

# Counting Gypsies & Travellers: A Review of the Gypsy Caravan Count System

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On 5th May 2006 the responsibilities of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) transferred to the Department for Communities and Local Government.

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## **Publication Information**

### **Counting Gypsies and Travellers: A Review of the Gypsy Caravan Count System**

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The system of twice-yearly counts of Gypsy caravans and families was introduced in England in 1979. Local authorities carry out the count and return figures to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). At the time the count was introduced county councils, metropolitan districts and London Boroughs were under a statutory duty to provide adequate accommodation for Gypsies residing in and resorting to their areas (Caravan Sites Act 1968 Part II). The count was intended to estimate the size of the Gypsy population for whom provision was to be made and to monitor progress towards meeting the provisions of the 1968 Act. Part II of the 1968 Act, and thus the duty to provide, was repealed in 1994 by the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. Department of the Environment Circulars 1/94 (*Gypsy Sites and Planning*) and 18/94 (*Gypsy Sites Policy and Unauthorised Camping*) make clear that local (planning) authorities should still consider and plan for Gypsy accommodation needs despite the repeal. The count system continues unchanged.

Between 1989 and 1991 the (then) Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) carried out extensive research into the count system following various criticisms from official agencies and Gypsy representative groups as to the system's adequacy and accuracy. In the course of the research, OPCS examined how local authorities carried out the count and how the count information was used. Researchers developed and tested an alternative series of count forms designed to collect fuller and more consistent information. The report *Counting Gypsies* was published in 1991 (Green 1991), but the recommendations have not been implemented.

In spring 2003, ODPM commissioned the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham to carry out a desk study to update the OPCS report. This followed continuing criticism of the count.

## Research Objectives

The purpose of the review was to examine the adequacy and accuracy of the Gypsy/Traveller count; to ascertain the current use of the existing count data; and to identify other useful data which could be collected at the same time. The aim was to propose several options which would produce a more useful and accurate count of Gypsies/Travellers without the burden on local authorities increasing to an unacceptable level. The review was also to specify basic checks for ODPM to carry out to ensure more accurate data.

## Research Approach

The review involved two main elements:

- Scoping interviews : three face-to-face interviews were carried out with ODPM personnel with responsibilities for Gypsy policy, planning and statistics. Six telephone interviews were carried out with Gypsy/Traveller officers in a range of local authorities. A letter was

sent to six Gypsy representative bodies/individuals asking for comments on a list of topics; five replies were received. The main focus in all these was the perceived adequacy and accuracy of the count; use made of data collected; and ideas about how the system might be changed. The findings from the local authority interviews and the Gypsy body/individual communications are summarised in Appendix A.

- Telephone interview survey : a small-scale survey of local authority officers responsible for completing the count returns was carried out. In all, 42 interviews were completed. The survey questionnaire was designed to identify the position of the person making the return and to check the source and perceived accuracy of each item of information. Particular problematic aspects of the count were explored and reactions to specific possible changes were checked. The findings of the survey are summarised in Appendix B.

This report brings together material from scoping interviews and survey. Chapter 2 looks at the current count system, Chapter 3 presents options for the future development of the system.

## Chapter 2: The Current Count System

This chapter looks at the current count system. First it notes the counts in the context of other information about Gypsies and Travellers. Next it describes the information provided in the count, how it is processed and published. The following four sub-sections draw on the review research to discuss in turn the accuracy, use and perceived adequacy of count information and to report concerns about the count. Finally, the main strengths and weaknesses of the current system are summarised.

### The Count in Context

There is no comprehensive source of information about the number or characteristics of Gypsies/Travellers in England:

- The 2001 and earlier Censuses have not included Gypsies/Travellers as separate ethnic group(s). Gypsy caravans are enumerated, insofar as they are identified and included at all, in the larger category of 'household space which is a caravan or other mobile or temporary structure' (which made up 0.42% of all household spaces in 2001).
- Few local authority or other ethnic record keeping systems identify Gypsies and/or Travellers as a specific group (Niner 2002). There are some exceptions - for example, Supporting People client records identify 'Travellers' as one of the specified client groups for monitoring purposes ('Traveller' was the primary client group for 0.3% of the validated client records for clients starting to receive SP services during April 2003 - figures from the internet updated 4/6/03). 'Traveller' is defined for SP monitoring purposes as a person of a nomadic habit of life or a person who travels or wanders for the purpose of making or seeking their livelihood.
- Even statistics from the Traveller Education Service, which might be expected to give an accurate figure for school-age children appear to produce widely varying estimates (Bhopal et al 2000).

Definitions are an obvious obstacle to collecting comprehensive information about Gypsies/Travellers. Ethnic, lifestyle and self-ascription approaches would produce different figures. Some Gypsies/Travellers, in some contexts, might be unwilling to acknowledge their origins. A consequence of all this is the frequent 'invisibility' of Gypsies and Travellers in service planning, delivery and monitoring (Morris 2000).

In this context, the Gypsy caravan/family count assumes great importance as almost the only source of information about Gypsies/Travellers which gives any idea of numbers and distribution of the Travelling communities. In this context it is important to identify any issues of adequacy and accuracy within the count system. These points are developed below.

### The Count System

The count is based upon two returns:

- GS1 : Count of Gypsy Caravans
- GS2 : Provision of Local Authority Gypsy Sites

These returns are reproduced in Appendix C. Both returns are paper-based rather than electronic.

### **The GS1 Return**

The count of Gypsy caravans (GS1) return is sent to all English local authorities (district councils in two-tier areas). It requires a count of Gypsy caravans, families, adults and children aged 0-16 on:

- unauthorised sites on Gypsies' own land (without planning permission) distinguishing between those which are tolerated and not tolerated;
- unauthorised sites (without planning permission) on land not owned by Gypsies, again distinguishing between those which are tolerated and not tolerated; and
- authorised sites (with planning permission), distinguishing between council and private sites.

Thus there are 24 cells to be completed on each return.

The count is to be carried out on a specified date in January and July each year, giving a snapshot of the number and location of caravans/families on those days. January and July were selected to give an idea of winter and summer patterns, given the known seasonality of travelling.

There are guidance notes on the back of the return which deal with definitions of 'caravans' and 'Gypsies', and give guidance on the various categories of unauthorised encampments and the tolerated/not tolerated distinction. About three-quarters of respondents in the telephone survey said that they regularly read the guidance notes, although some 'reading' was a rapid skim to look for changes.

### **The GS2 Return**

The approach for the GS2 return on provision of local authority Gypsy sites is different. This is an annual return each January (not on the same date as the caravan count: in 2003 the GS2 count date was 2 January, the GS1 count date was 17 January; there is no known reason why the two returns have different dates). ODPM records on the form sent to each authority the site details from the last return (address, total pitches, type of pitches (residential and transit), total caravan capacity and date the site was opened). Authorities are asked to note any changes

from this information. New sites should be added giving all these items of information.

## **Response**

The counts are voluntary. There are no rewards to local authorities completing the returns or penalties for those who fail to do so.

In January 2003 the GS1 was returned by 94% of authorities and the GS2 by 85%. Response to the GS1 is normally higher in January than in July. Responses for individual cells are impossible to assess accurately because of a general instruction to those entering data that blank cells should be entered as a zero. There is currently no provision for distinguishing between accurate figures and estimates even if authorities, as requested, make this distinction.

## **Processing**

Data entry is carried out by ODPM staff based in Bristol; responsibility for analysis lies with ODPM statisticians at Eland House. Entry is now to an Excel master spreadsheet which ensures that amendments in any cell will be reflected in all totals. This is an improvement over the former Word-based approach which meant that internal inconsistencies could arise. In January 2003 some phone calls were made to local authorities to check apparent inconsistencies and inaccuracies.

Statisticians drew attention to two areas of concern:

- Where authorities fail to make a return, figures are imputed using the previous year's figure (or most recent available) for either January or July as appropriate. In January 2003, 24 or 25 local authorities required imputed figures (depending on the cell). Where imputations are made, this is indicated against the authority and the count date. A more sophisticated approach might be possible, taking into account apparent trends over time. However, examination of the count figures suggests that a very small number of authorities rarely make a return, and any form of imputation would be dubious. Because of the lower response rate for GS2 returns, imputation seems a more serious issue for the count of local authority Gypsy sites; this would have the effect of increasing apparent stability in numbers and may well lie behind discrepancies between GS1 and GS2 returns where, for example, LA sites appear in the sites count, but no caravans on LA sites appear in the caravan count.
- The lack of distinction between a blank cell and a true zero is obviously potentially distorting. It appears that practice may be inconsistent here in that a count of imputed values for individual cells in the July 2002 caravan count revealed variation between 45 (for caravans on LA sites) and 66 (for the number of adults and children on tolerated unauthorised sites on Gypsy-owned land). There was no similar variation in January 2003. Either practice - imputation or recording blank cells as zero - inevitably introduce inaccuracies.

Carrying out a greater number of consistency checks and/or introducing better methods of

imputation for non-response and blank cells would require more staff time. While some obvious inconsistencies could be identified and checked, other inaccuracies could probably only be identified with outside knowledge.

## **Publication and Availability**

A full list of all local authority Gypsy sites from the GS2 return is published each year and is available in paper form and on the ODPM housing web site. All the information collected is published by local authority with regional and national totals, together with a brief commentary on the figures and changes from the previous year.

Publication of material from the GS1 caravan count is less complete:

- Figures for the last five counts are published (paper and ODPM housing web site) showing numbers of Gypsy caravans (total, unauthorised, private authorised and LA authorised) for each local authority, with regional and national totals. A similar breakdown of figures is available on the housing web site for Gypsy families, but availability of this seems less well known than the caravan count.
- Special supplementary tables are produced which break down the figures for caravans on unauthorised sites between those on Gypsy-owned land (distinguishing tolerated and not tolerated), and those on land not owned by Gypsies (distinguishing tolerated and not tolerated). The existence of these supplementary tables is not widely known and distribution seems very limited (routine circulation is to the Regional Controllers and planning officers in regional Government Offices).
- Data on numbers of adults and children are not analysed, and therefore are never published.

Publication of the counts is low key and not accompanied by a press notice or other public statement. A local authority officer interviewed at the scoping stage contrasted this with Rough Sleepers counts which have much higher profile and are regularly linked with policy debate.

## **Accuracy of the Count**

Every contributor to the research had serious reservations about the accuracy of the count figures. 'Evidence' of inaccuracies included:

- officer knowledge of 'guesstimates' or errors in their own authority's count;
- anecdotes of poor practice elsewhere;
- discrepancies between personal knowledge/observation and the count; and
- internal inconsistencies in published figures suggesting entries in the wrong cell etc.

The findings from both the scoping interviews and telephone surveys (Appendices A and B)

provide more details of inaccuracies and their sources. Here we summarise some of the apparent reasons for inaccuracies and suggest which pieces of information are most reliable.

## Reasons for Inaccuracies

A number of sometimes inter-related reasons for inaccuracy can be identified:

- Lack of commitment: it might be argued that (some) local authorities devote too few resources to the count to achieve accuracy. The mean time taken by those responding to the telephone survey who were able to give an answer was 6.3 hours, but in 12 authorities (almost a third) less than two hours of officer time was spent on the count including all information collection. Limited resources might be attributable to low priority accorded either to Gypsy/ Traveller issues generally or to the count specifically. This seems to be related to a widespread perception that there is little purpose behind the count and that figures do not directly influence policy. There appears to be a self-reinforcing spiral that perceived inaccuracy/inadequacy of the counts reduces their value and therefore authorities make less effort, which in turn reduces the accuracy and so on.
- Relation to local policies: some argue that a few authorities wilfully reduce the number of caravans counted because they wish to minimise apparent need for sites or other services. This argument perhaps had greater weight when authorities were under a duty to provide sites, but still applies where a local planning authority is reluctant to grant planning consent for Gypsy sites. The review has not provided any direct evidence to support or refute this. However other less direct links to local policies are apparent - for example, an authority which is less active in managing unauthorised camping will probably be less aware of encampments, and one which only carries out welfare enquiries where eviction is in prospect will have less accurate information from management records than more pro-active authorities. Some respondents to the telephone survey admitted that their information on encampments on private land would be patchy because they took no direct action.
- Poor counting practices: about half of authorities taking part in the telephone survey carried out some form of special exercise to identify unauthorised encampments for the count (many who did not said this was unnecessary). Just over half (57%) would visit or drive past encampments on the count day; the remainder relied on the records they kept for managing unauthorised encampments for information which could be incomplete or out-of-date. A significant minority of authorities (about one in five) appeared to complete all aspects of the counts as a desk exercise with the accuracy depending on the quality of management records, in turn probably related to local policies, practices and staffing levels. In some county areas, both county and district councils contribute to the return which may lead to inconsistencies - for example the county may provide figures for unauthorised encampments, but these will exclude encampments on Gypsy-owned land. In other county areas, there may be no collaboration on the count despite the county holding potentially useful information.
- Geography: for some authorities sheer geography presents a considerable challenge to accuracy. In a large rural area it is virtually impossible to be sure that all encampments are counted.
- Traveller mistrust: Gypsies/Travellers are rarely actively involved in or consulted on the count. They see little evidence that it is to their benefit to co-operate. Counting officers are

often those involved in management of unauthorised encampments and enforcement. In this context a degree of mistrust is natural and may be translated into reluctance to provide personal information. Where an authority is taking planning enforcement action against Gypsies on their own land or eviction action against other encampments, a lack of co-operation is not surprising. Information for the caravan count on numbers of families, adults and children must come from the Gypsies/ Travellers themselves. The telephone survey suggested that officers sometimes experience difficulties in identifying and counting Gypsy/Traveller men (where there are fears of links with housing benefit or other investigations) and children (if there are fears about school attendance). Information generally is likely to be less accurate where:

- o there is little contact and thus mistrust between the Travellers and the counting officers
  - o families on unauthorised encampments are new to the area and links and trust have not been established
- groups are aggressive towards 'authority'
  - Inconsistent definitions etc: the telephone survey identified a number of instances of officers using definitions and assumptions in such a way as to create inconsistencies between returns from different authorities. It is clear that guidance notes on the GS1 are not always followed. Some of the areas of inconsistency identified are:
    - o definitions of 'tolerated' and 'not tolerated' unauthorised encampments, especially the treatment of '28 day tolerated' encampments
    - o treatment and categorisation of leased local authority sites
    - o treatment of caravans in excess of permitted numbers on authorised sites (which should be treated as unauthorised, but often are not)
    - o treatment of private Gypsy sites where residents are no longer nomadic
    - o inclusion/exclusion of caravans within the curtilage of Gypsy-owned dwelling houses
    - o inclusion of New Travellers (some might automatically include them, others automatically exclude them and still others attempt to apply the GS1 guidance notes strictly).
    - o defining 'families' and especially whether extended families are treated as a single entity or broken into 'nuclear' family units
    - o inclusion of Traveller men and/or children 'known' to live on site, but not reported by Gypsies/Travellers on count day
    - o identification and treatment of derelict caravans or caravans only used for storage (should be excluded if not used for living purposes, but may not always be so)

## Relative Reliability of Information

The telephone survey asked respondents to say how accurate they thought their authority's count was. Just half thought it very accurate; almost half thought it fairly accurate; and only one respondent said it was not very accurate. Subsequent answers, however, suggest that some of those thinking it very accurate were perhaps being optimistic or judging 'accuracy' against what they thought achievable rather than in an absolute sense.

