
Cambridgeshire Travellers Review

Research Report Summary

Short Summary of Research



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1 PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

- This report is a short summary of five research reports completed for the Cambridgeshire Travellers Review. A description of each of the reports and instructions about how to obtain them is given at the end.
- The objective of the Review is to develop a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to working with Travellers. The role of the research component is to clarify the composition and needs of Traveller communities in Cambridgeshire, and provide a context for the analysis of a range of policy issues.
- The Review is supported by Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, Peterborough City Council, District Councils and Health Authorities in Cambridgeshire, Cambridgeshire Probation Service, the National Romani Rights Association, the Gypsy Council for Education, Culture, Welfare and Civil Rights, and the Ormiston Children and Families Trust.
- The contents of this report do not necessarily represent the views or policies of any organisation participating in the Review.

2 KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED AT THE START

2.1 A place to live

- Unauthorised camping.
- For some official Travellers' sites: a history of damage; conflict both within the site and with the surrounding community.
- The range of accommodation including of emergency stopping places and planning approval for private sites.
- Practical problems if Travellers do move into housing.
- Consistency in the management of sites and handling of unauthorised encampments.

2.2 Crime, disorder and policing

- Criminal activity by a minority of Travellers.
- A desire to re-establish community policing at particular problem locations.
- Possible discrimination in court, particularly in relation to bail.
- Desire for Traveller children to have good role models from their communities.
- Low levels of literacy noted amongst adult Travellers sentenced to community supervision.

2.3 Access to services and employment opportunities

- Educational attainment is still well below average for Traveller children at all stages.
- Retention into secondary education is considered to be a major problem.
- Traditional ways of making a living are now disappearing.
- Some social workers have experienced conflict in their contacts with Travellers.
- Travellers probably lack information about how to access welfare services.
- Low uptake of community health services but greater readiness to use hospitals.
- Need to share experience of working with Travellers with agencies which have less contact.

- There are no comprehensive mechanisms for consulting Travellers.

2.4 Availability of statistical information

- Most agencies have no ethnic monitoring of the use of services by Gypsy/Travellers.

3 SUMMARY OF TRAVELLERS AND SOCIAL POLICY

- Romany Gypsies are generally accepted to have descended from groups which migrated from northern India, although there has been mixing with the non-Gypsy population. Irish Travellers usually do not identify as Romany, and are often ascribed different origins within Ireland.

- Definitions of Gypsies and other Travellers based on ethnicity, culture, nomadism or socio-economic factors.

- There have been periods of both intolerance and relative tolerance towards Travellers.

- Accusations that Travellers fail to 'integrate' ignore this history of persecution.

- It is likely that crime is committed at a similar level to other groups in similar socio-economic circumstances: there is no empirical evidence suggesting otherwise.

- Although the introduction in 1968 of a duty to provide permanent sites for Travellers was well intentioned, it had the negative effect of creating welfare dependency amongst some.

- Increases in the ranks of caravan-dwellers by the 1980s, lead to unauthorised camping being seen as a public nuisance. The 1968 Act was repealed in 1994, and new powers to remove and criminalise unauthorised campers introduced. The intention to promote private provision was not backed by incentives to approve planning applications.

- An ethnic definition of Gypsies was articulated under the Race Relations Act. This established duties for Local Authorities to protect Gypsies from unlawful discrimination and promote good relations with the wider population.

4 SOME FIGURES ON TRAVELLERS IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE

4.1 Demographic information

- About 11,000 Travelling families are thought to live in England and Wales. At least 50% of the Gypsy-Traveller population may live in houses, and many families move in and out of housing.

- The number of Gypsy caravans in England and Wales has increased by more than 50% from 1979 to 1997. During the 1990s, the number of Gypsy caravans in Cambridgeshire increased by the same amount as the national average - around 11%.

- With around 850 caravans at any one time, Cambridgeshire has one of the largest caravan-dwelling Gypsy populations in England and Wales. In July 1997 Cambridgeshire had by far the largest number of caravans on authorised private sites (442) and one of the highest counts on local authority sites (303) compared with other counties, with far fewer on unauthorised encampments (103).

