



Cheshire & Warrington Traveller Team



# Gypsies and Travellers



## A Cultural Awareness Guide



IRISH COMMUNITY CARE MERSEYSIDE

Cheshire Gypsy and Travellers Voice

# Introduction

**“Great Britain is still like the American deep south for black people (was) in the 1950s. Discrimination against Gypsies & Irish Travellers appears to be the last ‘respectable’ form of racism.**

**“It is still considered acceptable to put up ‘No Traveller’ signs in pubs and shops and to make blatantly prejudiced remarks about Gypsies & Irish Travellers.”**

*Trevor Philips OBE,  
Head of the Equality and Human Rights Commission 2004*

Gypsies & Irish Travellers are amongst the most disadvantaged groups who access our services. There are cultural and language/literacy barriers and individuals need as much help and support as any others who access our services.

Equality, diversity and human rights are a critical area for Councils as we aim to secure the trust and confidence of all communities and build services which reflect the communities they serve.

## Key facts

- In 2006, 21% of Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans nationally were homeless, having no lawful place to park their caravan
- £18 million per year is spent on enforcement issues across the country
- Less than one square mile of land in the whole of England would be sufficient to provide pitches for all Gypsy and Traveller families who are currently homeless
- 42% of Gypsies and Travellers report limiting long term illness – compared to 18% of the settled population
- Average life expectancy is 10-12 years less than the settled population
- 18% of Gypsy and Traveller mothers have experienced the death of a child – compared to 1% in the settled population
- In 2004, 30% of Irish Traveller children and 13% of Gypsy children achieved 5 A-C Grades at GCSE – compared to 52% of the settled population
- 12% of Gypsy and Traveller sites are located close to rubbish tips
- 26% of Gypsy and Traveller sites are located close to major roads
- 4% of Gypsy and Traveller sites are located close to sewage farms

## Who are we talking about?

Gypsy and Traveller families are generally seen as being a similar group of nomadic people who reside in mobile caravans or trailers. Although Gypsies and Travellers share many aspects of their lifestyle and culture in common with others, there exist many different groups, each having their own distinct heritage and cultural identity. For simplicity's sake, travelling people in the UK can be said to belong to one of the following six main groupings:

- Romani Gypsies & Travellers of Anglo-Romany or of English, Irish, Scots or Welsh heritage
- Roma - a term that is generally acceptable in collectively describing all European Gypsies. There have been recent arrivals in the form of refugees and asylum seekers from Romania, the Czech Republic and Slovakia.
- Fairground or Travelling Show people
- Circus families
- Boat people (occupational boat dwellers)/Bargees
- New Age Travellers (NATS)

### **Ethnicity**

Roma, Romani Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Scottish Travellers are recognised as distinct ethnic minority groups for the purposes of the Equality Act 2010. The Public Sector Equality Duty established by the Equality Act 2010 means that those bodies subject to it (including the police and local authorities) must, in the exercise of their functions, have due regard to the 'general duty' to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not

### **Definitions (see Appendix 1)**

The definition was changed in August 2015 (Planning) and means that Gypsies and Travellers who have permanently stopped travelling – perhaps owing to old age or ill health – will no longer be covered by planning and housing policy. There is currently a court case being brought forward to challenge the changes.

Appendix 1 contains a table outlining the current definitions used in the Equality Act and planning/housing and also the previous definitions for Planning and Housing purposes.

Ethnic identity is not lost when members of those communities settle, but it continues and adapts to the new circumstances (it is estimated that 90% of these communities live in housing).

For the police the most important definition is that under the Equality Act 2010.

# Numbers

There is a lack of robust data on Gypsies & Irish Travellers and this is a major barrier to developing a good understanding of the needs of this group. Until now, Gypsies & Irish Travellers have not been included on the census but from 2011 they were included in the census as two separate ethnic groups.

The precise number of Gypsies & Irish Travellers within the UK is unknown. The Commission for Racial Equality (now replaced by Equality and Human Rights Commission) estimated that there were between 270,000 and 360,000 Gypsies & Irish Travellers in England living in bricks and mortar housing, this is around three times the numbers that maintain a nomadic lifestyle (CRE 2006).

