

VEHICLE DWELLERS

THE BRISTOL MODEL

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS
BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL



Vehicle Dwellers – The Bristol Model

Contents

- Foreword
- Executive Summary
- Summary Recommendations
- Traveller Groups in the United Kingdom
 - Gypsy Roma Travellers (GRT)
 - Cultural Travellers
 - New (Age) Travellers
 - Vehicle Dwellers
- Vehicle Dwellers in Bristol
 - How the Council are working with Vehicle Dwellers
 - Numbers of people living in vehicles
 - Reasons for vehicle living
 - Types of unauthorised Vehicle Dwellers sites in Bristol
 - Types of vehicles used
 - Demographics
 - Support organisations for Vehicle Dwellers
 - Lack of identification and postal address
- Meanwhile sites
- Encampments
 - Available powers in respect of the movement of vehicles
- Health Needs Analysis of people living in vehicles
 - Responses from professionals
 - Survey responses from vehicle dwellers
 - Health and wellbeing impacts of vehicle living
- Recommendations

Foreword from Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol

Bristol is just 42 square miles with a rapidly growing population, which we anticipate will reach 550,000 by 2050. There is increasing pressure on how we use space in our city to manage growth sustainably, build an inclusive economy and tackle climate and ecological crises.



Our need for affordable housing is huge. Households across Bristol are struggling to afford to keep a roof over their heads, with spiralling rents and rising bills, threatening to push many towards the brink of homelessness.

Before the pandemic, the number of Vehicle Dwellers in our city was estimated at roughly 150. The pandemic brought change, including the loss of jobs and social distancing requirements which forced people to think of new ways of living. During this time the Council had more powers to act quickly to enable the use of meanwhile sites. Since then, the vehicle dwelling community has grown. Due to the cost-of-living crisis, we now estimate numbers in Bristol to be around 600, concentrated in East Central around Eastgate, and on the roadside at the Downs. We believe fewer people are now choosing this way of life but are instead increasingly forced into it by the UK's Housing crisis.

Within this report, we have captured a snapshot of the current situation surrounding this issue and our response in Bristol. My administration has developed an approach which seeks to balance the concerns of residents, but that also considers the rights of Vehicle Dwellers.

Some Vehicle Dwellers are attracted to our city, in part, by its successful economy, but also by the spirit that makes Bristol what it is. Bristol is a City of Hope, with ambition, and the goals of inclusion and social justice. Whilst Vehicle Dwellers pose a modern challenge for the

city, some communities have roots that stretch further back. Every person in our city matters and we must provide a space where their voices can be taken seriously to help build a better Bristol.

We have a community which can be more vulnerable to ill health, imprisonment, and suicide than any other in our city. It is crucial that we continue to support those across Bristol, meeting the varied housing needs of citizens who cannot afford to pay market prices.

There are also negative impacts arising from encampments in parts of our city, including anti-social behaviour, littering and the visual impact of vehicles and caravans. Petitions and correspondence from residents and Councillors have highlighted the tensions between communities and how 'high impact' encampments harm neighbourhoods.

This report lays out some of the city-wide challenges and our need to work as One City to create solutions to support the most marginalised groups. Previous experience has shown us the potential in community empowerment and connection. Our One City Plan explains the need to work with a 'Many Neighbourhoods One City' mentality and this must continue if we are to see change in our city.

I am grateful to all those across the Council who have helped to develop this report. This is a starting point to inform the conversations needed to grow from it. If we are to see progress in this area, we must include the voices of the Vehicle Dweller community in those conversations. Bristol is a City of Sanctuary, and we must live up to that declaration, so that no one is left behind.

- **Marvin Rees, Mayor of Bristol**

Executive Summary

This report is a result of the need to understand, support and manage the Vehicle Dweller community in Bristol due to rapid growth in numbers since 2020.

This document collates information and statistics around Vehicle Dwellers and sets out recommendations from the Council services, including neighbourhood enforcement, to deal with Bristol's growing Vehicle Dweller community.

It takes into consideration the opinions voiced by Councillors and members of the public on this subject. This document shares information about the Vehicle Dweller communities' needs, their contribution to our city, both historically and in the present day, and provides suggestions of support for the Vehicle Dweller community, to ensure no one in our city is left behind.

Examples of the negative impact Vehicle Dweller encampments are having on our city are included. We have managed these in line with established policy and powers to focus on 'high impact' encampments. The document considers these examples and the effectiveness of our approach.

Everyone deserves a safe place to call home, but households across Bristol are struggling to afford to keep a roof over their heads. Bristol's housing crisis affects everyone and as a result, the city has some of the highest numbers of Vehicle Dwellers in the UK. These numbers have increased in the last 2 years, as a result of the cost-of-living-crisis and rental crisis and are due to continue to increase.

The most appropriate way of addressing our current Vehicle Dweller numbers, and working with any potential growth, is to provide increased access to 'meanwhile sites' across the city. Most people in vehicles in the city are from Bristol, so we need to support them and not look to displace them out of their home environment.

Research from the Health Needs Analysis (HNA) of people living in vehicles, the first of its kind in the UK, shows that the Vehicle Dweller community suffer from serious health concerns, which has a direct impact on already struggling health services in the city. The HNA also highlighted the increasing vulnerability of Vehicle Dwellers suffering from discrimination and prejudice.

Bristol City Council has a long-standing commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion, and is pro-active in championing under-represented groups and important social causes. The Council supports communities, such as Travellers, who are disproportionately affected by ill health, infant mortality, imprisonment, child poverty, domestic abuse, illiteracy, mental health issues, and suicide.

Summary Recommendations

The experiences and evidence within this report demonstrate the Council's approach and guiding principles since 2016:

- There should be a city-wide approach to working with Vehicle Dwellers, as opposed to attempting to find localised responses to specific or individual situations, which simply move encampments around.
- Vehicle Dweller groups need to be included in our work, to take responsibility for their impact and to include them in any policy changes that affect them. We recommend setting up a forum for agencies and representatives to better co-ordinate this.
- Council managed meanwhile use sites have been successful, but more need to be found and a pipeline developed. As the Vehicle Dwelling population continues to grow, a permanent site may be required.
- There is a balance to be drawn between a hard-line enforcement approach and a more tolerant supportive one, but consideration will also need to be given over the type of land

being occupied, when it is required for other uses and any health and safety concerns.

Due to the Bristol's growing Vehicle Dwelling population and impact, Bristol City Council's approach needs to be continually reviewed and updated. This document explores the following suggestions for future investigation by the next administration:

- The provision of additional meanwhile and permanent sites across the city, including a new service site with service provision to improve the health of people living in vehicles, which can be offered as an alternative option to people on unauthorised sites;
- The delivery of training sessions and roundtable events to better educate Bristol on the Vehicle Dweller community and encourage dialogue;
- To continue to review Bristol City Council's Policy for Vehicle Dwelling Encampments on the Highway to explore inclusion of roadside parking, encampments, squatted sites and meanwhile sites;

As Bristol moves to a new committee system, it is recommended the Council notes the current processes already in place which support the Vehicle Dwelling community and that future committees continue the development of city-wide policy and strategy.

Due to the potential impact Vehicle Dwellers present to Bristol's neighbourhoods, for example, antisocial behaviour, noise and waste, further investigation is needed into the levels of support required for the health and safety of all Bristol's citizens.

Bristol City Council's Neighbourhood Enforcement team (NET) works closely with communities, responding to reports and taking enforcement action where appropriate. This collaborative approach to help manage the challenges arising from Bristol's Vehicle Dwelling encampments is essential in the development of effective policy.

However, people living in vehicles cannot be ignored. Vehicle Dwellers are citizens of our city and need to be respected and represented with equal access to services as would be available to any other resident or visitor to our city.

Travellers in the United Kingdom

Gypsy Roma Travellers (GRT)

Romani people started to move out of Northwest India and across to Europe between 1000 and 1200 years ago. Reasons for moving are not clear. Some were sold, or moved independently as itinerant workers, some were musicians and entertainers who may have been forced or voluntarily moved to countries around the Persian Gulf or were banished or exiled from their homelands.

They underwent a diaspora that started their migration West, across Europe and on to Africa, the Americas and Australasia beyond. As they moved across Europe, they picked up words, habits and customs from the countries they passed through. Their language changed and evolved quickly, but with no written history of their own, we only have accounts from the countries they visited to describe and document them. This was often prejudiced against them.

Arriving in the UK in around the 13th Century, they were known as Egyptians, an incorrect assumption by Europeans as to their origin. This was shortened to just “Gyptians” and later to Gypsy or Gypsies. Changing between country, region and even family, some groups across Europe identify with the word Gypsy, whilst others see it as a racial slur. In the United Kingdom, the term Gypsy is accepted by most English and Welsh Romanies and is used to refer to them in official documentation.

Across Western Europe, Romany Gypsies move around their home countries in a similar way to the UK. In contrast, the Roma (often spelt Rroma, or referred to as Gypsy) people in Eastern Europe are more

settled and tend to live in some form of permanent home, as opposed to being nomadic and living in caravans.

Coming from the West rather than the East, a different group of nomadic people also came to the UK. Originally known, in their own language, as The Walking People, we know their descendants today as Irish Travellers.

