

Regulation  
& Inspection



Communities  
Scotland

# Services for Gypsies/ Travellers

a follow-up study  
2005/06

**Services for Gypsies/Travellers**  
**a follow-up study 2005/06**

**May 2006**



## Contents

Executive summary .....	v
1 Introduction .....	1
2 Service planning .....	5
3 Site provision .....	13
4 Access to services.....	23
5 Management and services on site.....	29
6 Consultation and participation .....	37
7 Conclusions .....	43
8 Recommendations.....	47
Appendix 1 Councils' views about the need for further official guidance .....	49
References .....	51



## **Executive summary**

This thematic study aimed to assess how councils in Scotland have addressed the findings of the 2002 Services for Gypsies/Travellers study and to report a national picture of current service quality and practice.

The study was carried out in two stages. The first stage involved carrying out a series of case studies in six council areas in November 2005. The second stage included an examination of services for Gypsies/Travellers at a national level. A postal questionnaire was circulated to each council in Scotland. Of 32 councils, 28 responded. This is a 87.5% response rate. Further, a focus group with Gypsy/Traveller site residents, telephone discussions with council representatives and site residents, and an examination of good practice examples provides evidence for the examination of practice across Scotland.

The study found that councils have made progress since the previous study in 2002 however, several councils have not acted on the recommendations given in 2002 and progress has been slow.

The key findings from the study are:

### **Service Planning**

- Progress is being made by councils to assess needs but it is not uniform and some assessments appear to be rather narrow.
- In some areas the needs of Gypsies/Travellers are not reflected in some significant strategy documents including local housing strategies.
- Several councils do not formally recognise Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct ethnic group.
- Some councils have still not set up inter-agency planning groups which include Gypsy/Traveller community representatives.

### **Site Provision**

- Some sites are situated close to features that cause a nuisance to site residents. The councils concerned are taking action to reduce the impact of the potential hazards, although their removal would not be feasible.
- There is continuing criticism from site residents about the amenities, physical layout, design and maintenance of some sites.
- A considerable amount of improvements have been made to sites in the last three years and more improvements are planned. This suggests there has been a

response to concerns raised by site residents, reflected in the 2002 report, about facilities.

- Not all councils have provided such basic facilities such as an information notice board for site residents and secure mailboxes.

### **Access to Services**

- There are significant differences between the letting of pitches and the letting of houses in some areas, including differences in information requirements and a failure by some councils to introduce needs-based priority systems for pitch lettings. There is also a failure in by some councils to publish letting rules.
- There is variable practice with regard to tenancy agreements.
- Many councils have responded to points made in the 2002 report about the need for information for site residents, although there are variations in the scope of information provided.
- Not all councils provide specific help to Gypsies/Travellers who move into settled housing.

### **Management & Services On-site**

- The role of some site managers is rather narrow. In some cases it does not embrace all basic site management functions. In some areas, the 2002 report recommendation regarding the need for wider responsibilities has not been acted upon.
- Not all councils have service standards that cover basic site management activities.
- Many councils are not following the recommendations made in the 2002 report about rent setting.
- Some councils do not appear to have responded to concern raised in the 2002 report about the accessibility of pre-payment electricity cards. Focus group participants voiced strong concerns about the cost of electricity.
- Not all councils' complaint mechanisms cover basic site management functions.

### **Consultation and participation**

- Most councils have some arrangements in place to consult with Gypsies/Travellers. Involvement of the members of the community who do not live in council sites appears, however, to be relatively rare.
- Whilst consultation mechanisms exist on most council sites, they are not present on all and not all important issues are consulted on including rent levels and rent increases. Gypsies/Travellers spoken to expressed dissatisfaction with consultation methods.

- Relatively few sites have site residents' associations and it could be that some site residents need help to set them up.

The report recommends that improvements are required in several areas. The recommendations are:

Councils should:

- include Gypsies/Travellers as a specific group in the monitoring and reporting of ethnicity;
- review their approach to consultation with Gypsies/Travellers on established sites and elsewhere in the community based on the advice set out in "How to gather views on service quality" published by Communities Scotland in January 2006;
- review their approach to, and monitoring of, satisfaction and complaints to ensure that they are fully aware of the quality of services that Gypsies/Travellers are receiving and their level of satisfaction with the service;
- review site rents and service charges on a regular basis to ensure that they are affordable and reasonable;
- ensure that they have in place fully funded planned and cyclical maintenance programmes to ensure that site amenities are maintained and improved effectively;
- ensure that the needs and aspirations of the Gypsy/Traveller community are properly reflected in all their key strategic planning documents and specifically in the Local Housing Strategies;
- assess training needs for site managers and work with relevant agencies to develop appropriate training courses. Councils should ensure that their site managers attend these courses.

The Scottish Executive should develop and publish a model tenancy agreement and model service standards for the letting and occupancy of pitches on sites for Gypsies/Travellers.



# 1 Introduction

Services for Gypsies/Travellers is the fourth in a series of thematic studies by the Regulation and Inspection Division (R & I) of Communities Scotland. Thematic studies complement R & I's programme of cyclical inspections of registered social landlords (RSLs) and councils. Where cyclical inspections look at the delivery of a spectrum of services within individual organisations, thematic studies look at a single area of practice across the sector.

This thematic study is a follow up to an earlier study in 2002 which also examined services to Gypsies/Travellers.

This report is limited to the accommodation-related Gypsy/Traveller services for which Communities Scotland has regulatory responsibility. It covers:

- needs assessment;
- service planning;
- site provision;
- site management;
- access to other services; and
- movement between caravans and settled housing.

This report sets out the findings, conclusions and recommendations arising from a follow-up study and examines the progress that councils have made in the four years since the original study.

## 1.1 Background

In 2002, Communities Scotland published a thematic study on *Services for Gypsies/Travellers* that examined services in eight councils in Scotland.

The study found that individual councils were making good progress in certain areas of service provision including:

- strategic planning;
- provision of council facilities on sites; and
- negotiation of improved electricity tariffs.

The study also found that councils demonstrated weaknesses in key areas including:

- robust information on the needs, preferences and aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers;
- long-term planning for site improvements;
- effective financial planning for sites;
- information for Gypsies/Travellers on finding and using pitches and on the range and quality of site services; and
- evidence of affordability and comparability of current rents.

Following the 2002 study, Communities Scotland has carried out a further study to assess how councils have addressed the findings of the 2002 study and to report a national picture of the service quality and practice.

The follow up study was carried out in two main stages. The first stage involved carrying out a series of case studies in November 2005 in six local authorities in Scotland. The case study organisations are:

- Falkirk Council
- Fife Council
- Perth & Kinross Council
- Argyll & Bute Council
- East Dunbartonshire Council
- North Ayrshire Council

These organisations volunteered to take part in the study and Communities Scotland would like to thank them and the staff involved for their help and assistance.

The focus of the case studies was an assessment of the councils' performance in relation to Activity Standard 6.1 within Communities Scotland's published *Performance Standards*, which states:

*'We plan and provide or arrange good quality serviced stopping places for Gypsies/Travellers. We let pitches in a way that ensures fair and open access for all. We take Gypsies/Travellers' views into account in delivering our services, and we are responsive to their needs.'*

Inspectors from Regulation & Inspection (R&I) carried out the case studies. Tony Cain, Inspection Manager and Carolanne Quigley, Good Practice Co-ordinator led the team. The inspectors were: Joyce Stewart, Janet Buchanan, Gordon Scobie, Marion McLellan, Marie Savage and Dougie McIntyre and were supported by Inspection Officers, Josephine McAloon, Georgina Kent and Joyce Kilpatrick.

