



**FRIENDS,
FAMILIES &
TRAVELLERS**

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***'They know the issues, they don't care':* Living conditions on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites**

**Research conducted by:
Friends, Families and Travellers**

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Introduction

Poor living conditions on Gypsy and Traveller sites are a widespread issue across the country. Due to unclear laws and policies, there is inconsistent practice among regulatory bodies in the treatment of residents of rented Gypsy and Traveller sites. This has created a systemic discriminatory effect, whereby Gypsy and Traveller families living on sites are not afforded the same protection against disrepair as those living in bricks and mortar rented accommodation.

This report presents findings from research conducted with 24 residents living on rented, local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites who were experiencing poor living conditions in 2025. The research exposes substandard living conditions endured by residents on Gypsy and Traveller sites, alongside a troubling lack of action from landlords to resolve serious health and safety concerns. This failure underscores an urgent need for robust protections that enable residents to hold landlords accountable and enjoy the right to safe, dignified, and habitable accommodation.

Although this research is based on a relatively small sample of site residents and provides only a snapshot of experiences at a particular point in time, its findings are consistent with wider research and anecdotal evidence, indicating that these failures are systemic rather than isolated incidents.

Key findings

- Site residents said they had experienced a total of 129 health and safety issues/hazards in the rented amenity block and site over the previous year.
- These included: vermin infestation, damp and mould, inadequate heating, asbestos, sewage and water issues, faulty electrics, fire safety failures, poor mobile home base, and poorly maintained site boundary.
- The majority of these issues/hazards were reported to the site owner/manager but just eight of the issues were dealt with adequately by the site owner/manager.
- Survey respondents said that the majority of the issues had a mild to severe impact on them and/or their family.
- Follow-up interviews with 10 of the residents gave in-depth insight into the extent of the issues/hazards and the financial, mental and physical impact on their lives.

Background

There is a long-standing, national shortage of Gypsy and Traveller sites which is recognised by [international human rights bodies](#) as a violation of the rights of Gypsies and Travellers. The *quality* of existing Gypsy and Traveller sites is given much less attention. Indeed, the issue appears to have fallen through the gaps of legislation designed to protect residents from substandard and inhumane living accommodation.

When the report refers to living conditions on Gypsy and Traveller sites, we are referring to the rented amenities for which the resident pays the site owner. This does not include any privately owned mobile homes/tourers stationed on the site. The rented facilities include an individual amenity block, all communal areas of the site, access to gas, water, electricity, the base on which the mobile home is stationed, access ways, fences and lighting. The amenity block which forms part of an individual pitch, is also referred to as a 'day room', 'outhouse', or 'shed' and usually contains essential kitchen, bathroom and sanitation facilities.

There is limited published evidence on the extent to which residents on Gypsy and Traveller sites experience poor living conditions. FFT have dealt with cases of extreme disrepair and negligence on Gypsy and Traveller sites and small-scale research indicates the problem is widespread. For example, the [Office for National Statistics' 'lived experience'](#) research with Gypsies and Travellers in 2022, revealed numerous health and safety issues on private and socially rented sites, including fly-tipping, vermin infestation, damp and leaks in communal facilities and the general need for repair. Research participants reported that the local authority often failed to deal with these issues in a timely manner.

[Research carried out in 2024](#) found that among the 167 local authorities included in the research, around three-quarters (73%) had received environmental complaints from Gypsy and Traveller sites within their areas. Of those local authorities that had received complaints, around half (51%) had complained about vermin, and 38% about waste. Aside from this research, there is no other national data on the living conditions on Gypsy and Traveller sites. The next section outlines legal protections for residents of rented accommodation to challenge poor living conditions.

Legal protections to challenge poor living conditions

Recent years have seen a series of legislative and regulatory reforms aimed at strengthening housing standards and tenant protections, following tragedies such as the Grenfell Tower fire and the death of Awaab Ishak from chronic mould exposure. The [Decent Homes Standard 2026](#) has been strengthened, the [Social Housing Regulation Act 2023](#) created robust new powers to hold landlords of social housing to account for failure to ensure a certain standard of living and the [Renters Right Act 2026](#) expanded existing protections into the private rented sector to ensure everyone has access to a safe home. Everyone, except those living on rented Gypsy and Traveller sites.