Irish Traveller culture has a long association with music, trading, and the pre-eminence of family and kinship ties. As Travellers moved from town to town, they brought with them songs and stories and worked as tinsmiths, thatchers, weavers, farm labourers, animal traders, and flower sellers.

In the 20th century, increasing industrialization in Ireland made many Traveller customs and means of making a living obsolete. Irish Travellers emigrated to England or migrated to cities in Ireland for work, turning to selling scrap metal or working on construction sites. Caravans (trailers) replaced the horse-drawn wagons.

During the 1980s a Travellers rights movement emerged that demanded recognition of their ethnic minority status, as well as alternative culturally appropriate accommodation and better access to health care and education.

Irish Travellers were formally recognised as an ethnic minority in 1997 followed by recognition in Britain in 2000. The largest number of ethnic Travellers in Bristol are Irish Travellers.

Gypsy, Roma and Travellers are recognised ethnicities under the Race Relations Act (1978) and have protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010). They are the most disadvantaged ethnicity in terms of education, health and deprivation and suffer some of the worst racism, discrimination and hate of any community in the U.K.



Image of traditional horse drawn carriage

Cultural Travellers

Classed as cultural Travellers rather than ethnic Travellers, Show People (who tend to self-refer as “Showmen”) and Circus People can, in some instances, trace their family line back over dozens of generations and hundreds of years.

Starting as musicians and storytellers, who travelled from town to town bringing news in the Middle Ages, through to large funfairs and theme parks today, Show People have a long tradition with their own heritage, customs and language. There is some suggestion that Show People may be linked to Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers, with many of their traditions and words adapted from these groups, but they remain strongly independent and will often refute this view.

The first Circus was born out of a Show Person’s fair in the second half of the 16th century, when a performer of trick horse-riding introduced clowns, acrobats and other acts to fill the gaps in his show. ‘Traditional’ circuses developed in the 19th century and were dominant until the 1970’s, when non-traditional performers started incorporating circus skills into performing arts and the “contemporary circus”, which did not rely on a traditional past, was born.

A fast-disappearing group of cultural Travellers are traditional ‘Bargee Travellers’. This was a group of transport professionals who operated commercial barges on Britain’s canal system during, and following on from, the industrial revolution.

The canals were the quickest and easiest way of transporting goods around the country and ‘Bargees’ were born, lived and died on the waterways. With the advent of railways, and later road transport,

canal transport increasingly became less efficient and there are thought to be few traditional 'Bargee Travellers' left on the water. Their places have, however, been filled by boat dwellers, who live on harbours and waterways, as well as 'Constant Cruisers', who live on the canals, and are so named, as the rules state that they must move berths every 14 days.



Image of a fairground



Image of a horse drawn barge

New (Age) Travellers

The mid to late 1960's saw the birth of the "hippy" movement. In the UK, the extreme edge of this hippy counterculture saw a move away from society and the setting up of an "off-grid" lifestyle, which was close to nature, self-sufficient, peaceful and self-managed.

After moving around the free summer festivals of the early 1970's, independent groups formed, which aimed to maintain this lifestyle and, for those unable to afford the luxury of land on which to set up communes and working farms, they travelled and emulated the idealised lives of traditional Romany and Traveller groups. Opting for tents, yurts, benders and horse-drawn vardos at first, then gradually moved towards caravans and converted commercial vehicles.

In the early 1980's people linked to the punk movement had also dropped out of society into a slightly less off-grid world of squats. With changes in UK squatting laws, they too, took to a life on the road, living

in old busses, vans and caravans year-round. The two groups merged into a new form of travelling community, marginalised by society. The group became known as New Age Travellers. The group grew until 1985 when it was broken up by a major, but controversial, police action, which led to the introduction of the Public Order Act in 1986.

In the early 90's the New Age Travellers, still on the road, moved around the emerging illegal raves and acid house parties of the time, which culminated in a week-long rave in 1992 in Worcestershire. This rave led directly to the Criminal Justice Act of 1994, which toughened laws on trespass, antisocial behaviour, and unlicensed gatherings of people listening to music. Subsequently, continuing to live as a New Age Traveler became very challenging. The phrase 'New Age' was dropped in favour of just 'New Travellers' and with some people now third generation New Travellers, this group of Cultural Travellers continues to thrive.



Image of New Traveller vehicles parked on the highway

Vehicle Dwellers

Vehicle Dwellers are a group of cultural Travellers who, live in vehicles. Van dwelling, as a lifestyle choice, has been around for many years with some crossover into New Travellers. Vehicle Dwellers differ from Gypsy Roma Travellers, as they are not recognised as an ethnic minority.

It became more popular from around 2018 with a lot of social media interest in the lifestyle as *#vanlifers*. The "Van-lifer" movement gained

considerable momentum in the first Covid pandemic lockdown in 2020. People chose vehicle dwelling as a safer way of socially distancing on their own terms than was available through shared housing, close-knit bedsits, and built-up areas.

Since 2020, however, the numbers of Vehicle Dwellers have grown exponentially and it is no longer seen as a lifestyle choice, but as a necessity of homelessness. Whilst some people are stepping up into vehicle dwelling from street homelessness and living in shelters, others are stepping down from bricks and mortar accommodation, as a result of rising housing costs, high rents and a lack of availability of affordable homes.



Image showing a Vehicle Dweller encampment situated in the centre of the city

Vehicle Dwellers in Bristol

How the Council are working with Vehicle Dwellers

Bristol City Council staff engage with people living in vehicles through the management of meanwhile sites, visits to encampments both on squatted sites and the kerbside, liaison with individual site representatives and a range of other informal ways of working.

The main departments working with Vehicle Dwellers are the GRT Team and Neighbourhood Enforcement Team (NET), as well as partner organisations such as Sirona Care and Health/NHS, St Mungo's, SARI, Bristol Drugs Project (BDP), Next Link and the Neighbourhood Policing Teams. People living in vehicles are well represented at the GR8T+ Group, which is the voices group for all travelling communities.

Bristol City Council staff facilitate a six-weekly Vehicle Dwellers Professionals meeting made up of: GRT Team, NET, Parking Services, ASB & Street Intervention Services, Public Health, the Police, St Mungo's, BDP and others. A police officer who sits on this group is an English Romany Gypsy and a member of police staff on the group is a New Traveller.

Bristol City Council chair, and facilitate, the Cross Area Vehicle Dweller Discussions Group, which is currently made up of 11 other Authorities and Avon & Somerset Police.

In 2021, Bristol City Council acknowledged the need for further work with Vehicle Dwellers by setting up specific sites for their use and by creating the new post of Partnership Manager for Vehicle Dwellers within the GRT Team.

Numbers of people living in vehicles

The number of Vehicle Dwellers in Bristol has grown significantly since the pandemic. In 2020, there were approximately 100-150 Vehicle Dwellers, compared to current numbers estimated at 600 – 650.

This growth creates management issues for the Local Authority and frustration within the Vehicle Dweller community with sites becoming too large.

Our current numbers of Vehicle Dwellers are based on a physical street count, combined with known numbers on meanwhile sites and squatted encampments. Whilst we estimate the numbers to be between 600 to 650 residential vehicles in the city, there are in the region of 800 people living in those vehicles.

We are only able to estimate these figures, due to the challenges of a physical count, which can lead to some variation in results. These challenges include:

- Not all vehicles remain stationary and so cannot always be consistently counted;
- Vehicles can often be used for work and may not be visible during the working day, appearing later in the evening;
- Officers may not be aware of all vehicle locations. The available information on vehicle whereabouts is dependent on reports from the public. If it is not reported, it can remain undetected. Citizens can, and do, report vehicles using the online reporting form available on the Council website.

Bristol has the highest number of Vehicle Dwellers of any authority in the UK, but not necessarily the highest proportionately. In order to compare this to other authorities, by accepting the estimated vehicle figure of 650 vehicles out of a population of 470,000 people, this represents 0.14% of the population.

Brighton and Hove have similar numbers with a population of 300,000, of which 300 live in vehicles, an estimated 0.1% of their population. Much smaller areas, such as Glastonbury and Falmouth are proportionately higher. Glastonbury has a population of 7,000, with 150 Vehicle Dwellers making up 0.22% of the population. However, this number doubles if we include the surrounding area.

The town of Falmouth (as opposed to the district), has relatively small numbers of Vehicle Dwellers. 50 vehicles make up 2.2% of their whole population, meaning that, in comparison, they have the largest proportionate number of Vehicle Dwellers.

Some councils do not know the numbers of Vehicle Dwellers in their authorities. Cornwall is a good example of this; there are large numbers of people living in vehicles in towns such as Newquay, Launceston, Bodmin, Truro, etc. The Local Authority has concerns with Vehicle Dwellers filling laybys on the main roads into the county.

Bristol City Council will continue to monitor the numbers of Vehicle Dwellers in the city to ensure we are meeting the needs of Bristol's citizens.

