

	<b>Cabinet</b> 8 September 2025
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director of Residents and Housing Services</b>
	<b>Lead Member - Cabinet Member for Housing</b> <b>(Councillor Fleur Donnelly-Jackson)</b>
<b>Developing a new Brent Gypsy, Roma &amp; Traveller Strategy</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	Two Appendix A: Draft Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy consultation and engagement plan Appendix B: Draft Pitch Allocation Policy
<b>Background Papers:</b>	<a href="#">Previous Brent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Inclusion Strategy 2009 - 2014</a>
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## 1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report shares the council's approach to develop a new Brent Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy; progress made to develop specific components of the strategy, including the new Pitch Allocation Policy and the search for new sites; and plans to reduce pitch rent at Lynton Close. The aim is to provide Cabinet with an update around progress to establish the council's ambitions and commitments to our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

### Developing the new strategy

- 1.2. In the coming month or so we plan to launch a formal 10-week consultation to enable residents to share their thoughts on the new strategy and hold a series of dedicated sessions with Brent's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Ahead of launching we are seeking advice and feedback from London Gypsies & Travellers, Traveller Movement and Roma Support Group to ensure we maximise engagement, enabling our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities the best possible opportunities to have their say. We want to ensure we establish a stronger understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller needs so that we can develop a strategy and approach that best supports and works with these communities.
- 1.3. The strategy will outline our ambitions to support and work with our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The provisional components in the strategy, that will continue to be refined throughout the consultation and engagement phase, have been listed in paragraph 3.3.5. Key components that we have progressed so far include:
  - A new proposed Pitch Allocation Policy
  - Search for new sites
  - A new approach to site management

### Site improvements

- 1.4. As part of our approach, we are seeking endorsement for up to c.£500,000 from 2026/27 for capital investment for site improvement. Lynton Close residents will shape how this will be invested as part of the upcoming engagement.

### Reviewing the pitch rent

- 1.5. Having benchmarked against other London boroughs, Brent's weekly pitch rent rate is well above the average for similar sized pitches. We are seeking to reduce our rate, from £185.13 to £138.96, bringing the borough in line to the London average.

## **2.0 Recommendation(s)**

Cabinet are asked to:

- 2.1 Endorse the proposed direction of travel to develop the Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy. This includes:
  - The skeleton outlined in paragraph 3.2.5.
  - The consultation and engagement approach as captured in paragraphs 3.2.24 – 3.2.27 and detailed within Appendix A.
- 2.2 Note progress made, and endorse next steps to develop key components of the strategy (see paragraphs 3.2.10 – 3.2.23), including:

- Draft Pitch Allocation Policy as detailed in Appendix B.
  - Site search – a report detailing options will return to Cabinet in 2026.
  - Site management approach.
- 2.3 Endorse the use of up to c.£500,000 capital investment from 2026/27 through the usual capital governance processes (Capital Programme Board and Cabinet) for site improvements as part of our improved approach to site management. This will be invested in priorities identified through consultation and engagement with the residents.
- 2.4 Endorse a reduction in the weekly pitch rate from £185.13 to £138.96.

### **3.0 Detail**

#### **3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword:**

- 3.1.1 At Brent we're proud of our diversity and committed to inclusion for all of our communities. Our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are an important part of that. Yet we recognise these communities have too often been seldom heard and under-served. It has been more than a decade since Brent last had a dedicated Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy, and it is vital that we now put in place a clear framework that reflects both our responsibilities and our commitment to ensuring no community is left behind.
- 3.1.2 Residents at Brent's permanent traveller site, Lynton Close, have been clear about the challenges they face – from high pitch rents to the need for improved site conditions. We have listened and responded. Pitch rents will be reduced to align with the London average, and funding has been identified for improvements that residents themselves will help to shape.
- 3.1.3 Equally, this strategy is about building stronger and more sustainable relationships. We have made early progress through closer engagement with residents, appointing dedicated liaison roles, and working alongside trusted organisations to improve communications. These steps are already helping to rebuild trust and ensure services are more responsive to community needs.
- 3.1.4 This strategy is a starting point. It will continue to be shaped through consultation, ensuring that it reflects the distinct voices of Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Irish Traveller people in Brent. By committing to this strategy, we are laying the foundations for a fairer future that enables these communities to flourish in Brent.
- 3.1.5 This paper, including the upcoming strategy, contributes most directly to the Borough Plan's Thriving Communities Strategic Priority but will also touch upon every strategic priority. This is because the commitments and activities across the priorities align with supporting the needs and improving the outcomes experienced by Brent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. The strategy also relates to Brent's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and the Local Plan. The former encompasses commitments to tackling inequality and

supporting marginalised groups, and the latter outlines our current approach to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller accommodation in Brent.

