EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report consists of the findings of a survey of Gypsy and Traveller residents of North Somerset.

The aims and objectives of this study were as follows:

- To generate reliable information pertaining to the current and future accommodation needs of sited and housed local Gypsy and Traveller families including:
  - limited demographic characteristics (e.g. age-range of householder and future anticipated household growth);
  - current accommodation type; extent of overcrowding and aspirations for various types of accommodation
  - Preferred locations of permanent residential sites and transit sites in the North Somerset locale and the structures and facilities which should be available to residents
  - Household mobility/family travelling patterns and seasonal indications pertaining to when transit sites might experience most usage by interviewees and their families.
  - Qualitative data on satisfaction with current accommodation
  - Preferred management of sites and optimum site size of new facilities
  - Information relating to waiting lists for site provision
  - Affordability of land for the provision of private sites (and interest in self-ownership/community land trust provision)

In addition, the study sought to explore to what extent respondents had made use of a number of local authority services (homelessness; energy efficiency) or had obtained assistance with adaptations for people with physical disabilities.

Finally, respondents were asked about their experiences of harassment and whether such incidents had been reported to the relevant authorities and dealt with satisfactorily where reporting had occurred.

The study set out to replicate the methodology utilised in the earlier West of England GTAA and accordingly used trained Gypsy and Traveller community interviewers to undertake the vast majority of the survey, supported by academic team members who monitored for quality control and undertook the analysis and production of this report. (See Appendices A & B for the questionnaire and information sheets used in this study)

In total, interviews were carried out with residents of 42 pitches out of 59 known to exist within the study area, equating to a completion rate of 71.7% of sited Gypsies and Travellers surveyed for the current project.

The majority of interviewees were resident on local authority and privately owned sites (both owner-occupied and rented). In addition a number of
residents on a single private tolerated site (without planning permission) were surveyed.

Regrettably only an estimated 10% of housed Gypsies and Travellers in the locality were surveyed as a result of difficulties in accessing this population within the time frame available.

**Key Findings**

Overall, across the authority area, 52/59 (88%) of pitches are located on private sites (either with planning permission or ‘tolerated’) with seven pitches available on three local authority sites.

The local ‘sited’ population consists overwhelmingly of Romany Gypsy households with a small number of ‘mixed’ (Gypsy/Non-Gypsy partners); Irish Traveller and New Traveller residents.

Amongst those sampled, the age range varied between 19 and 78 years of age with a mean age of 38.3. Women (unsurprisingly given typical cultural preferences for women to communicate on matters pertaining to the family) formed the overwhelming majority (90.4%) of respondents.

Whilst in this current study we did not explicitly ask for information on household size and numbers of dependent children, as is considered below (part 3 findings) based on self-assessment, overcrowding rates remain high amongst respondents and a continued need exists for additional pitches for household members.

Whilst duration of residence at their current location averaged eight years, fifteen households reported that they had lived at the same location for over ten years. This figure included all households on local authority owned sites and a substantial minority of those living at the privately owned serviced site, indicating low levels of turnover for these pitches.

Only one respondent reported living at a self-owned private site with planning permission for greater than ten years. For respondents who had moved to their current location in the previous three years, the majority lived on a private serviced site with a small percentage (25%) residing at self/family-owned sites with either permanent or temporary planning permission. Only one housed respondent had lived in ‘bricks and mortar’ accommodation for more than three years.

Amongst households who had moved to their current site within the previous year, the overwhelming majority were already from or residing in the North Somerset/West Country area with only two informants indicating a move from further afield (albeit in one case that they had a history of connection to the location lasting over 20 years).

No sited respondents had moved to their current location directly from a ‘roadside’ site, although a relatively high number of respondents had
experienced nomadic or ‘roadside’ life in the past. One housed respondent (25% of the small sample) had moved directly (and reluctantly) from a site as a result of closure of the facility. This family were extremely anxious to obtain a pitch on a site as soon as possible.