Reasons for vehicle living

Housing costs

Research from the Vehicle Dweller community in Bristol shows that the single largest reason to live in a vehicle is the inability to find or afford anywhere else to stay. The main reasons behind this are:

- A lack of affordable housing;
- The amount of available, privately rented, accommodation has dropped, while demand has increased leading to rental price increases. This can be evidenced by the fact that vulnerable people are having to be placed in hotels;
- Increase in mortgage rates and housing prices, nationally, but especially in Bristol, are pricing younger people out of the housing market, both as renters and first-time buyers;
- The GRT Team have made 35+ referrals to the Trussell Trust food bank, and home bank outlets, for Vehicle Dwellers suffering financial hardship over the past 12 months.

We have worked with a few Vehicle Dwellers in Bristol, who have stated their lifestyle is a short term means of saving up money for a deposit on a property, and to avoid increasing rents and council tax costs. Lack of affordable housing effects Vehicle Dwellers cross the country.

Data shows an increase in the number of people leaving privately rented accommodation, due to eviction or rent increases to live in vehicles to save money, unaware of the support services which may be available to them.

Bristol has also seen an increase in people moving into vehicle-dwellings as a “step up” from street homelessness.

Vulnerability

Many people on meanwhile sites, in squatted sites and on the kerbside are unable to cope with mainstream housing options. This may be due to a range of vulnerabilities including:

- Care leavers** - We are aware that the average age of Vehicle Dwellers seems to be getting younger and we have worked with several people in their late teens who have described themselves as care leavers. They have stated that an absence of positive role-modelling means they lack the social, emotional and domestic skills to maintain a place within a mainstream housing environment. The GRT Team have adopted a city-wide approach by linking in with partners such as St Mungo's and Bristol MAPS to improve support networks to care leavers forced into vehicle dwelling.
- **Substance misuse** - The GRT Team have worked with a number of organisations over the rise in chaotic substance misuse among Vehicle Dwellers. This includes, Bristol Drugs Project (BDP), St Mungo's, Bristol City Council's Neighbourhood Enforcement and Antisocial Behaviour Teams, Avon and Somerset Police and others. For some Vehicle Dwellers, substance misuse has led to a loss in mainstream housing and subsequent vehicle dwelling. For a small proportion of Vehicle Dwellers, certain “party drugs” are associated with their circumstances, including those who are currently accessing treatment services.
- **Mental Health** - Incidents of people experiencing mental ill health appears to be proportionately higher among people living in vehicles than in the non-vehicle dwelling population and may be a factor that further compounds some individual's ability to cope with mainstream housing options.

Vulnerability is also cited as a reason for people living in vehicles in Brighton & Hove, Glastonbury and within our Cross Area Vehicle Dweller Discussion Group.

Itinerant workers

Bristol has a relatively large proportion of Vehicle Dwellers who live in vehicles as the best means of accessing work, estimated at 10 to 20%. Kerbside parking outside of normal working hours can be busier than during the day, when people have returned “home” from work. Some Vehicle Dwellers are based in vehicles and travel out, others travel in.

Types of itinerant workers include:

- **Festival workers** - These are performers, tradespeople, labourers and others who work on the UK and European festival circuit and travel from one festival to the next, whilst living in their vehicles. A festival, such as Glastonbury, may take at least a month to set up and another month to take down and so they may only attend two or three festivals across the entire season. Festival workers will return to a base location – often Bristol – out of season. The festival circuit lasts broadly from Easter to October.
- **Festival travellers** - These are people who attend festivals, rather than working at them, and will go to a higher number of locations in a season. Again, returning to base themselves over the winter.
- **Tradespeople** - Bristol has many tradespeople who work from, and live in, their vehicles. Numbers are not known. These are people (often European), who work out of their vehicle during the day (plumbers, electricians, delivery drivers, etc.) but may sleep in their vehicle overnight to save money on hostels, hotels or other “digs”.
- **Professionals who “work away”** - Numbers are not known, but an example of such people is “Pete” who works in professional sales, from offices based in Bristol, his work takes him all over the UK and

he spends little time in any one place. Although, Bristol is the nearest city that he calls home.

- **Students and formal students** - We have only heard anecdotal reports of undergraduate students living in vehicles, but do not know any directly. However, we have had at least four postgraduate and mature students living on our meanwhile sites and are aware of a similar number kerbside. Additionally, we receive enquiries from people leaving full-time, higher education who came here as students and now wish to remain in the city, in a vehicle on meanwhile site accommodation.

Lifestyle choice

There has been a significant rise in the popularity of “van lifers” how-to videos to convert a van into a home, and “tiny living” homes driven by social media. This has led to a small increase in Vehicle Dweller numbers in Bristol and within other Local Authorities represented at our Cross Area Vehicle Dweller Discussion Group.

We have seen how some people, entering vehicle dwelling for the first time, have been very unprepared for their first British winter and have struggled to live in a vehicle. Equally, there are others who have thrived in this way of living.

Cultural Identity

New Travellers, sometimes still self-defined as New Age Travellers, have been around since the late 1960's, with a growth in the mid 1980's. There are now three generations of people who have lived in this way and been born into the lifestyle, establishing their own identity and cultural heritage. New Travellers do not always live in vehicles, but when they do, can be integrated with other Vehicle Dwellers.

Retirees

Bristol has previously had a limited number, predominantly men, estimated at 10 to 20%, of Vehicle Dwellers who had retired, sold their properties and bought a camper van in which to travel. A number had stated that they had intended to travel around Europe, but that

the pandemic had prevented this. In more recent times, their number seems to have gone down.

Laura (children's support worker) and partner Paul (factory worker):

So, there are a few reasons why I have been a van dweller for the last 4 years. The main reason being MONEY. I've lived in Bristol my entire life as has my partner Paul, neither of us enjoy living in shared houses and for most single people living in Bristol, a shared house is the only option. Personally, for my sanity, I need a lot of my own space and time. Working 50-70 hours a week to pay for a shared house that you spend very little time in due to working so much was making me unwell. I found it unsustainable for my mental and physical well-being. I was unable to do the things that made me happy due to being so over worked and exhausted from 14 hour shifts. Something had to change. There seemed no way out of the cycle, saving money is almost impossible on minimum wage and paying Bristol rent prices was a joke. 10 years ago, I was able to rent my own little one bed flat in Redland, that changed within 4 years of living there and I could no longer afford the cost of living alone.

Finally, I made the decision to learn to drive and borrowed money to buy my first van. I have never looked back.

Yes, I do miss living in a house, having running water, a washing machine and endless electricity is a wonderful thing. But nothing is more wonderful than having your own space and being able to save your money for your family's future and to know that what we want for our lives is now looking more achievable. One day we hope to save enough to get on the property ladder. We would never be able to do this living in a rented house in Bristol.

Pierre:

I was working 65 hours a week as a lorry driver. Living in the van means I now work 45 hours. It's lifted the financial pressure of having to find £1,000 a month for rent. I felt like I could breathe, like I was in control and could plan a nicer life with a brighter future.

Types of unauthorised Vehicle Dweller sites in Bristol

Squatted sites

Bristol regularly has large squatted sites, on both public and private land, accommodating a mix of New Travellers, Festival Travellers and other Vehicle Dwellers. Sites can have a range of six to a dozen vehicles on them. The largest site the city has seen, in 2023, claimed to have 100 occupants at Dovercourt Road depot.

Squatted sites tend to contain likeminded groups of people who form into a set community, although one group may differ greatly in its ethos to another. Some groups are open and allow others to join, others are closed and resist outsiders, but all seem democratically run within themselves.

Most of the squatted sites we come across are keen to engage with Council officers and services, but some can be resistant. Several people have moved from squatted sites and onto meanwhile sites, stating that they have become disillusioned with the community, or because aspects of the lifestyle on sites have not suited them.

Kerbside encampments.

The main draw of both meanwhile sites and squatted sites is that they present safety in numbers, with kerbside vehicle dwelling seen as the most vulnerable way to live.

Whilst there are large numbers of individual kerbside dwellers who will, either stay in one place, or constantly move around the city, we also see small groups of two or three people who come together in clusters of friendship groups, most commonly in the more inner-city areas. These groups tend to stay fixed to one place. When a safe and undisturbed location is found, larger groups can form out of clusters who will gather in one area, although they will often be seen as different people in the same place as opposed to large whole communities.

These 'collection of clusters' range in size from 10 to 30 vehicles depending on the space available at the kerbside. Although, a group may be seen as staying in one place for a long time, the group members may change.

There have been several longer-term kerbside encampments in the city, which have gone through complete changes in membership month to month, whilst the vehicles remaining put. These include Greenbank Road, Parry's Lane and New Stadium Road.



Image showing a Vehicle Dweller encampment situated in the North of the city

Private sites

There are a small number of private sites in the city where landowners have individual agreements to allow people living in vehicles to use their land. Full information on the number, size and facilities available on private site is not known.

Types of vehicles used

When the GRT Team started working formally with Vehicle Dwellers in 2020, most Vehicle Dwellers used either production camper vans, or more commonly, home converted lorries, vans and minibuses as their living vehicle. The key was to have a vehicle that could be easily moved and driven under its own power from one location to the next.

Since the main Covid lockdown periods, a rapid change from driven vehicles to caravans has been noted as the majority form of vehicle used. A number of the original driven vehicles have been replaced by caravans.