The second stage of the study was an examination of Services for Gypsies/Travellers at a national level. Bob Blackaby Associates were commissioned to carry out this work which included:

- A postal questionnaire survey of all Scottish councils carried out during December 2005 – February 2006.
- A review of documents provided by local councils to illustrate positive practice examples.
- Telephone discussions with representatives from councils, other organisations and Gypsy/Traveller site residents to obtain details about, or to verify, positive practice examples.
- A focus group of Gypsy/Traveller site residents from four council sites.
- A literature search to identify relevant publications.

Of the 32 councils in Scotland, 28 completed and returned the survey questionnaires. This represents a response rate of 87.5%. Four councils did not return the questionnaires: Aberdeen City Council, Clackmannanshire Council, Dumfries and Galloway Council and Scottish Borders Council.

This report discusses the results of the survey of councils and draws on the outcomes of the six case studies and focus group. These results are set in the context of the findings and recommendations from the 2002 study and provide the basis for assessing progress in improving services to Gypsies/Travellers over the last four years.

The examples of positive practice included in this report have been identified from both the case studies and the council postal questionnaire survey.

The report is structured under five main headings:

- Service planning
- Site provision
- Access to services

- Management and services on site
- Consultation and participation

Detailed conclusions are provided at the end of each of these sections with main conclusions and recommendations at the end of the report.

## **2 Service planning**

### **2.1 Practice in 2002**

The 2002 study found:

1. A lack of information about the accommodation needs, preferences and aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers. Only two councils demonstrated good practice.
2. A lack of policies, strategies and other written information concerning services for Gypsies/Travellers.

The report recommended that:

1. The Gypsy/Traveller community should be identified as a separate ethnic group within systems to monitor services.
2. Councils should improve the quality and use of information about the accommodation needs, preferences and aspirations.
3. Councils should improve the way they translate strategic decisions into action plans, community plans and key housing and corporate strategy documents.
4. Councils should, through consultation and planning, keep under review the types of sites and stopping places required and Gypsies'/Travellers' ability to get them. This should include consultation with residents of both official sites and unofficial stopping places.

The report further identified the need for multi-agency planning groups and recommended, as an area for improvement, the inclusion of as many bodies as possible on such groups, including representations from the local Gypsy/Traveller community.

### **2.2 Practice in 2005/06**

#### ***2.2.1 Assessing needs, preferences and aspirations***

The case studies revealed that, whilst some councils had started to build up knowledge about the needs of Gypsies/Travellers in their areas, several councils had not yet made sufficient progress in understanding the local communities.

Of the 28 councils that responded to the questionnaire, 10 have not carried out an assessment of the accommodation needs, preferences and aspirations of Gypsies/Travellers in the last three years. Eight of these councils do not have Gypsy/Traveller sites in their areas (including three island councils). Of the 18 councils

that have carried out an assessment one that does not currently have a council site. Two councils with Gypsy/Traveller sites have not carried out an assessment.

In carrying out their assessments, the 18 councils made use of a number of sources of information including: existing data from waiting list and other council records (14); discussion with Gypsy/Traveller support groups or liaison workers (13); and the *Twice Yearly Count* compiled by the Scottish Executive (13). Only nine carried out a specific survey and/or a focus group involving Gypsies/Travellers.

Of the 18 councils who had carried out assessments, the 17 with sites included their own site residents in the exercise. Nine included Gypsies/Travellers in settled housing and eight included those living on unauthorised encampments. Only three of the seven councils with private Gypsy/Traveller sites in their areas had carried out an assessment of the needs of residents in those sites. The majority of councils did not consider the variety of accommodation needs, preferences and aspirations of all Gypsies/Travellers in their areas.

Councils have used the results of the assessments in their local housing strategies (LHS). Nine councils reported that they have made changes to their LHS and a further seven thought changes would be likely. The majority of councils reported that changes have been or will be made in site improvements. Other changes that have resulted or are likely to result are:

- in the management of unauthorised encampments (6);
- in additional site provision (5);
- in consultation arrangements (5); and
- in site management (4).

### ***2.2.2 Including Gypsies/Travellers in strategy and policy documents***

All case study councils have some reference to services for Gypsies/Travellers in strategy documents and action plans. However, the quality of coverage varied and not all action plans complied with requirements to be SMART – Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time bound.

The survey shows that Gypsies/Travellers' needs are addressed within the local housing strategies of 20 councils. Other strategy documents containing proposals for meeting Gypsies/Travellers' needs include:

- the race equality scheme (11);
- homelessness strategy (10);
- housing service plan (8);
- community plan (6); and
- local plan (4).

Four councils had no proposals or strategies for meeting Gypsies'/Travellers' needs.

### **2.2.3 Recognising Gypsies/Travellers as an ethnic group**

In response to the 2001 Scottish Parliament Inquiry into *Gypsies/Travellers & Public Sector Policies*, the Scottish Executive announced that it recognises Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct ethnic group. The 2002 report recommended that the community be identified by councils as a separate group within monitoring systems.

Eight councils do not recognise Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct ethnic group and only five councils have a separate category in their ethnic monitoring systems.

### **2.2.4 Inter-agency working groups and forums**

The case studies and survey found that in some areas there are good examples of inter-agency working, including effective forums or working groups on which Gypsies/Travellers are represented. However, this was not the case in all areas. Only 13 councils reported that they have working groups or forums that include Gypsies/Travellers as members<sup>1</sup>.

Apart from Gypsy/Traveller community representatives, a wide variety of organisations and disciplines are represented on the groups/forums:

- housing staff (13);
- health workers (11);

---

<sup>1</sup> The councils that said they did not have groups/forums included the three island councils

- education workers (11);
- the police (10);
- voluntary organisations (9);
- site manager (7);
- social work staff (6);
- planning staff (5);
- environmental services (5);
- Gypsies/Travellers liaison officer (3);
- equalities staff (3);
- other local councils (2); and
- local site residents'/residents' panel (2).

These groups/forums vary in their organisation and frequency of contact.

### **2.2.5 *The contribution of other sites***

It is important that councils know about the level of private provision and its local role. They should also be aware of the level of, and reasons for, unauthorised encampments in their areas.

Only seven councils taking part in the council survey reported that there are privately owned Gypsy/Traveller sites in their areas. In three cases the provision is felt to be making a major contribution to needs (two year-round sites and one seasonal site) and in five cases it is considered to be making a small contribution (three year-round sites, one seasonal site and one transit site).

Two of the seven councils with private sites in their areas think it is likely that there will be changes to the contribution the sites will make in the next three years or so. In both cases, it is felt that the contribution will be greater than now.

Eighteen councils reported unauthorised Gypsy/Traveller encampments in their areas on a regular basis. Sixteen of these contained council sites.

Councils that have regular unauthorised encampments gave a number of reasons for them:

- Area attracts Gypsy/Traveller on a transitory basis, (for example because of seasonal employment, in order to visit settled Gypsies/Travellers, or because the area is on a favoured north-south or east-west route) (16).
- Preferred over authorised sites because of antisocial behaviour from residents there (3).
- Lack of council site or lack of vacancies on council sites or council sites are not in the right area (3).
- Preferred over authorised sites because of anonymity (2).

Participants at the focus group expressed strong views about a perceived lack of sites for Gypsies/Travellers in Scotland, particularly the need for transit sites which would, it was argued, reduce the incidence of unauthorised camping. The group also referred to the existence of long waiting lists and doubling up on pitches as evidence of need.

#### **Positive practice example**

**East Lothian Council** and **Midlothian Council** have established a Gypsies/Travellers Forum with representatives from the range of service providers – Housing, Health, Police, Education, the site manager and Save the Children. Council staff and workers from Save the Children have made particular efforts to encourage site residents to attend the meetings of the forum and they have now begun to attend on a regular basis.

Members of the Forum have driven a number of initiatives, improving access to services for Gypsies/Travellers. Involvement of Gypsies/Travellers empowers them to have their views heard and provides a mechanism to have problems discussed and to be given feedback on progress.

