

# Working with housed Gypsies and Travellers: A good practice guide



**West London  
Housing Partnership**

**Final Report**

**July 2010**

*fordham*  
RESEARCH



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Jamie Keddie

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# Executive Summary

## Background

- S1 This report is made up of a best practice guide on meeting the support needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers, backed by qualitative research carried out with Gypsies and Travellers and people working with the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- S2 The report was commissioned by the West London Housing Partnership, with additional sponsorship from the North London Housing Sub Region and the South West London Housing Partnership.
- S3 The purpose of the research was to understand the forms of support needed to ameliorate psychological aversion to living in bricks and mortar housing experienced by housed Gypsies and Travellers. One of the initial aims of the research was to produce a methodology which housing providers could use to assess Gypsies' and Travellers' level of psychological aversion to establish which families living in housing have the greatest need for a pitch. However, during the research, it became clear that in West London many of the problems that affect the Gypsy and Traveller community in bricks and mortar housing arise from the loss of community support. The project management group agreed that by producing a set of suggestions as to how a better support network could be generated, we would provide a more practical response to the issue of aversion for the situation in West London, given the large number of housed Gypsies and Travellers and the comparatively limited prospects for new pitches. This research has informed the production of the best practice guide included in the report, which provides background information on Gypsies and Travellers, their likely housing and support needs and recommendations on how these could be met.
- S4 To ensure that the guide is relevant to West London the research maps the services already available to Gypsies and Travellers in the sub-region. West London contains six Gypsy and Traveller sites which are mostly occupied by large Irish Traveller families. Ealing and Hillingdon provide the most services for Gypsies and Travellers and, according to the London Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (Fordham Research 2008), the two Boroughs contain more than half of the housed Gypsies and Travellers in West London.
- S5 The research draws on two primary data sources: a consultation event with stakeholders and interviews with Gypsies and Travellers on their experiences of living in housing. Secondary data includes a review of best practice in policy guidance and other research on Gypsies and Travellers.

## Findings

S6 The discussions with both stakeholders and Gypsies and Travellers identified the following issues:

### **Reasons for moving from sites to housing**

S7 A number of reasons for moving into housing from site accommodation were identified during the discussions. These include avoiding homelessness, gaining access to schools for children and wanting more privacy and stability for the family. However, it was noted that once housed Gypsies and Travellers frequently experience overcrowding, uncertain housing futures and difficulties placing children in schools. Some Gypsies and Travellers chose to move off site whilst others felt they do not have a choice. Many, including those living in housing and on sites were not happy with their current accommodation.

### **Psychological aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation**

S8 How psychological aversion is manifested can vary greatly according to the range of Gypsies and Travellers living in housing. For some, it is a short-term response to a transition into unfamiliar accommodation which lessens with time. For others, it can have longer lasting impacts upon their wellbeing and on their culture and identity.

S9 A move into bricks and mortar accommodation can often leave Gypsy and Traveller families:

- Isolated from their family and extensive kinship networks
- Alienated from their own culture and traditions
- Victim to prejudice and racism from their neighbours
- Confused in dealing with bureaucratic and official process
- Lacking support and advice
- Lacking empowerment to change the situation or seek help

S10 These factors were manifested in several ways:

- Depression, anxiety or claustrophobia
- The breakdown of traditional family roles and eventual break up of the family unit
- Increased isolation and vulnerability – especially for women
- Unstable accommodation circumstances with a knock on impact for health and education
- Worsening of health, especially for the elderly or infirm, who would usually be cared for by family on a site

S11 Aversion to living in housing needs to be considered as a combination of factors, including coping with a drastic change in lifestyle and surroundings, fear and isolation. In order to understand how Gypsies and Travellers relate to housing, there also needs to be an understanding of how they compare living in a house to living on a site. The benefits of living in housing include security, privacy and it being a more comfortable way of life. However, for the majority, choosing to live in a house also means loneliness, fear, and conflicts with settled neighbours. Living on a site is often associated with maintaining cultural familiarities, but this may also entail dealing with violence and isolation from wider society.

### **Support needs**

S12 Assessment and support needs to be delivered upon an individual needs basis and through an engaged assessment process. A wide range of support issues are presented by Gypsies and Travellers, ranging from low level and short-term, to more extensive and sustained.

S13 The areas that stakeholders noted for improvement were communication channels, which provide vital links between Gypsy and Traveller families and service providers, and site management which would benefit from clearer pitch allocation policies as currently many pitches pass from one family to another.

S14 In many respects the type of support which Gypsy and Traveller participants said they needed replicated the community support readily available on sites but often absent when living in housing. This ranged from having someone able to read mail, offer help with shopping or provide informal childcare at short notice. It is not therefore that the form of bricks and mortar accommodation prevents such support being available, but that moving to housing involves a geographical dispersal and disconnect from site-based support networks.

S15 Other support issues were specific to housing and do not occur to the same extent as on a site, such as managing tenancies or applying for choice-based lettings. Adjusting to the bureaucratic requirements of housing providers could pose a formidable challenge, exacerbated in cases of low literacy.

### **Pitch management**

S16 In the Gypsy and Traveller discussions there was a conflict in participants' responses about how sites should be managed and where they should be located. The overwhelming preferences for family-based sites contradicts having sites which are professionally managed and pitches allocated according to need, rather than family membership. Most wanted to stay in the area of London where they had family, social and employment networks, but others stated they were so desperate for a site they would consider relocating to a different part of the country.

## Recommendations

S17 Taking into account the feedback from stakeholders and Gypsies and Travellers, and the service mapping, the following recommendations have been made to the West London Housing Partnership. The extent to which they can be implemented will depend on the availability of resources in each Borough.

### **Housing support services**

1. Provide a Gypsy and Traveller officer or floating support worker who is available to assist with paperwork and tenancy agreements, provide advice and support for families in accessing education and health, and organise community events.
2. Compensate for the informal support networks available on sites and not in housed accommodation by providing a drop-in service or a telephone helpline for signposting and general advice. Consideration should be given as to the most appropriate way to publicise such a service.
3. Efforts should be made to include Gypsies and Travellers in the wider community such as collaborating with a range of service providers, creating a Gypsy and Traveller Forum and arranging local events. This would increase contact with service providers, combat isolation and reduce discrimination.
4. Develop partnership working with private landlords: as some local authorities currently do with other vulnerable groups, it can be beneficial to establish a certified register of trusted landlords who provide acceptable standards to tenants. Housing officers can also take a lead in mediating between private and social landlords and their Gypsy and Traveller tenants in cases where disputes arise.
5. Where possible, allow Gypsies and Travellers to use choice based lettings to identify appropriate homes such as ones located near to sites or areas with an established Gypsy and Traveller population.

### **Site management and pitch allocations**

6. Pitches are often allocated informally to friends or family members of existing residents and that waiting lists are rarely in operation partly because of low turnover. It remains vital that the formal procedure for site allocations is accessible and understandable to Gypsies and Travellers.
7. Allocate a site manager with a solid knowledge and an understanding of Gypsy and Traveller issues that can act as an intermediary between residents and service providers.
8. Promote the formation of site resident panels to ensure that frequent and effective channels of communication are established between site residents, site management and local authority support services.
9. Combat the intimidation and harassment reported on sites by adopting resident behaviour agreements.

**Monitoring and Coordination**

10. Identify Gypsy and Traveller categories in ethnic monitoring forms (including housing applications), and require that agencies working with the communities share information on their numbers and profile.
11. As the Gypsy and Traveller culture is closely based around community and local networks, it is increasingly important that when families access services they can do so through the advice of a recognised worker.



# Background

This report is the result of a study commissioned by the West London Housing Partnership with additional sponsorship provided by the South West and Northern London Housing Sub-Regions. The focus of the study is the housing and support needs of Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar accommodation in the seven West London Boroughs, as opposed to in a caravan on a site. The research considers Gypsies' and Travellers' experiences of living in bricks and mortar housing, including the impact on health and wellbeing, and the support services which can help ameliorate the negative effects of this where they arise.

One of the initial aims of the research was to produce a methodology which housing providers could use to assess Gypsies' and Travellers' level of psychological aversion to living in bricks and mortar housing. This would help establish which families living in housing have the greatest need for a pitch or support services. However, in the course of carrying out the research in West London, where there are limited prospects of new pitches, it became clear that many of the problems that affect the Gypsy and Traveller community in bricks and mortar housing arise from the loss of community support which is more readily accessible when living on a site. The project management group agreed that by producing a set of suggestions as to how a better support network could be generated, we are providing a more practical response to the issue of aversion for the situation in West London than by developing a methodology for assessing psychological aversion. This work can be seen as a first stage in addressing the wellbeing of Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar accommodation.

The focus of this study is Irish Travellers and English Gypsies. Although there are also European Roma and Travelling Showpeople in West London, their accommodation requirements are not affected by issues of aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation, and have not therefore been included within this study.

There are two sections to the report. The first section is a guide which summarises the main findings of the research and suggests policy solutions to help ameliorate the possible negative effects of living in housing. It also contains the results of a mapping exercise into the availability of services for housed Gypsies and Travellers in the West London Boroughs.

The second section presents the research on which the guide is based. The research comprised a series of interviews with Gypsies and Travellers living in housing and professionals who work with and provide support services to them, and a review of best practice from across the country.



# SECTION A: GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE



# 1. Introduction

## Who is this guide for?

- 1.1 The guide aims to inform policies designed to support Gypsies and Travellers, a community group whose complex needs are commonly not widely understood. It is primarily designed as a short guide for local authority housing officers who are unfamiliar with housed Gypsies' and Travellers' needs but are seeking to design services to help support them. However, as the effects of aversion to housing can impact upon a variety of areas of everyday life, the guide will also have relevance for professionals working with Gypsies and Travellers in health, education, social care and community engagement, as well as those in the voluntary sector.

## Outputs of the guide

- 1.2 The guide provides:
- Background information on Gypsies and Travellers living in housing and an outline of national policies referring to their accommodation needs
  - An understanding into the nature and causes of psychological aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation
  - Policy recommendations on how housing support services can be delivered to housed Gypsies and Travellers
  - An outline of current services available to meet the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers across the West London Housing Partnership area
  - Useful resources and references to current policies which can be used for those working with Gypsies and Travellers



## 2. The needs of Gypsies and Travellers living in housing

### Gypsies and Travellers in Britain

- 2.1 There are records of Gypsies and Travellers living in England as far back as the fifteenth century and today they are estimated to number between 200,000 and 300,000. The term “Gypsy and Traveller” encompasses a collection of different groups, including Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers, New (Age) Travellers and European Roma. While within each group there can be a complex range of lifestyles; what unites them is a nomadic heritage of travelling for work, family and cultural reasons.
- 2.2 Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are legally recognised as ethnic groups, and protected from discrimination by the Race Relations Act (1976, amended 2000) and the Human Rights Act (1998). In terms of health and education, they are one of the most deprived groups in Britain. Life expectancy is ten years lower than the national average, while educational attainment at GCSE level in 2003 was half that of the national average. A report by the Commission for Racial Equality in 2006, *Common Ground*, described how a lack of authorised places to stay perpetuates many of these problems.
- 2.3 Traditionally most Gypsies and Travellers have followed a nomadic existence which remains central to their identity. This entails living in caravans (historically on common land but more recently on pitches rented from a local authority, on privately owned land or on the roadside), and travelling to take up seasonal employment. However, this way of life has become increasingly difficult in recent decades. Since the abolition of the duty on local authorities to provide Gypsy and Traveller sites in 1994, there has been a growing shortage of pitches on authorised sites, while greater enforcement powers for landowners have reduced the number of traditional stopping places by the roadside or on common land. The result has been a rise in the number of unauthorised sites and – especially in urban areas – Gypsies and Travellers moving into housing. It is now estimated that the majority of Gypsies and Travellers live in bricks and mortar housing. Gypsies and Travellers have also been affected by changes to employment patterns, with increased competition for seasonal jobs from economic migrants. Accommodation policies and economic changes have therefore combined to curtail the traditional lifestyle of Gypsies and Travellers.

