

Housing Committee - 16 October 2014
Transcript of Item 6: Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision in London
Second Session

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We will now move to the formal panel part of the discussion today after hearing those contributions. Firstly, if I can put this to Gill Slater from the London Borough of Bromley and also Ilinca Diaconescu from the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit (LGTU), a London-wide assessment of Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs was last undertaken in 2008. That is now six years ago. How accurate an assessment of need does that now provide and what were the strengths and weaknesses of the study?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): Bromley was particularly concerned about the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment (GTANA)¹ in respect of the psychological aversion figures and the scale of the figures. We have been asked along today for having the largest Traveller community in the UK and, in the main, it is a settled Traveller community in bricks-and-mortar [accommodation]. The figure that was attached as a percentage figure of people who might therefore want to move out of bricks-and-mortar gave us a pitch requirement that we just did not recognise from our waiting lists.

We have recently carried out our own needs assessment on the basis of our tolerated sites, our own sites and how we see those increasing in number over the years from children within those sites. We are a long way away from where the GTANA was without the psychological aversion. Certainly, when the London Plan was being looked at and considered and there were a number of ways of cutting up the need, one of them that certainly had support from the travelling showmen - we have a large travelling showmen site as well - was a distribution across London that did not necessarily mean that the need reflected the current need. There were communities where, just because of historical reasons - there not being pitches available in other boroughs, for example - some boroughs had more pitches than others and therefore it generated a greater need.

There was an approach in the London Plan as it was being developed that distributed that need a bit more evenly across London. Without distribution, we had 20-something pitches. Then, with the distribution, we came down to 19 pitches. Our own recent needs assessment shows a need somewhere between 16, which are on our tolerated sites, and 25 as a current need. That was a long way of saying it was the psychological aversion that caused us the most concern, but obviously it is out-of-date.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Talk through 'psychological aversion' for us.

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): Psychological aversion - and I am probably not best placed to describe it - is the desire for people who live in bricks-and-mortar to return to a travelling way of live, people who over time have been relocated and rehoused into bricks-and-mortar but it is not where they want to be. Over the course of time, they have been relocated into bricks-and-mortar for various reasons, but they have travelling roots and they want to be in caravans on sites. There was a figure of 10% to be applied to people in bricks-and-mortar. Because we have a large recorded settled community of upwards of 1,000 families - which is a true fact - and these are families whose heritage is possibly Gypsy and Traveller but they have been in bricks-and-mortar for a long time, a 10% figure on those families was 100 pitches.

¹ *London Boroughs' Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment*, Fordham Research, March 2008

In fact, there was already a reduction when the GTANA was developed. In Bromley, there seemed to be quite a comfort level for our settled community and it was reduced to 7.9%, but that still gave us a requirement of 79 additional pitches as a current psychological aversion need. That was a huge stumbling block for Bromley because that it is a phenomenal amount of pitches and that was where we had a difficulty. That was in the GTANA but it was brought down as the London Plan was being developed.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): What would you say to the contributions that we have heard from people who feel that there needs to be a stronger London-wide strategic approach and just leaving it to individual boroughs is not delivering what is needed?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): That was certainly Bromley's representation to the London Plan. We have moved forward because there is not a strategic approach, but that was certainly the approach that Bromley was keen to have.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Let us hear from Ilinca from LGTU. If I can put the same question to you about the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment that took place in 2008 and your views on that?

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): In the LGTU's view and in the view of the community, we know that the total figure that the GTANA arrived at of around 800 pitches between 2007 and 2017 is definitely an underestimate, as is the Census, for example, which identifies a very low number of Gypsies and Travellers across the country. That is to do with the efforts that are put into engaging with the community in each of the boroughs. I know that in some boroughs there was quite good engagement with the local communities. Through focus groups and one-to-one interviews and through organisations who worked on the ground with the communities, more members of the Gypsy and Traveller community could be revealed and be counted. From that point of view, the London-wide needs assessment was quite uneven because the approach was not the same in each of the boroughs.

We would obviously fight for the maximum figure to be included in any Local Plan and in the London Plan because you have heard a few examples from the floor of people who did live in bricks-and-mortar due to various reasons but mainly because of a shortage of sites. That is the main reason in London, really. Some of them might choose or might accept offers for bricks-and-mortar housing because they have health issues that cannot be addressed on sites, but it is mainly to do with a shortage of culturally adequate provision.

Then there is the psychological aversion. That is a contentious issue because it is to do with how someone proves that they are ill because they live in a flat. In some of the court cases, people actually had to sit through psychiatric tests to prove that a flat was not suitable for them. That is really inhumane and I hope everyone in this room agrees with that. Calling it 'psychological aversion' implies that additional evidence needs to be provided about how much someone suffers from being placed in a type of accommodation that does not suit them and that they have not grown up in. They are not used to it and it causes depression, anxiety, stress and isolation, mainly.

I know there are examples of communities - and I think Bromley is one of the cases - where a part of a neighbourhood has a majority of Gypsies and Travellers. There are some examples of estates. One of them is in Hackney - a council estate, but some of the accommodation is private - where members of the community want to rent a property because of the layout of the estate, which is similar to bungalows or a site, and they are close to other sites. That is a type of bricks-and-mortar accommodation that is a bit more suitable.

In terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the 2008 GTANA, obviously the biggest strength is that it was done at the same time all over London and did not have all these discrepancies between neighbouring boroughs doing their needs assessments six months one after the other and failing to co-ordinate.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): It being done at the same time using standardised methodology across the capital, you felt, was a strength?

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): Yes. Obviously, you need to make sure that locally there are links with the community.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Can I ask if you see value in a revised GTANA and should that be on a pan-London or a sub-regional basis, Ilinca?

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): There is value in having a London-wide needs assessment which breaks it down in to sub-regions. As Phil [Regan, Volunteer, Kensington and Chelsea Social Council] said, you have to tie the needs assessment with the site provision. Otherwise, this becomes yet another accounting exercise, in a way. We recognise the importance of having a robust evidence base if it is co-ordinated at a London-wide level and can support the London's Plan and the Mayor's Housing Strategy. It can be effective in that way if it sits next to the London Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) and is not just a study that is done for the sake of doing it. We are six or seven years into the 2008 study and almost nothing has been delivered.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): You do not just want to see theoretical studies that get filed away?

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): Of course.

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): Just to say that within our sub-region, chiefly because we have some tolerated sites that were at the end of their temporary periods of permission, for us, looking at how we would address future pitch provision was a matter of some urgency. We carried out an internal needs assessment. We have been having duty-to-co-operate meetings with our neighbouring boroughs. Certainly in south east London we were looking at whether or not there was scope to jointly commission a company to look at producing a needs assessment for us.

Because of the speed of the various approaches to various plans - we were working towards our Local Plan and coming in fairly late and others were trying to make sure that their Plans were aligning with the new London Plan and everybody was at different stages - and added to that, of course, just workloads and stuff lining up and the various policies that had to be worked through, the timing was not good for everybody to come in as one. However, some of the other authorities were looking at jointly commissioning and at least having some kind of consistency in the approach taken by basically using a single consultant.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Is there anything else that you think the Mayor of London should be doing? Both Gill from a borough's perspective and Ilinca from a Gypsy and Traveller perspective, what else would you like to see the Mayor of London doing?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): We are moving ahead with our needs assessment and pitch allocations. The issue of transit sites and indeed sites for travelling showmen is definitely larger than a borough issue. We had felt that it was all a strategic issue but, certainly when you get to the level of transit sites and travelling showmen, those are issues and the panel agreed also in the run-up to the London

Plan that those need to be looked at sub-regionally. Obviously, there is a duty to co-operate and we are doing the best we can, but actually it is a tricky business without that kind of clear steer from the London Plan.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): A clear steer from the London Plan is your key message.

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): The same, a clear steer, but also practical support in terms of the Traveller Pitch Funding, for example, where the money sits. I am not even sure how many local authorities know about it. It could be something like the Mayor approaching local authorities, inviting them and working together to find this land through the London SHMA. There are practical ways in which the Mayor or the GLA can be proactive and not wait for local authorities to engage on the issue.

