

Good practice guide: Working with housed Gypsies and Travellers



Shelter

Foreword

Eddie MacDonald



It is estimated that between one-half to two-thirds of the Gypsy and Traveller population are currently in bricks-and-mortar housing. Yet their specific needs and concerns are rarely documented.

Gypsies and Travellers face widespread discrimination and prejudice. Even where they do not meet with outright hostility, they often find that people, including service providers, have very little knowledge of their culture, history and traditions. Those in bricks-and-mortar housing share all the issues facing the community as a whole, while also having their own particular concerns. Specific issues include difficulty in settling into mainstream accommodation, stress, isolation, and worsening health problems.

There are many organisations, often led by Gypsies and Travellers, that are working hard to identify and alleviate the problems faced by those in bricks-and-mortar housing. Housing providers have also shown that they can be crucial in offering timely support, advice and help to this group. Shelter wants the information and good practice examples provided in this guide to be helpful in encouraging new initiatives and promoting culturally sensitive working practices.

This guide is an example of Shelter's work in supporting local authorities and organisations. It aims to be clear, practical and easy to use. We hope that you will find it a valuable resource.

Adam Sampson
Chief Executive

Good practice guide: Working with housed Gypsies and Travellers

Sue Cullen, Paul Hayes and Liz Hughes

Additional research by Sandra Harris

Cover photograph by Andrea Testoni

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Contents

Foreword	3
Introduction	6
History and culture	7
Legal background	9
Identifying housed Gypsies and Travellers	11
Consultation	13
Advice and information	16
Conventional housing	18
Tenancy support	22
Community cohesion/ neighbour relations	24
Health and housing	27
Recommendations	30
Useful contacts/further information	32

Introduction

It is generally agreed that there are now more Gypsies and Travellers living in conventional housing in the UK than living on sites or unauthorised encampments. Numbers can only be estimated, as Gypsies and Travellers are not counted as a separate group by most data sources, including the census. Once they move into housing, Gypsies and Travellers encounter problems unique to their situation, as well as the widespread prejudice and discrimination that the whole community encounters.

Initially, Shelter contacted a number of Gypsy and Traveller organisations and services in the UK, including London, Kent, Cornwall and Doncaster. Shelter explained the purpose of the research, and that it would feed into a good practice guide and conference. Workers were asked to tell Shelter about any good practice around housed Gypsies and Travellers that they were aware of, and also to help Shelter set up focus groups and one-to-one interviews with their clients.

Shelter spoke to 82 Gypsies and Travellers, through 33 one-to-one interviews and four focus groups. Shelter also consulted extensively with local authorities, housing associations and health workers who had experience of working with Gypsies and Travellers. Some of these workers were of Gypsy/Traveller origin, which enabled them to speak from a unique perspective. Most interviewees were female – out of the 33 one-to-one interviews conducted only five were male, and this pattern was replicated in focus groups.

Most interviewees were living in local authority or housing association properties. They were asked a mixture of questions in order to get an overall picture of their housing experiences. These included strictly factual questions, eg, ‘How long have you lived in your current place?’ and ones which allowed interviewees scope for more detailed answers, such as: ‘What would improve the experience of living in a house?’ Focus groups were asked fewer questions in order to allow time for more discussion.

The majority of English Gypsies and Irish Travellers we spoke to did not want to be in conventional housing. Yet, there are not enough pitches on authorised sites to accommodate the number of Gypsies and Travellers who want to live this way, and some sites are so poorly maintained that to continue living there would constitute a serious threat to people’s health.

The difficulties Roma Gypsies encounter mainly revolve around their immigration status, language, racism and access to support services. There is very little official information about this growing population.

We spoke to a small sample of New Travellers, who are generally under-researched as a group. They share some of the same problems as other Traveller groups (especially those who are the second or third generation of their family to follow a travelling lifestyle). However, a full-scale study of this group and their housing issues is clearly needed.

A Traveller’s story

‘My parents, both Irish Travellers, first lived at the illegal site below the Westway motorway flyover in Hammersmith in the late 1950s. In 1960, before I was born, my parents moved to Bristol. There were no official sites to be found and they were encouraged to live in a flat in the St Paul’s area. My mother said that she was too frightened to have a baby in the trailer again after having lost two children, but once in bricks-and-mortar she felt completely trapped and became very depressed.

She had no neighbours to turn to and they found themselves being called ‘dirty Irish’ and asked ‘Why do you keep breeding?’ (I can still remember these taunts). She thought she was doing the right thing for us, but it was her that suffered the most.

My father travelled in his trailer for work. He came home when he could, but was trapped by the need to support his own family, so my mother became even more isolated. We constantly looked for fellow housed Travellers so we could support each other. We were all put to school, but by the age of nine I had already been to 10 schools. We were subjected to the same abuse as our mother but we all learnt to read well, so that helps! The rural area that I represent as a councillor has many housed Travellers and even the most elderly remain lonely and really miss the old ways, and being outside more! I am glad that the problems housed Travellers face are being put on the agenda and hope this report helps deliver the support that is desperately needed.’

Candy Sheridan,
Councillor for Stalham and Sutton

History and culture

‘When Travellers speak of travelling, we mean something different from what country people (sedentary people) usually understand by it... For Travellers, the physical fact of moving is just one aspect of a nomadic mindset that permeates every aspect of our lives. Nomadism entails a way of looking at the world, a different way of perceiving things, a different attitude to accommodation, to work, to life in general.’¹

English Gypsies

There is general agreement that the Gypsy culture originated in India and that the Romany language (a version of which is spoken by Gypsies worldwide) is rooted in an Indian dialect. It is believed that this group – which became known as ‘Romany Gypsies’ – emigrated from Northern India in the ninth century.

There are records of Romany Gypsies as a part of British society going back as far as the early 1500s. This group is now known as English Gypsies, (there are also Welsh and Scottish Gypsies) and they share some of the same cultural traditions and beliefs as Roma.

Roma

There are significant numbers of Roma Gypsies – descendants of original Indian Gypsies who were displaced – living in Eastern European countries such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania. Historically, they have suffered persecution and discrimination in their home countries, where many of them have faced draconian laws that have prevented their nomadic habit of life. In Poland, for example, Roma have been living in bricks-and-mortar housing since the early 1960s. Members of this community have recently moved to the UK in significant numbers, in search of a better way of life.

Irish Travellers

Irish Travellers have been living in Britain since the seventeenth century, and have been a part of Irish society for many hundreds of years before that. Their roots are thought to lie in a pre-Celtic, nomadic group of people. They have their own language, Shelta, which differs entirely from Irish Gaelic. There is some evidence that Irish Traveller numbers increased in the eighteenth century due to rural homelessness and poverty, but there was certainly a well-established Travelling community long before then.

New Travellers

From the 1960s onwards, some people in Britain decided to reject what they see as the materialistic and consumer-driven nature of mainstream society by exchanging it for a simpler, more nomadic lifestyle. There is anecdotal evidence that many vulnerable people on the margins of settled society, such as young care leavers, homeless people and ex-service personnel, have joined these travelling communities.

Their transport and homes consist of trucks, buses and caravans, as well as tipis, yurts and benders (canvas over hazel poles). There are now third and fourth generation Travellers, who share some of the same problems as Gypsies and Irish Travellers when they move into bricks-and-mortar housing.

Traditions and beliefs

Nomadism is often seen as the main, and sometimes the only, defining characteristic of Gypsy and Traveller life; however, many other elements that contribute to their group identity are equally important. Their culture is centred on family and community links, common traditions and a shared way of life. While New Travellers are also family- and community-orientated, they do not (as far as we know) share in the beliefs and practices common to Roma, English Gypsies and Irish Travellers (as outlined below).

¹ Power, C, *Room to roam, England’s Irish Travellers*, 2004, page 15.

- Young people take on adult roles within the community at an early age. They marry young, often within the extended family. For Roma Gypsies this is often by the age of 16.
- They take on traditional gender roles – ‘the man is the head of the family, the woman the heart of it’.² Status for a man depends on how well he is able to provide for his family and, for a woman, on how she manages the home and brings up the children.
- Education at secondary school level may be seen as a threat to Gypsy and Traveller culture, especially around issues such as sex education and mixed schooling.
- Births, marriages and deaths are occasions for large gatherings of extended families.
- There is a strict code of cleanliness and hygiene, for example, anything (such as a bag) that has been on the floor will never be put on the table.
- Animals and livestock are an important part of life – traditionally, Gypsy and Traveller men have been involved in horse-trading, and horse fairs are still an important custom today.
- All animals live outside the family home – Gypsies and Travellers said this was one cause of conflict with neighbours, who often considered chaining an animal up outside to be cruel.
- When someone dies, their clothes and personal belongings are burnt, or occasionally given or sold to non-Travellers. If possible, the family will then move to another place.
- Up to the mid-twentieth century, Gypsies and Travellers had an important role to play in rural society, engaging in seasonal agricultural work, such as hop picking. Families would travel the country, working and camping at the same farms year after year. Other traditional areas of work and income for the community have been scrap dealing, horse-trading and craftwork.

There have been some changes to these traditions over the years. Recent legislation and increasing mechanisation in agriculture have reduced the availability of seasonal agricultural work, so Gypsy and Traveller men have become an increasingly marginalised workforce. However, the changing nature of the employment market has made it easier for women to re-educate themselves and find work.

