

**Wiltshire Council**

**Environment Select Committee**

**6 November 2018**

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**Methodology - Understanding the Size of Gypsy and Traveller Populations in Wiltshire**

*Following a request from the Environment Select Committee at their 4 September 2018 meeting, this paper has been drafted – to help the Committee better understand the methodology for how the Gypsy and Traveller population is accounted for in Wiltshire.*

**Overview of Gypsy and Travellers in Wiltshire**

1. The precise number of Travellers in England and Wiltshire is unclear. The latest ONS analysis released in 2014 using 2011 Census data recorded 757 people in Wiltshire who identified themselves as being of Romany Gypsy or Irish traveller ethnicity which accounted for 0.2% of our population. The national average suggests that 0.1% of the population identify themselves as Gypsy or Irish Traveller.
2. According to the latest Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) for Wiltshire, in 2014, there were 200 traveller families on permitted and tolerated traveller sites in the county, totalling 634 people. The majority of families (171) were gypsies and travellers. There were 29 showpeople families on 4 sites.
3. The Kennet & Avon Canal is covered by six Area Boards and in partnership with Canal & River Trust. Data from Canal & River Trust regarding the Kennet & Avon Canal showed that between April 2015 and March 2016 there were 779 boats that were registered as continuous cruiser sighted between Dundas (KA-112) and Froxfield (KA-048) - the section of the canal that runs through Wiltshire. Of the 779 boats sighted during the year, 601 had also been sighted elsewhere on the canal. During the March National Boat Count this year 410 boats registered as continuous cruisers were sighted in the same area. It is further recognised that an unspecified number of boats which have permanent moorings are used residentially.

**2011 Census**

4. The national census is a snapshot survey that is considered an accepted means of complete population data. This allows us to make comparisons, influence resource allocation, allow for trend analysis and is often used as denominator data for health and other population statistics. Completion of the census is compulsory (under the Census Act). The ONS is responsible for the collection and dissemination of findings in England and Wales. The 2011 census was completed using a postal survey.

5. Census data does not go without its limitations. The census often under-enumerates certain groups including Gypsies and Travellers. The census takes place every 10 years so the data is often out of date by the time it is released. The census relies on self-reported data, meaning the accuracy of census information is difficult to assess especially given concerns around adult literacy issues in Traveller populations. Local based population data is often easier and cheaper to obtain, is more accurate and can be more up to date.
6. Ethnicity is essentially self-defined and may change over time. Classification of ethnicity is essentially based on categories that include common self-descriptions which are acceptable to respondents and seeks to identify variations that are important for research or policy. In the 2011 census, it was the first time Gypsy/Traveller appeared as a separate ethnicity option on the census form so that any meaningful comparisons with 2001 are not possible, figures suggest that previously this group largely self-recorded as "Irish" or other.
7. It has been claimed that the 2011 Census has been the most accurate census ever undertaken. Wiltshire recorded one of the highest return rates. Coverage among more hard-to-reach groups was carefully built into planning. At the time of the census it is not believed that the accuracy and completeness of returns given by our minority ethnic population were a cause for concern, although now we feel there are some issues regarding the accuracy of data relating to our Traveller communities.
8. Not all travellers in Wiltshire today would have been in the County when the census was undertaken and there is uncertainty around the accuracy of this data, given the transient nature of these populations. It must also be noted that only Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers have ethnicity status, so other travellers (boaters, showpeople, new age) would not identify at this. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that those with Gypsy or Irish Traveller ethnic status may not officially declare ethnicity for fear of stigma or discrimination. All these factors can contribute to a potential underestimating of population sizes across Wiltshire.

### **Local Data**

9. As highlighted above, as well as census data, a variety of council departments collect further information regarding Gypsy and Traveller populations. This includes the annual caravan counts across the county and the recording of personal information regarding those Travellers living on council sites. This does not take into account those living on private Gypsy or Traveller sites, or those on unlawful encampments. Similarly, the Canal and River Trust also undertake boat counts across the Kennet and Avon Canal annually.

### **Moving Forward**

10. The Traveller Reference Group recognises the limitations of using only census data to understand the demographics of Gypsy and Traveller populations in Wiltshire. A Health Needs Assessment is currently being undertaken by Public

Health on Gypsy, Traveller and Boater populations with an aim of triangulating all available data sources to get a more timely and accurate understanding of Traveller populations across the county.

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**26 September 2018**

**Documents used to inform this paper**

Wiltshire's Traveller Strategy Refresh 2016-18 (2016). Maddern, S. Wiltshire Council

Wiltshire's Diverse Communities – Results from the Census 2011 (2014). Morgan, P and Guinness, J. Wiltshire Council

Mastering Public Health – Second Edition (2015). Lewis, G; Sheringham, J; Lopez Bernal, J; Crayford, T. CRC Press