Secondly, provide more support for the community and for organisations that work with the community to be able to engage more and draw more people in so that, when the needs assessment is done, you make sure you have the right number in there and people are supported throughout the processes. Most times, Travellers have to arrange their own meetings with councils to discuss these issues and it takes a lot of effort, time and resources that the community does not necessarily have.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): OK. That is really helpful. Jamie, could I put some of this to you? You have heard the comments from the floor about the need to identify further sites and about the slow and often painful process that seems to be happening at borough level to get sites identified and up and running, and then about the need that we have heard for a clear London Plan policy. How would you respond to what you have heard so far?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director – Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): I do not think we would contend that the 2008 study is somehow an up-to-date and accurate position of the London-wide position now. We obviously refreshed the SHMA at the turn of this year and the end of last year. Whilst that looks at London-wide need overall and will pick up people in the Gypsy and Traveller community who were included within those statistics, it was not a local-level primary research-gathering piece of work which looked at overall needs and was able to drill down at very local level into what is needed. The clear thing overall is that the levels of need vary quite significantly from borough to borough and doing it from a top-level position like we did with the recent SHMA is not appropriate to assess that need.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): OK, you say it needs to be done locally borough by borough. Have all the boroughs now undertaken their assessments?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director – Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): I do not know that.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): If these things are being handled locally, surely there is a strategic role for the Mayor in co-ordinating the information that comes from those?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director – Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): There is a clear position in the London Plan, which I will defer to John [Lett] on. In terms of the Mayor's housing role, it is in terms of making the funding available, encouraging people to take that up.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): In other areas of housing policy, you gather data across London, do you not?

Nicky Gavron AM: Boroughs have to do SHMAs. By when do they have to do them?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director – Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): You need to have a SHMA to support your local plan. You have to have a firm evidence base and there are a number of other hurdles that you have to get over.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): You are not actively monitoring the delivery of the assessments at a borough level?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director – Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): In the same way that I could not tell you exactly what date each borough refreshed its local housing strategy recently.

John Biggs AM: That is really not good enough because we do know that there is this very deep-set prejudice against providing for Travellers and Gypsies in London and therefore there is a statutory equalities duty by the GLA to override that and to ensure that the boroughs are doing something. It could be that they do surveys and at the end conclude that there are absolutely no Travellers in their boroughs and there are one or two boroughs that have decided that they are not any, but they need to show they have been through that.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): As a result of the investigation, we will obviously be making recommendations, but there is surprise that a more proactive approach is not being taken to at least monitor what is happening at borough level, even if the overall assessment is being done locally rather than across the whole of London.

John Lett, could I ask you, then, about the London Plan policy? There is a clear call both from Bromley and from the LGTU that the London Plan policy needs to be clearer.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): Yes. You will be aware that the current London Plan policy was arrived at after three iterations of policy testing. It was not as if the Mayor did not take it seriously. He looked very carefully at how to address these needs. He recognises that addressing those needs is a strategic issue and in looking at the scale of the need – particularly in, as we have been talking about, SHMAs – it has to be proportionate and effective.

The London-wide SHMA shows a need on the one hand for 49,000 new homes per annum if we address the backlog of need over 20 years or 62,000 if we address it over 10 years. We are seeking, of course, to get as close to the 62,000 as we can, but for the moment realistically we focus on the 49,000.

Reference has been made to the Fordham study. If you look at the basic summary of that, it is quite a complicated study. You will see that the need from Fordham is somewhere between 22 and just over 70 a year. It is slightly higher if you take some of the subsequent calculations we did, which will get you up to 80 a year, when we were doing this iterative policy development exercise.

It is not really technically fit-for-purpose to try to get a really small-scale approach in assessing need and to couple that up with a broad London-wide SHMA. The two things are quite different technically. The sample sizes would be absolutely enormous if we were to try to do it in the same way.

The Mayor has taken the view that it is more effective to identify these needs locally, working with the boroughs, and we will then check those – which is the point Mr [John] Biggs was making – as part of the general conformity process when a Local Plan comes up. We look at the SHMAs in considerable detail now, particularly as the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is needs-driven and is about identification of housing need.

The point was made about using the SHMA to look at the supply side. You are looking at an aggregate figure of 62,000 and then trying to make good the gap between the 62,000 and the 49,000; very large figures. The way that this would be picked up would be an aggregate because it would be part of what we call the 'small sites assumption', which looks at the historic trend in sites of less than 0.25 hectares, which is where more or less most of these sites will come through. From memory, when we did this in 2010, most of the sites were around that size or a little bit less.

John Biggs AM: I am wondering - at the risk of asking a mischievous question - if you could just remind us for the record whether the [Planning] Inspector into the London Plan agreed with the Mayor's approach on this.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): Yes, as far as I can recall. I will need to check. It was in 2011.

John Biggs AM: I do not think he did.

Nicky Gavron AM: No, he did not. Some of us around this table made representations which chime with everything that has been said in terms of the Mayor taking a strategic view of this. In fact, that was borne out by the Inspector's report, but the Mayor chose not to pick it up.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We will get a detailed note on what the Inspector said.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): I think you are probably correct on that. I do apologise.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you. We note that.

Tony Arbour AM: You Ilinca [Diaconescu] told us there was "definitely", I quote, an underestimate of 800 pitches. How do you know there is definitely a shortfall of 800? You have heard from Mr Lett that the figure is nothing like that.

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): Obviously, no one collects very robust evidence on the Gypsy and Traveller population anywhere in the country, but just from knowing and working with the communities, the organisations who work with the communities know that there were more than 800 in London back in 2007 who needed a pitch. They are making some estimations, but then recording that need is a different --

Tony Arbour AM: It is not very scientific, is it?

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): It is not, but I have not seen any alternative that is more robust, certainly no more robust than Fordham's in terms of methodology and accepting the needs of Gypsies and Travellers who live in bricks-and-mortar.

Tony Arbour AM: It is interesting that you draw a comparison between what you are saying and Fordham because, of course, that was precisely the objection which was made to Fordham: that it was not terribly objective because in effect they were asking Travellers what they would like. You have done the same, have you not?

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): Comparing it with the way wider housing needs assessments are done, like the SHMA, which is really looking at survey data, the samples do not reflect all the distinctions in London's population. That is one of the criticisms we would have to that argument that the SHMA picked up

numbers of Gypsies and Travellers who lived in London in those areas. Gypsies and Travellers are not recorded in the English Housing Survey, for example, as a category.

Tony Arbour AM: Are you able to tell the Committee of any objective demonstration that there is a shortage of places in London, something objective?

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): Yes, the overcrowding on sites; knowing that people suffer from depression in housing and from being on waiting lists for 12 to 15 years. Those processes are not standardised across London and that is the biggest problem. No one at a London-wide level collects information from the local level on what the overcrowding situation is or how many people are mentally ill because they live in housing --

[Inaudible input from the public gallery]

Having waiting lists that are properly maintained and that people know about is another issue. Councils might say, "We have a waiting list", but they do not go out and reach out to the community and explain how to get their names on that waiting list or what it is all about. It is co-ordinating that with the wider housing allocation policies.

[Inaudible input from the public gallery]

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Most Members of the Committee have seen for ourselves some of the sites and the overcrowded conditions on a temporary site and so on and we are well aware of that, most of us.

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director – Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): Just very quickly, I just wanted to clarify that point around the SHMA. The most recent SHMA was not based on survey data, which is how the previous one was carried out. That was quite expensive and involved a lot of individual interviews and a consultant to do it. We based it entirely on secondary data and carried that out in-house at a much lower cost. Inasmuch as Gypsies and Travellers are represented within that data, they are captured, but you cannot analyse their individual needs. As Ilinca [Diaconescu] said, for the English Housing Survey, one of the sources we used, the sample size means you cannot say, "This is the individual need in those areas for Gypsies and Travellers", which is underlining my point about why the London-wide assessment cannot pick up this local need.

Nicky Gavron AM: Initially to Gill and to Ilinca [Diaconescu], can you tell us what criteria - and then which ones particularly are singled out - are used when identifying new sites?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): At the moment, our first concern is that we have prepared our needs assessment and certainly the needs are emanating in the main from our tolerated sites that have ongoing refusals and have then been allowed on appeal. Those sites are where families are established and have been established for five or sometimes ten years with subsequent rolling refusals and then permissions on appeal. Those sites are the ones that we are first looking at to address their own current needs.