There is some evidence that the use of caravans, over other vehicle types, suggests less financial stability amongst their occupants as many owners use them as a step up from homelessness. The range of quality of caravans seen in the city is very wide, with some being barely fit for habitation. With a rise in caravan use, so too has been noted a rise in vulnerability and exploitation of caravan dwellers.

The caravans in use tend to be 1980's and 1990's models designed for family holiday use. They are not designed for British winters and are poorly insulated. The minority proportion of Ethnic Gypsy Travellers who live full-time in the most modern and well-equipped caravans state that they are not good places to be on a cold winter night as they are expensive to keep heated and do not hold their heat well.

Caravans:

- Can be fitted with wood burning stoves by Vehicle Dwellers, which they are not designed to accommodate, leading to fire risk and dangers from carbon monoxide and smoke inhalation;
- Can be very damp and do not protect people living in them;
- Are often converted using unsuitable, "found", materials that could contain toxins, be highly flammable and add additional weight that the caravan chassis is not built to take, causing the structure to be unsound and dangerous;
- Often lack sanitary equipment;
- Are vulnerable and can be destroyed by fire in minutes;
- Cannot be moved independently;
- Require no legal minimum level of care and maintenance;
- Cannot be issued with a parking ticket;
- Do not require, tax, insurance or an MOT;
- Are not registered;
- Are relatively cheap to buy and have no ongoing running costs.

The move from some form of self-propelled "camper" over to caravans has also been noted in Brighton & Hove, Glastonbury and within our Cross Area Vehicle Dweller Discussion Group.



Image showing a Vehicle Dweller encampment in the North of the city

Demographics

In 2023, Bristol City Council's Public Health Department carried out a Health Needs Assessment (HNA) of Vehicle Dwellers [Bristol City Council, 2023: *Health Needs Analysis of People Living in Vehicles.*] reaching 12% of the Vehicle Dwellers in the city. The HNA revealed valuable demographics for the group.

Some of the key demographic findings of the HNA are as follows:

- 42% of respondents reported they were female and 54% male. The remainder of those who answered (4%) gave their gender as "other";
- 71% lived alone, 21% had 2 people living in their vehicle and 8% had 3 or more occupants per vehicles;
- 85% of people (64 respondents) did not have children under the age of 18, 12% (8 respondents) declared that they were parents with a child living with them full, or part-time and 4% (3 respondents) said that they had children who do not live with them;
- 10% of those who responded answered 'yes' to a question which asked if they identify as Disabled. 9% responded that they would

prefer not to say. Further data analysis showed that 24% of caravan/trailer dwellers and 5% of people living in other types of vehicles reported that they considered themselves disabled.

- 63% of caravan/trailer dwellers and 28% of other respondents, reported that they had... 'any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more'.
- Figure 2 shows a graph using Census data. Of those who reported living in 'a caravan or other mobile or temporary structure' 36.8% meet the Equality act definition of 'Disabled'. This is slightly higher than the Bristol average of 32.3%.

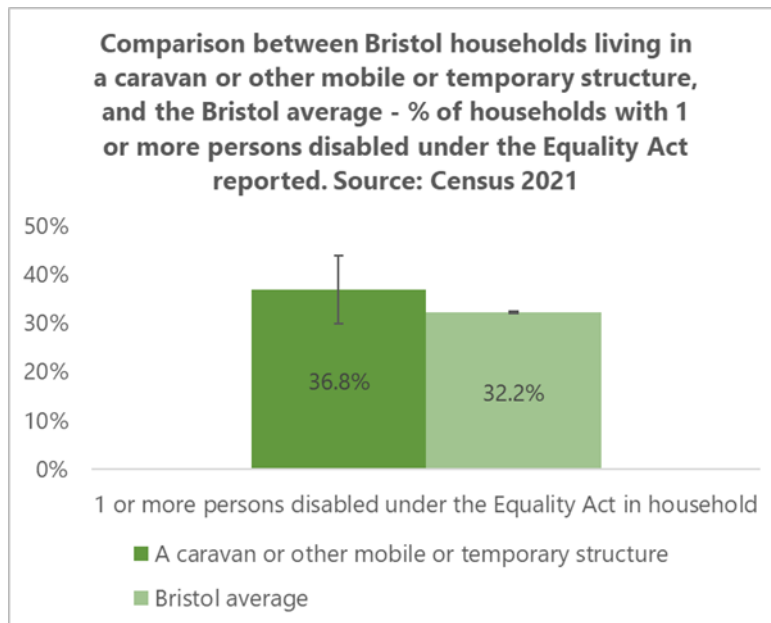


Figure 2: percentage of people disabled under the Equality Act

- Figure 3 shows the age distribution of respondents to the survey (of those whose age was known) and the Bristol average from the Census 2021. The oldest respondent to the survey was 79 and the youngest 18 years. Most were between 25 and 49 years. This differs from the age profile of the wider Bristol population, which has far more under 25s and over 50s.
- A far lower proportion (8.8%) of respondents were under 25 compared to 32.6% in Bristol overall. 14.7% of respondents were in

the 25-29 age group compared to 9.4% in Bristol. The age group with the highest proportion of survey respondents was 30-34, with 32.4%, far higher than in Bristol overall (9.3%). There was also a higher proportion of survey respondents who were 35-39, 40-44 and 45-49 (14.7%, 11.8% and 8.8%) than in the wider Bristol population (8.1%, 6.7% and 5.7%). Only 8.8% of survey respondents were aged 50 and over compared to 28.3% in Bristol overall.

- Observations outside of the HNA suggest that since 2021, there has been an increased number of young adults (18 to 25) amongst Vehicle Dwellers.

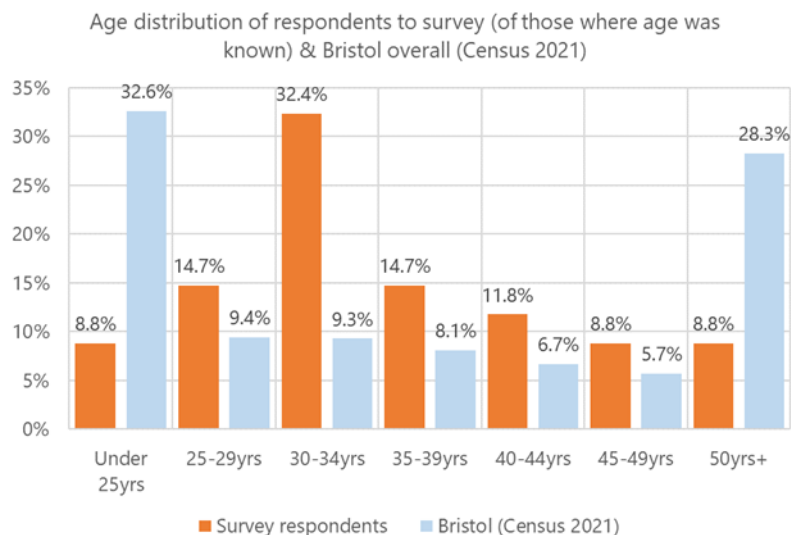


Figure 3 shows the age distribution of respondents to the survey

- Figure 4 shows that although 74% of all respondents to the survey reported being in work, when data was further analysed, differences in reported employment levels were found between people living in caravans and those living in other types of vehicles.
- 86% of those living in vehicles, other than caravans, reported being in full, part-time or self-employed work. For those who reported living in a caravan, this was 50%.

- The largest difference in reported employment type, between people living in caravans, and those in other types of vehicles, was in the percentage of those in full-time work. 16.7% of those living in caravans reported being in full-time work, compared to 40.8% of those living in other types of vehicles. For part-time work, there was also a large difference – 12.5% vs. 24.5%. However, the proportions of those in self-employed work were similar for the cohorts at roughly 20%.

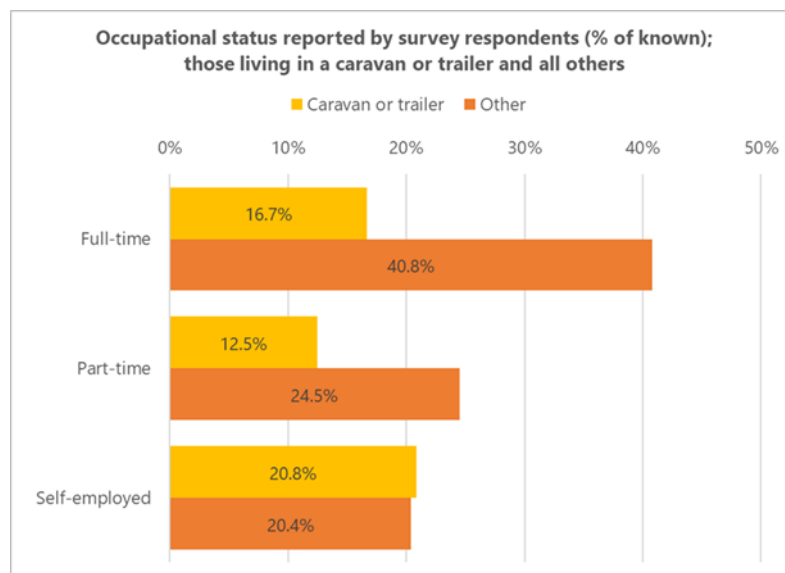


Figure 4: occupational status reported by respondents

- 44.5% of census respondents who identified as living in a caravan, or other, mobile, or temporary structure, reported that there were no adults in employment in the household, compared to a Bristol average of 29%.

