



Surrey Covid-19 Community Impact Assessment

Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Rapid Needs
Assessment

October 2020

Gypsy, Roma Traveller

Rapid Needs Assessment – Summary

Definition

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are often categorised together under the “Roma” definition in Europe and under the acronym “GRT” in Britain. These communities and other nomadic groups, such as Scottish and English Travellers, Show People and New Travellers, share a number of characteristics in common: the importance of family and/or community networks; the nomadic way of life, a tendency toward self-employment, experience of disadvantage and having the poorest health outcomes in the United Kingdom (The Traveller Movement.) Levels of poor health within the gypsy, roma, traveller communities leave some members more vulnerable to COVID-19.

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) have produced a set of COVID-19 guides for community members that are shielding [FFT shielding information](#). FFT have also produced a set of documents for use by local authorities in supporting gypsy, roma, traveller communities <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/covid-19/>

Stakeholders and Key Informants

Five interviews were conducted with key stakeholders across the health and social care system in Surrey. The stakeholders either worked directly with gypsy, roma, traveller (GRT) communities or had oversight of teams that did. Alongside insight was gathered via informal conversations with relevant parties that did not want to be interviewed. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Health Outreach project has also produced a report on the first year of the project that began in April 2019. This provides further insight into the challenges faced by gypsy, roma, traveller communities.

Highlights: Positives and Negatives

- Anecdotally there are conflicting view from professionals as to how well GRT communities have responded to COVID-19 guidance and how well sites have implemented government guidance.
- A GRT communities strategy group has been established to build on the work of the RNA and to provide a more multi-disciplinary approach to supporting GRT communities.
- The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Health Outreach team are well trusted, and often first point of contact for community members and facilitate access to other health services, including access to COVID testing.
- There has been good use virtual working for services, particularly health. Telephone contact has worked well.
- There is a lack of appropriate communications material, over reliance of digital media by services and organisations and not adapted for low levels literacy.
- There are concerns over mental health issues within the communities.
- Financial challenges were highlighted with many community members generally self-employed.

- Challenges accessing water and cleaning facilities for some families.
- Lack of joined up and oversight of safeguarding across children and adults.

Recommendations

- Anti-discrimination and cultural awareness training across Surrey to address the ongoing and established systemic issues that impact the way in which the Surrey system is able to identify and respond to the needs of the GRT communities effectively and a commitment to improving outcomes for GRT communities.
- All system wide staff working with GRT communities understand and implement their safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Clear read across between the GRT strategy and wider system strategies including the First 1000 days, Family Resilience, Helping Families Early strategies and the SEND transformation programme.
- Implementation of literacy training and support for community members.
- Further links with the Surrey GRT Forum are needed, especially to enable engagement with community members.
- Further joined up, co-ordinated and sustainable support for the local agencies and organisations working with GRT communities is required and should be overseen and co-ordinated by the GRT strategy group.
- Work closely with organisations like Friends, Families and Travellers and Traveller Movement who are supporting the work of the NHS England and NHS Improvement Health Inequalities National Advisory group, as part of their role on the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance.

Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Communities Rapid Needs Assessment

Definition and population profile

Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are often categorised together under the “Roma” definition in Europe and under the acronym “GRT” in Britain. These communities and other nomadic groups, such as Scottish and English Travellers, Show People and New Travellers, share a number of characteristics in common: the importance of family and/or community networks; the nomadic way of life, a tendency toward self-employment, experience of disadvantage and having the poorest health outcomes in the United Kingdom (The Traveller Movement.)

GRT communities collectively represent a significant ethnic minority group in Surrey. It is estimated that we have around 10-12,000 GRT residents, which would mean that Surrey has the fourth largest GRT population of any local authority. There are approximately 1,100 children and young people on roll in Surrey schools from English Gypsy, Travellers of Irish Heritage and Fairground communities. The limitations of the data are that it only represents details of the ethnicity of students attending Surrey schools who live in Surrey and can therefore only provide a proxy for the ethnicity of families with school aged children.

The largest number of students live in Guildford. Although the majority of GRT students live in Guildford overall, there are areas of smaller geography (for example in Waverley) with a high number of students for GRT backgrounds. Figure one shows the number of Surrey school students who identified as Gypsy, Roma or Traveller of Irish Heritage by borough and district.

