

June 2009

Key finding

Ensuring the provision of sufficient sites for Gypsies and Travellers would produce a significant financial benefit to local authorities.

Summary

- Failure to provide sites costs money.
- The provision of sites breaks even or generates a surplus, particularly once council tax receipts are included.
- Local authorities in Leicestershire currently spend at least £200,000 per year dealing with unauthorised sites. This figure is likely to be a significant underestimate and the actual amount could be many times higher. Only local authority spending is included in this analysis; overall public expenditure is even greater.
- Local authority-run authorised sites in the county cover costs or generate small surpluses.
- Better recording of information would help local authorities to deliver value for money and meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

Background

In 2007 BSHF co-ordinated a Consultation at Windsor Castle on the provision of accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers with a wide range of stakeholders. The findings of this Consultation and recommendations for action were published as *Out in the Open: Providing accommodation, promoting understanding and recognising rights of Gypsies and Travellers*.

Recommendation eight outlined the need for more research to "identify the comparative costs of new site provision and enforcement action on unauthorised sites".

This study sought to provide new information on this issue by collecting information from every local authority in Leicestershire using Freedom of Information requests.

Only costs to local authorities were investigated; associated costs to public expenditure, including police, education and healthcare are not included. Also excluded are the financial and human costs to Gypsies and Travellers and other members of the community.

Local authority and privately-run sites in the county already generate council tax receipts for the authorities of up to £125,000 per year.

The local Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs Assessment and East Midlands Regional Plan have identified the amount of site provision required.

Both the quantity and quality of data provided by local authorities varied significantly. Better recording of information about the costs incurred by local authorities in dealing with unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites would improve local authorities' abilities to ensure they are delivering value for money. This should be combined with transparent reporting of progress made by local authorities in delivering the site provision identified in the Regional Plan.

More information

The full report describes the method adopted in this research, including highlighting the areas in which the figures obtained are likely to be under-estimates.

Previous research and the experiences of other authorities around the country support the conclusions identified in Leicestershire.

Previous research suggests local authorities spend significant amounts of money responding to unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites. It was estimated that a minimum of £9m had been spent on dealing with unauthorised sites in the UK during a single year.

The experience of Bristol County Council suggests that it is possible to massively reduce this expenditure through the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites. This local authority estimated that it was spending £200,000 to £350,000 per year on dealing with unauthorised sites in the mid-1990s. Provision of authorised sites has removed this cost and these sites now generate income for the local authority.

This short paper presents the key findings from a longer report which can be downloaded for free from the publications section of the BSHF website: www.bshf.org.

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