

HIGHLAND COUNCIL GYPSY TRAVELLER CASE STUDY REPORT

**HIGHLAND COUNCIL  
GYPSY TRAVELLER CASE STUDY  
REPORT BY COMMUNITIES SCOTLAND  
WITH COMMENT AND UPDATING INFORMATION  
BY THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL**

# HIGHLAND COUNCIL GYPSY TRAVELLER CASE STUDY REPORT

## Introduction

The document attached includes a report produced by Communities Scotland looking at the planning and provision of services for Gypsy/Travellers in the Highland Council area. This report forms part of a pilot of inspections by Communities Scotland carried out under their regulation and inspection role. This report was published in June 2002. Inserted into the report at each section are updated comments and updated information in a bordered box provided by the Housing Service in December 2002.

The main Communities Scotland report is in normal typeface.

*Comment by the Housing Service is in italics and shown in a bordered box.*

On advice from the Scottish Gypsy/Traveller Association (SG/TA), the Council, as members of the Highland Gypsy/Traveller Partnership Group (HG/TPG), uses the terminology Gypsy/Traveller. However the HG/TPG accepts the right of individuals to define their own identity. Highland Council uses this style of reference consistently throughout this report, however the quotes from other documents retain the style used in the original document.

## Introduction

1. The planning and provision of services for Gypsy Travellers is a new area of regulation for Communities Scotland. Underpinning our approach to regulation is a new set of published Performance Standards that came into effect on 1 April 2002. The relevant Performance Standard against which we will assess councils in this area of service provision states:

### Activity Standard 6.1

We plan and provide or arrange good-quality serviced stopping places for Gypsy Travellers. We let pitches in a way that ensures fair and open access for all. We take Gypsy Travellers' views into account in delivering our services, and we are responsive to their needs.

*The Highland Council endorses these aims.*

2. To allow us to develop our approach to assessing councils' performance against Performance Standard AS6.1, and to gather some baseline information about current provision, Communities Scotland Regulation & Inspection Division is carrying out a thematic study. A key element of this thematic study is to test our approach through a number of individual case studies. This is one of eight case studies carried out across Scotland.

*The Council has worked closely with Communities Scotland on the pilot study, and will continue to do so as required.*

3. The case study was carried out in March 2002 with Communities Scotland's staff spending 4 days on site at Highland Council's housing offices and at their sites for Gypsy Travellers at Inverness, Newtonmore, Spean Bridge and Kentallan. The Communities Scotland staff who conducted the case study were; Denise Buchanan (Performance Auditor) Mark McCabe (Regulatory Projects Co-ordinator) and Andrew Gordon (Regulation Officer). The Highland Council staff involved in the case study

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were; Gordon Fisher (Director of Housing) Helen Ross (Housing Policy Officer), Tina Luxton (Area Housing Manager, Lochaber) Michael Hamilton (Area Housing Manager, Badenoch & Strathspey and Nairn) Murray Cochrane (Area Housing Manager (Inverness) Sally Kelbie (Tenant Services Officer) Sandy Bennet (Site Officer) Colin Critchell (Site Officer) and Lorne McMillan (Site Officer). We would like to thank Highland Council for agreeing to participate as a case study and all the staff involved for taking the time and effort to assist us.

*The Housing Service will of course continue to co-operate in working with Communities Scotland.*

4. The techniques used to assess the service from a consumer perspective included:
- critically examining the written material produced by the Council relevant to the provision of Gypsy Traveller services;
  - in-depth interviews with the range of staff who manage and deliver the services;
  - on-site assessment of the location, design and facilities of the Council's site(s) for Gypsy Travellers;
  - detailed reality checks on case files relating to, for example allocations, exclusions, evictions, anti-social behaviour and complaints;
  - semi-structured discussions with residents on the site to get their views on the services being provided.

*The above information is noted. However it should be noted that due to the issues relating to consultation with Gypsy/Travellers the number of residents spoken to was limited to four, and therefore cannot necessarily be regarded as a majority view.*

5. This report presents our findings of Highland Councils' provision of services for Gypsy Travellers. Our findings are broken down into five key areas of; planning, access to services, site quality, management of services and consultation and participation. The findings also include suggestions for potential improvements, which the Council may wish to consider.

*The Housing Service welcomes any good practice suggestions made.*

6. This report is for the Councils' own use and will not be published. The findings will however be incorporated into an anonymised report covering all the case studies which will be made publicly available.

