



GYPSIES and TRAVELLERS.
Report carried out for Barking and Dagenham Council
by the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit.
January to April 2006.

1st May 2006

INTRODUCTION

The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit (LGTU) has produced this report for the Corporate Equalities and Diversity department of the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham.

The report was commissioned in compliance with the Borough's *Community Cohesion Strategy 2004 – 2007* in which the Council is required to liaise with Travellers and Gypsies in the borough and produce an action plan to improve community cohesion by 2006. In addition the Equalities and Diversity Impact Assessment Report for Travellers of Spring 2005 recommend such a survey in order to "promote equality"

The report is based on a survey of the needs and experiences of English and Welsh Gypsies and Irish Travellers, living in the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham. Roma refugees and asylum seekers are likely to be the subject of a further survey.

In addition, at the request of the Equalities and Diversity department, LGTU has undertaken a series of interviews with key Council officers and other relevant agencies to ascertain policy, practices and other relevant information.

The report includes a response to the Protocol on unauthorised encampments and a review of strategy and policy documents which relate to the council's direct dealings with Gypsies and Travellers living on their The Chase Traveller's Site.

Acknowledgements.

The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit wishes to thank all Gypsies and Travellers in the borough who gave their time freely to this report. In addition we would like to thank the Council Officers, Police, PCT and Voluntary Sector staff who co-operated with the survey. Sara Dunn and Judy Spours both gave advice on the approach and format of the report.

The report was written by Gill Brown and Angela Emmerson.

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SUMMARY

AIM

The aim of the survey was to gather evidence in order to inform the Community Cohesion Action Plan to be produced by the council in 2006 by:

- recording the views of the Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities with particular reference to their experiences of council and other relevant provisions and services. In particular accommodation; education; health; council and other benefits; access to council and other services; community relationships.
- identifying both good practice and gaps in council provision and relevant policies in the borough.
- seeking the views of other statutory and voluntary agencies

PRACTICE

Interviews were carried out with a range of Gypsies and Travellers living at the official council site, in private rented accommodation and in rented council accommodation. There are no private sites in the borough.

In addition key council officers, statutory sector staff and voluntary sector personnel were interviewed.

Policy and Protocol documents directly relevant to the Council's dealings with Gypsies and Travellers were reviewed. During the survey period a number of issues were raised requiring action on the part of LGTU, which are noted within the relevant section.

Brief background information on Roma Gypsies is included. However, as agreed, LGTU will be advising LBBD on the viability and approach to a separate survey of the Roma community.

PRINCIPAL FINDINGS

Gypsies and Travellers

Accommodation (Housed Travellers)

- Mobility. Families tend to move frequently.
- Isolation. Living away from extended family members.
- Housing generally needing repair.
- Racial prejudice and discrimination.

Accommodation (The Chase Site)

- Families prefer living on the Site to living in a house.
- Site management has improved since Christmas but problems of consistent communication with residents still exists.
- Repairs. The programme of refurbishment requires attention and revision.
- Residents group. Respondents do not wish the council to impose a residents group.
- Health and Safety issues need to be addressed.
- The Pitch Allocation procedure is unclear and confusing to residents.

Education

- Education matters to the Gypsies and Travellers we interviewed.
- More support with schooling would be welcome.
- On the whole parents see primary schooling more relevant than secondary.
- Bullying of Gypsies and Travellers particularly in Secondary school is reported as common in the borough's schools.
- Poor attendance, literacy, homework problems and starting school late contribute to low attainment levels.
- Children at secondary school have few friendships with those from the settled community.
- Young adults are not accessing income /work related skills training.
- Point particular to Housed Traveller Families.
 - do not tend to know parents of children from settled families, which further isolates them.
- Point particular to The Chase Site
 - residents look forward to the resumption of Adult Basic Skills classes

Health

- Health visitors are valued as a source of general help.
- The Chase. Some residents have had bad experience with GPs although others have not.
- Housed Travellers report fewer bad experiences with GPs.
- Both Chase residents and Housed Travellers report varying levels of depression. In particular, in women living in houses.

Access to Council and other services including Benefits.

- Families generally do not see the need to access under 5s provision.
- Respondents not aware of the council's Community Strategies or Services and do not see any benefits or relevance.
- Health Advice and Education e.g at clinics, is not accessed, apart from GP consultations.
- Voluntary sector provision from the CAB and (for Housed travellers) Cairde na Gael is greatly valued.
- Accessing Benefits advice is difficult, due in part to illiteracy.
- The Chase residents rely on the Housing Benefits Welfare officer and other visitors for help with Benefits.

Community Involvement and Relationships

- Families do not see a need to get involved with activities outside their own community. Some church and school events are exceptions.
- Housed Travellers
 - Prejudice and harassment from locals is common
- The Chase Residents
 - Relationships with local shops and residents is generally good
 - The Millenium Centre is apparently "*out of bounds*"

PRINCIPLE FINDINGS

Barking and Dagenham Council

Corporate perspective:

- The Equalities and Diversity department currently hold the remit for Gypsies and Travellers. However there is no leadership from senior management to ensure strategies are implemented and there is no follow through or accountability. This has resulted in:
 - a piecemeal and reactive approach, confusion and lack of communication between departments.
 - lack of senior support in some areas resulting in a weak delivery service.
- Inter-agency working. Voluntary Sector/Advice agencies report ineffectual working relationships with council Departments.
- The Gypsy and Traveller Planning group is starting to bring parties together with Travellers. However
 - i. Unauthorised encampments tend not to be included on the agenda.
 - ii. Issues faced by Housed Travellers are not currently included.
 - iii. Attendance by officers has been patchy.
 - iv. Action and follow up is often uncoordinated and responsibilities are unclear.

Traveller Liaison Officer

- 3 officers apparently hold this job title.
- There is confusion across the council about the role of the TLO in Education.

Website (Appendix 3)

At the start of Field work (January 2006) we accessed the council's public website. The pages referring to Gypsies and Travellers presented a negative and stereotypical picture. It may be that this was actionable under the Race Relations Act, although we cannot confirm this. In addition they all were aimed at the general public and not Travellers. LGTU drew this to the attention of the Equalities Department and the Social Inclusion Department. On May 1st 2006 we again accessed the Website. It had changed and now carries 2 main sections about Gypsies and Travellers and the design and some of the wording has changed since January. However:

- 1) The "Traveller Liaison" Website issued from the Street Wardens Dpt.in Health and Consumer Services informs the public about unauthorised encampments and is out of date. It aimed at the public and there is little information that is helpful for Gypsies and Travellers. The tone could be described as "non inclusive". A paragraph advising Travellers on schooling is out of date.
- 2) The Equalities and Diversity Impact Assessment website which links to the above under the heading of "Information on Travellers" (Appendix 4). This was apparently written in early 2005 and refers only to actions taken or to be taken around The Chase Site. Some points need revising and correcting.

PRINCIPLE FINDINGS Barking and Dagenham Council (Website) contd

These two comprise the main web sites for Gypsies and Traveller information and as such need changing in approach, updating and widening to include council policies on Gypsies and Travellers in general.

Education

- Traveller Education Service. Barking and Dagenham is only one of two London Boroughs which does not have a TES.
- Officers are divided in their views about the need for a TES.
- In common with national patterns, school attendance particularly at secondary level has been an issue for many years.
- There is an apparent need to encourage schools to include Gypsy and Traveller culture in teaching. (NB No Teachers interviewed)
- There is a reported culture of bullying Traveller children from both housed and site families, particularly in Secondary schools.
- Liaison between Education Officers and Health personnel is weak.
- There appears to be no coherent strategy for improving the Educational opportunities for Gypsies and Travellers adults. There have been effective ad hoc initiatives in the past.

Council Sites.

Both English/Welsh Gypsies and Irish Travellers are from a nomadic background but the council only provides one site for Gypsies

The Chase Site

- Poor and inconsistent management of The Chase site for many years.
- There has been no revision of strategy for effective management of the site.
- There are too many Site Licence documents which are generally confusing and out of date.
- Residents are confused about the allocation policy.
- One and a half officers manage the work between them in 2 days a week.
- Thames Accord refuse to return to the Site to rectify poor and shoddy work and as far as we can ascertain they have not been challenged on this.
- The repair work remains an urgent issue (May 2006). Some residents disagree with the Manager about what needs to be done.

Unauthorised Encampments .

- No evidence of Travellers stopping longer than 2/3 days in the last 2 years.
- The council policy which is likely to be known by Travellers, means that no borough services are able to ascertain or respond to the needs of families on encampments. This also means there is no record of the needs of this group of Travellers who are resorting to Barking and Dagenham.

- The current Protocol on Unauthorised Encampments is out of date and inaccurate.
- The use of Section 61 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA) has apparently been misunderstood.

PRINCIPLE FINDINGS

Statutory and Voluntary Agencies.

