

Report of: Gareth Self, Gypsy Traveller Service Refugee Resettlement Manager

Report to: Outer North East Community Committee
(Harewood, Alwoodley, Wetherby)

Report author: Gareth Self, Gypsy Traveller Service / Refugee Resettlement Manager

Date: 11th December 2023

To note

Title: Gypsy Traveller Service

Purpose Of Report

1. To provide the Outer North Community Committee with an update on the work of the Gypsy Traveller Service

Main Issues

2. To provide the Outer North Community Committee with an update on encampments within the area, any preventative measures explored and further discussion points.

Recommendations

3. Elected Members are asked to note the contents of the report and discuss if their ward has any suitable locations that could potentially be used as stopping sites.

Background

4. Travellers Service Team forms part of the Communities, Housing and Environment Directorate and performs three core roles within the Leeds city boundaries.
 - To manage the Leeds City Council permanent caravan sites, Cottingley Springs and Kidacre Park.
 - To respond to unauthorised encampments city wide.
 - Liaise with and build links between the Gypsy and Traveller community and the wider community in Leeds, ensuring access to services is maximised.
5. In Leeds we see approximately 100 roadside encampments each year. This year Leeds has seen an increase and estimate 120+ by the end of March 2024. The majority

of encampments occur in the East and South of the City, we have seen a sharp increase recently in the North. The newly created East Leeds Orbital Road has been encamped on by smaller groups of Travellers.

- Leeds has a negotiated stopping policy whereby it will consider suitability for encampments to remain for a period of up to 28 days in situ or be moved to an alternate site in a managed and cooperative way. This has been successful in part but more recently sites are not suitable for negotiation due to their location. The cost to the Local Authority is approximately £230k - £250k. This figure incorporates legal fees, bailiff costs, cleaning and securing of sites.

Overview of Roadside Encampment Process

- New encampments reported are visited normally the same day or within 24 hours.
- Site visits takes place with the Traveller team and West Yorkshire Police to assess the encampments and carry out welfare checks.
- Legal process commences and as part of this it is considered whether negotiation is possible or to evict through the court process. Alongside this we may request the use of Police Powers commonly known as a section 61.
- Sites are visited frequently, and where practicable portable toilets and household waste management arranged.
- Site continue to be monitored by the Traveller team and a police log is set up to log incoming calls.
- Families tend to move of own accord or court order granted and group will leave the site. It is then secured where possible and cleaned. Families will normally relocate to a new site.

Encampments in Outer North Area over the last 3 years

Year	Total Encampments in Leeds	% Encampments Outer North East Area	Average Days + Cost
2021	109	2%	12 days - £6,807
2022	93	3%	15 days - £3,294
2023 to date	81	9%	3 days - £111 (short stays, S61 used once, no legal costs)

- The last three years have seen a shift in the location of encampments. Development and target hardening of once regular sites has created a decrease in the number of locations available. In the Outer North East area we have seen more frequent encampments at Wetherby Leisure Centre, The Ings and the Wilderness Car Park. There has been an increase in encampments in neighboring wards we believe due to

the popularity of the ELOR. Over the last 2 years we have seen 24 encampments in Cross gates & Whinmoor Ward with 12 of these on or close to the ELOR.

14. An update regarding land adjacent to the ELOR has been provided by James Gray, Principal Engineer:

- Numerous measures have been installed to deter illegal camping and fly-tipping. In particular, these include installation of concrete and steel bollards along with large stone boulders. Demountable bollards have been installed where vehicular access needs to be maintained for mowing etc. Unfortunately, criminals (who are equipped with industrial equipment) have vandalized some of these items. The maintenance teams are working hard to replace these items as swiftly as possible.
- Many incremental adjustments have been made to the road signs and roadmaking's etc. Further adjustments are due on site over the coming weeks. On request of the police, a number bays have been installed to facilitate the use of mobile speed cameras.

15. We have two main groups consisting of 1 and 5 caravans travelling within the city.

16. The pattern is that generally larger groups pass through the city during the spring/summer months as has been the situation to date.

What makes for a suitable Negotiated Stopping Site

- Suitable surfacing – hardstanding preferable although grass good for summer months.
- Good boundary with safe access
- Size – suitable for 5-12 caravans max
- Close to amenities – shops, GP/Hospital, schools
- Local area – not impacting on residential communities
- Amenities – ability to supply toilets and household waste removal

Points for further consideration

- To consider whether there are any available stopping locations
- Whether ward members in conjunction with Leeds GATE, LCC officers and members of the roadside community would wish to speak about future locations