The above demographics are agreed as consistent, within our Cross Area Vehicle Dweller Discussion Group for all areas with Vehicle Dwellers.

People living in vehicles have repeatedly reported that they feel particularly vulnerable, most especially for those living kerbside. Reports of incidents of antisocial behaviour and hate speech directed at them are high and many report fears of being attacked. Women

especially have stated that their living situation makes them feel at risk and exposed.

Support organisations for Vehicle Dwellers

When Covid shielding sites were set up for Vehicle Dwellers in 2020, there were a couple of support organisations for Vehicle Dwellers, who were able to provide a powerful representative voice, had extensive websites, and claimed to have a mailing list reaching out to over 500 people. Such groups were represented on several committees in the city and were well known by people living in vehicles in Bristol at that time, even if they were not always respected for their work within the community.

As the Vehicle Dweller population has grown, these groups gradually reduced their influence and presence to a point where they are not thought to still be in existence. The small number of people currently living in vehicles who remember them, state that they have not heard from any of the groups in a long time.

GR8T+ Bristol and South-West is a voices group for all travellers, ethnic and cultural, facilitated by the organisation, Stand Against Racism & Inequality (SARI), in central Bristol. In the past, this group has had strong representation from Vehicle Dwellers and although this has dwindled, the group continues to advocate on their behalf.

Lack of identification and postal address

Due to the nature of their type of home, a number (though, perhaps the majority) of people living in vehicles are unidentified. They do not appear on the electoral register, are not listed against council tax records, may not have children and so are not listed with schools, or social care services and may not have any health records.

Although some may have an address through which they can receive post, (such as a friend, family member, etc.) they are not able to receive direct post. This may place people living in vehicles at a disadvantage, as they may not be aware of health initiatives that are available to the rest of the population, such as bowel cancer

screening, cervical cancer screening and vaccinations, etc. In addition to this, they may not be able to claim their full entitlement of benefits or have access to bank accounts.

Meanwhile sites

Following the first lockdown in April 2020, the Government gave advice that all street homeless people should be offered accommodation in hotels and hostels to allow them the same opportunities for shielding, as was available to other citizens. At the same time, Bristol City Council opened two Covid sites for Vehicle Dwellers, who were no longer able to access washing and cleaning facilities, which had closed, because of the pandemic. One site situated at Portway Rugby Club and also land known as Action Indoor Sports' car park at Bamfield. These sites proved very successful and gave the Council an understanding of the numbers of people living in vehicles in the city. They also showed that there was a demand for managed sites for people to live on, and that the Vehicle Dwellers are willing to work alongside the Council.

The GRT Team commissioned a representative organisation to run a consultation, on Bristol City Council's behalf, to ask what Vehicle Dwellers wanted most from a managed site, and how much they were prepared to pay for it. The majority of responses identified that people required very limited facilities, and suggested a reasonable amount that people were prepared to pay. The GRT Team set about exploring options along these lines, working directly with Vehicle Dwellers to develop ideas and proposals.



Image taken of Covid shielding site for Vehicle Dwellers, Summer 2020

Meanwhile sites are unused pieces of land owned by Bristol City Council, which have been set aside for future redevelopment. The land may be in the process of being sold off, have planning consent for residential, or commercial use, or are in some other way, waiting for a new usage, but currently standing idle. Until such sites are used for their intended purpose, the GRT Team use some of them in the 'meanwhile', to provide temporary sites for Vehicle Dwellers – hence the name. Examples of sites that have been used as meanwhile sites so far include: two, separate, demolished schools that are awaiting redevelopment into housing, a former fire station site that will eventually be the location of a new school and an unused car park again awaiting development.

Bristol City Council has offered eight different meanwhile sites so far with seven open at the same time and 100 pitches available at their peak. The sites come with very limited resources: fresh water, waste disposal and chemical toilets, but have the additional bonus of being safe, secure and providing stability – without being moved on – even if only for a few weeks or months. Site security was not a key consideration when meanwhile sites were first being set up, but it has proved to be their biggest attraction. People living in vehicles on the kerbside can be vulnerable to crime, antisocial behaviour, intimidation and isolation, but the positives of knowing that you can go to bed at night and not have someone try to break in, accost, or insult you cannot be overstated.



Image of a former meanwhile site in South Bristol, 2021

Meanwhile sites are managed by experienced council employees and therefore, provide a Council point of contact for signposting to other support services and allow a place for residents to stabilise before accessing other services and employment. The GRT Team created a new post of Partnership Manager for Vehicle Dwellers just to cope with the increased demand that meanwhile sites have placed on the service.

There has been a lot of general praise for meanwhile sites from both Vehicle Dwellers and professionals alike. Within the HNA, they were described as helpful in supporting health, as they provide a water supply and toilets, as well as help with access to services. However, some professionals mentioned that the temporary nature of the meanwhile sites, very basic facilities and locations meant that it was not possible for people to gain a sense of pride, or form communities in the way they can on permanent sites.

The reaction from members of the public and neighbours to meanwhile sites has so far been very positive. When a new site is proposed, people have, in one or two instances, voiced concerns of what the sites may bring with them. For example, will they attract antisocial behaviour, noise and additional traffic to an area?

To date, all of our sites, once opened, have proven to fit in very well with the local community and local residents have seen that they are occupied with people just like them who are looking for a quiet life and a safe place to live. In a couple of cases, the sites have become

an asset to the local area. An example of this can be seen with our first site to open, situated in Knowle West. The site was at the end of a disused road on the location of former housing. With the site being unseen and down a dead end, it was repeatedly used for the illegal fly tipping of waste and was a regular location for antisocial behaviour by young people in the area. Having people visibly living on the site stopped the fly tipping immediately; meanwhile site residents litter picked the whole area and removed a quantity of broken glass, drinks cans and Nitrous Oxide (NOs) canisters and the antisocial behaviour promptly dropped off. The presence of people on the site has made the area feel safe and the local community have been grateful to the GRT team for having the site in place. Meanwhile sites have reduced the pressure on kerbside sites and have also helped to reduce the concerns of residents.

Some of our existing meanwhile locations will soon be closing for their original planned redevelopment which risks putting more people back out onto the kerbside if new sites are not identified and opened to replace the pitch spaces lost when a site closes.



Image of our first and oldest meanwhile site, located in Knowle West

Finding new sites can be challenging, as there are limited areas of land available, and what there is, normally has a range of other interests in it. Up to December 2022, we were able to bypass full planning consent for a new site under section 2.6 of the Town and

Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020. However, since that lapsed on 1 January 2023, a planning application must be made for any new meanwhile sites. This has added considerable time to the setting up of new sites.

The needs of the vehicle dwelling community are varied and many of the site users have had difficulties in accessing and maintaining engagement with support services. The continuity of council officers visiting sites, and frequently engaging, has enabled some to become more engaged with other support services. This was not anticipated at the outset when developing meanwhile sites but serves to demonstrate how disconnected vulnerable community members had become, while living kerbside, or on unauthorised sites.

Although no specific questions were asked about meanwhile sites within the HNA, five respondents chose to feedback on these using space for further comments provided at the end of the survey. The following are quotes from this feedback, which further illustrate themes identified of positive and negative impacts of vehicle living.

“My life improved a lot since I moved to my fully equipped campervan self-converted. As well the site provided by the council makes me feel secure and my belongings safe as well.”

“I am thankful to the council people involved with making meanwhile sites possible. It is really great to feel entitled and heard about my lifestyle choice for the first time in years. I personally live this way by choice, and the biggest difficulties have been previous to meanwhile sites, as even if it is a choice, it hasn't been easy when living roadside or living in unauthorised encampments. It was very difficult then to keep on top of living, managing work as well as health issues, and having to move all the time. I would really hope

“Living in a vehicle overall mostly has a positive impact as my mental health suffers without a community around. It also means that I get support when I need help with shopping and certain tasks due to health. I used to feel a lot worse mental health and support wise when I lived in a house. Meanwhile sites have also had a positive impact, since it has taken away the most negative parts of living in a vehicle, like feeling vulnerable, being moved on often and the inability to always stick to the community I have chosen and want to live around.”

“Living with a mutually supportive community has been very positive for me. Previously I was kerbside for several years which was not so good as I experienced some harassment and hostility, suffered more with anxiety and insomnia. Living in a vehicle generally shouldn't necessarily have any negative health effects - I've been living this way for decades and know how to manage and keep warm in winter etc.”

“Community living has huge benefits to my mental wellbeing as I feel supported. This has been especially important following the loss of a close family member. Not having a stable base for my van/being moved on has affected me. Meanwhile site has been very helpful especially a community that works.”

Encampments

Bristol City Council's teams work together to support Vehicle Dwellers and manage the impact their encampments have on surrounding communities.