This is because the legislation outlined above relies on legal definitions of what a home is and only applies to the homes that meet those definitions. For example, the definition of a 'dwelling' in the [Housing Act 2004](#)¹ does not explicitly include Gypsy and Traveller sites, and the definition of social housing in the [Housing and Regeneration Act 2008](#)², also does not explicitly include Gypsy and Traveller sites. This is a glaring example of structural discrimination, whereby all those Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers who retain the cultural and legal right to live in a caravan, are excluded from vital protections against poor living conditions which are afforded to other types of accommodation. This exclusion can leave residents exposed to substandard living conditions, with consequent impacts on health and wellbeing.

Routes to challenge poor living conditions on Gypsy and Traveller sites

Whilst there are some protections/mechanisms specifically relating to Gypsy and Traveller sites, below we outline what they are and why they are not fit for purpose. The [Mobile Homes Act 1983](#) sets out what is required of agreements between occupiers and owners of residential caravan sites. The implied terms of such agreements (which are those that must be included), state that the site owner must:

¹ For the definition of a 'dwelling', refer to section 1(5) of the Housing Act 2004

² For the definition of 'social housing', refer to section 68 and 69 of the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008

- *'be responsible for repairing the base on which the mobile home is stationed and for maintaining any gas, electricity, water, sewerage or other services supplied by the owner to the pitch or the mobile home;*
- *be responsible for repairing other amenities provided by the owner on the pitch including any outhouses and facilities provided;*
- *maintain in a clean and tidy condition those parts of the protected site, including access ways, site boundary fences and trees, which are not the responsibility of any occupier of a mobile home stationed on the protected site.'*³

However, the Act does not set out which specific conditions or hazards are covered by its repair and maintenance obligations, nor does it define what habitable is in practical terms. In contrast, the Renters' Rights Act 2026, the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023, and the updated Decent Homes Standard establish more robust and clearly defined protections, including explicit standards for safety and decency.

Furthermore, disputes concerning the MHA 1983 (apart from possession actions) are dealt with by the First Tier Property Tribunal which is a judicial body in England and Wales that resolves disputes relating to property and land. However, there is no legal aid available for this type of dispute in the First Tier Property Tribunal, rendering the rights outlined above worthless for the vast majority of people.

In cases where a site resident is experiencing poor living conditions on a local authority-owned Gypsy and Traveller site, in which the site owner/manager has failed to resolve the issue, the resident can go to the [Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman \(LGSC\)](#). The Ombudsman have a remit to investigate individual complaints against local authorities regarding disrepair on their Gypsy and Traveller sites. If the Ombudsman decide the resident has suffered injustice because of the local authority's faults, they will recommend how it should put things right.

However, in practice, this may not be the most effective way to get the site owner to address site disrepair issues as it can be a lengthy and complicated process. The resident must go through a two-stage formal complaints process against the council, which can take at least 40 working days. It takes around 6-8 weeks for a decision to be made on whether the Ombudsman will investigate a case. The Ombudsman

³ There may also be *express terms* which go further than this.

received 17,937 complaints between 2013-2024, and only 4,003 of those complaints were investigated. If the disrepair issue presents a serious risk to the health and safety of the resident(s), this route is not an effective remedy.

The [Environmental Protection Act \(EPA\) 1990](#) could potentially be used by residents on Gypsy and Traveller sites to challenge local authorities in the courts on poor living conditions. However, again, there is no legal aid for this type of case, and the burden of proof is to the criminal standard. This severely limits the ability of residents to enforce their rights contained within this Act through the courts.

The next section outlines the methods for conducting the research into living conditions on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites.