## **Gypsies and Travellers in West London**

- 2.4 There are six caravan sites for Gypsies and Travellers in West London, all social rented, with one each in Brent, Ealing, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow, and Kensington & Chelsea (which is shared with Hammersmith & Fulham). According to the July 2009 Caravan Count, there are no private sites or unauthorised developments, and stakeholders reported that unauthorised encampments have become extremely rare. The vast majority of residents on sites are Irish Travellers and, according to site managers we interviewed, each site is dominated by one or two extended families. Very few applications are received from non-Irish Travellers and most waiting list applicants have a family connection to existing residents. Three of the boroughs – Brent, Hammersmith & Fulham and Hillingdon are in the process of revising their allocation policies for vacant pitches to make them more equitable. The current system on these sites is date based, which has the advantage of being transparent and easily understood. However, consideration is being given to prioritising families on the waiting list according to need, and so bringing the allocation system for pitches into line with other forms of social rented accommodation. It should be stressed that this is in the context of a very low turnover of pitches, with many residents having occupied pitches for several decades. None of the site managers we spoke to were aware of anyone who had moved from housing to a pitch.
- 2.5 Among housed Gypsies and Travellers, stakeholders said that there were often concentrations close to existing sites, such as the White City estate in Hammersmith & Fulham and in West Drayton in Hillingdon. Other areas with housed Travellers were linked to where traditional stopping places and unauthorised encampments used to occur, such as Northolt in Ealing. But it was also reported that the situation had diversified in recent years, as housing shortages mean Gypsies and Travellers have had to move to homes outside these areas and away from where other housed Gypsies and Travellers live.
- 2.6 The London Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTANA) (Fordham Research 2008) included estimates for the number of Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar housing in West London. As the table below shows, around two-thirds are estimated to be Irish Travellers. The largest Gypsy Traveller population was found in Ealing, over a third of the total, followed by Hillingdon with a quarter of the total. It must be stressed that these are conservative estimates and the true number may be much higher. This is because not all housed Gypsies and Travellers identify themselves, and because their numbers are infrequently and inconsistently collected by service providers.

**Table 2.1 Estimated number of housed families in the West London housing sub-region, 2007**

<i>Borough</i>	<i>Irish Traveller</i>	<i>English Gypsy</i>	<i>Total</i>
Brent	30	20	50
Ealing	210	15	225
Hammersmith & Fulham	22	64	86
Harrow	55	10	65
Hillingdon	73	77	150
Hounslow	13	36	49
Kensington & Chelsea	22	3	25
Total	425	225	650

Source: London GTANA 2008

### Accommodation policies

- 2.7 Given the national shortage of authorised places to stay on caravan sites and the associated problems this can bring, there has been a Government emphasis on increasing the numbers of pitches for Gypsies and Travellers to live on. The main relevant statute for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation is the Housing Act 2004. Section 225 requires English local housing authorities to undertake an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers who reside in their area, through a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Need Assessment (GTANA). There then followed Planning Circular 01/2006 which detailed how local authority requirements to meet need could be modified by the regional planning body to distribute it across a region, specified how local authorities should respond to planning applications for sites, and contained draft guidance in conducting GTANAs.
- 2.8 The latter was finalised in separate DCLG Guidance in October 2007. Regarding housed Gypsies and Travellers, it made clear that they could generate demand for pitches and that this should be considered in Local Development Frameworks (LDFs) and Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs). Examples given of where housed Gypsies and Travellers may present demand are if their existing accommodation is overcrowded or unsuitable, including by virtue of a “proven psychological aversion” to bricks and mortar accommodation. While the term is not defined in this or other Government guidance on the subject, psychological aversion has been identified in case law. Carmarthenshire (2003: ‘Price’) was the first case where a Court used a Traveller family’s aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation to decide that they could remain on an unauthorised site.

2.9 Based on population estimates and findings from a survey of Gypsies and Travellers, the London GTANA included a requirement for pitches from housed Gypsies and Travellers with a psychological aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation. This formed the maximum pitch need for each borough, while the minimum figure was based on need from Gypsies and Travellers living on authorised or unauthorised sites. The figures for West London are given in Table 2.2 and shows that there is a need for residential pitches across the sub-region ranging between 21 and 138 for the period 2007-2012. It should be noted that even if the maximum number of pitches were provided, the vast majority of Gypsies and Travellers in the sub-region would continue to live in housing.

Table 2.2 Residential pitch need – West London Boroughs				
	2007-2012		2012-2017	
	Minimum Need	Maximum Need	Minimum Need	Maximum Need
Brent	7	13	7	8
Ealing	5	52	6	12
Hammersmith & Fulham	-	5	-	1
Harrow	-	14	-	2
Hillingdon	3	35	3	8
Hounslow	3	11	3	4
Kensington & Chelsea	3	8	3	4
Total	21	138	22	39

Source: London GTANA 2008

2.10 These figures informed the 2009 Draft Replacement London Plan which initially suggested that Boroughs would be required to meet a figure half way between the minimum and maximum. However, in March 2010 a minor alteration proposed only requiring Boroughs to provide the minimum figure from the GTANA.

### Gypsies and Travellers in housing

2.11 New national policy requirements have given rise to several studies on Gypsies' and Travellers' needs. While the main focus of such research has traditionally looked at the requirement of those living on sites, there is a growing body of information about those in bricks and mortar housing. Based on the findings presented in Section B of this report and a literature review in last year's Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) study of inequalities among Gypsies and Travellers, the following are some of the main issues for housed Gypsies and Travellers:

- Between half and two-thirds of Gypsies and Travellers are estimated to live in housing nationally. However the London GTANA conservatively estimated that in London four times as many Gypsies and Travellers lived in housing than on sites

- The main reasons for moving into housing were a shortage of authorised places to live or improved access to health or education services
- Gypsies and Travellers often live in poor quality and overcrowded housing, with increasing numbers at the lower end of the private rented sector. They can often live in areas where they experience racism or discrimination. An aversion to the housing form is frequently raised, often based on isolation from their community and a sense of feeling trapped within the housing form. Flats are particularly disliked, where a sense of enclosure is most acute
- There is considerable evidence of poor outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers living in housing, including homelessness, family breakdown and domestic violence. Health status is worse among housed Gypsies and Travellers compared to other Gypsy and Traveller groups, especially anxiety and depression, thought to be prompted by exposure to racism from neighbours and detachment from site-based support networks. Isolation can be particularly intense for women who often lack employment-based opportunities to meet other people and spend much of their day-to-day lives in isolation rather than among a community on a site.
- Partly as a result of depression and isolation, and the unfamiliarity of living in a different type of accommodation, tenancy breakdown can be high. Housed Gypsies and Travellers can find themselves in debt or classified as intentionally homeless and so ineligible for further accommodation from a local authority
- Aversion is most acute for Gypsies and Travellers who have recently transferred from sites to housing and who moved due to a lack of alternative places to stay. Our interviews with Gypsies and Travellers found that those who had moved through a positive choice or were living in culturally appropriate accommodation which broadly replicates living on a site (e.g. a bungalow with places to park caravans) were less likely to be dissatisfied
- The location of housing can be significant. Satisfaction and a sense of belonging is higher where social housing transfer procedures mean Gypsies and Travellers can reside close to relatives or other Gypsies and Travellers with whom they got on well.

2.12 While the root cause of the growing number of Gypsy and Traveller families in housing may stem from a lack of site-based places to live in London, even with planned increases in pitch numbers, the majority will continue to live in housing. While for some this will be a suitable alternative to a caravan, for many others support will be required if the potential effects of psychological aversion are to be lessened.

### **Psychological aversion: causes and symptoms**

2.13 Given the shortage of sites, addressing psychological aversion to living in housing is of increasing importance to local authorities as they attempt to provide suitable accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers. As discussed, psychological aversion is recognised in government guidance and case law as a reason for Gypsies and Travellers requiring caravan-based rather than bricks and mortar accommodation.

- 2.14 The first stage of this study was to understand psychological aversion in more detail, through interviews with Gypsies and Travellers living in housing and professionals working with the client group. The following summarises the findings from the research (explained in detail in Section B of this report).
- 2.15 Our research indicated that aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation needs to be understood as a complex combination of factors including the readjustment to a major change in lifestyle, surroundings and neighbours. It is important to understand how housed Gypsies and Travellers compare their life with living on a site. The benefits of living in housing included security, privacy and generally a more comfortable way of life however this was in opposition to feelings of loneliness, fear and conflict with neighbours. Living on a site was seen as the most suitable option for most of those interviewed. They noted that by not living on a site they failed to maintain cultural and familial ties and some felt they had been ostracised by the wider community.
- 2.16 A move into bricks and mortar accommodation can often leave Gypsy and Traveller families:
- Isolated from their family and extensive kinship networks
  - Alienated from their own culture and traditions
  - Victim to prejudice and racism from their neighbours
  - Confused in dealing with bureaucratic and official process
  - Lacking support and advice
  - Lacking empowerment to change the situation or seek help.
- 2.17 These factors were manifested in several ways:
- Depression, anxiety or claustrophobia
  - The breakdown of traditional family roles and eventual break up of the family unit
  - Increased isolation and vulnerability – especially for women
  - Unstable accommodation circumstances with a knock on impact for health and education
  - Worsening of health, especially for the elderly or infirm, who would usually be cared for by family on a site.
- 2.18 It is of course not only Gypsies and Travellers who experience these factors; they are commonly found among other vulnerable groups affected by social exclusion. But what often distinguishes housed Gypsies and Travellers is how the solution to their problems is often perceived as moving to a site. Many have family connections to sites in West London –and yet pitch shortages mean there are minimal opportunities to move from housing to a site.

## 3. Support services for housed Gypsies and Travellers

### Introduction

- 3.1 The preceding chapter has outlined the issues that Gypsies and Travellers can face when living in housing. While many may ideally prefer to live on a site in London, even with a planned increase in pitches the majority will continue to live in housing. There is therefore a need for support services to ameliorate the potential negative effects; the form that they can take is discussed in this chapter.
- 3.2 Based on discussions with service providers and a review of best practice in policy guidance and other research, we present a range of support models which can help housed Gypsies and Travellers. The extent to which they can all be implemented in each Borough does of course depend on the availability of resources.

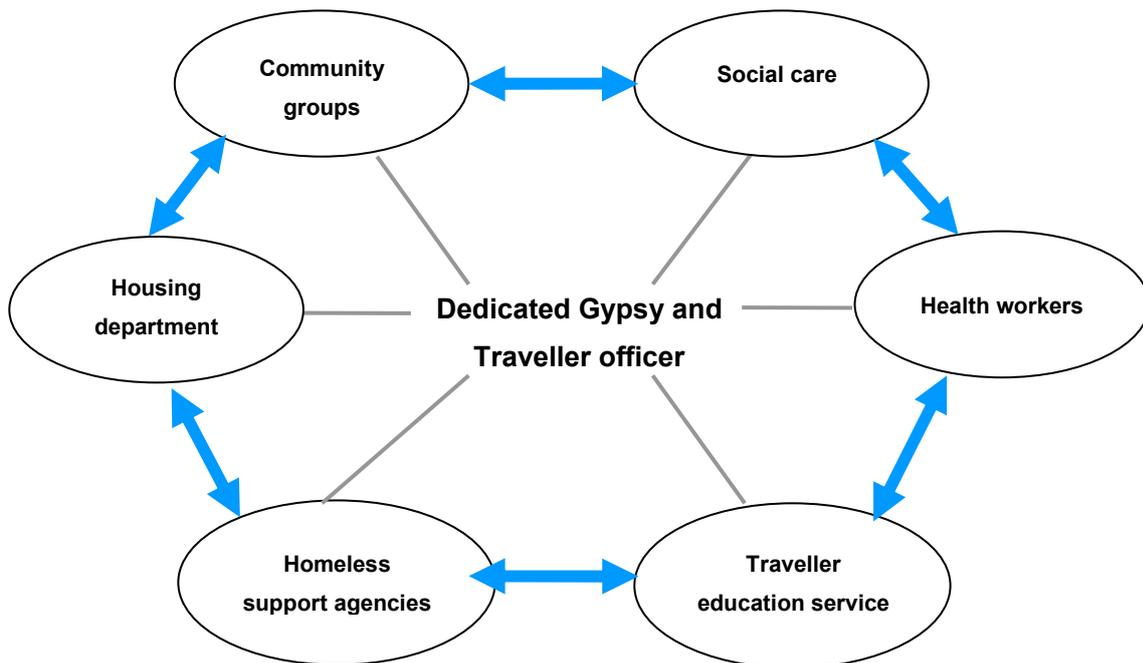
### Housing support services

- 3.3 It is widely acknowledged that some Gypsy and Traveller families require additional support to maintain stable housing and avoid the effects of psychological aversion. Due to isolation from support networks, unfamiliarity with the housing allocations system, low literacy levels, and the confusion for many in dealing with bureaucratic organisations such as local authorities it is common that Gypsy and Traveller families moving into housing need tailored assistance and advice, especially in the early stages of making the transition from site to housing. The interviews found several problems Gypsies and Travellers had dealing with council bureaucracies. These include discriminatory responses from service providers (such as refusing to provide additional help with literacy), and lack of awareness about which sections of the Council deal with which services. Often a bad experience dealing with one Council department will negatively affect their perceptions of the rest of the organisation.
- 3.4 The following measures are recommended:

**Gypsy and Traveller Officer/Floating Support Worker**

3.5 We found that many Gypsies and Travellers preferred to receive advice from a single, trusted professional from whom help was requested for a wide range of issues. In most Boroughs, however, there is not a dedicated role for this and individuals are often relied on to work outside their remit. The provision of a full-time Gypsy and Traveller support worker can act as a vital conduit between Gypsies and Travellers and service providers. In local authorities with small Gypsy and Traveller populations, the post could be jointly commissioned. The service mapping and best practice evidence suggests that by providing a support worker who is available to assist with paperwork and tenancy agreements, provide advice and support for families in accessing education and health, organise Gypsy and Traveller community events and to provide a link between council services and individual families is highly beneficial. The post should be flexible to engage with those living on sites as well as in housing, however given the latter's often higher support needs and greater number, the post should include actively engaging and conducting outreach work with the housed population. The following diagram represents how a dedicated support officer can interact with other service providers across a range of agencies and help coordinate their work.