The Forum was highlighted as a good example of joint working by the Scottish Executive in the April 2005 Scotland's Health on the Web (SHOW) newsletter.

#### **Training and awareness-raising**

The Forum has organised training and awareness sessions for staff in local organisations. Three sessions were held between January and March 2004, providing opportunities for a broad cross section of over 70 staff and Gypsies/Travellers to meet and consider in detail issues affecting the local community. The training was delivered by members of the Gypsy/Traveller community, facilitated by Save the Children, and was funded by the two councils and NHS Lothian. A similar programme is to be organised during 2006.

#### **Using video to consult with the community**

The Forum has produced a video entitled 'We are normal people. We are not aliens'. This method of informal and interactive consultation has been very successful in capturing the views of young people on the site. The second phase of the project, to be completed during 2006/07, is likely to focus on adults.

#### **Improving access to services**

A health visitor provides services to the Gypsies/Travellers at the site. Site residents and members of the Forum spoke of the benefits of having the health visitor. It has encouraged and supported women to access mainstream health services for themselves and their children. Male Gypsies/Travellers have more recently begun to request advice on health matters.

### **2.2.6 Responsibility for Gypsy/Traveller issues**

Councils report varying practice in dealing with Gypsy/Traveller issues.

Some case study councils had a clearly identified officer who was responsible for taking forward Gypsy/Traveller service issues.

Twelve councils reported that the Gypsy/Traveller site manager has main responsibility for dealing with Gypsy/Traveller issues; in 4, the Gypsy/Traveller liaison officer who is not also a site manager is responsible and in the remaining 12 councils it is another officer.

## **2.3 Conclusions**

- Gypsies/Travellers have not been included in the Local Housing Strategy of eight councils despite clear guidance that they should be.
- The majority of councils have acted upon the recommendation in the 2002 report about the need for specific research into needs, preferences and aspirations. However, a significant minority have not carried out assessments in the last three years, including two councils with sites. There is reliance, in some areas, on existing records rather than methods that involve direct contact with the community.
- In spite of the importance of a comprehensive understanding of needs, preferences and aspirations, many assessments do not include Gypsies/Travellers living in private sites, unauthorised encampments and settled housing.
- Where assessments have been carried out, they have resulted, or are likely to result in some changes – in most case these will involve site improvements.
- Private sites make a small contribution to needs in some areas and in almost two thirds of councils there are unauthorised encampments in their areas on a regular basis. In six council areas there are regular unauthorised encampments and long term vacancies on the council sites.

- Less than half of councils have set up working groups/consultative forums that include Gypsies/Travellers as members, as was recommended in the 2002 report. Membership of the groups that do exist are fairly broadly based, although it is perhaps surprising that social work staff are only represented on six of them.
- Not all councils recognise Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct ethnic group, which was highlighted as a requirement in the 2002 report. In spite of a further recommendation in the report, very few councils include the community as a separate group for ethnic monitoring purposes. Less than two in five race equality schemes contain proposals for this group.



## **3 Site provision**

### **3.1 Practice in 2002**

All sites that were visited as part of the 2002 study were owned and managed by local councils. The study found that:

1. Few concerns were raised about their general geographical location but some residents were concerned about specific positioning of several sites, including the close presence of electricity pylons and mineral workings and that some sites were on land that was prone to flooding.
2. Sites were generally considered to be well laid out and with pitches of a reasonable size.
3. There were concerns about the layout, facilities and the level of insulation in amenity units as well as difficulties in keeping the units warm. These difficulties were made worse, in some cases, by the relatively high cost of electricity.
4. Only three sites were found to have 'barrier free' amenity units that were suitable for wheelchair users.
5. The level of on-site communal facilities varied between councils and sites. Some had rooms for meetings where services could be provided. Some also had children's play areas, although not all were equipped.

The study recommended that:

1. Councils improve their financial planning for site improvements, which was generally weak.
2. Councils should look systematically at Gypsies'/Travellers' needs and expectations to see whether the quality of amenities and facilities on their sites reflect these
3. Councils recognise the benefits of such facilities as community meeting places, play areas, barrier-free access and adapted amenity blocks when considering new provision or improvements.
4. Councils make long-term site improvement plans, developed in effective consultation, and effectively resourced.

### **3.2 Practice in 2005/06**

The survey results discussed in this section relate to the responses of the 20 councils that completed the questionnaire and that have one or more council Gypsy/Traveller site in their areas. The 20 councils manage 29 sites between them.

The Twice-yearly Count in July 2005 shows that, in Scotland as a whole, there were 37 council-owned sites, of which 34 (containing 480 pitches) were for all-year use and 3 (containing 37 pitches) were for seasonal use. Since 1996, there has been a net loss of 63 all-year pitches.

The occupancy levels in July 2005 were 69% for the all-year use sites and 76% for the seasonal sites.

#### **3.2.1 Location of sites in relation to potential nuisances**

Ten councils with sites have identified a number of different potential environmental nuisances affecting one or more of their sites. These were:

- site crossed by electricity pylons (4);
- site close<sup>2</sup> to motorway (4);
- site on land liable to flooding (3);
- site close to large electricity substation (2); and
- site close to active landfill site (2).

Seven of these councils reported that site residents have complained about these nuisances. The concerns expressed mainly relate to safety issues concerning flooding damage, worries about possible health risks from electricity pylons and noise nuisance from various sources.

In all seven cases, the councils feel it is possible to do something about the site residents' concerns. Of those one did not provide any details of what was being, or could be, done.

The focus group participants also expressed concerns about site location. There was general agreement that sites are often in poor locations. Comments included: 'councils want to hide Gypsies/Travellers away in isolated places'; 'sites are often on land that no-

---

<sup>2</sup> 'Close to' is defined here as within 300 metres

one else wants' and 'lots of sites are near electricity pylons'. Councils do not have the needs of Gypsies/Travellers in mind when sites are planned.

One participant pointed out that people living in caravan sites experience the nuisance from busy roads more heavily than those in settled housing because they tend to be out of doors more often and therefore more exposed to noise and fumes. The latter is felt to be a particular problem for children playing outside.

### **3.2.2 Site amenities**

The case studies revealed a wide variety of the level and quality of site amenities across different sites. Some particular problems have been identified on some sites, including a lack of play space, poor security for mail and the absence of barriers between the pitches and site road creating particular hazards for children.

The questionnaire asked whether sites had particular amenities Table 1 gives the results.

**Table 1: Whether sites had particular amenities**

<b>Base</b>	<b>29</b>
Pitches made of tarmac, concrete or other hard surface	29
Barrier controlling vehicle access to site	25
Notice board containing information for site residents	19
Lockable cupboards for mail	15
Communal meeting room	14
Children's play ground with equipment	14
Sports facility	4
Communal laundry	2
Work area, e.g. for sorting scrap or storing equipment	1
Vehicle maintenance bay	-

Base: All council sites

As shown in Table 1 all sites have pitches formed from a hard surface. The large majority have a barrier controlling access, although in some cases it is not in use. Only around two thirds have a notice board and only half have a lockable cupboard for mail, a communal meeting room and an equipped children's playground.

Councils were asked whether particular health and education services are available on their sites. The most common service is adult education (10 sites). A clinic is available on seven, a school on six and a nursery on five sites. On 16 sites, there are no education or health services at all.

## **Positive practice example**

### **Facilitating access to services**

The Redburn Community Project was set up by **North Ayrshire Council**, in collaboration with a number of other organisations and local Gypsies/Travellers, in November 2004. The initiative aimed to improve access to services by the Gypsy/Traveller residents at the Council's Redburn site.

Before the Community Project group was formed there was very little consideration given to what services Gypsy/Traveller residents used, if any. There was also little engagement with residents other than through the site manager and the needs of residents were not looked at pro-actively.

