

Scottish Housing Regulator

National Panel of Tenants and Service Users 2018/19

**Thematic Report:
Gypsy/Traveller sites**

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. This report provides an overview of findings from the 2018/19 programme of National Panel engagement commissioned by the Scottish Housing Regulator.

Background

- 1.2. The National Panel was established in 2013 as a way for the Scottish Housing Regulator (SHR) to engage with tenants and other users of social landlord services. The Panel fits into SHR's wider approach to communication and engagement with service users. The Panel is used to gauge the priorities and experiences of service users. This helps to shape SHR's focus in its role as regulator of social landlords.
- 1.3. The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of tenants and service users. The current membership includes tenants, factored owners, tenants of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and people who use homelessness services. A large-scale Panel refreshment exercise over the last year has involved the replacement of more than a third of the existing membership to maintain engagement levels. Recruitment to the Panel is ongoing to ensure that the Panel continues to reflect the views of all key groups of service users. The Panel is widely promoted through several channels to ensure that those not normally involved in engaging with social landlords are represented. For example, more than three quarters of Panel members are not involved in RTOs.
- 1.4. Panel membership stands at 425 at the time of reporting, although this number is expected to increase over the coming months as new members continue to join. A profile of the current Panel membership is appended to this report.

The 2018/19 programme

- 1.5. The work programme this year was based around several key themes, including:
- tenant participation;
 - digital access to services;
 - rent affordability;
 - Gypsy/Traveller site standards; and
 - the experience of people who use homelessness services.
- 1.6. Panel engagement across these themes incorporated four main engagement strands:
- A full Panel survey issued to all retained and new Panel members (overall response rate of 60%).
 - In-depth telephone interview engagement with Panel members to explore themes emerging through the survey in more detail (total of 41 interviews).
 - Interview-based research with homeless service users through visits to homeless service access points and telephone interviews. This included those currently in temporary accommodation (supported and dispersed), and those who had been re-housed through the homeless system. Total of 69 interviews across 8 local authority areas.

- Interview-based research with tenants of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites through a mix of site visits and telephone interviews. Total of 55 interviews across 10 sites.
- 1.7. This report integrates quantitative survey results and qualitative findings to provide a rounded view of participants' views and experiences.

2. TENANTS ON GYPSY/TRAVELLER SITES

Key messages

Site location, the mix of residents and sense of community, and on-site wardens were seen as the main positives for current site provision. Concerns most commonly related to site condition and a perceived lack of investment.

Awareness of Gypsy/Traveller Site Standards appears to be limited. However, most feel that Site Standards are a positive for tenants, in judging the quality of services and ensuring equity with other social tenants.

Key areas of interest reflected views on what makes the biggest difference to quality of life on sites. Quality and condition of facilities were seen as the key Standards.

Views were generally positive on landlords' management of works to meet Standards, particularly where tenants had input to the design/planning process. Some significant frustration was expressed where planned works had been delayed or cancelled.

- 2.1. Engagement with tenants on social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites focused on awareness of and views on Site Standards. The Scottish Government published minimum standards for Gypsy/Traveller sites in 2015, building on wider changes to housing and planning policy developed to improve accommodation options for Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland. Site Standards cover the physical facilities and fabric of sites, services provided by the landlord such as repairs and maintenance, and how tenants are treated including consultation with tenants. All Council and RSL owned sites were expected to comply with minimum standards by June 2018.
- 2.2. This section considers tenants' awareness of Site Standards, views on the most relevant aspects of the Standards, experience of any improvement works to date, and views on the changes that make the biggest difference for tenants. Findings are based on qualitative feedback gathered through site visits and telephone interviews, incorporating interviews with 55 tenants across 10 Gypsy/Traveller sites.

