

Housing, Regeneration and Planning

Review of the Twice Yearly Count of Gypsies/Travellers in Scotland

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The research involved a review of the Twice Yearly Count of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland - which returns data on the population living on official sites, private sites and unauthorised encampments - in the context of its aim to influence delivery and planning of accommodation services for Gypsy/Travellers. The review has been undertaken by Craigforth for the Scottish Government, and provides an assessment of the readership and use of the Count including consideration of options for the future operation of the Count.

Main Findings

- An increase in the Gypsy/Traveller population to a peak of 848 households in summer 2007 is evident, with this growth primarily accommodated by increased encampment activity. It is not clear the extent to which growth in encampment activity may reflect unmet need for permanent site accommodation.
- A comparison of Count outputs with alternate population estimates suggests that the Count may record only between a third and a half of the total Gypsy/Traveller population in Scotland. This under-counting is due in very large part to exclusion of housed Gypsy/Travellers from the Count's remit; the housed population may be very substantial in some areas. However the housed Gypsy/Traveller population appears to have relatively little relevance to Count objectives, and therefore little policy basis for including this population within the Count's remit.
- A range of other population coverage issues emerged. Most significant issues related to some under-recording of encampment activity, inconsistencies across local authorities in Count processes, variations in the capacity and relevant knowledge of officers undertaking the Count, and inconsistencies in recording and maintenance of waiting list information for official sites.
- Gypsy/Travellers have an ongoing relevance to a range of policy areas, suggesting a continuing need for robust data on the size and profile of the Gypsy/Traveller population in Scotland. There is no immediate prospect of an alternative to the Twice Yearly Count sufficient to meet policy and service delivery requirements. However it is clear that the remit and objectives of the Count should be redefined to ensure continuing relevance to policy and service development.
- In relation to the operation and content of the Twice Yearly Count the preferred option was for a move away from the current bi-annual "snapshot" approach to data collection, to more continuous recording of encampment activity alongside an annual or bi-annual "snapshot" count of official and private site provision. This could offer significant benefits in terms of improved recording of patterns of encampment activity.
- Current awareness and use of Count outputs is relatively low across some stakeholder groups, suggesting a need to reconsider the approach to dissemination of Count results to maximise reach and ensure outputs can inform key policy areas. Dissemination should make better use of existing networks and communication channels to reach key stakeholder groups. Count outputs should have a greater focus on identifying key findings for specific policy areas, and the approach to reporting tailored to meet the needs of the full range of stakeholders, including the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Research Aims and Objectives

The Twice Yearly Count is undertaken in January and July each year and returns data on the Gypsy/ Traveller population living on official sites, private sites and caravans found on unauthorised encampments. The Count was implemented with the aim of improving understanding of the Gypsy/Traveller population, to shape the delivery of accommodation provision for Gypsy/Travellers and to inform policy and strategy development. Over the period of the Count's operation this has included contributing towards the Equalities agenda, informing decisions on site-related funding, and informing housing need assessments and other service provision by local authorities.

The main aims of the review were to:

- Assess the current readership and use of the Twice Yearly Count, in the context of its aim to inform delivery and planning of accommodation and services for Gypsy/Travellers;
- Assess the relevance, quality and robustness of data currently collected through the Count;
- Consider whether there is a continuing need for a separate Count of Gypsy/ Travellers in Scotland; and
- Consider options for the future operation of the Count if it is to continue, including the most appropriate scope in terms of population and range of information collected.

Approach

The scope and objectives of the review required a series of distinct research strands, including:

- Longitudinal analysis of Count data to identify emerging longer-term trends in Gypsy/Traveller population and accommodation provision;
- A detailed audit of Count data, to assess the extent to which the Count provided an accurate picture of the likely scale, distribution and profile of the Gypsy/Traveller population in Scotland;
- Extensive consultation with a range of stakeholders including the Gypsy/Traveller community to gauge views on the value and purpose of the Count, the accuracy of data collected, and potential future priorities for the Count in terms of its administration and the range of information collected. This involved survey, telephone and face to face interview approaches; and
- An options appraisal workshop with stakeholders to consider the main findings emerging from the review, and assess options for the future of the Count.