Another change over the years has been that the majority of Travellers now want their children to go to primary schools to learn to read and write. However, they may be more reluctant to send them

to secondary school, due to worries around sex education, mixing with the opposite sex, and dilution of culture.

‘No Traveller girl will want to marry him if he goes to secondary school. He’ll have to marry an outsider.’

Female Irish Traveller, Shelter interview

Living in bricks-and-mortar housing

The cultural beliefs and practices outlined above are as important to those living in bricks-and-mortar accommodation as they are to people living on sites.

‘Some people say you’re not proper Travellers, just because we live in a house. Don’t they understand it’s in your blood... you’re born that way.’

Sarah, aged 12³

Cultural and legislative change over the past 50 years means that many Gypsies and Travellers have no real choice about where, and how they live. The lack of suitable sites, poor facilities, and problems accessing health care and other services mean that between an estimated one-half to two-thirds⁴ live in bricks-and-mortar housing. People are often forced to move to conventional housing, and little help and support is on offer to assist people in adjusting to the change. Many of the viewpoints expressed in Shelter’s consultation reflected how alien living in ‘bricks and mortar’ felt.

‘Its like telling settled people, “You go and get yourselves a caravan, and go off with people that are nothing like you” – that’s how it feels, living in a house.’

Female English Gypsy, Shelter focus group

In Britain, there have always been tensions between Gypsy and Traveller groups and the dominant settled community. This creates difficulties for those on sites, and makes it even harder for those in settled housing to cope with being away from their community. These tensions are reflected in the widespread prejudice and discrimination directed at Gypsies and Travellers, both historically and today. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has commented that prejudice towards this community seems to be the only remaining racial prejudice that is still seen as socially acceptable.

² Gronfers, J, *Guide for health and other professionals*, 2000, Waltham Forest.

³ Ormiston Children and Families Trust, *Children’s voices: changing futures*, 2006.

⁴ Ivatts, A, *The education of Gypsy/Roma Traveller and travelling children*, Position paper for the National Strategy Group, Department for Education and Skills, 2005.

Legal background

The Housing Act 2004 defines Gypsies and Travellers as: 'persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in caravans; and... all other persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, including... such persons who, on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependant's educational or health needs or old age, have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently; and... members of an organised group of travelling showpeople or circus people (whether or not travelling together as such).'

Since 1960, the statutory framework for housing has been largely unfavourable to the travelling way of life. The Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 introduced a licensing scheme for private caravan sites, and also increased local authority powers to close common land to Travellers. Camping on sites not authorised by the local authority became unlawful, including farmland that had been traditionally used by Travellers carrying out seasonal work. The outcome was that Travellers were increasingly forced to camp on marginal land, and a nomadic way of life became more difficult.

The 1960 Act did provide local authorities with a power to provide sites themselves, but many chose not to. Less than 10 years later, the Government was forced to address the shortage of licensed sites, by introducing the Caravan Sites Act 1968. The Act provided local authorities with even greater powers to evict Travellers from unauthorised sites, but also placed a legal duty on each local authority to provide a designated site for the use of travelling people within their area. In theory, this should have increased the supply of local pitches to meet demand, but the reality was often different. The Government did not force local authorities to provide sites and many councils, pleading a lack of resources, failed to meet their legal duty. Those who did comply with the Act often only provided a bare minimum of pitches, so some Travellers were reluctant

to leave their sites and travel, in case they were unable to find somewhere else.

Through the 1970s and 1980s, governments made money available to local authorities to provide and improve their sites, but there remained a chronic shortage of pitches.

The Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 brought in a new phase of legislation that sought to control the movement of travelling people still further. The Act removed the duty of local authorities to provide a designated site for Travellers, criminalised unlawful camping and provided yet more powers for the police and local authority to evict those on unauthorised sites. The changes were justified by a call for more small private sites, owned and run by the community themselves. While this call might have been backed by Gypsies and Travellers, many have been disappointed with the number of planning applications that are successful, and with some local authorities allowing their sites to run down or even closing them, the pressure on pitch numbers has increased.⁵

In recent years, there have been some positive developments. The Homelessness Act 2002 placed a duty on local authorities to produce a homelessness strategy that identified sections of the community experiencing homelessness or bad housing, and also how those issues will be addressed. The 2006 Code of Guidance accompanying homelessness legislation is clear that when the local authority has reason to believe someone is homeless, or threatened with homelessness, or living in unsuitable accommodation, the local authority officer involved should initiate a homelessness application (regardless of whether or not one is requested), although the application should not proceed without permission from the individual(s) it concerns. Local

⁵ Local Government Information Unit (LGIU) Briefing 227/04, November 2004.

authorities must ensure that accommodation offered under the homelessness legislation is suitable for the person(s) concerned. Therefore, the suitability of bricks-and-mortar housing and site provision should be analysed in each individual case.

Assessments of accommodation needs

The Housing Act 2004 recognised the shortage of authorised sites and the potential for conflict this creates within local communities. The Act obliges local authorities to carry out an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers within their area, and those assessments should inform regional and local planning processes. These assessments are currently being completed and represent an opportunity for local authorities to accurately assess and plan to meet the need for sites and other accommodation.

Each local authority has been tasked to produce a report by the end of 2007 on these assessments of accommodation needs. This key document should be used in conjunction with other plans and strategies to assess current and future service provision. The report should form the basis for meeting Travellers' housing need – both in developing sites and accommodation, and in providing other housing-related services.

The European Court of Human Rights has held that the UK is under an obligation to facilitate Gypsies' and Travellers' ways of life.⁶ While the courts have not fully followed this judgment, due to existing

legislation, the Government is currently planning to update the law on site provision to ensure that Gypsy and Traveller local authority sites are protected.⁷

Race relations legislation

There is legislation that both promotes community relations and protects against racism and discrimination. The Act 1976, as amended in 2000⁸, has strengthened the duty on local authorities to ensure that race relations and race equality are built into the planning and provision of all major public services. The Race Relations Act now covers all the functions of public authorities and also gives over 40,000 listed public bodies a general statutory duty to pay 'due regard' to the need to promote good relations between racial groups, promote equality of opportunity, and eliminate unlawful racial discrimination.

Ethnic Gypsy and Irish Travellers are protected from discrimination regardless of whether or not they are nomadic. The legislation does not currently cover New Travellers, as they are not seen as an ethnic group.

The legal duties local authorities and other agencies have under race relations legislation are outlined in the *Code of practice on racial equality in housing*.⁹ Provision of services to black and minority ethnic groups, including Gypsies and Irish Travellers, is addressed in the statutory *Code of practice on the duty to promote race equality*¹⁰, and this should also be included in any local authority's Race Equality Scheme (RES).¹¹

6 *Connors v UK* App No.66746/01, 27 May 2004, European Court of Human Rights.

7 Clause 272 of the Housing and Regeneration Bill, amending section 5(1) of the Mobile Homes Act 1983.

8 By the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

9 <http://tinyurl.com/26zpxw>

10 <http://tinyurl.com/2fbojc>

11 This is a '... timetabled plan setting out how a public authority intends to meet the statutory general duty to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity and good relations between different racial groups.' *Common Ground*, op cit, page 275.

Identifying housed Gypsies and Travellers

Before local authorities and other organisations can begin to assess and meet the needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers, they need to be able to locate them. For most official purposes, they are invisible as a group and very little information about them is collected. They are not recorded as a separate ethnic group in many important data sources, including the census. Even where statistics on Gypsies and Travellers are collected, those in housing are usually ignored. The Government department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) co-ordinates a count twice a year, but this is only based on the number of caravans.

Local authorities and housing associations also rarely include information about Gypsies and Travellers in any monitoring they undertake; therefore most areas have no reliable data on the numbers living in conventional housing, how many are applying for housing, and what their needs are. In a study carried out by the Ormiston Trust only seven per cent of local authority housing departments responding to their survey kept records on housed Gypsies and Travellers.

It is difficult to see how the local authorities involved can make decisions about pitch requirements without accurately assessing how many housed Gypsies and Travellers would like the opportunity to live on sites. It is almost inevitable that in these areas, the demand for pitches will be inaccurate, and significantly underestimated. Therefore the opportunity to meet the needs of the Traveller population (and free up rented housing for members of the settled community) is going to be missed.

There needs to be an increase in the monitoring of numbers of Gypsies and Travellers, and more reliable systems for this set up. However, the positive outcomes that monitoring can achieve should be made clear, to ensure that community members do not perceive that such systems will be used to discriminate or exclude them.

‘Monitoring documentation needs to be appropriate and accurate and accompanied by training for practitioners, in order that they are aware of the reasons behind the monitoring and are able to pass this onto Gypsies and Travellers. There is a need to ensure that any monitoring is used to benefit the community and their housing and other support needs, and is not used purely as a tick box opportunity.’¹²

Groups specifically set up to help and support Gypsies and Travellers are the most reliable (and often the only) source for researchers and organisations seeking information on those living in housing. Most of the local authorities carrying out their assessments of accommodation needs have contacted people in this way, and much other research could not happen without the co-operation of these support services.

A strong social network is one of the characteristics of Gypsy and Traveller communities, and speaking to one or two housed individuals may lead to further contacts, providing prospective participants see any research as relevant and that research is undertaken by people who are aware of the cultural traditions of the community.