**Figure 3.1 Dedicated Gypsy Traveller Support Officer and interaction**



Source: Fordham Research 2010

### ***Modes of support***

- 3.6 While some families – particularly if they have recently moved into housing – will require fairly intensive support, for others lower level assistance is more appropriate. For many Gypsies and Travellers it is the detachment from the informal support networks available on sites which is especially missed when moving into housing, for example, with reading mail or getting advice about contacting service providers. A drop-in service could be of benefit in these cases, at an accessible and established location and regular time, or a telephone helpline able to provide signposting and general advice. How such services are publicised will need to be considered, given generally low literacy levels. Information given on CD/DVD has worked well elsewhere, and the importance of face-to-face contact should not be underestimated. Younger people interviewed also suggested websites specifically for Gypsies and Travellers as a way to gather information and advice.

### ***Inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers within the wider community***

- 3.7 The negative effects of living in housing should be addressed through a multi-agency approach, involving the collaboration of a wide range of service providers (including housing, health, education, social care and the voluntary sector). There are various approaches to this, such as the creation of a Gypsy and Traveller Forum, the inclusion of Gypsies and Travellers in local events encouraged by the local authority and fostering positive local media coverage, and the incentive and encouragement for Gypsies and Travellers to join residents groups or create their own representative housing forum. Through providing such services elsewhere, opportunities are created for potentially isolated Gypsy and Traveller families to become acquainted with peers and to build capacity when encountering service providers. Building a positive profile for the communities will help reduce discrimination which is sometimes encountered from Gypsies' and Travellers' neighbours.
- 3.8 It is worth remembering that local authorities have a duty to promote good race relations. Acting as a bridge between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community would help foster understanding and address any tensions between the two groups.

### ***Partnership working with private landlords***

- 3.9 We found that increasing numbers of Gypsies and Travellers are moving into private rented accommodation, and that there was often confusion about their rights and obligations as tenants. Housing departments should consider the information needs of Gypsies and Travellers in the private rented sector, should establish face-to-face contact at an early stage to ensure they understand how to manage their tenancy, and to provide further support if required. As some local authorities currently do with other vulnerable groups, it can be beneficial to establish a certified register of trusted landlords who provide acceptable standards to tenants. Housing officers can also take a lead in mediating between private and social landlords and their Gypsy and Traveller tenants in cases where disputes arise.

### **Housing allocation and development**

- 3.10 While for many Gypsies and Travellers a move into housing may not be the preferred option, the potential negative effects are reduced when they live near a site or other housed Gypsies and Travellers. This helps to keep contact with family and friends and to maintain their identity. The potential for providing Gypsies and Travellers with advice for using choice-based lettings to access homes located near to sites or areas with an established Gypsy and Traveller populations should be considered. Existing Good Practice recommends that the requirements of Gypsies and Travellers should be considered in the housing design and allocation process, such as the preference for ground floor units and parking space for travelling and working vehicles. As with other groups, consultation with the communities is vital to make sure current and future housing is appropriate for their needs. It is however acknowledged that local authorities in London have very few units which meet these requirements at their disposal, especially of three or more bedrooms which the larger family sizes of Gypsies and Travellers requires. Often the private rented sector is the only option available that can meet these requirements, making the previous recommendation of vital importance.

### **Site management and pitch allocations**

- 3.11 Even with a planned increase in pitch numbers, places to live on sites will remain scarce, so it is of priority to local authorities that places are allocated fairly and transparently. The following measures can help ensure that this can happen:

#### **Transparent allocation policy**

- 3.12 Our research found that pitches in the West London sub-region are often allocated informally to friends or family members of existing residents and that waiting lists are rarely in operation. This is partly because the turnover of pitches is so low that vacancies arise infrequently. If new pitches are provided, it is vital that the formal procedure for site allocations is accessible and understandable to Gypsies and Travellers. For example, by having an established figure in the Council's housing department – independent of site residents or management – who maintains the list and who can update applicants about their position on it. While Government guidance recommends a needs-based waiting list – and so essentially treating pitches as other forms of social housing – we found that in practice this can be problematic. Living on a site for some Gypsies and Travellers with high support needs is not always practical, while establishing the extent of psychological aversion among housed Gypsies and Travellers is susceptible to manipulation once the procedure becomes well known.

- 3.13 A more appropriate system would combine a date-based approach with a local connection, as successfully used elsewhere in London. This would help ensure that families who have lived longest in housing and are established in the Borough would have priority when pitches become vacant. Often Gypsies and Travellers who want a pitch will apply for several sites across the country. It is therefore advisable that waiting list applicants are required to re-apply each year, ideally at the same time and in the same way, to ensure that a move to a site in the Borough is still their preferred option. To prioritise local residents, evidence of having lived in the Borough (e.g. tenancy agreement or utility bills) should be required. References should be taken up before a move onto a site takes place. Gypsies and Travellers interviewed thought that this would be the fairest system as it is transparent, easily understood and means that applicants can know their position in the queue and how long it might mean waiting.
- 3.14 It is recommended that a standard application form for pitches is available across West London. This would help the Councils share information on waiting list numbers and, depending on where vacancies arise, potentially allocate pitches across the sub-region.

#### **Site management**

- 3.15 A site manager who has solid knowledge and an understanding of Gypsy and Traveller issues can provide a neutral role as an intermediary between residents and service providers. From our service mapping of current management services, it was clear that the role of a site manager extends beyond ensuring sites were running efficiently to helping families with paperwork and advising on administration processes to organising on site events for children and families. There are several options for management, including having a site resident as a manager or someone who lives off-site, whose frequency of visits will vary. The best arrangement will depend on the context of the individual site and the personality of the manager. Some smaller, well-established sites can flourish on minimal management, while other larger ones may require far closer involvement from on site management to avoid inter-family tensions. It is also clear from our research that it is very difficult to change sites which are dominated by a single family and are effectively closed to outsiders. Doing so requires substantial investment and sustained engagement from multiple agencies.

#### **Site resident panels**

- 3.16 These can ensure that frequent and effective channels of communication are established between site residents, site management and local authority support services. This is especially important for councils using ALMO organisations for site management and to ensure that site managers and support workers who visit the site have the opportunity to liaise with other support service agencies. Establishing such a panel also offers an opportunity for consultation on development and a platform for residents and (on occasions) members of the settled community to meet in a mediated environment to encourage engagement and partnership working.

### ***On site resident behaviour agreements***

- 3.17 There were several examples in the research of Gypsies and Travellers moving into housing because of harassment or intimidation on sites. While the regular and engaged presence of a site manager can help mitigate this, resident behaviour agreements should be drawn up to cover the behaviour expectations of site residents and the standards of maintenance for pitches and communal areas on site.

## **Monitoring and coordination**

### ***Increased monitoring***

- 3.18 The relative invisibility of Gypsy and Traveller families once they make a move into housing is noted as one of the major barriers in providing support services. It is vital that Gypsy and Traveller categories are included in ethnic monitoring forms (including housing applications), and that agencies working with the communities share information on their numbers and profile.

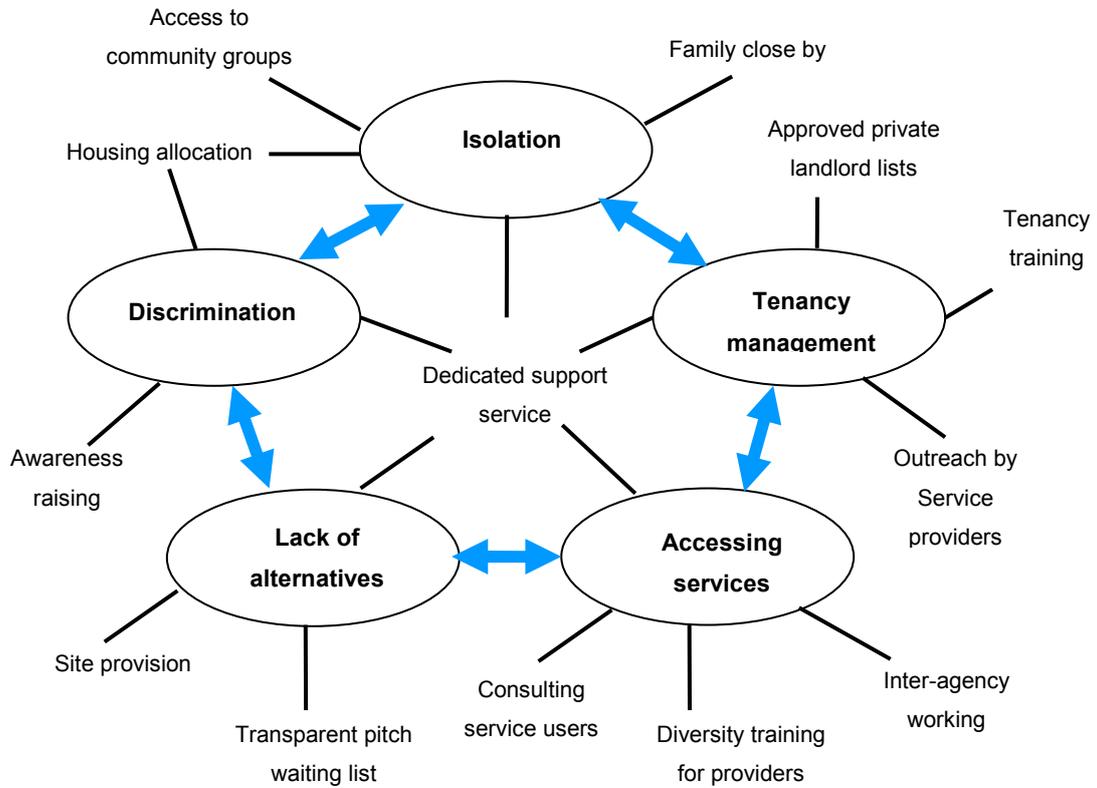
### ***Multi-agency links***

- 3.19 Through the use of user panels and forums, Gypsy and Traveller representatives have the opportunity for engagement with groups and agencies working to Gypsy and Traveller families. As the Gypsy and Traveller culture is closely based around community and local networks, it is increasingly important that when families access services they can do so through the advice of a recognised worker. Only through a joint service facilitated by support workers with other authority agencies can a comprehensive service be ensured for Gypsy and Traveller families.

## **Summary diagram**

- 3.20 The diagram below summaries the main elements of psychological aversion to housing (shown in ellipses), and shows how they can interrelate. For example, discrimination from neighbours increases a sense of isolation, which in turn can make accessing help to manage a tenancy more difficult. At the centre is a support service which we propose Gypsies and Travellers can access for help across the factors which can contribute to psychological aversion. As well as helping meet the communities' housing needs, the service can also support the coordination of other agencies' work and provide signposting to relevant organisations.
- 3.21 The diagram also shows the possible solutions for the elements of aversion to housing, each of which have been discussed previously in this guide. For example, housing allocation to areas where Gypsies and Travellers are well-established can help reduce the occurrence of discrimination from neighbours and reduce feelings of isolation from being disconnected from their community.