Police:

An Inspector and a Sergeant have responsibility for Gypsies and Travellers and both are engaged with relevant and current issues

Health Visitors:

- Overall health on The Chase site is reported to be "*reasonable*" however issues for under 5's remain a concern.
- Health Advice sessions at local clinics are not accessed by residents of The Chase.
- 2 GP surgeries serve The Chase and therefore 2 sets of Health Visitors.
- There is little liaison between Health Visitors and relevant Council Departments.
- Health Visitors are not aware of Housed Travellers in particular.
- At the time of interview (March 2006) Health Visitors were unaware of the Gypsy and Traveller Liaison meetings and of the Traveller Liaison officer in Education.

Voluntary Agencies:

- Ad hoc or no contact with relevant Council departments on Gypsy and Traveller issues.
- Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) mentioned the Homeless Persons Unit and Council Tax section in particular.
- There is no local CAB or advice centre for The Chase.
- Housed Irish Travellers travel to Cairde na Gael in Newham for Advice and Training.
- Cairde na Gael reports instances of bullying in schools.
- Neither the CAB nor Cairde na Gael have funding for outreach work but both stated such work is important for delivery of service.

LGTU REPORT for LB Barking and Dagenham April 2006
RECOMMENDATIONS

(The Commission for Racial Equality inquiry into local authorities' race and community relations work around sites for Gypsies and Travellers was released on 15th May 2006, the day we finalised this report. It bears out much of what we have found in Barking and Dagenham and the recommendations made by the CRE are both useful and timely).

PRINCIPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

General

- Allocation of a senior council officer at Head of Service level or higher to champion all Gypsy and Travellers issues in the borough and ensure that appropriate plans are implemented and monitored across departments.
- Ensure Gypsies and Travellers are included in all ethnic monitoring across all departments.
- Management of The Chase site to become the responsibility of the Housing Department to ensure equality of treatment for the residents with other council tenants.
- Recognition that Irish Travellers are a traditional nomadic group recognised under the Race Relation Act, currently living in houses in the borough. As such they need to be included on an equal basis in all policies and strategies, including site provision.
- Establishment of a Traveller Education Service. Below we include a box describing Traveller Education Services. We have placed it here rather than as an appendix to help with understanding.

Traveller Education Services have existed in the UK for some 30 years. Staff from Counties and Boroughs meet regularly so there is a shared body of experience and expertise on successful strategies to address the educational disadvantages of Gypsy and Traveller children. TES are funded by a central government grant and matched by Local Authority contribution.

- An urgent audit of the borough's schools, particularly at secondary level to ascertain awareness of Gypsy and Traveller issues and bullying of Gypsy and Traveller pupils.

- In the short term, the Traveller Liaison Officer Education to have a budget for additional educational support e.g. homework clubs and culturally inclusive materials for schools. Equipment and materials for adult education.

PRINCIPLE RECOMMENDATIONS General contd.

- Senior officer to ensure effective liaison between departments, PCT, the voluntary sector and police including leadership of the Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group.
- Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group to monitor the Action Plan arising from this report.
- Prioritise funding for the voluntary sector such as the Citizens Advice Bureau and Cairde na Gael, in particular for outreach work with Housed Travellers (Ref. Page 26)
- Website and other documents to be scrutinised and changed to remove negative and inappropriate stereotyping of Gypsies and Travellers.
- Training in Gypsy and Traveller awareness issues for designated Council staff.

PRINCIPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

Unauthorised Encampments

- The designated senior officer (**see above**) to have ultimate responsibility for decisions regarding unauthorised encampments.
- Current Protocol between the council and the police on unauthorised encampments to be updated now and reviewed every 3 years. This to include
 - Identified officers from Childrens, Adult and Community and Health services to visit unauthorised encampments to carry out welfare assessments which should inform decisions on whether to evict.
 - Identified officer to manage encampments and assist homeless applications.
 - A leniency agreement.
 - Guidance on the use of police powers to evict under Section 61 of the

PRINCIPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chase Site

- Repairs: there is an urgent need for this to be addressed at senior level and should not wait for the below review.

- A thorough review, at senior level, of the management structure, policy and procedures relating to the site to ensure that they are comparable to those in housing. Residents should be consulted in this review and the results should be transparent and easy to understand. This review should include:
 - A new tenancy agreement drawn up in consultation with residents to replace the many site licence documents currently in existence. (Examples exist of model tenancy agreements.)
 - The Pitch Allocation procedure needs revision in consultation with residents and brought into line with housing procedures. (Appendix 7)
 - Effective line management arrangements for the site manager.
- Proper consultation with residents to assess the role of and need for a residents group.
- A Health and Safety audit and production of a Safety booklet (possibly a children's project. Appendix 6)
- One named Health Visitor for The Chase site.
- The "wardens office" to be available for a range of services in addition to adult education e.g Health advice sessions.

PRINCIPLE RECOMMENDATIONS

Housed Travellers.

- Ensure housed Gypsies and Travellers are included in all ethnic monitoring.
- Development of a strategy to support these families, specifically with education, health and advice issues.
- Ensure Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group includes Housed Travellers and their issues.
- Liaison with Police and other agencies re awareness of racial incidents.

BACKGROUND.

Gypsy and Traveller Communities

Gypsies and Travellers living in Barking and Dagenham fall broadly into three groups: Gypsies who are predominately English Romany (although there are some Welsh Romany Gypsies), Irish Travellers, and Roma refugees and asylum seekers. Gypsies and Irish Travellers share similar traditional lifestyles and aspirations but are distinct ethnic groups and are living in very different circumstances in Barking and Dagenham, so for the purposes of this report responses are considered in three discrete groups, although there is some overlap.

i) English/Welsh Romany Gypsies, ii) Irish Travellers and iii) Roma are all recognised minority ethnic groups within the terms of the Race Relations Act 1997 and Amendment Act 2000.

Actual figures of people from these communities living in the borough are not known. The lack of data is evidence of their marginalisation and hidden status.

Irish Travellers

Irish Travellers are a nomadic people indigenous to Ireland who have been recorded since the 11th Century. They have their own cultural heritage and have traditionally travelled throughout Britain. It is estimated that there are approximately 19,000 Irish Travellers living in Britain although connection with Ireland remains strong and many families travel to and fro on a regular basis. Lack of ethnic monitoring means figures are approximate.

Romany Gypsies

Romany Gypsies are a nomadic group who arrived in Britain in the 14th century having originated from the Indian sub continent. They have a strong sense of their own identity and culture which is still strongly connected to their traditional nomadic lifestyle. An estimated 63,000 Romany Gypsies currently live in England and Wales, but lack of ethnic monitoring means these figures are approximate.

Roma Refugees and Asylum Seekers

As a result of centuries of rejection many Roma and Travellers communities today live in very difficult conditions, often on the fringe of the societies in the countries where they live, and their participation in public life is very limited. It is also very difficult for them to ensure that their contribution to European culture is fully acknowledged

(Council of Europe)

The Roma Gypsies form a group of approximately 8-10 million people in Europe. During the early to mid 1990's Roma families began arriving in Britain as refugees from Eastern European countries – Poland, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia and former Soviet Republics. Most have fled from persecution and discrimination in their home countries.

Most Roma families in Britain live in temporary accommodation with short term lets which means they are frequently moved on at short notice. Most arrive here with no English.

Barking and Dagenham and neighbouring areas.

I. Counties and Districts.

Barking and Dagenham lies at the edge of Greater London. Nearby areas such as Chelmsford, Basildon and Epping Forest have seen an increase in the development of land owned as caravan sites, with and without planning permission, suggesting that the areas are popular with Gypsies and Travellers who want to set up caravan sites for themselves and their families. There are a total of 820 caravans in the above Districts (all site types included). (5) *ODPM figures Jan 2005.*

Looking at the ODPM figures, since 1994 there has been a growth in private sites in the above area, in particular the development of sites without planning permission. Pat Niner (*Centre for Urban and Regional Studies, Birmingham University*) suggests that this is likely to reflect the suitability and cost of land. She argues that this “self help” is one of the strongest indicators of the need for site accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and is a key factor to take into account for the future.

II. Neighbouring London Boroughs

The ODPM caravan Jan 2005 count for the borough and neighbouring boroughs:

Barking and Dagenham	12 (council Site)
Havering	60 (46 Unauthorised private developments and 14 Authorised private Sites)
Newham	15 (Council Site)
Redbridge	17 (Council site)
Tower Hamlets	19 (Council Site)
Waltham Forest	11 (Council site)

The above figures reflect a drop in the caravan numbers on council sites in Waltham Forest, Barking and Dagenham and Newham and a growth in 2 years for caravans on private sites, both authorised and non authorised in Havering. It is significant that no roadside camps are included in the ODPM figures. Through our general work, LGTU is aware of specific incidents of speedy eviction which have not been recorded. Thus the real figures are unknown.