Table 1 shows for each item of information (ignoring for the moment the distinction between tolerated and not tolerated unauthorised encampments) the proportion of respondents saying that their information provided was 'accurate' as opposed to a 'guestimate'.

**Table 1: Proportion of Respondents Saying Each Item of Information is 'Accurate'**

Information	Unauthorised sites		Authorised sites	
	Gypsy land	Other land	Private	LA

<b>Caravans</b>	94	95	85	92
<b>Families</b>	40	24	59	92
<b>Adults</b>	27	18	48	92
<b>Children</b>	27	16	48	89
<b>Sample number</b>	16	39	27	26

Source : Telephone survey

As can be seen:

- Accuracy of information is generally greater on authorised than on unauthorised sites.
- On authorised sites, accuracy is greater for LA than for private sites. This is understandable since authorities are able to draw on their own landlord management information or request the details from site managers.
- On unauthorised sites, accuracy is greater for encampments on Gypsy-owned land than for other encampments.
- Across all types of site apart from LA sites, the information on caravans is thought to be significantly more accurate than information on numbers of families, which in turn is more accurate than numbers of adults and children. Caravans can be 'counted' objectively and accuracy does not rely on asking Gypsies/Travellers for personal information. The number of families can be 'imputed' from the number of caravans with greater certainty than the number of people.

The relative assessed inaccuracy of information on families, adults and children may justify ODPM in not publishing the figures, although in turn this may reduce an authority's incentive to achieve accuracy. Some respondents noted that the personal information provided was as good as they could reasonably be expected to collect given the nature of the task. Even where authorities visit specifically for the count, Gypsies/Travellers may be out when the counting officer calls and may have little incentive to be completely truthful in providing information anyway. Some commented that greater accuracy might be achieved if the count was carried out by Traveller support groups or others whom Gypsies/Travellers trust more than local authorities.

A further obvious point underlying a discussion of accuracy is the relative smallness of numbers concerned. The GS2 deals with around 300 LA sites with few additions or losses each year. A very small error could represent quite a large percentage, especially at the margin where trends are being measured. Caravan figures for the GS1 are rather larger, but again errors and omissions could easily cancel out 'real' changes and/or produce misleading results. This factor is inescapable.

### **Main Uses of Count Information**

The general impression given in the review was that relatively little use is currently made of count information. In part this may be because of perceived inaccuracies, in part because of

inadequacies in what is counted (see below). Another reason for low use of count information is undoubtedly lack of policy/service development in Gypsy/ Traveller matters in some areas which means that there is no perceived need for information.

There seem to be two (related) main uses of count material at present:

- Within the land use planning system. Count information is used to an unknown extent in assessing need for Gypsy accommodation and in developing structure and local plan policies (the review did not explore these aspects in any detail). It is more obviously used to evidence local need (or lack of need) for sites in development control and enforcement, and subsequent public inquiries and appeals. The Planning Inspectorate send Briefings including count figures to all identified Gypsy planning appeals. Thus count information is available to, and used by, local authorities, Gypsies and those acting on their behalf, and the Inspector.
- Within Gypsy sites policy. The count (GS1) provided the basis for the most recent attempt at estimating possible need for residential and transit site provision at national level (Niner 2002). Some local authority officers interviewed at the scoping stage said they had used the counts in making the case for transit sites or stopping places locally (others said that they would use their own more detailed records for such purposes). A Gypsy/Traveller body said they used count information in urging local authorities to provide (or retain) sites. Count information on LA sites (GS2) provides a general context against which Gypsy Sites Refurbishment Grant applications and awards can be seen.

The review collected no evidence that count information was used for health or education service planning. Beyond planning and site provision, uses referred to tended to be very general - for example keeping an eye on national or regional trends, having background information when talking to colleagues from another part of the country or talking to councillors about what might or might not be happening elsewhere. One interviewee remarked that count information is probably more useful at national than at local level.

## Adequacy of the Count

No-one contributing to the review thought the count information adequate. 'Adequacy' implies 'adequate for a purpose or purposes' and it is likely that respondents had purposes at least implicitly in mind when replying. Potential purposes and 'adequacy' of count data for each are summarised below after a number of more general points are made.

## Factors Limiting the 'Adequacy' of Count Information

Four general factors seem to limit perceived 'adequacy' of count information. These are:

- Accuracy: as already noted, there was an almost universal perception that the count was inaccurate which immediately reduces relevance and 'adequacy'.
- Snapshot: the caravan count is a twice-yearly snapshot. This is felt by some to be

especially inadequate as a realistic measure of unauthorised camping (particularly on land not owned by Gypsies where mobility can be expected to be greatest). Several of the survey authorities had a consistent zero return but said that this was chance as unauthorised encampments were experienced at other times in the year. Some respondents noted that regular movements (for race meetings, festivals etc) were missed by the count. Snapshots can, therefore, be misleading as an indication of the need for site provision and/or the likely demand for services and/or resources for managing unauthorised camping.

- The population: some respondents wanted the count to provide information about the Gypsy/Traveller population. Obviously the system does not do this since only Gypsy/Travellers living in caravans (on count days) are included. Housed Gypsies/Travellers are not included (unless they are travelling in caravans on count days and enumerated on an unauthorised site somewhere or on an authorised site as a visitor). In some areas the omission of housed Travellers is felt to be serious for several reasons:
  - o local Travellers are in houses because site places are not available; some of the demand/need for site provision would come from housed Travellers; and
  - o services (general support, health and education) are provided to housed Travellers as well as those on sites or on the roadside.

In one survey local authority the main limitation of the count was seen as its omission of New Travellers who, after long deliberation, were not felt to fall into the statutory definition of 'Gypsies' as set out in the GS1 guidance notes. Thus there is a feeling that the count only includes a section of the population potentially relevant for service planning purposes. Some thought that the Census, rather than the count, should provide overall information at least on ethnic Gypsies/Travellers.

- Information collected and/or published: many felt that, for any particular purpose, the information collected and/or published was inadequate - either incomplete or too general. This point is expanded in the following sub-section.

In the interests of fairness and balance it is necessary to point out that some of the comments about adequacy made in the course of the review seem to have been responses to specific questions, rather than a reflection of long-felt personal views or directly-experienced gaps in information. Some telephone survey respondents seemed to complete the count returns in a purely routine manner and to think little about it or even to consider what use they might make of the information. Other more pro-active officers were aware of the inadequacies. Some of the strongest views of all were expressed by Gypsy/Traveller representative bodies and individuals.

### **Potential Purposes and 'Adequacy' of Count Information**

Those contributing to the review had no very clear understanding of what count information was meant to be for now (especially since the repeal of the duty to make site provision). In this

context they tended to feel it was inadequate because it did not meet all (or any) of the various purposes for which they felt they needed information about Gypsies and Travellers. Table 2 lists in very general terms some of the purposes mentioned or implied by the review with comments as to the count's adequacy. Since the list is so varied it is hardly surprising that the count is found wanting. It is almost a truism that the more information is provided, the more is apparently needed. Obviously a major challenge for the second part of this report is to suggest the best and most effective balance between the long list of potentially 'useful' information and what it is realistic to collect on a regular routine basis.

**Table 2: Some Potential Uses of Count Material and its 'Adequacy'**

Potential use of information	Comments about the current count
Site availability	Number of LA sites and pitches (GS2); less detailed information for private sites. No information on availability of pitches
Need for residential site provision	Caravan/family numbers not on authorised sites, but nothing about Traveller preferences; no information on demand/need from housed Travellers
Need for transit site provision	Snapshot information on caravan/family numbers not on authorised sites; no information on other dates. Nothing about Traveller preferences
Monitoring progress towards site provision targets	GS2 information on change for LA sites; no information on private sites other than caravan/family numbers
Planning and resourcing other service provision (health, education, general support etc)	Would require demographic information where the count is particularly weak and inaccurate. Also requires 'need' measures
Equality issues	Count inadequate; might need more detailed information on ethnicity within the broad Gypsy/Traveller community
Incidence of unauthorised camping (for service planning, resourcing etc)	Snapshot numbers of caravan/families; no year round figures or indication of the number of encampments
Approaches to managing unauthorised camping	No information
Site management performance (LA)	No information

### Concerns about the Count

Primary concerns expressed during the review were about accuracy and adequacy of information and these have been described above. Three further concerns emerged.

- While local authority respondents were often critical of the accuracy and adequacy of the current count system there is no evidence that they would be prepared to devote greater resources and time to an amended, improved count. This is in part related to the local

profile of Gypsy/Traveller matters and the importance attached to them in local policies and services. Officers would need to see very clear benefits from putting more effort into the count.

- Some respondents thought that the very process of 'counting' Gypsies and Travellers is unduly intrusive and discriminatory since there is no equivalent 'count' of the settled community (other than the Census). Seeking personal information from Gypsies/Travellers was felt to be particularly intrusive and threatening to families' legitimate privacy.
- There was a clear realisation that information about Gypsies and Travellers is not neutral. Fuller information could be used 'against' as well as 'for' Gypsies/Travellers. Some officers felt that even their own local authorities could not necessarily be 'trusted' with fuller information since the slant of local policies was 'anti-Traveller'. This dilemma is apparent in all ethnic record keeping where the consensus seems now to have moved firmly in favour of better information as a basis of needs assessment and equalities monitoring. It appears still to be live in relation to Gypsies and Travellers where many are more cynical about the effectiveness of race relations legislation to protect minority community interests. Better information might be seen, by Travellers and others, as more likely to lead to enhanced control and enforcement rather than to generous, culturally-sensitive service provision.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Current Count System**

These findings from the review suggest something of a deficit on the balance sheet of strengths of the current count system. On the positive side of the equation, the count provides some information on an otherwise almost totally 'invisible' group. The great majority of local authorities complete the returns and strive for accuracy in an inherently difficult area for statistics. At a national level count information provides measures of trends over time in the number of caravans and local authority sites, and of the distribution of caravans between different types of site and over geographical areas. As such it provides a basis for site planning and some indication of the extent of unauthorised camping to be managed at any point in time.

On the negative side, relatively little use is made of count information, perhaps partly because of the acknowledged policy 'hiatus' since the abolition of the site provision duty in 1994. People are generally unsure what purpose the counts fulfil and how the information is supposed to relate to policy. This, and concerns about accuracy, contribute to general feelings that count information is inadequate. Some are concerned about 'counting' Gypsies and Travellers at a more fundamental level and some deplore the lack of involvement of Gypsies and Travellers themselves in the process.

Figures for physical items (caravans, pitches) are likely to be more accurate than figures for personal information (families, children). Similarly, count figures for authorised local authority sites are likely to be more accurate than those for private authorised sites which, in turn, are more credible than figures for unauthorised encampments. It is unfortunate that inaccuracies are likely to be greatest for those on unauthorised sites where policy attention is most focused.

The count certainly includes errors and omissions and the data should be interpreted with caution, especially where they affect relatively small totals. While the absolute figures published include these inaccuracies, trends which persist over time, identified from cumulated

data (for example at national or regional levels), are likely to reflect real trends.

The caravan count figures display a degree of internal consistency and match our real world experience. For example, caravan counts for unauthorised encampments in July are consistently higher than those for January. Conversely, counts on both public and private residential sites are lower in July than January as Gypsies and Travellers take to the road in summer.

The reliability of figures at local authority level will vary considerably. Where an authority has taken care in its counting, absolute figures and trends are likely to be reliable. Where little effort is made by an authority to achieve accuracy in counting, any inferences made from its data will be unreliable. The value of data at local authority level can only be assessed on a case by case basis.

Overall, there is probably consensus that the count should continue. Every effort should be made to reduce the weaknesses identified and to create information which is as useful as possible.

## Chapter 3: Options for the Future

This chapter looks towards the future, building upon the findings of the review. It starts by restating the importance of establishing links between policy, purpose and the count, and next explores the distinction between collecting information through a regular return and one-off or less frequent surveys. Subsections then look at possible items of information which could be collected through the count and at other aspects of the count system which might be varied. Possible changes are combined within a number of example options. Finally, it comments on how change might be implemented.

### Policy, Purpose and the Count

At present it is hard to see that count information is directly linked to policy on Gypsy/Traveller issues, either at local, regional or national level. Ideally, a discussion of the count system should follow clarification of policy towards Gypsies and Travellers. For the purposes of moving forward in this report, we make a number of assumptions.

First, we assume that the *main* client for count information is central rather than local government. It follows that the information collected should be particularly relevant to national policy concerns, rather than tailored to local concerns which could anyway vary between authorities. Retaining the local authority geographical basis within the system allows some locational analysis, and would allow local information to be seen within the wider county, regional or national context.

Second, we assume that the main concerns of government policy can be identified from recent statements and consultation documents, and that the counts should be particularly relevant within these areas. This provides a way of prioritising potential items of information.

The main elements of government policy towards Gypsies and Travellers are summarised in Table 3, along with the sort of information which would be useful in implementation and monitoring. The elements in italics are those implied from general policy statements. The information needs are stated in fairly crude and broad terms, and could be refined into much greater detail and depth.

**Table 3: Main Elements in National Policy and Resulting Information Needs**

Policy	Information needs
<b>Site provision</b>	
Making land available for site development through the planning system (Circular 1/94; PPGs 3 and 12)	Number of sites/pitches required by type of site and location; Gypsy/Traveller preferences; land available. Might be seen within context of wider housing needs assessments involving demographic change, new household formation, accommodation affordability etc
Retention of existing sites through physical	Change over time in number and quality

upgrading (GSRG for LA sites)	of existing sites
Provision of transit sites and stopping places to facilitate nomadism and reduce the extent of unauthorised camping and associated problems (support via GSRG)	Assessment of need for sites/pitches by type of provision and location; number of sites/pitches provided; usage of sites/pitches; extent of unauthorised camping
Pro-active management of unauthorised encampments to reduce nuisance, including enforcement against unacceptable behaviour	Extent of unauthorised camping; quality of site/facilities; scale of problems associated with encampments; action taken in relation to eviction/moving on of encampments; enforcement action (other than eviction) taken against unacceptable behaviour by individuals on encampments
<b>Site management</b>	
<i>LA Gypsy site management for site sustainability</i>	<i>Management PIs on voids, lettings, turnover rates, speed of letting, rent levels, other charges, arrears, evictions, resident satisfaction</i>
<b>Other policies</b>	
<i>Social inclusion and provision of services for Gypsies/Travellers</i>	<i>Assessments of need for health, education and other services (e.g. number of school-age and pre-school-age children, health status); monitoring of service provision and uptake (e.g. children in local schools, site residents registered with GP)</i>
<i>Social inclusion, diversity and equalities</i>	<i>Record keeping and monitoring to include Gypsies and Travellers along with other ethnic groups; may need ethnic distinctions within broader Gypsy/Traveller community</i>

The table provides a long shopping list of potential information requirements, and could be extended further to encompass, for example, links to social housing through housing or homelessness applications.