In total 1/3 households reported being technically overcrowded (based on their own assessment in the absence of a technical measure of overcrowding amongst residents of caravans). It is exceptionally difficult to assess degrees of overcrowding in the absence of any universally agreed measure given that the size of a caravan/mobile home may vary significantly from family to family (see further p33 for a discussion on this topic).

The percentage of respondents claiming overcrowding varied quite significantly depending upon type of accommodation with those in housing least likely to report overcrowding although one large family (see Appendix D) suffered from significant shortage of space, exacerbating their deep unhappiness at residence in ‘bricks and mortar’. Residents of local authority sites and owner occupied sites with temporary or no planning permission were most likely to report overcrowding, closely followed by those on rented private sites. A surprisingly high number of those on self-owned private sites reported overcrowding as a result of restrictive terms on their planning permission which limited the number of caravans permitted. We consider that amending the terms of existing permissions would significantly reduce this difficulty in a number of cases as reducing the demand for additional publically funded pitches from residents of these sites.

**Satisfaction with current accommodation**

Whilst perhaps unsurprisingly residents of self-owned sites reported the highest levels of satisfaction, the vast majority of respondents reported that they felt ‘neutral’ towards their place of residence or that they were ‘happy’ or ‘very happy’. Responses indicated that the overall majority were content in many ways, and had limited additional aspirations to improve their current place of residence.

Where respondents expressly referred to reasons for their dissatisfaction these tended to refer to maintenance concerns (rented sites) or restrictions on types of accommodation such as chalets or numbers of caravans allowed on both rented and self-owned sites.

Several individuals living on local authority or private rented sites (both tolerated and with planning permission) referred to the sense of neighbourly feeling, privacy when required, accessible services and tolerance amongst residents, which gave them a feeling of community: Amongst housed respondents only one stated that they were very unhappy (see Appendix D for a case study) and whilst the majority of those in housing noted that they would prefer to live on a site, satisfaction levels were generally relatively high.

When being asked about the accommodation preferences of family members wishing to form independent households all but one respondent who
answered this question was adamant that siblings or children wished to live on sites if these were available.

**Accommodation Need**

Overall 62% of respondents indicated that there would be a need for new accommodation/pitches amongst their household in the next five years. At Part 4 of this report an attempt is made to assess how much of this demand is required to meet current overcrowding and how much relates to aspiration for new pitches amongst young people who wish to leave home. It is suggested (Part 4) that **(with a number of caveats)** 60 new residential pitches (of which some can be provided by extending planning permission on pre-existing private sites) and five transit pitches are likely to meet the assessed need until 2016.

The findings from the questions pertaining to accommodation need indicate a large and rising demand for site accommodation amongst members of the Gypsy and Traveller population in North Somerset. It is therefore critically important that the local authority pays urgent attention to this anticipated need in order to deal with a short-fall caused by a combination of current overcrowding (see above) and a likely increase in over-crowding in the next five years as household members become older and form new partnerships which may be hidden from views as ‘suppressed households’ or disguised within the ‘hidden homeless’ categories.

Without adequate planning for future need, these findings suggest that a significant risk exists that unless more pitches are developed and made available for local residents there will be a potential for an increase in unauthorised encampments across the locality in future years. The data suggests that a high percentage of any such (potential) increase would be likely to arise amongst young people from North Somerset Gypsy and Traveller families who may leave home and move into caravans as a way of forming new households.

Qualitative data found an exceptionally strong preference for family members to live closely together and there was a clear demand for sites which could accommodate networks of siblings and/or adult children alongside their parents and grandparents. Caring roles and the support needs of family members featured strongly in reasons cited for the desire for relatives to be able to co-reside.

There was no evidence that respondents were making use of ‘official’ site waiting lists and it is likely this relates to a presumption that either no pitches will become available or that ‘word of mouth’ contacts may enable potential residents to hear of available plots on the two interlinked private rented sites in North Somerset.

**Site Preferences**
Respondents to the survey were asked to select from a number of potential new site locations in North Somerset and state their preferences. To some extent the responses might have been weighted by the location of existing sites and respondents’ desire to live near to family and friends. In general however, the most noticeable trend was for a desire for any and all types of site to be made available in North Somerset.