One difficulty in locating housed Gypsies and Travellers is the fact that many are driven to conceal their identity for fear of discrimination or harassment. This obviously has implications for people’s mental health and self-image. Many Gypsies and Travellers will not even reveal their identity to housing and support workers, which obviously affects the quality of the service that they can be offered.

¹² Observations by health professionals in a Shelter focus group.

‘Gypsies and Travellers who live in houses may feel particularly vulnerable, especially if they are separated from their extended families and decide to conceal their ethnicity in order to be accepted by the settled community.’¹³

One of the participants in Shelter’s focus group talked about what the concealment of her family’s identity meant in practical terms.

‘Where we lived before, the neighbours were horrible to my son. They told their kids not to play with him, called him a dirty Gypsy. When we moved, I told him to go out and play, and said “Don’t tell anyone you’re a Gypsy”. Now he’s got a really nice lot of friends.’

Female English Gypsy, Shelter focus group

For Gypsies and Travellers to feel confident about revealing their ethnic background, they must be free from the fear of discrimination and judgement by the staff of housing providers and support services. Some staff may have prejudices regarding community members, and this can affect the service they offer. Local authorities and housing associations need to be

aware of this and make training compulsory for their employees. Making potential service users aware of this policy will encourage more engagement and will help to build trust.

Ways to contact and build trust with Gypsies and Travellers in bricks-and-mortar accommodation might include the following.

- Working in conjunction with Gypsy and Traveller support groups, or organisations such as the Travellers Education Service. Joint home visits with a trusted service are an effective way to build a relationship.
- Regular attendance at a local Gypsy and Traveller forum, where one already exists, or taking steps to establish one.
- Visiting venues and social events (eg horse fairs) where there is likely to be a community presence, and either offering a service, such as housing advice, or taking time to talk to people about the issues that concern them.
- Making sure that any information produced is accessible to the whole community, especially those that are unable to read or write. This include making information available on CDs and/or DVDs.

13 Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), *Gypsies and Travellers: a strategy for the CRE, 2004–2007*.

Consultation

‘We found a general acceptance among local authorities that Gypsies and Irish Travellers did not engage, and little sense that any pro-active work was required.’¹⁴

The importance of effective consultation

Local authorities have a legislative duty to consult with Gypsies and Travellers under the Housing Act 2004, as part of their assessment of their accommodation needs, and also under the Race Equality Surveys (RES).¹⁵

Gypsies and Travellers are believed to be over-represented in all indicators of deprivation and experience high levels of exclusion. As a community they have similar support needs to the settled population – ie they are just as likely to have disabilities, be older, young or vulnerable. However, housed Gypsies and Travellers will also have additional support needs, due to lower literacy levels, isolation, lack of practical experience of living in a house, racism and negative public opinion. Consultation is one way to identify what their support needs are and find out how best to meet them.

Regular consultation has many benefits in terms of creating policies that are inclusive, and developing services that meet the needs of all the travelling communities. The housed Traveller community is not static and setting up ongoing consultation can enable local authorities to keep track of changes, and identify new needs and issues. Consultation can also increase social cohesion.

‘Consultation has other benefits, such as encouraging everyone to get involved in local decision making, and giving people a sense of ownership and belonging in the community.’¹⁶

However, it is also important to give feedback after any consultation exercise. Failure to do so, may lead to cynicism and a feeling that consultation does not promote change. Workers should be careful to avoid raising unrealistic expectations about the outcomes to be gained from consultations.

Multi-agency working

It is important to work with a variety of service providers, as well as community groups and members of the travelling community, when planning consultations with housed Gypsies and Travellers. Some areas have set up Gypsy and Traveller forums to ensure that communication is improved, so that the community are aware of the reasons behind any consultations and feel they can trust the agencies involved.

The good practice example, overleaf, shows how the Doncaster Gypsy and Traveller strategy group was set up to provide a more cohesive approach to meeting the support needs of these communities, including those in bricks-and-mortar housing.

Working with Traveller groups and other organisations already engaged with those in conventional housing, such as the Traveller Education Service and community and faith groups, can help identify where housed Travellers are and improve the local

14 CRE, *Common ground*, 2006, section 3.2.3a.

15 CRE, *Statutory code of practice on the duty to promote race equality*, paras 4.20–4.23.

16 *Common ground*, op cit, section 3.2.3.

authority's knowledge of their culture and ethnic identity. It is important to involve community organisations in the early stages of the consultation process, because they will have the expertise to help plan and target consultations appropriately. Smaller organisations may need longer timescales if they are to effectively participate, and they may have time and resource limitations that will need to be taken into account.

Peer consultations

When carrying out accommodation needs assessments of Gypsies and Travellers, some local authorities have used peer-consultation methods and have trained local Travellers to conduct the assessments. Increasing the knowledge and skills of Gypsies and Travellers can help to build up confidence, and can increase the numbers and range of those who get involved. Other benefits include:

- interviewers may be able to identify community members in bricks-and-mortar housing who might otherwise have remained hidden
- community members involved in the design and delivery of questionnaires might become willing stakeholders
- interviewers from their own community are more likely to be trusted by interviewees, leading to more candid responses (however, it is important to check with each individual; some people may prefer external interviewers, especially where sensitive information is being given)
- goodwill within the community is likely to persuade reluctant interviewees to participate, and these interviewees will refer other potential interviewees
- new skills are developed within the community, and these skills can be drawn upon at a later time if required.

For example, in the Cambridge sub-region, a group of Travellers who were known community activists were regularly consulted in the planning and delivery of the assessments. They were then trained to help other Travellers fill in questionnaires, the results of which were then fed into the assessment.¹⁷

Good practice example: Doncaster Gypsy and Traveller strategy group

Gypsies are Doncaster's largest ethnic minority group, currently making up about two per cent of the total population. Despite this, there are concerns about their lack of visibility. The local authority formed this group to develop a Gypsy and Traveller strategy to increase participation and improve services. It meets monthly and includes a range of organisations in addition to members of the travelling community, some of whom are living in bricks-and-mortar housing.

Some of the initial aims were to:

- share information and good practice
- present a more joined-up way of working with Gypsies and Travellers
- dispel some of the myths, break down some of the barriers, and reduce social exclusion
- help community development and cohesion
- address the invisibility of Travellers by producing a borough strategy.

Crucial to the project's success is meaningful engagement with local Travellers. In the initial stages, the strategy group worked with small groups of individuals to win their support and trust. The production of information in an accessible format (an audio CD) was particularly important.

The group has been successful in creating a forum where information and good practice is shared between organisations, and Gypsies and Travellers are generally happier about the way their issues are being dealt with. Community relations have improved and the travelling community is now more willing to engage with the council.

The local authority has accepted the Gypsy and Traveller strategy and established community development posts in the voluntary sector. It is hoped that the forum will become the main conduit between the agencies involved and the community.

¹⁷ Home, R, and Greenfields, M, *Cambridge sub-region Traveller needs assessment 2005–2010*, commissioned by Cambridgeshire County Council, 2006

Public meetings and group consultations

Good community consultation should contribute to building up community cohesion, not create a situation where people feel intimidated. One way of building cohesion is to encourage consultation around issues that are of interest to all sections of the community. In any consultation process some conflict is inevitable, as people will have differing viewpoints and opinions. Clear ground rules at the beginning of the process is a way of managing differences of opinion. All consultees, including housed Gypsies and Travellers, need to be clear about the objectives of the consultation and the process that will be used to reach decisions.

When holding large meetings or looking to attract a range of people from the travelling community it is important that communication and publicity is inclusive.

There are times when public meetings are not appropriate, and can lead to conflict within a community, or can make it difficult for Gypsies and Travellers to speak up if they wish to remain 'anonymous'. In these situations, open days or drop-in consultations can be very effective, especially if community members are involved. The agency in question can advertise a day or a week when there will be staff members based in a community centre or somewhere similar, who will be available to answer questions or gather the opinions of the community on a particular issue.

Other issues

Consultations need to take into account the low levels of literacy within the community, and offer opportunities to engage with processes in other ways. This will mean less paper consultations and more face-to-face interactions, allowing for time to explain the process and the role the individual can play in influencing the provision of services. It could also mean providing information in an audio format. For some members of the Roma community there will also be a need for translators and information presented in a range of community languages.

Housed Gypsies and Travellers are often some of the more vulnerable members from the travelling community. Travellers move into conventional housing for a wide range of reasons. They may be reluctant to identify themselves as Travellers, not only to the settled community but also to other Travellers – housed or living on site. Clear procedures around confidentiality and anonymity can encourage greater involvement of the more vulnerable members of the community.

Advice and information

‘We would be on the street if she had not helped us.’¹⁸

The Gypsy and Traveller community sometimes lack knowledge about their rights and entitlements to housing, and how advice services can help them secure these rights.¹⁹ For Gypsies and Travellers wishing to live in bricks-and-mortar housing, the availability of advice and information services is important for them to understand the complexities of the housing system, to access appropriate support and maintain their tenancies. Those participating in focus groups identified a range of ways they currently access advice services. They had mainly accessed informal advice from members of their own community, but they had also used a range of statutory and voluntary organisations. For some, the advice they received enabled them to move into accommodation of their choice, find out about any benefit entitlement, and find schools for their children. For others, the experience was more negative. Services need to monitor their users to see how effective their services are and if they are being used. This data should enable them to target their services and make them more accessible.