Current Legislation

In 1994 the Conservative government repealed the 1968 Caravan Sites Act including the duty on Local Authorities to provide caravan sites for Gypsies and Travellers. It was suggested that they provide for themselves in the future. There were also increased powers of summary eviction for roadside camps and tightened up planning controls. Those Gypsies and Travellers who had the resources to provide for themselves were met with over 90% failure rate on planning applications which resulted in increased unauthorised developments. No new local authority sites were built and roadside camps were evidence of this unmet need. Many Gypsies and Travellers went into housing, though not by choice. It also increased the marginalisation of the communities as there were no legitimate ways they could meet their traditional accommodation needs. The 2004 Housing Act for the first time recognised that Gypsy and Traveller accommodation should be treated under the same principles as housing. The clauses include a requirement of all Local Authorities to undertake Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment and to state how they will respond to the identified need in their local development framework. Planning guidance also now requires the Local Authority to identify land suitable for the development of Gypsy and Traveller sites.

The ODPM guidelines issued 2nd February 2006 place obligations on Local Authorities to engage with Gypsies and Travellers and produce appropriate strategies to ensure that community cohesion is achieved. The Guidelines include recommendations and advice on how to meet this obligation along with guidance on accommodation assessments and legislative powers surrounding unauthorised camps and anti social behaviour.

There are various government guidance documents on this and other Local Authority powers and responsibilities towards Gypsies and Travellers which can be found on the ODPM website

APPROACH

TIME SCALE

The survey took place from January to April 2006. The survey was subject to considerable constraints to do with time, geography and broken appointments. (Appendix 1).

METHODOLOGY

1 Gypsy and Traveller Families living in the Borough

A total of 18 families took part in this initial survey.

8 Irish Traveller families 8 English Gypsy families and 2 Welsh Gypsy families.

For the purpose of the report, the figures relate to family units in separate accommodation although over half had extended family members living nearby or a short drive away.

A further survey with Roma families was not possible in the Fieldwork timescale. Reasons for this are flagged below and were reported by LGTU to the Commissioners of this report in April 2006.

i. Contact

The Borough Education Arts Libraries Department provided a PLASC census providing data on 2 groups described as Gypsy/Roma and Travellers of Irish Heritage, taken from January 2005 figures. The Education Mobility Officer identified a further 8 families who agreed to be contacted.

36 children of school age were individually identified as coming from either of these groups within a total of 24 families. 1 family stated they were not Travellers and 2 had moved out of borough.

(2 families identified as Irish Travellers by PLASC list were English Gypsies). This left 21 families as potential respondents.

(8 Irish Traveller families, 10 English /Welsh Gypsy families and 3 Roma families). In addition the researcher met 2 more Gypsy and 2 Irish Traveller families during the fieldwork period .

A total of 25 families were possible respondents .Of these, 2 could not be contacted during fieldwork and 2 were unable to keep appointments. The researchers attempted contact with 3 Roma families but were unable to meet them in the fieldwork period. Further information is given in the relevant sections below.

Therefore a total of 18 families were interviewed for the survey

ii. Approach

13 of the 18 families interviewed were contacted in advance either by Corporate Equalities or the Education Department. The researcher then contacted them to explain the reasons for the survey and ask for their help. All families were given a leaflet and letter from LGTU with contact details of the researcher and Corporate Equalities. Confidentiality was assured by letter and verbally.

iii. Informal Interviews

In order to address the brief from Barking and Dagenham Council and the aims of the survey as outlined earlier, it was decided to use a semi structured questionnaire with an emphasis on listening. This allowed for voices to be heard and reported more directly than through a formal set of questions and answers.

The following broad headings were used as a basis for the interviews

- The purpose of the survey, with confidentiality emphasised.
- Education.
- Accommodation.
- Health.
- Access to services and community relationships.
- Council and other Benefits.
- Discrimination.

- Any other issues which particularly concerned respondents.
- The Councils “Tell us what you think” customer service survey card was completed by most respondents. (Appendix 2)

The survey was occasionally modified according to individual circumstances

iv. *Response to the Survey*

All Gypsies and Travellers approached agreed to be interviewed. Most were open and responsive. Some understood the nature and reason for the survey quicker than others. Most were interested to express the points on the councils “Tell Us What You Think” survey card.

2 Methodology : Unauthorised Encampments

During the Fieldwork period we were unable to speak to Travellers on unauthorised encampments passing through the borough directly.

3 Methodology: Council Officers.

Interviews were conducted with 12 council officers. The decision on who to interview was initially informed by names on the Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group. It became apparent that a number of other officers were also relevant to the survey. Officers were approached by phone or email and all were assured of confidentiality.

i. Informal Interviews

A semi-structured questionnaire and listening exercise was employed. The following broad headings were used as a basis for the interview

- Job description and responsibilities.
- Recent history of changes where appropriate.
- Areas felt to work satisfactorily within the council.
- Areas felt to be unsatisfactory within the council.
- Awareness of Gypsy and Traveller Issues.
- Internal communication issues.
- Issues of concern/interest to Gypsies and Travellers..

The survey was occasionally modified according to individual circumstances

ii. Response to the survey

Most officers were pleased to hear about the initiative and engaged with the issues. Some expressed frustration with the council’s past relationships and approach to Gypsies and Travellers. There was a sense of confusion on the part of some that developments were taking place on an ad hoc basis and a concern that the survey would simply add to the this confusion.

4 Methodology: Other Statutory and Voluntary Agencies.

A total of 4 other statutory sector personnel and 2 voluntary sector staff were interviewed - 2 Police representatives, 2 Health Visitors and 2 Voluntary Advice organisations.

i. Approach

The approach was informal and the following broad headings were employed:

- Job description and responsibilities.
- Relationship with the council.
- Knowledge of the Gypsy and traveller community.
- Relationship to the Travelling community.
- Gaps and constraints within the workplace.
- Issues of concern/interest to Gypsies and Travellers.

PART TWO

RESULTS GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS

The 18 families interviewed break down into 2 groups. Housed Families and Residents of the Chase Traveller's site. Therefore the results are presented in 2 sections.

Results. Housed Travellers.

All respondents in houses were Irish Travellers. A total of 8 families were interviewed all with children of school age. One other housed family, possibly English Gypsies, proved impossible to contact.

Of those interviewed, apart from 2 adults, all had a history of travelling for much of their lives, had either been homeless or forced to move because of racism and been in temporary housing at some point in the preceding 8 years (most had moved more recently). Most of these families had experienced life on temporary sites and 2 had lived on official council sites when they were young. Only 2 families included men who were happy take part in the survey .

1. Accommodation:

" We couldn't get no stay anywhere. Travelling's getting dangerous and with the children too. But I get restless in here and I need to go away before I go mad"

Moving into a house has its own set of problems including issues of isolation that can lead to depression and other long term health problems. Women and older girls can suddenly find themselves taking responsibility for the family without the back up they were used to within an extended family and the notion of *"being hemmed in"* is common in a community used to living as much outside as in. The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit's report on *Housed Irish Travellers* explores these issues.

i. Length of stay and previous accommodation.

No families had lived at their current address for longer than 4 years.

- One had moved at Christmas 2005 from Newham to a private rented house, due to harassment from the previous Housing Office and other tenants. She took the offer of a deposit from the previous council.
- One had been squatting near to family in another borough and were eventually re-housed in B and D council accommodation where they have been for 2 years.

Results:Housed Travellers. Accommodation contd.

- One respondent had lived for much of her life on the Haringey council site . Although she travelled with her husband and young family she felt the site was her home. It was closed down 3 years ago and she had *“no home to go to. The whole family split up”* She and her family found private rented accommodation where they have lived for just over a year.
- 3 families now living in council accommodation had been in the borough for longer. All had lived in temporary homeless accommodation and on an apparently notorious estate in the borough and moved from there to their present house. One of these women had to move around due to her husband’s violence.
- One had been in the UK for only 6 months. They had presented as homeless after leaving Ireland for work purposes and to be near the husband’s family who were unable to offer them accommodation for long. They then moved to Newham, who placed them in B and D council accommodation.

ii. Current living situation.

“ I feel I don’t belong here. In a caravan you can usually find someone you know but here you’re on your own with no one to fight for you. Not knowing anyone around”

- All respondents, bar one, expressed feelings of isolation and anxiety. None knew their neighbours and all but one family had experienced unpleasant incidents and taunting. In addition graffiti, rubbish and other actions were reported by 5 as frequent. Respondents were not generally able to report these incidents as they either did not know where to turn or as one put it *“She’s a settled woman. I’m only a Traveller. Who’s going to listen to me?”* All but the family who had arrived at Christmas either wanted to move or had put in for a move to get away. However they realised they may face the same problem again.
- Of the 7 houses visited, (one respondent was interviewed at her cousin’s house) 5 were in poor decorative order and with at least two additional problems. 3 were in bad repair, with fittings off the wall, cables, peeling paper, damp, tiles lifting etc. Some attempts at repair had been made by the tenants. Getting an adequate response from the Repairs Dpt. was mixed, in part due to illiteracy and hesitancy about speaking on the phone.
- No one interviewed expressed particular satisfaction about the area

or with the borough although those living in or near Dagenham felt better about the area than those in Barking.