Methods

The research focused on those who were living on a local authority-owned Gypsy and Traveller site at the time of the research and were experiencing poor living conditions. Methods included:

- Online multiple-choice resident survey
- Semi-structured follow-up interviews with residents who had completed the survey

24 Surveys were conducted with 10 follow up interviews across 10 counties in England.

Survey

The survey included questions about the type of issue/hazard experienced, the severity of the impact on the resident, and how the site manager/owner responded to the issue if it was reported by the resident.

The specific issues/hazards which formed the basis of the survey were drawn from the [Housing Health and Safety Rating System \(HHSRS\)](#)⁴, asking respondents to confirm which, if any, they had experienced in their rented amenity block, or other

⁴ The HHSRS is a risk-based evaluation tool to help local authorities identify and protect against potential risks and hazards to health and safety from any deficiencies identified in dwellings. It was introduced under the Housing Act 2004 and applies to residential properties in England and Wales. *This does not explicitly apply to Gypsy and Traveller sites.

rented facilities across the site in the last year.⁵ Two additional questions were asked about the base on which the mobile home was stationed, and the maintenance of the site boundary and fences. These two questions were added as they are not included in the HHSRS but are relevant to sites and the [Mobile Homes Act](#) places a duty on site owners/managers to ensure these are in good condition.

Semi-structured follow-up interviews

The semi-structured interviews included follow-up questions on the issues reported in the survey, asking participants to expand on the severity of the issue, how long it had been going on, the impact on residents and how the site manager/owner dealt with the issue.

Findings

<i>Survey results</i>	<i>Issue⁶</i>	<i>Reported⁷</i>	<i>Dealt with⁸</i>	<i>Mild-severe impact⁹</i>
<i>Mould and damp</i>	22	21	0	18
<i>Heating supply</i>	11	11	0	8
<i>Asbestos</i>	3	3	1	2
<i>Unauthorised entry</i>	13	9	0	10
<i>Water supply/sewage</i>	16	17 ¹⁰	1	16
<i>Pests</i>	21	18	1	18
<i>Accidents</i>	8	6	1	7
<i>Electricity supply</i>	6	6	0	5
<i>Fire safety</i>	10	9	4	8
<i>Mobile home base</i>	7	6	0	5
<i>Boundaries/access</i>	12	11	0	11

Issue/hazard on site

Mould and damp

The majority of the survey respondents reported mould and damp in their rented amenity block in the last year. The majority of those reported it to the site manager,

⁵ Some of the hazard categories were simplified or removed where not relevant within the context of a site.

⁶ Number of people who reported this as an issue in the rented amenity block, site or pitch in the last year.

⁷ Number of people who reported the issue to the site manager/owner.

⁸ Number of people who said the issue was dealt with quickly and effectively.

⁹ Number of people who said this issue had a mild, moderate or severe impact on them.

¹⁰ Someone may have ticked this box in error

none of whom said that the manager dealt with the issue adequately. During the follow-up interviews, many of the participants reported this to be a significant and ongoing issue:

'I had my own private mobile home, rented the utility block, it had a lot of mould... the mould was really bad all over the roof, sides, pipes, it was black mould.'

'Yes, in the bedrooms, we get a lot of mould. I have to bleach it off regularly, and it just comes back... Same with the out-house, it's full of mould and damp.'

'Yes, I've been on the site for 5 years, and there's been damp and mould in the shed (amenity block), on and off for years on the roof and walls, it was very black, and bad. The council saw it and they won't do nothing about it. We just paint over it ourselves.'

'Yea, I had problems with damp and mould, it's bad in the bathroom and the kitchen, but we just keep on top of it.'

'We have an amenity block on the pitch, it's got a kitchen and a bathroom, and loads of us on the site have problems with mildew and mould all over the blocks. Mine isn't too bad, but there is another woman on the site, she's had bad mould in hers for years, and the council took a long time before they did anything about it. All the amenity blocks were renovated about 5 years ago, but they still have problems with leaks and mould.'

Heating supply

Around half of respondents said they had experienced issues with the heating supply to their pitch/amenity block, all of which were reported, yet none of the respondents said the site owner/manager dealt with the issue adequately.

'The heaters in the shed were broken for a few years; they have finally been fixed them now. But it was freezing in there in the winter, when you go in for your shower or bath, it was too cold...'