Trends in Population and Accommodation Provision

There has been no consistent upward or downward trend in the total Gypsy/Traveller population over the period of the Count, although a general increase in the population to a

peak of 848 households in summer 2007 is evident. Population levels have since reduced during 2008 and 2009 to a more consistent level of 700.

The relationship between the summer and winter Gypsy/Traveller population is complex. Winter numbers are typically around two thirds of those reported in the summer although this can vary considerably year on year. However, growth over the period to 2007 was seen in both summer and winter populations suggesting there may be year-round factors influencing population levels.

The growth in Gypsy/Traveller population seen over the period to 2007 was primarily accommodated by encampment activity. There was significant growth in encampment numbers over this period, in the context of relatively little change in the private site population and some decrease in the number of usable pitches on official sites. It is not clear the extent to which growth in encampment activity may reflect an unmet need for permanent site accommodation.

Quality and Accuracy of Data

The Count's coverage of the Gypsy/Traveller population reflects both the remit in excluding some travelling communities (such as those in permanent housing), and also the robustness of Count processes in capturing all site and encampment activity. This is distinct to issues around the extent to which data collected through the Count provides an accurate picture of the "target" Gypsy/Traveller population (those on sites and encampments).

Stakeholders with limited understanding of the process of undertaking the Count tended to conflate issues of remit and robustness. As a result, policy questions around the Count's exclusion of parts of the Gypsy/Traveller population appear to impact on stakeholder confidence in the accuracy of Count data.

An assessment of the Count's coverage of the total Gypsy/Traveller population involved comparison with alternate population estimates. This suggests that the Count may record only between a third and a half of the Gypsy/Traveller population in Scotland.

This under-counting if due in very large part to exclusion of housed Gypsy/Travellers from the Count's remit. Evidence from the Gypsy/ Traveller community and other stakeholders suggests that the housed population may be very substantial in some areas. However, consultation suggests relatively little commonality between the housed population and those living on sites or encampments in terms of service and accommodation provision. Moreover there is currently no information source on housed Gypsy/ Travellers suitable for inclusion in the Count. As such there appears to be little policy basis for seeking to include housed Gypsy/ Travellers within the Twice Yearly Count for the purposes of accommodation services provision.

Other population coverage issues were raised in relation to the Gypsy/Traveller population living on sites and encampments. This was particularly in relation to recording of encampment activity. Despite recent improvements in the

robustness of encampment data there remain concerns that the Count does not adequately represent encampment activity. Consultation with the Gypsy/Traveller community identified a number of encampments which did not appear to have been captured through the Count. This is also consistent with concerns from other stakeholders regarding difficulties in meeting the resourcing requirements of a single day estimate of encampments.

In terms of wider accuracy and robustness concerns, most significant issues related to the extent of inconsistencies across local authorities in the processes used to produce Count data. Local authorities report variations in how encampment activity in particular is captured for the Count, often reflecting resource constraints.

There were also concerns from other stakeholders not involved in undertaking the Count, around the extent to which designated officers had sufficient capacity and knowledge to produce accurate data for the Count. This appears to be a particular issue for officers whose role does not have a specific Gypsy/Traveller focus.

Accuracy issues also emerged in relation to recording of waiting list demand. Stakeholders highlighted the potential value of this data for the Count's objectives in terms of informing delivery of services and accommodation for Gypsy/Travellers. However stakeholders - and particularly those not involved in the Count - suggested that waiting list data did not provide an accurate account of the scale of demand for official site provision. This reflected concerns around inconsistencies across local authorities in recording and maintenance of waiting list information, rather than how this is collated through the Count.

Readership and Use

Gypsy/Travellers have an ongoing relevance to a range of policy areas including accommodation needs, wider housing strategy and provision of services such as education, health and social care. Current national policy guidance, and local service delivery activities suggest a continuing need for robust data on the size and profile of the Gypsy/Traveller population in Scotland.

There is no immediate prospect of an alternative to the Twice Yearly Count to meet policy and service delivery requirements in terms of frequency and content of information. The 2011 Census will provide valuable baseline information and may assist in estimating the likely size of the housed Gypsy/Traveller population, but will not be sufficient to meet ongoing information requirements.