## **3.2 Background**

3.2.1 Brent has a longstanding Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. We have one permanent traveller site, which was established in 1997, and the Census 2021 captures Brent as having:

- 237 White Gypsy or Irish Travellers, although we suspect the actual figure is larger. The community is concentrated in the south and east of borough, namely Stonebridge, Harlesden & Kensal Green and Kilburn.
- 2520 White Roma's which is the third largest population in England and Wales. The community is concentrated in the south, east and north of the borough namely: Willesden Green, Harlesden & Kensal Green, Dollis Hill, Queensbury and Welsh Harp.

3.2.2 Romani (Gypsy), Roma and Traveller (Irish/Scottish Traveller) communities are not homogenous – they are distinct, each with their respective heritage, culture and needs. These communities' diversity and uniqueness is captured well in a [recent report from the Traveller Movement](#). As far as possible, the council recognises and refers to these communities as respective groups and seeks to tailor support and engagement with these groups accordingly. In some instances, particularly in relation to existing data and insights, we may refer to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in different ways or as a collective, this is solely due to the how data is collected and presented by other bodies and organisations. Our insights around these communities are limited, therefore we need to rely on the range of different types of information available.

3.2.3 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are marginalised, seldom heard and under-served groups, despite this there are limited examples of tailored council commitments and activities to support these communities and we have not updated our Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy in over 10 years. As an organisation and borough that strives for inclusion and seeks to ensure no community is left behind, it is vital that we establish a strategy that outlines a clear approach and commitments to support and work with our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

3.2.4 This report outlines our approach to developing a new Brent Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Strategy, including the provisional components that it will encompass. The strategy will be holistic, capturing our commitments to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities which, at a high level, seek to include:

- Recognising the marginalisation, challenges and disproportionate outcomes experienced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, including the council's approach to tackling this.
- Outlining the council's approach to providing safe and supportive accommodation sites. This will include our new Pitch Allocations Policy,

our approach to identifying new sites, how we will manage sites and our approach to unauthorised encampments.

- Capturing our commitment to building sustainable relationships with these communities, recognising existing challenges and learning from our past approaches and practice.

3.2.5 While the shape of, and detail within the strategy will be informed by the consultation (details captured from paragraph 3.2.24 and Appendix A) we have developed a skeleton structure that has been used to help guide progress to date:

- Introduction – overview of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Brent.
- Consultation feedback – high-level consultation and engagement findings, demonstrating how our approach and commitments reflect our communities' voices.
- Overarching approach and commitments to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities which will encompass:
  - Building strong, sustainable relationships and providing accessible services.
    - Approach to building and maintaining a positive relationship with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, including our resource commitments and engagement approach.
    - Assessment of these communities' strengths and needs, using quantitative and qualitative feedback.
    - Specific commitments and/or proposed activity to respond to these communities' strengths and needs.
  - Providing safe and secure sites
    - Pitch Allocations Policy – our approach to allocating permanent and transit pitches.
    - Site management approach, including pitch rent.
    - Unauthorised encampments policy – our approach to unauthorised incursions.
    - Approach to securing new sites – our commitment and approach to identify and secure new sites in Brent.

3.2.6 We have made the following progress to develop some of these components:

#### Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Needs and Outcomes

3.2.7 There have been many national and local studies exploring the disproportionate and poorer outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. National reports have identified and amplified poorer outcomes relating to health (both physical and mental), suicide rates, education, employment and skills and discrimination and hate crime.