- If they were near shops, transport and schools, respondents were generally more positive about the area than if they were a distance away from such facilities.
- There was a unanimously expressed desire to be nearer advice and other organisations.

Results :Housed Travellers. Accommodation contd.

iii. Ideal living situation.

"That site (referring to a photograph) is so lovely. You can just leave your caravan and go to see someone and be outside with an eye on your kids"

"I want to become a council tenant for the security. If we're forced to move again I couldn't stand having to find a place quickly. It would be good to have a base and then if we go travelling at least it's there for us and the kids"

Respondents differed in their ideal living situation. 5 preferring a "safe Site", either council run or private. By " safe" they meant with family or people they knew. Reasons given were: safety, cultural, (*"no one thinks you're different because of your ways"*), benefits for children - being with other Travellers and living a freer life, less everyday hassle e.g *"things seem to go wrong in a house"* Of the 3 who expressed preference for staying in a house, one is married to a Traveller and has never lived on a site. Another cited security for the children. *"You could be moved on from a Site."*

2.Education:children

" I want my children to have a proper education so they can read books and write. But why do they have to learn about all the Kings and Queens. That's nothing to do with us. It's no use to them. Why not learn about Traveller's ways and our own history. When they go travelling they'll want to know it"

"I expect big things for them because I want to see them do well"

Gypsy and Traveller children, particularly those of secondary age, have much lower levels of school attendance than pupils from other groups. By Key Stage 3, it is estimated that only 15-20% of Traveller pupils are registered or regularly attend school. (OFSTED, *The Education of Travelling Children: a survey of educational provision for Travelling Children (1996)*)

All 8 families had school age children. A total of 17 were on roll. At the time of interview (March 2006) the family who moved at Christmas had yet to be found a place at a local school (referred to Traveller Liaison Office Education). Public perception of housed Travellers is that they have fewer problems in school than

those who live on sites but this is not the case. Transfer to secondary school is a hurdle for Gypsies and Travellers but the largest proportion who drop out early are Irish Travellers. (*Hammersmith and Fulham TES "Travellers and Secondary Education"*.) All families stressed that they want children to read and write and most wanted more. Several secondary schools were identified by the families as posing problems for Traveller families. On the whole parents thought better of primary schools which they considered to be more community based. Children at secondary school had few friends outside their own families although one family recently arrived from Ireland and with children now at secondary school in Redbridge, reported friends from the settled community coming to the house.

Results: Education. Children contd.

i. School attendance

6 families, had difficulties with school attendance, particularly with secondary age children. The Education Welfare Dpt. is apparently in touch with them. 2 families reported that generally attendance was no problem. (1 of these families had children at school in Redbridge) Several families mentioned family events as interrupting schooling.

ii. Bullying /Harassment/Discrimination at school.

Every family, including the recent arrival, had experienced alarming incidents in the short and long term, particularly at secondary school. These ranged from being attacked by adult relatives of school bullies to having food spat in, pulling hair and calling names. One family had won the right to remove the child from school after consistent bullying and problems. He now has a computer to help him learn at home. They went through a lengthy process and the family had eventually received a formal apology from the Education Dpt. Respondents generally felt they had no tools or not enough knowledge to challenge the schools although a few families had received support from the Education Welfare Dpt. Support was also given by Cairde na Gael , a voluntary agency in Newham. Some reported discrimination from teachers e.g *"They said he had stolen it and went for him. He told the truth. When another boy owned up no one said sorry. I went to the school about it but nothing happened"*

iii. Location and type of school

Whilst schooling was generally felt to be important, all interviewees stated the need for schools to be nearby. In common with most Travellers, parents interviewed were wary of letting their children on buses or going too far to school. This is more likely to be the case with secondary schools and contributed to attendance problems. In one case a mother only let her daughter go there because her (only) friend at school is from a large Turkish family who take the bus together and she believes her daughter is protected this way. All expressed concern about drugs and gangs, believing that if they were near home they would be less likely to run into trouble.

The majority of those interviewed expressed a preference for a catholic school though only 2 families had children at such schools

iv. Attainment levels.

In common with many Gypsy and Traveller families, children had often arrived at primary school a year or more late. This caused difficulties for some "*Traveller children stand up for themselves you know. He won't say he doesn't know – that's not what he's like*". In 5 of the 8 families at least one child of secondary school age was unable to read or write properly. In one family a girl of 15 who attended secondary school could neither read nor write (referred to Traveller Liaison Officer, Education.)

Results: Education. Children contd.

v. Relevance and culture

Whilst most families stated they appreciated the relevance of learning about other cultures living in B and D they were generally resigned to the fact that their own culture "*...isn't worth studying. Who wants to know about us? We're just Travellers. But I want my children to learn about our history and be proud*". This was a strong theme when discussing schooling. Several families expressed a desire for children to have more religious/catholic input in their schooling.

vi. Communication between home and school

Managing the relationship with school can be difficult for parents who are illiterate and who, for homework purposes have few books and no computer. (This was the case for all respondents). 4 parents said they were unaware of their children's level of progress apart from reading and writing. The others had more knowledge as they could read reports although their own ability to write to the school or fill in forms was limited. This means that all families are frequently at the school asking for information in person as they don't have other Travellers nearby or neighbours to whom they can turn to for help. In addition they miss out on school events.

2a Education – Adults

13 adults, including 3 under 20, were interviewed within the 8 families. Of the 13 interviewed 9 could read. Only 3 of the 13 said they could also write well enough – the rest were either not able or unsure of their ability as they rarely wrote in any case. One of these was a young man of 18. Of those who could not read, 2 (both young men, one a father) expressed a wish to do so for work reasons such as the driving test and form filling. One was referred via LGTU to Connexions, the other remains too shy to attend a centre. No families with young adults in the house had approached an agency or college to enquire about training, even when literacy remained a problem.

3. Health

It should be noted that with such a small sample it is not possible to conclude if the experience below reflects that of all tenants in rented accommodation in the borough.

“I’ve never been ill although since I’ve been in a house with the heating I’m always getting colds”

All families interviewed were registered with a GP although 2 men (parents) had not done so for themselves. Dentists prove harder to find. Women were generally complimentary about Health Visitors and throughout the interviews it became apparent that they are often the only person “in authority” that women might meet in the years after the births of their children, so rely on them for other family help.

i. Children. All were up to date with immunisations and kept informed by the clinic. One family had two children with apparent learning difficulties and it was evident that one of the girls had behavioural problems. Her mother said the school were “taking no notice” (referred to the Traveller Liaison Officer, Education).

ii. Adults. 4 of the 8 families included an adult with either a long term illness or disability. 3 women had lost babies during pregnancy. Access to Health services apart from childrens needs, was limited. Apart from one, the women stated they would not want to visit the Clinic for personal advice. Several women were being treated for long term depression. There were reports of alcoholism amongst men although one had kicked the habit with help from the church.

iii. Older People. It is worth mentioning here that we only met one Housed Traveller over the age of 50 whilst carrying out the survey. She lives in a neighbouring borough so was not eligible for interview. We did however talk to her about the difficulty in locating older respondents and she expressed interest in helping in the future. (*Studies indicate a significantly shortened life span for Gypsies and Travellers*)

iv. Discrimination /Health No respondent reported any particular difficulty in registering with GPs or with their hospital and clinic experiences. One woman made a point of praising the Hospital for their response and encouragement to her when she fell pregnant after previously losing a baby.

4. Access to Council and other Services

“They should have someone who knows Travellers at the Housing Benefit. We don’t have our own representatives or community workers and we can’t understand the forms”

Most respondents had literacy problem. Apart from one person, even those who could write said they were unable or found it hard to fill in forms

i. Housing Repairs All respondents knew how to access the housing department via the central repairs number. Most had done so but some said they were worried about speaking and being understood on the phone. Most

reported slow or inadequate response. However 4 families mentioned incidents of repair teams, asked for help on the spot, as being helpful. As previously stated, most houses visited were in a poor state of decoration and repair.

ii. *Council and State Benefits.* All families interviewed received Housing and other State benefits. 5 respondents had questions about Benefits. They attributed their lack of knowledge partly to difficulty with forms and partly to not knowing where to go for help. The place mentioned most frequently was Cairde na Gael in Newham.

