



Briefing Note Number: 11

October 2006

Gypsies and Travellers



Myth Buster

For review: April 2007


Post this date contact Social Inclusion Unit x 4321

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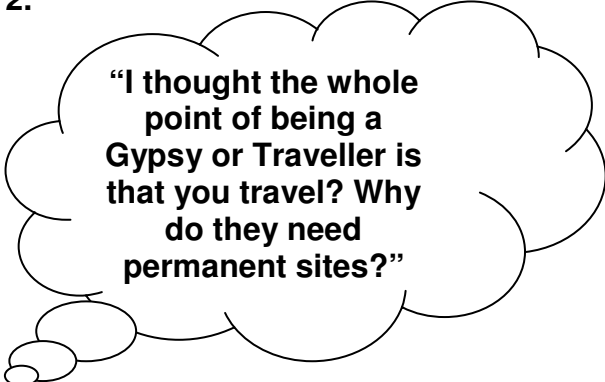


Do all Gypsies and Travellers travel?

Not all...

- ✓ Planning law defines Gypsies and Irish Travellers as people with a travelling way of life. Whilst this is historically true, 90% of Gypsies and Travellers around the world now live in houses.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ When Gypsies and Travellers live in houses their culture and heritage stays with them.
- ✓ Most Gypsy and Traveller families live within close-knit communities, whether in housing or on caravan sites, with strong family and social networks.
- ✓ Gypsies and Travellers now use modern, good quality vehicles and caravans.
- ✓ The main reason for travelling is to work, to follow fairs and visit family.

2.

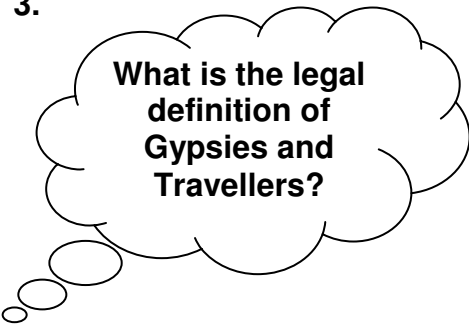


“I thought the whole point of being a Gypsy or Traveller is that you travel? Why do they need permanent sites?”

Although Gypsies and Travellers travel for some of the year, during the winter months most people need a place to stop...

- ✓ Travelling patterns are linked to the seasons and the work associated with the seasons. Gypsies and 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 GP’s, schools and a dentist.
- ✓ As Gypsies and 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 and 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.

3.



What is the legal definition of Gypsies and Travellers?

- ✓ There are lots of definitions for Gypsies and Travellers depending on whether you are interested for the purposes of planning or race relations’ law. The most general definition is:
- ✓ ‘persons of a **nomadic** habit of life whatever their race or origin, including such persons who on grounds only of their own or their families’ 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’.

4.



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, and are a recognised ethnic minority group, with protection under race equality law (The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000). This law means that all Local Authorities must promote the racial equality of Gypsies and Travellers and also get rid of discrimination against them.

✓ Romani Gypsies' ethnic roots lay in Northern India, where nomadic groups first started moving towards Europe around 1, 000 years ago. Much of their language is derived from the Indian language of Sanskrit and the modern day Romani Gypsies use a combination of Sanskrit and English in their conversations with each other today.

5.




Who are Irish Travellers?

✓ The first Irish Travellers were recorded in the 15th century as travelling metal workers and tinkers¹

✓ They are mainly of Catholic faith, and prefer to send their children to Catholic schools.

✓ Gypsies and Irish Travellers are identified as having a shared culture, language and beliefs.

6.



Who are Fairground workers or Show people?

✓ Fairground families often call themselves Showmen. They are a cultural minority with a long history of providing travelling entertainment and rides at local Markets and festivals. Plymouth hosts around 6 fairs each year at the Hoe and Central Park.

✓ Showmen families have a busy calendar between April and October and have a system for ensuring that everything runs smoothly at each location. A family or group of individuals will be responsible for arriving at the next location early (an 'advanced party') to ensure that everything is ok and the site is clear to begin setting up when the machinery arrives.

7.



Who are Circus Families?

✓ Circus families have a long history as travelling entertainers. The service they provide is wanted and towns and cities prepare for their arrival and make space available, like Showmen, these families send an 'advanced party' to prepare the area. Most circus children successfully access school, even when highly mobile.

8.



Who are New Travellers?

✓ This is the youngest group, with roots in the 20th century. Many of the adults have grown up in mainstream society, and are aware of their entitlements to education, health and other services.

✓ This group are also referred to as *New Age Travellers*, however, this term is generally viewed as derogatory and patronising to New Travellers who see themselves and modern people rather than as the 60's stereotype of 'Hippies'.

✓ However, there are now second and third generation New Traveller children. All families and groups are very different with little similarity in accommodation, mobility, work or faith trends.

¹ Definition: a travelling mender of metal household utensils.

9.



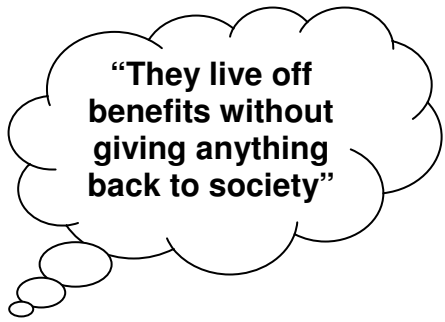
“Gypsies and Travellers never work!”

Yes, they do...

- ✓ Traditional forms of work include seasonal agricultural labour, peddling², basket making, and horse dealing. Working practices have now evolved in response to the needs of modern society to include landscaping, gardening, tarmac-ing, motor trading, scrap metal dealing and tree felling.