3.2.8 We have been building an understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller outcomes in Brent which will be supplemented by the upcoming consultation. However, we still have limited overall insights in Brent around our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) outcomes. What we do know, based on available quantitative insights, is that:

- Age (Census 2021): Brent has a young GRT population, with average ages lower than the Brent average:
  - Brent population, median age: 35
  - Brent White Gypsy and Irish Traveller population, median age: 27
  - Brent White Roma population, median age: 32
- School outcomes:
  - Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) (2021/22 – 2023/24): GRT pupils in Brent are more than twice as likely to have an EHCP when compared with GRT pupils nationally and three times as likely to have an EHCP when compared with the Brent pupil average.
  - SEN support (2021/22 – 2023/24): GRT pupils in Brent are slightly more likely to have SEN support when compared with GRT pupils nationally and more than twice as likely to have such support when compared with the Brent pupil average.
  - Grade attainment (2022 – 2024): GRT pupils in Brent achieved poorer outcomes compared to the national GRT pupil average across Early Years, Phonics Trend and KS2. GRT pupils in Brent achieved better outcomes compared to the national GRT pupil average for KS4.
  - School attendance (2023 – 2025): GRT pupils (categorised in our statistics respectively as Gypsy/Roma and Irish Traveller) in Brent persistently have lower attendance rates when compared to Brent pupils overall.
- Health (NHS NWL Whole Systems Integrated Care data, 2024/25):
  - Compared to the Brent average, Lynton Close residents have higher rates of multiple long-term conditions, anxiety, depression and learning disability.
  - Brent's wider GRT communities have had fewer GP visits but higher hospital admissions compared with the rest of Brent.
- Economic activity (Census 2021):
  - Brent's White Roma population has one of highest employment rates across all ethnic groups in the borough, ranking 2<sup>nd</sup> with 77% in employment. The Roma population is twice as likely to be self-employment compared to the Brent average.
  - However, Brent's Gypsy and Irish Traveller population has the lowest employment rate at 40%.
- Qualifications (Census 2021): Brent's GRT communities are among the least qualified ethnic groups in the borough:
  - Brent White Gypsy and Irish Traveller population: 61% have no qualifications, ranking the lowest.
  - Brent White Roma population: 27% have no qualifications, ranking 3<sup>rd</sup> lowest.
- Financial difficulties and debt: council data finds that some of the community has challenges around council tax payments and rent arrears.

3.2.9 We recognise that we need to gather more data and insights to help us understand these communities, particularly around health, employment and skills and discrimination where there are limited detailed quantitative insights available. We will continue to review existing studies, in addition to practice from other local authorities, and use the upcoming consultation and engagement phase to gather more information and build our understanding. The council will also conduct a separate Gypsy, Roma and Traveller health needs assessment which will replicate elements of the approach taken by [Hackney in 2024](#). The Public Health Evidence and Insight Team will lead the health needs assessment. Their approach is to commission an organisation with expertise in engaging with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to help deliver this project, with the provisional research period spanning October 2025 – January 2026.

#### Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Housing Allocations Scheme

3.2.10 The council is required in accordance with the Housing Act 1996 to have and to publish an Allocations Scheme, setting out how it determines priorities for allocating housing accommodation and the procedures to be followed. All allocations must be in accordance with that Scheme.

3.2.11 The council currently has a Housing Allocations scheme for this purpose; however, the current scheme does not cover the allocation of plots on Gypsy, Roma and Traveller sites. In common with other local authorities, it has been determined that a separate Allocations Scheme for Gypsy, Roma and Travellers should be created, which will sit alongside the main Allocation Scheme.

3.2.12 The London Gypsies and Travellers organisation advised officers that Hackney Council have an established Allocations Scheme, which is highly regarded by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. Officers have therefore drafted an Allocation Scheme which has taken into consideration the Hackney scheme and have sent it to legal services for counsel's advice.

3.2.13 Having had regard to the advice provided by counsel and legal services, a final draft scheme has been created – see appendix B. The scheme is now ready for consultation with Gypsy, Roma and Travellers communities as well as any groups or organisations which represent their interests.

3.2.14 The council will then take into account comments received during the consultation process before drafting a final Allocation Scheme which will be presented to Cabinet for sign off as part of the final strategy.