- South Cambridgeshire hosts the highest number of caravans in the county (32% in July 1997). South Cambridgeshire had the highest proportion of caravans on authorised private sites (48%). Peterborough and Fenland had the highest proportions on local authority sites (both 30%), and East Cambridgeshire had the largest share of unauthorised encampments (40%).

- In recent years, the highest rate of growth in caravans has been recorded in Fenland (50% increase from 1990 to 1997). South Cambridgeshire experienced the greatest shift in types of accommodation occupied during this time (from unauthorised encampments to authorised private sites), but only average growth for the county.

- The greatest concentration of private sites at present is in Willingham, Cottenham and the northern perimeter of Cambridge. There are also smaller family plots around Wisbech and scattered throughout East Cambridgeshire.

- Multiplying the number of Gypsy caravans included in official counts by the estimated number of occupants per caravan (roughly estimated at 3), gives an estimate of the caravan-dwelling Traveller population on any one day. In July 1997 the estimate would be 2,500.

- Nationally, it is estimated that about 50% of the Traveller population are housed at any one time. If this were true in Cambridgeshire, this could mean a population of around 5,000 people.

- Using only the estimated population figures for the Travellers population living in caravans, Travellers can be shown to be the biggest single ethnic minority group in Fenland, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire.

- Figures supplied by District Traveller Liaison Officers show the proportion of children under 17 living on official sites is about 38%. This compares with about 20% for the county as a whole.

- The majority of Travellers encountered by District officials in Cambridgeshire are traditional Travellers who would identify either as Irish Travellers or British Gypsies. Irish Travellers are encountered on unauthorised encampments more frequently than on official sites.

4.2 Socio-economic information

- Like other sections of the population, Travellers live in a variety of economic circumstances. Many Travellers operate successful businesses - some with European connections. Historically, agricultural workers have been the least well off group of Travellers.

- District officers report that tree lopping, tarmac, scrap dealing and agricultural work are the main sources of income for families encountered by them on unauthorised encampments. Social Security is the main source of income for families living on official sites, with the occupations mentioned above also taking place.

- There is generally no direct information about the relative social or economic disadvantage of Traveller groups. One exception is the Newbridge Lane site in Elm Parish, which occupied virtually the whole of an Enumeration District (ED) in the 1991 Census of Population. This ED had the highest rate of male unemployment in the county, and has been identified in a recent national analysis as the ninth most deprived in the country.

- This site, the Cambridge Road site at St Neots and Norwood Lane at Peterborough are all located within EDs which with high deprivation and disadvantage in a county context. The Burwell, Earith Bridge, Blackwell, Willingham and Whaddon sites are all located in areas which were not considered disadvantaged, with other sites in areas with moderate disadvantage.

4.3 Take-up of services

- The 1997/8 Report for the Team for Travellers Education in Cambridgeshire estimated that 65% of school-aged Traveller children were registered on a school roll - just above the English average of 61%.

- The proportions in secondary school are likely to be much lower than primary school. Figures compiled for the New Start programme showed that only about a quarter of 14 to 15 year olds are attending secondary school.

- Traveller pupils achieve below the level of all other groups in tested areas, particularly in formal reading tests but also including teacher-assessed subjects.

5 SUGGESTIONS FOR GOOD PRACTICE

5.1 Guiding principles

- A first step in creating a more positive relationship with travelling communities is to recognise their ethnic and/or cultural identities.
- Gypsies have been recognised in law as a group covered by the Race Relations Act. While Peterborough has a Race Equality Council, there is no obvious focus for race relations work in rural areas.
- Prejudice or pressure to conform to a majority way of life can create a vicious cycle, where aggressive responses from those experiencing these difficulties may come to justify even harsher treatment of them. Where Travellers are identified as a group by officials or the general public, they are often seen as a problem. A move away from this view (which emphasises enforcement and control), towards addressing the problems faced by Travellers (by helping Travellers to meet their own needs) may be the best way to break this vicious cycle. A model which attempts to represent this argument diagrammatically appears on the next page.
- The more that circumstances support and enable a Traveller way of life, the more justification one has for enforcing the law rigorously where necessary. There is not such a dichotomy between the 'control' and 'humanitarian' paradigms as might be assumed, as the latter may promote the development of self-regulation which reduces the need for external controls to be imposed.