We have two council Travellers sites of our own and one has boundaries that are not very clearly delineated on a map. We are revisiting our boundaries to check that those can be defensible because, probably in common with other outer London boroughs, our Travellers - both those on council-accepted sites and one permitted private site and those on the tolerated private sites - are all in the greenbelt. We are in a position where, in looking for sites, we look either at the urban area where sites are very few and far between, as with much of

London, or at a heavily developed residential area with not an awful lot of redevelopment. We are quite an established suburban residential area. The Travellers sites, permanent and those that are currently not permanent, are within the greenbelt and we are looking initially at those sites to see whether they meet the criteria.

Nicky Gavron AM: Have you identified sites in the greenbelt?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): We have, yes. They are tolerated sites.

Nicky Gavron AM: Is there any new provision in the greenbelt?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): It is not new provision. It is the tolerated sites, but our current need emanates from those tolerated sites. Those are the families within Bromley for which we have the need. Looking forward, chiefly, it is the children from those families. Their sites have pitches and the sites, such as they are, have temporary planning permissions limiting them to two or three mobiles and then trailers as well.

When we designate those as Traveller sites, which is our intention in line with the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (PPTS), there is scope for more pitches and for those to be more intensively used by those families. That is our first port of call when looking for new pitches. How can we make better use of the sites that we have that are already permitted and how the sites that are tolerated sites that we think certainly make the best option can be, by those families, more intensively used. We have a draft policy coming forward which points in that direction.

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, LGTU): Criteria for identifying new sites are set out in each Local Plan and the core strategy. Usually, from my knowledge, most of them have a policy on Gypsy and Traveller site provision and each local authority lists its own criteria for new sites. That is to assess planning applications that are coming in, as well as any sites that the council will put forward through its site allocation part of the Local Plan.

In terms of identifying land, the main process the councils use is to look at their assets and then assess them against those criteria and also to check if they are available, suitable and viable, which are the NPPF tests.

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): I would just say we also have a call for sites. Sites will come forward and there are some criteria, obviously, about access to schools and services. There are a range of criteria that we will be drawing from the PPTS and that we are formulating into our policy.

Nicky Gavron AM: Are there problems with identifying sites? I want to know what problems you have in identifying sites. When I was a councillor [for the London Borough of Haringey] I had enormous problems in identifying sites and in actually keeping the sites we had. I just want to hear a bit more about what problems you have in identifying new sites from other members of the panel.

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): Insofar as we are looking to deal with the need in our needs assessment, we are looking at sites that really the Travellers have brought along themselves. They have lived there for a certain length of time, they are established in that they have been there and tolerated and they own the sites. We have not actively gone out to look further than that because we think those sites will cater for those needs and the needs emanating from their families.

Obviously, we are still developing our Local Plan at this stage and the Inspector may argue differently, but we are comfortable with our existing sites that those sites very much are sites that the Travellers have had over a period of time, which has made it probably easy for us because we have not actually had to go out and seek sites. That is where the problems will be for authorities that do not have those solutions lining up for them.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): The sites have been identified anyway by the community and your role now is to assist in formalising that through the planning process?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): More or less.

Nicky Gavron AM: I just want to point out, Chair, that one of the results I found when I was involved in planning in a borough of not identifying sites and not holding on to the sites we had was that we had all sorts of temporary and - in the eyes of the community around those sites - illegal sites. It led to reinforcing the prejudice that we have heard about instead of making for better community relationships. I just wondered whether that has been a feature in anyone's experience. It seems to me one of the real challenges in boroughs - and the Mayor - not taking a strategic approach and boroughs not actually really facing up to the needs of this community.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Bill Forrester and Rob McCartney from Kent County Council and Leeds City Council respectively sat very patiently here. I am going to put Nicky's question to both of you to talk about your experiences in terms of identifying sites and any recommendations you would have for City Hall and the boroughs in London. Bill Forrester, shall we start with you?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Thank you for the invitation to join in your discussions. It has been very interesting this afternoon.

In Kent - and this would apply to all two-tier county authorities - the district councils are responsible for planning policy. The county council is no longer a planning authority, apart from minerals and waste and so on. They would have a list of criteria that they would use for assessing sites when they do a call for sites. The call for sites would be part of the planning policy process and the sites could be suggested by a whole range of different people, but in general most of the suggestions will come from - as Gill [Slater] has said - existing unauthorised developments or sites with some temporary consent to make them permanent because, until they are permanent, they do not count in the overall numbers.

In terms of my own experience, I have been involved in developing about 200 pitches altogether across Essex and Kent. Some of them have had unauthorised encampments on them beforehand that have presented the need. Quite a number of them have not had that. However, the criteria are very important and they are not all necessarily met. When you have a list of criteria when you go out to do searches and you are looking at different land ownerships and so on, you will not meet all of those criteria but it is very important to have them because they are the same sorts of considerations you would apply to other developments in a lot of cases. You are talking about planning issues, you are talking about visual intrusion, you are talking about highway access, you are talking about the ability to landscape and you are also talking about the size of land that you are actually looking at. It is very important to start with to be looking at what sort of size. The size, then, should have some reference to surrounding services and facilities.

There are also sustainability issues, which really test people out because a lot of Travellers will want to be in remote rural areas and to be away from other people who may be antagonistic to them, but that actually inherently is not very sustainable. I do not think you would have such an issue in London, certainly not in the inner boroughs, in terms of that sustainability, but you might have it in the outer boroughs.

It is very important to have a checklist and it is very important to have reference points. Otherwise, you will get challenged by people. You will always get challenged by people about finding more suitable sites or as suitable sites that they will be arguing should be put forward.

There are various techniques that different authorities use. Sometimes people will whittle it down to one particular site proposal and press forward with that. Sometimes people will have lists, in which case you can get a lot of feeling between different communities all trying to prevent their community being the one where it is developed. In general, I would probably opt for the first one rather than the second.

In fact, the site we have just completed in Kent is a 26-pitch site in a really good location. We had some ownership of land. We managed to acquire extra land. The services and facilities and access to transport and so on are absolutely superb. As far as I am concerned, any site that I have been involved in developing, I like to go and stand on it, "Would I live here?" If I would not live there, then I will go back and say, "This is not a suitable place". There are some very poor sites that have been established down the years in very poor locations.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): The point we heard from Richard [Lee, Co-ordinator, Just Space] earlier about integration with the wider planning policy is particularly important from your perspective, then?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Yes, because my view - and some of us have been arguing this for the last 20 years and eventually getting listened to - is that there is not any reason why Traveller provision should be treated any differently from other housing provision, including social housing, and it should be planned for. If you do not plan for it, then you get problems.

An unauthorised encampment is a symptom quite often of shortage of provision, but it is not just that. It is also that people who have a settled base elsewhere are travelling. It is holidays. It is social reasons for people travelling around the country. The fact that people are on an unauthorised encampment does not mean they have no other accommodation, but it may mean they do not have any other accommodation. It is quite a difficult issue to get into and the numbers are difficult to get into.

John Biggs AM: Kent is a county, but you must have a number of district councils?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): That is right, we have 12 districts.

John Biggs AM: My experience in London is that some districts will be more supportive than others in accommodating Traveller communities. Do you find that there are perverse or other consequences as a result of that? That the distribution of sites is mixed and the movement of families between districts is noticeably different as a result of that?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Yes, we do find that. There are sometimes historical reasons to do with policies that have been pursued against unauthorised encampments in the past where you do get provision made. Then what happens is that when you do the forward projections, you actually have increasing numbers and new household formation taking place and therefore the areas they already have will have a greater further need for sites.

Something we were looking at with the South East Plan² was the ability to correct that over 10, 15 or 20 years so that we had a wider range of sites available to people across the south east. That is not possible with the current planning processes. There should not really be some places where there are sites and some places where there are not, but there are certain particular areas where there are concentrations of Travellers. In Kent, we have three out of seven and they are 0.5% of the population across the country as a whole. Fenland is another of them. When you are looking at concentrations, there are probably 10,000 to 20,000 Travellers living across Kent. In some other counties, you will have much smaller numbers.

John Biggs AM: In terms of your strategic role as a county council, you would welcome having the opportunity to give some strategic oversight to the distribution of sites?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Yes, definitely. I was personally very involved with the drawing-up of the accommodation assessments and so on and working with the district. The second time around they have actually commissioned people to do it. I have been involved very little, but I certainly either know or could find out the numbers across Kent for need, provision and deliverability.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you. That is very helpful. Let us hear from Rob McCartney and Leeds City Council's experience.