**Figure 3.2 Elements of psychological aversion to housing and possible solutions**



Source: Fordham Research 2010



## 4. Mapping services in West London

### Introduction

- 4.1 As part of the research, a mapping exercise was conducted to establish the types of services available for Gypsies and Travellers among statutory and voluntary services in each Borough. A summary is given in the table below, followed by more detailed descriptions for each Borough. The information is correct as of March 2010.

### Summary of services

	Brent	Ealing	H&F	Harrow	Hillingdon	Hounslow	K&C
Site	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Allocation policy	●	●	●		●	●	●
Gypsy and Traveller officer		●			●		
Traveller Education Service (TES)	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Specific floating support service		●			●		
Housing advice service				●	●		
Connexions				●		●	●
Voluntary group	●	●	●		●		●
Inter-agency forum	●	●			●		

Source Fordham Research 2010

### Services in each Borough

#### **Brent**

- One local authority site, Lynton Close, of 31 pitches
- Allocation for sites currently under review, housing allocation based on needs model
- No dedicated Gypsy and Traveller Officer in place; expected to have some support by April/May 2010
- TES also operates youth forum and youth parliament
- Brent Irish Advisory Service currently works with local authority agencies in providing advice and support workers to Travellers.

### **Ealing**

- Currently one local authority site, Bashley Road, with 24 pitches
- Pitches allocated by site manager
- One full-time housing support officer in place who works with around 25 housed families across tenures
- TES currently runs a jointly funded service, working with pre-schools and school leavers on music/drama/sport projects and also working with schools to assist in encouraging engagement with curriculum
- TES works with young people outside of the formal education system on vocational training, music, sports and drama projects, primarily funded through Big Lottery Revenue
- Acton Community Group, Solas Anois Irish Women's Refuge Centre and Brent Irish Advisory service work alongside the Council with local Gypsies and Travellers.

### **Hammersmith & Fulham**

- Currently share the Stable Way site in Kensington & Chelsea (formally Westway)
- TES assist families in filling out benefit applications and also with teachers to support pupils and raise awareness
- The Roma Support Group currently offer workshops and projects aimed at young people.

### **Harrow**

- One social rented site, Watling Farm, one pitch
- Traveller Achievement Service (TAS) has two and a half teaching staff and one Connexions worker, working in schools to encourage engagement and raise awareness
- Low level support from Social Services for those experiencing housing difficulties
- Community Safety Services working to provide low level housing support to Gypsy and Travellers in housing. Currently work with local Catholic Priest and youth group to improve recognition of Gypsy and Traveller issues amongst the settled community.

### **Hillingdon**

- One local authority site, Colne Park, with 20 pitches and one site manager responsible for the day to day management of the site and liaison with residents
- Allocations policy under review for both housing and sites more in line with banding/needs basis instead of waiting list
- Currently one housing advice drop-in session weekly
- There is no dedicated Gypsy and Traveller worker, only generic support provided by a Floating Support service which, among other things, supports members of the community in housing and on site

- Hillingdon Multi-Agency Travellers Forum includes Travellers and lead agencies and groups working strategically on issues that affect Travellers in the Borough
- TES has one part-time Traveller Liaison Officer, two Traveller Support Teachers working in schools with children and one part-time class room assistant. TES also assist in dealing with housing related issues and paperwork
- NHS worker visits the site twice a month for check-ups and consultation.

### **Hounslow**

- One local authority site, The Heartlands, 17 pitches
- No specific Gypsy and Traveller support, but can access general floating support services
- TES, 3.1 full-time equivalent teachers and one Connexions worker. Visit sites and do outreach in schools, in service training, and direct work with families assisting with paperwork. TES extends up until the age of 19, although there are no specific extra-curricular activities for young people.

### **Kensington & Chelsea**

- One local authority site (in conjunction with Hammersmith & Fulham) the Stable Way (formally Westway), 19 pitches
- Site and housing allocation presently under review, currently using a needs model
- There is at present one Gypsy and Traveller Development Manager working with those on site, currently unable to deliver services to those in bricks and mortar accommodation. Organising information events and interagency work on site.
- Language Development Service working to improve Gypsy and Traveller educational achievement in schools, increase engagement with Gypsy and Traveller families in housing and to promote a multi-agency approach to mainstreaming Gypsy and Traveller needs
- Local authority agents currently work in conjunction with Connexions, Southwark Traveller Action Group, Advice Now, and the Irish Traveller Movement in Britain
- Health visitor makes regular visits to the Stable Way site.



# SECTION B: RESEARCH REPORT



## 5. Introduction

### Scope of the report

- 5.1 The broad aim of this research is to understand in more detail the housing and related support requirements of Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar housing. The study was commissioned in September 2009 by the seven London Boroughs that make up the West London Housing Partnership. Funding was also provided by the South West and Northern London Housing Sub-Regions. It will be used to help devise strategies at Borough and sub-regional level to address the group's needs and inform Boroughs' responses to the ongoing consultation on the Replacement London Plan.
- 5.2 While the majority of Gypsies and Travellers in London are believed to live in housing, relatively little is known about their attitudes towards living there and the types of support they require. Case law has identified that Gypsies and Travellers can suffer 'psychological aversion' to bricks and mortar housing, yet there is little research on what forms this aversion can take or how it can be ameliorated. This study therefore aims to contribute towards a more extensive awareness of the circumstances and needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers in West London.
- 5.3 The study draws on a number of sources including:
- **Reviews of secondary information:** including existing research into Gypsies' and Travellers' needs, policy guidance and best practice on site provision
  - **Consultation:** with professionals working with Gypsies and Travellers in the sub-region
  - **Interviews:** individual and group interviews with Gypsies and Travellers who live or used to live in housing.

### Report structure

- 5.4 The report presents findings relating to:
- The nature, causes and manifestations of psychological aversion to housing among Gypsies and Travellers in West London
  - Support services used and required by the client group
  - The management of future sites and the allocation of pitches.

- 5.5 The remainder of this Introduction explains the context behind the study in more detail. There then follows a chapter explaining the methodology used in the research, before Chapter 7 presents the summary of a stakeholder event. Chapters 8 to 10 describe the findings from interviews with Gypsies and Travellers, and consider the effects of living in housing, their support needs, and their accommodation aspirations.

### **Study context**

- 5.6 The context of the study is the Housing Act 2004 which requires local authorities to assess the accommodation needs of their Gypsy and Traveller population, and more specifically, the 2008 London Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA), conducted by Fordham Research. The GTANA identified two pitch requirements: a minimum figure based on the requirement from Gypsies and Travellers currently living on authorised or unauthorised sites, and a maximum figure which also includes Gypsies and Travellers living in housing and estimated to have a psychological aversion to housing.
- 5.7 The West London housing sub-region comprises the following seven Boroughs: Brent, Ealing, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Hillingdon, Hounslow and Kensington & Chelsea. The 2008 GTANA gave a conservative estimate that in 2007 there were 650 Gypsy and Traveller families living in housing throughout these seven Boroughs (see table 2.1 displaying the estimated number of house Gypsy and Travellers families in West London). There were a number of European Roma, although the assessment found that none wanted site-based accommodation, as for several generations bricks and mortar accommodation had been the norm. The accommodation requirements of Travelling Showpeople were also found not to be affected by issues of psychological aversion. These two groups are not therefore included within this study.
- 5.8 As explained, the GTANA gives a minimum and maximum pitch requirement for each Borough; the lower figure based only on need generated from existing sites (e.g. overcrowding or unauthorised encampments) while the higher figure also accounts for a transfer from housing to sites. The assessment took several steps to estimate how many of these households may have a requirement for a pitch based on a psychological aversion, (for full details see Chapter 11 of the GTANA). The assumption in the GTANA is that only a small proportion – 16% – of all Gypsies and Travellers in housing were estimated as having a psychological aversion and therefore a need for a pitch; the remainder were not counted towards the total pitch requirement in London. However, as London has a substantial number of housed Gypsies and Travellers, even a small percentage creates a large pitch requirement. For West London, 100 pitches would be required over 2007-17 to meet the needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers; this is on top of the 44 needed for those on sites.
- 5.9 It is therefore essential for West London Boroughs to ensure that any additional pitch provision above the minimum requirement is allocated to housed Gypsies and Travellers. Given that the majority of Gypsies and Travellers will continue to live in housing in London, it is also vital that support services

are put in place to meet their needs and ameliorate the adverse effects that living in housing can bring. This is of particular importance since March 2010 when a planned alteration of pitch provision for Gypsies and Travellers in the London Plan was announced. It proposes the target be reduced to represent the minimum figure. Assuming this goes forward into the final Plan, there is therefore an even greater requirement for West London councils to provide support services for housed Gypsies and Travellers who would otherwise be able to move onto a site. Hence the recommendations in this report regarding houses Gypsies and Travellers take on an even greater significance.

### The case law on psychological aversion

- 5.10 The inclusion of the concept of psychological aversion in Government guidance on accommodation assessments, and hence in the London GTANA, derives from a recognition of the term in case law. This consists mainly of two cases: Carmarthenshire (2003: 'Price') and Mid-Beds (2005: 'Codona'). In the first case the Court used the Traveller's aversion to bricks and mortar to decide that they could remain on an illegal site. The local authority had erred in giving too much weight to the fact that this Gypsy and Traveller family had been prepared at one stage to live in bricks and mortar housing, but was evidently culturally very averse to doing so. Due to an aversion towards living in bricks and mortar, the local authority was obliged to find an alternative authorised site on which to place the Price family.
- 5.11 In the case of Codona the local authority was saved by the fact that it had done a diligent search for a suitable site, but could not find one. The family involved required a large number of caravan sites. The Council was reasonable in offering bed and breakfast as the need was relatively urgent. The family then appealed to the European Court, which also turned them down, on the grounds that there was no such thing as a legal right to have a home, let alone a specific kind of home such as a caravan.
- 5.12 The European Court decision, however, refers to the 'Article 8' duty upon the 'contracting states' which says that:

*'Everyone has the right to respect for private and family life'*

- 5.13 This does not say anything directly on the matter, but it could be argued that being put into a position where psychological aversion was created breached that right to respect. In any case, the fact that the English courts have recognised it as a material consideration is sufficient to oblige local authorities to recognise that 'suitable' accommodation must include pitches where there is evidence of psychological aversion to housing.

- 5.14 At this point it is useful to look towards studies around psychological aversion to housing. *Gypsy Identity and Orientations to Space* (2004) offers an insight into the political and social dimensions of living on sites and housing. The paper identifies the idea of ‘the road’ as central to the ideology and identity of Gypsies and Travellers; even for those who no longer travel connection to a travelling way of life is seen as key to asserting one’s identity. The link with travelling and trailers, the paper notes, gives a sense of autonomy to travellers which allows them:

*“The power to transport themselves around, to define their own living space and reassert control”<sup>1</sup>*

- 5.15 When in housing the study found that participants noted feeling oppressed from high ceilings, stairs and closed in from far too few windows<sup>2</sup>, overall it was noted that a transition from the traveller lifestyle to the housed lifestyle meant a shift from dominating space to being dominated by space.

## Summary

- 5.16 The purpose of this research is to gain a comprehensive understanding of the nature and causes of psychological aversion as experienced by Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar housing. Additionally it aims to understand the forms of support needed to ameliorate aversion and improve the living circumstances of housed Gypsies and Travellers.
- 5.17 The nature of psychological aversion is complex and can be seen to affect both the health and wellbeing of Gypsies and Travellers and their social welfare. It is accepted throughout this report that whilst there remains a shortage of sites across the UK bricks and mortar housing options are an available option. Studies regarding this issue highlight that the transferral into housing from sites can be a traumatic experience throughout which Gypsies and Travellers would benefit from additional advice, help and support services to make this transition and adjustment as easy as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> Levinson & Sparks (2002), *Gypsy Identity and Orientations to Space*, Journal of Contemporary Ethnography 2004:33:704 page 714

<sup>2</sup> Full list of symptoms for psychological aversion, sensory deprivation, feeling trapped, feeling cut off from social contact, a sense of dislocation with the past, feelings of claustrophobia and the significance of windows and doors open, the potential of caravans and trailers for movement, the association of caravans and trailers with a traditional lifestyle; and the corresponding connotation of living in a house, ‘Gadgefication’, or selling out. See further Levinson and Sparks pg 721

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## 6. Methods

### Introduction

- 6.1 The research draws on two primary data sources: a consultation event with stakeholders (with findings summarised in the next chapter) and interviews with Gypsies and Travellers on their experiences of living in housing (Chapters 8 to 10). This chapter explains how the interviews took place and describes the profile of participants.