Results: Housed Travellers. Access to council and other services contd

iii. *Under 5s* Most families do not use nursery places either because there is no need as mother/family members are around, or because they do not trust those running the service. *"I don't want strangers looking after my child"* Groups such as Mother and Toddler are not used as families have their own networks. Respondents were aware that children can start nursery classes early but wanted to keep the children at home as long as possible. In addition few attend clinics for under 5s advice once the Health visitor stops coming.

iv. *Council Community Initiatives.* Respondents were not aware of these and apparently had little interest to attend forums *"What do we want with those things. They're not going to help Travellers. We have our own community"*.

v. *Borough Community Development Officers/Community events.* No respondents had either heard of or been approached by the above officers and did not feel such a service had anything to offer to them. Nor would they consider approaching the council for assistance with community events as if such an event takes place, it would be organised and funded by families or the church.

vi. *Voluntary Agencies.* Two Advice Agencies were mentioned by all respondents: the CAB in Barking and Cairde na Gael in Newham. Both help with literacy, legal and benefit issues. Both had actively pursued cases on behalf of respondents. 8 women attend Cairde na Gael womens group which apart from advice offers practical classes with childcare occasionally available in a nearby room. Respondents said they would be more likely to take up this childcare as they trust the organisation and can keep an eye on the children. All stated they would like such agencies to be closer as they appreciate the services offered to Travellers.

5. Community Relationships.

Irish Travellers largely operate within their own community networks rarely seeing the need to turn elsewhere. No one was friendly with neighbours or active in the local community. All had or were experiencing unpleasant or worse incidents ranging from being called names to graffiti and sustained hounding by

one or two local families. 3 families had been forced to move. The councils involved had facilitated this but in all 3 cases the process had been drawn out.

6. Discrimination

Experience of discrimination appeared apparent in many aspects of the lives of the Irish Travellers interviewed.

Results: Residents of The Chase.

Residents of The Chase Traveller's Site are English and Welsh Romany Gypsies. A total of 10 families took part in the survey. There are 11 pitches (a loss of 4 pitches since 2004) comprising 7 singles and 4 family size. During the fieldwork period there was 1 additional caravan located on a single pitch. However the make up of the Site has since changed and is apparently due to change again in late May 2006.

At the time of main fieldwork one extended family and 3 families unrelated to others live on the site. Interviews were carried out with the residents of 9 pitches and the residents of the temporary caravan, giving a total of 10 family dwelling units respondents interviewed. 2 families were not interested in taking part or were never available. Women were the main respondents although 3 men did take part in aspects of the survey.

1. Accommodation

"I'd rather live here than a house. There are problems here but its quiet and near things. And I'm happy living in my caravan.

i. Refurbishment

The Chase Site has been in its current location for 30 years. It is isolated but accessible to shops and schools. It was refurbished with a grant in 2004. The move into temporary accommodation whilst the work was being done was a problem for residents who report that the council failed to adequately research and provide suitable temporary accommodation for everyone whilst the work was being done. Some had never lived in a house before but felt forced to go, with one family being moved off by police. Some went a long way, including one family who were reportedly towed to a farmer's field in Cambridge and *"..just left there."* The number of pitches was reduced from 15 to 11 and no provision made for the 4 families left without a pitch.

ii. Site Management.

A new manager with previous experience of working with The Chase residents was appointed in January 2006. Residents generally welcomed the change, particularly as outstanding work got underway and the manager was more

accessible than the previous one. After the Traveller Liaison meeting on 10th March at which residents presented a letter about repair work many noted that the manager was only part time and had other responsibilities which meant he was unable to visit the site as frequently as they feel is necessary. *"How can he do all that he's been asked to? He's away doing other things"* Residents state they would welcome his availability at set times in the warden's office.

Respondents were asked what they thought of site management lying in the Noise Nuisance Department. 3 thought it compounded the perceived view of Travellers *"We are tolerated rather than treated as tenants."* 4 said it did not bother them. *"If we were in Housing would we get as much contact with them?"* Other respondents had no view either way.

Results: Residents of The Chase. Accommodation contd.

iii. Site Management/Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group.

Most who attend thought they had been a waste of time in the past. Although action had been taken since Christmas residents are still frustrated by the lack of action and proper consultation. Residents felt it was a useful meeting to present their March 2006 letter (see point ii) Subsequent contact with residents suggests that repairs remain an issue and communication on this issue was not straightforward. All respondents were pleased that senior officers attend the meetings but all had reservations. Examples:

"Its good they happen with all those important people but its hard to say what you really think"..

"I'd rather just talk to (the manager) straight."

"It's a lot of talk about things we don't know about"

iv. Residents Group

At the Traveller Liaison Meeting in March 2006 one officer was asked to set up a residents group. This was posed as an initiative to be taken by the council. However residents are not necessarily convinced this is a good idea. *"We don't want them to set up something for us – we'll deal with this on our own way".* Another person said *" I don't want a residents group because one or two people would have to take charge and there'd be trouble"*. Respondents were asked what their preference would be. The general feeling was that a small "working group" with the Site Manager *"or someone else"* would be a way forward.

v. Glossop Caravans

Several families rent from this firm and report problems in their dealings. One family in particular was unable to use a broken door for 3 months and the whole family were climbing in through a small window. In January/February LGTU tried to help as did the Council Housing Benefits Welfare Officer. Another site resident eventually repaired the door (which by April had become loose again). This example is used to point out the problem people face in dealing with a private company whilst living on a council Site. Health and Safety was ignored by both the council and Glossop for several months.

vi. Length of stay and previous accommodation

Most residents lived on the Site before the refurbishment or in previous years. As not all families took part it was impossible to ascertain exact numbers on who

had lived there for any length of time. At least one respondent has lived there for 13 years. 4 had been given a pitch after temporary stays or visiting. 2 had experience of Homeless Accommodation. All had travelled for much of their lives.

vii. Ideal living situation

All families expressed a desire to stay on the Site as long as they remain the borough although expressed a desire for management and provision to improve. Most would travel in the summer months if they get the chance.

2. Results: Residents of The Chase. Education – Children

“It’s hard for them in school. There aren’t other Travellers and there’s bullying goes on.”

“They can seem like older than their years, Traveller boys. Teachers don’t understand they are just young children who want to learn”

“ I don’t think the school know very much about us or our way of life - who is there to tell them anyway”?

“My boy won’t need to stay at (secondary) school. He can read and write now, and he’ll be working with his father soon anyway and learning that way”

As previously stated, Gypsy and Traveller children, particularly those of secondary age, have much lower levels of school attendance than pupils from other groups. This impacts on attainment levels. The move to secondary school presents problems which can prove difficult to overcome.

Of the families interviewed 7 had children of school age and 3 also had children of secondary school age. All families wanted their children to read and write. There was a difference in ambitions for girls and boys with it being reported that girls have less need than boys to attend secondary school.

The Education Dpt. Traveller Liaison Officer, appointed in December 2005 is in contact with all families on the Site.

i. School Attendance.

All families reported problems connected with school attendance and none interviewed had children who attended all term. One secondary school child is educated at home although the parent expressed frustration at lack of support for this. 2 other families have children of 15+ not attending school. The Education Welfare Dpt. and the Traveller Liaison Officer are in touch with all school age families.

One reported problems connected with the move during refurbishment as the family was housed too far from schools and there was no offer of help with travel costs. The parent believes this contributed to the breakdown with the school.

ii. Bullying/harassment

Bullying was widely reported at both primary and secondary schools, with parents facing difficulties getting the schools to take action. *“He’s being*

tormented. I've been to the school but they don't believe him" Another parent said *"She's a Traveller girl from a Site. She was alone in her class with no other Travellers. She'd no friends and they picked on her and the teachers turned a blind eye"*. A further example of harassment was given by 2 families who stated children who attend either primary or secondary school can be picked on by other Traveller children who do not attend school.

iii. Location of schools

Primary schools are nearby with Rush Green being the nearest. Secondary schools appear to be something of a lottery. Respondents stated that they would not wish their children to travel by bus, which can cause problems.

2. Results: Residents of The Chase. Education – Children contd.

iv. Attainment levels

Many Gypsy and Traveller children arrive at school a year or so late and so miss out on schooling. This can impact on a child's whole school life unless it is addressed early and can contribute to difficulties in class. *"The boys were behind when they went to school"* said one parent *"It's not taken into account and that's not fair on them. They try hard and they all want to learn"*. 4 families with children of school age said they would be interested in extra help – with someone coming to the site. One parent who can read said *"When I was young we had Traveller Teachers coming to sites we were on and doing things with us. They had a van and it was really good fun"*

v. Relevance and Culture

The point was made by several families that schools could do more to include Gypsy and Traveller culture in lessons as they do with other cultures. Rush Green primary was mentioned as making efforts to do this. *"It makes them feel proud at school"*

vi. Communication between Home and School

Families reported that this was fragmented although primary schools appear to make more effort than secondary. This may reflect the fact that children generally attend primary school more regularly. Parents who are illiterate are less able to help with homework than other parents and have difficulty understanding the forms and letters brought home from school. One parent had received a strongly worded school report about behaviour. Schools are required to standardise such reports but nevertheless this one seemed accusatory and confrontational in tone. The parent had been upset and wanted to respond although was unsure how to do so. Homework : there is one computer privately owned on the Site. There are plans to install one in the Wardens Office for use in Adult basic skills training.