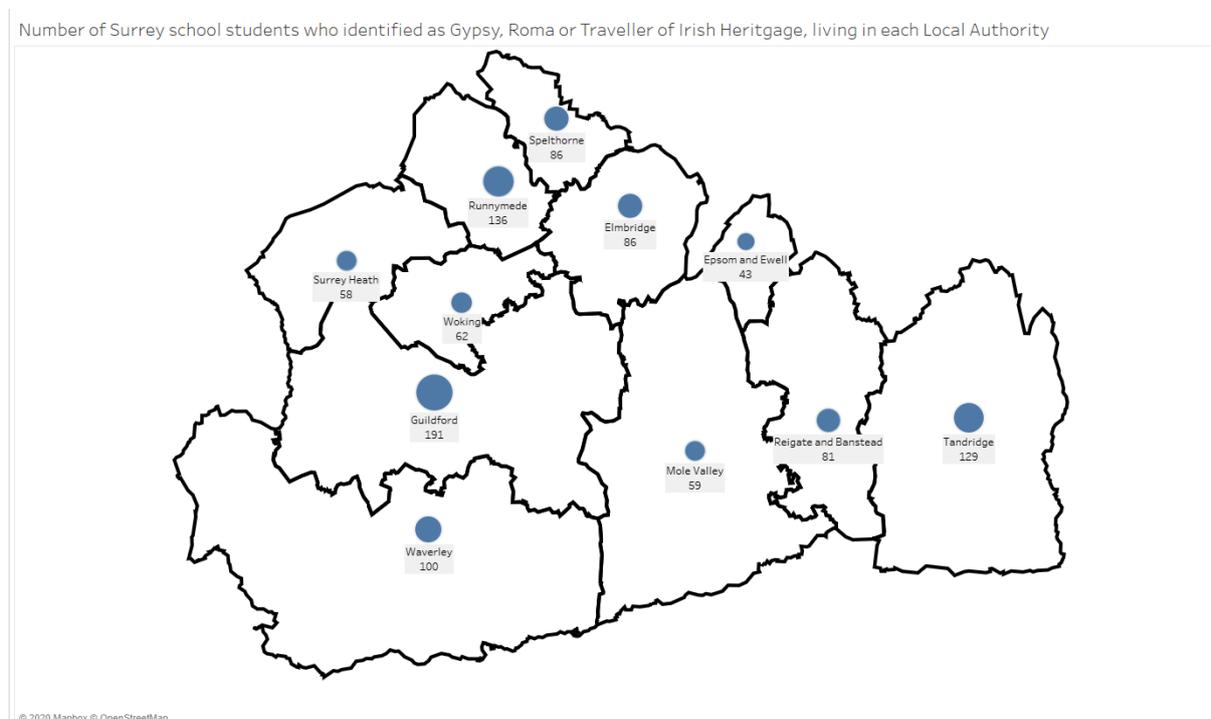


Figure 1

In addition to Surrey's housed population, there are 12 public GRT sites that are managed by Surrey County Council and Guildford Borough Council, and also numerous private sites. During 2019 to date there have been circa 45 unauthorised encampments across Surrey.

Relevant legislation/services/programmes that support this group in the UK/South East/Surrey

- [Race Disparities Audit](#) published in October 2017 found that Pupils from Gypsy and Roma, or Irish Traveller background:
 - had the lowest attainment and progress - at key stage 4 the disparity is wider; in 2015/16 the Attainment 8 score – an average of points scored for attainment in 8 GCSEs including English and Maths – for Gypsy and Roma pupils was 20 points compared with the English average of 50 points and 62 points for Chinese pupils.
 - were least likely to stay in education after the age of 16 with just 58% of Irish Traveller pupils and 62% of Gypsy and Roma pupils staying on in 2014/15, compared with 90% of White British pupils and 97% of Chinese pupils.
 - are most likely to be absent with overall absence rates of 13% and 18% respectively in 2016 (46% for white British and 2.4% for Chinese pupils).
 - are most likely to be excluded - in 2015/16 22% and 18% of pupils in these groups respectively were given fixed period exclusions, and 0.33% and 0.49% of each group respectively were permanently excluded.
 - are less likely to stay in education employment or training
- [The Welsh Government](#) and [Scottish Government](#) have released guidance on supporting GRT communities through COVID-19. These draw on both Countries wider strategies:
 - https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-02/enabling-gypsies-roma-and-travellers_0.pdf
 - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/improving-lives-scotlands-gypsy-travellers-2019-2021/pages/7/>
- [The Council of Europe's \(2016\) monitoring activities](#) on Roma and Traveller groups (Gypsies not specified) show they still suffer from widespread anti-Gypsy prejudice and stereotyping and are victims of massive discrimination in many member States. It also highlights that Roma and Travellers are extremely vulnerable to violence, crime and economic and cultural discrimination. Within these communities, women, children and youth are particularly exposed to multiple discrimination and specific forms of violence, including early or forced marriage, domestic violence, trafficking and forced begging.
- Some recently published Local Authority GRT needs assessments

- Leeds - <https://observatory.leeds.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/GTR-HNA-post-consultation-June-2019.pdf>
- West Berks - <https://info.westberks.gov.uk/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=43250&p=0>

Surrey County Council developed a Brighter Futures Strategy for GRT communities in 2014. This strategy was multi-agency and sought to tackle local inequalities and improve outcomes for Surrey's GRT children and young people. The action plan was timebound, from 2014-2017, with the recognition that many issues for GRT communities are long-standing and entrenched, so the actions were to be part of an ongoing approach to working with GRT families, children and young people to improve their outcomes and aspirations. The strategy focussed on 0-19 year olds but included broader issues relating to the needs of Surrey GRT families and communities where these impact upon children and young people's wellbeing. Key networks were established during this period of time and the health sub-group of the Brighter Future's Strategy helped to make the case for the GRT Outreach Project delivered by Children and Family Health Surrey. This team alongside Surrey's Race Equality and Minority Achievement (REMA) team, and the GRT Advice and Guidance officer from Surrey Community Action have regular contact and interaction with GRT communities across Surrey.