### The Count or Research?

In collecting information to inform and monitor policy, there is a basic choice between using regular routine returns, and one-off or less frequent surveys. Obviously the count falls into the first category while, for example, the various surveys carried out within the programme of research on the availability and condition of Gypsy sites (Niner 2002) fall into the second.

It is sensible to consider which items of potentially useful information listed in Table 3 would best be collected through a return, and which through 'research'. Criteria for collecting information as a regular return include:

- Simplicity: it must be possible for those collecting information to apply simple,

unambiguous definitions so that information is consistent when collated.

- Ease of collection: especially where completing the return is voluntary, collection of information should be easy and quick. It should not require a big resource input.
- Value in trends over time: returns are particularly valuable where time series data can be built up to monitor progress.

In the context of the Gypsy count, applying the first two criteria might suggest that only information which can be collected without talking to or interviewing Gypsies and Travellers should be included within the regular return. In mainstream housing the parallels would be, for example, house building statistics, homelessness statistics and key housing management performance indicators. The costs of collecting such information are mainly borne by local authorities in terms of staff time in keeping records and making the return.

The corollary of this is that any national information which is collected from Gypsies/Travellers and requires their active participation should be collected through regular surveys (for example, continuous, annual, every five years) or one-off studies. The parallel in mainstream housing would be information about demography and household characteristics, housing circumstances and household opinions collected through regular or continuous surveys (for example, General Household Survey, Survey of English Housing or English House Condition Survey) or one-off or infrequent research studies. Costs are borne centrally rather than locally. To date there have been no comparable regular surveys focusing on Gypsies and Travellers. While a number of research studies have been commissioned by government departments over the years, in retrospect these appear quite opportunistic and ad hoc and do not form a concerted programme of research on Gypsy/Traveller issues. Research findings have not always been implemented - for example Smith et al (1982) on the needs of long-distance Travellers and Green (1991) on counting Gypsies.

Again looking at mainstream housing, some policy-relevant information is gathered by local authorities (at their expense) with the encouragement of central government which may assist by providing advice on methodology and survey techniques (for example, local housing needs studies and house condition surveys). There is no parallel in research specifically on/for Gypsies and Travellers - the nearest approach might be preliminary surveys in support of Gypsy Sites Refurbishment Grant.

We check the implications of applying these principles and parallels in the options set out below. We also seek to achieve continuity with past information in compliance with the third criterion for return-based information.

### **Items of Information for the Count**

This section looks at various items of information already included or which might potentially be included in the count. First we comment on the items already in the count, then turn to other potential items identified above or mentioned during the review.

## Items of Information in the Count

As noted above the GS1 requires 24 cells to be completed.

- Number of caravans: at present the number of caravans is the central element in the count and it is suggested that this focus is retained. Guidance notes give the Caravan Sites and Control of Development Act 1960 definition of a 'caravan' and note that mobile homes, 'trailers' and converted vehicles that meet the definition should be included while tents, tepees and benders should be excluded. Small touring caravans should only be included where used as sleeping accommodation on a permanent or semi-permanent basis. While not specifically referred to in the notes, the logic suggests that derelict caravans, or those only used for storage should be excluded. Consideration should be given to whether tents etc should be included (perhaps identified separately) as was suggested by OPCS in the previous review (Green 1991); since these forms of accommodation are most common among New Travellers, the issue could usefully be considered alongside the options G below.
- Number of families, adults and children: the review showed that many authorities estimate (rather than count) the number of families, adults and children except on council sites. Count figures for adults and children are not currently analysed or published. It is hard to see that this information is either used or strictly usable at present. Following the principle of confining the regular count to information which can be collected without asking Gypsies/Travellers would suggest that this should be dropped from the count and be picked up in other surveys and research. This suggestion differs from the recommendations made by OPCS (Green 1991). They designed forms (see Appendix D) to be completed for every site (of all types) detailing every family or other grouping and noting the number of caravans etc occupied and the total number of persons in each family with a breakdown between six age groups. This was their basic data collection form from which the various summaries for sites of different types could be produced. Options appear to be:
  - o A1. simplify the GS1 form so as to collect information only on caravans (etc) and not on Gypsy/Traveller families, adults and children; or
  - o A2. continue the status quo with no change to the GS1, perhaps with more guidance on defining 'families'; or
  - o A3. place 'families' more centrally in the collection process as suggested by OPCS with the implication that information will be analysed and published in future.

Option A1 would undoubtedly be the easiest, and would not actually result in the loss of any usable information. Option A3 would require a greater input from local authorities; it is likely that there would be inaccuracies and gaps in the information collected, requiring imputation techniques which would reduce the transparency of the data.

- Primary distinction is made in the count between authorised (with planning permission) and unauthorised (without planning permission) sites. This distinction is central to any policy on site provision or managing unauthorised camping. It must be retained.
- Within unauthorised sites, distinction is made between sites on Gypsies' own land and

sites on land NOT owned by Gypsies. This is relevant because different forms of enforcement are potentially involved, namely planning enforcement on Gypsy-owned land and enforcement against trespass on other land. This distinction is important to any consideration of dealing with unauthorised camping and should be retained. Indeed it might be argued that it is sufficiently important to be included in the tables produced and published as a matter of course from the count.

- Within unauthorised sites, distinction is made between 'tolerated' and 'not tolerated' sites; the guidance notes give a general indication of what 'toleration' means - generally that the local authority has decided not to take action. The review showed that authorities applied differing definitions of 'tolerated' sites, especially for encampments not on Gypsy-owned land. Obviously, 'toleration' is likely to reflect local policies which can change; again, an encampment could change status overnight if, for example, behaviour of individuals or families deteriorated significantly. Sites are unlikely to be 'tolerated' for long periods (or if they are, it might be argued that their position should be regularised by the grant of planning permission if appropriate). There seem to be three Options here:
  - o B1. the current distinction could be retained with clearer guidance on how tolerated sites should be defined, and particularly whether '28 day' sites<sup>1</sup> should be counted as tolerated; or
  - o B2. a new distinction could be introduced - say 'encampment likely to move or be moved within (say) 28 days' and 'encampment not likely to move or be moved within (say) 28 days'; or
  - o B3. the distinction could be dropped.

The last option would be simplest but the implications of losing this information should be discussed.

- Within authorised sites, distinction is made between council and private sites. This is important for site provision policies and must be retained. Clearer guidance on how to treat local authority sites which are let on long leases should be issued.

The clarification of what is a 'local authority site' as above, should also be applied to the GS2 (Local Authority Gypsy Sites) return. This asks for information on:

- Site address: valuable information for identifying the site; should be retained.
- Total pitches + number of residential and transit pitches: this is basic information which should be retained. Clearer guidance is needed about the distinction between residential and transit pitches - is this related to design and facilities or use? A 'stopping place' category might be appropriate as government policy proceeds. To give a better indication of availability of pitches, the return might ask for number of pitches vacant but available and vacant and closed on count day.
- Total caravan capacity: caravan capacity in relation to the number of pitches gives an indication of whether some or all pitches on a site are single or double (that is, able to accommodate one or two caravans), but not in a way which is very easy to interpret. Since information is not sought at site level for the number of caravans present, it is not

possible to relate capacity to occupancy. Options are:

- o C1. continue to collect for consistency; or
  - o C2. collect information on the number of double and single pitches instead; or
  - o C3. drop altogether.
- Date site opened: this obviously gives an indication of site age, but not of facilities or condition. It might be desirable to add information on the date of the last major site upgrading or refurbishment.

## **Additional Information which might be Included**

The scoping interviews explored views about the inclusion of different sorts of information within the counts. The broad headings are listed below, with a brief account of views expressed and comments on feasibility.

- Personal information about Gypsies and Travellers (e.g. age, gender, family size, ethnicity). There was agreement that basic demographic information would be interesting; there was less agreement whether ethnicity was relevant (e.g. distinguishing between Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers). There was some concern that collecting personal information could be intrusive, and that access to such details should be carefully controlled (as with the Census). To an extent this issue has already been discussed above, and options presented on continuing to collect GS1 information on Gypsy/Traveller families, adults and children. Option A3 (give greater centrality to family information with a more detailed age breakdown) could be built upon to include reference to gender and ethnicity if thought desirable. If Option A1 (count caravans only and not families/adults/children) were adopted, demographic information as needed for site provision, service planning and monitoring should be collected through carefully planned surveys rather than as part of the routine count return.
- Gypsy/Traveller 'lifestyle' issues (e.g. travelling patterns, other accommodation, employment). Most respondents thought this information would be useful, especially indications of travelling patterns; they did not, however, think it should be collected as part of a regular count. We agree with this and have not presented it as an option for the count. Insofar as this information is needed for site provision, service planning or monitoring it should be collected through carefully planned surveys; some will be inherently very hard to collect at all (e.g. employment and finance) and some will be quite difficult to interpret/use (e.g. Gypsies/Travellers who apparently have a tenancy/licence of a house or site pitch but travel for large parts of the year).
- Gypsy/Traveller accommodation requirements and preferences. Respondents generally thought this sort of information vital to sound site/accommodation needs assessment and planning; they were less sure how feasible it is to collect as part of the count. OPCS (Green 1991) proposed an entry for each family on unauthorised sites indicating what type of site they wanted, distinguishing between LA residential, transit, other and none (see Appendix D). Collecting this information was not tested in their research and they anticipated a lot of gaps with consequent imputation issues. Options are:
  - o D1. adopt the approach suggested by OPCS, asking authorities to indicate the type of site wanted by Gypsies/Travellers on unauthorised sites. This would only be feasible in association with a family-based form for collecting count information; or

- o D2. do not collect information on accommodation requirements in the routine counts.

If D2 were to be adopted, information on accommodation needs and preferences would have to be collected through other means.

Table 3 above attempted to link national policy concerns to information requirements. The points below discuss in general terms how information from the count and from other sources might contribute.

- Assessment of need for sites: (demographic information, Gypsy/Traveller requirements and preferences). If Options A3 and D1 were to be adopted (a core family-based form), the count could provide information on which an assessment of need could be based. If the count were to be simplified along the lines of Option A1(caravans only counted), it could merely show the extent of unauthorised camping with an implicit assumption that they 'need' sites. This might appear to suggest considerable merit in developing the count in line with Options A3 and D1, as indeed was suggested by OPCS in 1991. However, the current review has shown how inaccurate some of the 'softer' information is at present and we think there would be significant issues about accuracy and completeness from a future enhanced count. There are alternative approaches possible, for example:
  - o research might be commissioned nationally to look at Gypsy/Traveller accommodation requirements and preferences.
  - o in the Republic of Ireland, local authorities have a duty to carry out local assessments of Travellers' accommodation need. While there is no such duty in England, ODPM could encourage and assist such local assessments by issuing guidance and advice on methodology (as has been done for mainstream housing).
- Site provision: (authorised council and private sites). The count already provides information on Local Authority Gypsy Sites (GS2). However, despite the importance placed in national policy on Gypsies/Travellers providing sites for themselves there is no comparable data on private authorised sites. Option:
  - o E. information should be collected for private authorised sites, to include: site address, total number of pitches and number of residential and transit pitches. There should be a distinction between owner-occupied sites and those with pitches available on a commercial basis; in the second category, sites owned by Registered Social Landlords could be distinguished.

While this would involve additional work for local authorities, building up the required information could be achieved in association with their site licensing duties. Once initial data are established, tracking changes should be relatively easy.

- Local authority site quality: (condition, facilities, environmental quality etc). There is no feasible way in which consistent information on site quality could be collected through regular returns. The national sample survey carried out in 2002 (Niner 2002) could be updated in, say, five year's time to gauge changes in condition.
- Local authority site management: (performance indicators). Mainstream housing

management performance information is routinely collected and published through the Audit Commission, based on returns from landlords. Many, but not all, local authorities proved able to provide information on basic site management performance in a questionnaire survey (Niner 2002). In future there are Options:

- o F1. A standard return form could be developed for routine collection by local authority site owners. For comparability with mainstream housing this would refer to the previous financial year.
  - o F2. The 2002 research could be updated through a further questionnaire survey in, say, 5 years time.
- Managing unauthorised camping: (extent and nature of encampments, problems and action taken). Better information on unauthorised camping probably requires a move from snapshot returns to some form of continuous or retrospective monitoring. Options are discussed below (see I1 to I3). It might be possible to develop a return recording enforcement action taken against unauthorised encampments over a stated period of time as a means of monitoring action. At present authorities vary so much in policy and practice, and especially in the extent to which encampments are managed through formal and informal action, that we believe such information would be virtually meaningless and potentially very misleading.
  - Other service planning and monitoring: (demographic + need information, service provision and uptake). This field is beyond the scope of the present review. Routine counts are likely to play a small role only. An important step forward would be to ensure that Gypsies and Travellers are routinely identified as a group in the Census and ethnic monitoring of mainstream services.

## Other Possible Changes to the Count System

The previous section discussed information to be collected through the counts. This section looks more briefly at other issues: the 'population' about which information is to be collected, the frequency of returns, snapshot versus continuous recording, who makes the return, what guidance is needed, the mechanics of the return, verification and publication.

### The 'Population'

Under this heading, we consider issues around which Gypsy/Traveller groups and which types of accommodation should be included in the count.

- In terms of Gypsy/Traveller groups to be included, there are two main issues: should New Travellers be included as well as 'ethnic' Gypsies/Travellers and if so should they be separately distinguished in the count; and should the 'legal' definition of a 'Gypsy' including reference to a nomadic lifestyle be retained (this definition is outlined in the guidance notes on GS1). Considering both aspects together, there seem to be a number of Options:
  - o G1. continue current practice of attempting to apply the legal definition of 'Gypsies' as outlined in the guidance notes on GS1. Strictly, this may exclude some 'settled' ethnic Gypsies, for example on private sites. It may include some New Travellers who meet the definition and exclude others, but it fails to distinguish them from traditional Gypsies/Travellers.

- o G2. continue with the legal definition of 'Gypsies' but within this request separate figures for New and traditional Travellers.
- o G3. explicitly recognise and adopt the sort of pragmatic definition apparently used by many local authorities now which includes *all* Gypsies/Travellers living in caravans or other vehicles whether or not they strictly meet the legal definition as to purpose of travelling; this would include all residents on 'Gypsy' sites whether or not they currently follow a nomadic or semi-nomadic lifestyle.
- o G4. follow the proposal in G3, but provide figures separately for New and traditional Travellers.

Options G3 and G4 might give a clearer picture of relevant numbers. Distinguishing between New and traditional Travellers as in G4 would allow different policies to be pursued towards the groups if felt appropriate.

