



**FRIENDS,  
FAMILIES &  
TRAVELLERS**

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# **Access to energy for Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans**

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## Introduction

In the wake of an energy price crisis, this report brings together information from research about energy access and prices for Romany Gypsies, Irish Travellers and nomadic communities living in caravans. The research looks at the different energy use arrangements for Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans and gives some insight into the rising costs of the different fuel types used.

Arrangements for energy use are often different to those living in bricks and mortar accommodation and the subsequent inflated costs have long been an issue for Gypsy and Traveller households. The energy costs crisis will compound the experience of fuel poverty for these households, who face other impacts from a wider cost-of-living crisis.

This report also highlights the exclusions from the [Energy Bills Support Scheme](#) (EBSS), a scheme to support households through the energy price crisis. Due to the way the £400 EBSS grant scheme is designed, many Gypsies and Travellers living on local authority and private sites, roadside camps, and liveaboard boaters, are excluded from this financial support.

## Research methods

We submitted Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to all 68 local authorities in the South-East of England. 20 local authorities responded, confirming they owned or managed permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites, amounting to 56 sites in total. Two local authorities did not respond to the FOI request in time for the publication of the research. The remaining 46 local authorities confirmed they did not own or manage any permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites<sup>1</sup>.

In order to supplement this research and to provide an understanding of how households used energy and at what price, we surveyed 12 households<sup>2</sup> on local authority sites, private sites, roadside camps and boats. The small number of in-

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<sup>1</sup> Number of FOI responses by local authority type: County Councils (5) Borough Councils (7) District Councils (4) Unitary authority (4).

<sup>2</sup> Number of surveys conducted by accommodation type: Local authority site (4) Private site (2) Roadside camp (3) Boat (3).

depth surveys were complimented by reports from energy retailers and national data sets on energy price increases.

## Research findings

### Access to energy

#### Findings from FOI responses: Local authority sites in the South-East<sup>3</sup>

- 97% of residents on sites managed by local authorities<sup>4</sup> had no access to mains gas with residents forced to purchase gas bottles instead.
- All of the local authorities who responded to the FOI request confirmed there was access to mains electricity supply on all sites<sup>5</sup>.
- For 32% of the sites, local authorities confirmed they hold the electricity contract and sell the electricity onto residents as a third party.
- Local authorities confirmed that on 82% of the sites, residents were on prepayment meters (some directly to the supplier, some to the site owner)<sup>6</sup>.

#### Findings from 12 household survey respondents: Local authority and private sites, roadside camps and boats<sup>7</sup>

- Households living on local authority sites, private sites, roadside camps, and liveaboard boaters, had no access to mains gas. Instead, households used gas bottles.
- Households living on roadside camps and liveaboard boaters had no access to mains electricity. Instead, households use other sources of power, predominantly generators.
- Households living on roadside camps and liveaboard boaters also used a range of alternative forms of energy such as wood-burners, multifuel stoves, and engines to power batteries for electricity.
- Four out of the six households on sites purchase their electricity via the site owner.

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<sup>3</sup> Evidence from FOI data from local authorities in the South-East of England.

<sup>4</sup> Of those who responded.

<sup>5</sup> To note, not all Gypsies and Travellers have access to mains electricity and use, for example, generators, see further below.

<sup>6</sup> On some sites, there is a mix of payment methods, including prepayment meter and direct debit. On sites where residents are charged directly to the supplier via prepayment meters, they will pay a higher rate per unit and are at risk of being cut-off. On sites where residents access their electricity via the site owner and are billed via prepayment meters, they may be paying a higher rate, and are at risk of being cut-off.

<sup>7</sup> Survey data.

- The two household survey respondents on separate private sites were on prepayment meters, and three out of the four households on local authority sites were on pre-payment meters.

## Exclusion from the Energy Bills Support Scheme

The £400 EBSS grant is a much-needed form of support for households to help pay energy bills. It is issued via domestic account holders' electricity supplier<sup>8</sup>. However, by design, this grant scheme currently excludes anyone who does not have a direct contract with an electricity supplier or mains electricity access. If households access electricity from a landlord as a third party through a commercial contract, they are also excluded. Gypsies and Travellers living on local authority sites, private sites, roadside camps, and liveaboard boaters are among those disproportionately excluded from the full £400 grant because of energy access arrangements in the different forms of accommodation. Many Gypsies and Travellers have contacted Friends, Families and Travellers' frontline support teams and other organisations about this issue, and the research shows:

- 32% of families on local authority sites in the South-East of England were not eligible for the £400 grant as the local authority held the contract for the electricity supply.
- 10 out of the 12 households surveyed were not eligible for the £400 grant as they either did not have a mains electricity connection or a third party held the electricity contract.

Whilst Government has stated exclusions from the EBSS will be addressed in Autumn 2022, progress on this is slow. Families are living in harder to heat homes, experiencing fuel poverty and not getting the support that's needed quickly enough, as temperatures begin to drop<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> Issued in six instalments with the first instalment of the grant issued from October 2022- March 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Friends, Families and Travellers and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Gypsies, Travellers and Roma are continuing to raise this issue with the Department for Business, Energy and Industry.

