



# Committee Report

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**PURPOSE:** Final Decision Report

**KEY OR NON-KEY DECISION:** Non-key decision

**COMMITTEE:** Homes and Housing Delivery Committee

**DATE:** 14 February 2025

**TITLE:** Recommendations from: Vehicle Dwellers – The Bristol Model

**Wards:** Citywide

**Officer presenting the report:** Ian Bowen (Report Author) **Job title:** GRT Service Coordinator

**Committee Chair:** Cllr Barry Parsons

**Executive Director lead:** John Smith: Executive Director for Growth & Regeneration

**Proposal origin:** Committee Chair

**Purpose of Report:** To update the committee on the proposals on the implementation of the recommendations from the report Vehicle Dwellers – The Bristol Model, published in March 2024, following internal consultation. This new paper discusses the following eight key points for ongoing discussion:

1. The existing document: “Bristol City Council’s Policy for Vehicle Dwelling Encampments on the Highway” (*September 2019*) to be re-written to acknowledge the changing issues and increased number of vehicle dwellers seen in the city over the past five years.
2. Carry out a review of all welfare and support related engagement with Vehicle Dwellers and all enforcement action to be carried out against them, to decide which team within the Council is best placed to conduct these different areas of work.
3. Change the model of meanwhile sites to one that supports a route out of homelessness for those who want it.
4. Establish permanent Vehicle Dweller site(s).
5. Establish service sites for Vehicle Dwellers.
6. Set up regular outreach support services to access and provide services for Vehicle Dwellers.
7. Support the establishment of a formal Vehicle Dweller voices group.
8. Set up an officer’s task and finish group to discuss Vehicle Dwellers in the city.

## Background:

Following a meeting held at the Policy Committee Chairs briefing (PCCB) on 24 July 2024, the following information was requested to enable further discussion around support to vehicle dwellers.

**1. The existing document: “Bristol City Council’s Policy for Vehicle Dwelling Encampments on the Highway” (September 2019) to be re-written to acknowledge the changing issues and increased number of vehicle dwellers seen in the city over the past five years.**

At the time that the 2019 policy was brought into place, Bristol had in the region of 150 living vehicles across the city. That number has more than quadrupled over the past five years, bringing new issues and challenges that were not previously being faced. The policy requires revising and updating to take into account the higher numbers and ensure that consideration is given to a widening range of impacts that vehicle dwelling has on the city. These areas of impact include, but are not limited to, the following: the use of meanwhile sites, antisocial behaviour, legislation and potential enforcement, vehicle dweller welfare, resourcing, links to the homeless strategy, the needs of the vehicle dwelling community, the impact on the settled community, the use of the highway, public safety, unauthorised encampments and a wide range of other areas.

**2. Carry out a review of all welfare and support related engagement with Vehicle Dwellers and all enforcement action to be carried out against them, to decide which team within the Council is best placed to carry out these different areas of work.**

Clearer distinctions could be made between the work undertaken by the Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Team, the Neighbourhood Enforcement Team (NET) and the Antisocial Behaviour Team. Where an overlap of roles exist, discussions to take place over exchanging selected roles and responsibilities of working with vehicle dwellers between these, and other, teams.

Within current arrangements, the GRT Team works with groups on BCC owned land, and NET work with groups on the highway. The GRT Team are effective at early engagement, establishing relationships, providing early support, carrying out welfare assessments, and signposting to other short and longer term support options. This work becomes difficult as any established rapport is challenged when the GRT Team also must manage, oversee, and facilitate eviction actions around unauthorised encampments (squatted sites). Trust between groups and the GRT Team is lost, and it becomes much harder to re-establish relationships.

The NET experience a similar, parallel issue. Their work centres around enforcement and a part of this process is conducting welfare assessments. NET struggle to achieve positive engagement on welfare visits as they are seen as an enforcement only service and the kerbside vehicle dwelling community do not feel that they can trust them to disclose personal details around their well-being.

It is suggested that a discussion be had to establish how best to deliver engagement, welfare, complaint management and enforcement in relation to vehicle dweller encampments. Under the current working arrangements, the work of the GRT Team is being severely negatively affected by the requirement to carry out site evictions. A potential solution that could be discussed would be for the GRT Team to carry out welfare visits for vehicle dwellers on the roadside and attempt to establish an ongoing supportive relationship with kerbside residents. The GRT Team would take no part in enforcement actions, nor offer any opinion on the level of impact made by any location. In return, the NET would take on all responsibility for enforcement around unauthorised encampments of vehicle dwellers on BCC land, including initial visits, issuing trespass notices, the preparation of all court files and paperwork. (The GRT Team would continue to

carry out welfare assessments, presenting findings to NET for them to process with other legal documents).

However, the impact of these changes will need to be considered as it could have a detrimental impact on the resources of either of the two teams.

Carrying out continued kerbside engagement will hopefully allow the GRT Team to be better placed to identify and support emerging issues within the kerbside community, including issues around trafficking and exploitation.

