Travellers in caravans and housing.
- More about aspirational accommodation needs.
- More about needs arising in and from housing.
- More information about where people want to live and whether they want/would be prepared to re-locate elsewhere.
- A comprehensive identification of traditional stopping places across the country. A register of such sites should be held centrally, and they should be reflected in planning policy as places where Gypsies and Travellers have the right to stop.

5.19 Although community consultation in some GTAAs had been tokenistic, participants thought that the GTAA process had itself been useful. It has raised a host of issues which must now be followed up.

Regions

5.20 Participants from Regional Assemblies were all involved in RSS reviews dealing with Gypsy and Traveller site provision. All had drawn, or were in the process of drawing, on GTAAs to provide one aspect of the evidence base for the RSS review. Additional information came from Caravan Counts and Advice submitted by Section 4(4) Authorities (strategic authorities: county councils, unitaries and metropolitan authorities). At regional level, GTAAs were found to be broadly adequate for a pragmatic approach although there were concerns about variable quality and inconsistencies in methods used. More specific limitations on usefulness included:

- There are some confusions between families, pitches and caravans, and it is not always clear which is being used.
- GTAAs are not very useful in helping Regional Assemblies develop options for pitch distributions between local authorities. Most are on a 'need where it arises' basis and provide little information on where Gypsies and Travellers would ideally like to live, or whether sites provided in a particular authority area would be taken up.
- Cross-boundary issues are not well dealt with, nor is inter-regional migration.
- Similarly, transit site needs are sometimes not dealt with at all in GTAAs, and almost always in less detail than residential pitch needs. Transit provision is sometimes seen as secondary, to be considered when the priority of addressing the shortage of residential pitches has been met.
- GTAAs have not always been supported by local authorities. A few authorities have re-visited the GTAA covering their area and recalculated pitch requirements using different assumptions which

produce lower figures. This presents difficulties for the Regional Assembly.

5.21 Additional information which would make GTAAs more useful at the regional scale includes:

- Precise information about the present number of sites and pitches in each local authority.
- Fuller information on unauthorised encampments, perhaps using police as well as local authority records.
- Better information on inter-regional flows, both 'migration' and more transient travelling movements.
- More information on site costs and affordability to help identify what proportion of requirements could realistically be met through Gypsies and Travellers providing sites for themselves.
- More differentiation in requirement figures to reflect ethnic diversity especially where this has implications for the number of sites/pitches to be provided.

Local Authorities

5.22 The impression given by this group was that GTAAs had been directly used to a limited extent so far. Some authorities are waiting for the RSS to tell them how many pitches they must provide before taking action. Others are working towards a more pro-active approach of regularising some unauthorised sites by granting planning permission.

5.23 Adequacy must be assessed in terms of the different potential functions GTAAs have:

- For ***planning*** purposes, the information on numbers which can be justified is adequate as the starting point for the process.
- For ***housing*** purposes crude numbers are less adequate. More information is really needed about those in need, linked to a mechanism to ensure that site provision actually meets those needs rather than attracting newcomers to the area. Information on the diversity of requirements is also needed to help plan provision in greater detail. The emphasis on caravans and sites may draw attention away from the needs for accommodation and services for Gypsies and Travellers in housing about whom little is known and who represent the majority in some areas.
- Additional information (housing-related support, health, education) was collected in some GTAAs and was felt to be useful. One example quoted was information relating to disability and need for mobility aids. Such needs may be better established for settled rather than transient families.
- Finally, there was a concern that under-counting in GTAAs, especially in relation to bricks and mortar, poses a threat since it could lead to withdrawal of funding for services.

5.24 These and some other concerns expressed over adequacy are reflected in suggestions for additional information which would make GTAAs more useful:

- More information about support services for Gypsies and Travellers in housing.
- Better and clearer information on, for example, overcrowding where general questions seem to have been interpreted in different ways. This requires an appropriate definition of 'overcrowding' specifically in the context of Gypsies and Travellers.
- Better information on unauthorised encampments.
- More differentiation reflecting ethnic diversity to avoid, for example, a situation where need is from New Travellers, but sites are designed with Romany Gypsies in mind.
- More information on the condition and suitability of sites. Poor quality sites should be captured as need.
- The possibility should be explored of lifting individual anonymity to help families access services where appropriate. Participants felt that there was a danger that someone reporting a health or support need in a GTAA interview might think the information would be passed on and something would be done about it. There is potential to use the GTAA interview to identify and act upon personal needs, although this obviously needs care and a clear protocol.