- In terms of 'accommodation' categories to be included the major issue is the treatment of housed Gypsies/Travellers and those living on 'non-Gypsy' caravan/ mobile home sites. There is no practical source of information on which local authorities could draw to identify such Gypsies/Travellers. While there is undoubtedly great interest in the needs and preferences of housed or 'settled' Gypsies/Travellers, it would be impossible to include them in routine returns. Information should rather come from national or local surveys and ethnic monitoring of access to mainstream housing and the Census.

### **Frequency of Return**

At present the GS1 return is six monthly (January and July) and the GS2 is annual (January). The more frequent caravan counts are intended to show the more fluid situation especially on unauthorised sites, while the local authority site return is expected to be much more stable. Some respondents to the review saw merit in having less frequent counts of authorised sites and caravan numbers (annual), but more frequent (up to monthly) returns on numbers of caravans on unauthorised sites to give a better year-round picture. One possibility, building on Option E above (a return for private as well as LA authorised sites) might be:

- H. an annual return in January which is site-based and includes all authorised sites, both LA and private, in an authority. In addition to number of pitches, actual numbers of caravans present on site on count day would be recorded thus continuing the GS1 sequence. Caravans on unauthorised sites would be treated separately with a return along the lines of the Options I below.

Under this option there would be no count of caravans/families on authorised sites in July (when figures for authorised sites might be affected by summer travelling), which would save some local authority resources. Even if this option is not followed, the GS1 and GS2 returns should be made on the same day in January.

## **Snapshot versus Continuous**

Opinion in the review was fairly evenly split between those who felt that the current snapshot approach to counting Gypsy caravans is appropriate, and those who felt that some sort of continuous or retrospective approach would be better in relation to unauthorised encampments. Snapshots miss encampments not present on count day and may not give a good impression of needs in any particular local authority; they do not give a very good picture of travelling patterns. However, if accurate, they do give a picture of the number of caravans without an authorised site at the point in time. Continuous records could give a better impression of travelling patterns and the year-round incidence of unauthorised encampments but would inevitably involve multiple counting as the same mobile group would be recorded at all its various camping locations. Half or more of the authorities taking part in the telephone survey said they would be able to provide information on the number, duration and approximate size of encampments experienced over the previous six or twelve months (see Table B7, Appendix B). Few would be able to identify the family groups involved to avoid double-counting (and this would only remove double-counting within an authority, not between authorities). Some already collect such information; for others it would represent new work.

A further complication is the distinction between unauthorised encampments on Gypsy-owned land and those on other land. Most of the considerations about travelling patterns probably apply to the latter rather than the former which can be expected to be more stable at least until enforcement action is taken.

There are no easy answers here. Options include:

- I1. retain the current situation with a six monthly return of caravans on unauthorised sites distinguishing between Gypsy-owned and other land; or
- I2. increase the frequency of the caravan count on unauthorised sites (perhaps only those on land not owned by Gypsies) to quarterly or monthly to give a more complete picture; or
- I3. introduce a new return asking local authorities to report on the number of encampments experienced over the previous six months distinguishing between those on Gypsy-owned and other land. Ideally the return would also include an estimate of the number of caravans involved and duration; this has been combined into a measure of 'caravan-days' by some authorities for their own monitoring purposes. For continuity with the previous series, the return should also ask for snapshot numbers of caravans on unauthorised sites at count day.

If Option I3 were to be adopted the new return would have to be worked up carefully, perhaps with technical advice offered for smaller authorities. Undoubtedly it would mean additional work for some authorities.

## **Who Makes the Return**

GS1 and GS2 are currently sent to district councils; this seems appropriate. Guidance could remind authorities of liaison with county councils, Traveller education etc as appropriate to

ensure the best information is collected.

Several respondents noted that there can be mistrust between Gypsies/Travellers and local authority personnel; some suggested that counts might be more accurate if carried out by Gypsy/Traveller bodies or support groups. While this may be possible in some local authority areas, it is unlikely to be feasible nationally. Gypsy/Travellers and associated groups should always be consulted on and, where appropriate involved in, surveys and research.

## **Guidance**

Very few officers participating in the review spontaneously called for more guidance on completing the count returns. Most were clear what they were doing - although they may not always have actually been following the guidance in detail. Few read the guidance with care, especially when they had been completing the return for several years.

Obviously revised guidance will be needed if the count is changed. The following general points apply:

- Paradoxically it may be easier to increase consistency if significant changes are made to the count because officers will feel the need to look again at guidance notes.
- There should be an explanation of why information is required in the form that it is so officers can understand the importance of following guidance.
- Guidance issued with the returns should be concise, with clear instructions on where to get further, more detailed instructions. ODPM staff offering guidance should have full documentation and training.

## **The Mechanics of the Return**

Two points arose about the mechanics of making the return:

- Currently the GS2 is completed by ODPM and authorities are asked to note any changes. This seems to have the effect in practice of retaining sites in the system which have been sold or closed. It also seems to lead to some inconsistency between GS1 and GS2 series. While obviously intended to save authorities effort, it might be worth considering a fresh start with a blank return sent to all authorities to clear 'deadwood'.
- Many returns are now electronic. If changes are to be made to the count system, it might be worth also changing to electronic format. The telephone survey suggested that only a small minority of authorities would have difficulty coping. ODPM statisticians saw significant advantages in moving to electronic format in terms of reducing clerical error in data transfer, potential to resolve internal inconsistencies and linking cells to instructions on how to complete them. Electronic format opens up possibilities of being able to cope with 'comments' which cannot be handled manually.

## **Verification and Checks**

As noted above, one of the major problems identified with the current count system is its

perceived inaccuracy. Most concern is usually expressed over figures for unauthorised encampments with suggestions that some sites are missed or excluded for various reasons, thus reducing the apparent need for site provision. There are potentially a number of different approaches to increasing accuracy.

- Whether or not changes are made, we suggest that the count system should be re-launched (see below). Part of this exercise would be to draw attention to the importance of the returns and their accuracy.
- A few contributors to the review suggested that ODPM should make some financial award or incentive to local authorities to encourage complete and accurate returns in recognition of the extra resources needed to ensure greater accuracy.
- Errors and omissions arising at the data collection stage could only really be checked by some sort of parallel fieldwork on count day carried out by independent officers as an 'audit' of the return. One respondent suggested that ODPM should announce that there would be spot checks of the count at undisclosed locations. There are obvious difficulties in identifying 'independent' checkers with sufficient local knowledge to undertake the task effectively (Gypsy/Traveller groups? officers from other local authorities? consultants?), and there would obviously be a cost. There is also a limit to what can realistically be done in connection with a non-mandatory return where there are no penalties for either non-response or inaccuracy. Too much checking might result in authorities simply not making a return.
- More consistent checks on completed returns could be carried out by ODPM. Follow-up checks might be used in several ways:
  - o inconsistencies between GS1 and GS2 returns (or their equivalents in a changed system) could be identified and reconciled.
  - o individual authority returns could be looked at over time to identify and reconcile any sudden changes arising, for example, from figures being entered in the wrong cell.
  - o all or some authorities making a zero return on unauthorised camping might be contacted to check that its accuracy and the source of information used.

A necessary change of practice to enable this is the ability to distinguish in data entry and analysis between blank cells and true zero returns.

## **Publication**

Publication of the count figures is currently low key and partial. The general significance and profile of the return could be enhanced. In turn this might lead to greater attention being given to making individual returns complete and accurate.

- All information collected should normally be published - this is a point of principle to enhance credibility of the return, as well as a practical step to get best value for money from the resources going into data collection.
- Publication could be accompanied by a press notice or other event commenting on the figures and their implications for government policy.

## Example of Possible Future Counts

A number of options for changing various aspects of the count system have been presented above. These are summarised in Tables 4 and 5.

**Table 4: Summary of Options for Aspects of the Count System: Current GS1 and GS2**

Aspect of count	Options and comments
<b>Current GS1</b>	
Caravans	Retain as basis of count; consider including tents etc; guidance on treatment of derelict caravans etc
Families	A1. drop this information A2. retain status quo + better guidance A3. family at core of information collections (OPCS)
Authorised/unauthorised sites	Retain as primary distinction
Gypsy land/other land	Retain distinction
Tolerated/not tolerated sites	B1. status quo + better guidance B2. number likely to move/be moved in set time B3. drop this distinction
Council/private sites	Retain + better guidance on leased sites
<b>Current GS2</b>	
Site address	Retain
Number of pitches: total/residential/transit	Retain + better guidance on residential/transit distinction; consider adding stopping places; consider adding number of vacant + available pitches
Caravan capacity	C1. status quo C2. number of double and single pitches C3. drop information
Date site opened	Retain; consider adding date of last major upgrading

**Table 5: Summary of Options for Aspects of the Count System: Other Information**

Aspect of count	Options and comments
Personal information	If adopt A3 above consider adding gender and ethnicity; otherwise collect through surveys
'Lifestyle' information	Not collected through regular return
Accommodation requirements	D1. for families on unauthorised encampments add OPCS question on accommodation requirements D2. not collected through regular return
Private sites	E. return similar to GS2 for private authorised sites; distinguish owner-occupied/commercial/RSL
LA site quality	Not collected through regular return
LA site management	F1. develop return for key performance indicators  F2. update 2002 survey
Traveller groups	G1. status quo + better guidance G2. status quo, but report New and traditional Travellers separately

	G3. pragmatic definition of Travellers, including all on 'Gypsy' sites G4. as G3, but report New and traditional Travellers separately
Housed Travellers	Do not include; also exclude on 'ordinary' caravan sites
Frequency	H. Annual authorised site return; treat unauthorised sites separately
Snapshot?	I1. 6 monthly return on unauthorised sites I2. more frequent return on unauthorised sites I3. report on number, size and duration of encampments in previous 6 months + snapshot caravan numbers on count day
Who makes the return	Status quo + guidance on co-operation
Mechanics of the return	Consider electronic return

Some of the options could be adopted independently, while others logically would only be adopted in combination. Four example combinations are set out below in Table 6.

**Table 6: Examples of the Shape of a Revised Count**

Name	Options	Comments
Status quo	A2, B1, C1, D2, F2, G1, I1; not E or H	Information as at present, quality (slightly?) improved through better guidance
Minimum	A1, B3, C3, D2, F2, G1 or G3, H, I1; not E	GS1 information but on caravans only, not distinguishing tolerated sites; GS2 without caravan capacity
Maximum	A3+, B1 or B2, C1 or C2, D1, E, F1, G2 or G4, H, I2 or I3	Stress on family and personal information as well as caravans; information on accommodation requirements; annual site return including caravan count for private and LA sites; LA site management PIs; New Travellers included; more frequent snapshots or retrospective count of unauthorised encampments
Personal preference	A1, B3, C2, D2, E, F1, G4, H, I3	Count information on caravans only, not distinguishing tolerated sites; annual return including caravan count for private and LA sites, dropping caravan capacity; LA site management PIs; New Travellers included and distinguished; retrospective count of unauthorised encampments

In deciding on changes the main criterion must be an assessment of the information needed for policy development and monitoring, and the uses for each item of information collected.

### Response to Consultation

A draft of this report was circulated to a 'virtual' advisory group of local authority officers, representatives of Gypsy/Traveller organisations and ODPM officers who were invited to comment on the draft. Some suggestions made have been incorporated into the report.

All consultees commented to some extent on the recommendations in the draft report. Two general themes emerge from these comments:

- There was agreement that central government, local authorities and all other bodies who plan, provide and monitor sites and other services for Gypsies and Travellers require information on Gypsy/Traveller families and individuals as well as caravans. Some thought demographic and personal information should be collected through the counts, others thought it was better to collect this through surveys, but all agreed that it should be collected in some way. If the scope of the count is reduced, complementary surveys must be part of the 'package'.
- Assessments of need for Gypsy sites are essential. Several consultees drew attention to *PPG 3 : Housing* and the need to include 'housing to help meet the needs of specific groups' including Travellers (para 13) within local housing need assessments. Gypsy/Traveller requirements for accommodation of all sorts should be considered within this wider remit. Count information may help here, but it would be appropriate also to include Gypsies and Travellers within mainstream assessment approaches.

Preferences expressed by consultees for detailed recommendations varied, and there was no overall agreement. Table 7 summarises replies from the four consultees who expressed preferences under each of the option headings; it also includes impressions from 'softer' comments made by other consultees.

**Table 7: Summary of Consultation Response on the Options**

Option	Preferences	'Softer' comments
Caravans as base, consider including tents etc		General agreement that tents etc should be included, but probably distinguished from caravans
A (retain/drop families in count)	A1 X 2 A2 X 1 A3 X 1	General tenor of comments in favour of dropping number of adults and children from the count, possibly retained families BUT information on families and people IS needed, however it is collected
B (retain/drop tolerated/non-tolerated sites distinction)	B1 X 1 B2 X 3	Comments generally in favour of retaining the distinction, but concentrating definitions on long-term 'toleration' only
C (dealing with caravan capacity on GS2)	C1 X 2 C2 X 2	Comments in favour of retaining some measure of capacity. Keen to include and identify vacant pitches on LA sites
Personal and lifestyle information		Consensus that this should not be collected through the counts, but it is necessary
D (accommodation requirements)	D1 X 1	General feeling that this information is not appropriate for the counts, but

	D2 X 3	some dissent
E (private site information as in GS2)	E X 3	Feeling that this would be useful, but may be confidentiality issues for private sites
F (LA site management information)	F1 X 2 F2 X 1 Uncertain X 1	Agreement that LA site management information should be collected, but differences in preferred methods
G (Traveller groups to be included)	G3 X 1 G4 X 3	Consensus in favour of pragmatic definitions and normal inclusion of New Travellers
H (annual site return + different approach to unauthorised encampments)	H X 2	No real agreement on this. Probably majority in favour of status quo
I (approach to unauthorised encampments)	I1 X 1 I2 X 1 I3 X 2	Again, very mixed views
Who makes the return		Some feeling that county councils might be more appropriate than districts in two-tier areas; Gypsy/Traveller support groups would lack credibility

See Tables 4 and 5 for the detail of the options

As can be seen, the consultation results do not define a single unequivocal path to reform.

### Implementing Change

As a final point, we would stress again the importance of raising the profile of the Gypsy caravan count. People do not believe the figures are accurate, and some take this as an indication that less effort need be put into collecting accurate information. In practice it will never be possible to count every caravan in every place with complete accuracy, but the current arrangements can be substantially improved. Whether or not changes are to be made in future, the count needs a re-launch to stress its importance, its links to policy and the uses that will be made of the information. In some ways it may be easier to do this if significant changes are proposed.

<sup>1</sup> Several local authorities have a policy of 'tolerating' non-problematic unauthorised encampments on their own land for a period of up to 28 days. This is quite different from a decision to 'tolerate' an encampment for an indefinite period or long-term.

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## **Appendix A: Scoping Interviews: Summary of Findings**

At the start of the project scoping interviews were carried out by telephone with six local authority officers. These interviews lasted about an hour, and proved very useful. The topic guide used is reproduced at the end of this appendix; this was sent to respondents in advance and appointments were made for the interviews. Most interviewees had clearly prepared for the interview.

A letter was sent to five Gypsy/Traveller organisations and to Dr Donald Kenrick. Five replies were received and are summarised briefly below.

