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# Cambridgeshire Travellers Review

## Research Report Number 5

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### Suggestions for Good Practice



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## **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.