
From: Dan Watkins, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health
Dr Anjan Ghosh, Director of Public Health

To: Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee
- 17 September 2024

Subject: Update on Gypsy Roma Traveller Health, including child immunisations and suicide prevention

Key decision : No

Classification: Unrestricted

Past Pathway of report: N/A

Future Pathway of report: N/A

Electoral Division: All

Is the decision eligible for call-in? N/A

Summary: This report was requested by members of the committee to provide an update on the work of the Public Health Team with Gypsy, Roma and Travellers in Kent, following the Health Needs Assessment completed in September 2023. This report highlights the ongoing commitment of the Public Health Team towards improving health outcomes for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in Kent through research, community engagement, and coordinated action.

Recommendation(s): The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** ongoing efforts and progress made to date to address the observed health inequalities identified in the Health Needs Assessment.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the work underway with Gypsy, Roma and Travellers (GRT) in Kent. Gypsies and some Traveller ethnicities have been recognised in law as being ethnic groups protected against discrimination by the Equality Act 2010. Migrant Roma communities are protected both by virtue of their ethnicities and their national identities.
- 1.2 The GRT communities experience multiple overlapping risk factors for poor health, such as poverty, health inequalities, low uptake of services such as vaccination, violence, and complex trauma. The Houses of Parliament Commons Select Women and Equalities Committee inquiry (completed in April 2019) into tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities, noted there was a lack of focus on these communities within Joint

Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) nationally and highlighted that this omission resulted in GRT communities being overlooked when planning services. The Select Committee stated this was unacceptable given the poor health outcomes faced by GRT communities.

1.3 The Public Health Team completed a Health Needs Assessment (HNA) for the GRT community during the spring/summer of 2023.

1.4 The HNA objectives were as follows:

- Describe, and where possible quantify, the scale of health needs faced by GRT communities across the life-course in Kent.
- Obtain stakeholder views on the needs for health and care services amongst GRT communities and elicit views on the extent to which these needs are currently being met and barriers faced.
- Map current community, health, and care services available to GRT communities against evidence-based/best practice standards in order to make an assessment of met and unmet need.

1.5 The 2021 Census recorded that 5,405 people in Kent (0.3%) identified themselves as being from Gypsy and Irish Traveller ethnic groups, while the figure for England was 60,073 (0.1%). Maidstone, Swale and Ashford rank in the top five of England local authority districts with the highest proportion of people from the Gypsy or Irish Traveller ethnic group (0.6%, 0.6% and 0.5% respectively). In the UK, around 3/4 Gypsy and Travellers now live in bricks and mortar settled accommodation, and 1/4 live in caravans or mobile structures, either residing on private and public (council) caravan sites or on unauthorised encampments. Information and data about the GRT community is not adequate to guide proper public health planning for programme and services.

1.6 Key Findings of health needs assessment:

- GRT communities in Kent experience significantly poorer health outcomes than the general population including high rates of childhood illness, non-communicable diseases, poor mental health, and unhealthy lifestyle behaviours such as smoking and obesity.
- These poorer health outcomes are the result of interactions between adverse environments (living, working and social), lifestyle behaviours and poor access to health and social care services and wider support services.
- Kent has a higher percentage of Gypsy and Traveller populations than the England average and sizeable Roma communities.
- GRT communities face multiple issues in relation to access to healthcare, meaning health issues often get dealt with when they become urgent, and people aren't accessing routine screenings and appointments. The reasons are multiple and complex; the needs assessment focused on approachability, acceptability, affordability and appropriateness of services and related recommendations.

1.6 The full report is available on the [Kent Public Health Observatory \(KPHO\) website](#).

2. Overview of Performance

2.1 Key recommendations from the Gypsy, Roma and Travellers Health Needs Assessment

2.1.1 Addressing the stark health inequalities as recorded in the HNA, is in line with the Public Health Business Plan which aims to develop a systemwide approach to reduce poor outcomes and reduce health inequalities through the Kent Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the Integrated Care Strategy.

2.1.2 The table below outlines some of the main recommendations from the HNA with some ongoing activities in response to them. Key to all these activities is the need to increase community engagement in order to strengthen trust and confidence of the GRT communities with public services.

Key recommendations from HNA	Ongoing efforts/Activities coordinated by Kent County Council
A lack of a system-wide approach	<p>The Public Health Team has produced culturally sensitive and appropriate materials which will be used to share key findings from the HNA with the GRT communities.</p> <p>Other ongoing planned activities is to use the Whole System Obesity (WSO) approach of introducing activities such as ‘grow your own’, healthy recipe and cooking class and support with food vouchers.</p>
Overreliance of short-term projects	<p>A GRT Project Officer will be recruited in the Autumn of 2024 with support from external funding. The purpose of the role will be to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop trusted and sustained relationships with the Gypsy Roma and Traveller community members, collaborating closely with key stakeholders and utilizing already established links into the community to improve health and wellbeing. • support the design and implementation of a programme of work to understand the location and health needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people across Kent and with the communities, co-design and deliver a programme of work to improve their health and wellbeing. • raise awareness of wider health and social care services by seeking out opportunities to promote and tailor services and community engagement to make them more accessible to Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. • work with colleagues to introduce the research agenda to Gypsy, Roma, and Travellers, and act as a source of advice and guidance regarding research related activities.