At any one time, there are between three and five unauthorised encampments in the city that the GRT Team are working with and around 70 kerbside locations that NET attend – although not all kerbside locations are subject to enforcement action. Taking on all welfare work with roadside vehicle dwellers will add greatly to the current workload of the GRT team which they are not currently resourced to do.

It is not proposed that enforcement of ethnic Romany Gypsy and/or Irish Traveller encampments is handed over to NET. This area of work would stay with the GRT Team.

(A further breakdown of GRT Team and NET responsibilities around vehicle dwellers may be found within Appendix A2)

### **3. Change the model of meanwhile sites to one that supports a route out of homelessness for those who want it.**

Meanwhile sites offer a pitch with access to shared fresh water, chemical toilets, and rubbish disposal facilities. The main benefit of the sites is that they are safe, secure and off the kerbside. At present, sites are allocated on a vulnerability point basis, similar to Homes Choice Bristol, but there is no natural movement through the sites. Once a pitch is allocated, movement from the site into permanent housing or other secure sites is unlikely, which blocks anyone else coming off the kerbside.

It is proposed that the function of meanwhile sites changes from a place providing a pitch with no progression or move on potential, to providing a supportive environment from which individuals can move out of vehicle dwelling into mainstream accommodation through the private sector, if that is what they wish to do. Meanwhile sites will therefore better suit the needs of people living in vehicles out of financial necessity than those who do so out of lifestyle choice. It should be noted that this may not suit all current meanwhile sites residents and so may be easiest to introduce on new sites as they become available. To enable this change, meanwhile sites would come with the following offer:

- Regular signposting of support facilities available to meanwhile site users from partner organisations, including housing, financial advice, employment, and health & social care.
- Set a maximum time that people can remain on sites (18 months is suggested). This time to be divided into initial intensive support, directed work towards accessing other accommodation within the private sector, and eventual resettlement into mainstream accommodation. This will allow people to consider other options which don't involve living in a vehicle?
- Maintain an ongoing waiting list for a throughflow of meanwhile site residents.
- Link in with the Homeless Strategy.
- Develop links with private sector settled accommodation providers.

The biggest challenges currently facing meanwhile sites are the availability of land and the protracted planning application process.

The above suggested changes may impact on the current workload of the GRT team which they are not currently resourced to do.

Further and more detailed information on this proposal can be found in Appendix A3.

#### **4. Establish a permanent Vehicle Dweller site.**

Although the previous section on meanwhile sites recommended that their use be changed to a place from which residents can move forward to mainstream accommodation, it is worth considering that a minority of vehicle dwellers know no other way of life.

It is recommended that one or more permanent sites are established to support long term vehicle dwellers. Sites would not need to provide additional services other than those offered on meanwhile sites (chemical toilets, fresh water, waste disposal), although a purpose built, shared amenities building could be considered, depending on costs. Pitch fees on permanent sites would be higher than meanwhile sites to reflect the long-term nature of the tenancy arrangements and improved on-site facilities.

The existing Kingswear Road and Rudgewood Close meanwhile sites would both make suitable permanent sites. Changes to permanent use would need to be passed through Planning.

Further and more detailed discussion on this proposal can be found in Appendix 4.

#### **5. Establish service sites for Vehicle Dwellers.**

The recently published Health Needs Analysis of People Living in Vehicles in Bristol (August 2023) highlighted serious concerns that vehicle dwellers were suffering higher than average levels of infectious diseases associated with a lack of access to clean water, toilet and washing facilities.

A means of supporting people in improving these poor outcomes could be the provision of a service site(s) where users could access fresh water, hygienic waste disposal for cassette toilets and other cleaning facilities.

It may be possible for sites to be set up at minimal cost to BCC if arrangements can be made with commercial providers where they would pay for the installation of the facilities and take their own revenue from their use. In addition to vehicle dwellers using these facilities, other users could use the service site (including member of the public), BCC would seek to support new service site provision through planning.

Service sites would provide fresh drinking quality water, hygienic waste disposal, and could provide laundry facilities.

Please see Appendix A5 for further information.

#### **6. Set up regular outreach support services to access and provide services for Vehicle Dwellers.**

Similar to the suggestion made in item 2, a partnership of welfare organisations could be established to support vehicle dwellers on the kerbside and on squatted trespass encampments. This comes from a recommendation currently under discussion at an ongoing Adult Safeguarding Review following the death of a vehicle dweller on an unauthorised encampment.

There would be a requirement for some assertive outreach from partnership organisations.

Previous vehicle dweller welfare support meetings have been facilitated by the GRT Team following the death of a service user, mentioned above.

See Appendix A3, Recommendation 2 for a list of potential outreach providers.

### **7. Support the establishment of a formal Vehicle Dweller voices group.**

Following the dissolution of the organisations Vehicles for Change and the Parry's Lane Supporters Club, there is currently a lack of voices groups for vehicle dwellers in the city. A general GRT voices group, known as "GR8T+" acts as a voice for Travellers and vehicle dwellers, but is limited and is not attended by a representative group.