- ✓ It is also common for Gypsies and Travellers to be employed as teachers, academics and public sector workers, as well as in the entertainment industry.
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10.



“They live off benefits without giving anything back to society”

A very small number of Gypsies and Travellers receive benefits...

- ✓ Many Gypsy and Traveller families, who spend the majority of their time travelling from one eviction to the next, find it difficult to access the correct level of benefit support (if any) without a fixed address.
 - ✓ Show people and fairground workers provide a valuable service to local communities in times of celebration. We rely upon them to supply safe entertainment for us all to enjoy.
 - ✓ Many Gypsies and Travellers work on the roads and on building sites through contracts with local authorities.
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11.



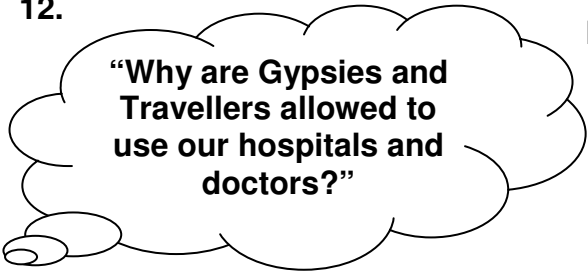
“Gypsies and Travellers don't pay taxes”

Yes they do...

- ✓ All Gypsies and Travellers living on a local authority or privately owned sites pay council tax, rent, gas, electricity, and all other charges measured in the same way as other houses.

- ✓ Those living on unauthorised encampments, generally speaking, do not pay council tax rates, 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 and Travellers might make payment for this service direct to the appropriate local authority.
 - ✓ All residents within the UK pay tax on their purchases and petrol.
 - ✓ All Gypsies and Travellers are charged VAT on everything that they buy.
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12.



“Why are Gypsies and Travellers allowed to use our hospitals and doctors?”

Because everyone is entitled to our health service...

- ✓ Whether people are travelling or not we all have the right to receive health care through a GP, health visitor, hospital or dentist.

² Definition: the act of selling goods for a living

13.



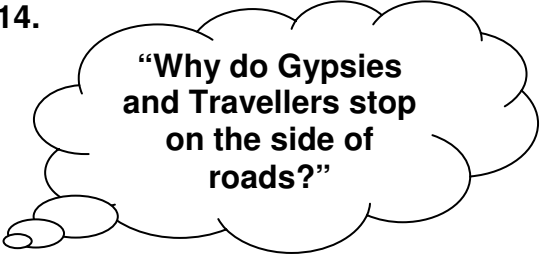
“Gypsies and Travellers don't have to send their children to school”

Yes they do...

- ✓ Gypsy and Traveller children have a legal right to be educated along with all other children.
- ✓ Parents have the same legal obligations to educate their children as others do.

- ✓ Families will be visited by the Traveller Education Service who will work in partnership with the families and local schools to place children in a school nearby.

14.



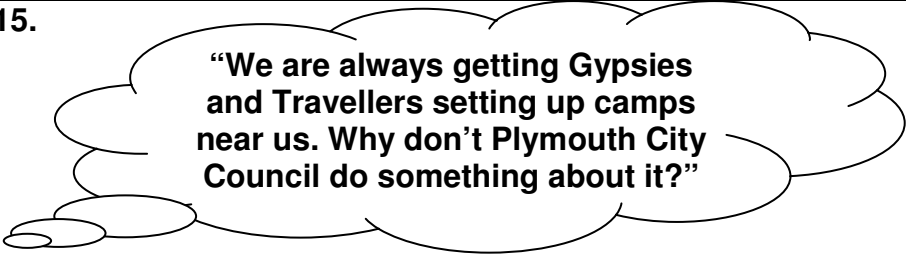
“Why do Gypsies and Travellers stop on the side of roads?”

There are not enough authorised places for them to stop; they are attending a family wedding or funeral in the area, they are travelling through the area and need to stop...

- ✓ These are called unauthorised encampments (ue's). The Government defines them as "encampments of caravans and/or other vehicles on land without the landowner or occupier's consent".

- ✓ UE's fall into two main categories: those on land owned by local authorities (highways, schools, public parks and car-parks etc) and those on privately owned land (some industrial estates or businesses).

15.



“We are always getting Gypsies and Travellers setting up camps near us. Why don't Plymouth City Council do something about it?”

Between January and September 2006 Plymouth has experienced 18 ue's.

Every Local Authority has a responsibility to manage ue's.

When one occurs on land owned by Plymouth City Council we will carry out the following set of procedures:

- ✓ Visit the site as soon as possible (usually within 48 hours).
- ✓ Checks will be made on the tidiness of the site, any impact on local residents/businesses and an assessment of any obstruction of highways or public rights of way.
- ✓ As a legal requirement we also take into account whether there are any health or welfare needs. If circumstances allow ue's may be tolerated for a short time.
- ✓ If problems occur, then officers will advise the encampment to be moved on sooner.
- ✓ If the decision is taken that the ue will not be permitted to stay, we will try to negotiate a mutually acceptable deadline for the unauthorised campers to move by.
- ✓ If that fails, there are powers that every local authority can use to officially evict the ue. This decision is subject to the Human rights and Race Relations Act, and all decisions made by the local authority in relation to the ue can be challenged in Court if people feel the decision is disproportionate.
- ✓ Any attempt to move a ue without following relevant procedures may seem quicker, but it could lead to lengthy court actions, considerable cost to the general public.

For further information please contact the Social Inclusion Unit.

Tel 01752 304321 or inclusion@plymouth.gov.uk