*Communities Scotland position is noted. However it is felt that it may be helpful to share this report at appropriate forum, such as the Highland Gypsy/Traveller Partnership Group (HG/TPG), and the Inverness and Lochaber Forums.*

### **Context/Background**

7. Highland Council operates four sites for Gypsy Travellers, one in Inverness (Longman) two in Lochaber (Spean Bridge and Kentallan) and a seasonal site in Newtonmore. The Council employs three Site Officers whose role is to provide a

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reception /administration service and to carry out basic site inspection and maintenance. The three all year sites have medium to low occupancy levels and relatively high turnover. The authority has recorded a relatively high level of unauthorised encampments.

### Key Findings

The Council has a practical approach to planning. There is a Partnership Group and an Area Forum made up of a comprehensive range of agencies. Housing has a key role; the Director of Housing chairs the Partnership group.

There is a lack of consistency in the provision of services and the quality of the sites. The lack of policies and procedures contribute to this, as does the absence of published Service Standards and monitoring of service provision for Gypsy Traveller sites. The Council has acknowledged the lack of consistency in quality of site and service provision and is making efforts to improve this.

There is no allocation policy in place. This has not been a priority for the Council as there has been no waiting list for Gypsy Traveller Sites. We suggest that the Council develops clear guidelines for access to its sites for Gypsy Travellers.

Budgets for Gypsy Traveller Sites are set as part of the Councils budget process, however there is no link between the budgets set and the level of rents charged.

The Council has a positive approach to consultation via the Gypsy Traveller Partnership Group and Area forums. Wider consultation through less formal structures would complement and extend this approach.

*It should be noted that the Gypsy/Traveller Site Officers provide a site management service, in addition to their reception and administration duties.*

*The Housing Service is seeking to address issues of variances in service delivery, which may occur if standards are not met.*

*The Housing Service has agreed that an allocations policy should be developed in the near future in consultation with the HG/TPG. This has not been a priority previously as there is no waiting list for access to the sites.*

*Work has now started looking at the rents charged at each site and at the budget, with the aim of beginning to address the variation in charges between the sites and to ensure that the charges are reasonable.*

*Genuine consultation through a variety of mechanisms has been a priority for Housing Services and will continue to be so. For example the Outreach Workers now in post under the Innovation Project will be utilised to obtain feedback from Gypsy/Travellers on the implementation and impact of the Procedure for responding to unauthorised camps.*

### Planning

#### Inclusion in corporate strategic planning process

8. Highland Council has a multi disciplinary approach to planning on service provision for Gypsy Travellers, pulling together a number of different services and agencies There is an overarching Partnership Group, which includes representatives from various Council departments, Health Services, the Police, the Scottish Gypsy Traveller Association, Save the Children and Gypsy Travellers who live locally.

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Housing takes the lead in this with the Director of Housing chairing the Group. There have been a number of positive outputs from this approach, for example a new tenancy agreement and application form have been developed and are currently under consultation.

*This approach will be continued.*

9. A positive outcome from the Partnership Group was the success of an Innovation Fund bid to develop a coordinated multi agency approach to improving child and family health and well being among Gypsy Travellers in Highland. A Development Officer has just been appointed. An advisory team has been set up to manage and monitor the project.

*As Communities Scotland notes this is a positive outcome. In addition to the Development Officer, 2 outreach workers are now also in post and a seconded post of Development Officer for Gypsy/Traveller Education has been in place since March 2002. Continuation funding for this post has been confirmed for the period December 2002 to November 2003*

10. There is no overall strategic framework in place for the provision of services for Gypsy Travellers by Highland Council. The needs of Gypsy Travellers have been specifically recognised in the Plan for Services for Children and Families in Highland. They will also be included in the next draft of the local housing strategy. The Council is working to address gaps in its service delivery via the Partnership Groups, however, the lack of a strategic framework means that priorities are unclear. We note that the Council is updating strategic documents as they are rolled out to include provision of services to Gypsy Travellers. We suggest that the Council develops an overall strategic framework to prioritise work that supports and reflects the positive developments of the Partnership Group.

*The strategic framework in place is being updated as documents are reviewed to appropriately reflect Gypsy/Traveller issues. The main strategic document for the Housing Service is the Local Housing Strategy, and there is reference to Gypsy/Travellers in the current draft. The Highland Council homelessness strategy is currently being prepared and consideration will be given to the needs of Gypsy/Travellers in this.*

11. The lack of specific policies and procedures for Gypsy Traveller sites has led to a varying level of service delivery across the four sites, for example mail is delivered directly to chalets at all sites except Longman, where it is delivered to the site officers office. Site residents have to pick up their mail from there. One site resident that we spoke to identified this as a problem.