The Neighbourhood Enforcement Team (NET) deal with large numbers of reports and complaints received by members of the public, but also from Councillors and police, regarding encampments. The Neighbourhood Enforcement Team are also responsible for removing abandoned and, or, burnt out vehicles from sites. Since the start of 2024, they have removed a total of 25 unused vehicles.

The presence of encampments of cultural Travellers, either kerbside, or on squatted land, cause a range of concerns for members of the public. Bristol City Council receive in excess of 1500 complaints and reports relating to encampments. However, the number of reports received is not always a reflection of the number of encampments. At the start of 2024, the top five areas of Bristol we receive the most reports for are:

- Eastville;
- Horfield;
- Lockleaze;
- St George and
- The Downs.

Within the received reports, the most common causes of concern include:

- litter, disposal of human waste;
- blocked pavements;
- feeling threatened & antisocial behaviour;
- looking unsightly and a general sense of unfairness that people are in some way getting away with something by living in vehicles.
- Unfortunately, reports regularly contain hate speech and “othering”, which contributes to prejudice against vehicle dwelling communities.

All kerbside encampments in Bristol are managed by NET and all encampments on Bristol City Council owned land are managed by the Gypsy Roma Traveller (GRT) Team.

Each encampment is individually considered before a decision is taken whether enforcement action will be taken. Each kerbside encampment is assessed by NET and categorised as either 'High' or 'Low' impact. Welfare, education and health needs assessments of the people living in the encampments are completed before any action is taken. Occupiers are signposted to sources of support and advice, including homeless outreach service, if required. Due to the current processes, many Vehicle Dwelling encampments do not qualify as being 'High Impact' meaning enforcement action is limited.

All encampments on land are assessed by the GRT Team, who consider the type of land, current requirements against it, site safety and impact on local neighbourhood. The team visit the site, carry out a welfare assessment, issue a trespass notice and then support the officers responsible for that land through a Possession Order process, if necessary.

Available powers in respect of the movement of vehicles

There are limited powers available for dealing with problematic encampments, most of which were intended for use with ethnic Gypsy Travellers and not the newer phenomenon of Vehicle Dwellers.

The legislation available gives powers to the Local Authority under Civil Protection Rules and the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (CJPOA). Police powers are available through CJPOA, Police Crime Sentencing and Courts Act, Common Law and rules around obstruction.

The council may apply to court for twelve-month (or longer) injunction orders for sites which are assessed as 'high impact'.

As an example, after receiving complaints from residents of blocked pavements, fires, littering and human waste being incorrectly disposed

of, Bristol City Council's Neighbourhood Enforcement Team assessed an encampment in Greenbank View (and adjoining roads) as 'high impact'. The Council was therefore granted a two year injunction order to move in excess of 60 vehicles, resulting in a significant reduction of impact in that area. The Council was able to offer the Vehicle Dwellers temporary sites although some may have moved to other encampments nearby.

Bristol City Council has now taken measures to change the road layout at Greenbank to prevent further encampments on this site. This highlights the need for permanent and meanwhile sites in Bristol, as Vehicle Dwellers move from one area of the city to another.

During the Covid pandemic, Central Government advised that no removal or enforcement action was to be taken on Vehicle Dwellers and powers to move encampments were restricted between March 2020 and November 2021.

Since 2018, Bristol City Council has obtained six injunctions for encampments in Bristol. This number reflects that many Vehicle Dweller encampments are not assessed as 'high impact'. However, where impact affects communities, Bristol City Council must act in line with our policy.

Health Needs Analysis of Vehicle Dwellers

In 2023, Bristol City Council's Public Health Department carried out a Health Needs Analysis (HNA) of people living in vehicles in the city which is believed to have been the first of its kind anywhere in the UK. Bristol City Council, 2023: *Health Needs Analysis of People Living in Vehicles* Surveys were returned by 72 Vehicle Dwellers which, when we consider that there are estimated to be between 600 and 650 living vehicles in the city, represents a strong data sample with a higher number of returns than predicted.

Responses from Professionals

Workers questioned within the HNA included, not only council employees, but professionals from a range of different statutory, non-statutory and voluntary organisations, all of which work closely with Vehicle Dwellers. The main concerns that came from questioning professionals are outlined below.

Health and Wellbeing

- Respiratory health conditions, such as asthma, had been noticed with coughs and chestiness common;
- As a result of living in cold and damp conditions, there was thought to be a higher risk of hypothermia;
- There are services that use the postal systems to communicate, such as sending invitations to cervical screening. People living in vehicles may not have a postal address, or may use one, which they check sporadically. They could miss out on an invitation to screening due to the method of communication used.
- Some professionals described older people living in vehicles as having intentionally positioned themselves near to a hospital to access their appointments there more easily;

- Complex cases were described including pregnancy and domestic abuse;
- Poor mental health, loneliness and isolation were described. But also, people supporting each other and having a sense of community;
- Smoking was thought to be common and access to dental care difficult;
- Substance use, and risks associated with intravenous drug use, were raised as a concern. Some people using needle exchange services are known to live in vehicles. Ketamine and heroin were both mentioned as substances which are known to be used. There were reports that some clients of substance use services, who live in vehicles have sustained bladder damage from Ketamine use. In some, this has led to heroin use to manage the pain experienced as a result.

Amenities

- Professionals described amenities that they have observed in vehicles. It was thought unusual to have a toilet, or shower in the vehicle, but most are thought to have cooking facilities and a kettle on the stove. Electricity supply was rarely seen, and as a result, fridges and freezers were uncommon.
- A common observation was that people live in vehicles, because they cannot afford to rent or buy a home in Bristol. Some may be working and saving up for a deposit for a mortgage or for a rental property. Others for example, European workers, most commonly working in service and hospitality industries, as well as health and social care, have come to the UK to work and can maximise their earnings by not spending excessively on housing.

- Clients of rough sleeping outreach services were sometimes found living in abandoned, or rented, caravans and cars in Bristol.
- It was reported as unusual to see children living in vehicles in Bristol.
- There are thought to be different levels of understanding of how to live most comfortably, and healthily, in a vehicle. People who are the first generation, in their family, or community, to live in a vehicle, are less likely to have had relevant skills passed on or support available. Whilst they may access information online, this may give an expectation of vehicle living, which the reality of doing so in Bristol cannot live up to.

Wood and fires

- Concerns were raised about potential issues with smoke inhalation, especially where the wood being burnt was damp or treated with chemicals. Rubbish on campfires, lack of smoke detectors, carbon monoxide monitors, and lack of ventilation were also thought to contribute to increased risk.

Caravans

- Professionals explained that older caravans are being purchased and rented to people. Some caravans were described as, 'very dilapidated' and often the people who live in them, kerbside, would otherwise have nowhere to live.
- Homelessness service professionals reported that they have found clients, who were previously rough sleeping, now using caravans.
- Neighbourhood enforcement teams explained that, even when a group of people living in motorised vehicles are already parked up, complaints of anti-social behaviour from residents increase when caravans arrive at a highway, or at a squatted site. They

also described those living in caravans as having higher support needs and more likely to need medical attention.

- People living in caravans were described as more likely to be younger adults of between 20-25 years old.

Survey Responses from Vehicle Dwellers

Respondents were asked to select from a list of standard household items, and amenities, they had access to where they live currently. Figure 5 shows the percentage of respondents who reported access to each amenity where they live now.

Only 91% selected that they have a bed or mattress to sleep on, but, concerningly, 17% of respondents did not report access to clean drinking water. 18% did not report access to a toilet and 32% did not report access to water to wash in. 55% did not report access to a fridge, freezer, or way of keeping food fresh.

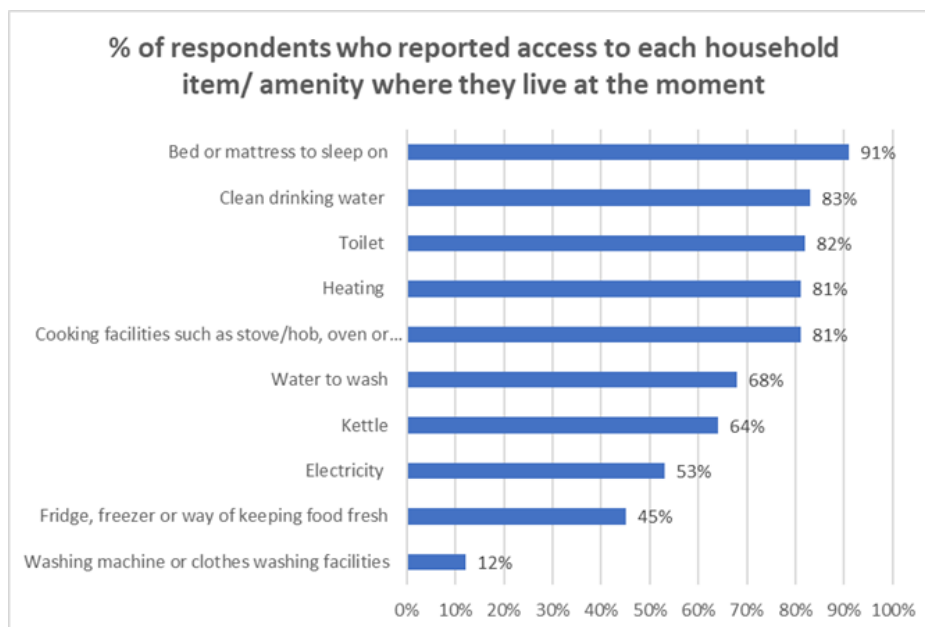


Figure 5: % of respondents who reported current access to stated items and amenities.