Good practice example: Thames Valley Gypsy and Traveller Advice Project

The Gypsy and Traveller Advice Project is a new pilot service run by Shelter. It aims to increase awareness of housing rights, and to help clients make better use of both Shelter and other mainstream services. Based in Slough Housing Advice Centre, it is staffed by one full-time and one part-time adviser. It offers high-quality housing advice delivered by these dedicated specialists. As well as advice on issues such as security of tenure on official sites and evictions from unauthorised encampments, it also aims to support housed Travellers or those wanting to move into bricks-and-mortar housing. The areas covered include

‘The council seemed to make everything difficult. They should tell you in advance what you need to bring with you to make a claim for a benefit.’

Female New Traveller

‘They don’t help you at all. They know we can’t read and write but they still keep sending the forms out.’

Female English Gypsy

Accessibility

Travellers experience the same problems attending advice sessions as other excluded groups, including limited opening times, a lack of public transport in rural areas, and the fact that they may have caring or childcare responsibilities. However, they might also struggle with poor literacy skills and come across advice workers who have very little understanding of their culture.

homelessness applications, defending possession proceedings, domestic violence and repairs.

Clients are referred to the project by voluntary agencies working with Gypsies and Travellers, including Friends, Families and Travellers; the Travellers Advice Team; the English Gypsy Council and regional Citizens Advice Bureaux. In the first instance, advice is provided over the phone. This can then be followed up by a series of face-to-face interviews if the problem is ongoing.

The project delivers short training courses on housing and homelessness to the referral agencies, and also holds informal sessions with Gypsies and Travellers about basic housing and planning issues. These sessions take place either on sites, or in local community premises.

¹⁸ Young Roma Gypsies talking about the importance of the advice and information they received from The Children’s Society.

¹⁹ Michael Bell Associates, *The advice gap: a study of barriers to housing advice for people from black and minority ethnic communities*, Shelter, 2007.

There are several strategies that services can adopt in order to improve Travellers' access to advice.

- Provide outreach surgeries. These should be organised so that they promote an integrated service within the wider community, rather than encourage separation.
- Offer free transport to isolated Travellers or older people.
- Set up a telephone advice service.
- Offer out-of-hours advice sessions.

For example, in Dorset, Purbeck District Council arranges for housing officers to visit sites in remote rural areas, offering help and advice on filling in forms. They then provide ongoing telephone support so that applicants are able to keep up to date with progress. This face-to-face contact has enabled Travellers to build up a relationship with a housing officer and discuss their needs more fully.

Travellers have said that they are not always clear if advice is free or would have to be paid for, which has put them off approaching services. Not-for-profit advice providers need to advertise their services more widely, to ensure that potential clients are aware that they will not be charged.

Targeted advice services

In recognition of the invisibility and marginalisation of Gypsies and Travellers, in some areas there is a need for targeted advice services. This may involve having a specialist adviser in the housing advice centre, setting up outreach surgeries, or running a dedicated helpline. However, there is an ongoing debate as to whether or not the provision of specialist

advice services leads to mainstream services neglecting to ensure that they can also provide for Gypsies and Travellers. Building the capacity of community and faith groups working with housed Travellers, by offering them training on housing rights and casework support, is another option to target services if resources are limited. They will then be able to provide basic housing advice, and the more complex cases can be referred to specialist agencies.

Flexibility and building trust

Trust can be built by making real efforts to develop flexible, accessible and welcoming services; involving and/or recruiting community members; and ensuring staff are trained in cultural awareness and their responsibilities under the Race Relations Act 1976. Racism and patronising attitudes were identified as factors preventing Gypsies and Travellers from using services. For communities marginalised from mainstream services, the issue of trust is key to developing good relationships. Traveller support workers identified that once good relationships have been established, the extended family will make more use of a service and feel more able to discuss their support needs. This, in turn, will encourage other Travellers to request help or get involved.

In addition, the Gypsies and Travellers who Shelter consulted in its focus groups said that holding drop-in sessions or telephoning people to remind them of appointments are good ways to ensure people get to advice sessions.

Good practice example: Robert Barton Trust, Glastonbury

Glastonbury has traditionally attracted a number of New Travellers in unauthorised encampments, low impact developments and houses. The Robert Barton Trust is a voluntary organisation and its flexibility has been a key factor in its success in working with this group.

The three full-time workers provide generic advice but have their own areas of expertise, including housing, sites and benefits, health support, and skills and training. Services can be accessed through the drop-in clinic, by appointment or through outreach visits to the Traveller's house or site. The Trust has good links to other statutory and voluntary organisations in the area, and are able to refer clients on to more specialist support if needed.

The project also offers:

- a community space and café
- a shower and washing machine
- volunteering opportunities for the community
- a counselling service
- facilities for other agencies to meet or contact clients.

The Trust has established a strong awareness of the cultural needs of the travelling community, and positive images of the travelling lifestyle are displayed around the building. A current staff member is a Traveller, as are several volunteers at the project. One strength of the Trust is that it has been running for 10 years and, in this time, has established a good reputation in the local area.

Conventional housing

Most Gypsies and Travellers do not move into bricks-and-mortar housing by choice. The majority would prefer to remain on site. There are number of reasons for moving away from sites:

- a chronic shortage of suitable pitches
- overcrowding
- the site may be rundown or poorly maintained, or there may be a lack of adequate amenities (eg electricity, running water, sanitation)
- the trailer no longer meets health needs, it may not be accessible to a resident with disabilities
- for easier access to education, health or social services
- a need for security of tenure (many families find the stress of living on unauthorised sites unbearable)
- domestic violence, or threats and harassment from other residents.

'I haven't really adjusted to it (living a house). I lived on site for 15 years but feel isolated now. I spend a lot of time back on site and where my eldest son lives.'²⁰

Local authorities and other agencies can work with Gypsies and Travellers to address some of these issues so that they can remain on site – for example, help with transport for regular hospital appointments. It may also be possible to work with the local health and social services, to adapt trailers or provide care on site for older or Travellers with disabilities.

Many allocations are made as a result of a homelessness application. In these cases bricks-and-mortar accommodation is not always suitable. Some Travellers will have a cultural aversion to conventional properties, and the adverse reaction they might experience by being placed in this type of housing

makes it 'unsuitable' within the homelessness legislation framework.²¹ In these instances, the local authority will need to find alternatives, for example a trailer on a site. This need for applicants to be offered suitable accommodation is supported by case law, and assessing people's needs should be part of any application, for both emergency accommodation and mainstream allocation.²²

Many housed Travellers that Shelter consulted, recalled the shock of moving into settled accommodation. The stress and anxiety resulting from a complete change in lifestyle and feelings of isolation commonly cause mental health problems, so any measures that can be taken to reduce this should be considered (see section on Health and housing on page 27).

For Roma Gypsies, it is a slightly different situation, as they are used to living in housing, having been forced to do so for generations. However, anecdotal evidence shows that they still have nomadic lifestyles, reflected in their frequent moves between addresses, which clearly will have an impact on their access and engagement with support services.

Social housing

Assessments of housing needs have shown that most Gypsies and Travellers in bricks-and-mortar housing rent from a social landlord. Studies, including Shelter's, have also shown that those considering a move to settled accommodation, or who are currently living in the private rented sector, would prefer to rent from social landlords.²³ Gypsies and Travellers need to have more opportunities to find out about the structure of the social housing system. Local authorities and housing associations can promote this by encouraging them to join residents groups, and ensuring that there is information available that is accessible to the community.

20 New Traveller who moved into a house for health reasons and to enable his children to attend school.

21 Greenfields, M, and Clark, C, *Here to stay: Gypsies and Travellers of Britain*, University of Hertfordshire Press, 2006.

22 *R v Carmarthenshire County Council, ex parte Price* [2003] EWHC 42.

23 As an example, *A study and assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers in South Yorkshire*, op cit.

To minimise the chances of a tenancy failing, social landlords need to take into consideration the cultural needs of Gypsies and Travellers when making allocations. Travellers often need larger properties to house their extended families, as well as gardens and sufficient space to allow vehicles and trailers needed for work and travelling. In Shelter's research, Travellers explained the need for a garden for children who are used to the freedom of a site, but also to allow fires. Respondents explained the sense of claustrophobia that living within four walls brought; they said they preferred housing with plenty of windows to allow them to see outside.

'We need outside space and more windows... [when you] live in a caravan you can see outside from all angles. I would like the same in a house. I need to go outside to escape and [some] rented ground for animals.'

Female English Gypsy

Social landlords could review their allocations policies to see how they can best cater for a Gypsy's and Traveller's cultural needs.

Travellers' needs require consideration at each stage of the housing process. Choice-based lettings are now the most common way of allocating social

housing. People with limited literacy skills will need help with making the application and the bidding process, to make sure this process is accessible to all, is covered in race relations legislation (see page 10).

When allocating a property to a Traveller, social landlords need to take into account any potential community issues. They should not provide properties where such groups face racism or harassment. Many of our respondents placed proximity to family members, and others who share their culture, at the top of their list of priorities. Studies (eg *Common ground*) have also shown that Gypsies and Travellers are concerned about bullying in schools. They need to be able to send children to a school where Travellers' needs are acknowledged and addressed, and where there is an existing Traveller presence. It is important that the school environment supports Gypsy and Traveller children in order to sustain school attendance.