In May 2005, the Council provided a 'portacabin' as a temporary community facility for the project.

It was agreed early on that a survey should be undertaken to find out what residents felt they would like to see provided. This was followed up by an 'open week' at the community room when service providers came along on programmed days. Residents called in to find out more about the services that were available and to discuss the services they would like to see provided on a regular basis. The Council and other service providers used the findings of the survey and open week to develop a programme of events and services.

The post of a part-time adult literacy worker for the site has been funded through Challenge Fund grant aid. There are plans to hold alternative therapy sessions, basic computing training and the promotion of healthy eating options in the community room.

The formation of the project has raised the priority given to improvements to the site. Successful bids have been made for grant aid for new play facilities for children and a permanent purpose-built community facility. Additionally, it has assisted in agreeing priorities for grant applications for 2006/08 to up-grade the utility blocks and install CCTV.

A mixed picture emerged when site amenities were discussed at the focus group. Some sites were said to have good quality amenities and have benefited from upgrades. Others were said to be poor. One site was criticised for being too stark – it comprises of all hard surfaces and there is no grass or gardens.

The focus group included a discussion of site security. No major problems were identified. Some could see the benefits of CCTV where it had been installed. On some sites, however, it is felt that there are too many cameras that have been put in the wrong place. They are considered to be intrusive.

The survey results show that site residents have expressed particular concerns in the last three years. Table 2 shows the results.

**Table 2: Site residents' complaints about site facilities**

<b>Base</b>	<b>20</b>
No complaints	5
Separation between pitches	9
Surface of the site	9
Communal facilities	9
Size of pitches	8
Security of the site generally	8
Access to the site	4
Security of mail boxes	3
Insufficient health and education facilities	2
Other	3

Base: Councils with council Gypsy/Traveller sites

As shown in Table 2, only five councils report that there have been no complaints. The most frequent complaints are about separation between pitches, the surface of the site and communal facilities.

The focus group participants also expressed concern that pitches are too small and close together on some sites.

Fourteen of the fifteen councils that have received complaints feel it is possible to do something about these. In the great majority of cases, physical improvements to the site are planned, although in some cases this is dependent on a successful application for grant funding.

Thirteen of the twenty councils have carried out improvements or major repairs to their sites in the last three years.

Eleven of the councils could say how much the work had cost. Costs for each council ranged from approximately £2,500 to £250,000, with an average of approximately £76,000 per council and totalled approximately £840,000 across the 11 councils.

### **3.2.3 Amenity units**

The inspectors carrying out the 2005 case studies encountered some criticisms of amenity units. In one area, reference was made to a lack of modernisation since the sites opened. In another area, the issue was that the units were too small and suffered from a poor layout. Site residents also complained about the quality of the finish to walls and floors following refurbishment. A further criticism made by some site residents related to

difficulties in keeping the amenity units warm. In some areas, insulation works have been carried out. A variety of types of space heating is provided. Fixed radiant heaters are the most common form. On one site, the Council provides no heating.

Focus group participants confirmed that there are continuing problems of keeping amenity units warm.

The survey found that all 29 sites have amenity units. On all sites, the units include a bath/shower, a WC and a washbasin. On 27 of the 29, they contain a kitchen sink and in 14 they contain a cooker point.

Fourteen councils reported that site residents have expressed concerns about the amenity units within the last three years. These concerns have been:

- difficulties in keeping the units warm (11);
- the size of the units (10);
- the internal layout of the units (10); and
- facilities within the units (9).

Thirteen of these councils feel it is possible to do something about the concerns and twelve reported that upgrading is being carried out, or is proposed. In some cases, the latter is dependent on a positive decision about grant aid. In one case, the units will be completely replaced, subject to receiving grant aid

### ***3.2.4 Meeting the needs of disabled Gypsies/Travellers***

The focus group participants feel that some of the amenity units on all sites should be capable of accommodating a disabled person.

There was a considerable variation in the response from councils when asked what proportion of amenity units had no steps to the entrance and were especially designed/adapted to meet the needs of disabled people. The survey results show that thirteen sites have no pitches that meet this standard. In three sites all pitches meet the standard. The remaining 13 sites have a small number of units with no steps and special design/adaptation.

Twenty-one councils have carried out adaptations and only three have had problems. Two of these councils cited the need to provide a water supply and sewage facilities to a caravan. A third referred to difficulties funding the installation of a shower. The work could not be funded through the housing revenue account and, it was claimed the Social Work Department's budget did not allow for adaptations to this kind of accommodation.

### **3.2.5 External and internal decorations**

Councils were asked when site buildings were last decorated internally and externally.

In 12 cases, buildings have been decorated internally within the last 5 years. In five cases, the decoration was carried out over five years ago – in one case, as long ago as 1992. A further two councils pointed out that they decorate on an ad hoc basis when units become vacant. One council did not provide an answer to the question.

In 13 cases, external decorations have been carried out in the last 5 years. In five cases they were decorated more than five years ago and, again, in one case, as long ago as 1992. Two councils did not say.

### **3.2.6 Future improvements and major repairs to sites**

Nineteen councils are intending to carry out improvements or major repairs to sites in the next three years. One council has neither carried out any work nor is intending to.

A variety of types of work was planned:

- improving communal facilities (14);
- improving facilities in amenity units (12);
- increasing site security (12);
- improving heating/insulation in amenity units (11);
- renewing pitch surfaces (3); and
- increasing the number of pitches (2).

A number of other types of work were identified, each by one council.

Sixteen of the 19 councils planning work could estimate how much the work will cost. It ranges from £10,000 to £1.5 m for each council, with an average of approximately £400,000 per council and totals approximately £6.4m across all 16 councils.

### **Positive practice example**

#### **Consulting with site residents about site improvements**

**Argyll and Bute Council** carried out extensive consultation with site residents about proposed improvements to its sites.

A survey of site residents was carried out in spring 2005 to find out about priorities for improvements. This not only gave the Council information on what site residents would like to see, it strengthened the bid to the Scottish Executive for funding. Further detailed consultation was undertaken once funding for the investment had been secured. Site residents commented favourably to inspectors carrying out the case study on the way the Council had consulted with them.

Because some site residents had difficulties with reading and writing, the Council relied on oral means of communication.

The lines of communication that were developed were then used to strengthen tenant participation. The Council's Tenant Liaison Officer has helped the site residents to form a site residents' association on one of the sites and has helped a playgroup on another site to secure lottery funding for a new facility.

### **3.2.7 Proposals for new sites**

Five councils are aware of firm proposals for new Gypsy/Traveller sites in their areas. In one case, a RSL will manage the new provision, and in the others, the Council will manage it. In three of the four council areas where additional provision is proposed, there are regular unauthorised encampments.

Proposals include four transit sites, three year round sites and two seasonal sites.

### **3.3 Conclusions**

- In many areas sites are located close to environmental features that are a cause for concern to site residents. There is certainly a community perception, revealed by the focus group, that Gypsy/Traveller sites are placed in poor quality environments.
- Some councils have reacted positively to the concerns regarding environmental features. Councils have addressed, or are proposing to address, at least some of the concerns of site residents about site amenities.

- There is a wide variety in the level of amenities on sites. In spite of attention being drawn to the problems in the 2002 report, many sites still do not have tenant notice boards, lockable mail cupboards and equipped playgrounds.
- Education and/or health services are available at around a half of sites.
- There are concerns regarding suitability of amenity units and pitches for disabled people. The majority of councils appear to have plans to address site residents' concerns through improvement programmes; however several schemes are subject to the outcome of bids for grant aid.
- The buildings on several sites have not been decorated either internally or externally for at least five years.
- There is substantial evidence that councils have, and are seeking to, invest in their sites and are therefore responding positively to the 2002 recommendation concerning the need for site improvement plans. However in many cases investment is dependent on grant aid. Not all councils have planned maintenance programmes in place for their sites.
- Some councils have had experience of adapting amenity units for use by disabled people. Relatively few problems have been encountered, although funding was said to be a problem in one area.
- A number of councils reported that they were aware of proposals for new sites in their areas, including proposals for transit sites.