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): Thank you for the invitation. Leeds is the second-largest single-tier authority in England and whilst people would commonly think of Leeds as having an urban core, two-thirds of Leeds is greenbelt land and clearly that has implications in respect of planning decisions and certainly in terms of Travellers.

To start with, I would highlight that Leeds has updated its accommodation assessment. We, as a city, were not satisfied with the 2008 work that had been done, which was done on a West Yorkshire basis across the five West Yorkshire authorities. There were a number of reasons for that, which I will not go through in great detail, but essentially, we did not believe that the views of Gypsies and Travellers were at the heart of the 2008 GTANAs. It was carried out in conjunction with a local advocacy group, Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (GATE), and we used community members to develop the survey and also to carry out the survey work, so we used community members as community enumerators.

That enabled us to identify concealed or hard to reach households that ourselves, as council officers, but also the advocacy group, would not necessarily be aware of. That then enabled us to find a good balance between an expressed housing preference and assessed housing need. The reason why I talk about the updated GTANA is that when we move on to site allocation work specifically in terms of call for sites, it has got to be more than Gypsies and Travellers having the capacity to suggest sites. In my view, they need to be involved in the assessment process as well in terms of determining whether sites are suitable.

In Leeds, so far we have put forward one site for permanent development. That is in the greenbelt. It was approved by Leeds Council, but has been called in by the Secretary of State [for Communities and Local Government] and we are expecting a decision early next year as to whether that is approved or not. In terms of site criteria, clearly issues such as land status, whether the site is in the greenbelt, the flood risk, proximity to industry, to things such as businesses, accessibility to schools, shops and health services, healthcare and so on, but also in terms of ultimately one of the key criteria we will be looking at is absence of alternative sites,

² Former Regional Spatial Strategy for the South East – abolished in February 2013, to be replaced by measures set out in the Localism Act 2011.

because ultimately we need to deliver the pitch need figure that is included within the accommodation assessment, which is included within the core strategy.

Nicky Gavron AM: The greenbelt site is a temporary one?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): No, it is a permanent site and so clearly we will have to demonstrate, or the Planning Inspector will have to be persuaded, if they are to approve, that there are very exceptional circumstances that outweigh the harm caused to the greenbelt by the proposed development. We have put forward our argument as to what those very exceptional circumstances are. We are aware that it has a high threshold and we await what the Planning Inspector and the Secretary of State's decision is.

Nicky Gavron AM: All right. I would like to know what John Lett thinks about that if we were to follow that in London, which to a certain extent in some cases it has been followed.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): My colleague from Kent made a very telling observation that Gypsies and Travellers under Government policy should be treated in the same way as the settled population. That is the approach, as I say, with the five-year supply, and also in connection with greenbelt development. I notice it is not mentioned in your report [at Agenda Item 6], but the Government is currently consulting on revisions to national policy and one element of that is to do with the release of greenbelt land. The Secretary of State is equally onerous in limiting these exceptional circumstances - or he proposes to be - for the Gypsy and Traveller community as he is with the settled community. As you will be aware from previous meetings, it is a challenge for London as a whole and that line would be carried through under the London Plan policy also to the local level, colleagues in Bromley and elsewhere. Again, this is a challenge in trying to address need for what is essentially a low-density form of housing.

Nicky Gavron AM: That is what I wanted to come on to because you just said - if I heard you correctly - that the needs of this community have to be considered in the way the needs for any housing are considered, and yet this is, as you just mentioned, low density. It is only of course as low density as car-parking, I want to point out, which we seem to be quite liberal in our standards, but anyway. Sorry, just answer the density question, could you?

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): The density question you have picked up very tellingly in paragraph 4.8 of your report [at Agenda Item 6] and all I am doing is reiterating the report. As you are aware, again, from previous meetings, high-density development is a particular concern in London. The average is in the order of 140. I cannot remember what it was last year of dwellings per hectare exactly. I think it might be 137. Land here would be, as you say, able to accommodate 150. We have the greenbelt issue which has been raised as an issue in Kent and in Leeds. Government is tightening up on the circumstances where we could look for greenbelt as an option. I have to put this in the context of a need for 49,000 homes, of an identified supply for 62,000 and then looking at major initiatives like town centre renewal and building at particularly high densities in opportunity areas to be able to meet overall need.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Yes, and that is paragraph 4.8 of the Committee report on page 48 of the main agenda that John was referring to. Just for the record, John, as well, can I ask how you see the need for sites changing in the next few years?

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): You mean relative to the old GTANA?

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Yes.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): Just as a technician, as a piece of work, that is a study done in 2008. On something that old, looking at any form of housing, economic demand or anything like that, we would look to refresh something that was done in 2008, not least it was at the peak of a cycle and the data behind it, from what I can remember reflects the run-up to that peak.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): OK, thank you. We had points raised from the floor earlier on about funding and I am keen that we move on to the issue of funding now.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Initially to the GLA. Only about a third of the Mayor's Traveller Pitch Fund has been spent. How many boroughs have taken up that funding so far?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): I am pleased to report that actually we have had additional allocation since we last updated you and we are now 72% allocated, and there is another potential application that came in only a couple of days ago and so there is still interest which is live.

In terms of the allocations that were made, there are five different boroughs that have live allocations from us. The work at Barking & Dagenham is already completed and then three other boroughs - Lambeth, Hounslow and Sutton - are due to complete their works by the end of this year. The funding that we have is a combination of refurbishing existing pitches and providing some new pitches. It is just telling, looking back at the statistics I have - that we wrote to you about, Tom [Copley] - that since 2008 there have been four new pitches provided across London with Government funding and in this year we will be providing seven new ones. Seven is not a fantastic number --

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): It is still very low.

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): -- but compared to historical performance it is a big improvement.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): What would you say to the gentleman over there from Barking & Dagenham about this issue of the two-year cut-off point? I am not sure because you said Barking & Dagenham has completed now, but then --

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): Yes, Barking & Dagenham had funding to do refurbishment to 12 pitches and there are obviously further discussions in relation to a new site. The issue that is being alluded to is in relation to the time limits that we do have on our funding. We had funding for the 2011 to 2015 period with a deadline for Affordable Homes Programme completions by March 2015 and the Traveller Pitch Funding was part of that.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Is this tied up with the Government?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): It is tied up to the Government's timelines and, in the same way with all our housing programmes, we have argued that fiscal devolution would enable us to plan on a longer-term basis, give people greater certainty in terms of their funding and deliver more overall. The good news though is that we have made that funding available in the 2015 to 2018 period and, although there is still a time limit that completions will need to be achieved by March 2018, we have still a good period of time where there is funding available and we could allocate it to new sites. We definitely will pick up that point.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): On the Affordable Homes Programme, which has now slipped, it is going back to December 2015, is it not?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): No, within the Affordable Homes Programme, the deadline for all allocations is and has always been 31 March 2015.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): That was my understanding, but I have been seeing things that are coming out from the Mayor now saying December 2015, which looked like a bit of a slippage on that. Are you saying that that is not the case?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): I fear we are getting side-tracked, but the [Boris Johnson's Mayoral candidate] manifesto commitment was to deliver around 55,000 homes by 2015 and that is being given its normal meaning, in other words the 2015 calendar year.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): OK. I do not want to get side-tracked but it is just because it is tied up with the Gypsy and Traveller Pitch Funding. Why do you think boroughs are reluctant to bid?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): We have also made two other allocations and that was referred to in the audience's comments. Camden had an initial allocation of £700,000 and was not able to take it up.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): It was not able to take it up, yes.

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director - Programme, Policy and Services, GLA): Kensington and Chelsea also had an allocation and then they had problems with site assembly so it is clear that bringing this together with a site that is deliverable and with local support is very challenging for local authorities to deliver. Our funding can help with that, but it is certainly not the full answer. Listening to what I have heard it seems that land is one of the key challenges in looking across London housing as a whole, that land is obviously a key constraint and that the land market is very hot at the moment. It is very valuable and it is difficult to acquire land and deliver housing on it.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): This is where I will bring John in. Do you think that if there were specific targets within the London Plan, boroughs would be knocking on the door for funding a bit more regularly?