5.2 Accommodation provision

- For those Travellers who are able to sustain a nomadic way of life, provision of short term stopping places and the encouragement of responsible use of them is the obvious priority.
- For Travellers who are willing and able to provide a home base for themselves (as encouraged by government policy) a planning system in which they have confidence may be the basis for improved co-operation in the future.
- As there are increasing management problems and reducing demand for some existing sites, any new provision should avoid the 'caravan estate' model.
- Management of existing sites might be enhanced by the adoption of some community development principles, and should be brought in line as far as possible with the service provided for housed tenants.
- Housing Associations have led the way in developing innovative approaches to housing provision and are beginning to apply these to the provision of accommodation for Travellers.

- Local planners could consider moving beyond the criteria-based policies which are being developed at present towards a more proactive approach. This might involve moving towards identifying land suitable for caravan sites.
- Volunteer-based support for Travellers who have moved into housing could greatly improve community relations.
- If volunteer schemes are to be established, they would need good links to housing providers and a sound training and support structure for volunteers.
- As in some other counties, housing benefit should be allowed to cover the rental of a caravan.

5.3 Equality in service delivery

- Clear recognition within equal opportunities policies of Travellers as a minority group has been the starting point for much positive work.
- In some cases, general training in equality of service provision may be necessary to help staff and to maximise the impact of specific awareness-raising about Travelling cultures and lifestyles.
- Ultimately, action 'on the ground' is necessary to ensure that equal opportunities for Travellers is not just a paper exercise.
- For agencies which provide non-threatening services but have little contact with Travellers, training and partnership working with specialist agencies may be the way to overcome barriers.
- For agencies whose role carries the greatest risk of conflictual contact, being proactive in promoting positive aspects of services may be the best strategy.
- Principles for site management could include:

the promotion of resident participation,
 access to general housing complaints systems,
 a possible role for the County Travellers Liaison Officer as a mediator
 between residents and site managers (at the request of either),
 a calculated balance between privacy and monitoring,
 articulation of information sharing agreements,
 consideration of more secure tenancies (or even the right to buy) for long-term
 residents after a probationary period on licence.

- Consideration should be given to making pitch allocation systems more explicit and open.

5.4 Co-ordination of services

- Better co-ordination of services has the potential to benefit all Travellers, including mobile Travellers passing through the county.
- Opportunities for communication with Travellers should be improved, these may need to take place outside the Traveller Liaison Group (TLGs) meetings.
- If a more strategic role is envisaged for TLGs, this might be better directed towards developing a problem-solving approach and working more clearly towards identified goals and action plans.
- If TLGs are to work effectively as fora for co-ordinating services, both the scope of the membership (in terms of agencies attending) and the continuity of individual members is important.
- Establishing the appropriate geographical area to be covered by a TLG also raises some difficulties. While the focus on local authority areas makes sense administratively, it does not always correspond to the dispersal of the Traveller community. In the West Midlands a consortium has been formed to meet the needs of Travellers moving through the area and crossing authority boundaries.
- The drawing up of a list which identifies the person or persons from each agency who is responsible for key services in each district.
- Voluntary groups which have a close working relationship with Travellers can play an important role in mediation and advocacy.
- As the key to improving the co-ordination of services on the ground, Traveller Liaison Groups, would benefit from more support.
- It has been suggested that new site management arrangements might lead to TLGs taking on a community development role. Although TLGs can clearly generate ideas for development, they do not currently have the skills or resources to conduct this work.
- If a more strategic role is envisaged for TLGs, this might be better directed towards encouraging a problem-solving approach and working more clearly towards identified goals.
- Throughout the research period TLGs have been considering their terms of reference. In view of the different organisational and personal perspectives discussed above, it might be helpful to conduct a simple review. The key points raised could be discussed in the groups, and brought to the attention of the Travellers Review Steering Group.