## The cost of energy

### Gas bottles

All of the households surveyed and 97% of local authority site residents in the South-East of England currently use gas bottles as they do not have access to a mains gas supply. We contacted Calor retailers<sup>10</sup> across the country who reported prices for gas bottles for October 2022 between £38-£62 for a 13kg gas bottle refill and £85-£136 for a 47kg gas bottle refill. For those gas retailers who were able to obtain previous prices for 2022, they reported increases between January and October 2022 of 14-17% for a 13kg gas bottle and 20-25% for 47kg gas bottle.

Households surveyed reported that a 47kg bottle of gas would last between one and two weeks in the winter. Given the most recent gas bottle prices, Gypsies and Travellers could be paying anywhere from £184 up to £589 a month on gas alone in winter 2022. [British Gas](#) estimated that the average family of 4-5 could be paying £155 a month from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October.

### Petrol and Diesel

Gypsies and Travellers who live on roadside camps, or liveaboard boaters, use petrol/diesel either in a generator or to power the boat engine to charge batteries for electricity. Those survey respondents reported usually spending between £30 and £300<sup>11</sup> a month on petrol/diesel in the winter. According to the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the price of petrol and diesel has increased by over 30% in the last 3 years<sup>12</sup>.

### Solid fuel

Some survey respondents reported using solid fuel such as coal and wood for multifuel stoves and wood burners. Respondents reported spending £30 - £296 on solid fuel per month in the winter<sup>13</sup>. Reports from a local retailer indicated the price of solid fuel had increased by 61% in the last three years<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Jefferson Calor Gas Brighton, Gas bottles direct Goring, Bottle gasses Kent, The Boatyard Staverton, Catleys Devizes, Jewsons Devizes, Bath Narrowboats.

<sup>11</sup> There is a wide variation in monthly spend, depending on the other forms of energy being used by the household and family size.

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/weekly-road-fuel-prices>

<sup>13</sup> There is a wide variation in monthly spend owing to different energy set ups and family size.

<sup>14</sup> Stove glow.

## Mains electricity

All residents on local authority sites in the South-East of England have access to mains electricity supply, with the majority on prepayment meters.

Those survey respondents with access to mains electricity reported spending between £50-£660 a month on electricity during the winter<sup>15</sup><sup>16</sup>. The Office for National Statistics, reported a 54% increase in the cost of electricity in the last 12 months (September 2022)<sup>17</sup>.

## Summary

The findings have highlighted several issues which have resulted in high energy costs for Gypsies and Travellers living on sites, roadside camps, and liveboard boaters.

The research showed that many Gypsies and Travellers living on sites do not have a direct contract with an electricity supplier. The way that some sites are designed and managed means households must buy their electricity from the site owner as a third party and do not have the freedom to choose supplier or shop around for the best rates and tariffs.

A large number of Gypsies and Travellers living on sites are also on prepayment meters, meaning many households are paying more per unit of energy and are at greater risk of having their electricity supply cut off<sup>18</sup>.

Most of the Gypsy and Traveller sites in the South-East of England and the surveyed households, do not have access to a mains gas supply. Most households use gas bottles, an incredibly expensive source of energy for heating a home and cooking, when compared with mains gas.

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<sup>15</sup> There is a wide variation in monthly spend owing to different energy set ups and family size.

<sup>16</sup> Some of these electricity charges are in dispute by households.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/czcz>

<sup>18</sup> On sites where the local authority hold the electricity contract and are billed via prepayment meter, and then bill residents via submeters, they will pay higher rates per unit and are at risk of self-disconnection. Some councils purchase electricity in bulk and bill residents via prepayment meters, in this case, those residents will not necessarily pay the higher rates but are still subject to self-disconnection.

The research also highlighted dramatic price increases for the different forms of energy used, for gas bottles, solid fuel, electricity, diesel and petrol. Gypsies and Travellers living in caravans have harder to heat homes, and despite the rising prices of energy, many are excluded from receiving the sorely needed £400 financial support under the Energy Bills Support Scheme.

## Recommendations

- Government to urgently issue the equivalent £400 financial support to all households currently excluded from the Energy Bills Support Scheme.
- Government to work with Ofgem to reduce the price cap inequality for households on prepayment meters and to prevent customers being forced onto prepayment meters.
- Government and local authorities should review and address fuel poverty and energy access on Gypsy and Traveller sites by:
  - ensuring households on socially-rented Gypsy and Traveller sites are able to have a direct supply with an electricity company (i.e. not through a third party) where they wish to;
  - developing sites so there is access to a mains gas supply (leading to less reliance on more expensive gas bottles);
  - addressing the high percentage of prepayment meters on sites, establishing more affordable access to energy;
  - improving site design, to introduce sustainable green energy access on sites.

## About us

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is a leading national charity that seeks to end racism and discrimination against Gypsies, Travellers and Roma and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life. [www.gypsy-traveller.org](http://www.gypsy-traveller.org) | **Telephone** +44 (0)1273 234 777 | **Email** [fft@gypsy-traveller.org](mailto:fft@gypsy-traveller.org)  
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