2b Education – Adults

13 adults including 1 under 20 were interviewed. 4 could read and write "well enough". 5 said they could read and write "a little" or "some things" and 4 were illiterate.

2 of those who are illiterate said they are keen to learn. The other 3 who are older members of the community said they were not interested to learn now. The 5 who have some reading and writing skills all said they were interested to learn more

In 2005 a Basic Skills class had been set up on the site with a tutor from Barking College. Everyone said they enjoyed it. However there were difficulties due to limited accommodation and childcare. At Christmas there was a measles outbreak on the site which meant the class ended.

Asked about future classes, interested respondents generally wanted to resume. Concerns were expressed about childcare, in particular at a nursery where they did not know the staff. Parents also want to keep children nearby so class and childcare need to be at the same location. No respondents questioned had ever approached an agency to enquire about literacy or other training for themselves.

Results: Residents of The Chase. Health

All families (bar the temporary visitor) said they were registered with a GP although reported difficulties such as an apparent reluctance by GPs to visit the site and appointment waiting times. Some said they go to A and E rather than try and see their doctor. Apart from the above, relationships with the 2 local surgeries were reported as reasonably good. Comments about Health visitors and Oxlow Lane clinic were particularly positive.

Again with such a small sample is not possible conclude if the health experiences of Site residents is representative of health in the general population in the borough

i. Children

Not all children are immunised. There is a hesitation by some families to take up MMR after the debate about autism. Although in general children on the site are reported by Health Visitors to be reasonably healthy, a few are asthmatic with parents worrying that it may be caused by damp in the sheds. Excema was also mentioned by a few parents. A few of the younger children apparently have late speech development although this was observed at time of interview rather than reported by parents.

ii. Adults

One older resident has a disability which affects him mentally and physically. He is cared for by his family although has his own trailer. One older woman has severe arthritis . One woman interviewed had a long term health problem which bothers her. She was not getting the appropriate Benefit for this. One man reported receiving long term sickness or disability benefit (not clear which one) No other respondents said they had long term health problems. Access to health advice is limited to the doctor. 2 women spontaneously mentioned that they would like personal health advice but not from a doctor, although they would not know where to go.

4. Access to Council and other services

Most of the Council services accessed by residents on the Chase are connected with the running and management of the Travellers site and are dealt with in an earlier section.

i. Housing Benefit.

All residents know the H.B Visiting and Welfare officer and no one reported any problems. Several spontaneously mentioned that the officer will help with forms or other benefits.

ii. Under 5s

Parents generally reported that they had not or did not wish to seek out nursery or other provision for Under 5s. *"Why do we want to send them (away) to someone we don't know. S(he) can stay here with the other children"* 2 parents reported that they have investigated the nursery class at the local school.

ii. Council Community Initiatives.

No one was aware of community forums although those who attend the Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group meetings wondered if they had been mentioned there. There was a strong feeling of *"too many council people coming to see us and asking us things(e.g) someone talking about planning and what's happening in 10 years time. It's nothing to do with us"*

iii. Borough Community Development Officers/Community Events.

No one had heard of or been approached by the above officers and did not feel such a service had anything to offer them.

iv. Voluntary Agencies.

The CAB at Heathway which was on a main bus route closed due to funding problems in 2004. A few residents of The Chase report having used that office in the past. The nearest CAB is now in Barking. No other Voluntary Sector agencies were mentioned as a source of advice.

v. Police

"We were born to be blamed"

Most families had dealings with the Police whilst travelling and distrusted them. Several reported unpleasant encounters in recent years, although 2 were referring to other family members who had been travelling. One respondent said *" You don't expect them to treat you like you have any rights"*

Residents reported a history of harassment with the local police going back over some years. More recently they had complained in particular that they were being harassed by police *"just waiting"* in the lane outside the site. After bringing this to the attention of the Gypsy and Traveller meeting in January the Met. representative took steps to deal with it and the situation improved. In early May 2006 the researcher was told again that police cars had been driving onto the site. Residents had made a point of taking the numbers and this, they felt, had resulted in the police backing off.

5. Community Relationships

Relationships with local shops and residents were reported as reasonably good. Respondents reported fly tipping near the site for which they had been blamed

but which not been carried out by them, reflecting a common experience reported by Travellers living on such Sites.

Results: Roma refugees and Asylum Seekers.

During the Fieldwork period we were unable to access any Roma families. We were passed details of 3 families all of whom we contacted . 1 had apparently moved and the other 2 were unable to meet. Since the fieldwork period the Traveller Liaison Officer in Education has gathered more names. LGTU can provide a roma speaker to do further work.

Results: Unauthorised Camps

During the fieldwork period January to March date we were unable to meet any families stopping in the borough on a temporary basis although we heard about 5 such families. 3 via the Education department who had noticed caravans on 2 occasions in the car park by their office. On a 3rd occasion the Street Wardens had alerted the Education Traveller Liaison officer. Other Travellers with whom we were in touch told us about the other 2 occasions, both family members of those who alerted us. We were unable to respond before they moved on, but would have wished to ascertain why they moved so quickly when in other London boroughs it is likely they may have stayed longer. One common reason reported in other areas is that families may know that the council has a 48 hour tolerance period.

Police records show a total of 15 Unauthorised camps in the borough for the 14 months 1st January 2005 to 31st January 2006, although the figures are released as a "snapshot". All left after 2 days and in 1 case Bailiffs had been instructed. There were 5 locations and an average 3 caravans and 4 vehicles. All had 4+ children. None were closed or moved on by police.

PART THREE

RESULTS: COUNCIL OFFICERS..

“It changed my life meeting Travellers. My own perceptions were turned around and I know I have a connection I will never lose”

“They don’t do themselves any favours”

“There are people in my office who would be too worried to go near a Travellers Site”

12 Council Officers were interviewed. 10 in person and 2 by phone. Because of the nature of individual jobs and confidentiality, the reports below are in parts deliberately general.

The researchers found most officers were interested to learn more about Gypsy and Travellers and generally responsive to the idea of the survey although there was some suspicion about its aim and how it would be used. There is a history of confusion and lack of commitment to Gypsy and Travellers issues within the Council which has resulted in a fragmented and uninformed approach. The researcher found examples of willingness to engage with issues but also of resistance and ignorance. Despite the existence of the Corporate Gypsy and Traveller group, officers generally remain in the dark about what other departments are doing and how they can liaise effectively.

All officers report a lack of comprehensive corporate guidance and strategies relevant to their department. There is evidence of a piecemeal approach to work with Gypsies and Travellers across the board

Awareness of Gypsy and Traveller issues and culture.

There is a strong commitment in some departments to engage with and understand Gypsies and Travellers. Officers interviewed from such departments are generally open and pro active despite the prevailing confusion within the council. There is less commitment in other departments where either the relevance of such issues had never been aired or in others where there is a sense of grappling with the impossible and of going round in circles. This frustration is partly being played out in some officers approach to working with the Travelling community rather than where it belongs - that is within a council which is not taking a corporate lead and not equipping such departments to devise relevant strategies and proper support at senior level. In the light of the above, we suggest that the council look closely at such areas.

Results: Barking and Dagenham Council contd.

Traveller Liaison Officer.

There are currently 3 job titles in different Council teams with this title: The *Traveller Liaison Officer* in Education appointed in December 2005. The *Traveller Liaison Officer*, Manager of The Chase Site in Noise Nuisance Services appointed in January 2006 and the *Traveller Liaison Officer*, Street Warden with responsibility for unauthorised encampments. Officers are confused about areas of responsibility. Travellers and no doubt the public are also confused.

Website(Appendix 3)

In January 2006 the researcher from LGTU drew attention to the Council's website entitled "Traveller Liaison" which contained negative (and possibly actionable elements). In May 2006 the researcher looked again and found a revised version of the above. Below are the findings.

Anyone looking on the Council's website would assume there is a Traveller Liaison Department with responsibility for all Traveller issues which lies in the Street Warden's Department of *Health and Consumer Services*. There are 3 pages, currently headed *Traveller Liaison* all addressed to the public and focussing on enforcement and legislation issues about unauthorised encampments. The liaison element appears not to include Travellers themselves although there is a short out of date paragraph on schooling. The public are also referred to the Animal Welfare Service on the same page. In addition the *Equalities and Diversity Impact Assessment* site has a link entitled "Traveller Information " which takes users to the above site.

Response to enquiries: Switchboard and Street Wardens Dpt.

A year ago (April 2005) the researcher rang Barking and Dagenham switchboard for another purpose asking for the name of the officer who worked with Travellers and Gypsies. She was asked if she wanted to make a complaint. After explaining that she wanted to find the person responsible for Gypsy and Traveller accommodation and education she was put through to Street Wardens. No one there knew who she should contact but thought The Chase manager was in Noise Nuisance (as indeed he was). This person was knowledgeable about The Chase but had no idea who to contact on policy, equality or other issues. 9 months later she rang the switchboard again and was put through to an answerphone for noise complaints which she was told was the number held at the switchboard. It is fair to point out here that should she have been put through to the Chase site manager he would have been able to refer to the attendees list of the Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group where other departments are represented.