### **Local Authority Officers**

The following introductory notes describe the respondents and summarise the three or four main points arising from the interview.

#### **General comments on interview**

**Southern Unitary Authority:** Main points:

- counts should include housed Travellers
- easier where specialist team who have good information/trust anyway
- ethnicity is relevant
- very aware of ethical issues about what it is right to record about a minority group

**South Western County Council:** Main points:

- national count information should be kept simple
- Census should collect personal information as it does for everyone else; counts simply for trends
- wants greater accuracy/consistency rather than more or different information
- recognises difficulties in getting any accurate personal or lifestyle information from Travellers
- also concerned about ethical issues around this and potential use of information by other sections of an LA for enforcement etc

**South Western Unitary Authority:** Main points:

- absolutely clear that cannot discuss counts and ideal information without knowing why we are counting
- convinced on inaccuracy, inconsistency of counts in some areas

- favours flow rather than snapshot approach on unauthorised camping
- recognises clear resource constraints especially in areas where unauthorised encampments are rare and there are no specialist staff
- have to make it worthwhile for LAs to count accurately
- recognises that information is not neutral and could be used 'wrongly'

**Southern District Council:** Main points:

- perspective from LA which has no/little commitment to Travellers
- perspective from county where some LAs even less committed, with no staff etc
- have to make accurate counts much higher priority for LAs to move forward
- recognition that information can be dangerous in wrong hands

**Eastern District Council:** Main points:

- long list of ideal information needs including lot of detail re lifestyle, needs and site management
- at same time very conscious of resource limits and only makes a return once a year at present
- counts discredited and no-one sees purpose/benefit so not committed
- needs political + officer re-launch to generate commitment to get over this

**North Western Metropolitan Borough:** Main points:

- very clear on current count's uselessness
- need to know the purpose and link to policy debate, cf Rough Sleeper counts
- would ideally like a lot of personal and lifestyle information + preferences
- better for counts/research to be done by support groups whom Travellers trust more than LAs
- need re-launch to restore 'shininess'

Each section of the topic guide is now reported.

**1. Perceptions of the main issues involved**

Interviews started with an open-ended question about respondents' perceptions of the main issues involved in 'counting' Gypsies and Travellers. There was considerable agreement. Many of the issues raised were picked up in greater detail later in the interviews.

The overall feeling seemed to be that the counts are valuable because they are the only

information (however imperfect) which is available. However, all respondents raised significant concerns:

- Fears about accuracy and consistency of the figures.
- Why do we carry out the count? A feeling that the purpose and link to policy has become blurred.
  - o one respondent compared the Gypsy count with the Rough Sleepers count where each count is openly discussed and considered in context of service provision. In comparison, Gypsy count figures are considered meaningless, so counting is a meaningless pursuit.
  - o one respondent noted growing resistance from some Gypsies, especially on their own land, to being 'singled out' for counting; without a clear purpose such concerns are hard to answer.
- Do we really use the information? Is it used for service planning? Is it used in land use planning? If there is an increase in Travellers, is it reflected in Local Plans? Need to ask whether it influences policy decisions at national, regional and local levels.
- Counts *'are not a true reflection of anything'*.
  - o one respondent thought them inadequate because they do not include housed Travellers who are important locally and should be included in any needs assessments because they do not want to be in houses.
  - o another respondent deplored the lack of any overall picture of 'Gypsies and Travellers' in the absence of identification in the Census. The count is not an adequate substitute.

## 2. What use is made of current information?

*'Not a lot at present to be honest'* seemed to sum up most respondents' answers. Several respondents said that they generally used their own internal, more detailed records for their own service planning etc. *'Essentially we do the count because we have to'* sums up several comments. One respondent noted that her authority was *'basically anti-Traveller'*, so was not interested in any form of information (even following the Race Relations (Amendment) Act).

Some respondents did report making use of count information to a limited extent:

- Two respondents specifically said they had used count information in making a case for a transit site or stopping places
- One respondent said count information was used in conjunction with planning enquiries, arguing need for sites.
- Some respondents noted that count information could be useful to local Traveller support groups in arguing for sites or services.
- Other minor personal uses of count information reported were:
  - o one officer might look up count information as background if talking to a colleague from elsewhere.
  - o one officer has used information in discussion with councillors etc who want to argue that other LAs do such-and-such. In this context the count information might be seen as 'official' and 'objective'.

### 3. How relevant is the current information?

The consensus was that the current count information is not very relevant or, in one extreme view, *'worse than useless'*.

- The main criticism related to the snapshot nature of the count on two days in the year. Snapshots may miss mass gatherings, and give no indication of movement. One respondent commented that it is *'serendipitous as to who is where on a single day'*.
- There was some (sometimes implicit) recognition that count information may be more useful at national or regional level than at local level. For local service planning or equalities purposes, numbers alone as provided by the count are not detailed enough.
- One respondent found the count less relevant locally because it excludes housed Travellers who are important in any assessment of local demand for sites and in general workload.

### 4. How accurate is the current information?

Respondents recognised that *'different councils carry out the count with differing enthusiasm and meticulousness'*. Perhaps understandably all said that their own returns were generally as accurate as possible, but were aware of less good practice elsewhere. One respondent said he had only submitted one return a year recently because of resource constraints, preferring to miss a return rather than fudge the figures.

Some of the factors identified which might affect accuracy were:

- Geography: in a large rural area there may be groups no-one knows about which will obviously be missed.
- Local policies etc: *'If you do nothing about encampments, you may not be aware of their presence.'*
- Counting practices: some LAs do not visit on count day, so probably less accurate.
- Staffing issues : Rather different points were raised:
  - o figures will be less accurate if the main Gypsy/Traveller officer is absent on count day.
  - o where officers know most local Travellers and are trusted, information is more likely to be accurate.
  - o resource constraints may limit how much effort can be put into getting accurate figures.
- The Travellers: figures are likely to be less accurate where 'non-local' or aggressive Travellers are involved.
- Information from several sources: one county council respondent provided information on unauthorised encampments to his districts, not including encampments on Gypsy-owned land; he was unsure whether the districts added these in from their own information sources.
- Political pressure: some respondents wondered whether there was sometimes political pressure for a nil return.
- Inconsistent definitions: LAs may apply different definitions of 'families' or different assumptions about the number of adults etc.

One respondent felt the need for some sort of quality control in the system - perhaps spot check shadow counts in some areas which could have a psychological effect on LAs.

## **5. What (if any) information should ideally be collected from/about Gypsies and Travellers?**

People answered this question in rather different ways - some had clearly thought about it more than others. Individual answers are summarised below.

- Probably is useful to have a count, but needs to be better collected and more consistent.
- Would be useful to know how many private sites there are - basis for information etc which could give to Travellers. On unauthorised, better to count factual information which can be checked independently than information from Gypsies (i.e. less personal information). For LA sites some measure of occupancy would be useful.
- Need to know how many Travellers there are and what their needs are. Really need to get at ethnic dimension because it is relevant to know how far Irish Traveller needs are not being met.
- Would like to know more about the people rather than caravans. Age, gender, family units, patterns of travel + accommodation preferences. Should be geared to service needs assessment and provision. Real emphasis on travelling patterns because that is the element of culture need to understand. Waiting to count only when they stop is a settled community concept.
- Cannot answer this without knowing why we are collecting the information. Must also tell the Travellers why; need to be able to offer them something. Very, very important that every council could say how many unauthorised encampments they have (caravans, families and children) to get an idea of what is going on. Should know when encampment arrived and left to see how quickly move on. How many people need transit sites and where. How many are looking for permanent sites. Some concern that some may seek more information in order to get rid of Travellers.
- On unauthorised encampments:
  - o how many on the roadside
  - o how many on long-term sites/encampments with and without planning permission
  - o how many on Gypsy owned land
  - o environmental score for sites
  - o well-being score, e.g. number of children in school, access to GPs and health services
  - o health needs indicators
  - o adequate potable water supply
  - o collection of domestic refuse
  - o adequate access to support services
- On long-term authorised sites:
  - o turnover rates
  - o vacancies
  - o how many on benefits/in employment
  - o how many children in local school
  - o how many registered with GPs

Thus, most but not all respondents wanted more information about people. Some wanted more management type information. Some emphasised the importance of movement patterns and mobility.

## **6. Should the count be of caravans or of Gypsies and Travellers?**

Answers to this question reflected respondents' overall views. Two strongly believed that the count should be of people, not caravans. One felt equally strongly that the count should be of caravans with the Census picking up 'people' issues. One noted that it depended on the purpose. For site provision, caravans are more relevant, but personal information is needed for other service planning.

## **7. What types of accommodation should be included in the counts?**

Discussion focussed on two aspects only: inclusion of housed Travellers and the distinction between tolerated and not tolerated unauthorised encampments.

- Two respondents felt that housed Travellers should be included because of their importance locally. Most other respondents took the view that, while it *'would be nice to know about Travellers in houses'*, they had no information source and would not welcome their inclusion in the count.
- People did not seem to feel very strongly about the tolerated/not tolerated split. Some had little difficulty making the distinction locally, but conceded that other LAs might apply different criteria. One felt the distinction problematic since most 'tolerated' camps are unlikely to be tolerated for ever. He thought it might be better to ask about the number of encampments likely to move/be moved on in next x days.

## **8. What groups of Gypsies and Travellers should be included?**

Discussion was limited to the inclusion/exclusion of New Travellers. The consensus was that New Travellers should be included in the count, but as a separate category because *'they travel for different reasons and face different problems'* and have different behaviour patterns.

## **9. Should any personal information be collected from Gypsies and Travellers?**

Once again there were some differences of view between respondents. One respondent would like the count to collect information on family size, age, gender and ethnicity. Others were more doubtful, for a number of slightly different reasons:

- Personal information should be collected only if everyone knows what is going to be done with it. There would be data protection issues over who has access etc. If Travellers are

going to be interviewed, they must see some tangible benefit and buy into it.

- How truthful will Travellers be to people from the LA who may be associated with enforcement? Traveller men in particular may be reluctant to 'appear'. Some LAs already have dual information systems, e.g. for the count and for HB purposes.
- Requiring more personal information would mean greater staff input. The count might have to be spread over a week rather than a day.
- Respondents differed over the value of recording ethnicity (i.e. mainly distinguishing between Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers). Some felt the distinction '*overdone on the whole*', while others still found enormous mistrust between ethnic groups.

#### **10. Should any information be collected on Gypsy/Traveller 'lifestyle' issues, e.g. travelling patterns, other accommodation, employment?**

Respondents felt that information on travelling patterns would be very useful in planning transit sites etc. However, they were generally much more doubtful over both the practicalities and principles of collecting lifestyle information. This is an area where privacy and equalities issues arise, and where the use to which such information might be put are critical. Some LAs might seek to use such information for negative rather than positive purposes to the disadvantage of Travellers. Travellers might only be prepared to disclose lifestyle information to non-LA, trusted bodies.

#### **11. Should any information be collected about Gypsy/Traveller accommodation requirements and preferences?**

Respondents generally thought this sort of information would be extremely valuable as a basis for site planning. However, there were doubts that such information could or should come from the count. Specific points made included:

- The count is a useful starting point, but greater detail probably needs to be at local level. The idea of requiring LAs to make a needs assessment may be worth considering. However, need is not 'watertight' at DC level.
- Such information is probably needed if we are serious about site provision, but '*how much input you would have to put in to produce it is another question*'.
- We should be finding out what Travellers actually want. This is no good, however, unless something is going to happen as a result. Political will is needed to make it happen.
- Discovering requirements may be difficult because Travellers want a lot of different things (cf people in houses).
- Answers given by Travellers may not always be a good guide - they may not always have thought things through or have enough information.

#### **12. Should they be snapshots or continuous?**

There was some discussion of the snapshot/continuous issue, and of the frequency and timing of returns.

- For authorised sites, both private and LA, a snapshot approach should continue. Where

officers were specifically asked, they thought that an annual return would be adequate.

- Respondents were evenly divided between those who thought it best to continue a snapshot approach for unauthorised encampments, and those who would prefer a retrospective return of the number of encampments over the previous year or six months. One officer favouring the snapshot approach suggested more frequent (monthly) returns to give a more complete picture. All respondents, whether favouring a retrospective return or not, thought that this might entail more work and would need care in coping with double counting etc; some doubted that other LAs with less well developed policies and information systems for managing unauthorised encampments would be able and prepared to provide the information.
- There seemed to be some uncertainty about the rationale for the January/July count at present. One thought it appropriate to capture any winter/summer distinctions. Another said that the July date sometimes coincided with school holidays, which could mean Traveller Education staff were unable to help in providing information.

### **13. County or district?**

Three respondents came from single-tier authorities. Respondents from two-tier areas thought the most important thing was quality of information. Completing the return should be a collaborative exercise to get the best information possible and to reduce duplication. One respondent made the point that county councils vary greatly in the extent to which they are involved, and could make no contribution in some areas.

One respondent thought that better and more complete information might be provided if it were collected by Traveller support groups or other local Traveller bodies who had the trust of local Travellers. There will always be some mistrust of LAs by Travellers because of their enforcement role.

### **14. Where is the appropriate boundary between regular counts and one-off or infrequent research?**

This issue was not really discussed in any of the interviews.

### **15. Are there equalities or civil liberty issues to be taken into account?**

Some respondents had concerns about Travellers' privacy in relation to the collection of intrusive personal information - this was not confined to the count, but also related to welfare enquiries. Some were concerned that only Travellers are being asked such questions. For most, the issue seemed to boil down to a balance between the benefits of collecting information which would contribute to policy development and service provision to the Travellers' advantage, and the potential costs/disadvantages of invasion of privacy and 'misuse' of fuller information. One put it: *'we must recognise that better information on unauthorised camping could be used to get rid of Travellers as well as for service provision planning etc'*; another said *'we need to be clear why collecting information in this context - is it genuinely to meet needs, or to keep an eye on those causing mayhem?'* One officer who consistently argued against collecting personal and lifestyle information through the counts

(although he could see great merit in having such information) thought that counting caravans essentially avoids civil liberty issues.

## **16. Are there resource/commitment issues?**

Two respondents answered this in relation to their own experience of the counts at present. One had and foresaw no resource problems; the other experienced great difficulties and had only made annual returns in recent years.

People saw particular problems in areas where there are no specialist Traveller officers. They saw a link to commitment.

'Counts are a fiddly little job unless there is someone dealing with Travellers all the time. Resource implications of including more information from Travellers would be serious. There is a limit to what you can expect LAs to do, especially where handled by a sole EHO who is not trained to collect information from Travellers etc.'

'The whole thing has to have much higher status. In areas not interested in Traveller issues, may have no-one with responsibilities or championing the cause. Have to make it important enough for people to care.'

'The majority of LAs do not see any benefit from the counts, so are not committed.'