#### Site Search

3.2.15 A comprehensive site search has been undertaken to identify potential locations within Brent for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller accommodation. The Property Team appointed a consultant, Three Dragons, who have specialist expertise in Gypsy, Roma and Traveller site identification. They have a strong track record of delivering similar work for other local authorities and maintain a

constructive working relationship with the London Gypsies and Travellers organisation.

3.2.16 Over a three-month period, a long list of sites were identified and assessed collaboratively by Three Dragons, the Property Team, and the Planning Department.

3.2.17 Subject to Cabinet approval to explore these sites further, it is anticipated that the process of delivering any individual site will take approximately 18–24 months. This includes time for due diligence and land agreements (3 months), site design (3 months), planning (6–9 months), and construction (9 months). The timeline also incorporates engagement with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller residents, particularly during the design phase. An update report focused on the site search will return to Cabinet in 2026.

3.2.18 Given their planning expertise and experience working with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, the consultant will be retained for ongoing support on an ad-hoc basis, especially during resident engagement and design development stages.

#### Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Site Management Approach

3.2.19 To improve our approach to site management, funding has been agreed for two new posts that will be fundamental in building relationships with the community and ensuring that services are delivered in a positive and timely way:

- One Traveller Liaison and Site Manager
- One Traveller Liaison Officer

3.2.20 The officers would be co-located between the Civic Centre and Lynton Close and be focused on:

- Operational site management, which will span issues such as:
  - Ensuring repairs are reported and completed.
  - Rent and debt management.
  - Ensuring the site is well maintained
- Resident engagement, which will span issues such as:
  - Working with the community to build trust, including establishing regular dialogue with the community.
  - Establishing the needs of the families on site.
  - Collaborating with corporate services to manage engagement around site regeneration and new sites.
- Community engagement and multi-agency working, which will span issues such as:
  - Working with the local community to build trust, communication and escalation channels.
  - Working with Public Health and the NHS to promote health and wellbeing.

3.2.21 As part of our approach, we are seeking endorsement for up to c.£500,000 from 2026/27 for capital investment for site improvement. Lynton Close residents will shape how this will be invested as part of the upcoming engagement.



### Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Site: Pitch Rent

3.2.22 We have benchmarked pitch rents across large Gypsy, Roma and Traveller sites in London. The snapshot finds rents range from £75.64 a week to £242.43, with an average of £138.96 – see the table below.

3.2.23 We are committed to providing a fair rate for our Lynton Close residents. We believe our current rates are too high and we recognise our Lynton Close community's challenges around debt and rent arrears. Having assessed various options, we believe reducing our rates from £185.13 to £138.96 (the London average for large pitches) is a fair rate and are seeking Cabinet's endorsement for this change. If endorsed, we will seek to implement this change as soon as is practicably possible.

*N.b. We will continue to review rents once a year in line with Government rules. Any changes are carefully regulated and, in most cases, will mean a small increase.*

London local authority – pitch rent benchmarking	
Borough	Weekly rent for large pitch
Barking & Dagenham	£242.43
Bexley	£123.00
Brent	£185.13
Greenwich	£75.64
Hackney	£151.60
Harrow	£76.71
Merton	£121.10
Southwark	£153.24
Sutton	£121.79

### **Consultation and engagement phase**

3.2.24 To develop the new strategy we will launch a 10-week formal consultation and engagement phase in September which seeks to:

- Invite open feedback from Brent communities, particularly our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities, to help shape the strategy.
- Build an understanding of perceptions, challenges and opportunities in relation to Brent's Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- Contribute to efforts to build the council's relationship with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

3.2.25 The consultation adopts mixed methods with a focus on direct engagement with communities across Brent. Ahead of the launch will plan to engage with London Gypsies & Travellers, Traveller Movement and Roma Support Group to help shape the approach. Currently the engagement methods are:

- Brent Have Your Say survey - an open survey that invites feedback around general issues and themes and the draft Pitch Allocation Policy. We will also ensure an easy read version is available.
- Qualitative consultation and engagement sessions with Lynton Close community representatives; Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities; Brent residents; and Members. We will also explore the possibility of a session with children and young people from Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.
- Discussions with Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community support groups and organisations such as local churches and schools.