### Arranging interviews

- 6.2 Interviews were arranged with the collaboration of stakeholders who had offered to put our researchers in touch with housed Gypsies and Travellers. Stakeholders explained the nature of the research to potential participants and introduced the interviewers. This took the form of accompanying stakeholders on routine visits to the client group or attending meetings (both regular events and specifically arranged for this study). Our past experience of research with Gypsies and Travellers is that the involvement of stakeholders is vital for ensuring good access to the community, especially those in housing. This study is no exception; several participants said they would not have taken part unless the interviews had been arranged by a trusted stakeholder, partly due to cynicism over what research can achieve when they have not seen the results of previous projects or consultations they have taken part in. As one interview participant explained:

*“I’ve come to meetings after meetings over the past few years and still no one hears us. If I don’t see something happen, I won’t come to your meetings no more. If it wasn’t for that policeman telling me about this, I wouldn’t have come today”*

- 6.3 A disadvantage of this approach is that by accessing participants through stakeholders, those interviewed were Gypsies and Travellers who already have access to support networks and, it could be argued, have different requirements to those who either do not need or are unable to access support. However, in many cases interview participants acted as conduits to other contacts, whether by inviting friends or family to attend focus groups, or by passing on contact details of other interested people.
- 6.4 Interviews took place in the Boroughs of Ealing and Hillingdon. This reflects where support networks already existed which we could access and which Gypsies and Travellers felt comfortable using. Participants however lived in all seven West London Boroughs. The first three interviews also took place at the Irish Traveller Movement annual conference. This provided a good forum to explain the research and pilot the interview topic guide. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. They lasted between 20 minutes and an hour. Participants were given a shopping voucher for their time.

- 6.5 It should be noted that the aim of this study is not to draw a representative sample of West London's Gypsies and Travellers from which statistically robust findings can be determined. Rather, the intention is to interview participants from a broad range of living circumstances and explore their views in depth.
- 6.6 Throughout the report, verbatim comments are used from participants and stakeholders. These are used to illustrate the synthesis and analysis of views rather than as a description. The quotations provide a summary of particular perceptions, but do not necessarily represent the views of all those interviewed.

### **Profile of participants**

- 6.7 In total 29 Gypsies and Travellers were interviewed for the research, either during two focus groups or through individual, face-to-face interviews. The profile of participants is as follows:
- 23 of the participants were female and six were male. As with our experiences of GTANAs, women are more willing to be interviewed, partly as men are often unavailable as they are engaged in income-generating activities
  - Their ages ranged from 16 to 76. Three young people aged 12 to 16 were also interviewed.
  - Seven lived on sites although four of these had previously lived in housing. The remaining 22 currently lived in housing; all had lived on a site at some point in their lives.

### **Topic guide**

- 6.8 An interview topic guide was drawn up in consultation with the project steering group, covering aspects of participants' current housing and history, reasons for moving and future aspirations, positive and negative aspects of site and house living, and support needs (see Appendix 2).
- 6.9 Efforts were made to make the interview as informal as possible, rather than conducting a survey-style interview based on closed questions. This encouraged participants to feel comfortable discussing often personal issues relating to their experiences and wellbeing. This was aided by stakeholders explaining the nature of the research prior to interview. The presence of trusted stakeholders lent legitimacy to the project and also helped reassure participants that they could speak freely to someone they did not know. Interviews were semi-structured allowing participants to raise issues of concern not included in the topic guide.

# 7. Stakeholder consultation

## Introduction

- 7.1 This chapter presents the information gathered from stakeholders through a consultation workshop and follow-up interviews with key informants unable to attend. The consultation workshop was held in November 2009 at Council offices in West London. The session provided an opportunity for the Project Management Group to introduce the goals and aims of the project and to provide an overview of the research methods to stakeholders who work with housed Gypsies and Travellers. It also allowed for the research group to further their knowledge of issues affecting Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar accommodation and discuss the issues faced by these families with key support and local authority workers. Additionally the discussions informed the development of the interview topic guide, provided an opportunity to explore the various methods of accessing housed Gypsies and Travellers for interviewing, and to seek advice and gain cooperation from key gatekeeper stakeholders.
- 7.2 There were over 20 attendees to the event who came primarily from the seven local authorities which comprise the West London sub-region. Also in attendance were representatives from Gypsy and Traveller organisations and neighbouring Boroughs interested in the research. Information from this session is complemented by a series of telephone and face-to-face interviews conducted in November and December.
- 7.3 Workshop attendees and people subsequently interviewed were from the following organisations:
- West London Boroughs
  - Housing Strategy and Policy
  - Tenancy Support
  - Adult and Community Services
  - Supporting People
  - Traveller Education Services
  - Metropolitan Police
  - London Gypsy and Traveller Unit (LGTU)
  - Irish Traveller Movement (ITM)
  - Haringey Travelling Peoples Team
  - Southwark Travellers' Action Group.

- 7.4 The discussion covered a wide range of issues currently affecting Gypsies and Travellers including: population profiles of the Gypsy and Traveller communities in each Borough, site shortage and the alternatives accommodation available, psychological aversion and the unique needs of those living in housing, the availability and use of support services and current gaps in provision. See Appendix 1 for the discussion guide.
- 7.5 This chapter briefly summarises the key themes which emerged from the stakeholder workshop session and follow-up interviews.

### Current accommodation

- 7.6 There is currently a shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites across the sub-region as identified in the London-wide 2008 GTANA. Many highlighted that for most Gypsy and Traveller families, social rented or privately rented housing were the main tenure choices, and increasingly the only options available:

*“Most families are only living in housing because they have to” – Traveller Education Services*

- 7.7 It was thought that the majority of Gypsy and Traveller families in the sub-region had moved into bricks and mortar accommodation. Stakeholders identified overcrowding, temporary housing and short-term leases leading to frequent movement and accommodation instability. Moves into private rented housing could be especially problematic according to the LGTU as Gypsies and Travellers were not always aware that this meant losing their place on their housing register or that the Local Housing Allowance would not necessarily cover the rent. Stakeholders identified poor quality private rented housing as a particular issue in parts of the sub-region and that landlords sometimes tried to evict tenants once they found out they were Gypsies or Travellers. The uncertain housing situations impacted on education as school placements were not always kept. Low educational attainment also meant that housed Gypsies and Travellers were often unaware of their rights and responsibilities as social or private rented tenants.
- 7.8 Regarding the sites in West London, turnover of pitches was very low with vacant pitches often allocated on an informal basis to other family members, rather than taking a needs- or date-based approach. Research by the LGTU found that just eight of London's 32 Boroughs had a site waiting list, reflecting how council-owned sites were often effectively self-managed, with dominant families electing who could move to the site and harassing others off it.

## Psychological aversion to bricks and mortar accommodation

- 7.9 For those working closely with Gypsy and Traveller families, 'psychological aversion' is a dubious term with multiple meanings that indicates a variety of support needs at a number of levels. Its existence in policy guidance was criticised for encouraging site applicants to manipulate the system and try to prove they have greater psychological issues than another applicant.
- 7.10 This was not to deny the negative effects that living in housing could bring to Gypsies and Travellers, and stakeholders gave numerous examples of the forms, including family break up, depression and victimisation. It was suggested that what Gypsies and Travellers in housing often missed most was the informal support networks available on sites, such as informal childcare, and the sense of isolation from not having friends and family in immediate proximity. For some, it appeared that the initial difficulties experienced when families moved into housing – such as unfamiliarity with stairs, using only the ground floor of accommodation and a sense of claustrophobia – could be put down to transition and often subsided over time:

*“The longer they are in accommodation, they get used to it, they adapt to it, but for these families it is not a matter of choice” – Traveller Education Services*

- 7.11 However, others argued that negative psychological effects of living in housing did not always lessen with time. Such long-term effects included depression, reflected in higher suicide rates amongst housed Gypsies and Travellers, the high turnover of tenancies in Gypsy and Traveller households, and family breakdown. It was felt that these factors were also of key importance in ensuring wellbeing and a strong cultural identity amongst the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- 7.12 It was also pointed out that Gypsies and Travellers were not unique in having difficulties adjusting to a new form of accommodation and parallels were drawn with former rough sleepers or hostel leavers. However, the difference is that the experience of isolation could be worsened for Gypsies and Travellers as a constant comparison could be made with site living where living was perceived as much easier.
- 7.13 Another consideration was how Gypsies and Travellers living on sites regard those living in housing. It was suggested that the latter were seen to threaten the coherent identity of Gypsies and Travellers by giving up the 'true' lifestyle:

*“If Travellers decide that they are going to go into housing as there is nowhere else to live, other Travellers get upset, as the other Traveller is letting them down by getting a house and settling into it. They think that will be the rule for every Traveller – they feel disintegrated towards each other and against each other” – Housed Traveller*

## Support needs

- 7.14 The experience of those working with Gypsy and Traveller families across the sub-region was that it was difficult to apply a broad-brush policy approach in attempts to cater for the specific needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers. The wide variety of individual circumstances and reasons for moving into housing meant that there was widespread support for assessment on a case-by-case basis along with good, clear communication between the relevant supporting services within the local authority.

*“Their needs are varied and it is a family-by-family approach, individual by individual approach” – Traveller Education Services*

- 7.15 An example given of good practice in the sub-region was the current work carried out by tenancy support in Ealing, which provides help and assistance to Gypsies and Traveller families in a multi-faceted approach. This includes work to improve the profile of Gypsy and Travellers in the area, increase their access to decent accommodation, petition landlords and council bodies to ensure decent housing standards are met, serving as a central contact point for other local authority departments, safeguarding clients and ensuring they receive the assistance they need. However, while floating support was seen as valuable for families with high support needs, it was also recognised that more informal support would be sufficient for others, for example, through a drop-in session or telephone service providing less intensive support than provided through floating support.

*“There’s a role for floating support and for drop-ins. But drop-ins don’t work for all families, some would rather keep things to themselves and keep things in an extended family and so won’t be too keen to come to a drop-in where they may meet other Travellers. The most important thing is to give Travellers a choice that they can come to a drop-in, but that there’s also a floating support service if they need long-term help. You can also look at telephone type outreach work, that’s a form of communication that Travellers often use and doing outreach work that way” – Haringey Travelling Peoples Team*

- 7.16 The importance of those working with Gypsies and Travellers needing to understand and fully engage with the community was emphasised in the interview with a stakeholder from the Metropolitan Police. Establishing community knowledge entails going beyond working with interest groups and getting out of the office and working face-to-face with the Gypsies and Travellers. This not only helps to develop cultural understanding, but also moves towards developing relationships based on trust.

- 7.17 Distinct differences were noted between those Gypsy and Traveller families living on sites and those living in housing. It was acknowledged that provision was in place, in some form, for those families on a site to ensure education, health and housing were addressed. However, due to the infrequent ethnic monitoring of housed Gypsy and Traveller families and the high turnover and mobility there was very little knowledge of those in housing. This had obvious knock on effects in providing support to Gypsy and Traveller families in bricks and mortar accommodation.

*“With Travellers living on sites you can take a more targeted approach to knowing where they are and supporting them, with Travellers living in general needs rented sector it is much more difficult as they are often going under the radar” – Supporting People*

- 7.18 It was also seen as important to acknowledge how unstable housing frequently spilled over into other areas of life such as education, health and access to benefits. This was seen as going beyond the home into more formal settings such as school, whereby isolation of Gypsy and Traveller families could lead to discrimination from their settled neighbours and other warring Gypsy and Traveller families they could frequently be placed next to.

- 7.19 Living in bricks and mortar accommodation can leave many Gypsy and Traveller families feeling very vulnerable. Many believed that one of the ways to address this is through joined-up support. This assists many families to find a focus as well as combat feelings of isolation and anxiety that can arise from not being able to cope with the paperwork associated with everyday housing situations, such as bills, tenancies and other documents.

*“If your housing is settled, then you be confident that you’ve literally got the building blocks for a settled life” – Traveller Education Services*

- 7.20 While support at the early stages of transition needed to be fairly intensive, it was also cautioned that it could lead to long-term dependency. It was therefore important that support involved an element of capacity building so Gypsies and Travellers could eventually independently access support services and reduce barriers such as low literacy levels.