There needs to be a full pre-tenancy assessment identifying any existing issues that might make tenancy failure more likely, for instance the need for support to ensure bills are paid, or the need for the tenancy agreement to be presented in a way that someone with low literacy skills can understand. Housing officers should offer a referral to a housing support service when necessary.

Good practice example: Health Opportunities Promotion and Education (HOPE), Hillingdon

HOPE is a partnership-led project that aims to address the inequalities in health provision of three excluded groups – Travellers, refugees and asylum seekers, and single homeless people in the Hillingdon borough. The project is funded through the New Opportunity Fund, Hillingdon Primary Care Trust, Healthy Hillingdon and the local authority. Partners in the project include Hillingdon Traveller Support.

The project's focus is on use and access to health care, and the wider issues that affect health, such as accommodation and/or the environment that these communities occupy. It also improves access to employment, education and training opportunities.

Marginalised groups often find themselves living in private rented accommodation that is in need of repair. HOPE developed a health and safety housing assessment form to enable health visitors to assess housing hazards and safety issues effectively. The form is comprehensive and was designed with close reference to health and safety guidance. It has sections on a wide range of things, including fire safety, damp, ventilation and mould, overcrowding, heating and infestation.

Health visitors will produce a report, and HOPE tries to work with individual landlords to address any problems. The reports can be used by local authorities and others to take action against landlords, or to refer tenants to other services. The assessment also takes into consideration legislation on disability discrimination so that action can be taken to secure the legal rights of disabled people to suitable housing.

Housing staff

Some of our interviewees felt they had been discriminated against by some social landlords or housing officers. Those who complained of problems with disrepair may have been unaware how slow this system can be, but the experiences of others were more difficult to explain away. One respondent, the tenant of a housing association in a city with a large proportion of its population from BME groups, felt that her housing officer victimised her. She felt that the attention she received from the officer about vehicles and animals amounted to harassment – no complaints had been received from her neighbours, who had actually begun to petition in her support.

One Gypsy worker felt the housing officer working with one of her service users was actually preventing her from travelling: the officer was threatening her with eviction (presumably on the grounds of abandonment) if she was absent from her property for longer than two weeks at a time. Regardless of how likely this threat was to be carried out, the end result was that the service user felt increased anxiety and that she could no longer continue her culture.

It is important that social landlords and their workers are aware of how cultural characteristics will affect the behaviour and needs of Gypsy and Traveller tenants. Where rules and regulations might impinge on Gypsy and Traveller behaviour, they should be reviewed or at least applied with greater sensitivity. Clearly, staff must gain an insight into the cultures of all their tenants through adequate training and management support. Where there are instances of victimisation or harassment, action must be taken.

Private rented sector

With increasing shortages in the supply of social housing, many Travellers are finding themselves moving into, or remaining in, the private rented sector. The assessment of accommodation needs in South Yorkshire suggested that the private rented sector was the last resort (after sites and social housing) for local Gypsies and Travellers.

Private rented sector housing has minimal security of tenure, and disrepair problems are much more common. East European Roma, often with no recourse to public funds or other help because of immigration issues, are particularly vulnerable to unscrupulous private rented sector landlords. In South Yorkshire concerns have been expressed about Roma having no choice, due to a lack of options, but to live in unsuitable, overcrowded and poorly repaired accommodation, often at high rents.²⁴

When there are incidents of harassment from private landlords, local authorities should take any incidents seriously and make use of enforcement powers through the tenancy relations service. Publicising any action that is taken will increase the level of trust Gypsies and Travellers place in the authorities, and will show other landlords that discrimination will not be tolerated.

Local authorities should consider compiling a list of trusted and reasonable landlords who are more aware of the needs of Travellers and will liaise with the council and other services if there are problems with the tenancy or with neighbours. There is a need for cross-agency working, and for advice and floating support in the private sector to be aimed not just at Travellers who have become private tenants, but also at their landlords.

New initiatives

Aside from the mainstream tenures discussed above, there are some new developments in providing suitable bricks-and-mortar housing for Gypsies and Travellers. Local authorities and other organisations could explore these, in order to expand the range of choices offered. The following initiatives are rarely found in England, but it is worth discussing their feasibility with community members.

Group housing

Local authorities could look at group housing as one possible option. This form of social housing has been adopted in Ireland, and attempts to replicate many of the features of a site. Residents are given as much say as possible in the design of the properties, which are usually bungalows. The schemes are small in scale, typically eight homes that a single extended family can live in, as this is how many Travellers would choose to live. They offer the convenience and accessibility of bungalow accommodation but in site-style living arrangements. Therefore, it is particularly suitable for families with older or disabled people, as it allows them to continue to live in a supportive environment where family members can provide care. Not all Gypsy and Traveller communities favour this type of scheme, so it is important to consult the community in advance of developing proposals.

²⁴ Horton, M, and Grayson, J, *Slovak Roma people in Sheffield: briefing and research report*, AdEd Knowledge Company, 2007.

Self-build

The Government has been interested in self-build schemes for some years, as an alternative way to meet housing demand. This type of initiative could be extended to Gypsies and Travellers, as they often have the skills required to build their own housing.

Local authorities could provide assistance in dealing with the planning procedure, securing low-cost loans (especially for those whose working practices mean they find it hard to get credit), and encouraging shared ownership schemes. Again, many people in the travelling community will not want to live in this type of housing, but for those who do, it could have

many benefits. If Gypsies and Travellers are involved in designing and building their own properties, they are more likely to feel comfortable living there. In addition, schemes of this type can have a positive impact on local community relations.

Good practice example – multi-agency assessment, Cornwall County Council

Cornwall County Council employs a social worker for Gypsies and Travellers. Part of this role is to co-ordinate a consistent multi-agency approach to assessing the needs of Travellers on unauthorised sites in Cornwall. Drawing on the expertise of other agencies the assessment covers welfare, health, and education needs (WHEN). Part of this assessment identifies accommodation needs and Travellers are supported to make a homelessness application and their accommodation options are discussed.

In Cornwall, there is a health visitor for Gypsies and Travellers and an Equality and Diversity Traveller Education team. There is also a dedicated Gypsy

and Traveller adult social care team, consisting of a Gypsy and Traveller liaison officer, a site manager, and two support workers (one of whom is from the Romany Gypsy community).

Working alongside this team is a social worker, also employed by Adult Social Care, who has a remit to work with children, young people, families and adults in the Gypsy and Traveller community. Any issues identified in the WHEN assessment by Gypsies and Travellers about their accommodation and homelessness situation would be referred to appropriate dedicated team members to enable Gypsies and Travellers to access appropriate mainstream services.

Tenancy support

When Gypsies and Travellers move into housing from sites, they often struggle to maintain their tenancies. Without appropriate support and help, the tenancy may break down, and the family or individual might become homeless and vulnerable to all the problems this can cause. In recent studies, the following have been identified as the most common reasons for the breakdown in tenancies held by Gypsies and Travellers²⁵:

- an inability to settle into housing
- problems with neighbours
- isolation from family and friends
- a desire to move to a caravan site
- budgeting problems and/or rent arrears
- harassment.

Shelter's research mirrored these findings, and found the problems to be interlinked. For example, inability

to settle into housing can lead to problems with neighbours which, in turn, can lead to harassment. People also found that the things that might help them feel at home in a house, such as having family and friends around them, could be seen as antisocial behaviour by their neighbours.

'We have a lot of visitors, and the council came around to investigate because neighbours were saying my mother was a prostitute. Just because we had a lot of people round!'

Female English Gypsy

Roma Gypsies are more used to living in housing, but still have nomadic ways, so will move more frequently – this will have an impact on the effectiveness of tenancy support services. They often face hostility from neighbours because of their ethnic origin, and

Good practice example: Haringey Travelling People's Team

Haringey Council in north London is almost unique (there is a similar service in Cornwall) in having a statutory social work team that deals exclusively with Gypsies and Travellers.

There are approximately 2,500 Travellers in Haringey, mainly of Irish background but with increasing numbers of Roma. Most of the population is in conventional housing, and this group is the main focus for the team's work.

The team works closely with other statutory and voluntary agencies, and provides regular drop-in sessions. Most importantly, it focuses on building trust and respect through offering a flexible service that sensitively responds to clients at all times.

The team offers support, advice, advocacy and liaison in:

- access to appropriate housing
- maintenance of tenancies and licences
- welfare benefits, arrears and budgeting
- neighbour harassment and discrimination

- isolation from friends and extended families
- problems with settling into bricks-and-mortar accommodation
- access to culture-specific support services, health services, education, and training and employment.

Much of the work of the team is about preventing eviction. The team provides a valuable bridge between Travellers, housing services and landlords, advocating on the tenant's behalf.

The team works closely with the council's antisocial behaviour team to deal with disputes at an early stage, and is in close contact with police and youth offending teams. It also increasingly seeks to involve Travellers directly in planning services for the community, and addresses social exclusion through community development and casework.

Innovative initiatives include training the women's group to work with consultants researching the housing needs of Travellers across London. The group has advised on methodology and piloted survey questionnaires, and Haringey Travellers have also been recruited and trained as interviewers.

