



GOVERNMENT OFFICE  
FOR THE SOUTH EAST

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Dear Ms Fielder,

**HAVANT BOROUGH COUNCIL STATEMENT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT  
REGULATION 28 SUBMISSION**

Thank you for your letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> January 2006 enclosing the Havant Borough Council Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) Regulation 28 submission documents. We hope that you will find the following comments useful:

1. As previously mentioned in GOSE's comments at the Regulation 26 stage (dated 1<sup>st</sup> September 2005), it is good to see reference to your links with the Hampshire Compact (though the Compact timescales are different and cannot be met) and the principle of working with the local voluntary sector highlighted.
2. Since GOSE's comments in September 2005, when reference was made to the need to consult with the Gypsy and Traveller community, there has been an article published in the November issue of "*Inside Housing*" which offers some thoughts on alternative ways to consult and approach this community. I attach a copy of this for your information. Another contact to add to your list is the Traveller Education Service and your local office is found at Education Office, River Way, Havant PO9 2EL. Their telephone number if you need to speak with them is 023 9244 1440. ODPM has also just recently published several documents regarding gypsies and travellers, mainly on guidance on accommodation assessments and managing unauthorized camping, which your housing department will have received. These again might be able to highlight possible ways of consulting with this community.

3. You also mention the difficulties you have had in reaching the BME community and you may find consulting with PRENO (Portsmouth Race Equality Network Organisation) helpful. They work across Portsmouth and South East Hampshire and act as a representative forum for BME organisations. Using organizations who already access 'hard to reach groups' may prove a useful approach as outlined above, and for elderly and young people these can be reached through voluntary and community groups, schools and youth services.
4. The telephone number for obtaining copies of the SCI document in large print and other languages is very welcome and perhaps it could be made clearer that this service was available as one of your tools for all Council documents, if this is the case.
5. Finally, can I take the opportunity to remind you of the need to complete a Regulation 31 Statement in PINS template format at the end of the 6 week period.

I am happy to discuss the above if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

*M.C. O'Sullivan*

MARIE O'SULLIVAN

Assessing the housing needs of gypsies and travellers is no straightforward task.

**Phil Brown, Anya Ahmed and Andy Steele** suggest how best to approach the challenge

# Without prejudice

The phrase 'hard to reach' is now well established in the vocabulary of sustainable communities, most often when referring to certain black and minority ethnic communities.

Gypsies and travellers have historically been considered particularly hard to reach due in part to their invisibility in the census and a general lack of knowledge about their needs and aspirations.

It seems that bridging this gap and gaining knowledge about gypsies and travellers is confounded by fear and prejudice among the wider population, as public feeling often means that interests of the wider 'settled' community are seen as being at odds with their needs.

Such animosity towards gypsies and travellers is showing no signs of letting up. A MORI poll in 2001 showed that they were the groups people felt most prejudice towards, an interaction shown dramatically in the recent BBC3 documentary *Gypsy Wars*.

In a similar way to groups such as asylum seekers, gypsies and travellers have long lived with various negative labels and stereotypes such as scroungers, burdens and tax evaders.

However, regardless of perceptions, the facts are that many gypsies and travellers throughout the UK are living in often severe deprivation as a result of the increased restrictions affecting their movement and settlement.

This is mainly due to the effects of the Criminal Justice & Public Order Act 1994. The act aimed to give gypsies and travellers the opportunity to buy their own land but simultaneously took away the obligation on local authorities to create more sites for them. Constant planning refusals meant that many gypsies and travellers who bought land found themselves settling illegally and were liable for eviction.

Coupled with the increased powers of removal contained in the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, this has led to gypsies and travellers moving on from unauthorised encampment to unauthorised encampment and attracting more and more ill-feeling, prejudice and frustration.

But a new opportunity has been offered. The Housing Act 2004 responded to growing evidence that the gypsy population in the UK far exceeds the places allocated for their accommodation.