5.25 Local authority participants thought that the GTAA process would be more useful if the Gypsy and Traveller communities were empowered to participate fully in future rounds. There was a suggestion that the Department of Health's work with BME communities should be considered as a model for this. They started at the grass-roots and worked upwards, and included significant work on community development, capacity building, empowerment etc.

Recommendations for the Future

5.26 The intention of the final session in the workshop was to start learning lessons from experience to date and convert these into suggestions for improvements for subsequent GTAAs. Three questions were posed: how can GTAAs be better carried out in future? How can they be made more useful? and recommendations for amendments to the Guidance. Not surprisingly there was some overlap between these points and repetition of previous material, especially relating to perceived shortcomings.

How can GTAA's be better carried out in future?

5.27 Participants made a number of suggestions which can be broadly grouped under seven themes:

- It is important that we start to prepare **now** by making sure that better basic information is available. In particular, the Caravan Counts system should be improved to achieve greater consistency and the inclusion of all relevant communities, and it should be made compulsory.
- The GTAA process itself must be better planned and should start before contractors are hired. Authorities should debate at the start how people will work together and should agree a checklist of required outcomes. Over-large GTAA sub-regions should be avoided.
- Management of the GTAA process should be better. Steering groups should include more members of Gypsy and Traveller communities (groups and individuals) to ensure that they are fully engaged from the outset and that the project is grounded more solidly. The right mix of officer skills (housing and planning) should be represented, with sufficient seniority for full buy-in.
- There needs to be greater consistency between GTAA's in subsequent rounds, building on best practice. This requires stronger and more detailed guidance to ensure that similar methods, approaches to making estimates and terminology are used.
- GTAA methods should include more focus groups and detailed survey work.
- Topics which require enhancement include the needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers, transit needs (perhaps work at national level) and minimum site standards and resulting requirements.
- Quality might be enhanced if GTAA's (and the Caravan Counts?) were to be subject to independent audit.

How can GTAA's be made more useful?

5.28 Many of the suggestions here mirrored those already noted above concerning the quality and consistency of GTAA's. Additional points included:

- Elected members should be involved earlier in the process so that the results are not such a shock to them and action can follow more smoothly.
- Community interviewer initiatives should be built on in order to develop a pool of trained and experienced researchers able to carry out GTAA work. They might also be involved in the Caravan Count or in quality audits.
- GTAA reports could be improved by:
 - being written in Plain English.
 - ensuring that need is always expressed in the same terms and format.
 - including a 'Key Facts' section (one or two sides) which would be in the same format for all GTAA's.

Recommendations for the Future

5.29 Recommendations for the future related to amendments to GTAA guidance and to wider changes. Participants did not always agree and some proposals contradict others.

Amendments to GTAA Guidance

5.30 By implication there was complete agreement that CLG Guidance should be revised, and that the revised guidance should be available in good time for authorities to plan the next wave of GTAAs. There should be less jargon (such as ‘front loaded’) in the guidance.

5.31 Proposals which were not explicitly challenged by counter views included:

- There should be more in the guidance about preparing for the GTAA, setting up partnership arrangements, developing the brief for contractors (and ensuring contractors fulfil the brief).
- Guidance on the composition of project steering groups would be useful, including the local authority departments and other agencies which should be represented, appropriate levels of seniority and so on.
- There should be clearer working definitions of elements of pitch need and supply, distinguishing between elements to be treated as ‘aspirational’ and those to be treated as ‘need’. In particular, there is need for guidance on practical definitions for proven ‘psychological aversion’ to bricks and mortar. Guidance should also spell out how GTAAs are to deal with ‘aspirational’ elements.
- A question ‘bank’ or example question wordings would be useful especially in areas where it is difficult to elicit potentially sensitive information in a culturally sensitive manner – such as affordability.
- The way pitch requirement estimates are to be developed should be made clearer. Standard ‘default’ assumptions might be developed (for example for household formation or proportions on unauthorised encampments requiring residential pitches) which could be used in studies unless there is evidence that they are not appropriate.
- The guidance should more clearly link into what happens next. If it is thought inappropriate to move into comments on policy development, at least the guidance should make clear that there is an expectation that the GTAA will provide information which can be used for future monitoring.