²⁵ Irish Traveller Movement, *A good practice guide for involving Travellers in housing*, 2007, quoting an earlier study – Niner, *Availability and quality of local authority Gypsy/Traveller sites in England*, 2003.

language problems will exacerbate any difficulties they have in dealing with landlords.

Until recently, any help offered with tenancy support has come from specialist Gypsy and Traveller organisations that provide a wide spectrum of services. Many of these reported to Shelter that housing issues made up the bulk of their work. However, these organisations simply do not have the resources or funding to provide ‘tenancy support packages’ in a comprehensive way.

Supporting People funding has enabled some local authorities to develop specialist tenancy support schemes for Gypsies and Travellers. There are not many such schemes at the moment, but they are slowly becoming more widespread. Most are run in conjunction with housing associations or voluntary groups, and are able to offer help across a range of tenancies, including the private rented sector. The most commonly offered kind of support is floating support, where families or individuals are offered help for between six months and three years. The most effective schemes provide support plans, which help clients to develop at their own pace and eventually feel confident enough to move on.

Given the potential vulnerability of Travellers, social landlords need to carry out pre-tenancy interviews

to establish what potential pitfalls to tenancy sustainment exist and then offer full advice and assistance, including effective referrals. Many Gypsies and Travellers new to bricks-and-mortar housing face the difficult task of maintaining a tenancy given their often low literacy skills and unfamiliarity with paying utility bills and rent.

Gypsies and Travellers taking up a council or housing authority tenancy should be informed about available support in a culturally sensitive way. A preliminary interview before a tenancy begins can be an effective way of identifying potential problems before they occur, and ensuring that support is provided where necessary.

Local authorities should also assess the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in private rented housing and those living in temporary accommodation.

‘Eventually we got a brilliant tenancy support officer, but we needed to get to absolute crisis before we got one. I could phone him and say “look I can’t hack this, I need to go away for a few months” and he would keep things going.’

Female New Traveller

Good practice example: Traveller Floating Support Service (Hereford Housing Support Service)

The Traveller Floating Support Service (TFSS) is run by Shelter and funded by Supporting People. It works with housed Travellers and those on sites who want, or need, to move into housing. It was set up as a specialist project within the wider Hereford Housing Support Service (HHSS), because Gypsies and Travellers accounted for 10 per cent of casework, and tended to have larger families and more complex problems. A needs analysis undertaken by the local Traveller liaison service indicated particular areas where members of the travelling community needed support (ranked in order of need):

- gaining access to other services and community organisations
- finding accommodation
- culture-specific counselling/emotional support/advocacy
- harassment
- managing finances and benefit claims
- personal safety and security.

The TFSS consists of one worker with experience of working with Travellers, and other HHSS staff help out occasionally as necessary. Referrals come from local organisations, but around 30 to 40 per cent are self-referrals. Those accepted onto the scheme can expect to receive:

- an initial needs and risks assessment
- a benefits check and support to access entitlements
- a detailed, individually tailored support plan
- regular support plan reviews (at least quarterly).

The service expects to work with families/individuals for approximately one year, depending on the needs of the client. The small client base of TFSS reflects the complex and deep-seated issues that Gypsies and Travellers face, such as widespread difficulties with basic skills, an inherent cultural invisibility, and the isolation and confusion of adapting to a settled lifestyle. Project workers need to support clients in overcoming the barriers they deal with daily in accessing mainstream services.

An essential element of the support worker’s role is to interact with other agencies and promote joint working. Links are made with Traveller-specific workers, such as the local Traveller liaison officer and Traveller education officer, and also with mainstream services, such as housing and health.

Community cohesion/ neighbour relations

Throughout Shelter's consultation with housed Gypsies and Travellers, they spoke of conflict within the communities they had moved to. In some instances, issues with neighbours were cited as a reason why tenancies broke down and people moved back out onto the road.

'Nobody wants Gypsies and Travellers as neighbours. They complain about the noise, that the children are in the street, that there are too many of them, too many people in and out of the house all the time. Community cohesion is hard to achieve.'

Roma support worker, London

Despite the substantial increase in race relations legislation, Gypsies and Travellers are still experiencing discrimination of the most overt kind. Racism against Gypsies and Travellers is still regarded as socially acceptable and can fuel the discrimination they face. Voluntary organisations working with housed Irish Travellers report discrimination within housing and homeless services provided by local authorities, and in local communities.²⁶

'One of my neighbours, when my kids are playing outside, she brings her kids in.'

Female housed Gypsy, Bromley

The responsibilities of public bodies

Local authorities, police, health authorities and central Government have specific duties to prepare and publish a race equality scheme. As part of this, they are obliged to monitor the impact of existing policies on race equality, and set out arrangements for consulting and assessing the impact of new and proposed policies on race equality. This means

that local authorities should assess the impact of their policies on Gypsies and Travellers and use the findings to inform future policies and practice.

Strong local leadership is important in giving a lead to all staff and partnership agencies on challenging discrimination and racism. Both employees and councillors need to be aware of their statutory duty to promote race relations and race equality, and that Gypsies and Travellers are covered by that requirement. Different departments within a local authority need to follow the same agenda and partner bodies, such as housing associations, the police and health services, need to have a clear strategic direction. Gypsies and Travellers should be included in all local authority strategies that promote community cohesion.

Good practice example: South Cambridge District Council

As part of their Community Safety Strategy 2005–2008, South Cambridgeshire District Council included an aim to promote community cohesion between Gypsies and Travellers and the settled community. To meet this aim, they drew up a list of objectives covering issues with communication, crime, cultural awareness for agencies, and the accessibility of services.²⁷ In partnership with The Ormiston Children and Families Trust, the council are working with the travelling community to produce a leaflet that quashes myths about Gypsies and Travellers.

²⁶ Power, C, *Room to roam: England's Irish Travellers*, 2004, section 1.3.

²⁷ www.scambs.gov.uk/Environment/Travellerissues/communityrelations.htm

Media

‘Poor quality reporting, which exploits or panders to stereotypes, can cause much harm to those about whom the stories are written. By repeating false and negative stereotypes the media can encourage bad practice on the part of those whom Travellers and Gypsies deal with and can validate the expression of language and attitudes which in other circumstances would be seen as totally unacceptable.’²⁸

Local authorities need to be prepared to challenge inaccurate and unfair coverage of the Gypsy and Traveller communities in their local area. Working with Traveller groups and their representatives can help to implement an effective media strategy. Promoting positive images and giving Gypsies and Travellers a voice, and more accurate representation, will help to counteract any negative coverage.

Multi-agency working and community involvement

‘In the experience of the Safer Communities Initiative the most productive work in promoting good race relations tends to be done when groups work together in partnership, as members of multi-agency forums.’²⁹

Inter-agency forums, including a range of voluntary and statutory services, as well as Gypsies and Travellers, are an effective way of working in partnership to promote community cohesion. They provide an opportunity to monitor the local situation and to share developments and community concerns, and can be the catalyst for the development of specialist services and community events. Travellers taking part in the consultations felt that having community ‘fun days’ were a good way to get neighbours together to celebrate diversity, and for people to find out more about each other and their ways of life.

Allocations

Local authorities need to recognise the hostility that Gypsies and Travellers face in the settled community, and the likelihood of racial harassment. Steps need to be put in place to counter the discrimination that housed Travellers may face, including high quality training for staff, a clear complaints procedure for people with low levels of literacy, and a zero tolerance approach to racism. Allocations policies need to take into account levels of racism and antisocial behaviour to ensure that Gypsies and Travellers are not housed in areas where they might become victims of hate crime.

The Shelter consultation clearly identified that community tension was increased where Gypsies and Travellers were living in accommodation that did not meet their needs. Young families placed in blocks of flats with older people, Roma gypsies living in overcrowded private rented accommodation, and large numbers of visitors that put tenancy agreements in jeopardy, were all highlighted as increasing tensions that led to tenancy breakdowns in some instances.

Antisocial behaviour and hate crime

For many Gypsies and Travellers, their experience of the police force has been limited to enforcement and evictions. The feeling that police have disproportionately targeted Traveller sites has compounded this lack of trust. Gypsies and Travellers are thought more often to be the victims of crime than the perpetrators. However, their under-reporting of crime makes this difficult to investigate thoroughly. Throughout the consultations, there was a clear reluctance to contact the police or use any other official channels, even in instances where homes had been petrol bombed or attacked by local vigilantes.

²⁸ CRE, *Travellers, Gypsies and the media – a good practice guide from the Commission for Racial Equality*, 1998.

²⁹ CRE, *Safer Communities Initiative*, 2006.

'If there is a problem involving a Traveller lots of police are called whereas if it was a member of the settled community there would only be one car.'

Gypsy and Irish Traveller focus group, Bromley

Police forces need to build positive relations with Gypsies and Travellers and promote more positive relations with the settled community. Local authorities, in collaboration with the police, should monitor instances of antisocial behaviour and crime against housed Gypsies and Travellers, and publicise how these instances have been dealt with. This would

encourage more people to report incidents to the authorities. Ensuring the police and housing staff have a clearer understanding of the racism and hate crimes experienced by Travellers moving into housing will also increase trust and step up the levels of reporting. In addition, the information gathered through monitoring can be used to develop a preventative strategy that housing providers, community groups and the police can adopt.