## **17. What practical problems might there be in changing/improving the counts?**

All respondents saw the main practical problem as generating commitment on the part of LAs to take the count seriously and to provide accurate returns. Three themes emerged here:

- The counts must be seen as firmly part of Government policy. Information must be seen as driving policy on site provision and other services so that providing the information is seen as worthwhile. Regional offices could help here.
- The count system must be re-launched at two levels:
  - o sell to politicians
  - o sell to middle/junior level officers who will actually be doing it. Have to sell them the benefits in better Local Plans, health and education services etc, perhaps through the profession (mostly EHOs).
- Some incentive should be provided for LAs to provide an accurate count - perhaps a small resource could be made available.

## **Gypsy Organisations**

Responses from Gypsy/Traveller bodies varied widely and are very difficult to summarise. A number of themes emerged.

- There was some consensus that the count is seen as flawed and inaccurate, but necessary because there is essentially no other source of information. Many would prefer the Census to have included Gypsies and Travellers.
- *'The community being counted is not invited to and does not participate in the counts. The counts are carried out, in most instances, by the same officers who carry out enforcement action against the community. Travellers are not consulted, invited to participate in or verify the information gathering, nor control how and for what that information is being used. The counts are therefore widely mistrusted and no real benefit to the community is evident on the ground to Travellers themselves.'* This situation might be improved if the purpose of the counts was clearer, and links to positive service provision apparent. Some argued that counts were more complete when carried out by support groups prior to the government system being introduced.
- A major use of count figures is in pressing for site provision and in evidencing need at planning inquiries. Respondents drew attention to Circular 1/94 and PPGs 3 (Housing) and 12 (Development Plans) all of which require a quantitative assessment of need for sites to be made. The counts are not fully adequate for this, but are often all that is available.
- Inaccuracies and inconsistencies in count information were pointed out, with known examples being quoted in some detail. Factors contributing to this were identified:
  - o wilful undercounting by LAs unwilling to provide sites.
  - o mistakes and omissions by LAs.
  - o inconsistencies in which Travellers are included.
  - o data entry mistakes and/or lack of checking for consistency by ODPM.
- Publication of information collected is partial, and sometimes not in the most useful form. It is hard to identify caravans/families on the roadside who need site accommodation from the published figures. Circulation of published information is limited.
- Information suggested as particularly useful included:
  - o Traveller families, including extended family links.
  - o Traveller families in housing who would prefer site provision.
  - o accommodation requirements and preferences, as is available for the housed community.
  - o evictions from unauthorised encampments.
  - o vacant pitches on LA sites.

## Counting Gypsies And Travellers: Issues To Be Explored

1. of the main issues involved in 'counting Gypsies and Travellers'
2. use is made of the current count information?
3. relevant is the count information at present?
4. accurate is the current information?
5. (if any) information should ideally be collected from/about Gypsies and Travellers?
6. the count be of caravans or of Gypsies and Travellers?
7. types of accommodation should be included in the counts, e.g. authorised sites, unauthorised sites, housing?
8. groups of Gypsies and Travellers should be included, e.g. New Travellers, non-nomadic Gypsies/Travellers, visitors on authorised sites?
9. any personal information be collected from Gypsies and Travellers, e.g. family size, age,

gender, ethnicity?

10. any information be collected on Gypsy/Traveller 'lifestyle' issues, e.g. travelling patterns, other accommodation, employment?
11. any information be collected about Gypsy/Traveller accommodation requirements and preferences?
12. often should the counts take place - should they be 'snapshots' or continuous?
13. should carry out the count - e.g. county or district in two-tier areas?
14. is the appropriate boundary between regular routine 'counts' and one-off or infrequent 'research'?
15. there equalities and/or civil liberty issues to be taken into account?
16. there resource/commitment issues?
17. practical problems might there be in changing/improving the counts?

## Appendix B: Findings of the Telephone Survey

The telephone survey was designed to provide information on how local authorities currently complete their Gypsy count returns, especially the form GS1. The survey was always intended to be small scale (sample 35-50), and to give a general impression through qualitative as well as quantitative analysis.

### Methods

A sample of 60 English local authorities was selected to give a range of geography, type of authority and number of Gypsy caravans in July 2002. ODPM provided names for the contact officers in these LAs and their telephone numbers. ODPM also notified each contact officer of the research and the telephone survey, mainly by e-mail. Interviews were carried out during the first half of May 2003.

A short questionnaire was drawn up in consultation with ODPM. An initial section identified who was responsible for the count return and what guidance was referred to when completing the return. Sections followed for each of the types of site/ encampment covered by the GS1 (unauthorised encampments on Gypsy's own land; other unauthorised encampments; authorised private sites; and authorised LA sites). Each section asked about the sources of information used and the perceived accuracy of the figures. The remainder of the questionnaire tried to identify which groups of Gypsies/Travellers might and might not be included to check possible inconsistencies between LAs, any problems faced in carrying out the count, and whether existing records would easily permit a change from snapshot to retrospective reporting of encampments over a specified period. The interviews took between about 10 and 20 minutes.

Completed questionnaires were coded and analysed using SPSS. All answers to open-ended questions, and other comments made by respondents in the course of the interview were recorded and transcribed. 'Thumbnail' summaries of the approach adopted by each LA were produced. In the note below, accounts of LAs' approaches are inset; actual words used by respondents are italicised.

### The Response

The number of interviews completed was limited by the number of days allowed within the research project. A higher response could have been achieved with more call-backs, but it seemed reasonable to stop after three full days:

- a variety of LAs had been covered; and
- later interviews were throwing up little new material.

Response is summarised in Table B1.

**Table B1: Summary of Survey Response**

Total LAs in sample	60
Number contacted	57
Contact officer off sick, on leave etc	5
Message left but no response (not chased further)	10
Refusal	0
Interview completed	42

Sample details are shown in Table B2.

**Table B2: Sample Details**

Region	Number	%
'North'	10	24
'Midlands'	11	26
'South'	21	50
<b>Type of LA</b>		
Met, LB, unitary	15	36
District council	27	64
<b>Number of caravans July 2002</b>		
Zero	4	10
1-25	8	19
26-50	13	31
51-75	10	24
76-100	3	7
Over 100	4	10

Doncaster had the largest number of caravans (324); the other LAs with over 100 included in the sample were Epping Forest, Tewkesbury and Waverley. The four LAs with a zero return were North Tyneside, Oadby & Wigston, Suffolk Coastal and Warwick.

### Who Completes the GS1?

In most LAs the named contact officer proved to be the person responsible for the count return. In a few LAs that officer had left, but the responsibility had been passed on to another member of staff who was interviewed. In one unitary LA a housing officer was named as the contact point but did not actually complete the GS1 and was unable to identify anyone who did. This LA has a number of imputed values in its published counts, and it seems likely that no-one was actually making a return there.

In 25 LAs (60%) the responsible officer was based in an environmental health/services section or department - mainly an EHO or technician, often with responsibility for private sector housing. In 11 LAs (26%) the responsible officer had a job title including the word Gypsy or Traveller (Traveller Officer, Traveller/Gypsy Liaison Officer), sometimes located in Environmental Services, sometimes elsewhere. Other locations for the responsible officer were Housing (3 LAs), Planning (2 LAs) and an Enforcement Officer (1 LA, under Licensing

Manager). This broadly mirrors the pattern found in the site research for general responsibility for Gypsy/Traveller issues in LAs other than county councils (Niner 2002).

In 4 LAs (10%), the responsible officer was located in the county rather than the district council. In these instances, it is not clear that DC staff were significantly involved at all. In the remaining LAs (90%), the responsible officer was located at DC level (or unitary), but the county council had a significant input in 8 further LAs (in 2 providing the information on unauthorised encampments on land not owned by Gypsies; and in 6 providing information on LA sites). Thus the county council had a significant input in 12 out of 27 returns from district councils (44%), suggesting that collaboration is not unusual, but equally is not universal.

The GS1 return potentially draws on information related to planning/enforcement (unauthorised encampments on Gypsy-owned land); managing unauthorised encampments (other unauthorised); caravan site licensing (private authorised sites); and Gypsy/Traveller site management (authorised LA site). The position of the officer responsible for the GS1 in relation to these other relevant responsibilities was checked as far as possible. The most common patterns were:

Responsible for site licensing + managing unauthorised camping (12 LAs)

Responsible for managing unauthorised camping only (11 LAs)

Responsible for managing unauthorised camping + LA sites (10 LAs)

Responsible for all three (4 LAs)

About three-quarters of respondents (30 LAs) said that they regularly read the guidance on the GS1 form before completing it. Officers in the remaining 11 LAs admitted that they did not, usually commenting that they had read it once and/or had been making the return for many years. Some of those who read it regularly said that 'reading' was a quick scan to check for any changes. This suggests that any changes to the scheme must be very clearly labelled to draw peoples' attention to them.

Very few respondents claimed to draw on any other guidance. One had consulted the officer who had previously been responsible, and one referred to the OPCS report *Counting Gypsies* (Green 1991).

## General Accuracy

Respondents were asked how accurate they thought their LA's count was. Just half (21 LAs) thought it very accurate; 19 LAs thought it fairly accurate; only 1 LA said it was not very accurate (1 did not know). Traveller Officers were rather more likely than EHOs to think their return very accurate (64% cf 48%), and respondents in DCs were more likely to think it very accurate than those in met/LB/unitary LAs (56% cf 40%).

These assessments are fairly favourable. Some of the comments made illustrate:

'We go to a lot of trouble.' (very accurate)

'It's very accurate because we go and look.' (very accurate)

'We do not fudge the figures.' (very accurate from LA with a zero return)

'We try very hard to give the right picture. We return what we see, and make assumptions over the number of children.' (fairly accurate)

'The number of caravans is fairly accurate, but figures for children etc include a lot of estimates. There is no time to go back if no-one is in.' (not very accurate)

### **Unauthorised Encampments on Land Owned by Gypsies**

Only 16 of the 42 LAs had encampments on land owned by Gypsies. Identifying such sites was not a problem - they were well known through planning enforcement and/or general environmental health duties.

In 12 of the 16 LAs, officers would drive past or visit the sites on count days. Others relied on the most up-to-date information available on file for numbers of caravans and occupiers. Just half of those who drove past/visited on the day said that they talked to Gypsy/Traveller residents to gather count information (one of these only talked to the site owner). Others simply drove past to count the caravans but did not enter the site, or only called to talk to someone if there was no recent information or if it was apparent that there had been changes from the last count. In at least 4 LAs officers did not call at the site for health and safety reasons, having been threatened on previous occasions. Another officer had been told politely that the residents no longer wanted them to visit for the count. Given that such sites are sometimes the subject of active planning enforcement action, this is perhaps not surprising. The following approaches described by respondents illustrate:

Know sites from planning + complaints. 4 sites of which 3 are large. Visit for counts. If have good recent information on people will not talk to anyone, just count caravans. Otherwise will talk to people. Will not enter one site for safety reasons - use planning records for people information. Time + access constraints on what can do.

Has a list of named sites, and the main families and what is there for enforcement records (recent). Liaises with Traveller education. Does not visit for count. Not practicable on the day + H&S issues.

Know sites are there because of normal EH work. On count day will pop over and have a look. If nothing has changed, will not bother to ask.

Information from planning colleague - enforcement action. Do not visit for count.

Information from planners. Personal visit for count + talk to every individual if can or ask others for information. No animosity and residents expect to be 'counted'.

Respondents were asked whether the various items of information needed for the GS1 were

normally 'accurate' or a 'guestimate'. Table B3 shows the answers.

**Table B3: Accuracy of Items of Information for Unauthorised Encampments on Gypsy Land**

Information	Number accurate	Number guestimate	% accurate
Caravans	15	1	94
Families	6	9	40
Adults	4	11	27
Children	4	11	27

As can be seen, the majority are confident of the accuracy of the caravan count (being literally a count in most cases), but less so for the number of families and still less so for the numbers of adults and children. Families are perhaps easier to 'count' because a number of these unauthorised encampments are occupied by a single family. Obviously personal details are hard or impossible to estimate without a visit, especially as some commented that individuals on this sort of site changed quite frequently (however others commented that the same people had been there for years). Other comments show that visiting does not guarantee accuracy:

'We find they are never in when we visit.'

It's a single family, but there are many within the group, often with the same names. It's a problem to assess who is there.'

'We find no-one knows about everyone.'

13 of the 16 LAs made a distinction between tolerated and not tolerated sites as required by the GS1. Those who did not said it was because their council had a policy of not tolerating any site without planning permission and therefore all are not tolerated - it is not clear however, whether all these LAs were actually actively seeking enforcement against the encampment. Some made a distinction between principle (a site *may* be tolerated in policy e.g. if there are no complaints) and practice (*this* site is not being tolerated because it doesn't meet the criteria). Distinguishing tolerated and not tolerated sites did not appear to present difficulties to respondents.

### Other Unauthorised Encampments

All LAs, potentially at least, may have an unauthorised encampment on count day. Respondents were more or less evenly split between those who carried out any specific exercise to identify unauthorised encampments (not on Gypsy land) and those who did not. Those who did not carry out any exercise often claimed that they were informed of Gypsies/Travellers in the area within hours (if not minutes) of their arrival by members of the public, businesses, councillors or the police.

Specific exercises to identify encampments most usually took the form of asking officers to keep a watch for encampments as they toured the district in the period before count day and/or driving the district on count day including visiting known stopping places to check for encampments. In answer to a prompted question:

17 LAs (43%) visited known stopping places to check

8 DCs (32%) asked the county council for encampment records

4 LAs (10%) asked the police

1 LA (2%) asked Traveller education

The following comments illustrate the different approaches:

Very small area, high population density. No special exercise needed.

Would not ask education and police as *'finds information flows the other way generally'*.

Week before count asks EHOs to keep their eyes open around the district. Check on the day that encampment is still there.

Know area and will check 3/4 known sites. Have regular liaison with education and police, but would not specifically approach for counts.

In past have visited known stopping places to check for encampments, but find it is unnecessary because of public complaints. Copy draft counts to planners and CC and ask for comments.

Cover as much of district as can on day. Drive past and look in *'hot spots'*.

Would be impossible to really survey the area.

In [LA] get ten calls in an hour if there is an encampment, so don't need any special exercise to identify.

Most information from complaints. Ask EH team to observe as they are out and about in the district. If suspicious might check a known stopping place, but not as a matter of routine.

A few respondents commented that, especially in large rural districts, small encampments hidden away on private land might be missed. In some shire district areas it is possible that the apparent lack of contact between DCs and their county could lead to encampments being missed if each authority deals with encampments on their own land. A large metropolitan district normally with a zero return admitted to having missed an encampments on a recent count day - it came to their attention later when the form had been returned. Most respondents, however, gave the impression that they were confident that the great majority of encampments would be picked up and included in the count. There is, of course, no way of checking this.

Having identified unauthorised encampments, 24 LAs (57%) would drive past or visit the encampments on the day to check they were still there and to count caravans. 13 LAs (31%) did not visit and relied on information from management records for the count. 2 DCs got all information from their county council (no information on how *they* got the information). Of those driving past/visiting encampments, 16 would talk to as many Gypsies/Travellers as possible to get personal details for the count, while 5 would not talk to anyone (2 depends/varies). Some

specifically did not speak to people on unauthorised encampments for health and safety reasons. Some felt they had good information anyway from welfare enquiries etc and were driving past on the day to check the encampment was still there and unchanged in size. The following illustrate approaches:

Visit all encampments for management purposes. Will have been in contact for welfare enquiries etc. Visit for counts and talk to people.