*Where different service delivery standards are identified these are being addressed. In this particular instance, further consultation showed that the preferred option of residents was to have the mail kept at the site office for collection.*

### **Identifying need and demand**

12. Highland Council carries out the bi – annual seasonal count for the Scottish Executive, however, this information is not used to inform their planning process. The Council does not have a process in place at present to identify need and

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demand among Gypsy Travellers. The Council has had discussions with Communities Scotland Area Office in Inverness about carrying out research to identify the accommodation needs and aspirations of Gypsy Travellers. This information would enable the Council to target its provision of services to Gypsy Travellers.

*It is important to note in this context that the Highland Council did meet the pitch target previously in place. The information from the count and levels of unauthorised camping are monitored, but it should be noted that reasons for unauthorised camping are varied and the presence of camps should not therefore automatically be seen as evidence of need for additional site provision. It should also be noted that the number of unauthorised camps tends to be relatively low.*

13. There is no formal recognition of Gypsy Travellers as an ethnic minority by the Council, however the Council will consider the impact of its policies on Gypsy Travellers as part of its Race Equality Scheme which it is required to implement by 30 November 2002. We welcome this pro active approach by the Council.

*As advised by the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE), the Wellbeing Alliance multi-agency Racist incident strategy states:*

*“Whilst current legislation protects Gypsies as a racial group, Travellers in Scotland are currently not protected. However, discriminatory practices against Travellers are also likely to be discriminatory against Gypsies. It is therefore recommended that Travellers be treated as if they were a racial group.”*

*The Highland Council, as a member of the Wellbeing Alliance, accepts this recommendation from the CRE.*

*The Highland Council's first Race Equality Scheme has identified Housing Allocation policies as one of a number of priority areas to assess during the first year of the scheme for any potential adverse impact on race equality.*

### **Access to Services**

14. The Council has not considered an allocation policy to be a priority for Gypsy Traveller sites as Sites are never full and there is no waiting list, however, file checks showed that there are criteria for admission to sites. We recommend that the Council develops an allocations policy that sets out criteria for admission to its sites to ensure consistency in decision-making and that criteria for access to sites are explicit.

*As noted above this had not been a priority previously, as there is no waiting list for access to the sites. However the Housing Service intends to develop a simple allocations policy in the near future in consultation with the HG/TPG.*

15. The Site Officer does not have the authority to exclude applicants from the sites. If necessary, this decision would be taken by the Area Housing Manager. There have been a very few exclusions from sites. The Council only excludes applicants in the case of unpaid rent arrears (to the Council), where there is no repayment arrangement in place, for example a former site resident who owed the Council money for rent arrears was allocated a pitch on a site once a repayment agreement was in place and kept. The Council would also exclude an applicant if there was proven anti social behaviour. This is in line with their policy for mainstream housing and complies with good practice.

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*The Council will continue this practice.*

### Tenancy Agreements

16. The Council operates a Missive of Let for Gypsy Traveller sites. There are two different versions of this. There is a new draft tenancy agreement, which is out for consultation with members of the Partnership Group. The new tenancy agreement is intended to mirror the Scottish Secure tenancy as far as possible. This indicates a positive approach to increasing tenants rights. There is a written sign up procedure in place for the Longman site, but not for the other three sites. Discussions with residents indicated that the Site Officer explains the conditions of the missive of let at sign up.

*The Highland Council model tenancy agreement, developed in discussion with the HG/TPG and due to be implemented soon, reflects good practice. Following discussions at the HG/TPG the site tenancy agreement will also be made available on audio tape. The site officer will continue to be available to explain the conditions of let at sign up, as consultation suggest that this is the preferred method.*

### Information about services and how to access them

17. The Site officer can provide basic information about access to other services. Housing Benefit advice is also available at the Longman site on a surgery basis. There is a portacabin on the Inverness site, which is used as a community facility. This has demonstrated improved access to health and education services. A portacabin has just been installed in the Spean Bridge site for the same purpose.