5.5 Promotion of economic and community development

- Community and economic development for Travellers fits clearly within the government's agenda on reducing social exclusion, although no specific funding or legislative framework seems to have resulted.
- Community development may be of particular benefit for those adopting a relatively settled lifestyle.
- Successful programmes have tended to begin with groups of Traveller women.
- There is clear evidence of interest in personal development at several locations.
- Successful programmes vary widely in terms of lead agencies.
- Each area seems to have identified literacy and vocational training as a starting point.
- The County's Community and Economic strategy could provide a supportive overall framework, particularly to assist with funding and in order to bring in an element of economic development.
- Confidential and voluntary reviews of benefit entitlements (not by site managers) may assist many families in setting up a more secure and legitimate benefits regime. There is anecdotal evidence that some families may not be accessing entitlements related to disability, and that some working families may be having trouble accessing discretionary benefits such as Family Credit, which could help support their efforts to remain independent.

5.6 Support for young people

- Practical support is needed if young Travellers are to have access to the dwindling employment opportunities of the 'non-Traveller world', while retaining or developing the secure identity which may once have been offered by the 'Traveller world'.
- Community Education, Traveller Education and schools have a clear role to play in supporting for young people
- There may therefore be an argument for a county-wide framework for providing services to young Travellers, based on (but not merely replicating) the work at Witchford Village College.
- Suggesting a countywide framework for Traveller youths is not to suggest that separate provision should necessarily follow, but that specific consideration is definitely warranted to try to find solutions to long-standing problems and disadvantages.

- The issue of drug use has not even been touched upon in this research, but is mentioned here to flag it as an emerging issue identified by some people working with young Travellers. (Some problems may also exist with mis-use of prescription drugs by adults.)

5.7 Consulting Travellers

- It has already been suggested that TLGs might be encouraged to invite Travellers (other than local authority employees) to selected meetings in order to obtain feedback on particular ideas.

- The development of residents' associations might be encouraged.

- Access to complaints or appeals procedures is another potential channel of communication.

- Providing community development or other field workers and advocates is another way of obtaining feedback from Travellers.

- Representatives of Traveller organisations are already invited to various fora, including the Cambridgeshire Travellers Review Steering Group, to broadly represent Travellers' views.

5.8 Funding and resources

- Although attention is often focused on external sources of funding, there are several avenues which could be explored within county budgets.

- There could be more exploration of possibilities to bid for special funds earmarked for Gypsy communities.

- Independent organisations may have a role in developing community-led work.

- There might even be an argument for trying to establish an earmarked central fund, along the lines of the Cambridge City Council's 'ethnic minority employment project', which provides funds to community-led groups.

5.9 Information needs

- Planning and policy development - and competition for funds - is increasingly information-driven. The gaps and inadequacies of the information data is available at present are apparent.

- In light of this many have called for ethnic monitoring within service providing and criminal justice agencies to include Travellers. However, any steps taken should be sensitive to the historical mis-use of information about Travellers, the relatively high levels monitoring some groups are already subjected to, and to the serious technical difficulties of identifying Traveller clients.

- This said, it should be achievable to establish reasonably accurate records of Travellers moving from caravans to housing, and of the outcomes of planning applications submitted by Travellers, which would greatly assist in a more planned approach to accommodation provision.
- Several national bodies, including the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health, have called for more meaningful DETR counts which enumerate people as well as caravans, include housed Travellers wherever possible, and ask about accommodation needs.
- The one-off district data collection exercise which was used to obtain some of the information for the Travellers in Cambridgeshire report could provide a starting point for considering what information might be worth collating on a regular basis.
- A multi-agency working party on management information might be established through the Travellers Review Steering Group to develop these ideas further.

6 OTHER REPORTS

The research component of the Cambridgeshire Travellers Review has been organised into a programme of sub-projects (SP1-SP6) as follows:

SP1. Identification of Key Issues (pp39 plus Appendices)

SP2. Travellers and Social Policy (pp30 plus Appendices)

SP3. Traveller Population Profile (pp 62 plus Appendices)

SP4. Location Studies (pp82 plus Appendices)

SP5. Suggestions for Good Practice (pp 80 report due to be completed by end of March 1999)

SP6. Overall Summary of Research Programme (pp 58 plus Appendices)