In the 2011 census:

- It was the first time Gypsy or Irish Traveller was an available option to select
- 58,000 people identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller (0.1% of the usual resident population in England & Wales)
- Within Cheshire as a whole 633 identified as Gypsy or Irish Traveller

The twice yearly Caravan Count carried out by local authorities provided information regarding numbers of caravans and locations; the count in July 2019 showed:

- The total number of Gypsy and Traveller caravans in England in July 2019 was approximately 23, 125. This is 463 more than 22,662 in July 2018
- 6,638 caravans were socially rented sites. This is an increase of 57 since July 2018
- Overall, the count indicated that 87% were on authorised land and 13% on unauthorised land
- There were 82 encampments in Cheshire West in 2018(1st Jan-31st December 2018) and only 49 in 2019 (1st Jan – 30th Nov 2019)
- 18 of these on private land and a further 31 on council owned land

## A brief history (see Appendix 2)

The presence of Gypsies in Britain can be traced back to the 1500s. The first authenticated record in England was in 1514 and in Scotland in 1505. The term 'Gypsy' originates from 'little Egyptians' first used by Henry VIII. Within a few years of their arrival in England in the 1500s, they had become the focus of intense prejudice and discrimination.

This was embodied in a range of legislation, the harshest of which contained the death sentence for merely being a Gypsy – the Egyptian Law, introduced by Queen Mary 1; this made it a crime, punishable by death, to enter the country as a Gypsy. In York under this law, passed in 1554, Gypsy children were made to watch while their parents were hanged. Gypsy executions continued until the 1650s, when the last known hanging took place in Suffolk.

Following a relaxation of legislation against Gypsies, it wasn't until the 1780s when Gypsies were able to begin to integrate, if only marginally, back into society. They were recognised as an ethnic group in 1989.

Irish Travellers were first recorded in Britain in the 8th Century, long before the famines in the 18th Century. Irish Travellers in Britain and Ireland remain a highly marginalised group with a poor health profile and poor access to services. They also suffer as a result of the national shortage of sites, as many do not have secure or authorised places to live. Irish Travellers, sometimes referred to as 'Minceir' or 'Pavees', are a largely nomadic group from Ireland. They were recognised as an ethnic group in the UK in 2000.

## Traditions & Culture

There is no universal culture but there are attributes common to all, including: loyalty to family; standards and rules; and adapting to changing conditions such as the type of work carried out.

### Language

#### Romani/Roma Gypsies

Distinct language – Romani or Roma

Gypsies today speak fluent English; much of their language is derived from ancient Sanskrit originating in India.

Many words have been adopted into English:

"Chav" is derived from the Romani word 'chavies' meaning children (chav, child, chavi, girl, chavo, boy)

"lové" (pronounced lova) is a common Romani slang word for money.

"Kushdi" – immortalised by 'Delboy' Trotter

#### Irish Travellers

Shelta (also Known as Gammon, Sheldru, Pavee, or simply the Cant) is spoken by Irish Travellers



# Traditions & Culture continued

## Cleanliness

Referred to as Chickli (meaning dirty) or Mokhadi (meaning filthy) is a basic principle of daily life. Separate bowls are used for personal washing, food and clothes. Objects generally associated with being placed on the floor must never be placed on a table e.g. handbag (and vice versa). Toilets within caravans are thought to be unhygienic and are removed or not used.

## Family (very similar in both communities)

Gypsy culture holds 'traditional' views of male and female roles within the family – men go out to work and women look after the home and children. Weddings occur as young as 16 although this is slowly changing in some communities.

From the age of 12 it is common for boys to join their fathers working and girls to help their mothers

There are strict values around sex education, pregnancy and young women. There is a taboo of sex before marriage and again very traditional views, family are everything to the community and extended families are the support networks for care. There are strong rules about modesty and morals.

Faith and being with family at religious times is very important. Irish Travellers are generally Roman Catholic although many are becoming Born Again Christians.