It is particularly noteworthy that four respondents explicitly referred to ‘flood plain’ risks, which may be indicative of negative experiences in other locations e.g. extensive flooding of sites in Somerset/South West during the past decade.

In (decreasing in popularity) order of preference, respondents noted that they would prefer any new sites to be located at: Weston-Super-Mare; Clevedon-Yatton; Nailsea-Backwell and Portishead-Gordano.

On being asked to assess the optimum number of pitches at new sites slightly more respondents favoured sites with 20-30 pitches, closely followed by those proposing less than 10 pitches, with this latter group in the main wishing for fairly small family sites which they would often hope to self-provide.

Slightly more respondents favoured having a resident site-manager although there was not a huge difference in numbers, when the percentage of respondents who would prefer to have a 'visiting' site manager were compared with those who preferred to have a live-in manager.

Over half of respondents felt that sites should be available to anyone in need with a substantial minority however believing that priority should be offered to relatives of current residents. Unusually and indicative of high levels of tolerant co-existence in the locality, one third of respondents were happy to live on ‘mixed’ sites (with groups of different ethnicities) although over 45% did indicate they that they only wanted to live with other Romany Gypsies. Several respondents were clear that New Travellers should not be able to co-reside with other ‘ethnic’ Gypsies and Travellers as a result of very different life-styles and origins.

When asked to select preferences from a list of amenities which should be available in the locality of on any newly provided site – e.g. access to GP surgeries; bus routes; shops; working/storage areas and play facilities; unsurprisingly almost all respondents wished to have all available facilities accessible near to any new site provision.

**Barriers to Residence in Preferred Accommodation**

Other than amongst some housed respondents there was a relatively high level of satisfaction voiced by respondents in relation to their ‘type’ of residence. However the main barriers to being able to live as they pleased referred to inadequate pitch numbers which meant that were over-crowded or unable to co-reside with relatives; affordability of land to self-provide a sites and extremely importantly, for some households concerns that if they did
purchase land that they would not be able to obtain planning permission. This was a cause of significant stress for several respondents on self-owned sites without planning permission or who only had a temporary permission.

**Affordability of Sites**

There was significant confusion amongst some respondents as to whether they could afford to purchase land to self-provide a site if assistance was available with obtaining planning permission. We therefore make recommendations (see Appendix C) that planning advice and assistance should be made more easily available and publicised amongst Gypsy and Traveller households to enable families to undertake an assessment of the viability of this option.

In practice however, the overwhelming majority of respondents felt that they were either not in a financial position to purchase land (or housing) or were unaware of their financial ability to so do. No housed respondents felt that they would be in a position to self-provide a site or purchase a house as a result of financial barriers.

On being asked whether if mortgages on land were available and reassures existed that support would be available with obtaining planning permission, the majority of respondents expressed a very keen interest in purchasing land and self-providing a site; in some cases with members of their wider family.

**Community Land Trusts (CLTs)**

There was exceptionally little knowledge amongst respondents over this form of site provision. Once explanations were provided however there was a widespread interest in this mechanism for the delivery of sites, such that we suggest that North Somerset Council should consider the practicality of assisting in the development of CLTs on land leased from the authority.

**Travelling Patterns**

Whilst there was evidence of unmet aspiration to ‘travel’ more often amongst some respondents; a fairly high percentage of respondents (47.8%) travel for social and cultural reasons at certain periods of the year. No housed respondents did so and this was regarded with regret by these interviewees who in several cases referred to the inability to have a caravan at their place of residence as constraining their ability to travel. The majority of travel is short-term and associated with family and cultural events although 31% of those who do travel do so for economic purposes. If site regulations and personal circumstances were favourable (for example if rented pitches could be left for longer periods of time or storage space existed at sites) it would appear that a greater number of respondents would wish to travel for economic purposes than do so at present.
A substantial number of respondents who do undertake economic related travel stated that they do so for between 3 and 6 months each year. A pattern is discernible which reveals that residence on a private rented pitch is more likely to be associated with greater amounts of travel, and for a greater period each year. In practice this might be associated with the degree of flexibility the owners of a private site are willing to grant in relation to unoccupied pitches or allowing family members to remain on a pitch if the key lessee is absent. Overall 10/26 (38.4%) of respondents resident on private rented pitches travelled for 3 months or more of the year, with residents of privately owned sites with (temporary) planning permission travelling for a significant portion of the year in 50% of cases. In contrast, residents of both local authority sites and self-owned sites with permanent planning permission, were more likely to be sedentarised or in the case of residents of local authority pitches travel for short periods for social/cultural reasons.