*The facility in Inverness has been in existence for the longest and has been well used, including for educational purposes, pre-school provision and library, for meetings, and by a visiting Health Visitor. The Council is currently looking to identify funding to provide a larger unit. As Newtonmore is a seasonal site it is not felt appropriate to provide a unit. At Kentallan the need for a Portakabin has not been identified by Gypsy/Travellers. The appointment of Outreach Workers under the Innovation Project as noted above will also be helpful in the provision of information.*

### Physical Accessibility

18. All four sites have very different characteristics and physical accessibility varies between sites.

*It should be noted that the sites are provided at what were traditional stopping places. It is also of course the position that many residents of the Highlands live in remote rural areas, often served by single track roads and often at some distance from local facilities.*

19. Newtonmore is easily accessible by road. The site is situated between Newtonmore and Laggan Bridge, in a rural area. We spoke to one tenant who indicated that access to other services was not a problem.

*See comments at 18 above.*

20. The Longman Site in Inverness is not easily accessible, albeit it is situated in a town. The access road is narrow and winding with steep banking on either side. This was

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designed to prevent illegal parking on the entrance to the site and to reduce speed. While the reasons for this design are sound it could cause some problems for large vehicles, although residents we spoke to did not report this as a problem.

*See comments at 18 above.*

21. Spean Bridge is located some distance from the nearest village. Public transport is infrequent so access to Fort William, the nearest town, for access to GP's and shops can be difficult.

*See comments at 18 above.*

22. Kentallan is located next to a busy road, but is not convenient for access to shops, schools, GPs and other facilities.

*See comments at 18 above.*

23. All sites have a physical barrier in place. The barrier is only used in one site due to previous problems with illegal entry to the site. Residents reported no problems with access to or exit from the site where the barrier is used.

*The use of barriers will be kept under review, but no change is planned at present.*

### Site Quality

24. The Council has fulfilled its historic pitch target set by the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee. There are a number of private sites in the area that are used by Gypsy Travellers, which count towards the pitch target. The local authority sites are rarely full, however, there is a pattern of unauthorised encampments which could indicate a need for a different type of provision. This information could be fed into the Council's proposed needs assessment research. The Council has a clear unauthorised encampment policy and procedure that had just been approved.

*See comments at 12 above.*

25. Site quality varies between the four sites, as does the quality of pitches and amenity units.

*All sites provided comply with Scottish Office guidance and specification and are therefore of a consistent quality, albeit there may have been some changes over time*

26. The Longman site is situated adjacent to a sand and salt works. This is an issue for residents as sand and salt blow into the site; the Council recognises this. The site is likely to move in the next two to five years as the area is zoned for redevelopment. This move will be funded as part of the redevelopment. The likelihood of moving has informed the level of action that the Council is willing to take to alleviate this problem. Initial impressions of the site are that it is reasonably well kept, however, some aspects of the site were poorly maintained, such as damaged or missing drains, damage to fencing and chipped areas were full of weeds. There were other positive aspects on the site, with the Tenancy Services Officer attempting to use any available funds, for example, to provide a laundrette. In the absence of a planned improvement programme this is a positive use of resources.

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*The difficulties raised are recognised. However the level of action which it would be reasonable for the Council to take given the likely move of the site should be noted here – clearly the likelihood of the site being moved must inform resource decisions.*

*The Site Officer at the Longman site has always taken a proactive role in keeping the site tidy and maintained, and whilst there may have been some specific minor repairs requiring his attention the site generally presents a good appearance. Regular site inspections are now undertaken.*

27. The Council is reluctant to invest further in the Longman site because of long term plans to move the site, however the Council has a responsibility to carry out its responsive repairs and maintenance role.

*The Housing Service is not reluctant to invest in the Longman site – this is evidenced by the upgrading works carried out. In addition to this play equipment is to be installed in the current financial year.*

28. During the site visit we noted that all fire extinguishers are kept in the site office due to previous vandalism. We recommend that the Council keeps this under review as part of its fire risk assessments.

*A fire safety audit has been started, and action will be taken to implement its recommendations.*

29. Newtonmore is located adjacent to a main road just outside Newtonmore village. This is a seasonal site. Previous land use was as a landfill site. There is no evidence that this has caused any problems. The site is well laid out and well maintained. The pitches are good quality with a concrete hard standing for caravans and a small-grassed area with clothes poles. Amenity units are good quality and larger than others in the area. They lack heating, because Newtonmore is only open from spring to late summer. All the amenity units are in one block, but as the site is quite small access is not difficult. One unit has been adapted to incorporate a shower and grab rails in the bathroom. Discussions with one tenant indicated that they were very satisfied with the site; suggested improvements were the inclusion of play facilities and longer opening times. The site and amenity units were the best quality we found during this inspection. Although the site is seasonal, the Council endeavour to be flexible and where possible adjust opening and closing times in response to need and demand.