## **4 Access to services**

### **4.1 Practice in 2002**

The 2002 study found that:

1. Councils that operated waiting lists generally used time waited rather than need as the basis for priority.
2. Information about the letting of pitches was generally poor and noted that some councils asked applicants to provide information that was not relevant to the pitch letting process and which did not match the request for information made of those seeking settled housing.
3. Site residents were not given information about how to access site services and did not receive information about welfare benefits or about local services

The study recommended that:

1. Councils should be consistent in approaches to letting pitches based on the needs of the family.
2. Information requested from applicants for pitches should be consistent with that requested of applicants for settled accommodation and should be relevant to what is needed for letting a pitch
3. Site residents should have a comprehensive tenancy agreement and that it should contain rights that, so far as possible, mirror those of the Scottish Secure Tenancy.
4. Councils consider the range of information that Gypsies/Travellers need and the most appropriate formats in which to present it. Councils should give clear information on site management services.

### **4.2 Practice in 2005/06**

#### ***4.2.1 How pitches are let***

In some of the 2005 case studies, inspectors found that councils still do not use need as the basis for letting their pitches. In one case inspectors found that, in the pitch application form, the Council requests details of close relatives who reside locally and also details of car registration numbers. This information has no clear relevance to letting

a pitch and does not match the information requested from mainstream housing applicants.

In another area, the Council has no specific policy or guidelines for the allocation of site pitches or maintaining a waiting list.

The survey results show that eight councils with Gypsy/Traveller sites appear to comply with official guidance to base lettings priorities on need. A further seven use a first come first served system and five keep a list and let according to the length of time on it. Sixteen councils said that their lettings policy is set out in writing.

In all 20 councils, applicants for pitches are asked to complete an application form. Nine said the forms are broadly similar to those used for applications for settled housing and eleven said there are differences.

There was some disagreement within the focus group about how pitches should be let. Some felt it should be based on need and similar to practices that exist in the letting of settled housing by local councils. Others think that specific arrangements are needed for Gypsy/Traveller sites and that existing site residents ought to have a say on who should be allowed to come on to sites.

One focus group participant said that prospective site residents were asked to provide too much information.

During discussion at the focus group about demand for sites, participants' attention was drawn to the existence of vacancies on some sites. The group felt that, where vacancies exist, this is due to compatibility issues (groups not wanting to live alongside other groups) and not lack of demand. It was argued that if there are more sites then this will increase the possibility of finding a compatible group to live alongside. It will also increase choice.

The survey results show that 12 councils have one or more sites that often, or sometimes, have long-term vacancies.

Table 3 gives the reasons for these vacancies. Compatibility issues and a lack of long-term demand head the list.

**Table 3: Reasons for long-term vacancies**

<b>Base</b>	<b>12</b>
Compatibility issues – potential site residents do not like to live alongside existing site residents	7
Lack of long term demand	7
Site location is unpopular – pitches would be lettable if elsewhere	3
Site amenities are unpopular – pitches would be lettable if amenities were improved	2
Other	1

Base: Councils often or sometimes having long-term vacancies on one or more council sites

#### **4.2.2 Tenancy agreements**

There is variation in practice across councils with regard to tenancy agreements. Five of the twenty councils use the model tenancy agreement set out in *Guidance for Site Management* published by the former Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People in 1998. A further five state that their tenancy agreement contains rights that are at least as comprehensive as those in the Scottish Secure Tenancy (SST). Ten councils have tenancy agreements that do not meet either of these standards.

Some of the participants at the focus group think that the rights of site residents on permanent council sites should be brought fully into line with the rights of council site residents in settled housing, including the right to buy.

#### **4.2.3 Providing written information to site residents**

All councils give site residents some written information about the site and their rights and responsibilities at the start of each tenancy. Table 4 shows the topics that are included in the written information.

**Table 4: Topics which site residents are given written information**

<b>Base</b>	<b>20</b>
The Council's and site residents' responsibilities regarding repairs	18
The Council's policy on visitors	18
How site residents can make a complaint or appeal	18
How the Council deals with antisocial behaviour	17
The service standards site residents can expect	15
How site residents can comment on services they receive or new services that are needed	12
How the Council monitors service standards	6

Base: Councils with council Gypsy/Traveller sites

As shown in Table 4, for the great majority of councils the written information includes details about repairs, visitors and complaints or appeals. However, rather fewer information packs contain details of how site residents can make comments or how the council monitors service standards.

### **Positive practice example**

#### **Site residents' information pack**

**Falkirk Council** provides site residents on its site with a comprehensive welcome pack at the start of each tenancy. The pack includes:

- The Council's Charter for Gypsies/Travellers which describes what site residents can expect from the Council
- Tenancy and repairs handbooks
- Specific information about the site and local services
- Leaflets on local schools and health services
- Leaflets on neighbour nuisance and dog owners' responsibilities
- A specific information leaflet for Gypsies/Travellers prepared by Central Scotland Police
- Details on how to complain about the Council's services

Councils were asked whether they provide help to people who had specific communication needs. All 20 councils replied that they explain to people who cannot read what leaflets, agreements and other documents say and that they provide documents in other formats, such as in Braille or on tape. Seventeen provide signers for people with hearing impairment. A further two added that they make available an interpreting service for people who do not speak English, if required.

#### **4.2.4 Help with moving into settled housing**

Councils are expected by Communities Scotland to offer all new site residents taking up council tenancies help to become established in their homes and to access services. Sixteen councils reported that they do provide specific help to Gypsies/Travellers who move from caravans into settled housing.<sup>3</sup>

Ten of these councils said that they visit the households after they have taken up the tenancies and four make available resettlement/support services. Some of the councils referred to other specific help that is offered where necessary: help with accessing

---

<sup>3</sup> The councils that did not provide specific help include the three Island councils

benefits/ services (7); help with getting furniture (5), giving advice (2) and providing a new tenancy checklist/pack (2).

### 4.3 Conclusions

- In spite of a recommendation in the 2002 report, several councils do not prioritise the letting of pitches on the basis of need. Not all have written lettings policies.
- There are differences in practices between the letting of council housing and the letting of pitches on sites, including the use of different forms and asking for unnecessary information. This is in spite of the fact that attention was paid to these kinds of inconsistencies in the 2002 report.
- On nearly a third of sites where there are long-term vacancies. Compatibility issues and lack of demand were given as the main reasons for this.
- Half of councils have tenancy agreements that are not based on any recognised model. Only five councils have revised their tenancy agreements in line with the recommendations of the 2002 study.
- Councils appear to be responding positively to the 2002 report's recommendation about the range of information that should be available to site residents, although there is some variation in the range of written information provided to site residents at the start of the tenancy. .
- Most councils provide information in a format that is appropriate for people with specific needs.
- In spite of a general expectation that settling-in help should be given to new tenants, only somewhat over half of councils provide specific help to Gypsies/Travellers moving from caravans into settled housing.



## **5 Management and services on site**

### **5.1 Practice in 2002**

The 2002 study found that:

1. Site management arrangements varied between local councils, although a full time residential site manager was the most common arrangement.
2. Managers had different kinds of responsibilities and not all had up-to-date job descriptions.
3. Estate management services, such as hard and soft area maintenance, were generally found to be working well.
4. There was, however, a lack of service standards for response repairs.
5. Policies on visitors were found to vary
6. Pitch rents were generally higher in comparison with council house rents
7. Some councils charged initial deposits from site residents, which, the report said, was not acceptable
8. Only two councils could demonstrate that site residents were given information about how to make a complaint.
9. Councils had not considered affordability of rents.