Whilst there was very low knowledge pertaining to the availability of transit sites in the area, there was significant interest amongst all respondents in the provision of transit pitches which could be used when travelling themselves (or to accommodate relatives and other Travellers passing through the locality). It is worth noting however, that given these respondents already had access to pitches in the local area which could in some cases potentially accommodate relatives visiting for a short period of time, and that statistics on unauthorised encampments over the year 2010-2011 indicate very few occasions when such provision would have been required in North Somerset, it may be that apparent interest does not equate to the actual level of likely need. No qualitative responses were gathered in relation to use of ‘emergency stopping places’ and it appeared that little interest existed in this type of provision although relatives could potentially do so if no other opportunity existed for them to park-up whilst visiting family members.

In the main, few very respondents felt that it would be suitable to provide transit pitches alongside residential ones – frequently citing security concerns and fears that temporary residents of transit sites would not ‘respect’ the facilities shared with permanent residents. Given the travelling patterns identified in this survey we suggest that transit sites might in some cases be available on a seasonal basis albeit available to be reopened during times of high demand such as when local weddings/funerals or religious gatherings occur.

Use of Local Authority Provided Services

Respondents were asked to identify whether or not they had made use of a variety of services such as assistance with energy saving insulation; homelessness services and adaptations to their home to assist disabled household members. Whilst overall there was very low rates of use of these services (and no sited respondents had made of energy efficiency services in
contrast to housed interviewees); satisfaction levels with the services provided by the homelessness department and teams working to provide adaptations were high. It is recommended that a publicity drive should take place to ensure that site residents are made aware of their right to request access to such services in the light of limited knowledge of these services.

Just under seventeen percent of households requested assistance with completing forms or dealing with bureaucracy as a result of literacy problems and we suggest that further information should be disseminated on the availability of support services and/or adult literacy classes targeted at members of the Gypsy and Travellers communities who might have need of such services.

Experiences of Racism/Harassment/Intimidation

The final section of the survey sought to explore respondents’ experiences of racism, the routes they took to report such incidents of harassment and abuse, and their satisfaction with the result achieved. The findings from this element of the research whilst in some senses extremely positive, indicating that Gypsies and Travellers in the North Somerset area are significantly less likely to experience abuse than in many other parts of the country, and also feel more confident in reporting such abuse to various agencies, also indicate that additional work may be required to combat “anti-Gypsyism” in daily life, particularly in school settings.

In total 45.2% of site residents and 100% of housed Gypsy and Traveller families reported having experienced cases of harassment across their life course (in some cases many years in the past), with three housed families noting that they (or close relatives) had needed to move home to escape the abuse. Whilst these respondents praised the support provided by the local housing department in all of those cases the fact remains that the extent of the enacted racism experienced by members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities is still depressingly and unacceptably high, whilst the effectiveness of responses to such incidents are often perceived of low. Amongst sited respondents, there was a significantly lower rate of such incidents leading to the suggestion that residence on a site amongst other Gypsies acts as protective factor. There were a significant number of reports by respondents of having experienced racist abuse when stopping at roadside locations, albeit in some cases many years in the past once account had been taken of duration of residence at their current site. All housed families were very clear that the harassment was directly linked to their ethnicity, as were 84.2% of the sited population who reported that they had experienced such incidents at some point (not necessarily whilst resident in North Somerset).

The final part of the report provides a summary of anticipated pitch provision (referred to above) and summarises the findings of the study. Appendices A-B contain the information sheets and questionnaire used in this study; Appendix C details the recommendations contained within this report, and Appendix D provides a case study of Travellers in housing.