



Accommodation Needs Assessment of Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian

2008-2009

Executive Summary



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Chapters 1 and 2 Introduction and Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian

1. In January 2008, Craigforth was commissioned by Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire and Moray Local authorities to carry out an Accommodation Needs Assessment of Gypsies/Travellers in the Grampian area. The research was carried out in a number of phases, but essentially took the form of a household survey interview of Gypsies/Travellers living in different types of accommodation, including Council sites, unauthorised encampments, houses and private sites.
2. Seventy three (73) people representing a total of 55 households were interviewed across the three local authority areas. What follows is a summary of the research's findings.

Defining Gypsies/Travellers

3. While they have yet to be legally recognized as a separate racial group, the Scottish Government formulates policy around the idea that Gypsies/Travellers are a racial/ethnic group in their own right. The term 'Gypsies/Travellers' includes Scottish Travellers, Irish Travellers, Roma/Romany, English or Welsh Travellers and those who identify as Gypsy Travellers/Scottish Gypsy Travellers. It excludes Occupational Travellers (Travelling Show People/Show Travellers or Circus People) and /New Age/New Travellers.
4. Of the Gypsies/Travellers interviewed in Grampian, almost 40% defined themselves as 'Travellers', 28% as Scottish Travellers, 18% as Gypsy Travellers, 3% as Gypsies and 3% as Roma. Around 10% identified themselves in another way.

Population Levels

5. Information on population levels of Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian is derived from a number of sources, including the household survey conducted as part of this research, the Twice Yearly Count, site records, and information from Gypsy/Traveller liaisons.
6. According to the Twice Yearly Count, the summer population in Grampian has averaged between 300-450 people over the last 5 years. In the winter months it has averaged between 80-200 people, and has undergone an average 5% increase since 2001. Combining this data with that identified during the research, it is estimated that there are 500-650 Gypsies/Travellers living in Grampian. This is likely to be a conservative estimate.
7. Gypsies/Travellers households are fairly evenly spread across all three authorities, ranging from 47 in Moray, 50 in Aberdeenshire and 56 households in Aberdeen City.
8. The average household size was 3.5. The largest average household sizes were found on privately owned sites (4.5) and in housing (4.4). The smallest were found in encampments (2.9).

9. Based on current trends identified in the Craigforth survey, a potential growth of up to 50 households is possible in the resident Grampian Gypsy/Traveller population over the next 5 years. This represents a total increase of just under a third on the estimated number of Gypsies/Travellers households in Grampian.

Other Characteristics

10. The survey sample was 63% female and 37% male, which reflects the reluctance of male Gypsies/Travellers to engage in research, as well as the limited availability of these individuals for interview during the day. Nevertheless, it compares well with other similar studies.
11. The majority of interviewees (62%) were under the age of 40. Just under a third (29%) were aged between 40 and 59 and 8% were between 60 and 89. The Gypsy/Traveller population is much younger than the overall population of Grampian; 81% of the Gypsies/Travellers sample population reached was under 40, compared to just 49% of both the total Grampian and total Scottish population.
12. The survey data confirms research by the University of Sheffield into health among Gypsies/Travellers, which found that mobility problems and mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, were commonplace.

Travelling Behaviour

13. Over two thirds of Gypsies/Travellers from the sample population who were living on sites and in housing said they still travelled for at least part of the year. The most commonly mentioned reasons for not travelling were ill-health, age, bereavement and wishing to avoid disrupting their child's schooling.
14. Visiting family and friends and work purposes were the most commonly mentioned motivations for travelling, followed by the desire for a change of scene and a holiday. A few households moved around to participate in Christian missions and conventions.
15. Just under half of respondents used local authority land as a stopping place.
16. Some Gypsies/Travellers leave the region during the travelling season, visiting England, Wales and other parts of Scotland, particularly the far north. The most popular destinations were Highland and Fife.

Employment and Income

17. Around a quarter of the sample population were looking after the home or family and a similar proportion self-employed. Just over one fifth were unemployed, while a tenth were unwell or disabled and unable to work because of this.
18. A much larger proportion of the survey sample was unemployed than in the rest of Grampian as a whole – 22% compared to only 1.3%. Similarly, the level of self-employment in the Gypsies/Travellers population was 90%, compared to 10.8% for the whole of Grampian.