*Funding has now been identified and play equipment will be provided at this site in the current financial year. Work is currently ongoing to look at the feasibility of extending the opening times to include March, October and November, subject to cost implications and planning permission.*

30. There was a marked difference between the quality of the Newtonmore site and the two sites in Lochaber. The pitches at Spean Bridge were poorly maintained, the chipped areas were full of weeds and looked untidy, and fencing showed signs of neglect with a number of holes that had not been repaired. Amenity units in Spean Bridge were small, but well maintained inside. A positive aspect of the Spean Bridge site was the gates and fencing around each pitch, which provide a safe area for children and animals.

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*The rest of the report does not reflect the difference noted here between the sites in Newtonmore and Inverness and those in Lochaber. In all sites regular inspections are now being made.*

31. Kentallan is located in a disused quarry. This is poorly located, however, the site was selected as it was a traditional stopping area for Gypsy Travellers. The site is susceptible to flooding due to a culvert not being large enough. During discussions with one of the three households then resident on the site concerns were expressed about proximity to the main road and the dangers of this for children. The other main issue was their experience of flooding and dampness on site. Concerns were expressed about children's health due to the damp conditions and mention was also made of difficulties accessing amenity units during periods of flooding and rats having been seen on site. Fencing and gates at the pitches would improve safety for individual residents, given the proximity of pitches to the main road.

*As the report points out Kentallen is located in a disused quarry, which was a traditional stopping place. It is not a damp site. Provided the culvert referred to in the report is kept clear the site does not flood. Arrangements are in place for the culvert to be cleared on a regular basis. If the culvert does block and flooding results the problem can be resolved in approximately 24 hours by clearing the culvert.*

*The report also refers to rats having been seen – no reports of rats were made..*

32. The role of the Tenancy Services Officer enhances the service to Gypsy Travellers in Inverness and Newtonmore. She supervises and supports the Site Officers and acts in a liaison role with site residents and residents in unauthorised encampments. Services in Lochaber may benefit from a similar role.

*Whilst there may be benefits of replicating this service elsewhere it must be recognised that this would have a resource implication.*

### Design

33. There are three different styles of amenity unit across the four sites. The design varies, with turf roofs on the Longman amenity units, small individual amenity units in the two Lochaber sites and a block of large amenity units at Newtonmore.

*The amenity units at the 3 biggest sites are broadly similar and all were built to the specification set out at the time by the Scottish Executive. The existence of turf roofs on the Longman site does not, in my view, constitute any significant difference.*

34. All of the amenity units we visited were consistent with the published design guidelines from the Secretary of State's Advisory Committee. These guidelines were based on an expectation that the amenity units would be used for washing and toilet facilities only. However, it was clear that some units are now also being used for cooking purposes.

*Although the amenity units were not intended for cooking purposes they have in fact been commonly used for cooking by Gypsy/Travellers. In recognition of this Housing Services are reviewing the fire safety precautions for the units.*

35. While we recognise that this was not originally anticipated when the units were built, there is a need to consider the possible hygiene implications arising from the existing

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internal layout, with the bathroom/toilet accessed directly from the area being used for cooking.

*As noted above the units were built to the standards set out at the time by the Scottish Executive. Whilst it is recognised that an alternative layout might be preferable it must be recognised that this would have major resource implications.*

36. The other issue which was consistently raised by residents in relation to the amenity units was the difficulty, and cost, of heating the amenity units to an acceptable level. As part of the medium to longer term planning for the site, the Council should discuss with site residents how they see the amenity units being used in the future and the possible options for ensuring that the standards of provision take account of changing user expectations.

*As noted in 35 above plans for such improvement work would have a major resource implication which may not be a priority. Work is in progress looking at the electricity charging to ensure that the costs of electricity are kept to a minimum for residents.*

37. The need for improvement to amenity units has already been highlighted by the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee (SPEOC) and we suggest that the Council examines the need for improvements, in consultation with Gypsy Travellers, and takes the recommendations of the SPEOC into account in developing improvement plans.

*See comment at 36 above. Should any improvements be considered full consultation would take place and the SPEOC recommendations considered.*

### **Facilities**

38. Facilities on site vary across the area. As mentioned previously there is a portacabin based at Longman and Spean Bridge for health, community and education services. This a positive development in improving access to services. The laundrette at Longman is well used and the Council plans to provide laundrettes at both Lochaber sites during summer 2002.