The report welcomed the success achieved by some councils in negotiating electricity charges that corresponded more fairly with domestic electricity charges. However, where electricity was purchased through pre-payment electricity cards, it was noted that there could be difficulties if they could not be purchased on site, especially if transport were not available.

The study recommended that:

1. Site managers should have clear and detailed job descriptions.
2. Councils should give clear information on service standards. This should include standards for repairs and maintenance, which should mirror the standards for settled housing.
3. Policies on visitors should be defined and should correspond fairly with the rights and restrictions on council house site residents.
4. The conditions attached to renting a pitch should correspond fairly to the conditions applying to renting a council house. Deposits should not be taken.

## 5.2 Practice in 2005/06

In 17 of the 29 sites managed by councils responding to the survey, there is a non-residential manager with an on-site office. In a further seven there is a residential site manager and in the remaining five the manager is based in an office off site.

Some positive comments were made by site residents about site managers during the case study visits. However, focus group participants drew attention to what they thought to be sharp differences in the way managers approach their jobs. It was claimed that some are extremely helpful and responsive whilst others are unhelpful and overbearing. An argument was made for a consistent style of management.

Table 5 shows the range of matters for which site managers were responsible.

**Table 5: Site managers' responsibilities**

<b>Base</b>	<b>29</b>
Letting pitches	27
Consultation with site residents	24
Liaison with other agencies about care and support needs	22
Monitoring the level of unauthorised encampments	22
Helping Gypsies/Travellers in unauthorised encampments	21
Carrying out minor repairs	14
Managing rent arrears	14
Helping Gypsies/Travellers on private sites	11
Managing the repairs budget for the site	10
Managing the environmental maintenance budget for the site	10
Advising site residents on welfare benefits	6

Base: All council sites

As shown in Table 5, in the vast majority of sites, the managers are responsible for lettings and consultation. Fewer are responsible for other basic management functions, such as rent arrears (less than a half of sites), and repairs and maintenance budgets (just over a third of sites). Involvement in unauthorised encampments is fairly common.

Fifteen managers' job descriptions have been reviewed between 2003 and 2006. However one council said the description was reviewed 'many years ago' and another said 'never'. A further council said the description is currently under review and two councils did not provide the information.

Five councils (a quarter of those with sites) said that their Gypsy/Traveller support services are funded by the Supporting People programme.

### **5.2.1 Service standards**

The case studies found that several councils do not have specific service standards for the services provided to Gypsies/Travellers and some do not have associated monitoring and reporting mechanisms. This latter issue was also highlighted in the 2002 thematic study. This is a weakness and means that the councils have limited information on how well the service is performing and which areas require improvement. This also means that site residents will be unclear about what level of service to expect.

The survey results show that five councils have no written service standards. Fifteen have standards on the speed of repairs and dealing with complaints about other site residents. Few councils have service standards on other matters: tenant consultation/involvement (11) and letting of pitches (9). Only one council had a charter for Gypsies/Travellers.

### **5.2.2 Policies on what is allowed in sites**

Work vehicles (but not work itself) are allowed in 24 sites (82.8%).

Visitors' caravans are allowed in 28 sites (96.6%). In 19 of these, visitors' caravans are only allowed for a limited period.

Residential units are allowed in 19 (65.5%) of the sites.

In the 10 cases where residential units are not permitted, councils were asked to give reasons. In five cases it was pointed out that the site caters solely for travelling people. One council referred to a lack of space. Another referred to the fact that the units would need to be connected to services and that they are difficult to dispose of when no longer needed. Two said that there is no current policy, one adding that cases will be considered on their merits if requests are made.

Focus group participants argued that chalets should be allowed on permanent sites. This would provide an alternative to a conventional house for those Gypsies/Travellers who no longer wish to travel, especially for older people.

### 5.2.3 Rent levels

Councils were asked important a number of factors are in setting rents for pitches. Table 6 presents the results.

**Table 6: Factors that are very important or important in rent setting**

	Base	Very important	Important
Covering day to day management and maintenance costs	20	11	6
Achieving a rent that is affordable to site residents who are not receiving housing benefit	20	8	5
Achieving a fair comparison with the rents charged for council housing	20	6	6
Staying competitive with other site providers (private or other local councils)	20	3	4
Recovering the costs of past investment	20	2	4
Building up a fund for future site improvements	20	1	3
Rents set when site first provided – same increases as settled housing since then	20	1	-

Base: Councils with council Gypsy/Traveller sites

As shown in Table 6, the need to cover day-to-day costs dominates the list. Achieving affordable rents is only regarded as very important or important by 13 councils and achieving a fair comparison with council housing is regarded as very important or important by only 12. Only just over a third regards it as very important or important to stay competitive with other site providers. Relatively few councils regard past or future investment as important in rent setting.

Pitch rents vary considerably: from £31.60 to more than double that level at £67.93 per week. The average weekly net rent for a pitch was £49.15.

Nineteen of the councils could compare pitch rents with council house rents. In 11 cases, pitch rents are higher. The amount by which they are higher varies from £2.09 to £17.50 a week.

Five councils state that it is very important or important to achieve a fair comparison with council housing rents in setting pitch rents yet charge more for pitches than houses – from £4.00 to £9.77 a week more.

Only two (10.0%) councils ask for a deposit when pitches are let. One is for an electrical plug and the other is for electricity bills. This latter council has a system of reading site residents' individual meters and sending them the bill.

#### **5.2.4 *Paying for electricity***

Methods used for making charges for electricity include:

- Prepaid card operated meters (26 sites)
- Individual meters are read and the bills are sent by the Council (2 sites)
- Individual meters are read and bills are sent by the electricity company (1 site)

Some of the Gypsies/Travellers attending the focus groups were concerned about the cost of electricity they are paying through pre-payment cards. They could not understand how the little electricity they are using could cost so much. Councils are required by law to resell electricity at the prices they bought it but they can make an administration charge and one council did so until 2005.

Seventeen councils reported that they have checked that their sites' electricity tariffs represented good value for money and are broadly comparable with tariffs paid by council or RSL site tenants.

#### **5.2.5 *Appeals and complaints***

The 2005 case studies showed that, in one area, complaints have been dealt with in a rather informal manner and site residents feel that complaints have not always been recorded or dealt with satisfactorily by the Council. In another area, the Council did not appear to deal with complaints from Gypsies/Travellers in accordance with its complaints procedure.

The focus group participants voiced some concerns about complaints systems. Some said that complaints were not acted upon or followed up. When questioned about whether site residents take complaints up with councillors, one participant said she had recently discovered who her local councillor is and positive contacts had been made. Others were not aware of who their councillors are. Several also said that Gypsies/Travellers tend not to vote in elections.

The survey results show that the majority of councils have formal complaint or appeal mechanisms for three aspects of site management. Mechanisms exist for:

- the Council's refusal to grant a tenancy on the site (19);
- decisions about the way the site is managed (17);
- the Council's decision to evict a tenant (16).

Sixteen councils said that complaints and appeals are routinely monitored to see if patterns were emerging.

### **5.2.6 Best Value reviews**

Six said that they have conducted a Best Value review of the management of their Gypsy/Traveller sites.

When asked what changes have been made as a result of the review, two councils said they do not know. Three councils referred to the upgrading of the site, with one adding that management issues have been addressed and opportunities for greater tenant participation are being pursued. The sixth council said that the site concerned was closed and redeveloped and resources are concentrated on one central location.

## **5.3 Conclusions**

- Site managers' roles vary considerably. Some of them are not responsible for basic site management functions, such as lettings and managing rent arrears, and many do not fulfil the wider role that was recommended in the 2002 report, such as benefits advice and liaison with other organisations over support needs. Generally, job descriptions have been reviewed recently.
- Many, but not all, councils have written service standards and there is some variation in what they cover. Some standards do not cover repairs, which was a specific recommendation in the 2002 report.
- There is variation in policies on whether work vehicles, visitors' caravans and residential units are allowed on sites. Policy to refuse access to residential units was criticised by focus group participants.