'Heaters in the shed don't work. When I report it, it just goes through one ear and out the other. But as I said, I don't really go in there, cos it's mouldy and I spend most my time in my tourer.'

Asbestos

Some of the respondents said they had an issue with asbestos on the site in the last year, all of those cases were reported, just one of which was dealt with adequately by the site owner/manager.

'The site is right next to a tip, 5, 10 min walk, the previous warden said that we should not let the kids play in the field next to the site because there is asbestos in the tip. How is it right, that we are living next to that?'

Sewage, drainage and water supply

Over half of survey respondents reported issues with the water supply to their pitch in the last year. All of whom reported it to the site manager, with just one person saying that the manager dealt with the issue quickly and properly. During the follow-up interviews, many of the participants reported this to be a significant and ongoing issue:

'Our big problem is flooding on my plot. When it rains, we get a big, deep, 40-foot-wide puddle. It comes into the kitchen, 6 inches high, there was raw sewage and everything.'

'We have problems every week with sewage, the cesspit is not fitted right, our drains get backed up. The toilets get blocked up. Every week, there is a terrible smell across the site. There are flies all the time.'

'I've got a £500 water bill hanging over my head because I've had a leak in the bathroom, which came right through to the kitchen, back bedroom, and that's what's caused the mould.'

'Loads of us on site had problems with leaks in the amenity blocks. My immersion boiler burst, all the water was coming through and damaged the ceiling, a huge hole in it...'

Vermin infestation

Most of the survey respondents reported issues with pests in their rented amenity block across the site in the last year. Most of those cases were reported to the site manager, yet just one person said that the manager dealt with the issue quickly and

properly. During the follow-up interviews, people described the impact of severe and ongoing rat infestations on the site:

'We have rats on the site, everywhere, but the council said it's us who have caused the infestation... They also get into my food, it's just miserable, I can see them, talking to you now.'

'We've got a rat infestation on site, they bring on an exterminator occasionally, but it doesn't work. Rats got into the shed and damaged my Christmas decorations, so I had to throw them all out, I put a freezer in there and they got into it, and all the food was ruined. The doors don't lock so I use ropes to tie them, but the rats chew through them.'

'We have rats, we are invaded, they have got into my chalet, they have started eating the insulation, I see them every day, they have eaten the back out of my chalet.'

'Yes, the rats are everywhere, the rats eaten through my plastic shed, wires of my car, so we have to pay to get those fixed...the kids find dead ones all over the site.'

'We have a really bad rat infestation, we buy our own traps. Because we live next to the railway line, when they do any work in there, it seems to disturb them, and they just overrun the site.'

Accidents on site

A third of survey respondents said they had experienced accidents on the site as a result of poor conditions, three quarters of those reported it to the site owner/manager, yet just one person said that the issue was dealt with properly. Those residents described serious accidents resulting in injury.

'Yes, the ground is concrete and uneven, my granddaughter fell over, hurt her knees multiple times, it's all rough, the ground. We did report it, and they have done nothing.'

'My son fell over, where there was no light, the streetlights were off, I reported them, they didn't repair them. He was going out to my sisters, and he tripped over cos the lights weren't working.'

'On the footpaths around the site, we have potholes, loose curbs, only now are they starting to fix them, for the first time since 1997! There have been a few people have had accidents because of it. My wife tripped over the slabs that have come loose around our plot, it was a bad fall, she got a couple of stitches in her eyebrow, at the time we were afraid to report it because we thought we'd get evicted. Another lady that was visiting family on the site tripped and broke her wrist. Now, they're getting around, slowly but surely.'

Electrical supply

A quarter of survey respondents said they experienced an issue with the electricity supply to their pitch or amenity block in the previous year, all of those cases were reported, none of which were dealt with adequately.

'My plug sockets caught fire on my washing machine, lucky I was there. I showed the warden when they came out and they put a new socket on it, but didn't check the electricity; it was just a new casing, this was in March. The electricity is always tripping off, they just say it's because we are using too many things.'