5.32 Differing views were expressed on a number of important issues:

- There was complete agreement that Gypsy and Traveller communities should be much more fully and consistently involved/engaged in the GTAA process (including Gypsy and Traveller men). Not all participants thought that this was necessarily best achieved through membership of a project steering group.
- A view was expressed that GTAAs might concentrate more on accommodation issues and drop some of the wider topics relating to health and education. Some participants thought that the wider questions were useful and should be retained.

- Some saw the ideal GTAA interview as a standardised, tick-box interview which could be replicated everywhere; others saw it as an open 'conversation'. There is an obvious conflict between these views.
- More fundamentally, there appeared to be considerable support for greater prescription in the guidance on survey methods, questions and methods for estimating pitch requirements (including the possible use of 'default' assumptions). This is seen as necessary to increase consistency and reduce scope for any 'massaging' of figures. However, some participants felt equally strongly that prescription and standardisation would not be appropriate, and that GTAAs should be able to make local responses to local circumstances.

Wider Changes

5.33 The following comments were made concerning wider desirable changes or recommendations:

- There should be an examination, probably at national scale, of need for transient accommodation and how it can be met – whether by formal transit sites or other measures.
- It is important that there is continuing central co-ordination to:
 - encourage national buy-in from Gypsy and Traveller communities.
 - give the system 'teeth' in terms of getting GTAAs completed on time and to robust standards.
 - enable/encourage/promote the transfer of good practice.
 - keep contacts up to date.
- Issues around funding for Gypsy and Traveller bodies/individuals must be sorted out to enable maximum participation and full engagement.
- Funding and support policies for provision of sites to meet identified requirements are also needed.

5.34 The final point made is most important of all : **IT'S TIME TO STOP TALKING AND START DOING!** Specifically, unless Gypsy and Traveller communities see the supply of sites increasing soon, any goodwill engendered by the process to date will be lost, and it will be still more difficult to achieve engagement in future.

ANNEX : WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

GTAA Contractors Workshop : 10 July 2008

Name	Organisation
John Bloxsom	John Bloxsom Housing Services
Phil Brown	SHUSU, University of Salford
Colin Davis	Ark Consultancy
Sara Elias	Fordham Research
John Grayson	AdEd Knowledge Company
Rob Home	Anglia Ruskin University
Marion Horton	AdEd Knowledge Company
Lisa Hunt	SHUSU, University of Salford
Jonathan Hyams	arc4 (formerly David Cumberland Associates)
Jamie Keddie	Fordham Research
Lucy Mayblin	CURS, University of Birmingham
Pat Niner	CURS, University of Birmingham
Andrew Petrie	dba Management Consultancy
Ryan Powell	CRESR, Sheffield Hallam University
Providing information by e-mail or telephone	
David Couttie	David Couttie Associates
Dale Hall	Opinion Research Services

GTAA Users Workshop : 21 July 2008

Name	Organisation
Jake Berryman	South Shropshire District Council
Eleanor Church	Planning Inspectorate
Claire Durbin	Planning Inspectorate
Bill Forrester	Kent County Council
James Gleeson	Greater London Authority
Rebecca Gossage-Worrall	Derby City Council
John Hardman	Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council
Jo Hill	West Midlands Regional Assembly
Ian Holding	Bristol City Council
Jane Ann Hurn	Northern Network
Caroline Keightley	CLG Gypsy & Traveller Unit
Jillian Luntz	(formerly) East of England Regional Assembly
Pat Niner	CURS, University of Birmingham
Chris Poulton	Greater London Authority
Andrew Ryder	Irish Traveller Movement
Sian Sankey	CURS, University of Birmingham
Janet Smith	Northern Network
Steve Staines	Friends, Families and Travellers
George Summers	CLG Gypsy & Traveller Unit
Jim Vine	Building and Social Housing Foundation
Matt Whitworth	South West Regional Assembly
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