- Many councils do not appear to be following the recommendation in the 2002 report that pitch rents should be comparable to council house rents and not all take account of the need to achieve affordable rents when making decisions about rent levels.
- Most councils provide convenient arrangements for site residents to pay for their electricity, although in some sites, pre-payment cards have to be purchased from an office that is not on the site.
- Over four out of five councils say they have ensured that the electricity tariffs being paid by site residents represent good value for money and are comparable with tariffs applying to site residents in settled housing. However, some focus group participants were extremely concerned about the cost of electricity bought through prepayment cards.
- The case studies and survey both found that not all councils have appeal and complaint mechanisms for basic site management functions. Focus group participants queried the efficacy of systems. The survey also found that not all councils monitor complaints and appeals to see if patterns are emerging.
- Six out of twenty councils with sites have carried out a Best Value review of the service.



## 6 Consultation and participation

### 6.1 Practice in 2002

The 2002 study found:

1. There were a number of problems concerning consultation with Gypsies/Travellers. Several councils had not gathered views from the community about their needs. Some had not consulted directly with their own site residents and others had not included Gypsies/Travellers in specific consultation exercises, for example on a new racial harassment policy.
2. Consultation was satisfactory in some areas but there was little evidence that the results of consultation were fed back to residents.

The study recommended that:

1. Councils increase involvement from the local Gypsy/Traveller community in decision-making, including involving community representatives on planning groups.
2. Councils should consider the resources needed to promote consultation and participation, for example giving financial and administrative help.
3. Councils should provide Gypsies/Travellers with feedback on the outcome of consultation exercises.

### 6.2 Practice in 2005/06

The survey found that 22 councils have consulted with Gypsies/Travellers in the last three years and six have not<sup>4</sup>.

Site management or improvement issues are most frequently consulted on. Ten councils have consulted on policies, such as those concerned with equalities, racial harassment or antisocial behaviour. Only seven councils have consulted on changes to rents on council sites and five have consulted about the need for additional sites.

Thirteen councils have working groups or forums that include Gypsies/Travellers as members<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> The councils that had not consulted include the three island councils

In those councils that include community representatives on their groups/forums, 12 include council site residents and 9 include Gypsy/Traveller support groups. Relatively few forums include Gypsies/Travellers in settled housing (5), in unauthorised encampments (2) and in private sites (2).

### **Positive practice example**

#### **Empowering Gypsies/Travellers and ensuring they are treated fairly**

**Fife Council** formally recognises Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct ethnic minority and includes them as a separate category in ethnic monitoring arrangements. The Council uses a variety of methods for consulting with its site residents. There is Gypsy/Traveller membership of its Gypsies/Travellers working group; it holds regular site meetings and site managers hold one to one discussions with site residents.

Managers of the three council sites make particular efforts to enable site residents to have an effective contribution to discussions. They regularly visit site residents for one to one discussions about issues and proposals and visit each tenant prior to site meetings in order to encourage them to attend. They also make sure that site residents receive feedback on progress that has been made on issues that have been raised.

The manager of the Thorntonwood site has also taken particular care to make sure that representatives from outside organisations treat site residents fairly and in a dignified way. This includes:

- Meeting representatives from the contractors before any improvement or building work starts. This is to establish 'ground rules' for treating the site residents with respect and for responding appropriately to their needs
- Challenging inappropriate behaviour when it occurs. Examples of things the manager has taken up include:
  - The use of improper language
  - Workmen who work with their shirts off – this is offensive to many within the community
  - Groups of officials who just arrive at the site to look round and who assume they can do this without any information regarding the purpose of their visit or any prior consultation with, or permission, from, tenants

### **6.2.1 Consultation with Gypsies/Travellers on council sites**

The case studies revealed that there has been a considerable amount of recent participation by Gypsies/Travellers. Many site residents had been involved in discussions with their councils about such matters as site improvements, amenity unit upgrades, (including choosing the colour of the kitchen units), the siting of CCTV cameras and on proposed changes to lettings policies, handbooks and tenancy agreements.

However, the case study inspectors also encountered some criticisms about the extent to which consultation has taken place on sites. In one area, Gypsies/Travellers advised the

---

<sup>5</sup> The councils that did not have groups/forums include the three island councils

inspectors that the Council had not consulted them on any aspect of its service provision. In another area, there were criticisms about insufficient consultation on the details of amenity unit upgrades, site improvements and a new tenancy agreement.

One case study council recognised that it needs to improve the form of the written material it presents to site residents because some have difficulty with reading.

The survey found that, of the 20 councils with sites, 18 (90.0%) said they have specific mechanisms to obtain feedback from site residents.

The case studies reveal that a variety of methods of engagement are in place, including: one to one discussions; surveys and meetings. Some councils employ tenant participation co-ordinators.

The survey revealed that a variety of approaches exist. Door to door visiting (9) and monitoring complaints and appeals (9) are the most frequently cited mechanisms. Six councils said they hold meetings with site residents' associations and three use feedback cards. A few councils reported a number of other methods.

For sixteen councils taking part in the survey, the feedback mechanisms include one or more method that uses personal contact between council staff and site residents, either in groups or individually. The other councils rely on less personal methods - monitoring complaints and the use of feedback cards or do not have feedback mechanisms at all.

Focus group participants endorsed the need outlined in the 2002 report for a variety of methods to be used to consult with site residents. However, generally it was felt that one to one discussions work best. The participants stressed that a lot depends on who conducts the discussions and what their approach is. Extremely critical comments were made about some consultation exercises – councils just informing site residents what is proposed, with site residents feeling they have been railroaded into accepting the plans. The possibility of an independent person or group carrying out consultation was raised – this could be a tenant liaison officer who does not have day to day site management responsibilities, or possibly people drawn from the Gypsy/Traveller community itself.

The case studies found evidence that the councils concerned acted upon comments made by site residents. In the survey, 16 councils (88.9% of the 18 with feedback

mechanisms) said that they have, in the last three years, made specific efforts to feedback to site residents of the site the results arising from their consultations.

### **6.2.2 *Site residents' associations***

Seven councils (35.0% of the 20 with sites) said there are one or more active site residents' associations on their sites. There are Registered Tenants' Organisations in three council areas.

Six of the seven councils with active site tenants' associations provide some specific support to them. Three councils provide funding for day-to-day expenses; three provide training; two give assistance in kind and two have a dedicated support worker. A number of other kinds of assistance are provided by a small number of councils.

The focus group had limited experience of tenants' associations. There were plans to form an association in one area but one participant commented that few site residents know how to go about forming an association.

### **Positive practice example**

#### **Working with a Registered Site residents' Organisation on a council site**

In 2004, **Perth and Kinross Council** helped site residents on its Gypsy/Traveller site to form a site residents' association with the help of a start-up grant of £200. Over the last two years, the Council has developed close relations with the association. It is a Registered Site Residents' Organisation.

Known as the Double Dykes Tenants' Association, the association aims to safeguard and promote the interests of site residents, to uphold equal opportunities and to work towards good relations amongst all members of the community.

Association members meet on a regular basis and every two months they meet officers from the Council to discuss issues of concern. The association is represented on to the executive of Perth and Kinross Council Tenants' and Residents' Federation. This ensures that the association has access to the same information as the associations representing residents in settled housing.

The association has campaigned for improvements to the site. This followed a visit to a Gypsy/Traveller site in Dumfries and Galloway that involved site residents' representatives, council officers and representatives from other statutory and voluntary organisations. The purpose of the visit was to obtain information on how Dumfries and Galloway approach site access and management and consultation. Participants were also able to compare tenancy agreements, tenant information, application forms and policies and procedures.