## Education

Many families only send their children to school until the age of 12 when senior school starts; they are then home educated. Many Romani Gypsies & Irish Travellers experience illiteracy issues. Although more children are staying in school now because traditional ways are diminishing, but those that drop out of mainstream education do so for several reasons, either travel patterns, bullying, lack of cultural sensitivity i.e. sex education, non-representation of Gypsies & Irish Travellers in lessons

## Employment

Traditional crafts (metal work, household items and seasonal agriculture) have died out as a result of urbanisation and the introduction of plastic and industrial technology. Today work is mainly within the building trades and the selling of goods. Other traditional areas of work and income are scrap dealing, horse-trading and craftwork. Mainly ground work like driveways and general household building work, tree-logging, fascias and roofing, but some are starting to work for others now too due to fall in economy, laws and legislation putting a halt on cold calling and trading standards targeting traders and commercial ventures.

## Death

There are a number of important customs relating to the death of a Traveller. Many families will sit with the dead before the funeral to show respect. These are personal to families and involve the disposal of most goods owned by the deceased. For example, if they lived in a caravan, the caravan may be burnt, but due to many Gypsies & Irish Travellers living below the breadline this doesn't happen very often now as a trailer is a very expensive commodity. If they live in a house, the family may want to move immediately. Need to understand the impact of a woman losing a husband also (as they are usually the main bread winner) and the impact this may have on her ability to support herself on a site so may be forced in to housing affecting mental well-being. For many Irish Travellers after the death of a family member the women will wear only black for 1 year & the grave will be visited regularly by all the immediate family.

## Other traditions

Animals and livestock are an important part of life – horse-trading and horse fairs are still an important custom today (Appleby Horse fair picture on front cover supplied by D. Taylor – Cheshire and Warrington Traveller Team Manager)

## Conventional housing

The majority of Gypsies & Irish Travellers would prefer to live on sites and many have a cultural aversion to conventional bricks and mortar accommodation. The communities tend to move into housing for a number of reasons:

- A shortage of good quality pitches on authorised sites both public and private
- The caravan no longer meets their health needs, disability issues or reduced mobility due to age
- For easier access to health, education and support services
- Due to domestic violence or harassment
- Personal choice

“I haven't really adjusted to it (living in a house). I lived on a site for 15 years but feel isolated now. I spend a lot of time back on the site and where my eldest son lives”

*Quoted in Good Practice Guide: Working with Gypsies & Travellers, Shelter 2008*

“Some people say we are not proper Travellers, just because we live in a house. Don't they understand it's in your blood....you're born that way.”

*Quoted by Children's voices: Changing Futures, Ormiston Children and Family Trust 2006*

# Appendix 1 - Definitions

Defining Gypsies & Irish Travellers is not straightforward. Different definitions have been used for different purposes based, for example, on ethnicity, lifestyle and self-ascription. Prior to 31st August 2015 there were 3 definitions. Below are the definitions used for the Equality Act, Planning and Housing purposes. Defining a person as a Gypsy, Roma or Traveller is a matter of self-ascription and does not exclude those living in housing although, in planning terms, it does if they no longer travel for work purposes. Ethnic identity is not lost when members of those communities settle, but it continues and adapts to the new circumstances (it is estimated that 90% of these communities live in housing).

## **Policy area**      **Equality Act**

**Definition**      Gypsies & Irish Travellers are established by case law as ‘ethnic groups’ and duties of public bodies thus apply. Only Anglo Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Scottish Travellers legally recognised as an ethnic race, other ethnic groups taken into recognition.

**Comments**      Omits New Travellers and Showmen. An ethnic definition would include Roma – the term usually applied to European ‘Gypsy’ groups who may come to UK as migrant workers or asylum seekers / refugees. While not specifically tested by case law, an ethnic definition would also, presumably include Welsh Gypsies and Scottish Gypsy Travellers since the term ‘Gypsy’ is not prefixed by ‘English’ or any other indication of origin.