Accommodation Provision used by Gypsies/Travellers

19. Accommodation provision is defined as council site provision, privately owned sites, commercial caravan sites or bricks and mortar housing.
20. At present, both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire have Council owned and operated sites. Aberdeen City's site is at Clinterty while Aberdeenshire's seasonal summer site is at Greenbanks in Banff.
21. Between October 2008 and March 2009 on average 12 pitches were let at Clinterty, while over the summer months an average of 9 pitches were let. Occupancy of Clinterty is generally higher in the winter months, suggesting that the site is viewed as a winter base. The facility is overseen by an on site Manager. The rent for Clinterty during the 2007/2008 financial year was £57 per week (now £59) or £228 per month; this compares with an average rent of £52 per week or £208 per month for a two apartment property (two bedrooms, one living room) in Aberdeen City. Rents are currently under review by Aberdeen City Council. The Clinterty site has a poor reputation among Gypsies/Travellers but is currently undergoing a significant upgrade.
22. The Greenbanks site is only open during the summer months and is almost always fully occupied. Current rent at Greenbanks is £44 per week compared to an average rent of £40.08 per week for a two apartment (two bedrooms, one living room) property elsewhere in the local authority area.
23. Evidence suggests that Gypsies/Travellers are using both commercial caravan sites and privately owned sites in the Grampian region. Some commercial sites refuse to allow Gypsies/Travellers on the site.
24. Wealthier members of the family who own their own pitch on a private site may rent to less wealthy family members.
25. Housed Gypsies/Travellers may use their bricks and mortar property as a winter base. Housing does mean that Gypsies/Travellers do not also have a traditional, nomadic lifestyle.

Unauthorised Encampments

26. The number of households on encampments in the Grampian area during the summer is generally higher than the number present in the winter. Irish travellers visiting the area may travel in large groups, pushing the figures to higher than average levels.
27. Key drivers for households to living on encampments are the lack of availability of other provision, socio-economic status (including employment and income) and the time of year (encampment living is significantly easier in the summer). Other important factors are peace and quiet and the presence of family and friends. Length of stay is typically around two or three weeks.
28. In general, residents of encampments had older, smaller caravans than residents of council sites, possibly indicating that encampment based households were less wealthy and more restricted as to accommodation choice.

Chapter 3 Quality of Life

Harassment

29. Perceived harassment, or a perceived likelihood of harassment affected Gypsies/Travellers' quality of life and influenced their decision both to select and to stay on a site or encampment location. There was evidence that harassment from other Gypsies/Travellers can be decisive in driving families onto the road. More than half the respondents had past experience of harassment from either the settled community and its representatives, or other Gypsies/Travellers.
30. A quarter of respondents had at some point been assaulted, either in Grampian or elsewhere, and a third had had stones thrown at them or suffered damage to their trailers from stone throwing. Almost half the respondents had been subjected to verbal abuse and name calling.
31. Respondents on council sites reported low level harassment from local communities and occasional 'prowlers'. There were also reports of harassment of individuals by other Gypsies/Travellers families on the site at Clinterty. Greenbanks suffered occasional intrusions by local people, especially at the time of the fair. These were attributed to the open design of the site.
32. The more extreme cases of harassment were reported by families on encampments or in housing. Gypsies/Travellers seemed to feel more exposed in housing, disconnected from the support and collective security provided by friends and family.
33. The low levels of harassment reported on privately owned sites could suggest this strategy has proved an effective means of avoiding harassment and securing peace and quiet.

Discrimination

34. Discrimination can be direct or indirect:
 - Direct discrimination would occur where Gypsies/Travellers were treated less favourably because of their race. Examples from the research ranged from allegations that some taxi companies refused to pick up at a council site to more serious reports of bullying or abuse from institutions such as schools or name calling from the police.
 - Indirect discrimination would occur where a policy, practice or criterion which is applied to everyone puts Gypsies/Travellers at a particular disadvantage and is not a proportionate way to achieve a legitimate aim. This is a complex area, of which there may need to be further clarification through case law.
35. Most respondents reported no instances of discrimination from local authority officials. However, twelve did claim that they had experienced recent or past discrimination from local authority employees. It should be noted that none of these incidents was reported to any of the local authorities by the Gypsies/Travellers concerned and thus they have not had the opportunity to investigate the alleged incidents.