Physically drive the district + visit all encampments found and talk to group leader.

Drive past + go on site for monthly count [this LA carries out a monthly count for its own purposes]. Speak to people who are about - may speak to different people each time. Everyone knows what they are there for and will say what changes there have been etc. All personal and largely face-to-face

Visits for counts, but only checks for changes rather than talking to everyone on day.

In past tended to drive around. Now usually talk to property services re reports of encampments + to county GLO. May visit, but rarely now. Would only stop and talk to people with a small group.

Visit on count day but wouldn't talk to people on sites. Officers go alone, and are instructed not to visit alone for H&S. CC carries out welfare enquiries.

Don't visit specifically for counts, but draw on management information.

What they do for the counts depends on what else they have on at the time. If busy, will not drive round.

Makes a few phone calls to DC and CC colleagues to see if camps still there.

Table B4 shows respondents' assessments of the accuracy of the various items of information normally included in the return.

**Table B4: Accuracy of Items of Information for Unauthorised Encampments not on Gypsy Land**

Information	Number accurate	Number guesstimate	% accurate
Caravans	37	2	95
Families	9	29	24
Adults	7	31	18
Children	6	32	16

This shows that, while confident as to the accuracy of the caravan count, respondents were much less confident about all items of personal information. Comments suggest that this, not surprisingly, reflects how recently anyone had been spoken to on the encampment, and how co-operative and truthful they had been. In turn this may depend on local practices in managing encampments, carrying out welfare enquiries etc - for example some LAs appear only to carry out welfare checks if embarking on court action so will have less information on non-problematic encampments. Most respondents commented that some Gypsy/Travellers are

reluctant to give any information and are suspicious of 'authority'. Generally, information was felt to be much more likely to be accurate from groups who had been in the area for some time, with whom officers had some relationship. Newly arrived groups - especially if aggressive - are least likely to be accurately recorded.

Family etc details are guestimates *'they don't tell you anything'*. Won't talk to LA people.

Estimates families etc from number of caravans.

Visit for management purposes. Families etc information fairly accurate but relies on who is there when visit.

Accuracy of information depends on whether taking enforcement action. Accurate if so, less so if not.

Try to talk to any Travellers there on the day, but reluctant to talk to him. Problem where person who enforces on the one hand is trying to get information for the count on the other.

Clearly the count can only be seen as a very general indication for numbers of families, adults and children at unauthorised encampments not on Gypsy land. Caravan numbers seem, on this evidence, much more likely to be accurate although there must be scope for error in LAs where officers do not go out on the day.

24 of the 38 LAs answering the question said that they distinguished between tolerated and not tolerated sites. Those not distinguishing generally said this was because their council had a policy of not tolerating any encampments, so all would be counted as not tolerated. Answers from other LAs revealed some differences in the formality of policies being applied, and in the relevant criteria. Some inconsistencies also emerged: in some areas encampments still within a general 28 day 'toleration' policy would be counted as tolerated while in others only long-term tolerated encampments would be included and the 28 day encampments would be counted as not tolerated.

No toleration without planning permission.

Tolerated where there is an informal agreement that land can be used for a short period. Where the landowner is happy and there are no problems and no formal action to evict.

All on DC land are tolerated for 28 days; talk to private landowner.

Would count as tolerated only sites tolerated long term, not the normal 28 days.

### **Private Authorised Sites with Planning Permission**

27 of the 42 LAs (64%) had authorised private sites in their area. Some had one only, but others had several (2 LAs had over 100 caravans on such sites in July 2002). There proved to be potential for inconsistency in classifying some sites:

- Site sales and leases : Bromley counted the former LA sites now owned by Novas Ouvertures as private sites for the GS1, but they still appear in the GS2 as LA sites. Three LAs had in their area LA sites leased on a long term basis; all counted them as LA sites still, although one respondent had agonised and was not sure what decision he had come to. This is an area where further guidance might be appropriate.
- In one LA a couple of private sites had been removed from the count on the grounds that their residents no longer satisfied the legal definition of 'Gypsies' having settled on the site and no longer travelling. Other LAs seem to have followed the practice of counting any sites and their residents where the planning permission/site licence was for Gypsy site rather than residential use regardless of the current lifestyle of residents.
- A couple of more detailed points also arose. A few (northern) LAs reported having caravans within the curtilage of Gypsy-owned houses which might be used as living accommodation by various family members. In one LA these had site licences and were included in the GS1, in others they did not and were not included: in one case the respondent commented that including them would be an impossible job; in another the respondent said that planning colleagues had advised against including them since the caravans were being used as part of the dwelling house. A second detailed point of inconsistency arose over caravans in excess of planning condition/site licence numbers. In one LA these were counted as unauthorised on Gypsy-owned land, in another they were counted along with other 'permitted' caravans as authorised.

Identifying private authorised sites for inclusion in the GS1 seemed broadly unproblematic. Planning and site licensing records were available, and many sites were long-established and well known.

Respondents in 19 of the 27 LAs (70%) said that they would drive past or visit some or all the sites on count day. The remainder relied on records for the information. This is likely to be of variable currency and accuracy - some said they called frequently (but not specifically for the counts) for site licensing purposes or '*just to have a chat*', but one admitted that there had been no contact since planning permission had been granted some years previously. Of those driving past/visiting on count day, 6 LAs would try to talk to as many people as possible, 7 LAs would talk to the site owner/manager only, and 2 LAs would just drive past without talking to anyone. In 3 LAs respondents said that practice varied with time available, how recently they had called in the past and residents' wishes (some reported increasing resistance from residents to being 'counted'). The following comments illustrate approaches reported:

Inspect private sites annually for site licensing - can find ownership and conditions change rapidly and frequently. Have a good working knowledge of the sites through visits and drive-pasts, but not specifically for the counts. More accurate information for caravans than for families etc.

Have 4 sites. Get on extremely well with people living there through regular visits for site licensing etc. May ring site owner or go on day - may leave query or contact until count day to combine activities.

One site and physically walk around it with the owner. No resistance from site

owner. Will chat to anyone on site to keep good relations and awareness.

Have 30ish sites. Visit for count and talk where no other recent information on people. No access problems re safety, but can find people not in.

Quite a few both multiples and individuals. Used to visit, but got so many rude comments no longer do so. Multiple sites visited for site licence, but not individuals. Guestimates for all information.

One private site and still relying on information collected when permission granted. Never been back.

Table B5 shows assessed accuracy of the various items of information required for the GS1.

**Table B5: Accuracy of Items of Information for Private Authorised Sites**

Information	Number accurate	Number guesstimate	% accurate
Caravans	23	4	85
Families	16	11	59
Adults	13	14	48
Children	13	14	48

The usual pattern is apparent with greater accuracy for caravan numbers than for any personal details. Interestingly, assessments of accuracy on caravan numbers are slightly lower than for either category of unauthorised encampment, but for all personal aspects they are higher.

Tends to be a guesstimate for families etc. Find the number of caravans remains steady, but population can be fluid.

All 'family' sites. Information as accurate as you are going to get.

### Local Authority Authorised Sites

29 out of the 42 LAs (69%) had an LA site. In fact one more LA physically had an LA site in its district, owned and managed by a neighbouring LA - this site always appears under the site owner's name for both the GS1 and GS2. As noted above, LAs with leased sites returned figures under the LA site heading while sometimes wondering whether this was correct. The LA with no-one apparently making a GS1 return had two LA sites (included in the GS2) but no recorded caravans on LA sites in the GS1 return for July 2002.

Only 10 of the 29 (34%) visited or drove past the LA sites specifically for the count; 12 (41%) relied on normal site management visits and/or records for count figures while the remaining 7 LAs (24%) got information from another body which acted as site manager and had no hand in collecting that information. Of those who visited specifically for the count, 6 LAs usually talked to as many people as possible, while 4 LAs spoke only to the site manager or warden. The greater reliance on management records and normal site management contacts with residents reflects, of course, the landlord role. Several respondents commented that they had no need to visit or talk to people specifically for the count because they were on site every week/couple of days/day and personally knew everyone there. Interestingly, in LAs where the site was

managed by housing officers, the officer responsible for completing the GS1 (or his/her departmental colleagues) tended to visit on count day rather than rely on records from another department. The following illustrate the different approaches:

Site managed by [LA's] Landlord Services. Gypsy Officer will go with someone from there for the count and goes door-to-door.

County council site and all information provided by the county.

Manage site and have records + visit on day and talk to people.

LA sites are leased. Get occupation information from leaseholder, but also walk around site on day.

3 sites and manages them with two wardens. Visits all sites every other day and knows everyone who is there. Doesn't visit specifically for counts - management information. 100% HB receipt so have all personal information.

Table B6 shows assessed accuracy of items of information. The much higher levels of confidence in accuracy compared with other types of sites/encampments are clear. One of the 2 LAs making a guestimate for caravan numbers claimed absolute accuracy for personal details - uniquely admitting lower accuracy on the aspect most LAs claim greater accuracy for. This respondent pointed to problems in identifying how many caravans some people have on a plot, which are just used for storage or are scarcely in use at all. (The question of how to deal in the count with 'abandoned' caravans also arose at other points in a few interviews.)

**Table B6: Accuracy of Items of Information for Local Authority Authorised Sites**

Information	Number accurate	Number guestimate	% accurate
Caravans	24	2	92
Families	24	2	92
Adults	24	2	92
Children	23	3	89

### Potential Inconsistencies and Problems in the Count

As noted, many LAs are unsure of the accuracy of all their figures relating to Gypsy/ Traveller families, adults and children, especially on unauthorised encampments. This is partly because of the way in which the information is collected for the count, but also because the accuracy of information inevitably depends on the presence, co-operation and truthfulness of Gypsies and Travellers who may not always trust LA officers and may not see any direct advantage in providing accurate information for the count. In addition, a few potential inconsistencies have been pointed out:

- The division between tolerated and not tolerated unauthorised encampments is inconsistent in that some include and some exclude 'normal' 28 day tolerated encampments within the 'tolerated' category.
- Some respondents were unsure about how to categorise LA sites now leased to Gypsies

or other bodies.

- Respondents seem to have been following different practices in removing/counting private Gypsy sites where residents are no longer nomadic.
- Respondents were also inconsistent in their treatment of caravans within the curtilage of Gypsy-owned dwelling houses which may be used for residential purposes and caravans in excess of permitted numbers on authorised sites.

The questionnaire also sought to identify in a more structured way potential areas of difference in practice. A question asked whether respondents would normally include a number of types of Travellers in the counts if they were aware of them on the count day. This proved hard to analyse quantitatively because differing numbers of respondents had ever had relevant experience on which they could draw, and some were happier than others to answer hypothetically. It is more useful to consider answers qualitatively.

**New Travellers:** Most respondents said that they had never experienced a New Traveller encampment; many of these, and most who have had encampments would normally include them in the counts. 4 LAs specifically said that they would look at the guidance on the GS1 form if faced with New Travellers and would try to follow the definitions there. One LA had developed a short questionnaire to check whether New Travellers met the 'Gypsy' definition, and made the decision to include/exclude accordingly. For one rural/coastal LA this proved the main issue regarding the count. That LA normally had about 60 New Traveller caravans at any time, but did not include them in the count because, after serious consideration, they took the view that they did not meet the definition of a Gypsy, being predominantly settled and not travelling for economic purposes. This reduced the relevance of the count for this LA, and the respondent wanted instructions to be changed so that New Travellers could be included as a separate category.

**Irish Travellers:** All LAs would include Irish Travellers, indeed many commented spontaneously that most unauthorised encampments are by Irish Travellers.

**Long-distance Travellers passing through:** 4 LAs said they would not include long-distance Travellers passing through. Comments made suggest that this was more because they thought that they would be unlikely to pick up such Travellers than because of any point of principle. Many said that they aimed to include all Travellers in the area on the day, however brief their stay.

**Non-nomadic Travellers living in caravans:** this proved to be an interesting point for some respondents. As noted a couple of LAs had actually removed private sites from the count because their residents were no longer 'nomadic'. Some commented that many LA site residents were settled and no longer travelled in any real sense. The general approach seemed to be that all residents of sites (both private and LA) classed as 'Gypsy' should continue to be included and counted, regardless of the current lifestyle of residents. Individual respondents introduced two further justifications for including/excluding sites or individuals: self-ascription (whether the people regarded themselves as Gypsies) and ethnic origin:

Have removed some sites from count recently where residents say they no longer travel and do not claim to be Gypsies; if occupants said they were Gypsies would leave in.

Would count non-nomadic if of Traveller origin.

**Visitors on authorised sites in caravans:** most respondents said that they would include visitors and their caravans in the count if present on the day on an authorised site. A few said that they would not, and a few raised purely practical problems in identifying visitors especially on private sites.

**Gypsies/Travellers living on 'ordinary' caravan sites:** the response of most to this question was to say that they were not aware of any Gypsies/Travellers living on ordinary caravan and mobile home parks in their area, and that they were very unlikely to be so accommodated because they would be unwelcome. A few acknowledged that there were Gypsies/Travellers on caravan/mobile home sites in their area, but they did not include them - partly for practical reasons around information availability, partly because they were seen as more akin to housed Gypsies/Travellers who have chosen to 'settle'.

Wouldn't know about Travellers on a caravan site without specific Gypsy permission.

A former Traveller runs a caravan site which is not classed as a Gypsy site, and is thought to accommodate Travellers on occasion - this is not included in the counts.

Some mobile home sites are owned by Travellers, but would not count as not 'Gypsies' anymore. On own land and have 'naturalised'.

Have some Gypsies on caravan sites with residential licences. Never thought to include them in the count - would only include those with Gypsy site licence where coming and going.

**Other relevant groups:** respondents were asked if there were any other groups they wondered whether or not to include. The following were mentioned: housed Gypsies/Travellers, people associated with circuses and fairs, Travellers on house-boats, caravans in Gypsy-owned house gardens and people described in one area as *'drug addicts living in tents'*. None of these were included.

Questions were also included to check any issues in defining/counting 'families' and in 'counting' the number of adults. 19 LAs (45%) said there were issues in defining/counting families, and 26 LAs (62%) said there were issues around counting adults. Looking at the answers and comments made shows further scope for inconsistencies and inaccuracies in returns.

**'Families':** a few referred to the general issue of getting accurate information about Gypsies/Travellers and their living patterns. The more general, and widely recognised issue lies in defining 'family' in a culture where the extended family is important.

Travelling groups often inter-related. Where do you draw the line in defining 'families'?

The majority of respondents appeared to make decisions on available evidence to identify and 'count' nuclear families within the extended family:

Broadly apply rule that a group living in one/two caravans and cooking together = family.

The minority said that they took and applied what the Gypsy/Traveller said:

Extended families. Tend to take what they say.