*“The approach can be with floating support to say that you’re going to do it for a set period and you’re trying to empower and be enabling. So you need to look at other things at the same time to make this work such as adult education in a way which is valued by the community and can approach literacy issues that way and doesn’t patronise adults.” – Haringey Travelling Peoples Team*

- 7.21 It was suggested that effective support provision needed effective communication between the local authority support services, Gypsy and Traveller organisations and Gypsy and Traveller families.

*“There’s not enough communication around work happening with Gypsies and Travellers, it needs to be headed up months in advance, so people can inform each other and work closer together” – Traveller Education Service*

- 7.22 The issue of communication also included the need for the creation of a multi-agency, action oriented network that is integrated with the community through well-known points of contact. This would also provide a regular forum to share and develop best practices. In order for the network to be credible, Gypsies and Travellers would need to be directly involved in the network. However, there would need to be a concerted effort to involve community leaders beyond those involved in the interest groups, and to use these individuals as resources when developing and implementing strategies and plans.

*“Any network that is really just meetings with emails to each other is pointless. It won’t develop any trust with Travellers.” – Metropolitan Police*

### Future sites

- 7.23 How any new sites can be built in West London was discussed. While the need for additional pitches was not doubted, how they could be allocated was an important consideration. Several stakeholders mentioned the importance of moving away from the current situation where many council-owned sites were effectively self-managed and where waiting lists are not in operation. The importance of a transparent and easily administered allocation policy was stressed, however, there was some disagreement over whether a needs-based approach should be taken (as recommended in CLG guidance) or one which took into account length of time on the list and local connections. The LGTU also pointed out that it has proven very difficult elsewhere to change the management and allocation practices on existing sites without significant investment and involvement with existing site residents.

### Summary

- 7.24 Stakeholders identified several key issues which were brought forward and addressed in this research:
- 7.25 Current shortages of pitches on Gypsy and Traveller sites result in many families moving into bricks and mortar accommodation to avoid homelessness, however upon doing so they frequently experience overcrowding, uncertain housing futures and difficulties placing children in schools.
- 7.26 How psychological aversion is manifested can vary greatly according to the range of Gypsies and Travellers living in housing. For some, it is a short-term response of a transition into unfamiliar accommodation which lessens with time. For others, it can have longer lasting impacts upon their wellbeing, and impacts on wider issues of the culture and identity of Gypsy and Traveller families.

- 7.27 Assessment and support needs to be delivered upon an individual needs basis and through an engaged assessment process. A wide range of support issues are presented by Gypsies and Travellers, ranging from low level and short-term, to more extensive and sustained.
- 7.28 Communication channels need to be improved to provide vital links between Gypsy and Traveller families and service providers, and among the range of organisations working with Gypsies and Travellers.
- 7.29 Future sites should have a strong management structure with a clear allocation policy and waiting list. This will help avoid the common practice at the moment where pitches on council-owned sites are passed from one family member to another.



## 8. The contours of psychological aversion

### Introduction

- 8.1 This section deals with the different factors that contribute to psychological aversion. It is important to note that the motivations for moving into housing and the desire to live on a site or in housing are based on individual experiences. This often involves a range of reasons particular to personal circumstances. However, several themes emerged in the interviews which are now discussed. The key element is that aversion is often not truly about an inability to cope with the physical building structure, but rather an aversion to the socio-cultural factors which often accompany living in housing, such as isolation, lack of support, family breakdown and dealing with settled neighbours.

### Reasons for moving into housing

- 8.2 The majority of those interviewed lived in housing. Although some had not lived on a site for several years, all had lived in a caravan at different points in their lives. Some had moved into housing out of choice.
- 8.3 The key motivations for moving into housing included providing opportunities for children as well as stability. The majority discussed the linkages between housing and access to education and extra-curricular activities for school-aged children. On one occasion two Irish Travellers were interviewed together. One often elaborated on the statements of the other. The exchange below is an example of how providing opportunities for children influenced housing decisions:

*“He needed somewhere permanent because he’s being a boxer now and needs to be settled so he can do that”*

*“...And so all the kids can go to school.”*

- 8.4 A sense of stability was an important theme through all of the interviews. For some, housing was viewed as more secure and permanent than living in a caravan. A typical concern for families related to when one parent (typically the father) would need to travel away for work. A site resident explained the reasons why her cousin’s family moved into a house:

*“Because it’s hard to travel to places because that way his dad can go like miles out of the way, but he knows where he needs to come back to. He doesn’t have to worry if the family gets in trouble or have to move them if they get thrown off a campsite and then get all the way back to work”*

- 8.5 Despite the opportunities and sense of stability that many believed housing offered, the majority considered housing as an option of last resort. The shortage of pitches often led to newly married couples living in caravans with extended family. Many had experiences of living on temporary sites and the frequent moves were becoming too difficult.

*“I moved into a house because of a lack of stopping places made it harder and harder to travel”*

### Examples of aversion to housing

- 8.6 The term ‘psychological aversion’ is commonly used in Guidance and regulations relating to Gypsies and Travellers, however it is not one that is readily understood by Gypsies and Travellers themselves. The topic was approached through exploring each individual’s perceptions and experiences of living in housing and what they understood as the wider implications of living in housing for them, their families and their wider community. This would ultimately entail a discussion of how living in housing compares and contrasts with living on a site.

- 8.7 One of the elements of the interviews involved developing a set of examples of what aversion means from a Gypsy Traveller perspective. The quotations below summarise the common issues identified as aspects of aversion. Through the interviews it became clear that aversion incorporates several overlapping elements. It cannot be defined by one stand-alone feature, but rather as a combination of coping with a drastic change in lifestyle and surroundings, fear and isolation.

*“It is kind of frightening when they move you in because you don’t know what they expect.”*

*“I stay at my girl’s house sometimes. I love to hear the rain and it helps me go to sleep. But I can’t hear it so I have to put a carrier bag out the window so I can hear the rain.”*

*“When I first got married and we moved into a house, it felt so ghostly and lonely, I cried every night. I found it so lonely, I cried myself to sleep. I was so used to the site. You’d hear dogs barking, or you’d hear people chatting, you know what I mean.”*

*“Like say I’m getting you now and putting you into a site and you don’t know anybody in there and it’s a completely different culture and it’s a completely different, new way of life. It’s the same what they do to us.”*

- 8.8 Stakeholders had highlighted that psychological aversion to housing also needs to include longer term effects that can vary by individual and family. This also emerged as a key theme in the interviews. Many believed that the problems of family breakdown, and drug and alcohol abuse were a tangible result of living in housing.

*“Living in a house, for instance, say you took a family and you took them straight from site and put them in a house and they got big boys and men and whatever, and put them in a house. We, sometimes the boys, they turn to drugs and the men turn to drink because they’re used to being in and out and chatting and they can’t wash their cars outside and they can’t do what they want to do and they’re stuck in and start to arguing. All Travellers have large families and they’re used to being outside at all time – drinking tea outside, everything. It does. It does make them very depressed.”*

### **Perspectives on housing versus sites**

- 8.9 Due to the nature of the project topic, interview discussions involved a comparison and contrast of life in housing and on sites. This led to an examination of the benefits as well as the negatives of both options. These are extensions of participants’ personal experiences and beliefs.
- 8.10 For the majority of the participants, living in housing and on sites is simultaneously positive and negative. These are not contradictions or inconsistencies, but rather an acknowledgement of complexities. The positive and negative aspects of both living in a house or on a site are interwoven with definitions and understandings of Gypsy and Traveller culture, identity and sense of community.

#### ***Benefits of living in housing***

- 8.11 The vast majority of those interviewed wish to return or remain on a site. However, nearly all believed that there are distinct advantages to living in housing. The key benefits included privacy, the amenities and day-to-day conveniences as well as access to schools.
- 8.12 The privacy and the creature comforts of living in housing were often associated with a more convenient or calmer way of life.

*“Since living in housing I have grown to like the privacy you can get in a house that you don’t get on site. Houses are warmer in winter and you’ve got better access to water in housing.”*

*“You get to do what you want and you have your own routine and it is very comforting. You can do what you want in a house, but on a campsite it’s different. There’s not enough room in the caravan. Then we moved into a house and the house is perfect.”*

*“If you were in a house everything would just be more calmer because when you’re in a caravan everything can just get on top of you.”*

*“At first I found things really comfortable, got on fine... You get things like your own privacy and for another thing you get all your rooms and your facilities all in together like your bathroom and your bedroom all in together, and your kids are settled and can go to a proper school and that, and it’s especially easier when it comes to going to things like that doctors and that when you’ve got an address and they don’t know you’re a Traveller, they don’t bother with you if you’ve got a caravan address.”*

- 8.13 One of key reasons for moving into housing was to provide access to education for their children. Blending in with the settled community was an extension of stable school attendance. For some, this was a desired outcome of living in housing.

*“Living in a house made it possible for children to get the education that I never had.”*

*“I want it so my family and my grandkids to be able to blend in with the settled people – go to school together, go to college together. It would be a start. You have to start somewhere.”*

- 8.14 Some of those interviewed had experienced violence on sites and many others identified this as a real problem and drawback to living on a site. For these participants, the importance of having a safe, secure home was paramount.

*“At the end of the day, housing is bricks and mortar and all that, and it is more safer.”*

*“I won’t live on a site again because of the inter-clan Traveller feuding that can happen on sites.”*

- 8.15 It is important to note that during the discussions of the benefits of housing it was implied that they were referring to council housing. The majority of those interviewed currently live in council housing. Those who live in privately rented accommodation as well as those living on sites who would like to move into housing all aspired to live in council housing.

### ***Downsides of living in bricks and mortar accommodation***

- 8.16 For a few, there were not any negative aspects to living in housing and they were quite clear that they did not wish to return to living on a site. However, it may be important to consider that these sentiments were expressed by teenagers.

*“There’s nothing [wrong with living in housing]. It’s brilliant. I love it.”*

*“Everything is better in a house. I never want to move back to a site.”*

- 8.17 These sentiments were not shared by the majority of those interviewed. Although many did feel there were benefits to living in housing, the vast majority identified several challenges. The most common difficulties involved dealing with complaints from neighbours, feelings of loneliness and depression as well as the disorder that takes place once their household is removed from the community network of a site. The quotations below summarise these issues:

*“But there’s neighbours. My, our grandchildren come down. We have 30, 31 grandkids. Everyday there’s five or six of them in the house. When a couple of them go, three or four more come, you know? And people are going to complain and that sort of thing.”*

*“Living in a house can make my sons feel depressed and isolated, because we all miss the Travelling life and the close support and help of our extended family. In a house you are more isolated from your family.”*

*“The children go very, very wild when the Travellers move into houses. Because they get out of hand. They mix with the wrong company, they get into drugs, they get into everything when they wasn’t doing it when they were in the closed community because they was all watching out for one another.”*

- 8.18 A few, particularly those in privately rented housing, reported living in poorly maintained housing.

*“There’s no cooker. Twelve months in and they have never come to fix the cooker. The toilet is leaking. There’s no heating or anything. They won’t come out.”*

- 8.19 The move into housing was also perceived to put Gypsies and Travellers into a more vulnerable position when dealing with the settled community. Many felt that living in housing exposed them and their children to increased levels of prejudice because of lack of acceptance from wider society towards Gypsies and Travellers. This prevalent theme was discussed by nearly all of the participants.

*“There’s an awful lot of prejudice with Travellers. For instance, I tell you, I was living in my house for about eight year... but then, after me being there eight year, and my son was on the school paper with [support worker] and they asked if they could do something with the children and saying they’re Travellers and like all that. And after that, about a month after that, they started to a petition to get me out because they only knew then that then I was a Traveller. After eight year.”*

*“Bullying gets a lot worse... If you’re living on a site there are loads of Traveller children going to one school and everyone watches out for one another. But if you’re in a house, you might get two, maybe one Traveller child going to a school, maybe two, three at tops. Two, three Traveller children to fight two, three hundred English children. And that’s what makes it a lot worse.”*

- 8.20 Coping with prejudice is also understandably associated with anxiety and fear. None of the participants were sure of the best way to address these types of situations or how to handle any possible repercussions.

*“You don’t know what to do. You’re all panicky. You don’t know what to do and what to expect.”*

*“And you’re afraid because if there are complaints to the council then you’re going to get evicted out of your house. They will be believed before we would be believed.”*

- 8.21 For many, the move into housing represented a break with cultural traditions. A few participants believed that those who have moved into housing can no longer call themselves Travellers.