36. Despite measures that are in place to allow Gypsies/Travellers who are council tenants to travel, a common fear among the sample group seemed to be that housing officers were not sensitive to the requirements of the Gypsy/Traveller lifestyle, and there was a perception that tenancies were at risk and locks would be changed without warning if a family was on the road for a period.
37. Around 1 in 3 respondents (26) said that they felt they had been discriminated against by police officers, although many of these incidents had been in the past and some had taken place in local authorities outside the Grampian area. There were however, some serious allegations made.
38. The majority of households (89%) indicated that they had never had any problems with NHS staff; however, 11% of households indicated that they had experienced some discrimination in hospitals and doctors surgeries.
39. Eight interviewees reported that they or their children had experienced some discrimination at school. Some of the details of these incidents are unclear and many were not reported.
40. There was a working assumption among many of the Gypsies/Travellers interviewed that it was impossible or at least very difficult for them to access a commercial caravan site due to discrimination.
41. A number of interviewees felt the local press in Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire had contributed to bad feeling between settled communities and Gypsies/Travellers.

Illness and Disability

42. Issues ranged from the physical illness and disability, to mental health issues, often connected to fears of harassment and discrimination and a linked desire to be near others in their extended family group. This was often related to the perceived threat to security posed by new or unknown families pulling onto a site or encampment next to them.

Chapter 4 Issues that Influence Accommodation Choice

43. Conversations with Gypsies/Travellers uncovered many common indicators of what satisfied them about their accommodation, and what the major areas of dissatisfaction were likely to be. These give a good indicator of the factors taken into account by Gypsies/Travellers when making choices about accommodation.
44. The proximity of family members to each other emerged as a particularly important issue that, for good or bad, affected Gypsies/Travellers' accommodation choices in a number of other situations.
45. The importance of family was evident at Greenbanks, where an entire family occupies the site every year.
46. Family is also an important motivation in the decision to develop privately owned provision, which is usually occupied by members of the same extended family.

Drivers of Satisfaction

- Peace and quiet
- Family/neighbours
- Location and access to services
- Selective Allocations
- Quality of amenities

Drivers of Dissatisfaction

- Lack of security
- Influx of disruptive behaviour.
- Quality of the site

Chapter 5 Accommodation Needs and Aspirations

47. There is a clear desire among Gypsies/Travellers to retain the practice of living with their extended family and friends, in trailers or mobile homes, with the option of pulling on or off if they so choose.
48. The development of privately owned sites was a common aspiration among Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian. Many felt money and planning restrictions made this difficult to achieve.
49. There is a strong preference towards smaller sites which can accommodate an extended family. This is felt to ensure greater harmony between Gypsies/Travellers and with the settled community.
50. There is a desire to live among family and other kin, as well as the potential to travel which is highly regarded by Gypsies/Travellers and is seen as an integral part of their culture.
51. Equalities issues impact on the provision of information, tenancy agreements, local services, adaptations and wider relationships with the settled community.

Living in Bricks and Mortar Housing: Push or Pull?

52. There was evidence that many of the features distinctive to Gypsy/Traveller culture, such as multi-generational families transfer from sites into housing. This included taking nieces or nephews to live with them for extended periods.
53. There was a strong perception that most 'schemes' of social rented housing suffer endemic drug misuse and that Gypsy/Traveller children would be put at risk from such a move.
54. Evidence supplied by a Registered Social Landlord suggests that housing may be a popular choice for single females or households headed by a single female (although sample sizes are too small to make any further generalisations). Of the 14 identified Gypsies/Travellers applicants recorded by the RSL concerned since December 2007, 12 were headed by a single female.
55. Gypsies/Travellers who move into housing are usually seeking a base for the winter period or have a desire to settle or obtain privacy from relatives and other Gypsies/Travellers. Others had moved into housing due to site closure.

56. There were some families who felt they were being pushed into housing as there were no sites and it was not possible to camp or develop their own provision. Many young males said they intended to travel again upon leaving their parent's home.
57. Other households had opted for housing in order to gain easier access health and education services. Some also appreciated having a secure base from which to travel.