Common Health Disorders

40% of respondents reported that they have physical or mental health conditions expected to last 12 months or more (including problems related to old age). For respondents living in a caravan or trailer, this

was 63%. The Bristol average, from the latest Quality of Life data, is 24%.

Participants were asked to select from a list of common health disorders; any that they had been diagnosed with or were being treated for. Figure 6 shows that 'Mental health, or neurological' was the group of conditions which the highest percentage of survey respondents reported they were diagnosed with or being treated for. Respiratory conditions such as asthma and COPD were selected by 13% of participants. Musculoskeletal conditions by 8%, Cardiovascular conditions by 4%, and long-term conditions (such as cancer, chronic kidney disease, diabetes or chronic liver disease) by 4%.

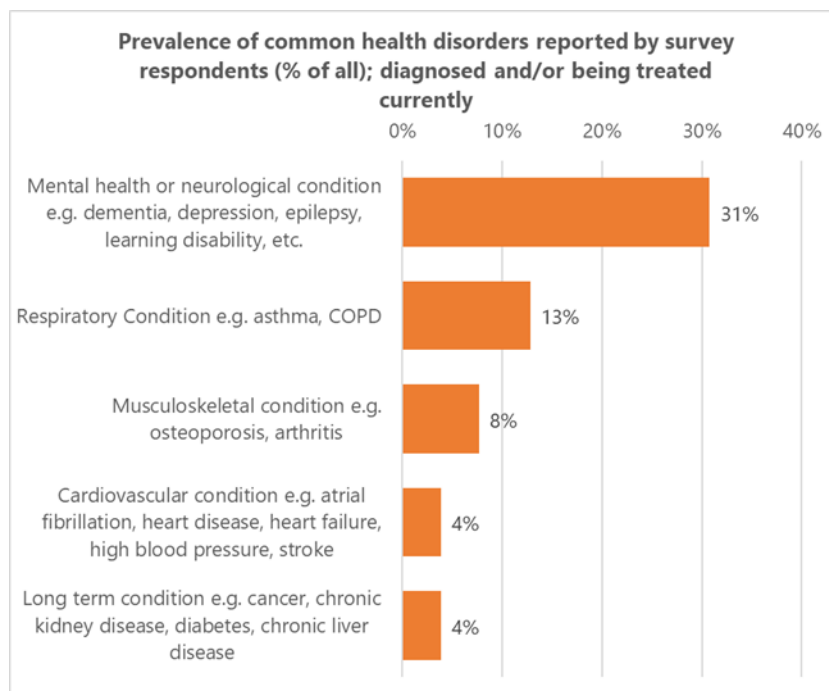


Figure 6: Prevalence of common health disorders reported by respondents.

Mental health conditions and social connections

Figure 7 shows the prevalence of common mental health disorders reported by respondents. A diagnosis or treatment for anxiety was reported by 43.6% of respondents, depression by 38.5%, Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) by 11.5%, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder by 9%, an Eating Disorder by 6.4%, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD) by 5.1%, Psychosis by 2.6% and Borderline Personality Disorder by 1.3%.

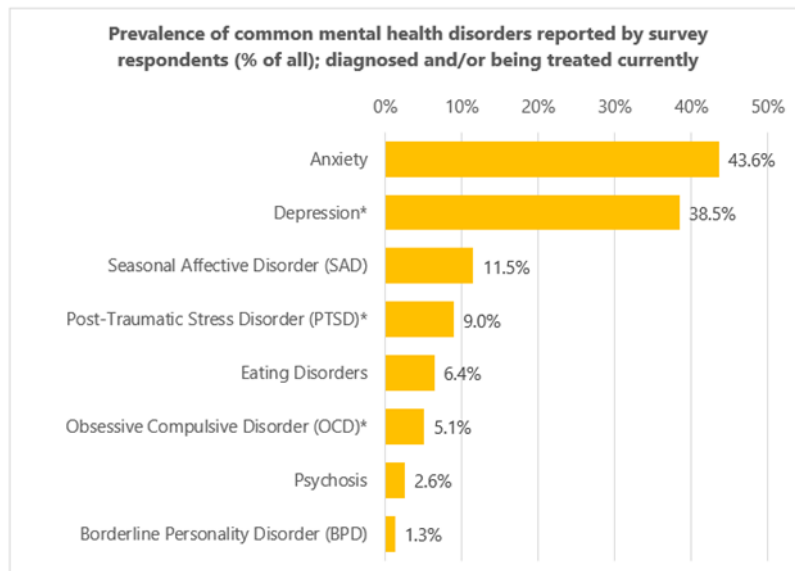


Figure 7: prevalence of common mental health disorders reported by respondents

However, several respondents mentioned improved mental health through vehicle living, due to less financial stress, compared to living in rented accommodation in Bristol. Being in nature, feelings of freedom and community were also reported as positive impacts of vehicle living on health and wellbeing.

Symptoms

Figure 8 shows the percentage of respondents who reported they had experienced each symptom in the last 12 months, from a list provided in the survey, all of which can be symptoms of infectious diseases.

43% reported they had experienced a change in cough, or new cough and 40% a sore throat, or new mouth sore. 38% reported having had nasal congestion, 34% a stiff neck and 30% diarrhoea. Chills and sweats were reported by 28% of respondents and shortness of breath by 23%. 17% reported vomiting and the same proportion increased urination. A pain in the abdomen, or rectum was reported by 13%.

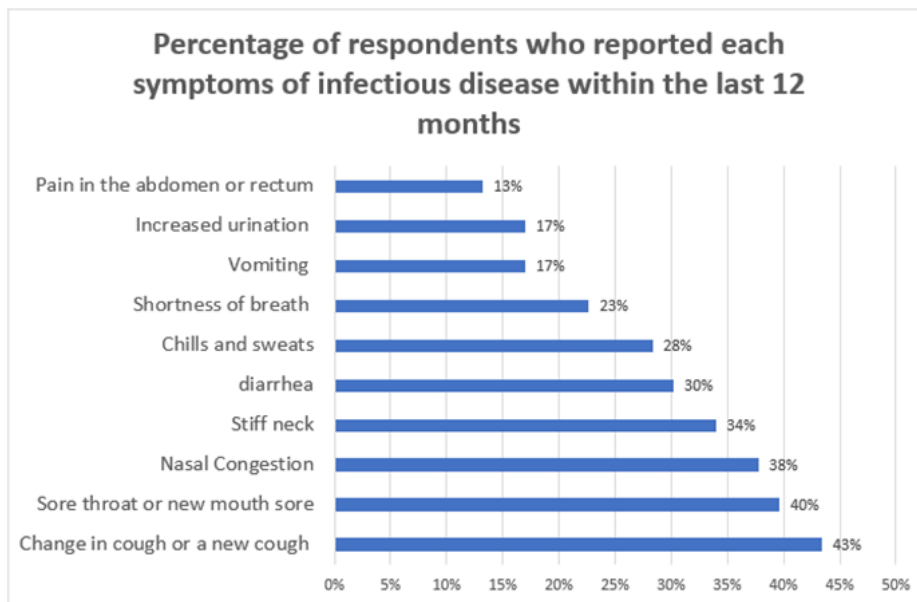


Figure 8: percentage of respondents who reported each symptom of infectious disease in the last 12 months.

Dental pain and joint pain, which are not reported in Figure 8, were reported as experienced in the last 12 months by around quarter of the respondents.

Respiratory Health – Smoking and Wood Burners

Figure 9 shows the average percentage of Quality of Life survey respondents in Bristol who said they smoke is, 9.8%. A higher percentage (21.8%) is reported from people living in areas of deprivation and 27.3 % amongst those who live in Local Authority housing.

People living in vehicles who participated in the survey were far more likely to report they smoke. Of 76 people who answered, 41.9 % said they smoke, and this was even higher amongst people living in caravans, or trailers at 61.5%. In addition, 29% of respondents reported they burn solid fuel 5 times a week, compared to the Bristol average from Quality of Life which is 1.3%.

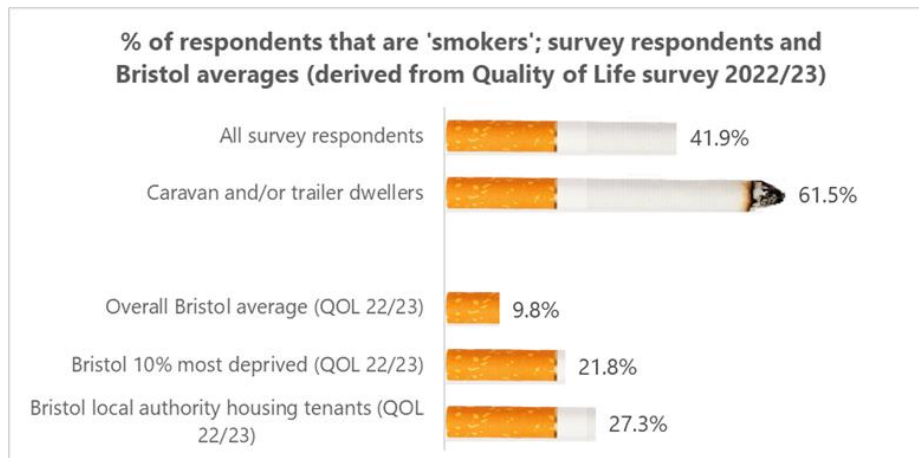


Figure 9: percentage of respondents who are 'smokers'.