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): That has to be pure conjecture. We have never had that situation before. They do have to have - as colleagues from the LGTU have said - policies already in their Local Plans so that the numbers are there and the targets are there. For the Mayor to have them is probably, I would say --

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): You may as well say the Mayor therefore does not need to have an overall target for housing.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): No, no, that --

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): You may as well. What is the difference?

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): Of course not. It is a matter of scale, sir, surely. A need for 49,000 or 62,000 is a properly strategic matter and best effectively addressed at a strategic level. A need

for somewhere between 20 pitches divided by 33 boroughs and 70-odd divided by 33 boroughs is a different matter of scale. It is a matter of proportionality when you come to using targets.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Of course it was included previously until 2008 and the Planning Inspector did object to it being taken out.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): Indeed, the Government changed its policy and that was why the Mayor changed his policy.

John Biggs AM: I was going to ask two questions. One may lead you a bit off-beam, but I just wanted to remind the meeting that the Mayor has in the GLA Act [1999] an equalities duty. I just want to remind people of that because it should form part of the record of this meeting. However inconvenient or annoying Travellers may be to some people, they are human beings and they have rights.

The second point, though maybe more constructively and more helpfully - although hopefully that was helpful as well - is whether there is a role for specialist housing providers in helping to nudge up these targets and whether there might be some role there for people who have a specialist interest who can act as advocates, who can secure funding, who can bring good practice and experience and who could help to nudge boroughs and others towards achieving targets.

John Lett (Strategic Planning Manager, GLA): On the equalities duty, the Mayor is clearly addressing those both in the London Plan and in the Housing Strategy.

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): To date all of our funding has been provided through boroughs themselves, but there is no reason that that has to be the case. We could provide funding to housing associations or other organisations. Indeed, I would welcome the chance to do so. Looking back at historical allocations --

John Biggs AM: There are one or two nationally who have worked in this area and can add some real value.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Your fund does not exclude bids from others?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): Not all, and I am aware of housing associations providing and managing sites in other parts of the country. I am not aware of national specialists. I am happy to take those names.

The other point I was going to make is that just looking back at all the allocations that have been made in London since 2001, there are two allocations that were made to stock transfer housing associations in Richmond. There have been housing associations that have had this funding in the past. If community groups wanted to set up organisations to get the funding and deliver it, then that would also be something we could do.

I was going to pick up the Camden point as well, where the funding fell away because it had to complete by March 2015. We now have that funding available until March 2018. If the council or another group that can deliver that site wants to come forward, then we have funding available and can help.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Jamie, what will happen to the remaining funds if it is not all spent by March 2015? Do we lose it?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): No. It is funding that is secured for London for affordable housing and we would either spend it on more affordable housing this year or roll it over into providing affordable housing or Gypsy and Traveller provision next year.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): It could go into Gypsy and Traveller provision or it could go into the general pot for affordable housing?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): For affordable housing, yes.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Again, on this point about the two-year flexibility, given you are keeping the money anyway, there is no way you can be more flexible?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): Effectively now we are being more flexible. We did not have funding certainty beyond 2015. We could not provide people with funding at that point. The point until 2018 is hitting the housing targets which are in the London Housing Strategy. If we can hit them for less than the funding that we have available, then we could stretch funding beyond 2018, even before the Government gives us further money for beyond that point. The constraint on us is that we have to agree targets for delivery with the Government and we have set them out in the London Housing Strategy for specific time periods.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Do you know what funding is going to be available post 2015 for Gypsy and Traveller sites?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): The Government has given us no ring-fenced funding, but we are willing to make it available in terms of how much demand there is from the £1.25 billion that we have.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): You now say it is a 72% take up. Do you think it will be lower given that not all of it has been taken up this time?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): Based on the two things that we have heard - that Barking & Dagenham might have an application for £2-3 million and that there might be one in Camden for £700,000 - that would suggest it is significantly more. At the moment, if there are deliverable sites that offer good value for money we could fund those schemes, but it will depend on what other things we do in terms of allocating that funding and what else comes forward in terms of affordable housing.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Gill, can I ask you why Bromley did not apply for funding from the Mayor?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): We have not applied for funding chiefly because the sites we are looking at taking forward, although the greenbelt issue is going to be a seriously big problem for us, are private sites. These are sites that the Travellers themselves own and they are keen to maintain them at their own cost. We may well be looking to apply for funding on one of our sites that we are just looking at redrawing the boundary on, just because at the moment there is no real clarity about the boundary. There is quite a big bunding area out to open land and we will define that boundary a bit more clearly, which will potentially give us scope for another couple of pitches. Again, though, this is an existing site which is in the green belt. We will have to see how that situation evolves or where it takes us with our proposals.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): How significant and important do you think the funding from the Mayor is?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): In terms of Bromley's situation, for the majority of the sites it is not relevant at all because they are quite happy to fund it. With our own site, certainly we will be looking for money because, otherwise, making good of the boundary will appear on paper but it will not necessarily be followed up with an awful lot. There is not a huge maintenance budget that goes in that direction and so it would be very useful.

Steve O'Connell AM: It was very helpful earlier to hear about experiences from the audience of the shortfall in sites from personal experiences. It would be worth now us revisiting that and hearing both from the local authorities and also from Ilinca [Diaconescu] about the impact - perhaps citing examples of the impact on both the local community and also the Traveller community - of the lack of space, on the challenges that face both, if you like, the indigenous community and the Travelling community. Perhaps the local authorities can comment on that with some examples of how it has been affecting your own authorities and perhaps with some specific examples on things like public services and that sort of impact.

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): In 2010, Leeds held a scrutiny inquiry into the impact of unauthorised encampments of Gypsies and Travellers. Essentially, back in 2010 we had 12 predominately Leeds-based roadside families who invariably were trespassing on public land because of their cultural aversion to bricks-and-mortar housing but also because of an absence of sites. A cycle of encampment and eviction then ensued.

In terms of cost, the costs of dealing with unauthorised encampments were approximately £300,000 per year, which is a sizeable amount of money that could have been invested in other Council services, and there was lot of tension between local communities and the Gypsies and Travellers' families. Finally, we were not meeting need, either.

Overall, in that situation, never mind in terms of the money, but all it did was compound the tensions between the local authority and the group of Gypsies and Travellers, between local communities and Gypsies and Travellers, and made it more difficult to find solutions. Following the scrutiny inquiry then there was a political will and an officer will to move things forward.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): That is encouraging. We are hoping that we will have the same impact here.

Steve O'Connell AM: What you are saying is that there was a cost through social cohesion, in essence, through the friction between both communities. We will get onto the cost to the community itself. Also, there is a cost to the budget, presumably, with evictions and also other public services. That is one of the triggers that the council said, "We need to be perhaps more progressive". I know we are going to hear in the next round of questioning the sorts of things that perhaps you were doing.

What about Kent? What sorts of examples have you had in Kent as a result of a problem of lack of sites, particularly around public services, cohesion and other examples?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Can I divide this into two parts? One part is a shortage of accommodation generally, and then also the impact of the situation in London on Kent.

As far as the situation generally is concerned, we have fewer unauthorised encampments now than we had ten years ago. Ten years ago we had a monitoring system set up for authorising encampments and we had enormous difficulties, particularly up in the north west of the county in the early 2000s. We monitored 280 encampments altogether in 2004. That number actually fell to about 20% of that. We do not completely understand why that happened. It has now gone up, particularly during the summer months. I do not have exact data yet for this summer but we have had quite a considerable number of encampments. We are talking probably about 100 or 200 caravans at any time across the county at maximum.

Steve O'Connell AM: These are local unpermitted or unsanctioned camps?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Yes, these are unauthorised encampments. They are people stopping on land without the consent of the owner. The team that I head up has responsibility for all those on County Council land. That includes most of the highways, apart from the Highways Agency who look after some of the major trunk roads and motorways and so on, but the rest of that. A lot of them are stopping on highway land or highway verges or whatever. Our team is actually involved in discussions with those people, giving them an opportunity to apply for site places that we have and to be on the waiting list. Some directions to leave are taking place. In some cases we can let people stay.

We actually keep the figures and we very rarely now have any major evictions. There used to be major evictions happening and they are very costly things. Occasionally, we might get to that point. Certainly in the early 2000s, some of the police resources they had to use for some of the encampments were very substantial. We work very closely and very hard with the police to take down the number of section 61 directions that have been given and to reduce the temperature and to be making proportionate decisions in each case.