**Good practice example:
Teyluva Children's Centre, St Day, Cornwall**

TravellerSpace, an independent organisation, set up the St Day Gypsy and Traveller Women's Group with the involvement of a Traveller health visitor. It is based at the Children's Centre and benefits both agencies, as it encourages more Travellers to use other services the Children's Centre offers.

The women's group is used by all sectors of the travelling community and, for those who are living in bricks-and-mortar housing, it is an important link to other Travellers. For people living on unauthorised encampments or authorised sites, it is an opportunity to find out about their accommodation and housing options.

This approach has been positive for the Children's Centre as they have developed better relations with the travelling community and their services are more accessible. A Traveller is now on its steering group; there has been a greater take up of services, such as the baby clinic; and

Travellers are using the centre for family learning opportunities and other meetings.

'I'm amazed at how the group has grown – we have 25 people here some weeks. We have had the opportunity to build good relationships with the Gypsies and Travellers who come along, which means we are in a better position to address their needs. We can read letters, make phone calls, or simply ensure that the service providers needed attend the group. Sometimes all people want is a chat, because they haven't seen anyone all week – or they just want to touch base with their community.'

Caroline Dann, Senior Gypsy and Traveller Support Worker, TravellerSpace

Health and housing

Health needs

There has been little research into the health needs of Gypsies and Travellers, and information on those living in conventional housing is scant. However, marked health-related inequalities between the travelling community and the general population are acknowledged. Gypsies and Travellers are more likely to suffer from health problems than other minority communities. The British Medical Association has stated that they die younger (on average 10 to 12 years sooner) and have the highest infant mortality rates of all ethnic groups in the UK, recent studies suggesting that one in five Gypsy and Traveller women have lost a child.³⁰ A recent report found that only 11 studies have been published in the UK exploring Gypsy and Traveller health.

‘The evidence from these studies suggest high infant mortality and perinatal death rates, low birthweight, low immunisation uptake and high child accident rate.’³¹

Many Gypsies and Travellers are forced to move into mainstream housing because of ill health. However, this can also have an adverse effect on their health, in particular, their mental health.

‘In most cases, levels of ill health and extreme stress are allowed to build up to the point of physical and mental breakdown before the Traveller concerned will even consider the idea of moving into housing. Unfortunately, due to the difficulties faced once housed, mental and physical health rarely improves and cases of suicide have been reported due to severe depression following a move into housing.’³²

‘For Gypsy Travellers living in a house is associated with long-term illness, poorer health state and anxiety. Those who rarely travel have the poorest health.’³³

There are a number of health issues that might lead people into mainstream housing, including:

- the need to be close to a GP, clinic or hospital for ongoing treatment
- poorly maintained sites, eg with rat infestations or lack of electricity
- physical disabilities and a reluctance, or inability, to provide adaptations and services on site to allow Travellers to remain there
- age-related problems, eg lessening mobility
- poor child health.

One Shelter interviewee noted how the practical aspects of living on a site were too much for her husband (in chronic ill health) to be able to deal with.

‘[My husband] wouldn’t be able to live in a trailer now. He’d need help getting up and down the steps, for one thing. Then the beds are awful narrow, and he gets dizzy. I’d be afraid of him falling out. A flat is the best place for us now.’

Female Irish Traveller living with her husband in a ground floor flat

Travellers living on sites will have direct access to outdoor space and will be able to interact socially with their site neighbours. They will be used to living on one level, and having everything they need for every day living well organised and to hand. Getting used to a living space that is physically very different can be hard – for example, one interviewee’s husband refused to go upstairs in their house for a period of six months. Several people mentioned claustrophobia, and feelings of being shut up.

30 Research team, Chief Executive’s Office, Rotherham MBC, *Analysis of the Gypsy and Traveller community in Rotherham*, 2007.

31 Parry, G, van Cleemput, P, Peters, J, Moore, J, Walters, S, Thomas, K, and Cooper, C, *The health status of Gypsies and Travellers in England*, University of Sheffield, 2004.

32 Friends, Families and Travellers, www.gypsy-traveller.org

33 *The health status of Gypsies and Travellers in England*, op cit.

‘Put a Traveller in a house, you might as well put them in a prison.’

Female Irish Traveller, Shelter interview

Many interviewees mentioned mental health issues, such as depression and stress. For women, the onset of depression was often associated with loss of social networks and lack of help and advice from other women in the community, eg around childcare issues. A number of organisations highlighted the issue of how moving into housing affects men’s mental health. There is anecdotal evidence to suggest that the incidence of depression and even suicide among Gypsy and Traveller men is much higher than average.

‘Men suffer a lot when they move into housing. The traditional role of the man is to make money and to look after his family. On the site they’re outdoors a lot, doing business, meeting up with the other men. When the traditional way of life goes, it makes them depressed, they don’t know what they’re supposed to do anymore. We know the levels of depression and even suicide for Gypsy men is much higher than for men in the settled community.’

Worker from a Gypsy and Traveller organisation

How much a feeling of a lack of control and choice in relation to accommodation influences people’s health came up in a study by the University of Sheffield.

‘Accommodation was the overriding factor... in the context of health effects... for most respondents the ability to choose their style of accommodation and to decide for themselves whether, or how, they continue to live a traditional travelling lifestyle is of fundamental importance and crucial to their sense of independence and autonomy.’³⁴

Being isolated from the community when ill was also raised as an issue by a number of people that Shelter interviewed.

‘In a caravan some of the young girls, they’d come in and clean up and cook. I could just sit back. But in a house, there’s no-one.’

Female Irish Traveller

Health practitioners

The relationship between Gypsies and Travellers and health practitioners is a mixed one. One Shelter interviewee praised ‘... my health visitor, who helped me to get out of the flat I was in’. The flat was small and damp, and the interviewee’s young child was suffering. However, another interviewee was ‘[threatened] by the midwife that my children would be taken into care when I had a baby with scoliosis (damage to the spine)’.

Some interviewees found it difficult to get GPs or dentists to put them on their registers. They could not be entirely sure that this was due to their ethnic identity, although most suspected this was the case. Where those in temporary accommodation did manage to access good services and build up relationships with doctors, dentists and health visitors, when they were moved on they had to start the process all over again.

There was general agreement that most health practitioners knew little about the Gypsy and Traveller history and culture. Some people felt there should be specialist workers for the community, while others felt that mainstream health staff should be able to increase their cultural awareness and treat them with respect. Where a specialist worker was in place, most comments were positive.

However, among Gypsies and Travellers, support agencies and specialist health workers, there was some suspicion that where a specialist was in place, mainstream workers sometimes felt they did not need to improve their cultural awareness.

‘They feel it is covered, and sometimes even try to get you to collude in their negative attitudes towards Gypsies and Travellers.’

Specialist health visitor

³⁴ *The health status of Gypsies and Travellers in England*, op cit.

Good practice example: health inclusion worker for Gypsies and Travellers, City and Hackney NHS Trust

The City and Hackney Health Reference Group in London was set up to look at the particular health issues Gypsies and Travellers in Hackney faced, and to ensure that there were appropriate services. Members of the group include the local primary care trust, the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Hackney Homes, the Health Protection Agency and the Traveller Education Service.

The group recommended the creation of a new post, one with a strategic as well as 'hands on' remit – the health inclusion worker post. The post covers three main areas of work: developing and evaluating services, increasing access to services, and advocating for the Gypsy and Traveller community. Housed Gypsies and Travellers account for approximately 50 per cent of the health inclusion worker's clients.

The post-holder liaises closely with the Travellers service development officer, based within Hackney Homes, and also other members of the reference group, which means the services are developed jointly and the solutions are shared between the organisations.

Projects that the health inclusion worker works on, include:

- conducting a health needs assessment, so gaps in services and health priorities can be identified
- developing a health literacy programme for Travellers, including health promotion and self-management education resources for non-readers
- developing an information booklet and intranet page about Gypsies and Travellers for health professionals
- conducting a staff survey within provider services on their beliefs, attitudes to, and understanding of Gypsy and Traveller culture. Information gathered will be used to develop equality, diversity and cultural competence training.

A recent typical case involved an older couple that had moved into housing as a result of health problems and their need for carers. They were not happy with the agency providing the carers, because they tended to get a different carer every day who was generally unaware of the Gypsy and Traveller culture. The health inclusion worker supported the couple with the difficulties they had adjusting to settled housing, and helped them to arrange for a family member to become their official carer.

More evidence of the effects of bricks-and-mortar housing on the community's health is needed before strategies can be put into place. However, the connection between mainstream housing and worsening mental health appears to be sufficiently established to demand closer scrutiny. In the meantime, local authorities and health services need to look at improved ways of meeting the needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers.

Recommendations

For many English Gypsies and Irish Travellers, conventional housing will not be suitable in the long term. Local authorities need to prioritise their provision of sites so that people have a real choice about where to live.

In addition to the recommendations made below, as the rest of the guide has highlighted, cultural awareness training needs to be provided across a wide range of organisations, including local authorities, the police, health trusts and social services. This training should ideally come from representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

Legal duties

- Local authorities should regularly update their assessments of accommodation needs. They should consider both site provision and the needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers.
- Local authorities and other agencies must fulfil their duties under race relations legislation with regard to Gypsies and Irish Travellers.
- Homelessness strategies should be reviewed to see how they address the problems faced by Gypsies and Travellers, and check what action is being taken.