However it is clear that some degree of modification is required to ensure the Twice Yearly Count continues to meet policy and service objectives. There is a need for the remit and specific policy objectives of the Count to be redefined, to ensure appropriate balance is struck between the requirements of agencies, service providers and Gypsy/Travellers. In this context a number of stakeholder agencies and the Gypsy/ Traveller community suggested that Count objectives be re-focused to provide a greater emphasis on measurable outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers in

terms of accommodation provision and local service delivery.

Specific priorities also emerged in relation to the operation and content of the Twice Yearly Count, with the focus on ensuring Count outputs meet policy and service requirements. The most significant priority is for improved information on encampment activity, seen as particularly relevant in terms of informing assessment of accommodation and service needs. However there are likely to be considerable challenges to gathering highly detailed information on encampment activity, reflecting issues around access to and engagement with the population on unauthorised encampments.

Nevertheless a number of options emerged through the review to improve the Count's coverage of encampment activity, and potentially to move towards gathering more detailed information in terms of population profile and travel patterns. The preferred option was for a move away from the current bi-annual "snapshot" approach to data collection, to more continuous recording of encampment activity alongside an annual or bi-annual "snapshot" count of official and private site provision.

Current awareness and use of Count outputs varies significantly across stakeholder groups, and is relatively low amongst Gypsy /Travellers. This suggests a need to reconsider the approach to dissemination of Count results to maximise reach, and ensure outputs can inform relevant policy and service delivery activities. Housing strategy and management, and environmental health emerged as key priorities amongst a range of relevant policy areas. There is also some interest amongst the Gypsy/Traveller community in receiving feedback on Count findings, and potentially having some input to improving accuracy of information.

A range of options were identified in relation to potential approaches to dissemination of Count outputs. A more strategic approach should make better use of relevant existing networks and communication channels to reach key stakeholder agencies recommended making best use of existing networks. This should also include consideration of more direct in-person feedback for the Gypsy/Traveller community. Stakeholder agencies also suggested potential for shorter, themed summary reports to make clearer the implications of Count findings for specific policy areas.

Recommendations

A series of recommendations emerged from the review in relation to (i) the scope and accuracy of Count data, (ii) the value of Count data for policy and service development, and (iii) readership and use of Count outputs.

In relation to the format, scope and accuracy of Count data:

- A separate Count of Gypsy/Travellers in Scotland should continue, on the basis of a re-assessment of the purpose of the Count and a clear set of policy objectives.
- The scope of the Count should remain Gypsy/Travellers on official sites, private sites and encampments.

- The Count should move to more continuous recording of encampment activity by local authorities, and an annual Count exercise to gather data on official and private sites. The Government should consider in partnership with local agencies, the most appropriate mechanism for ongoing collection of encampment data.
- Greater use is made of the Count process as a mechanism for sharing good practice in gathering information on private sites, and to encourage greater consistency across areas in terms of systems in place to undertake the Count.
- Dissemination of Count findings should give all stakeholders - including local and national agencies, and Gypsies/Travellers - the opportunity to raise concerns around the data coverage and accuracy.

In relation to maximising the value of data produced by the Count:

- The Scottish Government and local agencies should work towards gathering information on the profile and travel patterns of Gypsy/Travellers occupying unauthorised encampments.
- Consideration should be given to whether and how the collection of more detailed information on the Gypsy/Traveller child population could better inform provision of education and other child services.

- Consideration should be given to gathering information on the availability and condition of amenities on official sites.

In relation to improving Count readership:

- Dissemination of outputs from the Count should make greater use of existing networks and communication channels, with a focus on key policy areas where Count data has a role to play. The Scottish Government should specify local and national groups, and communication networks as the basis for future dissemination of Count outputs.
- Count outputs should place greater emphasis on providing a high level commentary to aid readers in identifying key trends and issues.
- Dissemination of Count results should include production of a short summary report highlighting key findings and implications for stakeholder agencies.
- A shorter and more informal paper should be produced suitable for dissemination to Gypsy/ Travellers, as part of a more tailored approach to ensure that Count results are fed back to Gypsy/Travellers.

This document, along with full research report of the project, and further information about social and policy research commissioned and published on behalf of the Scottish Government, can be viewed on the Internet at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch>. If you have any further queries about social research, please contact us at socialresearch@scotland.gsi.gov.uk or on 0131-244 7560.



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