We cannot speak for every other landowner. Private landowners are not covered by the Human Rights Act in the same way the County Council is. We make decisions on the basis of the exact merits of the situation.

All the time we are thinking about reducing impact. We actually had a site in the middle of Sittingbourne which was an old industrial site that Travellers themselves found. We actually finished up doing a quite unique deal with Tesco. Tesco actually lets us use land which was not going to be developed as a supermarket for a couple of years and we enabled a number of families to stop there, who were about a sixth of our unauthorised encampments around the county. We were actually looking and were able to identify who had the most impact in terms of moving around.

That is quite an interesting thing to develop. It is the possibility of a business or a number of businesses protecting the interests of other businesses if people are moving around an area. That clearly was something Tesco was getting brownie points from the local borough council about for making this arrangement. We managed it and it prevented lots of families being moved around the same town at much greater cost.

In Kent - and you quoted from Leeds having very high costs of moving people - we have not had the high cost of moving people, but we try to work on the basis of dealing with everyone individually. When we monitored ten years ago, 80% of the unauthorised encampments had caused no significant problems. It was only 20% that did. There is not a direct correlation with crime, although people may think there is. There is not a direct correlation with crime. Sometimes you get very difficult people on encampments, but that is not the norm.

Steve O'Connell AM: We will get on to Bromley. It is not just necessarily talking about the costs of moving on or eviction. There may be other public service costs --

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Yes, there are.

Steve O'Connell AM: -- perhaps around housing when good people are being housed in bricks-and-mortar when they actually do not want to be. That, of course, has an opportunity cost to your waiting list because there are others who may want that.

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Can I just talk about the impact of what is going on in London on Kent? We have families coming out, not usually on to unauthorised encampments but certainly onto unauthorised developments, as a direct result of there not being provision in London. For example, there is one large south London site and I can name half a dozen families who moved and bought land in Kent because there is not the opportunity and there is no provision being made. We might say also they like Kent and have moved out. However, that is some of the impact.

We have a rising number of public provision pitches but in London it is falling. There is a connection. I am sure that other Home Counties would say the same thing. There is an impact in terms of movement that is taking place.

Steve O'Connell AM: Gill, that might be your borough. Do you want to give me some examples of costs?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): I do not think it is our borough.

Steve O'Connell AM: I am sure it is not, but maybe the cost in Bromley to the public purse that could be avoided with better sites?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): The costs in Bromley are exactly as Rob [McCartney] has mentioned: the costs of going through the processes of moving people on through the proper processes and significant clean-up activities as well for the unauthorised encampments, although, as Bill [Forrester] mentioned, they are not necessarily always travelling. Sometimes they are visits. It is not necessarily a sign of homelessness. Sometimes they are just moving from place to place.

The unauthorised encampments we tend to get in Bromley are families who crop up from time to time but clearly are based in neighbouring authorities. That is the thing with London. The borders are very porous and the families might stray into Bromley but actually most of the time, be it in permanent pitches or possibly without any base, tend to come from other boroughs. That is why, I suppose, we have not taken them significantly into account in our needs assessment.

We note the unauthorised encampments but they do not tend to be people who have an intention to reside long-term in Bromley. They are usually put up on parks. There are a few situations of private land and then, absolutely, the private landowners tend to take those matters into their own hands. On parks, of course, the cost there is not just the financial cost of clearing up but the cost to the local community of not using that park and the tensions that build up because they cannot use the park. One of the attempts to prevent unauthorised incursions, which is a far from attractive option but has happened in a number of parks, is to install barriers. There is the cost of barriers and the unsightliness of barriers simply to make sure that there cannot be access at certain times on to the park.

The community tension is the real tricky one. When it comes to finding sites, probably the Travellers themselves who have wanted to get sites have self-selected away from the residential areas to avoid some of those tensions. There was discussion earlier about how when sites were put forward there was surprisingly not so much concern as was anticipated. We found that with our tolerated sites that have been there for ten years. When we actually reached the stage of thinking, "We need to deal with this situation and the way forward is to make these tolerated sites permanent and put it forward in a consultation document", in fact there was

virtually no comeback whatsoever from local residents. There was not. There were a few representations generally about use of the greenbelt, but there was not the local tension with sites that were already in use being made permanent. I know I have gone off track a bit there but I just wanted to make that point.

With regard to the impact on Gypsies and Travellers themselves, not for unauthorised necessarily but for the tolerated sites, the tolerated sites are in a difficult position because they are in the greenbelt but cannot apply for utility buildings. Where you have members of the family who have sickness and the elderly, they need those utility blocks. There is a problem for both the housed community and the Traveller community of not having sufficient provision.

In terms of the costs, I would definitely say that the financial cost is always there but the biggest cost is the impact on community cohesion.

Steve O'Connell AM: What we do not have today is the cost to the private purse, Chair. We have examples of the local authorities, but we have heard that where there is illegal encampment on non-borough land for our records. For the record itself, there needs to be a note that actually there is some private cost. I do not want to dwell; we have dwelt enough on that.

Steve O'Connell AM: What I would like to do is turn to Ilinca. We have heard from colleagues here about costs to the education of the families and the health costs to the families themselves because they are not getting proper health treatment, perhaps. Tell me about the effect on the Travelling community itself. We have heard already personal examples. Your perception of the effect on the Travelling community itself and the cost to the Travellers themselves of lack of sites in London; give me some details around that.

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, London Gypsy & Traveller Unit): One of the biggest effects of not having enough sites is increasing social exclusion. The community feels this. A lot of times they talk about why there are not any new sites being built. Why have no new sites been built in London in the last 20 or 30 years? They see a lot of development going on around them. A lot of people put forward site proposals to the councils and they are always being turned back, not in the sense of a planning application but they would suggest sites that they have seen that have been vacant for dozens of years. The response is almost always, "That site cannot be used as a Traveller site". Then development happens all around them so they feel like they are not part of society and that they are not treated the same. People talk about that and they have that impression, even when they make efforts to integrate with the rest of the community.

Secondly, there is a lot of displacement happening due to a shortage of site provision where new families form on sites and obviously there are no pitch vacancies. Some of them are being made offers for council housing or emergency accommodation if they get onto that route. Most of the time those are out of the borough that they grew up in and even outside of London. Families are effectively ripped apart. If you recognise that family is central, it is one of the most important things for Gypsies and Travellers and the isolation and impacts on health - mental health especially - that come from being torn apart from your family and being placed into an environment where you do not feel you are accepted are huge.

In terms of health and education, again, it is the effect of being moved around against your will, in a way. It is not the same as when people choose to travel. This is actually being evicted or forced to move into a type of accommodation you cannot live in.

Steve O'Connell AM: The Travelling community, if they are truly travelling, would have challenges around settled education just caused by the nature of travelling.

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, London Gypsy & Traveller Unit): Sure.

Steve O'Connell AM: I guess they would manage it around their plans of travelling. I am guessing here.

Ilinca Diaconescu (Planning Policy, London Gypsy & Traveller Unit): Yes, but travelling in the sense that it used to happen back in the day does not happen anymore because people cannot really travel. They are not allowed to.

Steve O'Connell AM: For the education and health of your family, you would be happy to have a settled site and then look after your children from that settled site?

Anne Marie O'Brien (from the floor): Yes, 100%, I would be.

Steve O'Connell AM: OK. Thank you. That is very helpful.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): We have clarified that and that was a useful point because, while the culture has moved away from actually travelling to settled sites, you need sites that can still accommodate and sustain that culture rather than disregard it entirely.

Anne Marie O'Brien (from the floor): Yes, it is our culture.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): That has been a really useful point and a point well made. There was a lot in the discussion from the floor at the start of the meeting of examples of best practice and so on. We are looking now at good practice in working with the Gypsy and Travelling community.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Rob, we have covered some of this already. You obviously have a successful scheme for temporary tolerated sites. How do you find a site? What is the process?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): We have an existing kind of tolerated negotiated stopping site for the Leeds-based roadside Travellers. We have had that since the beginning of May this year. We have had two previous tolerated sites where that group of Travellers has moved on to the site, but essentially we have effectively just allowed them to stay there rather than putting any investment or putting any emphasis on making it a viable site. This is the first time that we have really made a conscious effort to make things work for as long as possible.