In April 2006 the researcher, who by then had spoken to Street Wardens dpt about the survey, was rung by the Site manager of another borough. This person had rung the council asking about management of the Travellers site. She was put through to Street Wardens who gave her the name of the Researcher from LGTU who they said, managed the site.

Results: Barking and Dagenham Council contd.

Education

i. *Traveller Liaison Officer*

The recent appointment of a *Traveller Liaison Officer* within the *Social Inclusion Unit Education Department* is a significant step towards engaging with the Gypsy and Traveller community. The officer's brief focuses on: inclusion, assessing educational needs, awareness raising and training in schools, supporting families in accessing the educational system. The brief does not include enforcing school attendance which stays within the remit of the Education Welfare Team. In addition the Officer will liaise with Adult Education providers.

The appointment of this officer is generally welcomed by officers interviewed although there is confusion about the role and level of inter departmental liaison, in part due to the confusion over job title. Some see the officer as an advocate for the Travelling community others perceive her as a general fixer for issues on The Chase Site. The Education element of such a job is still generally seen as an Attendance issue. The Chase Housing Benefits Officer and Site Manager have established working relationships with the TLO.

The officer currently sees her brief as a broad one in order to learn about, engage and assist with Education and other issues in the Gypsy and Traveller community including Roma about whom little is known within the Council. She currently does not have a budget to pursue any education initiatives.

As she is the first person to have such a wide ranging role her knowledge will become invaluable.

The role does not have teacher status. Despite the brief to raise awareness and training in schools the gap in teaching provisions appropriate for Gypsy and Traveller children remains.

ii. *Schools*

The researcher was unable to access Head Teachers in the fieldwork period.

iii. *Gypsy and Traveller Culture.*

As we were unable to access teachers we cannot report on schools awareness of this. Anecdotally, Rush Green Primary was reported by 2 Travellers as including Gypsy and Traveller "events" in teaching. Education officers interviewed were not sufficiently in touch with schools on this subject. However one officer reported that several Travellers had mentioned it when discussing the relevance of schooling.

iv. *School Nurses*

The school nurse at Rush Green school reports that she is not aware of any Gypsies or Travellers at the school. The researcher did not have time to access any other school nurses

Results: Barking and Dagenham Council. Education contd.

v. *School Attendance*

1/5th of an EWO post is dedicated to work with Gypsies and Travellers including Fairground Travellers passing through the borough. The officer foresees that most of this work will pass to the Education Traveller Liaison Officer. (There is an apparent confusion here as Attendance is not in the TLO brief) Secondary school attendance by Gypsy and Traveller children has presented particular difficulties for the council over many years and resulted in prosecutions. Home Tuition is an option but usually parents are not equipped or supported sufficiently to provide it. The officer knows many families personally whom she has helped with Benefit and other queries. She believes that prejudice is common and affects the daily lives of the Travelling community and reported instances of harassment in school which had been described to her by families. The officer reports liaison between Education, Health visitors and School Nurses could be improved.

The Chase residents requested a school bus last year but it was turned down.

vi. *Bullying and Harassment in schools*

As we were unable to access teachers we cannot report on schools experience. Officers reported anecdotal evidence whilst talking to families about difficulties at school. In the light of these, the reports from Gypsies and Travellers interviewed and also reported to Cairde na Gael, we urgently recommend an audit of schools.

vii. *Traveller Education Service*

Most council officers were unaware of how a Traveller Education Service operates. The few who do are divided in their views on a dedicated service. Some believe it would work against integration, others that it is vital for integration. A regional TES co-ordinator has been a useful source of training and skills information in the past.

Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group.

Not all officers interviewed had attended the above but those who had all agreed they were a welcome and useful initiative. Officers particularly welcomed meeting Travellers and representatives from outside agencies. However, the meeting in March threw some into confusion as to the purpose of the meeting (although we did not ask all officers about this point). The letter from the Traveller representatives was felt to be appropriate but threw up responses already mentioned to the researcher – namely that there should be a smaller “working group” for The Chase Site attended by senior officers when appropriate and another larger meeting say quarterly, attended by those on the working group, other senior officers and representatives from the wider Gypsy and Traveller community.

Management of The Chase Travellers Site

The Site is managed by the Noise Nuisance Department of Health and Consumer Services.

- *Strategy*

The Equalities and Diversity Impact assessment Report for Travellers Spring 2005 lays out a series of steps for reviewing the impact of consultation, procedures and repairs and for dealing with issues arising from the above by November 2005. In the hiatus following the refurbishment much of this work has gone by the board and new manager has been appointed (see below). The strategy has, as far as we can ascertain, not been revisited or revised by senior officers.

- *Manager Post*

A new Manager, who had previous connection with the site was appointed at New Year and has been picking up the backlog of repairs work as well as re-establishing relationships with residents on behalf of the council. This officer has around 2 days a week, occasionally more, for managing the site. This cannot be on a regular basis as his work as a Noise Nuisance officer requires irregular working hours including nights. The Manager gave his mobile number to residents. As he always kept it on this was resulting in phone calls out of hours and as far as we can ascertain, the manager has had to review this practice – although we cannot confirm this. An additional officer from the same department helps out when possible. The two officers manage the work between them which they feel is the only way it can be done in the current circumstances. The Manager immediately faced difficulties when Thames Accord refused to work back on the Site because reportedly they faced hostility. (It is not known if the council has followed this up or taken steps to recover monies for some shoddy work needing repair.) He organised another firm to step in. The amount of time and work required to establish effective Site Management practice, based on an out of date strategy, appears to be the responsibility of this one officer.

Responsibility for The Chase Site and Unauthorised Encampments.

There is a debate going on about whether management of the Chase Site and responsibility for Unauthorised Encampments should lie with *Health and Consumer Services* or *Housing*. A number of comments were made by some officers and are recorded here simply as a contribution to that debate.

COMMENTS FROM OFFICERS.

General Comments

- There is a confusion in the council over who does what, which needs to be clarified.
- It has always been a thorny issue.

The Chase – officer comments.

- If moved to Housing, likely that the Estate Officer would be less informed and less available.
- The Site should be moved to Housing so that residents have Tenant Status and are treated as such.
- Keeping the Site with Noise Nuisance reinforces the view that residents are 2nd class.

Unauthorised Encampments. – officer comments.

- The same person and department who deals with The Chase should deal with unauthorised sites as it would be less confusing within the council.
- The Chase and unauthorised camps are separate issues. i.e Chase residents are council “tenants”.

ROMA Refugees and Asylum Seekers .

Only the Social Inclusion Unit and another officer connected with the now defunct Asylum Seekers team mentioned Roma Gypsies. Both felt that work needs to be done to ascertain numbers and needs. At present neither department has a full brief to do this and in April 2006 neither was aware of the other.

As stated earlier, since fieldwork ended the Traveller Liaison Officer Education has identified and met further Roma families.

RESULTS: STATUTORY AND VOLUNTARY AGENCIES

Statutory Agencies:

Police.

There is currently 1 Inspectors and 1 Sergeant in the borough whose brief covers Gypsies and Travellers.

The Inspector Community and Operations holds a brief for minority interest groups and attends the council’s Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group. He expresses a desire to move forward to involve this community and would like representatives at the borough’s Community Forums. He apparently understands some of the difficulties connected with this.

He feels he has made some progress with the Chase as far as his own understanding and actions are concerned e.g. the apparent “harassment” of police cars “lying in wait” for drivers moving on and off the Site.

The Sergeant Operations is reviewing the Protocol on Unauthorised Encampments and in May 2006 identified an appropriate Council Officer with whom to work. LGTU have met with this Sergeant and advised on the Protocol. It is likely that this officer is the first person Travellers on unauthorised camps will meet.

Results: Statutory and Voluntary Agencies/ Police contd.

It should be noted that new Police recruits are trained at Havering college in minority awareness but this does not include Gypsy and Traveller issues. The Police apparently have no particular knowledge of the Roma community or of issues involving Housed Travellers in the borough.

Health Visitors.

We talked to 3 Health visitors from 2 GP practices. At the time none were aware of the Gypsy and Traveller Planning Group and had apparently received no feedback from the PCT member who attends these. Neither were they aware of the recently appointed Gypsy and Traveller Liaison officer in Education. All three currently or in the past have worked with residents of The Chase site. None were aware of working with Housed Travellers or Roma and we were unable to identify any such Health Visitors in the time available.

Before the refurbishment in 2004 Health Visitors had built up years of trust with The Chase residents. However, since then there has been change amongst a number of pitches with young children. Health Visitors report that overall families on the site maintain "*reasonable levels*" of health in children. However speech/behaviour in under 5s remains a concern. One in particular expressed interest in and ideas about encouraging residents to seek health advice.