A couple of LAs were clearly applying inconsistent definitions between different parts of the GS1 form:

Usually counts 'nuclear' type families except on a 'single family' private site where counts as one despite there being several nuclear bits.

**Adults:** the issues reported were mainly to do with counting Gypsy/Traveller men. Respondents referred to general access issues, suspicion of LA officers and 'authority' in general and the likelihood that men would be out working in the day when officers are likely to visit. Some implied more intention behind the wish to 'disappear' than others. The following comments illustrate:

Travellers are uncomfortable about any record keeping affecting their personal details or activities. Reluctant to give information. LA '*seen to some extent as the enemy*'. Would need someone from the community to get accurate information.

Men usually out when visit so have to rely on what people say. May have no idea how many adult sons a woman may have.

OK with authorised on the whole, but think a lot of people will be missed as men will 'disappear' for the count.

Respondents differed in how they reacted to the issue. Opinion seemed fairly evenly split between those who would include men in the count if they 'knew' they were there regardless of what they were told, and those who would not.

Try to visit encampments at different times of the day. Would count men if reason to believe they are present.

Count if feel they are there. Know approximately how many are there if have visited recently. Make assumptions based on local knowledge.

Take word for what people say. No time, resources or inclination to challenge.

Take what people say - not much point in asking if don't listen.

Too many problems on site if sought to count them all. Guestimate. No real check on what people say.

**Children:** there was no specific question about counting children, however there were some spontaneous comments. The majority view was that it was easier to count women and children than men since they were more likely to be around and more willing to be 'counted'. However, a minority of respondents reported problems in getting accurate numbers of children, especially if there was concern that this could lead to pressure or prosecution over non-

attendance at school.

A further question asked respondents whether there were any aspects of the count that caused them particular problems. 14 LAs (33%) said there were no problems. Many of the other things identified were to do with getting accurate information, definitions of families and so on which have already been outlined. The listing below gives a flavour of some of the other problem areas reported - though none was particularly widespread. As can be seen, some are matters of practicalities and resources, others are rather more fundamental.

On GS2 has difficulty re definition of transit/residential sites. Their sites are transit, but used residentially - becomes blurred.

In past had debate whether to count both mobile homes and touring caravans on sites. Counted both.

Definitions for caravans on LA site and when they should be included (storage etc). Would like to know why this is needed.

Practicalities of 506 square mile DC with 2 officers means count of heads must be questionable. Would double the time to do it accurately. Have reasonable information and tend to rely on it.

Issue re accuracy. H&S issue; if wanted to talk to people would have to go in pairs.

Date can clash with other work priorities. In summer can be short staffed.

Query re July date if after school and people are travelling. Site appears under-occupied. January may find them still away after Christmas.

Resource issue because few staff, and no specialists; don't have the resources to go looking for Travellers on the day.

Resistance to giving any information when going through planning enforcement. People on sites still seem surprisingly unfamiliar with counts.

Personally thinks count is an infringement of Travellers' human rights - don't count anyone else in this way.

How useful is a snapshot when group may be counted and gone tomorrow never to be seen again.

Is important, but what is the value in the end? What is the information needed for? Devoting a lot of time, but what does it achieve? Not a proper survey of Traveller needs.

### **Time Taken for the Count**

Towards the end of the interview respondents were asked how long it usually took to complete the count, including officer time in collecting information specifically for the count. While some

said that it obviously depended how many encampments there were at the time, the majority (38 LAs) were able to give some estimate.

Estimates ranged from a quarter of an hour to 4 officer days. The mean was 6.3 hours, the median was 4 hours, the distribution:

Up to 1 hour	7
> 1, up to 2 hours	5
> 2, up to 3 hours	2
> 3, up to 4 hours	6
> 4, up to 5 hours	2
> 5, up to 6 hours	-
> 6, up to 1 officer day	9
More than 1 officer day	7

It seems sensible to assume that the length of time taken depends both on the number of caravans to be counted and the local approach - especially whether it involves special exercises to identify encampments and/or visits to known encampments and sites on the day. As has been seen, LAs differed widely on both these measures. A simple regression analysis was carried out with time taken (in hours) as the dependent variable. The best model included the following variables (all being statistically significant):

Total number of caravans counted July 2002

Information collected on unauthorised encampments through visits

Met/LB/unitary LA

Total number of caravans and collecting information through visit both acted in a positive direction. Being a met/LB/unitary LA acted in a negative direction - i.e. being a unitary reduced the time taken other things being equal, perhaps because these LAs have smaller geographical areas. The model incorporating these variables 'explained' around 46% of the total variance in time taken as dependent variable. There are, therefore, other unidentified factors at work.

Inability of the model to explain much of the variation is intuitively unsurprising given some individual accounts, including one LA with a consistent zero return which employed several officer hours in looking for encampments on the day. By contrast, another LA with medium/high caravan numbers took less than an hour since they relied entirely on management records and '*don't make a meal of it*'. Intuitively it seems likely that different sorts of sites/encampments will need differing time inputs to count 'properly'.

Few respondents implied that they thought the count absorbed excessive time. There were indications that some had spent longer in the past, but had stopped visiting encampments/sites now. As noted above, one respondent queried the *value* of the time spent. Others, in the final open comments section of the interview raised similar issues, asking what it was all for.

## Possible Changes and Improvements

Most respondents were relatively happy with the count and with the GS1 form - or at least could not suggest any change or improvement they would like to see. Some commented that it was the issues themselves rather than the count which gave them problems. For others, the count had clearly become totally routine:

'I've never given it a thought, I just do it.'

16 LAs did make some suggestion. Changes/improvements suggested were:

**Simplifying/changing the GS1 form:** most respondents found the GS1 simple and straightforward to complete. A couple of LAs had suggestions for simplification: requiring a range rather than actual numbers, and simplifying the land ownership and tolerated/not tolerated distinctions for unauthorised camping (or at least explaining why the detail is required). Another respondent wondered whether the age breakdown for children was not too coarse for service planning.

**Better guidance:** especially on defining 'families' and when someone ceases to be a 'Gypsy'.

**Frequency:** a couple of respondents commented that count days seemed to come round very quickly and would welcome annual rather than bi-annual counts. However, the consensus seemed in favour of twice yearly counts while a snapshot approach is followed.

**Snapshot versus continuous:** this issue is covered below, but it is worth noting that 2 respondents spontaneously said that a continuous system would be preferable. Another thought that the count should be much more frequent - an alternative approach for getting a continuous picture - through say weekly snapshots. The desire for a continuous recording system was justified both as a better basis for service planning and to give a more realistic picture (view expressed by an LA with an annual event leading to major encampments which never appeared in the count).

**The 'population':** a few respondents commented on the limitations of the count as a count of 'Gypsies', pointing out that housed Gypsies are excluded. Some felt it would be useful to know the 'population'; one was clear that that should be from the Census.

'There is no count of 'Gypsies' - just of caravans on 2 days.'

**Why count? :** a few respondents echoed the comments made strongly in some scoping interviews about the purpose of the count. A link was made between clear purpose, perceived benefit and encouraging people to take more care in completing the count with accuracy.

'Seems a bit pointless and hard to justify. I've not seen any benefits from the counts.'

What is the object of the exercise? Make clearer to encourage people to take pains. Needs a purpose.

It should be a proper survey of Traveller needs. Just a routine paper exercise and

nothing comes back from count.

Specific possible changes to the count system were tested after this open-ended question. When asked for views on the possibility of converting to an electronic rather than a paper return, 18 LAs (43%) were neutral (saying they didn't mind, could cope etc); 16 (38%) were in favour and 7 (17%) definitely against. Reasons for being in favour included an expectation that it would be quicker and that there would be less risk of forms getting lost in the post. Those against feared it would take longer or were generally '*not computer-minded*'. More specific reasons for not going electronic were lack of access to IT facilities (officer based at Gypsy site); poor, unreliable IT systems; doubts about forms getting to the 'right' person if sent by e-mail to someone no longer in post; and poor previous experience of ODPM electronic returns. One respondent suggested a downloadable form as an intermediate stage.

The second potential change explored was a move from snapshot reporting of unauthorised encampments to retrospective reporting of encampments during a specified period prior to a given date. Respondents were first asked whether their data sources would enable them to provide specified items of information on encampments. Table B7 summarises the answers.

**Table B7: Ability to Provide Information about Unauthorised Encampments over Stated Period**

Information	Number yes	Number no	% yes
Total number of encampments	34	6	85
Duration of encampment	21	19	53
Size of encampment (caravans)	20	20	50
OS grid reference or postcode	12	28	30
Number of families/groups involved	9	30	23

Most LAs could provide the number of encampments (of which they were aware) over a specified period. This information was normally recorded on some sort of complaint/incident database if not in a specific log of encampments. A smaller number would be able to tell how long an encampment lasted; some said they could tell roughly from the dates a complaint record was opened and closed on the system. Just half of LAs could say how many caravans had been involved in an encampment, and still fewer used a form of GIS or other geographical referencing system. Only 9 LAs said they could really identify the families/groups involved so as to take account of double-counting and distinguish, for example, between 3 encampments by the same family and single encampments by 3 separate families/groups. Some said they tracked some well-known local families, but not on a consistent basis. Others kept no record of the families/groups involved.

A few authorities were already providing this sort of continuous information on encampments, sometimes through county-wide arrangements. A respondent in an LB said they provided similar information (including vehicle registration numbers) to the Metropolitan Police. Others said they might be able to provide such information given sufficient advance notice. For some LAs, providing the information would apparently involve a change in practice in managing encampments as well as record keeping.

The approaches listed below illustrate a number of the issues likely to be involved:

Would use complaints logging system which would identify encampments and would include

number of caravans. Would have to cross-refer to notes for personal details. Could not provide duration, only when complaint closed. Could give grid reference, but would require additional exercise.

Size of encampment problematic because fluctuate. Families only where people co-operate.

Complaints record should give this except family/groups. Commented that families tend to mix and split up, so would be difficult in practice.

Given a lead-in time of 6 months could provide - currently only encampments. Family/group information might be tricky as only have names which may not be accurate.

Unlikely to have much information, especially on private land.

Encampment on complaints system, but unless go to court, no further information recorded so couldn't answer re caravans or families or duration for all cases. Generally little information unless go to court.

Already report to county council re encampments etc. Not grid ref. or family groups involved.

Respondents were asked if they thought this sort of retrospective information on encampments would be useful. 27 out of 42 LAs (64%) said that it would be useful; 5 (12%) said that it would not; and 10 (24%) said that they did not know. Those in favour of retrospective records, either instead of or in addition to snapshots, generally felt that they would give a more accurate picture and provide a better basis for service planning.

More useful for service planning. Snapshot could be misleading because zero on day, but encampments every other day. More accurate picture over time.

Encampments useful. Would be easier to track movements with a data base.

Useful - less easy to manipulate than snapshots. Ongoing more useful.

Would show that [LA] does get encampments and can be problematic.

Those categorised as neutral generally commented along the lines that such information might well be useful, but would require much more effort to collect accurately and consistently. They also pointed to some of the problems - double-counting etc - that could arise. Some referred to the possible bias in such figures towards problematic encampments where LAs at present do not record information on encampments where they are not going to take eviction action but may identify and include them for the 'snapshot' count. Some undecided respondents thought that 'usefulness' could only be judged in relation to purpose and/or recognised the potential double-edged nature of 'better' information.

More realistic and better indication of movement. Questions how easy it would be to collect information, especially re fluidity of encampments, comings and goings etc. Good idea but onerous for comprehensive records. Don't know if there would be adequate benefit in the data.

Would be difficult to keep track and avoid double-counting if move around area.

Would be a lot more bother to collect retrospective information than the snapshots if comprehensive.

If done on retrospective basis might concentrate on problematic encampments where taking action. Might not pick up small hidden encampments which they do in a snapshot. People split and join up; would require very frequent visits to be accurate and these visits would not be justified for management reasons.

It depends what you are trying to show.

Thinks might create a political problem. Encampment figures might suggest need for a transit site which politicians are firmly against.

Those against generally felt that snapshots provided sufficient or better information. Some thought that LAs would be more likely to complete snapshots accurately. The following comment includes a number of the arguments against retrospective records.

Since only make enquiries prior to court action, feels that collecting information on all encampments routinely for continuous recording would be intrusive re human rights. Thinks that snapshots are more likely to be consistent between LAs as there would be variations in what they record on encampments. Would be bigger job to *'keep our eyes open all the time'*.

## Final Comments

At the very end of the interview, respondents were asked whether there was anything else they would like to say about the count system. 15 respondents made some final comment. Most were variations on the theme of purpose or usefulness of the count system/information. Some respondents commented that they thought the counts had their place and were useful. A couple specifically identified local use made of the count in connection with GSRG bids. Others, however, questioned their usefulness, especially at local level. The following comments seem to sum up the views of people who carry out the counts because they are required to (as they see it), but do not see any direct benefit.

Low key issue in [county] so quite pointless. Do it, but hard to justify any greater time on it.

'More for your records than mine. The present system doesn't help me plan, or give my members very relevant information.'

One respondent made the link between purpose and achieving greater accuracy:

Need more accurate information. Problem in getting greater accuracy if people do not see the point of it.

A different point was made by a respondent who was hoping to carry out a survey of Traveller needs locally, and who had therefore been thinking about information etc. He commented that the counts *'need to engage the Traveller community and identify things they need and think are*

*important'.*

## Conclusions

On the evidence of this survey, the following points emerge:

- Most LAs seem to carry out the count with reasonable seriousness.
- Most respondents are confident that their count is at least 'fairly accurate' (possibly an over-confident assessment given answers later in the interview). Looking in more detail suggests that - not surprisingly - the less accurate elements are unauthorised encampments, and personal details (number of families, adults and children) on all except LA sites. The former is obviously a weakness in a very important area for information; the importance of accuracy in the latter is perhaps more questionable. How accurate does the count have to be?
- Increasing accuracy would require greater input from LAs, and probably greater co-operation from the Gypsy/Traveller community.
- This is unlikely to be forthcoming without both LAs and Gypsies/Travellers being able to see a fairly direct benefit. This implies that count information needs to be more closely integrated into national and local policy. The purpose of count information must be more readily apparent than it is now.
- Comparing practices on defining families, inclusion/exclusion of different Gypsy/Traveller groups etc reveals potential for inconsistency between LAs at the margin at least. Fuller instructions and guidance on how to complete the GS1 might help, but again the most effective way of encouraging greater consistency might be by telling people *why* the items of information are required in that form.
- Few LAs would object to or be unable to cope with a change to electronic data collection.
- The majority of LAs see merit in having retrospective information on the number of encampments experienced in a specified period prior to a set date. In practical terms, because of differences in ways of managing unauthorised encampments, this information might not be consistent between LAs, especially if fuller details were to be sought on size, nature, location and duration of encampment.
- Any change to the count system would need to be carefully introduced, with launch activities to stress its importance. Any changes should be introduced with due notice to allow recording systems to be amended.

## **Appendix C: Gypsy Count Return Forms**

This appendix is available below for download separately in Word format.

