



Department for
Communities and
Local Government

Draft guidance to local housing authorities on the periodical review of housing needs

Caravans and Houseboats



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Introduction

The Government is keen to see fairness and transparency in housing with all sections of the community treated equally.

The periodical review of housing needs under section 8 of the Housing Act 1985 is a statutory requirement on local housing authorities. This requires local housing authorities to assess and understand the accommodation needs of people residing or resorting to their district. It includes the duty to consider the needs of people residing in or resorting to a district with respect to sites for caravans and the mooring of houseboats is part of that requirement.

This guidance aims to provide advice on how to consider the needs of such people where they differ from those of the settled community. While we recommend that the basic principles outlined here should be followed, the exact approach will need to be adapted to local circumstances.

An understanding of the need for caravan sites and moorings for houseboats is essential to make properly planned provision and avoid the problems associated with ad-hoc or unauthorised provision. A comprehensive consideration of needs and strategy to meet the need identified will greatly strengthen the ability of local authorities to respond swiftly and firmly to inappropriate unauthorised developments and encampments.

Who should use the guidance?

The guidance is provided for those within local housing authorities who have responsibility for undertaking, arranging or commissioning the accommodation needs assessments.

Assessing the need for caravans and houseboats

When considering the need for caravans and houseboats local authorities will need to include the needs of a variety of residents in differing circumstances, for example:

Caravan and houseboat dwelling households:

- who have no authorised site anywhere on which to reside;
- whose existing site accommodation is overcrowded or unsuitable, but who are unable to obtain larger or more suitable accommodation;
- who contain suppressed households who are unable to set up separate family units and
- who are unable to access a place on an authorised site, or obtain or afford land to develop on.

Bricks and mortar dwelling households:

- Whose existing accommodation is overcrowded or unsuitable ('unsuitable' in this context can include unsuitability by virtue of a person's cultural preference not to live in bricks-and-mortar accommodation).

Are there particular groups who have a need for caravans and houseboats?

This guidance is concerned with all those who have a need to live in a caravan or houseboat whatever their race or origin. It includes, but is not restricted to, bargees, Romany Gypsies, Irish and Scottish Travellers, new-age travellers and travelling show people.

Romany Gypsies and Scottish and Irish Travellers are recognised ethnic groups who have needs relevant to their ethnicity and culture, and all the duties on public bodies under the Equalities Act 2010, Human Rights Act 1998 and relevant case law apply.

How will assessing the needs of particular groups differ from the needs of the rest of the community?

The needs of those residing in caravans and houseboats may differ from the rest of the population because of:

- their nomadic or semi-nomadic pattern of life;
- their preference for caravan and houseboat-dwelling;
- movement between bricks-and-mortar housing and caravans or houseboats;
- their presence on unauthorised encampments or developments.

Mobility between areas may have implications for carrying out an assessment. Local authorities will need to consider:

- co-operating across boundaries both in carrying out assessments and delivering solutions;
- the timing of the accommodation needs assessment;
- different data sources .

Travelling show people also have different accommodation needs. Account should be taken of the need for storage and maintenance of equipment as well as accommodation. The transient nature of many travelling show people should be considered.

Carrying out the Accommodation Needs Assessment

Engagement

We strongly recommend close engagement with the community throughout the whole process. Many members of these communities are hard to reach and have poor levels of literacy.

It is important therefore that the purpose of the work is fully explained to travelling communities before the assessment begins. A community liaison group could be formed for this purpose, with the help of representatives or a steering group, which could also provide advice on other matters, including the conduct of the assessment itself. They could also help interpret and comment on the results emerging from the assessment, the conduct of a specialist survey where undertaken, and generally help encourage greater trust and community buy-in for the overall process.

Existing data sources

The data available for those residing in caravans and houseboats may not be readily available in other data sources for the rest of the community. The following may assist local housing authorities in identifying caravans and houseboats:

- Caravan count data maintained by the Department for Communities and Local Government – eg number of caravans and the types of site on which they are located
- Site management information – e.g. site waiting lists; pitch turnover; length of licenses; transfer applications; mooring licenses.
- Information on private authorised sites and moorings – numbers permitted on each site; type of planning permission; restrictions on occupancy
- Information from recent applications, whether successful or unsuccessful, or enforcement action
- Data from other service providers – e.g. health and education
- Information gathered by traveller groups or representative bodies e.g. the Showmen's Guild, the Traveller Movement, or National Bargee Travellers Association.
- Data from surveys of accommodation needs.

Conducting a specialist survey

A crucial objective of the survey process is to identify and interpret those aspects of caravan and houseboat accommodation need that are less well understood. This can often manifest itself in the case of unauthorised and private authorised sites and bricks-and-mortar housing. Special effort may be needed to ensure that a similar amount of evidence is available as for local authority owned sites for which more information may already be available. This may imply higher percentage sample size coverage.

We therefore recommend that the local housing authority or partnership conduct a specialist survey and / or qualitative research to obtain further more detailed information.

Making use of the Accommodation Needs Assessment

Current need

The data collected through the accommodation needs assessment process should enable the local housing authority or partnership to derive overall figures by which to identify accurately the current levels of households and the accommodation needs for caravans and houseboats existing in their area.

It should be possible to identify:

- the number of households that have or are likely to have a specific need to be addressed, either immediately, or in the foreseeable future;
- a broad indication of where there is a demand for additional pitches or moorings;
- the level and types of accommodation required for this need to be suitably addressed (e.g. socially rented / private site provision, transit sites or stopping places, bricks-and-mortar housing);
- the level of unauthorised development, which, if planning permission is not approved, is likely to swell the scale of need.

Future Need

It should be possible to identify:

- the intentions of those households planning to move, which may free up spare pitch, mooring or bricks-and-mortar capacity;
- the likely rate of household formation and annual population increase;
- travelling patterns of particular groups within the survey area and in and out of surrounding areas.

How to use the outcome of the assessment

Once the accommodation needs assessment has been completed, the local housing authority will need to begin considering how to meet the accommodation needs identified in the assessment. Needs can be met in a variety of ways, through the socially rented or commercially rented sectors (be it for sites or bricks-and-mortar accommodation), or through private ownership of sites or bricks-and-mortar housing, moorings and houseboats. The assessment will provide the data on which decisions about the appropriate mix of provision can be made.

The local housing authority will need to disseminate the results of the accommodation needs assessment to all relevant people and departments within the local authority (including planning colleagues) and partner organisations (such as other social landlords), and begin the process of facilitating or providing the necessary provision. This could for example require the identification of land for sites, or the allocation of tenancies in existing properties. As with the assessment itself, it will be important to involve the right people at a sufficiently high level to drive the agenda forward.