*“If you live in a house, I think if you live in a house then you’re not a Traveller. Even though lots of people, and most of my dad’s family, don’t live in a trailer and do live in a house, I think that to carry on your Irish tradition, you should always live in a trailer...Because houses are the only thing that separates us from, mainly.”*

*“Because it won’t make me a Traveller. That’s my culture and I want to stick with my culture.”*

However, this sentiment was not shared by the majority, including other Travellers currently living on sites.

*“You’re still a Traveller even if you always live in housing. Five or six weeks in the summer, that’s it. And then back into the housing.”*

### **Benefits of living on a site**

- 8.22 Several of those interviewed aspired to return to sites. For many, sites were seen as the answer to many of the problems associated with living in housing. Although most of those interviewed believed that living on a site was not essential to maintain their heritage, living on a site was considered a clear statement of identity, culture and community.

*“I prefer a caravan because I have been in it all my life. It is what I know.”*

*“You’d rather be on a site because it’s more open, it’s more space. That’s our culture. We’d rather be outside.”*

- 8.23 Many participants believed that living on sites was the best way to avoid conflicts with settled neighbours and by extension the Council.

*“With Travelling people, us Travelling people get a lot of visitors. They don’t ring and say they’re coming, they just turn up whenever they want. But when you’re in a house, the Council don’t like that. Neighbours think there’s something going on when you getting so many visitors and getting cars parked all around and all that. But when you’re on a site, anyone can come.”*

### **Negatives of living on a site**

- 8.24 In some ways, the negative points to living on a site mirror the benefits to living in housing. Some of those interviewed had personally experienced crime and violence and others had friends or family who were victims of violent behaviour. These participants believed living on sites involves dealing with violence and crime:

*“Living on sites is too dangerous at the moment.”*

*“I wouldn’t live on a site. There’s too much problems.”*

- 8.25 Many felt that sites had increased in size considerably. Overcrowding contributed to lack of privacy as well as changed the nature of how sites functioned. This was a common theme throughout the interviews. This is captured below in the complaints of two site residents:

*“They’re building too many big sites. Who wants big sites? You don’t want those kinds of sites. Ask the Travellers!”*

*“The site’s full up and the people, it’s not the way it used to be, it’s got too big now. You don’t know who’s coming on or out.”*

- 8.26 Although isolation is most frequently a problem associated with living in housing, it was a key theme that emerged when discussing the downsides of living on a site. Nearly all of the participants believed that living on sites reinforced divisions between the settled and Gypsy and Traveller communities. Several stated that young people in particular were cut off from social and economic opportunities. The quotations used below illustrate these common perspectives:

*“I don’t want to be me living there [site] and them [settled people] living there. I want it so my family and my grandkids to be able to blend in with the settled people.”*

*“There’s nothing for the young people. Why not taking the young ones off the site every other week, like taking the lads off one day and the girls off another. Like a girls’ day or a girls’ night out.”*

## Intersections of culture, identity and accommodation

8.27 It is widely accepted that for many people housing is not simply bricks and mortar but is also a representation of who they are. Throughout this study, Gypsies and Travellers demonstrated how accommodation is very much tied to how they define themselves and their culture.

8.28 During the course of the interviews, it became clear that the move into housing is one that for many evokes conflicting feelings. This is in part due to the strong association of caravans and living on a site with the Gypsy and Traveller identity. This is evident from the number of times 'this is our culture' and 'this is who we are' are used as the explanation and rationalisation of their feelings and experiences of living on sites and in housing.

8.29 For the majority, it was not the living in housing that they objected so strongly to, but rather what the move into housing represents. For these participants, housing is a symbol of the breakdown of Gypsy and Traveller traditions of community and lifestyle.

*"On site it's freedom, your children get more freedom and you get more freedom yourself, you don't feel trapped in. It's your culture, it's the key to who you are, you know you're not changing your life."*

8.30 Although most of those interviewed believed that it is important to take steps towards bridging the cultural and physical divisions between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled communities, there were individuals who expressed concern that the move into housing will result in their children losing touch with their families and heritage.

*"I do not like social mix with settled people, especially because my children get isolated from their Traveller cousins and not do get the time to forge bonds with their extended family. These bonds are very important for our culture and living in a house weakens these bonds and is bad for our culture."*

8.31 However, several stated that moving into housing did not mean that they had lost their ties with their heritage. For the majority of the participants, while living in housing certainly presented challenges, this was not the sole, defining aspect of their cultural identity.

*"Even if I have to live in a house for the rest of my life I will always be an Irish Traveller and even if my children cannot all get sites they will I think marry other Irish Travellers. Being a Traveller is not just about living in a caravan. It's about family and blood."*

### Accommodation aspirations

- 8.32 The majority of those interviewed were dissatisfied with their current accommodation. Many housed Travellers wished to return to a site, while others wanted to remain in housing or change tenures and move from privately rented accommodation to council housing. Not all Travellers living on sites wanted to stay there. Some desperately wanted to move into housing. Others were adamant they could never cope with living in a house.

*“I’m been living eight years in temporary [housing] and I am very upset about it. I’m looking for a permanent site.”*

*“I want to forget about the culture that is happening on the site and I want to move into housing”*

*“I could never move into a house. I couldn’t handle it. Because I was reared on the site and my children was reared there. And all my friends come in to me there and if I was in a house that wouldn’t happen. And my sons keep horses and you can’t keep horses in a council house!”*

- 8.33 Group housing was seen as the best and most desirable housing option. Many believed that group housing was the ideal situation for Gypsies and Travellers because they could maintain their cultural and social networks while also integrating with the settled community without causing disruption and having to deal with any prejudices.

*“The group housing would be better than a site because it’s still Travellers and they would be able to do what they want.”*

*“It is just like a site, but housing. It’s Travellers only. Where I eventually, eventually my grandkids could be in and with the settled people and not so isolated and so far away.”*

*“It would be a lot less hassle for the Council because they wouldn’t be getting so many complaints because we have different cultural needs. So they wouldn’t be getting so many complaints.”*

- 8.34 The location of the ideal site or house was not consistent across the interviews. For some, living on a site was more important than remaining in West London. For others, it was critical to remain in the area.

## Summary

- 8.35 There are many reasons for moving into housing, including access to schools for children and wanting more privacy and stability for the family. Some chose to move off site, while others feel they have no other choice.
- 8.36 Aversion to living in housing needs to be considered as a combination of factors, including coping with a drastic change in lifestyle and surroundings, fear and isolation. In order to understand how Gypsies and Travellers relate to housing, there also needs to be an understanding of how they compare and contrast living in a house versus on a site. The benefits of living in housing include security, privacy and it being a more comfortable way of life. However, for the majority, choosing to live in a house also means loneliness, fear, and conflicts with settled neighbours. Living on a site is often associated with maintaining cultural and familial ties, but this may also entail dealing with violence and isolation from wider society.
- 8.37 Many were not happy with their current accommodation, both those living in housing and on sites. However, all agreed that group housing would be the best option for their families. They viewed group housing as bringing the best of housing and sites together.

## 9. Support needs

### Introduction

- 9.1 Given the range of negative impacts that living in housing can have on Gypsies and Travellers, the type of support available to them is of utmost importance. The interviews asked participants for the type of support they used and required, and suggestions for how it can best be provided.

### Types of support required

- 9.2 As stakeholders reported and as we saw in the previous chapter, negotiating the initial transition to housing from sites could be particularly difficult for Gypsies and Travellers. Participants explained that advice on understanding their tenancy support was especially important, including paying bills, understanding tenancies and explaining housing rights.

*“My mum helped me find a place and with the move and that but I didn’t really understand things like the rent and the deposit and things like that... Paying bills is very difficult, cos for something like the water it’s every three months or they want a direct debit and I have no bank account or anything and I can’t afford to pay out three or four months worth altogether so I needed help to set it up [from support worker] so I can pay every week or whatever”*

- 9.3 The difficulty in managing tenancies was worsened for participants who had low levels of literacy. With no one in immediate contact who could read a letter (as opposed to a site where a neighbour may be able to help), receiving official correspondence often caused anxiety based on not knowing its contents or implications. Ready access to support was required. A related issue is that low literacy levels combined with unfamiliarity with bureaucratic systems meant that advocacy support was often required:

*“Travellers aren’t as educated as the settled people so we don’t know our rights.”*

*“I don’t really like going to the Council for anything cos they don’t understand and you try and explain that I can’t read or write and they don’t understand half the words I’m saying. The times I have to go up to the Council I have to make an appointment with [support worker] so if someone else is sitting there and he was speaking to me, he’d have to say the words to me because I wouldn’t really understand it”.*

*“I was at the Council offices cos I was made homeless and I was trying to sort out somewhere to stay... I rang up [support worker] and asked if the person was OK cos I wanted to know I could trust her”*

- 9.4 Often the type of support participants used or said they required was fairly low level and related to alleviating some of the isolation which, as we saw in the last chapter, can be a feature of Gypsies' and Travellers' experiences of living in housing. Many wanted help accessing community networks which could replicate the types of support that are available informally on sites:

*"What would have helped is having someone to talk to, but I didn't know anyone, there wasn't anyone else around for years, we didn't know who to contact about getting the kids into school and things. I would have liked someone to help me, give me somewhere to go to basically get me out of the house and meet other Travellers, somewhere like that, where all the Travellers could meet up together, just like they'd bump into each other on a site, you don't get that in housing so you'd need somewhere to meet."*

- 9.5 For others, the type of support required was a variation on the form of neighbourliness which sites were seen to offer, and which could not be replicated to the same extent in bricks and mortar accommodation:

*"What it is though, see if you're a Traveller and you need something, some milk you know or to keep an eye on the kids, you can go and ask someone on the site, but when you're in a house you can't do that, you don't know your neighbours in the same way like you do on a site."*

*"You've got help all around you [on a site], if you've going down the shops, or you've got an appointment or at the hospital, then someone can drive you there, and people can do things for you and help you out when you need it, you just need to walk out your door and there's people around."*

- 9.6 An elderly Traveller explained the importance of these support networks:

*"If there are travelling people who are good neighbours to each other, you can walk out and say hello, how're you're keeping, what's going on today or happening tomorrow or this and that, and that's what you miss. And if they're going to the shop – 'do you want anything from the shop?'. I don't have to wait for someone to help me down the shops, you miss all that. You can go there and if there's anything you want they can sort you out this minute. You can't do that if you're in housing, even off your neighbours."*

- 9.7 While the initial transition into housing was often particularly difficult for the first months, it was also apparent that it could be a lengthy process and some had been in housing for many years but still needed help with their tenancies. One participant had lived in several bricks and mortar properties in the private rented sector over the past three years, but had been unable to find a permanent place to live. She described how not understanding the system contributed to her anxiety and unease in housing:

*“The tenancy runs out in March and I’ve got two kids and I don’t where I’m going or if I’ll be on the streets. I need someone to come explain what I’m entitled to, a two bed or whatever and to put my name down for one, cos you’re meant to be bidding for your own housing and I don’t how that’s meant to work.”*

### Support provision

- 9.8 It was sometimes quite difficult to gather information on the type of support required during interviews as some participants had a low awareness of precisely what services they used. For example, many relied on one individual (often working outside their remit) for a wide range of help and support, however were not always clear about their role within an organisation:

*“I just get [council support worker] to do it, just go and see him and he sorts everything out ... I wouldn’t trust going up the Council and speaking to anyone”*

- 9.9 Issues of trust, familiarity and the ability to provide a wide range of support were common themes in interviews:

*“[support worker] does that. She helps with everything, with papers, with everything for me or my family. She does every paper for us. She’ll read for you. Any problems, she helps you”*

- 9.10 A related issue is that professionals often worked outside their remit. For example, Traveller Education staff were used for matters not only relating to children’s schooling, but tenancy support and general advice. It was also reported how Gypsies and Travellers self-referred to professionals able to offer support based on recommendations from peers:

*“I heard about [support worker] through my sister on the site so I got in touch with him through her, she gave me his number and just said he’ll sort things out, ask him anything and he’ll work it out”*

- 9.11 Participants were asked about the best way for finding about information about issues affecting Gypsies and Travellers. Responses varied. While leaflets seemed appealing, after probing it became apparent that literacy issues and unfamiliarity meant that they may be ignored. Most stressed the importance of face-to-face, informal meetings and discussion sessions at established places and times.

*“What is nice is when we come here, whatever this is [Traveller Education Service offices]. It is sort of like a home away from home for us. But if we had a place nearer that we could go for just ourselves, that would be a lot better.”*

- 9.12 It became clear how important it is to communicate in a manner in which Gypsies and Travellers understand and that information is delivered through trusted networks. Some participants joked about how they are 'too thick to understand' and this is why they need informal, conversational meetings.