Fire safety

Nearly half of survey respondents said they had experienced issues with fire safety on the site, most of those reported it to the site owner/manager, yet just half said that the issue was dealt with properly.

'We were out at a communion in the village when the fire happened, we were all out, it wasn't until we were all on our way home, coming in the entrance where you could see the smoke. We were all evacuated and the council have put us in hotels, but they haven't told us anything...the investigation came back inconclusive, so we don't know what caused the fire.'

'We haven't had a fire, but we are overcrowded on site, the mobile homes are too close together and the council said it presents an 'intolerable risk to life'. They served loads of people with eviction notices to get rid of the second mobile homes, but people have nowhere to go, you're breaking up families. Some people left, some took up the offer of housing, but lots refused to go. The fire brigade had to just do what they could, so they put fire alarms and heat detectors in each of the mobile homes and they are all connected if there is an issue on one, we all know about it.'

Site boundaries/access ways

Half of the residents said there was an issue with the site boundary/access ways to the site, the majority of those cases were reported, none of which were dealt with adequately.

'Lots of the residents just do their own repairs, the fencing around the pitches they are falling apart, and they won't fix it.'

'I need a fence around my pitch, but they won't do it, I need a fence to secure it to stop people just wandering on, It's about safety and security. But I've given up asking them now.'

General need for repair of amenity block/dayroom/shed

Another theme emerged from the follow up interviews in relation to the general state of repair and quality of the amenity blocks, with some highlighting a lack of maintenance from the site owner/manager.

'Things in the shed need to be replaced, the bath is all chipped, both sinks are cracked all the way through, and it's just not right, dirt sits in the cracks, it's been like this for years.'

'It was a new kitchen, but it hasn't been done very well, loads of the MDF has come off, tiles aren't finished, around the plug sockets haven't been sealed. The doors have dropped, so you can't shut them properly. One of the doors fell down completely and just missed my head.'

'... everyone else on site has a kitchen in their shed, but I don't. I had no shower in the shed for about 4 months. The sink in the shed was held up by some wooden planks. They are all rotting... I had a leaking boiler for years...'

'The amenity blocks were refurbished back in 2010, but we've had problems with them. The sink was coming away from the wall, and it was leaking...same with the toilet, it was all loose where you sit on it...'

Site manager/owner response

Survey respondents said that just eight of the 117 issues reported were dealt with adequately by the site owner/manager. In the follow up interviews, residents described huge delays in dealing with issues, being told there was a lack of funding, and a reluctance to take responsibility for the issues among the site manager or owner.

‘..they just said, oh you have to speak to the council, so then I speak to the council, and they don’t do anything. They didn’t do anything for years... You just give up in the end because you know you report things and nothing gets done.’

‘I asked them to replace it, but they just say there is no funds, no funds... if there is something that needs to be done, they try and get us to do it, they say they haven’t got the funds, and they say if you want something done, you have to do it.’

‘I complained to the council because I’ve got a newborn, premature baby and you have to be so careful with mould. But they haven’t done anything about it. They say people have come to visit, but they haven’t been out.’

‘The site wardens just don’t do nothing. I rang Citizens Advice, the council, the ombudsman. The site warden promised compensation after I complained, but they never gave it.’

‘They know the issues, they don’t care. We’ve got new wardens, so we are starting to see people more recently. I’ve never seen anyone coming onto the site and doing a health and safety inspection.’

‘I tell it to the council, but they just come and paint over it, and then it comes back, I report it again, and we just go round and round. I’m in touch with a woman at CAB, we have a meeting in August, she’s going to help me do a complaint to the council.’

‘I know they get money to do refurb from the Government, but I ask them, where does all this money go? because it’s not here.’

‘The council wouldn’t do anything; they said that it was up to the contractors to fix the issue, and they wouldn’t take responsibility till the problems on the site were fixed by the contractor. But the contractors were refusing, the council were taking them to

court, but the council said to us, it could take years...and so we're just left with this flooding. So, in the end, we had to just do it ourselves,

Impact of poor living conditions

Out of the 129 issues reported, most of those issues had a mild to severe impact on the participants and/or their families.¹¹ In the follow up interviews, residents described the mental, physical and financial impacts of the poor living conditions on the site/amenity block.