Overall views on site provision

- 2.3. Fieldwork with Gypsy/Travellers first asked for tenants' overall views on current site provision.
- 2.4. Feedback highlighted a number of specific positives for site provision. Views were most positive in relation to site location including proximity to shops, amenities and transport; the mix of residents and sense of community on sites; the size of sites and pitches (although some felt site pitches were too small); and the role of the site warden. Some noted that these are significant factors for quality of life on sites, and that they had chosen to stay on their site for many years due to factors such as location and the mix of residents.

2.5. However, most participants expressed concerns about their site. These were most commonly focused around the condition of sites and a perceived lack of investment in recent years, although issues regarding safety and the level of accommodation provision were also raised.

- The most common concerns were around the overall condition and cleanliness of sites, and a perception that sites have suffered from insufficient maintenance and capital investment. This view was most pronounced for sites which were not currently compliant with Site Standards, and which some tenants felt had received insufficient investment for several years.
- Specific concerns most commonly focused on the amenity blocks provided to each pitch (housing kitchen and/or bathroom facilities). Most participants raised issues with their amenity block including some who felt that these were no longer fit for purpose, and who sought to avoid using the block. For those who tried to avoid use of their amenity block, landlords preventing the plumbing-in of static caravans or chalets was a frustration. Specific issues for amenity blocks included significant disrepair, limited facilities (e.g. lack of a bath for those with young children and/or mobility needs), poor insulation and difficulties heating, and a lack of ventilation and associated dampness. Some contrasted the perceived poor condition and quality of amenity blocks with provision elsewhere in Scotland or the UK.
- Some referred to examples of long-standing disrepair to the site. Most interviewees had experience of repairs to their pitch and/or site amenities, including some who rated these services very positively. However, a substantial number referred to examples of repairs not being completed within reasonable timescales, or not being completed at all.
- Tenants also raised concerns around safety and security on site, primarily in relation to younger children on site. This included comments around the proximity of sites to major roads, the condition and suitability of any play park facilities, and provision of fences to individual pitches (these were provided at several sites visited for the fieldwork, and were rated positively by interviewees on these sites).
- Several interviewees suggested that a shortage of Gypsy/Traveller site provision was having an impact on quality of life for family and friends. This included reference to households having to stay with family where they are unable to access a pitch of their own. Some wished to see additional pitches provided to their site, while others felt that additional sites are required

In their words...

"The site used to be OK but it has really gone downhill in the last few years."



Awareness of Site Standards

2.6. Fieldwork suggests limited awareness of Gypsy/Traveller Site Standards amongst site tenants. A little more than 1 in 10 of all interviewees had heard of the Standards, although for some sites this fell to no tenants being aware of specific Standards. Tenants were most likely to be aware of standards around physical facilities and fabric, including some reference to energy efficiency standards.

- 2.7. Differences in levels of awareness of Site Standards appear to reflect how tenants had heard of the Standards. This was typically via involvement in tenant participation opportunities and direct communication from landlords around works being completed to meet Standards, which appears to have been limited to specific sites. A small number of participants also reported having seen media reports around lack of compliance with the Standards.

Interest in Site Standards

- 2.8. While awareness of Site Standards was limited, most participants felt that tenants would benefit from access to information on minimum standards for Gypsy/Traveller sites. This reflected a view that Site Standards can be valuable in enabling tenants to judge the quality of their site, similar to the role currently played by tenants' knowledge of other sites. Standards were also seen as important in ensuring tenants receive equity of service. However, it should be noted that some questioned whether all tenants would see Site Standards as relevant to their experience. This included some participants who were sceptical about whether Standards will translate into real change for sites.

In their words...

"[Tenants] need to know if we're getting what we should."