With so many subcategories under the vehicle dweller banner, finding a truly representative group would be challenging, especially when it comes to feeding information back and forth with the wider community.

We are nonetheless determined to hear more from this group and are in the process of setting up a specific meanwhile site voices group.

The GRT Team has a large number of contacts within the community with whom we can consult, although we are missing representation from kerbside dwellers and people who are moving into vehicles to avoid street homelessness.

At the time of writing, we are aware of two different groups that are trying to establish as voices groups, one with support from the organisation Friends Families Travellers and one with support from SARI. We do not know how well the establishment of these groups is progressing.

Meanwhile site representation is to be set up along the lines of the tenancy forums used by estate management to gauge the opinions and views of council tenants.

### **8. Set up an officer's task and finish group to discuss Vehicle Dwellers in the city.**

Setting up a round table discussion between officers is straightforward and can be progressed immediately. It would require officers at a decision making level and we recommend that the group have an independent chair.

Suggested group attendees can be found in Appendix A8.

## Officer Recommendations:

That the Committee for Homes and Housing Delivery discuss the different options presented within the report and make a commitment to further engagement with vehicle dwellers across the city.

## Corporate Strategy alignment:

**ES1 Regeneration:** Meanwhile and permanent sites will improve access to opportunities afforded by regeneration for disadvantaged areas and groups of people.

**ES2 Access to Employment:** Meanwhile and permanent sites will provide a stable base for accessing employment opportunities.

**HCW2 Mental Health and Wellbeing:** Meanwhile and permanent sites, service sites and improved, targeted, welfare provision will help tackle the causes of poor mental health and wellbeing.

**HCW3 Poverty:** Meanwhile and permanent sites will provide a stable base from which to work towards reducing the impact of social and economic disadvantage on the health of different groups of people.

**HC1 Housing Supply:** The change of focus of meanwhile sites is aimed at providing a route into permanent affordable housing and out of vehicle living.

**HC3 Homelessness:** Reduce and prevent homelessness and rough sleeping, tackling the underlying causes.

**HC5 Community Participation:** Setting up a voices group will make sure that more people can actively participate in their community and in the life of the city.

## City Benefits:

1. The report recognises the numbers of vehicle dwellers in the city and accepts that people living in vehicles are citizens of Bristol with equal right to access of services.
2. Streamlining the legal processes around unauthorised encampments will help to address strategies around managing them that suits both Council and vehicle dwellers alike.
3. Recommendations within the report allow routes out of vehicle dwelling into sustained, appropriate “bricks and mortar” accommodation, removing the need to live in a vehicle.
4. Providing service sites for vehicle dwellers reduce the impact of vehicle dwelling sites in local communities and improves health and well-being outcomes for vehicle dwellers.

## Consultation Details:

Consultation would not be required at this stage.

## Background Documents:

1. Health needs Analysis of People living in vehicles: [Health Needs Analysis of people living in vehicles Bristol 2023](#)
2. [Vehicle Dwellers – The Bristol Model](#)
3. 5 March 2024 cabinet paper '[People Living in Vehicles in Bristol](#)'

<b>Revenue Cost</b>	£	<b>Source of Revenue Funding</b>	N/A
<b>Capital Cost</b>	£	<b>Source of Capital Funding</b>	N/A
<b>One off cost</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Ongoing cost</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>Saving Proposal</b> <input type="checkbox"/>	<b>If yes - existing or new saving?</b> N/A <b>OR Income generation proposal</b> <input type="checkbox"/>

**1. Finance Advice:** There are no financial implications associated with this report. However, depending on which of the options presented within this report is/are taken forward, then future budgetary provision may be required. This may require reallocations of existing budgets in order to be accommodated within the current Medium Term Financial Plan constraints. Any option taken forward will require a full costing and financial appraisal exercise to be undertaken.

**Finance Business Partner:** Martin Johnson – Interim Finance Manager Housing and Landlord Services 25 November 2024

**2. Legal Advice:**

There are no specific legal implications arising out of this report.

**Legal Team Leader:** Kate Meller

**3. Implications on IT:** I can see no implications on IT regarding this activity.

**IT Team Leader:** Alex Simpson – Lead Enterprise Architect 22 November 2024

**4. Implications on HR:** There may be an impact on the team depending on the committee’s decision on future vehicle dweller delivery, specifically with assessment and enforcement work. Any impact on the workforce should be managed in line with the Council’s Managing Change Policy with support from HR.

**HR Partner:** Celia Williams. HR Business Partner – Growth and Regeneration 25 November 2024

## APPENDICES

<b>Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal</b>	<b>YES</b>
Appendices A2 to A5 include additional supplementary information to items 1 to 5 in <i>Background</i> , above.	
<b>Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Appendix C – Environmental Impact Assessment</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Appendix D – Decision Risk Assessment</b>	<b>YES</b>
<b>Appendix E – Exempt Information</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix F – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix G – Options appraisal matrix</b>	<b>NO</b>
<b>Appendix H – Business case / financial analysis</b>	<b>NO</b>