Availability of information and support

58. Aberdeen City and Moray Council maintain links with Gypsy/Traveller populations through a Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Officer and relevant officers within appropriate local authority departments. Moray Council has an Unauthorised Encampments Officer/Estate caretaker who performs many of the functions of a Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer. Aberdeenshire Council does not currently have a Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Officer but addresses Gypsies/Travellers related issues through its Equalities and Tenant Participation teams.
59. All three local authorities maintain links with Gypsies/Travellers through GTEIP. Tenants groups, such as TIGHRA also provide a mechanism for consulting with Gypsies/Travellers and to some degree, offering information and support.
60. Gypsies/Travellers consulted in the research did not show great awareness of their general rights, or of information services that might help them to gain a better understanding of their entitlements. Of those who had accessed such services, most had used the Citizen's Advice Bureaux or GTEIP.
61. There is some support for a specialist advice service and the use of Resident's Associations, though many remain sceptical about the possibility of collective action.
62. Site managers were key contacts for their tenants and in many cases were the preferred source of information and advice. This role also seemed to be played, to a limited degree, on a privately owned site.
63. Some Gypsies/Travellers had used planning agents for applications to build their own site accommodation.

Chapter 6 Overarching Priorities and Action Plan

64. The demand from all quarters was for a strategic approach that covered housing, planning, environmental health, health and education, with a number of different outcomes tailored to actual conditions and the features of each locality.
65. This could create a 'mixed economy' that included public and private provision, combined with support services that meet the specific needs of Gypsies/Travellers.
66. It is recommended that local authorities adopt a joint working approach unless otherwise specified, and that individual local authorities take 'corporate ownership' of strategies to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies/Travellers in their area.

67. Taking these priorities into account we developed four outcomes. Delivering these outcomes can only be achieved if there is clear and strong commitment from the local authority executive, which is then communicated to all levels of local authority activity.

Outcome 1: Better planning by local authorities, RSLs and partner organisations to anticipate, and plan to meet, the future needs and aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian.

Outcome 2: Gypsies/Travellers normally resident in Grampian and Gypsies/Travellers visiting the area have accommodation that meets their needs, culture and lifestyle.

Outcome 3: Individual support and community development needs are identified and met.

Outcome 4: Better and more constructive relationships are developed between Gypsies/Travellers and settled communities.

68. Each outcome has been split into a number of Service Delivery Outcomes. These are as detailed under each outcome heading below.

Outcome 1: Better planning by local authorities, RSLs and partner organisations to anticipate, and plan to meet, the future needs and aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian.

69. To achieve Outcome 1, the following Service Delivery Outcomes are recommended:

An Encampment Management Strategy is established for the whole Grampian area.

Updated information on accommodation and support needs for Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian is provided.

Gypsies/Travellers' accommodation and support needs are integrated into LHS and other appropriate council strategies.

Outcome 2: Gypsies/Travellers normally resident in Grampian and Gypsies/Travellers visiting the area have accommodation that meets their needs, culture and lifestyle.

70. This outcome would be met through delivering three service delivery outcomes, which are:

Accommodation is reorganised to meet needs of current users and an additional 35 pitches are provided.

Provision is of high quality and well-maintained, meeting the highest standards in line with current Scottish Government Guidance.

Gypsies/Travellers have developed their own privately owned sites for families and friends, relieving pressure on high demand council sites and encampments. Provisions for privately developed

Gypsies/Travellers sites are incorporated into local development plans.

Outcome 3: Individual support and community development needs are identified and met.

71. This outcome would be met through delivering four service delivery outcomes, which are:

Gypsies/Travellers access services they need, are more self-reliant and pro-active, and engage more with the wider community.

Support, care and health needs of Gypsies/Travellers are better met.

Reduced risk of harassment, disadvantage and mental health/isolation issues amongst housed Gypsies/Travellers.

Reduced discrimination against Gypsies/Travellers.

Outcome 4: Better and more constructive relationships are developed between Gypsies/Travellers and settled communities.

72. This outcome would be met through delivering four service delivery outcomes, which are:

General relations between Gypsies/Travellers and settled communities are improved, with clear guidelines on acceptable behaviour established for both.

Increased understanding of the needs, culture and lifestyle of Gypsies/Travellers amongst public sector employees.

Improved representation of Gypsies/Travellers in Grampian.

Improved consultation with Gypsies/Travellers and the Settled Community.

73. Specific actions in relation to each of these service delivery outcomes are identified in the Action Plan.