- 2.9. Key areas of interest for participants appeared to reflect views on which aspects of Site Standards make the biggest difference for tenants' quality of life. As such, views appeared to vary dependent on participants' circumstances including any outstanding issues with their current site, and their family circumstances (for example families with young children were more likely to focus on play parks and safety).
- 2.10. Overall, feedback suggests that standards around the quality and condition of pitches and site facilities are seen as most relevant for tenants. The key areas of interest are summarised below:

Site Standards seen as most relevant for tenants of Gypsy/Traveller sites	
Physical fabric and facilities	Safety and security
Condition of amenity blocks (including energy efficiency), the range of facilities provided by amenity blocks, the condition of pitch surfaces and the quality of play park facilities.	Provision of fencing to pitches, safety for children (including road safety on and off-site, and access to suitable secure play parks), and fire safety (including some concerns around the extent to which sufficient smoke detectors and fire extinguishers were provided).
Maintenance and repairs	Fair treatment and consultation
Ensuring sufficient ongoing maintenance and investment for sites – there is a common view that there has been insufficient investment in recent years. Repair timescales were also highlighted, with some suggesting that multiple requests are needed for work to be completed. A small number also referred to fly tipping on vacant pitches, and noted the detrimental impact on neighbouring pitches.	Ensuring equity with other sites and social tenants. Some compared their rent unfavourably with that for permanent housing, and suggested that this was poor value for money relative to the facilities provided. Communication with tenants is also important, although participants typically focused on engagement around specific planned works (rather than ongoing engagement, for example).

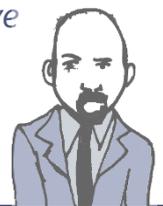
- 2.11. Views were somewhat mixed on how tenants would prefer to receive information on Site Standards. Most preferred to receive information in person, either through site meetings (particularly for sites with established tenant groups or ongoing tenant engagement) or via site managers speaking directly to individual households. Some would also like written information in the form of posters or newsletters, although it was noted that literacy levels vary across Gypsy/Traveller sites.

Works to meet Site Standards

- 2.12. Most interviewees referred to improvement works having been completed in recent years, although some were unclear on when works were completed. Moreover, few were able to say whether these were specifically related to minimum Site Standards.
- 2.13. Specific works mentioned by participants included:
- **Upgrades to amenity blocks** including new kitchen and bathroom facilities, replacement of flooring and general interior decoration, renewal of cladding and installation of solar panels.
 - **Upgrades to site pitches** including extension of pitches, upgrading of pitch surfaces, installation of fencing to pitches, and provision of storage sheds.
 - **Upgrades to site facilities** including new play parks and recreation areas, road repairs and upgrades to drainage.
- 2.14. Interviewees also referred to planned improvement works across several sites. These were similar to the completed works noted above, including upgrades to amenity blocks and pitches, site facilities and drainage. Planned improvements also included other works such as upgrades to communal facilities and creation of new pitches.
- 2.15. Participants were generally positive around landlords' management of improvement works. Most had received information in advance of works (typically via site meetings and/or 1-1 engagement with tenants) and felt that this had provided sufficient detail. Across several sites, tenants had been given a role in the design process such as input to the choice of pitch fencing, location and design of play parks, and design choices for upgrades to amenity blocks. This input had a positive impact on tenants' experience of the process, and on their satisfaction with the completed works.
- 2.16. Where tenants did not have any input to improvement works, this appeared to have contributed to some frustration with the planning process – and in some cases a view that the design of completed works could have been improved. This included for example cladding to amenity blocks improving their appearance but having a limited impact on insulation and energy efficiency.
- 2.17. Feedback was also generally positive on the process of works being completed. Participants typically indicated that the process had been managed well, and arrangements put in place for tenants to access alternative pitches or amenities as required.

In their words...

"They should let us have a say...we know what we need, what works for the site."



- 2.18. The main frustration around improvement works related to the time taken for works to be completed. A substantial proportion of participants who had works completed also referred to this process taking much longer than their landlord had advised. However, the most significant frustration was associated with commencement dates having been significantly delayed, changed and/or plans not coming to fruition after having been developed with site tenants. For some tenants, this appeared to have contributed to some scepticism around planned improvements, and a reluctance to participate in the planning process.

In their words...

"It's got to the point where we have given up trying to change things."