	<p>The Project Officer will support efforts to draw in additional grants to sustain health and wellbeing programme activities.</p>
<p>Invest in developing trust and culturally competent services</p>	<p>There are ongoing efforts to train and deploy community champions as facilitators and health and wellbeing points of contacts. In addition, through the GRT Community of Practice (COP) group, Members and those working with the community have been encouraged to undertake the cultural awareness training. Many have undertaken the training and demonstrating learning by the use of language and constructive engagement when in the community.</p> <p>In addition, the GRT Toolkit for GPs which was developed last year and based on the HNA, has been further circulated. The aim is to disseminate more through the COP.</p>
<p>Low uptake of services, such vaccination and health checks</p>	<p>A short video to promote Measles Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccination uptake, have been produced and deployed to the GRT community. The video, which was produced with the support of a staff member of KCC who identifies as a GRT community member, has been well received by GRT communities as well as the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and other key stakeholders.</p> <p>Link to video as below. https://vimeo.com/user/18906734/folder/21090643</p>
<p>Address barriers to accessing primary care</p>	<p>Twenty GP practices, known to be within the vicinity of Traveller sites, have been surveyed by the Kent and Medway (K&M) screening inequalities team to understand the challenges practices may face in identifying and providing services for GRT communities. The K&M screening team has identified which GP practices are actively engaging with local GRT communities and this is an opportunity to widen good practice through peer support.</p>
<p>Lack of knowledge and uptake of eligible wider support for community members.</p>	<p>KCC's Growth Environment and Transport (GET) Gypsy and Roma Traveller Residents Service are working with KCC Traveller site liaison managers to disseminate information about help and support such as with managing utility bills and negotiating how to resolve outstanding bills.</p> <p>Kent Police has provided routine security advice and Kent Fire and Rescue Service has installed and provided guidance on use of smoke and fire alarms.</p>

	<p>Plans are underway to use the health bus to provide blood pressure readings and other health checks.</p> <p>Wider work is in the scoping phase to improve asthma treatment, provide cooking lessons and 'grow your own' activities to promote healthy eating.</p> <p>Scoping feasibility and funding options to identify and train community members to become peer educators, ambassadors and/or health champions allowing them to share reliable and accurate information to the wider community.</p>
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2.3 Additional Activities to address health inequalities and gaps

2.3.1 **Community of Practice (COP):** Re-established to coordinate activities among stakeholders, the COP has held four meetings since April 2024, leading to:

- Promotion of cultural awareness training for members.
- Updates on KCC resident services.
- Discussion about findings of a GP survey on service challenges and a tool to help identify which GP practices are located close to and could serve people from GRT communities.
- Information sharing to discuss integrated approaches to mental health, Cardiovascular Disease (CVD) checks and suicide prevention.
- Improved coordination, joint planning of events and strengthening collaboration.

2.3.2 **Increased research engagement:** Since October 2023, efforts have been made to increase participation in National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) portfolio studies, recruiting five Research Connectors and one Research Champion. This engagement has fostered a more positive view of research within the GRT communities.

2.3.3 One of the key recommendations from the HNA was to undertake Wave 2 analysis – a health survey with GRT community members to understand the lived experience of people from these communities and, in the absence of system wide data, to accurately capture the health needs of different groups and triangulate these findings with Wave 1 (stakeholder engagement findings) to help determine priority areas of focus. However our community interaction has informed us that the GRT community is feeling over-researched.

3. Conclusions

3.1 The work with GRT communities in Kent highlights the persistent health inequalities faced by these groups. The Public Health Team conducted a Health Needs Assessment (HNA) in 2023, revealing significant health disparities across the life course.

- 3.2 Further engagement with GRT communities is needed to build trust and confidence which is the foundation required for a broad health improvement programme to address the observed health inequalities.
- 3.3 The focus of the Public Health Team will be to build a system wide community of practice who can help deliver visible health improvement work which will help build relationships and trust. The proposal to engage with particular community members who may wish to be health champions will also develop a strong foundation. From this, further work can be undertaken to deepen our insight of the health needs of the communities.
- 3.4 The next steps will be to further engage with GRT community members to prioritise action to be taken to ensure we understand which health outcomes are most important to them and how we can most effectively work together.

4. **Recommendation(s):** The Health Reform and Public Health Cabinet Committee is asked to **NOTE** ongoing efforts and progress made to date to address the observed health inequalities identified in the Health Needs Assessment.

5. Background Documents

Gypsy Roma Traveller Health Needs Assessment
[Ethnicity - Kent Public Health Observatory \(kpho.org.uk\)](http://kpho.org.uk)

6. Contact details

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