3.2.26 The consultation and engagement will cover several topics which will help shape key components within the strategy. Currently, the draft topics are:

- Our new Pitch Allocation Policy – this policy outlines the council approach to allocating permanent and transit pitches.
- General issues and improving access to services – understanding the communities needs and how we can support around challenges such as health (including social care), debt, children and education, employment etc.
- Site search – understanding the key specifications and design features for any future Gypsy and Traveller sites.

3.2.27 To promote this phase and encourage responses there will be a supporting communications plan. This plan will include different methods to promote the consultation to all Brent residents, including tailored methods for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities.

### **Next steps**

3.2.28 The crucial next step is to launch the consultation, enabling residents to share their voice and shape the new strategy. Once the consultation is complete we will analyse the findings and combine with the quantitative analysis to translate them into a series of commitments and subsequent activity that will respond to any needs and opportunities that have been identified. We are then seeking to report the final strategy to Cabinet by the end of the year. In the meantime, some components of the strategy will continue to develop during the consultation.

## **4.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

4.1 As detailed in appendix A, we have initiated engagement with Brent residents, including specific sessions with Members and Brent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. To shape the consultation and engagement approach we will engage with the Roma Support Group, London Gypsies and Travellers and the Traveller Movement for advice.

- 4.2 The findings from the consultation will be used to shape the new Brent Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Strategy which we aim to finalise by the end of the year.

## **5.0 Financial Considerations**

- 5.1 Financial considerations on the £500k of capital investment will be provided as part of the papers seeking approval for this under the usual capital governance structures.
- 5.2 In 2024/25, rents raised for Traveller Sites amounted to £281k, with £36.5k in arrears accumulating during the year. The total outstanding arrears as at 31st March 2025 was £524k, with a provision of £480k set aside for non- collection.
- 5.3 A reduction in the rate to £138.96 per week will be funded from budget growth provided for in the 2026/27 Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 5.4 The two additional posts are to be funded from the Public Health Grant and budget growth provided for in the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

## **6.0 Legal Considerations**

- 6.1 Brent is aware of the need to consult when the proposals are at a formative stage and to ensure that the feedback received from the consultation is conscientiously taken into account when the ultimate decision is made.
- 6.2 The new strategy will be formulated following engagement with members of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities as well as stakeholder organisations including the Roma Support Group, London Gypsies and Travellers and the Traveller Movement.

## **7.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Considerations**

- 7.1 Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities are protected groups and their experiences of marginalisation, discrimination and disadvantage are well reported at national and local levels. Currently, Brent outlines its commitment to support marginalised groups - through tailoring service delivery and tackling inequality - within the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2024-28; however, we're looking to go beyond this. The report outlines how we will develop specific commitments to support and work with our Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities to best respond to their needs. The final product will have positive EDI implications for the community and around community cohesion, more broadly. Additionally, the new strategy will be accompanied by an Equality Impact Assessment.

## **8.0 Climate Change and Environmental Considerations**

- 8.1 The selection and improvement of sites will consider ways to bring about positive changes for the communities on environmental matters such as cleaner

air, greener spaces, warmer homes, healthier travel and resilience to adverse climate impacts such as heatwaves, flooding and drought.

- 8.2 The strategy will also promote the ways that the communities can take local environmental action, including support with applications for grants to support such activity.

## **9.0 Human Resource and Property Considerations**

- 9.1 The two new posts that will help realise the new site management approach have been agreed and will be recruited through the standard process.
- 9.2 The new strategy will include a commitment to search for new Gypsy, Roma and Traveller sites and engagement around this will be included within the upcoming strategy consultation. There has also already been progress around this as the council have been working with Three Dragons to identify and assess potential sites. A specific update around the site search will be share with Cabinet in 2026.

## **10.0 Communication Considerations**

- 10.1 To support the consultation and engagement phase there will be a range of general and targeted communications to encourage residents and specific communities to participate and share their voice. This is captured within appendix A.

### **Report sign off:**

**Tom Cattermole**

Corporate Director of Residents and Housing Services