## **Policy area**      **Planning 31st August 2015**

**Definition**      Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds of their own or their family’s or dependants’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such. (ODPM Circular 01/2006, para 15)

## **Policy area**      **Planning**

**Previous definition**      Persons of nomadic habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds of their own or their family’s or dependants’ educational or health needs or old age have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, but excluding members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people travelling together as such. (ODPM Circular 01/2006, para 15)

**Comments**      A ‘lifestyle’ definition, similar to that in use prior to 2006, but allowing people to ‘retire’ from travelling or to otherwise stop travelling for specific purposes without losing their Gypsy & Irish Traveller status. Likely to include many Gypsies & Irish Travellers, and New Age Travellers (certainly while actively travelling). It specifically excludes Showmen as group. Probably excludes most Roma as they have followed a sedentary lifestyle for generations.

(NAT are an ‘aspirational’ group which should not be confused with Gypsies & Irish Travellers which have their own distinct cultural and ethnic identity which could also include members of the communities working as show people or circus people who may also identify their ethnicity as Gypsy or Traveller)

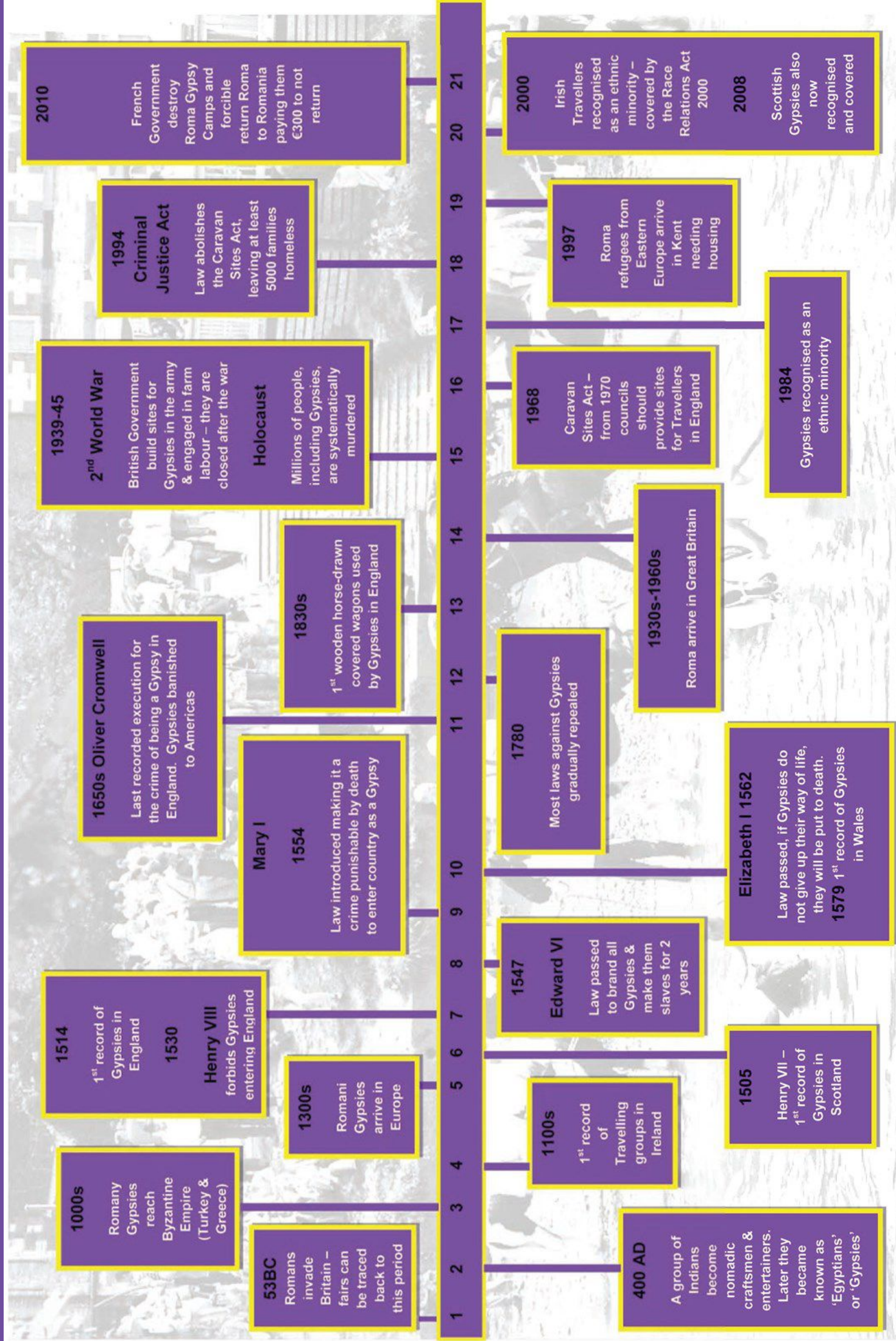
## **Policy area**      **Housing**

**Definition**      (a) persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a caravan; and,  
  
(b) all other persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin, including:  
  
such persons who, on ground only of their own or their family’s or dependant’s educational or health needs or old age, have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and  
  
members of an organised group travelling Showpeople or circus people (whether or not travelling together as such)

**Comments**      This is a wider ‘lifestyle’ definition referring to a ‘cultural tradition’ of nomadism, and to ‘caravan dwelling’ as a distinct concept. The definition could be amended or, if it stands, could be challenged in the courts on its more intangible aspects. It seems likely to include Gypsies & Irish Travellers, New Travellers and Showmen, and could include Roma depending on how ‘cultural traditions of nomadism’ are interpreted. The Draft Practice Guidance on Gypsy & Irish Traveller Accommodation Assessments is silent on (European) Roma and their inclusion/exclusion



# Appendix 2—Gypsy and Traveller timeline



## Appendix 3 - Terminology

(Taken from the Cheshire Partnership Area Gypsy & Irish Traveller Accommodation and Related Services Assessment May 2007)

Term	Explanation
Amenity block/shed	On most residential Gypsy/Travellers sites these are building where basic plumbing amenities (bath/shower, WC and sink) are provided at the rate of one building per pitch