Making a difference for site tenants

- 2.19. All participants who had seen improvement works were positive about the difference these had made to their site. This included some highlighting the extent to which improvements had a very significant impact on tenants' quality of life, and noting the importance of tenants' input to the planning process to ensure works have the greatest possible impact for tenants.
- 2.20. Feedback made clear that some improvements have had (or would have for those still awaiting improvements) a more significant impact for tenants. The main suggested improvements are summarised below.

Site improvement works suggested by participants

Amenity blocks

The most common suggestion, reflecting frequency of use and impact on energy costs. Access to modern facilities also seen as important for tenants' dignity. Suggestions focused on ventilation, insulation and heating – and perceived need to improve energy efficiency. Others felt replacement was required to address fundamental issues.

Play parks

Most participants felt that play parks no longer fit for purpose. Improvement suggestions related to design (e.g. not suitable for younger children) and condition. Secure fencing around play parks was also suggested, particularly for sites close to major roads.

Safety and security

A common priority for all sites. Fencing to pitches was a common suggestion, particularly for those with children and to ensure control of dogs on site. Road safety was also a common concern. Suggestions included speed controls on-site and on access roads. Fire safety was a third key safety concern, particularly on sites having experienced fire incidents.

Other suggested improvements

- Resurfacing of pitches, particularly for those with limited mobility;
- Upgrading to communal portacabins to provide a usable space for site tenants and children;
- Improvements to drainage on site, particularly for the small number of tenants who had been affected by repeated failure of drainage facilities;
- Installation of solar panels to improve energy efficiency;
- Enabling site tenants to access more robust static caravan or chalet accommodation, through landlords allowing plumbing to site pitches and/or considering schemes to enable tenants to rent chalets;
- Providing individual mailboxes for delivery of mail direct to site pitches – this reflected some concerns around mail being delivered collectively to the site office; and
- Screening to protect pitches from the elements where sites are in exposed locations.

PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Panel seeks to engage with a good cross-section of tenants and service users. The current membership includes tenants, factored owners, tenants of social rented Gypsy/Traveller sites and people who use homelessness services. In terms of the wider Panel profile, the focus is on ensuring membership includes representation across all socio-demographic groups, rather than achieving an exact match to the wider service user population. In this context, some groups such as those in rural areas have been over-sampled to ensure sufficient volume for more focused engagement within these groups.

Ensuring a balanced Panel membership is also a key element of ongoing promotion and recruitment work. This seeks to expand the reach of the Panel in terms of the size of the membership and representation of specific population subgroups. A Panel refreshment exercise has been undertaken during 2018 and 2019 to replace the longest-standing members and maintain engagement levels. This has involved replacing more than a third of the total membership through recruitment of 191 new members at the time of reporting. As a result the total membership currently stands at 425, although this number is expected to increase over the coming months as new members continue to join.

The current Panel profile suggests a number of areas where further expanding Panel membership would improve representation. As noted above, the aim of ongoing recruitment and promotion work should be on ensuring a sufficient number of members within specific groups, rather than an exact match with the wider population. In this context, the current Panel profile suggests recruitment should seek to boost numbers of black and minority ethnic members, factored owners and potential those aged under 35.

A profile of the current Panel membership is provided over the page.

Current membership		425
Age		
Under 35		14%
35-44		16%
45-59		29%
60-74		29%
75+		10%
Unknown		2%
How would you describe your gender?		
Woman		53%
Man		46%
In another way		1%
Housing Tenure		
Council tenant		41%
RSL tenant		44%
Owner		6%
Gypsy/ Traveller site resident		7%
Unknown		3%
Have used homelessness services		
Yes		4%
No		96%
Ethnicity		
White Scottish, British or Irish		87%
White other (inc Scottish Traveller, Gypsy/ Traveller)		9%
Black Minority Ethnic		2%
Unknown		1%
Disability		
1 or more disabilities		39%
No disability		48%
Unknown		13%
RTO membership		
Member of RTO		24%
Not a member of RTO		76%