All participants found the trip interesting and informative and it led to improvements to communal facilities at the Double Dykes site in Perth and Kinross and helped in the drafting of visitors' agreement and information for site residents.

Association members also take part in an annual risk assessment of the site. The assessment, which involves a review of a range of health and safety issues, involves officers from the Council and Tayside Fire Brigade.

### **6.3 Conclusions**

- The large majority of councils do, in some way, involve Gypsies/Travellers in decision-making, as recommended in the 2002 report.
- Less than half of councils have acted on the recommendation to set up planning groups that include community representatives as members.
- On council sites, tenant consultation mechanisms exist in almost all cases and most, although not all involve some face-to-face contact between council representatives and Gypsies/Travellers. However, it is clear that not all major decisions are effectively consulted on, including in some cases the up grading of facilities and proposed changes in rent levels.
- Only 7 councils consulted with site residents on rent levels and increases.

- Most, but not all, councils feedback to site residents the results of consultation as recommended in the 2002 report.
- There appear to be relatively few tenants' associations and a comment made at the focus group suggests there is a need for councils to do more to help site residents who wish to start one. It is clear, however, that where associations exist, councils are providing them with practical support, as was recommended in the 2002 report.

## 7 Conclusions

The study on which this report is based has sought to find out how far local councils have responded to the 2002 thematic regulation study on *Services for Gypsies/Travellers*. A number of overall conclusions can be drawn.

Many councils said that the 2002 report had an impact on their services for Gypsies/Travellers, although it is of some concern that in only half of councils did the report lead to a service review. Certainly there is evidence that, over the last three years, there has been investment in council sites and there is the likelihood of more to come. However, not all councils have planned maintenance programmes for their sites and in some cases investment is dependent on grant aid.

However, there are many areas where the impact of the report has been patchy, if not disappointing.

Needs assessments and consultation initiatives have not always embraced the full spectrum of the Gypsy/Traveller community, although this may reflect the difficulties surrounding methodology. The community has not always been consulted when it should have been. Neither are Gypsies/Travellers always recognised in relevant policies and strategies.

The 2002 report articulated the principle that practices in service provision for Gypsies/Travellers should, where relevant, mirror those that apply to site residents of settled housing. In many areas, this principle has not been turned into reality.

### 7.1 Service planning

- Progress is being made to assess needs but it is not uniform and some assessments appear to be rather narrow. In some areas, there have been site closures, in other areas there is site under-occupation and in further areas there are regular unauthorised encampments. This underlines the importance of careful needs assessment,

- It is particularly disappointing that the needs of Gypsies/Travellers are not in some areas reflected in some significant strategy documents including local housing strategies. It is also disappointing that several councils do not formally recognise Gypsies/Travellers as a distinct ethnic group. Very few councils have set up ethnic monitoring systems that include them as a separate group.
- Some councils have still not set up inter-agency planning groups which include Gypsies/Travellers community representatives.

## **7.2 Site provision**

- Some sites are situated close to features that cause a nuisance to site residents. The councils concerned are taking action to reduce the impact of the potential hazards, although their removal would not be feasible.
- There is continuing criticism about the amenities, physical layout, design and maintenance of some sites.
- It is clear, however, from the survey results that a considerable amount of improvements have been made to sites in the last three years and more improvements are planned. This suggests there has been a response to concerns raised by site residents, reflected in the 2002 report, about facilities.
- It is very disappointing that not all councils have provided such basis facilities as an information notice board for site residents and secure mailboxes.

## **7.3 Access to services**

- There are significant differences between the letting of pitches and the letting of houses in some areas, including differences in information requirements and a failure by some councils to introduce needs-based priority systems for pitch lettings. There is also a failure in by some councils to publish letting rules.
- There is variable practice with regard to tenancy agreements.

- Many councils have responded to points made in the 2002 report about the need for information for site residents, although there are variations in the scope of information provided.
- Not all councils provide specific help to Gypsies/Travellers who move into settled housing.

#### **7.4 Management and services on site**

- The role of some site managers is rather narrow. In some cases it does not embrace all basic site management functions. In some areas, the 2002 report recommendation regarding the need for wider responsibilities has not been acted upon.
- Not all councils have service standards that cover basic site management activities.
- Policies on access by visitors, work vehicles and residential units vary.
- Many councils are not following the recommendations made in the 2002 report about rent setting.
- Some councils do not appear to have responded to concern raised in the 2002 report about the accessibility of pre-payment electricity cards. Focus group participants voiced strong concerns about the cost of electricity.
- Not all councils carry out decoration work to site buildings on a regular basis.
- Not all councils' complaint mechanisms cover basic site management functions.

#### **7.5 Consultation and participation**

- Most councils have some arrangements in place to consult with Gypsies/Travellers. Involvement of the members of the community who do not live in council sites appears, however, to be relatively rare.

- Whilst consultation mechanisms exist on most council sites, they are not present on all and not all important issues are consulted on including rent levels and rent increases. Gypsies/Travellers spoken to expressed dissatisfaction with consultation methods.
- Relatively few sites have site residents' associations and it could be that some site residents need help to set them up.

## 8 Recommendations

For some councils all the recommendations of the 2002 report remain relevant.

The recommendations relate to improving the overall standard of planning and delivery of services for Gypsies/Travellers. The recommendations should be read in conjunction with those from the earlier report.

Councils should:

- include Gypsies/Travellers as a specific group in the monitoring and reporting of ethnicity;
- review their approach to consultation with Gypsies/Travellers on established sites and elsewhere in the community based on the advice set out in “How to gather views on service quality” published by Communities Scotland in January 2006;
- review their approach to, and monitoring of, satisfaction and complaints to ensure that they are fully aware of the quality of services that Gypsies/Travellers are receiving and their level of satisfaction with the service;
- review site rents and service charges on a regular basis to ensure that they are affordable and reasonable;
- ensure that they have in place fully funded planned and cyclical maintenance programmes to ensure that site amenities are maintained and improved effectively;
- ensure that the needs and aspirations of the Gypsy/Traveller community are properly reflected in all their key strategic planning documents and specifically in the Local Housing Strategies;
- assess training needs for site managers and work with relevant agencies to develop appropriate training courses. Councils should ensure that their site managers attend these courses.

The Scottish Executive should develop and publish a model tenancy agreement and model service standards for the letting and occupancy of pitches on sites for Gypsy/Traveller.

Communities Scotland will also consider other actions it may take to encourage councils to take these recommendations forward.

## **Appendix 1 Councils' views about the need for further official guidance**

Councils were asked in the survey questionnaire whether there were any issues where it would be helpful to have more official guidance. Fifteen said that there were such issues. These councils said that they would like guidance in the following areas:

- Unauthorised encampments (3)
- Needs assessment (3)
- Education (2)
- Mobile homes (2)
- Model site tenancy agreement (1)
- What is a proportionate response in areas with few Gypsies/Travellers (1)
- Child protection (1)
- Standard site lettings policy (1)
- Assessing need when letting pitches (1)
- Links with health services (1)
- Consulting with roadside families (1)
- Short stay site provision (1)
- Qualification period for future right to buy applications (1)
- Good practice generally (1)



## References

Advisory Committee on Scotland's Travelling People (1998) *Guidance for Site Management*

Communities Scotland (2002) *Services for Gypsies/Travellers*, Thematic Regulation Study

Scottish Executive Social Research *Gypsies/Travellers: Twice-yearly Count*

## Regulation & Inspection

### **EDINBURGH**

Rosebery House  
9 Haymarket Terrace  
Edinburgh EH12 5YA  
Tel: 0131 313 3700

### **GLASGOW**

Highlander House  
58 Waterloo Street  
Glasgow G2 7DA  
Tel: 0141 226 4611