Use of alcohol and other drugs

Based on analysis of responses, an estimated 19% of survey respondents are likely to be drinking more than the recommended 14-units of alcohol per week, and 27% of those that live in a caravan and/or trailer. Data for the wider Bristol population for the three years 2015-2018 shows that 29.7% drink over 14 units per week (Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2023). 16% of respondents to the Quality-of-Life survey were assessed as at higher risk of alcohol related problems (Bristol City Council, 2023).

A list of substances was included for respondents to select that they had used in the last month, the last year or not applicable. From the responses received, it appears a wide range of illegal substances are regularly used by some people living in vehicles.

Victims of crime

People living in vehicles were significantly more likely to report being a victim of crime than the Bristol average and harassment and discrimination were mentioned as a negative impact of vehicle living. The percentage of survey respondents who reported they have been a victim of crime during the last 12 months was compared to the Bristol Average from Quality of Life 2022/23 responses.

25% of survey respondents reported having been a victim of crime within the last 12 months, which is much higher than the Bristol average of 13%.

Health and Wellbeing Impacts of Vehicle Living

Included in the survey was the following question:

“What effects (positive and negative) do you think living in a vehicle is having on your health and wellbeing?”

Analysis was carried out on responses and themes identified. The following is a list of these themes along with an example quote:

Positive Themes:

1. Escape from high rent, poor living conditions, feeling tied down, financial stress and difficulties.

“I don't have to deal with landlords who treat you badly and hike up prices and rooms are mouldy. I have more control over my life/money. I am able to eat well because all my money doesn't go on rent.”

2. Better Mental Health

“Living with my family and friends is very important for my mental health and wellbeing. We all support each other in our group.”

3. Own Space and freedom

“I have my own place only for me.”

4. Being in nature

“I find living in a vehicle more positive in general, as I'm more connected to the seasons.”

5. Sense of community

“Living in a vehicle overall mostly has a positive impact as my mental health suffers without a community around. It also means that I get support when I need help with shopping and certain tasks due to health.”

Negative Themes

1. Harassment and discrimination

“The negative effects tend to be consequences of public opinion, more than the vehicle dwelling itself.”

2. Winter- Seasonal Adjustment Disorder and feeling cold.

“It's a struggle working full-time in the winter, due to cold and lack of solar power during the winter months.”

3. Extra time and effort involved in vehicle living.

“Simple things like making sure you have enough water and gas and having to go off-site to wash, all take time out of my day, which can all add up if you are also trying to maintain a social life as well as working full-time!”

The HNA has been an extremely important means of capturing just some of the data needed to highlight the issues affecting Vehicle Dwellers. It has shown officers just how much the Vehicle Dweller community suffer from serious health concerns. As a result, this enables us to better understand the potential impacts these issues might have on Bristol's services.

However, it is important to note that this data does not reflect the true numbers of Vehicle Dwellers in Bristol, due to many people living in vehicles being unidentifiable, meaning some groups of Vehicle Dwellers are therefore underrepresented in these records.

Recommendations

Bristol City Council has worked collaboratively across teams, as well as City Partners, to research the most effective ways of working with Vehicle Dwellers, as set out in this document.

As Bristol moves to a new committee system, it is recommended the Council notes the current processes already in place which support the Vehicle Dwelling community and that future committees continue the development of this work to support communities across Bristol.

City-wide Approach

It has been widely recognised that there should be a city-wide response to working with Vehicle Dwellers, as opposed to attempting to find localised responses to specific, or individual situations. This is important for a number of reasons, but it will be key in accepting that people living in vehicles is not a passing fad, not a “problem” which needs to be solved, and not something which can be ignored. Vehicle Dwellers are citizens of our city and need to be respected and represented as such, with equal access to services as would be available to any other resident or visitor to our city.

Having a whole city response recognises this across services, but also means that we do not focus unduly on one part of the city over another. The vehicle dwelling community are not an “inner city problem” and they do not live in affluent areas more than poorer areas and vice versa. We remain resolved not to put more effort into any one part of Bristol over another. We must ensure that we give equal focus to all.

Meanwhile, Permanent and Service sites

The most appropriate way of addressing our current Vehicle Dweller numbers and working with any potential growth in numbers is to explore the provision of increased access across the city for “Meanwhile”, “Permanent” and “Service” sites. These sites have the potential to greatly improve the health of people living in vehicles, as

well as protect the health and safety of the public impacted by Vehicle Dwellers.

The establishment of a service site means people living in vehicles could access fresh clean water, empty their chemical toilets, and dispose of rubbish. This would keep streets cleaner, but more importantly, would help to reduce the spread of infectious diseases by allowing people clean washing and drinking water and a hygienic waste disposal system.

The challenges that this option presents, includes finding a suitable central piece of land which could be made available for long term use and of establishing who would have responsibility over it, how it would be maintained and who would hold ownership of the site.

Outreach support

The continued evaluation by Bristol City Council of the support services available from partner organisations intended for people living in vehicles. This would take the form of outreach support for all squatted and kerbside sites (as well as meanwhile sites if there was an identified need), to check on the welfare of Vehicle Dwellers, provide limited support services and provide signposting and referral services to other support agencies such as: Bristol Drugs Project, St Mungo's, Avon and Wiltshire Partnership etc.

This outreach service could also support Vehicle Dwellers into mainstream bricks and mortar housing options, provide benefit advice and support around activities of daily living within a vehicle-based environment.

Review of the 'Community Pact'

In 2020, a 'Community Pact' was introduced between Vehicle Dwellers and the council which aimed to show that Bristol aims to be a fair and equitable place to live. We want to ensure that all our residents can live as a safe, harmonious and hardworking community of One Bristol. We want all residents, together, to feel an ownership and a pride in their city, be they homeowners, tenants, Vehicle

Dwellers, or others in nontraditional housing; regardless of age, disability, gender, race, religion or sex.

The aim of this document is to outline Bristol's approach to Vehicle Dwellers and to foster on going good relations and to have jointly agreed values and principles for living together in our city. It has been created in good faith with the intention of fulfilling due diligence to the public sector equality duty – striving to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation – and is intended to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. This Pact remains relevant and is still handed out to new Vehicle Dwellers found to be living in the city, but it needs updating and fresh information added to the services available across the city.

Policy Development

It is recommended that the creation of a Council officer's Task and Finish group is considered, in order to look into the issues and options around vehicle dwelling in Bristol, with the intention that this work feed into a review of the Bristol City Council's Policy for Vehicle Dwelling Encampments on the Highway to explore the inclusion of roadside parking, encampments, squatted sites and meanwhile sites.

There is need for a clear policy on how to consistently manage large, squatted, unauthorised encampments on council owned land. There is a balance to be drawn between a hard-line enforcement approach, and a more tolerant supportive one. Consideration will also need to be given over the type of land being occupied, when it is required for other uses, and any health and safety concerns. Policy development will allow a uniform response to squatted sites and make clear the legal process that we must follow in all instances.

Training

Wider understanding of Vehicle Dwellers, their needs, and the impact encampments have on communities needs to be shared more widely. Delivery of a training session for all elected members about vehicle

dwelling in Bristol will aid representatives in responding to neighbourhood reports and ensure clear procedures across the piece. In addition to this, the benefits of a roundtable event to discuss this document, 'Vehicle Dwellers – The Bristol Model' with key stakeholders would ensure City Partners are included on this journey.

Other areas to consider are:

- Introduction of stronger enforcement powers for areas where kerbside living becomes 'high impact'. The current powers in use are effective, but can be lengthy, and just move a problem from one area to another without providing a long-term solution. Other powers that may be considered include the introduction of bylaws, although, there can be confusion regarding who has responsibility over managing these, and whole area injunctions, which require considerable evidence and have not been used in the UK against Vehicle Dwellers as far as we can ascertain.
- Increased parking restrictions city-wide. Having tighter parking restrictions, which are robustly enforced, could prevent some areas from being used by lived-in vehicles. This could be expensive to implement, and some Vehicle Dwellers may accept parking charges as their "rent" for living in a certain area. Parking restrictions would impact on all members of the public, not just those living in their vehicles. Parking restrictions are challenging to enforce against caravans and other non-motorised vehicles which are not required to be registered, taxed or licensed.
- Greater support for Vehicle Dwellers and the establishment of a Vehicle Dweller voices group, as there is currently no representative organisation for the different Vehicle Dweller groups in the City.

These recommendations will be considered by Cabinet in Spring 2024.

We have laid out the current approach to Bristol's Vehicle Dweller community in this report as an aid to future policy development.