'...it was freezing in there in the winter, when you go in for your shower or bath, it was too cold, and my arthritis is so much worse in the cold.'

They have chewed through wires in the shed, wires in my husband's car, and that cost a lot of money to fix.

'...I asked them to replace it, but they just say there is no funds, no funds. So, I just did it, it looks good now, but that's because we did it and paid out of our pocket.'

'They chewed the electrical items so I had to replace them, but I can't afford that, I've got 7 kids and I'm a single mum...It's really hard for me; I struggle mentally with the stress of it all.'

'I'm always getting chest infections, I've got COPD, I need asthma pumps, and I'm always having to get antibiotics from the doctors for my breathing. The mould is just so bad, it's making my health worse.'

'...I was on the pitch for 6 years. After one year, the mould started. It was so bad, I stopped using the shed, because my child has breathing problems, I can't let the kids use it. So, we just had to use the mobile home, we are paying for that amenity block, but we can't use it because it so bad.'

'...we had to fit a whole new soakaway in, with proper drainage, it cost us nearly 3 grand, we shouldn't have had to pay that, you know.'

¹¹ Impact scale ranged from no impact, mild, moderate, and severe

Conclusion

This research reveals serious, unresolved health and safety failures on local authority Gypsy and Traveller sites. In just one year, the 24 households surveyed reported 129 serious issues across rented amenity blocks and communal areas. Despite the vast majority of these issues being reported to site managers or owners, fewer than one in ten were resolved adequately. Conditions described by residents, including damp and mould, rat infestations, sewage flooding, unsafe electrics and fire risks, would be unacceptable in any other form of rented housing.

The findings build on other research and anecdotal evidence and shows that these failures are not isolated or incidental. They are the predictable result of systemic neglect and a legal framework that excludes Gypsy and Traveller sites from mainstream housing standards, regulation and enforcement. While residents repeatedly attempted to raise concerns, they encountered long delays, inaction, blame-shifting and a lack of accountability from site managers/owners. Many felt forced to tolerate unsafe conditions, pay for essential repairs themselves, or abandon rented facilities they could no longer safely use.

The impact on residents' lives is profound. Poor site conditions have caused physical illness, worsened existing health conditions, increased financial hardship and significant stress and anxiety. These harms are entirely avoidable and stem from unequal treatment in housing law and policy.

Gypsy and Traveller families living on sites have the same right as everyone else to safe, dignified living conditions. This research demonstrates the urgent need for national housing standards and regulatory protections to be extended to Gypsy and Traveller sites, alongside effective enforcement and accountability for local authorities. Without meaningful reform, residents will continue to be exposed to preventable harm and systemic discrimination.

Recommendations

- The Government should undertake a national assessment of conditions on Gypsy and Traveller sites, informed by meaningful engagement with residents and representative organisations.
- The Government should review the effectiveness of the legal and regulatory framework governing conditions on Gypsy and Traveller sites, including access to justice, enforcement mechanisms and routes to redress.
- As part of that review, the Government should reform the Mobile Homes Act 1983 framework to ensure residents of Gypsy and Traveller sites have an effective, accessible and legally aided route to challenge disrepair and enforce their rights.
- The Government should issue clear guidance on the duties of Gypsy and Traveller site owners and managers regarding maintenance, repair and health and safety standards, including expectations for inspection, reporting, response times and resident communication.
- The Government should amend the Housing Act 2004 to ensure rented Gypsy and Traveller sites fall within the definition of a dwelling for the purposes of housing quality and disrepair protections, including the Decent Homes Standard.
- The Government should amend the Housing and Regeneration Act 2008 to explicitly include socially rented Gypsy and Traveller sites within the definition of social housing, enabling residents to benefit from the protections and oversight established under the Social Housing Regulation Act 2023.

About us

Friends, Families and Travellers is a leading national charity that works on behalf of all Gypsies, Roma and Travellers regardless of ethnicity, culture or background.

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