The site itself is close to the city centre and it had been left empty for the best part of 30 years. It had a sign for the West Yorkshire County Council on it which was disbanded in 1985. That is how long that site had been unused. There could not really be a credible argument that alternative development was pending or was impending on that site. That was the first thing that we did.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): That was owned by the Council?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): It is owned by the Council. Since the Travellers have moved on to the site, in comparison to the previous year when we did not have a tolerated site in 2013, in the period May to September we have had a two-thirds reduction in the number of unauthorised encampments. That is a two-thirds reduction in the number of possession actions that we need to take, a two-thirds reduction in terms of the clean-up costs and also all the other benefits from Council members of staff who would be involved in taking the possession action or cleaning up unauthorised encampment sites.

They can do other things. At a very clear level, the litter-pickers who were cleaning up after unauthorised encampments can clean up the streets of Leeds. There are so many wins there.

We are anticipating that if it cost us £300,000 a year when we were simply evicting the Travellers, we believe we will see a two-thirds reduction in the costs associated with unauthorised encampments. In the current financial climate that is a significant amount of money that can be reinvested in other services.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): What was the reaction from people in Leeds and other communities?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): One of the really crucial things is that we cannot determine Travellers' behaviour by what has occurred on unauthorised encampments. Whilst you cannot wholly mitigate antisocial behaviour or things of that ilk, ultimately, if you are going to get evicted within a matter of days, why should you put an investment into a particular site? What we found since the Travellers have gone on the current tolerated site is an almost universal adherence to the toleration agreements we have set up and a willingness to engage with the local communities and with local business. We have looked at the latest crime figures and reported crime statistics have actually gone down in that particular area. Bill [Forrester] alluded to it earlier on and certainly it is relevant from a planning perspective as well that perception is often not realised in terms of the reality. A Gypsy and Traveller site is not by definition going to cause crime and antisocial behaviour.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Absolutely.

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): We have learned an awful lot. There are a lot of costs and there also benefits associated with our engagement with the Gypsies and Travellers. It also gives us food for thought in terms of how readily Gypsies and Travellers can integrate into the wider community as well.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): It sounds excellent. Could it work in London?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): Those principles apply across the board. The notion of 'not in my back yard' and that we will continue to evict and continue to move people around perhaps might have political benefits, but it is not a very sensible approach for managing budgets.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): It is not a long-term approach.

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): Also, the statements that have been made by the Gypsies and Travellers here echo the views of Gypsies and Travellers in Leeds. They want somewhere to live where they can express their culture. If they are given that, then more often than not things work out quite well.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Excellent.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): The financial benefits for the authority in pursuing that sort of approach are clear compared with a move-on and eviction approach?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): If nothing more, if that is the only positive, what everyone can take is that a policy of encampment and eviction and of not putting in place development makes very little financial sense.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Is it sustainable in the long-term?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): At this site we are looking for them to stay for one year. We have applied for planning permission and we are looking for one year. What we are looking to do is to demonstrate that finding housing solutions for Gypsies and Travellers works. It works for the city as a whole. Essentially, if we can get this year, then that buys us time to find other alternatives. It also will hopefully shape the debate about where we go from here in terms of long-term Gypsy and Traveller housing needs; so yes, it is sustainable.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): To bring in John [Lett] and Jamie, do you think this sort of scheme would be workable in London?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): I have to say that I have no idea what the average expenditure is by individual London boroughs on moving people on from unauthorised encampments. If there are opportunities to make those kinds of savings, then possibly it could. At a London-wide level, obviously, we are not incurring those costs.

Tom Copley AM (Deputy Chair): Gill might have something to add on whether, Gill, you think the scheme is something that would work.

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): Certainly anything that reduces the costs and cuts down the problems that it brings about with community cohesion is absolutely a positive. The difficulty with London is probably the one I alluded to earlier about the porous borders. As an authority, we could probably see the benefits and certainly officers who do that face-to-face work with the Travellers on unauthorised encampments. It is not a pleasant experience for anybody, Council employees or Travellers. If there was somewhere that they could be moved on to, it is better for the families concerned. There are lots of reasons why it seems like a very good and straightforward answer. The problem with the borough boundaries is where the issue falls down.

As I say, at the moment we do have 8 to 12 unauthorised encampment incidents a year, which is not a huge number. Other boroughs will have similar numbers. Whilst we have our own issue about dealing with Travellers based in the borough, we are looking for sites. We have already discussed how we might have problems with that, which may or may not lead us to have to look for further sites, which will be difficult enough. Then, to provide a site which may be perceived as one that then potentially would draw in unauthorised encampments from our very near neighbouring boroughs, people on the roads there, would see that as far more preferable, obviously, to the streets in a neighbouring borough. Yes, you can see why for Leeds, as a standalone city it works, yes. There definitely will be challenges, politically and locally, to make it work to prevent there being further intensification in any one particular borough.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you. Jamie, did you want to come back on this quickly?

Jamie Ratcliff (Assistant Director, Programme, Policy & Services, GLA): Just a brief point about good practice in other places and something that Rob [McCartney] said earlier about the needs assessment they carried out and how they put the community at the heart of it and were able to engage really strongly locally. That sounds like quite good practice. The wider approach, when they did it on a west Yorkshire level, had not worked. It is reinforcing my point that if we tried to do that very community-based engagement on a pan-London basis, I just do not think we are placed to do it, but perhaps individual boroughs could learn from that approach.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thanks for that. I am keen to get a couple of contributions from the floor on this. Could the Leeds scheme work in London?

Debby Kennett (from the floor): Absolutely. This has happened in London. More than ten years ago in Hackney, as an example, it was similar to the role that Leeds GATE took with working with the council and the community. We worked with Travellers who were on unauthorised encampments in Hackney and worked with the landowner, the council, the police and the community in doing exactly the example that was given around looking at land that was suitable. With agreement with the landowner, we actually had a clear toleration agreement that the families signed up to. That slowed down the evictions and allowed children to go to school. Camps were left there for a period of time with an agreement from the families that when that land was needed for development, they would leave. That is exactly what they did and the sites were left spotless.

Also in Hackney, the key point is what Rob [McCartney] said, which was about political and officer commitment, both from a political level in the council and at an officer level working with the community. The opposite also happened in Hackney over the last couple of years, where there was a group of about eight families who were moving around and facing constant evictions. In supporting the families, we wrote to the Mayor of Hackney and said, "We are not trying to cause a nuisance. Please could you work with us in identifying suitable pieces of land?" Land was clearly vacant, up for development, but not being used maybe for a period of six months or a year or less. They were happy to move on to those pieces of land, have some basic services and some toilets and agree to leave when that land was needed for development. However, there was not the political commitment to that or the interest and so that led to maybe about 15 evictions in the course of a year and more than £20,000 spent by the council. There is both good and bad practice.

It absolutely can work in London because there are vacant sites there that are earmarked for development to slow down evictions. The point is that if you are talking about the needs of children, once the evictions have slowed down, children can access schools. That particular group of families in Hackney continually took their children back to the same schools but it was very difficult and children did miss out on education because of the constant evictions. Education and health is a key thing when you are talking about impact.

Marian Mahoney (from the floor): I am 33 years an activist and 33 years ago I was at the side of the road in Old Ford in east London. We liaised with Ken Livingstone [former Vice Chairman of the Greater London Council Housing Management Committee] and some of the members of his political group. We had our own site built in Tower Hamlets, which we have just left at the moment because Crossrail has taken it over for a new shaft. We negotiated a new site. When we were getting evicted from our site that we had been in for 33 years and we were told by Crossrail, "Get all your trailers and your tow bars and go", we negotiated. I personally myself went with a petition from 19 residents to the Houses of Parliament. That left us with a new site in Old Willow Close.

I have lived 33 years in my own culture in Eleanor Street. We have practiced our own culture where we have our morals and we have different ways to other people, yes, but it has worked for 33 years at Eleanor Street and it has worked for the last 500 years. We have always negotiated. We have always integrated. I have three of my family married into a settled community. It is not a load of codswallop, as settled people will call it. We do integrate.