Authorised Private site	An authorised site owned by a private individual (who may or may not be a Gypsy or a Traveller)
Bricks and mortar	Permanent mainstream housing
Caravan/Trailer	Mobile living vehicle used by Gypsies and Travellers. Also referred to as trailers
Chalet	In the absence of a specific definition the term 'chalet' is used here to refer to single storey residential units which resemble mobile homes but which are not legally 'caravans' as they are usually brick based and not mobile.
Doubling-up	To share a pitch on an authorised site
Gypsy	Members of Gypsy or Traveller communities. Usually used to describe Romany (English) Gypsies originating from India. This term is not acceptable to all Travellers, who have moved away from being called Gypsy due to perceived links with Egypt and identified themselves as 'Travellers'. When New Age Travellers took to the roads, 'Travellers' did not want to be associated with this group so reverted back to being called Gypsy or in the UK English or Anglo Gypsy. Some may even use the term Roma/Romani Gypsy to denote their ancestry.
Gypsies and Travellers	Consistent with the Housing Act 2004, inclusive of: all Gypsies, Irish Travellers, Show People, Circus People, Bargees, Roma and Gypsies and Travellers in bricks and mortar accommodation.
Gaujo/Gorger	Romany word used mainly, but not exclusively, by Romany Gypsies to refer to members of the settled community/non-Travellers
Country Folk	Some Irish Travellers' term for people from the settled community.
Settled community/ people	Reference to non-travellers (those that live in houses)
Mobile home	Legally classified as a caravan but not usually moveable without dismantling/ or lorry
Pitch/plot/slab	Area of land on a site/development generally home to one licensee household. Can be varying sizes and have varying caravan occupancy levels. There is no agreed definition as to the size of a pitch. Often also referred to as a plot
Pulling-up	To park a trailer/caravan
Site	An authorised area of land on which Gypsies and Travellers are accommodated in trailers/chalets/ vehicles
Stopping place	Locations frequented by Gypsies and Travellers, usually for short periods of time
Trailer	Term commonly used by Gypsies and Travellers to refer to a moveable caravan
Transit site	Site intended for short stays. Such sites are usually permanent, but there is a limit on the length of time residents can stay.
Travelling Showpeople	Commonly referred to as Showmen, these are a group of occupational Travellers who work on Travelling Shows and fairs across the UK and abroad
Unauthorised Development	This refers to a caravan/trailer or group of caravans/trailers on land owned (possibly developed) by Gypsies and Travellers without planning permission
Unauthorised Encampment	Stopping on private/public land without permission (e.g. at the side of the road)