*The laundrette facilities at the Lochaber sites have not been installed. Funding for the additional facilities is being sought although costs for the work have been obtained.*

39. Residents at each site mentioned the lack of play areas and facilities on the sites as possible improvements if funding can be made available. We suggest that the Council consult with site residents to establish their priorities for any future improvement programme for site facilities.

*Funding for play equipment has been identified for the Inverness and the Newtonmore sites. The work has been the subject of consultation with residents and will be installed in the current financial year.*

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## Management and Services on Site

40. Highland Council does not have service standards for Gypsy Traveller sites, so residents do not know what level of service to expect. There are no performance targets set and no monitoring of service provision. This is reflected in the different levels of service at each site. One particular issue mentioned by residents at the Longman site was mail delivery. Mail is delivered to the Site Officers office and residents have to pick it up from there. This is an unreliable system. The Council are aware of this and will revise this system.

*See comments at 11. The Housing Service are also in the process of producing a Business Plan. This will include service standards which will be applicable to site residents as well as house tenants.*

41. During discussions residents highlighted the relationship with the Site Officer as an important factor in the level of services delivered. We suggest that the Council introduces service standards for Gypsy Travellers sites and communicates these to site residents. The Council should set targets and monitor its service provision against these targets.

*See comments at 11. Service standard will normally apply to all Highland Council tenants – for example repair response target times will be the same for all Highland Council tenants. All sites will in future display information about the repair response times. In addition to this complaints forms are now available at all of the sites.*

42. The Council has taken a pro active approach to health and safety on sites. Formal Health and Safety Inspections are carried out on each site. There is evidence that the Council has acted to implement any resulting recommendations in the reports.

*As noted above a fire safety audit is in progress and recommendations will be actioned. A pro active approach to health and safety on the sites will continue.*

43. Rents were set by the previous District Councils and have been adopted by Highland Council. Rents are increased annually by the same percentage as mainstream housing rents. There was no evidence that the Council has assessed whether rents were affordable or comparable with other areas. Income from rents does not cover the cost of Gypsy Traveller sites in Highland. The Council did acknowledge the differences in rent levels and plan to move towards harmonisation of the rents. Budgets are set for each site, however these do not provide enough information to make informed decisions about rent setting and long term planning for improvements.

*See comment to 7 above.*

44. From discussions with residents and Site Officers it appears that repairs performance varies between sites. The Site Officer has a handyman role, and deals with minor repairs. Not many of the residents we spoke to had reported repairs, however one resident has recently reported a repair, but was not given a timescale for the repair being completed. A visual inspection of the sites indicated a general lack of maintenance in three of the sites, as discussed earlier. The Council should ensure that it fulfils its responsibilities for responsive repairs and maintenance.

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*See comments to 26, 27 and 41 above.*

45. Visitors are allowed on sites, but there are no specific visitor pitches. Visitors can be accommodated on a pitch for fourteen days, provided there is space on the site. It may be useful to make this information more widely available.

*This issue has been the subject of recent consideration, and the Housing Service will now allow visitors onto pitches, provided there are no more than 2 caravans per pitch overall, for safety reasons. This updated position will be introduced at the next HG/TPG at the end of January and site officers will ensure that it is generally known.*

46. Although there were few documented cases of anti social behaviour between site residents, the sites have suffered from anti social behaviour in the past where some Gypsy Travellers have caused the site to empty because of threatening behaviour. The Council tries to manage this realistically and will accommodate families on other sites where necessary.

*This approach will be continued. It is also recognised that in some cases it is the fear of anti social behaviour which will make some residents leave. This is difficult to address as it does not relate to actual behaviour. The Anti Social Behaviour Policy is applicable to all Highland Council tenants, and therefore provides the framework for action on the sites.*

47. There were no examples of documented complaints by site residents. There is no published complaints procedure available at sites for Gypsy Travellers. Discussions with site residents indicated an awareness of how to make complaints if necessary. We suggest that the Council makes its Complaints Policy available at each Gypsy Traveller site.

*The Council's complaints procedure is now available at all sites.*

### **Consultation and Participation Arrangements**

48. The Council has a positive approach to consultation and participation arrangements. It has taken the lead role in the Gypsy Traveller Partnership Group and holds meetings of the Group on the Longman Site to make it accessible to site residents.

*Consultation will continue to be central to working with Gypsy/Travellers.*

49. Another positive development is the Council's recent efforts to consult tenants in Lochaber on the level and types of services they wish to receive from the Site Officer. We suggest that the Council should complement its formal structures with more informal ad hoc arrangements for consultation on specific issues.

*See comment to 48 above.*

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**Denise Buchanan**  
**28 June 2002**