*"Say if you have posh words or that we can't understand, and you have rules and regulations that we don't understand now, you'd be there to make us understand."*

- 9.13 Younger participants pointed to vibrant websites specifically for Gypsies and Travellers and suggested they were particularly good for finding out about support and events for Gypsies and Travellers:

*"Most of the younger ones can read, sites like Savvy Chavvy, you could find out about things there."*

- 9.14 The lack of familiar places for housed Gypsies and Travellers to meet in West London meant that many travelled some distance to attend community groups:

*"We'd like a place to do sewing classes and a place for the children to do their [driving] theory test and the computers and all that. We can't get that right now where I am [Harrow] and I have six children and it is very hard for me to come all the way over here [Ealing]."*

- 9.15 Some participants believed that Gypsies and Travellers should have more input and ownership over the types of services and community centres they used. However, there was always the overriding expectation that local councils should take the initiative and provide the leadership and on-going support for Gypsy and Traveller programmes.

## Summary

- 9.16 In many respects the type of support which participants said they needed replicated that which was readily available on sites and was often absent when living in housing. This ranged from having someone able to read mail, offer help with shopping or provide informal childcare at short notice. It is not therefore that the form of bricks and mortar accommodation prevents such support being available, but that moving to housing involves a geographical dispersal and disconnect from site-based support networks. Other support issues were specific to housing and do not occur to the same extent as on a site, such as managing tenancies or applying for choice-based lettings. Adjusting to the bureaucratic requirements of housing providers could pose a formidable challenge, exacerbated in cases of low literacy.

- 9.17 It is clear from the interviews the importance that trusted individuals have in meeting housed Gypsies' and Travellers' support needs. A reluctance to seek help from unfamiliar people meant that Gypsies and Travellers would rely on one individual for a wide range of support needs, with professionals often working outside their remit to meet these needs. The importance of established networks is therefore apparent if services are to be expanded.



# 10. Future accommodation

## Introduction

- 10.1 An element of the research brief is to explore how any future sites in West London should best be managed and new pitches allocated. The interviews findings are presented here and link with the work on best practice incorporated into the guide. While the vast majority of housed Gypsies and Travellers interviewed said they wanted to return to living on a site, most made it clear that the current conditions of sites in West London meant there would have to be change in how sites are designed and managed if they are to be suitable.

## Type and location of sites

- 10.2 The preference among participants was for small sites of between eight and 12 pitches, in line with Government guidance. The advantages of smaller sites were that they were thought to have fewer tensions among family groups and provided familiarity among residents. Most participants also stressed that they should be occupied only by one extended family:

*“I’d love to go back to living on a site, if the perfect site came up, not like the ones at the moment, just a small family-sized one, you know, just with people you know and just your family around... I’d feel comfortable on a site with just knowing your immediate family’s on it.” [Would you be willing to live with other non-family?] “No, well you would if you got on with them but if it’s not your family you get all sorts of problems and arguing and violent ways and it’s not a safe place to live.”*

- 10.3 Not all agreed, as explained below, as some thought this would contravene the principles of need by which pitches should be allocated.
- 10.4 Most participants emphasised the importance of local connections and that sites should be located close to where Gypsies and Travellers currently live. When asked if they would consider leaving West London to move on to the perfect site, one responded:

*“No, no it’d have to be around here cos we’ve got the kids in the schools round here and I’ve got family who can help, my sister’s round the way and she helps me and I help her.”*

- 10.5 Others however were so desperate to move to a site that they said they were willing to move outside London.

- 10.6 Also regarding location, it was suggested that new sites are spatially integrated into the surrounding neighbourhood:

*“I don’t want to be me living there [site] and them [settled people] living there. I want it so my family and my grandkids are able to blend in with the settled people – go to school together, go to college together. It would be a start. You have to start somewhere”*

*“They should built the sites near the estates, you know so you’ve got your housed Travellers able to live near to them on the sites so they can stay in touch”*

- 10.7 Finally, the usefulness of group housing, as discussed in Chapter 8, was commonly praised by participants.

### Management and allocation

- 10.8 Participants were divided regarding how pitches should be allocated on existing and new sites. For some, the importance of family dynamics was explained and how they would only consider living with their extended family for reasons of trust and familiarity. It was therefore important for housing providers to consider inter-residential relationships when allocating pitches:

*“They have to decide who they want on the sites. They wouldn’t put people in new houses who might cause anti-social behaviour, so they have to make sure they get people who can get along and look after it and not cause problems.”*

*“I think it’s better to have your family or people you know so there’s no arguments, you know”*

- 10.9 However, others explained how family dominance on larger sites can lead to tension, an unstable living environment, and can be a factor in their moving into housing. It also increases pitch shortages; participants explained how pitches were informally passed to other family members or families bribed site management to move onto a pitch. It was therefore suggested that a more transparent system of allocation was needed, whether based on time on a waiting list or priority needs:

*“What they should do is make a priority list, when they’re planning it, get the word out to Travellers about where they’re building and which year and if you want to try and get a plot, contact us and who comes first goes on the list. When people come in to find out about it, you can show them the list and they can’t keep pressurising the Council cos they’ll know where they are on the list and how long they’ll have to wait. First come first served and Travellers will know that and they’ll have to accept it and they’ll know that they’ll have to wait their turn, it could take two year, three year, they need to know that whenever a pitch comes up or a new site is built, when it’s their turn they’ll get a pitch, they need to trust that it’ll be done fairly not just whoever the site manager wants on it. It’s clear and everyone understands how it works.”*

*“It should have a priority like council housing, A, B and C. If you’re homeless and need to be housed or need support from your family on the site, whereas C is you’re in a house but are ok there but would prefer to be on a site. At Leicestershire the way it works is they have a list, and I had to wait a year and a half and I was offered it and I knew that when my time for a pitch would come up then I would be offered it. It’d be my turn and I understood it and I accepted it. People can’t then just say, when I moving out I’m giving the plot to my daughter, no – it’s going to whoever’s name is next on the list is getting the plot.”*

- 10.10 Several believed that there needs to be better security measures in place on sites. Some felt that overcrowding contributed to safety concerns. Too many people allowed people to access the site easily.

*“They’re bringing trouble into the site. We don’t know who is coming in. There’s no one to stop them coming in.”*

- 10.11 From the perspective of some participants, site managers were ideally placed to improve the sense of security on sites. Site managers would be in the best position to know who has legitimate ties to the site as well as an impartial understanding of site dynamics. However, those currently living on sites felt that there is a high turnover in site managers making it difficult for them to develop knowledge of residents and any particular issues on the site.

*“We have a warden [site manager]. But there’s problems with wardens. Once they get to know us, they’re moved around.”*

## Summary

- 10.12 There is a tension in participants' responses about how sites should be managed and where they should be located. The overwhelming preferences for family-based sites contradicts having sites which are professionally managed and pitches allocated according to need, rather than family membership. Most wanted to stay in the area of London where they had family, social and employment networks, but others stated they were so desperate for a site they would consider relocating to a different part of the country.

# Appendix 1: Stakeholder workshop discussion guide

- A1.1 The key objectives of the stakeholder workshop were to explore the housing and related support requirements of Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar accommodation and to generate discussion around appropriate methods for this project.

Element	Rationale
<p><b>Welcome:</b></p> <p>Introduce research team, Fordham Research and explain the aim of the workshop – to discuss the issues surrounding housed Gypsies and Travellers, including their support needs</p> <p>Explain that research is for the West London Housing Partnership and does not seek to reassess the GTANA pitch count</p> <p>Confidentiality: reassure participants that any information they provide will remain anonymous in the report</p> <p>Get permission to record: recorded and transcribed for the purpose of the research with no detailed attribution</p> <p>Toilets, mobile phones off, fire exits, refreshments</p>	<p>Welcome: prepares participants to take part in the discussion</p> <p>Outlines the background and purpose of the research</p>
<p><b>Introductions:</b></p> <p>Names and organisational role</p>	<p>Introductions: gives participants an opportunity to see who else /what agencies are taking part in the discussion</p>

<p><b>Population profile:</b></p> <p>Where are Gypsies and Travellers currently living and figures – estimates and records?</p> <p>Specific needs of Gypsies and Travellers in housing</p> <p>Tenure and housing type</p> <p>Family characteristics including size and composition</p> <p>Housing histories, reasons for making the move into housing</p>	<p>Understand the types of Gypsy and Traveller households living in West London and their current accommodation needs.</p>
<p><b>Psychological aversion:</b></p> <p>How is the term understood by support agencies and services and Gypsies and Travellers</p> <p>Current causes of psychological aversion</p> <p>Examples of aversion to housing</p> <p>Service provision to overcome aversion to housing – current and potential</p> <p>Demand for living on sites – from who, what reasons, in what areas</p> <p>How important is it to remain in London</p> <p>Implications of living in housing on social, cultural, mental and physical well-being</p>	<p>To understand what the concept of psychological aversion means to workshop participants and how this might shape housing and support services.</p>
<p><b>Support needs and types of support required:</b></p> <p>Comparison of needs of Gypsies and Travellers living in housing and on sites and other settled populations</p> <p>Housing trends of Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar accommodation</p> <p>Services housed Gypsies and Travellers currently access</p> <p>Awareness of gaps in current service provision</p> <p>Services needed to improve current housing circumstances</p>	<p>To determine the types and range of services available as well as any unaddressed needs.</p>
<p><b>Research methods:</b></p> <p>Best methods to contact and work with Gypsies and Travellers</p> <p>Potential avenues to access a diverse group of Gypsies and Travellers in West London</p>	<p>To generate discussion on different means of contacting Gypsies and Travellers and to identify groups working with Gypsies and Travellers to contact</p>

# Appendix 2: Gypsy and Traveller interview discussion guide

A2.1 The key objectives of the interviews were to gather information about the current housing situations of Gypsies and Travellers, explore their views on living in housing and identify what support services they use and need as well as their future accommodation aspirations.

Element	Rationale
<p><b>Welcome:</b></p> <p>Introduce self and explain the purpose of the interview – to discuss the housing and accommodation issues for Gypsies and Travellers, including their support needs</p> <p>Explain that research is for the West London Housing Partnership and does not seek to reassess the GTANA pitch count</p> <p>Role of Fordham Research – research organisation and not part of the local council, gather all opinions: all opinions are valid and there is no right or wrong answer</p> <p>Confidentiality: reassure participants that any information they provide will remain anonymous in the report</p> <p>Get permission to record: recorded and transcribed for the purpose of the research with no detailed attribution</p>	<p>Welcome: orientates participants to take part in the interview</p> <p>Outlines the background and purpose of the research and sets the ‘ground rules’</p>
<p><b>Introductions:</b></p> <p>First names, where do they live now, for how long, where they lived previously, housing tenure</p>	<p>Introductions: gives participants the opportunity to start by speaking about something fairly straightforward and helps to set them at ease</p>
<p><b>Reasons for moving into housing:</b></p> <p>Why did you move into a house?</p>	<p>To determine key triggers for the move into housing</p>

<p><b>Attitudes towards housing:</b></p> <p>What do you think is good about living in housing?</p> <p>Are there any negatives about living in a house?</p> <p>Are there any ways to improve these downsides?</p> <p>How does living in a house compare with living on a site?</p>	<p>To gather information about participants' attitudes towards their current and past accommodation</p>
<p><b>Psychological aversion:</b></p> <p>What does this term mean to you?</p> <p>How does living in a house make you feel?</p> <p>Has your life changed by moving into a house?</p>	<p>To develop an understanding of how Gypsies and Travellers interpret this phrase</p>
<p><b>Support needs and types of support required:</b></p> <p>Do you use any particular services or types of support (e.g. TES)?</p> <p>What do you use these services for?</p> <p>How often?</p> <p>How did you find out about it?</p> <p>What is good about these services?</p> <p>What types of services/support do you need that you currently cannot access or is not available?</p>	<p>To determine the types and range of services available as well as any unaddressed needs and the best way to disseminate information to Gypsies and Travellers.</p>
<p><b>Future accommodation aspirations:</b></p> <p>Are you happy to stay in a house?</p> <p>Where would you like to live (in London or elsewhere)?</p> <p>Would you move out of London if a site became available?</p>	<p>To determine what Gypsies and Travellers consider to be the ideal accommodation scenario and what trade-offs they are willing to make to secure this.</p>

## Appendix 3: References

### Legislation, guidance and policy

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