# Appendix 4 - Gypsy & Traveller

## Myth Buster

### Who are Romani Gypsies?

This group includes English, Welsh and Scottish Gypsies and European Roma. Romani Gypsies have the longest known history of the Traveller communities, with their roots being traced back to Northern India over 1,000 years ago. Their language is known as Romany/Rom a universal language, which has different dialects and slang terms but one which is understood by all Gypsies whatever their country of origin.

### Who are Irish Travellers?

The first Irish Travellers were recorded in the 8th Century as travelling metal workers and menders of household utensils. Their language is called Cant or Gammon. They are mainly of Catholic faith and prefer to send their children to Catholic schools. Gypsies have a shared culture, language and belief system, as do Irish Travellers; both groups may be referred to as Travellers. They are recognised as ethnic minority groups under race relations legislation. Additionally all public sector organisations have a positive duty under the law to eliminate racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity, which includes Gypsies & Irish Travellers.

### Do all Gypsies & Irish Travellers travel?

The planning system defines Gypsies & Irish Travellers as people with a travelling way of life. Whilst this is historically true, 90% of Gypsies & Irish Travellers around the world now live in houses. When Gypsies & Irish Travellers live in houses their culture and heritage stays with them, you do not have to travel to be part of these ethnic groups. Some groups are highly mobile, moving on when work opportunities have been exhausted and others live permanently in one area or only travel for a few weeks or months of the year. Most Gypsy & Irish Traveller families live within close-knit communities, whether in housing or on caravan sites, with strong family and social networks. Gypsies & Irish Travellers now use modern, good quality vehicles and caravans. The main reasons for travelling are to work, to follow fairs and visit family.

### I thought the whole point of being a Gypsy or an Irish Traveller was that you travel - Why do they need permanent sites?

Although Gypsies & Irish Travellers travel for some of the year, during the winter months most people need a place to stop. It also gives them an address affording access to services. Travelling patterns are linked to the seasons and the work associated with the seasons. Gypsies & Irish Travellers do not travel on a daily basis, all year round. Families require safe and secure places from which to do their travelling. The 'base' site (if they have one) will usually be where they access GPs, schools and a dentist. As Gypsies & Irish Travellers grow older and become less able to travel on a regular basis, some require a safe and secure stopping place where they can maintain the cultural traditions of being a Gypsy or Traveller. Gypsies & Irish Travellers also sometimes stop travelling for periods of time to care for sick or elderly relatives or to continue a child's education within a supportive school environment. Families will then take up the travelling way of life again following these critical events.

### Why do Gypsies & Irish Travellers stop on the side of the road?

There are not enough authorised places for them to stop; they may be attending a family wedding or funeral in the area, or they are travelling through to one of the many Horse Fairs and need to stop. These are called unauthorised encampments. The Government defines them as "encampments of caravans and / or other vehicles on land without the landowner or occupier's consent"; trespass is a civil rather than criminal offence. Nationally, 21% of all Gypsies & Irish Travellers living in caravans are homeless; this means they have nowhere legally to park their caravan. One solution to this would be to

provide permanent and transit sites (Sites intended for short stays. Such sites are usually permanent but there is a limit on the length of time residents can stay).