What I find is that between the Mayor, the Travellers and the councils, there is a lack of communication. If there was more communication, we would not be sitting here today. I really believe that you have plenty of experience from Travellers living in London. You should pick up the old consultation reports because I have been a part of many of them over the years. I have not missed one. You should go back and look at what they have spent hundreds and thousands of pounds on with research and learn from that. I actually think that the

experience is there. They just do not look for it. Every time there is a consultation, it comes up by the time the Government has changed and everything goes back to square one again. It is nothing but a complete waste of money to the taxpayers. Everything is laid there. It is just to be picked up where we left off and learn from it. Thank you very much for listening to us.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you very much for that. Dialogue and negotiation at the local level are obviously essential.

Stephen Knight AM: I want to ask about the way in which pitches are allocated and waiting lists. We have heard a certain amount of scepticism about whether waiting lists are operated in some cases or not and whether or not they are ignored. Perhaps I can ask our local authority representatives here to say what you do in terms of allocation of empty pitches and waiting lists and how you operate that. Gill, do you want to start off?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): I am going to have to check this because I am a planner rather than a housing officer. We certainly do have a waiting list. Currently we have four people on the waiting list. There are four applications and they are not individuals; they can be families. One of them at least is from someone in Kent. They are on the waiting list until such time as a pitch becomes free and then there are criteria which determine who from that waiting list will then get a pitch. It is not that the first on the list gets the pitch.

Stephen Knight AM: Perhaps you can let us have a copy of your criteria?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): Yes, certainly. Overcrowding and vulnerability are mentioned. Yes, I can certainly send that.

Stephen Knight AM: The other issue, if you could comment on it, is whether or not existing pitch owners on that site get a say or are consulted in terms of who the vacant pitch is allocated to.

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): To be honest, most of the applications tend to come from people within the pitches and people within the sites. To some extent, yes, there are occasions when certainly there are mixes of families that come together on one site and that is troublesome. The people on the pitch do not get the final say, but often the need comes from overcrowding on the site in the first place and they are already part of the family. Certainly one of our sites is significantly one large extended family.

Then the private pitches that we are looking to allocate are their own pitches and they are their own. We do not have a role in allocating them.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you. Rob, could you comment on what you do in Leeds?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): We have a housing register for Gypsies and Travellers which runs in parallel with the allocation scheme that we run for council housing across the city. Essentially, households have an assessment of their housing need and they are given the relevant priority preference, reasonable preference, for rehousing that reflects their housing need. Invariably Gypsies and Travellers who are living on the roadside, doubling up with family members or living in bricks-and-mortar housing but have a cultural aversion to conventional housing are awarded some level of preference. Certainly if they have dependent children or include a pregnant woman they will be deemed to be statutorily homeless with the accompanying housing duty which we will only discharge through a suitable housing offer.

I know we talked about people who sometimes move into conventional housing. Clearly we need to assess each case on its individual merits, but essentially if someone moved in who we have decided has a cultural aversion, they are statutorily homeless. Even if they moved temporarily into bricks-and-mortar housing, we would consider that was not a suitable offer to discharge the housing duty owed to them. We would retain that housing duty pending a pitch becoming available. They could live in the conventional housing until a pitch became available. There is a lot more to it than that, but essentially that is it in summary.

Stephen Knight AM: Does your allocation policy try to ensure that extended families can be accommodated on the same site or does that not come into it?

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): More often than not, the Gypsies and Travellers will decide that themselves. They may say that an offer of a pitch is not suitable because it may not be on the site that they want to be.

Because I have a wider role in terms of housing need, I am not a great believer in discharging a housing duty to a household when they refuse an offer. Ultimately we have awarded the housing priority on the basis that they have unmet housing need and that unmet housing need is still there. It is a lot easier for me to take such an approach in an authority like Leeds, perhaps. For people who work in homelessness and allocations in London it might be more difficult for them to adopt such a policy, but certainly we can in Leeds.

Stephen Knight AM: Thank you. Bill, can you comment on Kent's approach?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): Yes. We have had a waiting list since 1996 that was at that time entirely based on need and had no connection with how long people had been on the list. We then overhauled it. We had a very sizeable consultation a couple of years ago. At that time we had support for having no limits to the waiting list. Interestingly enough, we have had applications from considerable numbers of families in London, mainly south London boroughs, but going up to Haringey and so on, particularly for new pitches that we had on the new site development. We had 17 new pitches and we had over 70 applications altogether. We have learned a great deal through that process to do with changes we are going to make. We are going to review the whole allocation process in the spring of next year. We are very rigorous about who gets offered. We are very resistant to people finding ways on to sites in order to try to take over pitches or to plan ways of doing it.

Do we consult with other people? We inform people and we keep in close touch if there are clashes between families. We have actually had to deal with some quite tricky issues recently around an incident on another site and people's fears and concerns about it. We are careful. If issues do break out between families, then we would want to be involved with that. We are increasingly getting people, I am glad to say, reporting such things - whereas in the past we did not get that - and actually sometimes involving the police and so on in dealing with some of these issues.

We try to resist the idea that a site belongs to a few families. We have been working with a number of families for about the last five years and encouraging them to believe in the benefits of having wider communities. I am glad to say I am making some progress now. If you go to a group of families who are all from the same family on a site then it can be quite inward looking. We are actually looking at sustainable communities. We are looking at reasonable preference for everybody on our list. We had to get the council's opinion on what we were doing for the new big Coldharbour site because the local borough council wanted to have a priority for local connection. We have a slightly different allocation policy for that site to favour local connection than we do for other sites that we allocate.

We always have to make sure that anyone on our list stands some chance of getting an offer and that they should be considered fairly. We are actually now getting feedback from Travellers saying, "We might have been turned down but we know your system is fair", and that is good to hear back.

Stephen Knight AM: That is good to hear. The final element of the question was really to ask you how you manage communication with the Travellers resident on your sites. I know that some local authorities have a dedicated local Gypsies and Traveller officer who manages the communication between the local authority and the residents. Is that the way that the three local authorities here manage it or is there some other way?

Bill Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit, Kent County Council): We have communication, but people on our sites have the mobile numbers of the site managers. We have contact on a daily or hourly basis directly with Travellers, including applicants and including other people onsite. There are no communication issues. In fact, the only communication issue is trying to deal with people on leave and people making calls and getting voicemails and so on and advising people to come back through the contact centre number for the authority.

A lot of people in our authority are people on the front of our reception area in County Hall and all sorts. We have developed together welcoming approaches to people, even to people in some distress and people coming into the council with enormous homelessness issues. Some of that is quite difficult. It is in order to prevent the difficulties and the tensions or even the prejudices arising. We work very hard to make sure that does not happen.

Stephen Knight AM: Just finally then to Rob [McCartney] or Gill, do either of your authorities have a dedicated Gypsies and Travellers officer who handles communication or do you do it via the wider housing team?

Gill Slater (Policy Planner, London Borough of Bromley): We have a site liaison officer who is embedded within the housing team. Of late he has had to take on more housing responsibilities as well, but he is onsite once a week without fail, if not more. Two sites they are. The private sites come in regularly to the planning department because they are very keen to see what is happening and knowing their temporary permissions are expiring and where we are with the local planning. They come directly to me and they are on the phone frequently to find out how things are progressing and what the current situation is. The private sites I am in contact with. Added to that, of course, is the biannual caravan camp which the liaison officer and I do together. Then I get to see both sites and I introduce him to the private sites.

Rob McCartney (Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council): We have a dedicated Gypsy and Traveller team. They have recently been integrated. They are keeping their specialist role but they have been integrated into a home visiting housing needs assessment team simply to maintain that expertise and also to put some more resources towards the Gypsy and Traveller service as well. Yes, there is a dedicated resource.

Darren Johnson AM (Chair): Thank you very much. Thank you to everyone who contributed from the floor and came along. Thank you to our panellists as well. It is clear that we do need to improve how we accommodate our Gypsy and Traveller community here in London. We have heard some examples of good practice. It is an important part of London as a diverse multicultural city and we should not forget that.

There are two reflections from me that came from the floor at the start. One is the need for calm dialogue. We have had a calm dialogue today and that has been extremely helpful. I am also very hopeful after hearing about the scrutiny exercise that Leeds City Council took on and how that directly led to some good clear

recommendations and some very clear improvements which have obviously improved things in the city of Leeds. Hopefully we can learn from that. Thank you to everyone who has taken part today.