Identification and consultation

- Service providers should include Gypsies and Travellers in any monitoring systems.
- Local authorities should work closely with local Gypsy and Traveller organisations in order to make contact with housed Gypsies and Travellers.
- Materials should be produced in a non-written format, where necessary and appropriate.
- Local authorities should establish a Gypsy and Traveller Forum, with community representatives.
- Local authority staff could attend community events where Gypsies and Travellers will be – and consider providing one-off outreach services or consultation stalls.

- Service providers should also consider running open days or one-off drop-in sessions to consult with the community.
- Frontline agencies could work with community members to set up peer consultations.
- Consultation exercises should always have clear systems to ensure confidentiality and anonymity are maintained, and the community should receive feedback.

Advice and information

- Local authorities could provide outreach surgeries for communities where Gypsies and Travellers live, so that they are more integrated.
- Providers should consider providing specialist services and/or building the capacity of Gypsy and Traveller organisations, but it is important that mainstream agencies are still improved to make them accessible to community members.
- Advice services in the not-for-profit sector should publicise that their services are free.

Conventional housing

- There should be accessible information available on social housing and how it is allocated.
- Local authorities should compile a list of trusted private landlords.
- Providers of housing support services should work with Gypsies and Travellers living in all tenures, and offer support to landlords too.
- Social landlords should make sensitive lettings, having regard to the proximity to other Gypsies and Travellers and ‘community friendly’ services and schools.
- Consultation on the development of other options, such as group housing or self-build schemes, should be considered.

Tenancy support

- Housing providers should carry out pre-tenancy assessments and offer ongoing support to Gypsies and Travellers.
- Local authorities should monitor the reasons for, and rates of, tenancies breaking down that are held by Gypsies and Travellers.
- The possibility of a specialist Gypsy and Traveller tenancy support service should be investigated.
- Support providers should acknowledge the different experiences of individual Gypsy and Traveller groups, and develop their services accordingly.
- Gypsies and Travellers should have access to a resettlement service, whether they are moving from bricks-and-mortar housing to a site or vice versa.
- The cultural needs of Gypsies and Travellers need to be taken into account when allocating housing – eg space to park vehicles.

Community cohesion

- All Gypsies and Travellers must be protected from harassment.
- Gypsies and Travellers should be encouraged to join residents' groups and other community forums.
- Abusive language or discriminatory views about Gypsies and Travellers should not be tolerated – either from staff or clients.
- Ways of bringing communities together should be investigated, and sources made available to help people find out more about Gypsy and Traveller culture and tradition.
- When working with the local media, local authorities should challenge negative stereotypes and promote positive images of Gypsies and Travellers.

Health and housing

- Health and housing professionals should receive training on health-related traditions of Gypsies and Travellers.
- Local consultations and/or research should be carried out into the health problems of those who are housed, particularly concerning mental health.
- A forum should be set up to focus on the health needs of housed Gypsies and Travellers.

Site provision

- Local authorities should increase site provision and improve facilities where necessary.
- Local authorities should explore ways of helping families to remain on site if that is their preferred option.
- Housing providers should consider offering services which can:
 - assess the practical and emotional support needs of each household wishing to return to sites
 - offer a befriending service for people moving to sites where they do not know anyone, to help them integrate into a new community
 - work with families or individuals on site, acting as 'community key workers' for the initial few weeks on a new site, or perhaps mediate in situations where the family/individual is returning to a site they left due to a dispute
 - ensure the site is secure and in a suitable location for the household
 - link with other advice and support agencies as necessary, for example to assist with support on claiming benefits and offer advice to Gypsies and Travellers on paying outstanding bills.

Useful contacts/further information

Brent Irish Advisory Service (BIAS)

The Old Library Building
Willesden Green Library Centre
95 High Road
London NW10 2SF
Tel: 020 8459 6655

Bromley Gypsy/Traveller Project

230 Sandway Road
St Mary Cray
Orpington
Kent BR5 3TF
Tel: 01689 839052

Cambridgeshire Travellers' Advocacy Service

Working for Travellers' Rights
Cambs Travellers Initiative
Travellers Advocacy Service
7e High Street
Fenstanton
Cambridgeshire PE28 9LQ
Tel: 01480 496577
Email: advocacy@ormiston.org
Web: www.ormiston.org/community/opus24.html

The Children's Society

Edward Rudolf House
Margery Street
London WC1X 0JL
Tel: 0845 300 1128

Derbyshire Gypsy Liaison Group (DGLG)

Ernest Bailey Community Centre
Office 3
New Street
Matlock DE4 3FE
Tel: 01629 583300
Web: www.dglg.org

Doncaster CVS

'Give us a Voice' Gypsy and Traveller forum
5-6 Trafford Court
Doncaster DN1 1PN
Tel: 01302 343300 (ext 280)

East Anglian Gypsy Council

Web: www.eagc.org.uk

Friends, Families and Travellers

Community Base
113 Queen's Road
Brighton
East Sussex BN1 3XG
Tel: 01273 234777
Email: fft@gypsy-traveller.org

Leeds GATE (Gypsy and Traveller Exchange)

Tel: 0113 240 2596
Email: info@leedsgate.co.uk

The Gypsy Council

Anne Bagehot
Tel: 01708 868986
Web: www.thegypsycouncil.org

Irish Community Care Merseyside: Working with Irish Travellers

Tel: 0151 707 4302

The Irish Traveller Movement (UK)

The Resource Centre
Holloway Road
London N7 6PA
Tel: 020 7607 2002
Fax: 020 7607 2005
Email: info@irishtraveller.org.uk

Leicester Gypsy Council Liaison Group

Rosevale House
Hinkley Road
Sapcote LE9 4LH
Tel: 07838 340371 (ask for Alfie Kefford, chairman)

London Gypsy Traveller Unit

Tel: 020 8533 2002
Web: www.lgtu.org.uk

National Federation of Gypsy Liaison Groups

Ernest Bailey Community Centre
New Street
Matlock DE4 3FE
Tel: 01629 760435
Email: nfgtlg@tiscali.co.uk
Web: www.nationalfederationgypsytraveller.org

National Romani Gypsy and Traveller Alliance

Email: nrgta@uk49.fsnet.co.uk
Roma Support Group
PO Box 23610
London E7 OXB
Email: roma@supportgroup.freeserve.co.uk
Web: www.romasupportgroup.org.uk

Sheffield Gypsy and Traveller Support Group

Tel: 0114 279 8236 (ask for Lorraine Gedge)
Email: Sheffieldgypsy.travellersupport@virgin.net

SPARC (Society for the Promotion and Advancement of Romany Culture)

Web: www.sparcnortheast.org.uk

Southwark Traveller Action Group (STAG)

The Peckham Settlement
Goldsmith Road
London SE15 5TF
Tel: 020 7639 1823
Fax: 020 7635 9830
Web: www.peckhamsettlement.org.uk

South West Alliance of Nomads (SWAN)

Sussex Traveller Action Group
Email: info@sussextag.org.uk
Web: www.sussextag.org.uk
Web: www.gypsytravellerhelp.org

Thames Valley Gypsy Association

Tel: 07963 565952 (ask for Joseph G Jones)
Web: www.gypsy-association.com

Travellers Consultancy Service

Freelance consultancy services in all areas affecting the Gypsy and Traveller community in the UK
Email: info@travellercs.co.uk
Web: www.travellercs.co.uk

Travellers Advice Team

(part of the Community Law Partnership)
4th Floor, Ruskin Chambers
191 Corporation Street
Birmingham B4 6RP
Advice line: 0845 120 2980
Tel: 0121 685 8595
Fax: 0121 236 5121
Email: office@communitylawpartnership.co.uk

The Traveller Law Reform Project

c/o London Gypsy and Traveller Unit
6 Westgate Street
London E8 3RN
Email: info@travellerslaw.org.uk
Web: www.travellerslaw.org.uk

TravellerSpace

Room 13, PCDT
Parade Street
Penzance
Cornwall TR18 4BU
Tel: 01736 334683
Email: travellerspace@yahoo.co.uk

Travellers' Times

The Rural Media Company
Sullivan House
72–80 Widemarsh Street
Hereford HR4 9HG
Tel: 01432 344039
Email: travellerstimes@ruralmedia.co.uk
Download Travellers Times at their website
<http://travellerstimes.org.uk>
Send your news and views to editor, Bill Laws, at
BillL@ruralmedia.co.uk

York Traveller Trust

Tel: 01904 630526 (ask for Christine Sheppard)

Everyone should have a home

We are the fourth richest country in the world, and yet millions of people in Britain wake up every day in housing that is run-down, overcrowded, or dangerous. Many others have lost their home altogether. Bad housing robs us of security, health, and a fair chance in life.

Shelter helps more than 170,000 people a year fight for their rights, get back on their feet, and find and keep a home. We also tackle the root causes of bad housing by campaigning for new laws, policies, and solutions.

Our website gets more than 100,000 visits a month; visit www.shelter.org.uk to join our campaign, find housing advice, or make a donation.

**We need your help to continue our work.
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88 Old Street
London EC1V 9HU

0845 458 4590
www.shelter.org.uk

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