### Why does the council have to make provision for Gypsy & Irish Traveller sites?

Local authorities have a responsibility to undertake housing needs assessments for the settled population to identify their accommodation needs. These needs are fed into the Local Planning Framework and the Council will address the housing need by providing different types of accommodation, for example flats, houses or perhaps sheltered housing. This is now the same for Gypsy & Irish Traveller accommodation, which is just another form of provision that takes into account people's different ways of life. The legal requirement in the Housing Act 2004 is for all local authorities to complete a Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA), which identifies pitch requirements. Councils are expected to identify sufficient land, including making specific site allocations, to meet the need through their Local Development Frameworks (LDFs). If a Council does not identify and release sufficient land for Gypsy & Irish Traveller pitches, there may be an increase in the number of unauthorised developments. An unauthorised development is when Gypsies or Travellers buy land and develop their own site without planning permission. Often planning permission is then applied for retrospectively and even where councils refuse these developments they can be allowed through the appeal process. A key consideration in deciding planning applications and appeals will be whether there are sufficient sites and pitches in the area. Our GTAA (completed in 2007) says that 31-45 additional permanent pitches are required within Cheshire West and Chester between 2007 and 2016. In addition, the GTAA says that a further 10 transit pitches are required in this period.

### Who is going to pay?

Public provision – in recognition of the importance of the need to provide sites, the new coalition government is looking at introducing incentives for authorities who build new sites (or grant planning permission on sites). Private provision – land would be identified in Local Development Plans and could be purchased by individuals to meet their family needs or self manage but not all Gypsies & Irish Travellers can afford to buy and develop their own land.

### Do Gypsies & Irish Travellers pay taxes and rent?

All Gypsies & Irish Travellers living on local authority or privately owned sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity, and all other charges measured in the same way as for houses. Those living on unauthorised encampments, generally speaking, do not pay council tax but they also do not generally receive services. There are occasions when basic services, such as a toilet or a wheelie bin, are provided and the Gypsies & Irish Travellers might make payment for this service direct to the appropriate local authority. Many who live on sites and are self-employed are also now part of the formal economy and complete tax returns, pay vat and national insurance. All residents within the UK pay tax on their purchases, petrol and road tax as do Gypsies & Travellers.

### Will having Gypsy sites nearby increase crime levels?

There is no evidence anywhere to suggest that this is the case. Crimes are committed by individuals not communities. There is no evidence at all that there is a disproportionate number of offenders within Gypsy and Traveller communities as opposed to any other communities. The police service has learned from past experience that it is wrong to create stereotypes that link particular crimes with ethnic or social groups. In Cheshire, neighbourhood policing and the establishment of Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Officers has helped build greater trust. Many Travellers return to the same sites year after year and do get to know local officers and local people. There are far fewer unauthorised encampment issues across the county than five or ten years ago. (Cheshire Constabulary 2011)

# Bibliography

Addressing Gypsy and Traveller accommodation Needs – a Position Statement November 2009 – Cheshire West and Chester Borough Council

Good practice guide: Working with housed Gypsies and Travellers – Shelter February 2008

Gypsy and Traveller Culture – Briefing Note Number 17 – Plymouth City Council Social Inclusion Unit

Gypsies and Travellers; Simple Solutions for living together – Equality and Human Rights Commission 2009

## The Cheshire and Warrington Traveller Team (CWTT)

The team is hosted by Cheshire West and Chester Council and manage:

the Council's two sites in Ellesmere Port and Winsford which provide homes for 30 families

Unauthorised Encampments on behalf of Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, and Warrington Borough Councils. There was a total of 219 in 2018 and 49 in 2019 (1 January – 30 November)

## What can I do?

- Challenge negative stereotypes and promote positive images of the communities in line with our Public Sector Equality Duty
- Gypsy, Irish and Scottish Travellers are recognised ethnic minorities and as such need to be spelt with a capital letter
- Report any encampments to CWTT

If you have any queries please contact CWTT on

0300 123 7727

[GypsyandTravellersenquiries@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk](mailto:GypsyandTravellersenquiries@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk)



### Cheshire & Warrington Traveller Team

