



Unauthorised Encampments and Data Collection

Briefing Paper February 2018

The only nationally collected data on unauthorised encampments available is the bi-annual caravan count. Caravans are 'counted' on a single day in January and again in July. Gypsy and Traveller people have long distrusted the count given the data is gathered by officers on behalf of Local Authorities who might benefit from lower count data in terms of their obligation to ensure that land is made available to meet accommodation need. While accepted to be an inexact methodology and provided that its potential weakness is understood, the data is said to be useful for comparative purposes. According to the last 8 counts the percentage of overall caravans which are on unauthorised encampments varies between 3% and 7%, usually lower in the January than the July, but

Year	Month	Total caravans	Total caravans on unauthorised encampments on land not owned by Travellers (% of total caravans counted)	Caravans on encampments not tolerated (% of total unauthorised encampments)	Caravans on encampments tolerated (% of total unauthorised encampments)
2014	January	19,503	977 (5%)	574 (59%)	403 (41%)
	July	20,035	1282 (6.3%)	971 (76%)	311 (34%)
2015	January	20,074	886 (4%)	450 (63%)	328 (37%)
	July	21,074	1201 (6%)	944 (79%)	257 (21%)
2016	January	21,256	676 (3%)	412 (61%)	264 (39%)
	July	21,370	1265 (5%)	1067 (84%)	198 (16%)
2017	January	21,920	780 (3.5%)	543 (70%)	237 (30%)
	July	22,792	1524 (6.6%)	1231 (81%)	293 (19%)

apparently with no predictable incremental increase. According to the data provided the percentage of caravans on unauthorised encampments, both winter and summer has increased since the planning definition of Gypsies and Travellers was changed in October 2015. However numbers of unauthorised caravans counted in 2014 were higher, and were a higher percentage of total caravans, than in 2016. On the data available it is not possible to say definitively that the definition change has impacted the number of

caravans on unauthorised encampments. The data would also, disappointingly, suggest that so called 'toleration' of unauthorised encampments has decreased since a high of 46% in January 2014. Percentages tolerated would seem to go down in the summer which is interesting to note given that the number of encampments increases in summer. 'Tolerated' and 'not tolerated' was not recorded prior to 2014.

Year	Month	Total caravans counted in Leeds	Total caravans on unauthorised encampments on land not owned by Travellers (% of total caravans counted)	Caravans on encampments not tolerated (% of total unauthorised encampments)	Caravans on encampments tolerated (% of total unauthorised encampments)
2014	January	113	29 (26%)	28 (96.5%)	1 (3.5%)
	July	96	16 (17%)	14 (87%)	2 (12.5%)
2015	January	129	18 (14%)	5 (28%)	13 (72%)
	July	99	13 (13%)	0 (0%)	13 (100%)
2016	January	68	0 (0 %!!)	0 ()	0 ()
	July	42	42 (100 %!!)	32 (76%)	10 (24%)
2017	January	122	38 (34%)	28 (74%)	10 (26%)
	July	131	62 (55%)	59 (95%)	3 (5%)

Again it is important to note that the data may be unreliable. The table of data entered by Leeds City Council below illustrates why the data needs to be treated with great caution. The figure entered for the total number of caravans in Leeds in July 2016 (42) must be an error. If all the known Gypsy and Traveller caravans were on unauthorised encampments that would mean that the local authority site at Cottingley Springs must have been empty (as is indicated by the table), which is was not. Similarly it is

unlikely that there were no encampments at a given point in the winter of 2016. Without reliable data it is virtually impossible to analyse what may be going on in terms of unauthorised encampment in England. When one takes into account the possible impact of media reporting, local and national elections and any number of possible local variables, the truth is that we don't know. One is left to rely on local impressions.

During 2017 areas across the UK continued to experience unauthorised encampments at what *seemed to be* greater levels than at the pre 2016 change to the definition of Gypsies and Travellers according to Planning Law. However without better data there does not seem to be any potential for government to track the impact of the change.

See also Friends Families & Travellers Briefing: [Lack of increase in Affordable Pitches for Gypsies and Travellers in England, December 2017](#)