The act attempts to resolve many of the issues created by previous legislation by ensuring local authorities in England and Wales take a strategic approach to assessing and meeting the needs of gypsies and travellers. The first step in this process is to assess the needs of gypsies and travellers in their particular locality. However, those already involved in needs assessments with the settled community may appreciate the challenges that this prospect poses. Of course, every group offers its own particular dimension and considerations in the needs assessment process but the challenges posed by the

→ Continued overleaf



A young resident of the Star Lane site in South London, managed by Novas Group



A MORI poll in 2001 showed that they were the groups people felt most prejudice towards, an interaction shown dramatically in the recent BBC3 documentary *Gypsy Wars*

characteristics of gypsies and travellers require innovation, particular strategies and specialised approaches.

Data collection has always been a problem with the only methods currently available being the gypsy/traveller caravan count in England and the gypsy/traveller count in Scotland. These mechanisms simply attempt to ascertain the number of caravans and their settlement status throughout local authority areas.

The limitations of this count are well known and include, not least of all, the questionable will for accuracy of the count on behalf of the local authorities collecting the data; more caravans mean more need for provision which can lead to more local community tension.

By placing pressure upon local authorities to assess the needs of gypsies and travellers it is hoped to offer more opportunities for legal settlement status and reduce local/national tensions within the 'settled' community. But for those whose task it is to perform the assessments, particular dilemmas, challenges and questions exist.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is due to publish guidance later this year. Meanwhile, our experience of producing a county-wide plan for addressing the needs of gypsies and travellers in Essex has provided us with valuable experience in developing useful workable strategies of data collection and consultation.

Traditional measures of assessing need via approaches such as postal questionnaires or personal interviews are limited due to both the level of literacy in gypsy and traveller communities and the unfamiliarity of concepts. The administration of such measures is also complicated by the transient nature of some groups/families and the lack of confidence in the intentions of local authorities.

In the face of these considerations the research team abandoned traditional measures of assessing housing need and effectively returned to the drawing board to develop a method of consultation that met the needs of local authorities but also fitted into the lives of gypsies and travellers.

Our methodology evolved out of increased consultation with key stakeholders including the local traveller education service, local authority departments and gypsies and travellers themselves.

As gypsies and travellers have a particular oral culture that influences the way they understand the world around them and, in line with the guidance to emerge from the ODFM, we opted for a semi-structured interview format for gathering the data.

Although adhering to collecting particular demographic data, the interview was allowed to shift from topic to topic in line with the individuals' own experiences, needs and aspirations. Flexibility is vital as researchers must appreciate the tendency for the interviewees to move away from our idea of a structure of a consultation to one that makes more sense to them, thus allowing a greater development of their perspective.

This method, although time consuming, has allowed for relationships to be built up, enhancing both confidence and trust in the assessment process. This meant an initial slow start to the process but it paid dividends in the longer run.

Of course, using a quantitative approach demands a departure from tradition approaches in analysing the data. However, building policy and practice upon data achieved from quantitative studies with limited sampling frames is also a questionable strategy, but one which is

not often challenged

Overall our experience has shown us the importance of:

- engaging with a wide range of stakeholders including statutory organisations, voluntary and community organisations and gypsies and travellers themselves;
- holding regular meetings with these groups to discuss data-gathering strategies and foster trust in the process;
- understanding the heterogeneity of the gypsy and traveller community. What works with one group may not apply to another; this in turn may differ geographically too;
- reaching the range of gypsy and traveller groups across a particular area;
- taking advantage of cultural awareness training to further understand the lives of gypsies and travellers; and
- developing strategies to deal with the absence or non-participation of men, such as out-of-hours assessments to consult with those who are working during the day.

Rather than expecting gypsies and travellers to deliver information based on a 'tried and tested' survey format, researchers need to be flexible in the way they consult and the process in which this is done. Only then will they be able to successfully and meaningfully draw on the experiences of gypsies and travellers and help meet their housing needs.

● Phil Brown is a research fellow at the University of Salford's housing & urban studies unit. Anya Ahmed is a lecturer in housing studies at the University of Salford and Andy Steele is professor of housing studies at the University of Salford and director of the housing & urban studies unit

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