Voluntary Agencies.

Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB)

The CAB service in Barking and Dagenham had 2 offices until recently but have been forced to close the Dagenham office due to funding. This leaves the office in Dagenham as the only one serving the borough. Residents of The Chase who report having used that office find it difficult to travel down to Barking particularly as waiting time can be lengthy. (It should be noted that with such a small sample it is not possible to conclude if the comments below apply to general clients).

The CAB report regular contact with Gypsies and Travellers including Roma over the years. In particular they report Chase residents (until the office closure), Irish Travellers and Roma, particularly those from Romania.

- Contact has been through the general advice service as well as the specialist service provision eg Health Help Project which has helped Roma particularly.
- Literacy difficulties with form filling and reading correspondence are common.
- Common issues are rent shortfalls, debt and council tax payments.
- Anecdotal evidence from CAB workers indicates a reluctance to engage with mental health advice and a reluctance to take prescribed medication.
- The CAB is concerned in general, about the structure and response of the Homeless Persons Unit (HPU)
- The CAB feels encouraged by the initiatives taken by the Council's Equalities Department e.g the "Forums" initiative.
- In general they report ad hoc Council liaison with the voluntary sector.

Cairde na Gael Newham

This small voluntary advice agency has a brief to provide cultural welfare advice and advocacy to Irish and other residents. There is one part time worker. The agency is the main advice contact for housed Irish Travellers living in Barking and Dagenham. They also advise Travellers from Redbridge, Newham and Waltham Forest.

Cairde na Gael state that last year they approached the Council with a proposal for work with women and children in conjunction with other boroughs who were already committed. However, Barking and Dagenham did not wish to pursue it. In addition to welfare advice the unit has set up an Irish Traveller womens group with a creche provided with Sure Start funding. The group provides training in dressmaking, computers and driving test theory.

It is worth noting here that Cairde na Gael was the only place mentioned to us, unprompted by every Irish Traveller we met. It is an apparent lifeline to some.

RESULTS: REVIEW of COUNCIL POLICIES and PRACTICES

Unauthorised Encampments and The Chase Site

We were provided with the following documents:

3 versions of the Protocol on Unauthorised camps. Initially unclear which was the current version.

Site Licence Form.

Site Procedures.

Site Licence Conditions.

Application for Licence.

Pitch Allocation Procedures.

Below, we comment on the main documents and include guidance on points which need to be addressed. LGTU has already met with the Met. Officer dealing with the revision of the Protocol.

1. Unauthorised Encampments.

(An Unauthorised encampment does not in itself constitute a criminal offence but it is civil trespass. Unauthorised camping on unsuitable and visible locations exacerbates opposition from neighbouring settled communities).

The existing Protocol between the Borough Operational Command Unit of the Metropolitan Police and the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham on Unauthorised Camping by Travellers is out of date and does not comply with current Government guidance. It is currently being reviewed by the Met. Police Traveller Liaison Officer with whom LGTU has had a meeting. This officer has expressed a wish for LGTU to advise on this review.

2a The Chase Site Licence and Licence Conditions.

There are considerable inequalities between Gypsies and Travellers living on council caravan sites and people living in Council/Social landlord housing. This inequality impacts on the day to day living standards of Gypsies & Travellers.

Lawyer Chris Johnson from the Travellers advice team in Birmingham has drawn up a model tenancy agreement which could be presented to the Council and used to create a new tenancy agreement.

Comments

The existing Barking and Dagenham Site Licence fails to indicate that it would be an offence if a Court Order was not obtained before evicting someone (Section 3 of the Caravan Sites Act 1968) and also does not properly indicate that the minimum notice for terminating a licence is 28 days (Section 2 of the 1968 Act)

Clause A.3.7 Transit provision should clearly be separate from permanent provision rather than potentially interspersed amongst the permanent provision.

There is little in the Licence about the council obligations with regard to repairs and managing the site.

The deposit of £250, payable in advance of occupation, could discriminate against financially disadvantaged families. It should be noted that families moving into mainstream council housing are not required to pay a deposit, neither are families living in emergency accommodation provided by the council.

All new licence agreements and all matters pertaining to Local Authority sites must now be seen in the context of the May 27th 2004 decision of the European Court of Human Rights Act in *Connors-v-the UK*. (Appendix 7)

2b. The Chase Pitch Allocation Procedures.

This is a confusing document.

Comments.

1. Issue of an annual licence. This is not usual or necessary and gives the impression people can only live there for a year.
2. The Transient site. It is stated that this pitch can be available for a short time. As has been seen with recent (May 2006) events this policy can be confusing and seen to be divisive. It is inappropriate to have a temporary pitch within a permanent site. It is also stated that any application for a temporary pitch shall have the right over that of visitors. It does not state what happens if a visitor is already on the pitch.
3. Point system. This includes the phrase “ any other matters deemed relevant gain 2-10 points”. It is not stated who take the decision as to what "relevant"

means. As previously stated, residents are unclear on pitch allocation procedure.

Attached is the Hackney Site Allocation leaflet (appendix 6) which was drawn up by residents, community workers and the council based on the council's policy of a date system. Barking and Dagenham may wish to keep a points system. However, the system needs to be fair and transparent to everyone.

PART THREE

Appendices	No.
• Constraints.	1.
• Photocopies "Tell Us What You Think Response Cards."	2.
• Council Traveller Liaison Website pages.	3.
• Equalities and Diversity Impact Assessment Report for Travellers.(2005)	4.
• Example: Health and Safety Leaflet.	5.
• Example: Hackney Site Allocation Leaflet.	6.
• Site Tenancy Agreement – information	7.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1.

1a Constraints

Gypsies and Travellers.

- There were particular difficulties geographical difficulties in that the main researcher had no base in the borough. When appointments were broken, others appointments had to be re arranged because of wasted time in the intervening period.
- Visits to families usually took over 2 hours, sometimes longer and sometimes requiring return visits. 2 families had only brief interviews due to other commitments and the researcher returned twice to 3 other families to continue the survey.
- People had pressing concerns about Benefits, Schooling and Housing issues with which they wanted help. As LGTU operates an Advice service we responded or referred where possible. Inevitably this meant extra work some of which is ongoing.
- Most families had little contact with the Education Department in the past, other than in connection with attendance issues. They were wary of the purpose of the research. It was difficult for some to understand when there was apparently nothing tangible on offer
- More women than men were interviewed. Men were either less willing to talk or absent.
- There are few agencies that have established ongoing relationships with Gypsy and Traveller families in the area. Consequently introductions which might have been expected via that route were not forthcoming.

1b. Constraints

Council Officers.

- There was a reluctance on the part of a few officers to engage fully with the aims of the survey.
- Several cancelled and rearranged their meetings
- As already stated the researcher had no base in the borough so had to rearrange meetings at short notice when families, council officers or others cancelled appointments. This resulted in waste of time and repeat journeys.

APPENDIX 2

Photocopies Barking and Dagenham "Tell Us What You Think Cards." Attached.

APPENDIX 3

Council Traveller Liaison Website Pages. Attached.

APPENDIX 4

Equalities and Diversity Impact Assessment Report for Travellers.(2005).
(Attached)

APPENDIX 5

Example: Children's Health and Safety Leaflet. (Attached)

APPENDIX 6

Example: Hackney Site Allocation Leaflet. (Attached)

APPENDIX 7

Site Tenancy Agreement – information.

New Gypsy/ Traveller Site Tenancy Agreements

All new licence agreements and all matters pertaining to Local Authority sites must now be seen in the context of the May 27th 2004 decision of the European Court of Human Rights Act in *Connors-v-the UK*. In this case, the European Court of Human Rights Act held that it was incompatible with Article 8 of the Convention for a Traveller family to be evicted on 28 days' notice where the underlying reason was nuisance allegations, which the family contested. The Court stated:- *"the power to evict without the burden of giving reasons liable to be examined as to their merits by an independent tribunal has not been convincingly shown to respond to any specific goal or to provide any benefit to members of the Gypsy community"*(paragraph 94). The court further stated:- *"the Court finds that the eviction of the applicant and his family from the Local Authority site was not attended by the requisite procedural safeguards, namely the requirement to establish proper justification for the serious interference with his rights and consequently cannot be regarded as justification for the serious interference with his rights and consequently cannot be regarded as justified by a 'pressing social need' or proportionate to the legitimate aim being pursued"* (paragraph 95).

In light of *Connors*, a Local Authority would not be acting compatibly with the Convention of Human rights Act 1998 if they did not introduce Security of Tenure in any new agreements they provide. It seems that other issues such as succession and assignment and the right to exchange should also be dealt with.

It is noted that Oxfordshire County Council, has since July 2005, introduced a clause in their new Gypsy/Traveller site agreements that bring in security of tenure as well as making clear the Local Authority's repairing obligations and bringing in right to succession.