Roles and responsibilities within the Surrey system

Across the Surrey system there are several organisations and agencies that work with GRT communities, and have responsibilities for safeguarding and improving outcomes for Surrey children and adults. These include:

- Children's Social Care, SCC
- CFLC Commissioning, SCC
- Education (children and adults) including REMA, SCC
- Public health, SCC
- GRT Health Outreach Team
- Site managers, SCC
- Borough and district housing officers
- Surrey Police
- SCC community safety
- Surrey Community GRT Forum
- Surrey Community Action

Safeguarding Children

The Surrey Safeguarding Children's Partnership (SSCP) is the key statutory mechanism for agreeing how the relevant organisations in Surrey will cooperate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and ensure the effectiveness of what they do and provide strategic oversight. This entails a wide range of responsibilities across the Surrey area including:

- establishing and monitoring thresholds for the provision of services by partner agencies

- developing policies and procedures
- commissioning and evaluating single and multi-agency training
- establishing specific, local protocols to reflect local priorities
- communicating and raising awareness
- monitoring and evaluating the activities of partners through S11 and auditing activity
- reviewing child deaths and conducting serious case reviews.

Safeguarding Adults

Each local authority area must have a safeguarding adults board. They are a multi-agency partnership that helps to prevent abuse and neglect of adults with care and support needs.

The Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board works collaboratively across statutory, voluntary and third sector organisations to enable people in Surrey to live a life free from fear, harm and abuse.

The Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board oversees the effectiveness of adult safeguarding work across the county, co-ordinating activities to ensure the quality of work in this area.

The board:

- Receives assurance of the safeguarding arrangements in place
- Listens and responds to the voices of adults at risk, their families and their carers
- Coordinates multi-agency projects to prevent to abuse and neglect
- Develops and drives awareness raising activity highlighting the importance of safeguarding
- Provides a multi-agency training programme to give staff the right skills to safeguard adults.

Corporate Parenting

Surrey County Council also has a corporate parenting responsibility. Corporate parenting must be seen as a wider responsibility for partners also and shared with Surrey County Council.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 sets out seven principles that need to be follow:

1. To act in the best interests and promote the physical and mental wellbeing of children and young people.
2. To encourage those children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
3. To consider the views, wishes and feelings of those children and young people.
4. To help those children and young people gain access to, and make best use of, services provided by the local authority and its relevant partners.
5. Seek to secure the best outcomes, for those children and young people.
6. For those children and young people to be safe and stable in their home lives, relationships and education or work.
7. To prepare children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Existing vulnerabilities

Findings from the needs analysis that informed the Brighter Future's Strategy 2014-17 highlighted that:

- Despite notable achievements in some Surrey schools, educational outcomes for Surrey's GRT children and young people overall are significantly poorer than those of their non-GRT peers. School attendance tends to fall off as children get older. Experiences of bullying and racial discrimination are commonly cited. Many GRT families find vocational training and employment more relevant than academic qualifications.
- Social issues impacting on GRT communities include high levels of domestic abuse; cultural expectations for females to take on significant domestic and caring responsibilities at a young age, and experiences of discrimination and low trust in services.
- The physical and mental health of GRT children and young people and adults is significantly poorer than in the population as a whole. GRT life expectancy is ten years lower than the national average and infant mortality is twenty times higher than in the rest of the population.
- There is insufficient accommodation to meet local need; and overcrowding and poor conditions on some sites.
- Child poverty disproportionately affects GRT children and young people, and many families experience economic exclusion. Many GRT families will be impacted by the welfare reforms.
- Data collection systems vary in their effectiveness in identifying outcomes for GRT service users. This is compounded by the reluctance of some families to self-ascribe.

Covid-19 impact + future impacts

Servicing sites: Currently, there are only two site managers who work across all SCC GRT community sites. They offer welfare checks on new unauthorised encampments but people often do not disclose health and wellbeing issues due to a lack of trust. The normal role of the site managers involves servicing the sites, but their presence has reduced during the lockdown for fear of the spread of COVID-19. This role needs to be reviewed in light of the ongoing pandemic to ensure they have access to PPE equipment and continue to make regular trips to each site to carry out essential maintenance.

Hygiene: There is a concern that caravans without running water are presenting a risk for handwashing. Some families are unable to practice the regular handwashing and relying on small quantities of alcohol gel. We need to ensure that local councils and charities are providing buckets and hand wash for people to keep outside of each caravan for regular handwashing. There are also concerns about washing clothes as families rely on laundrettes for washing their clothes and often sports centres for showers, all of which are currently closed.

Nursing capacity: Surrey wide, the GRT Health Outreach Project currently has very limited capacity with only 0.5 FTE (full time equivalent) clinical lead and 2 FTE community staff nurses (of which one is a paediatric staff nurse and one is an adult nurse who is shielding). This team is focused on providing community health outreach to GRT communities which includes health promotion and prevention messaging; linking people to appropriate health services; oral health promotion and promoting childhood immunisations. However, increasingly this team is picking up broader welfare issues as GRT communities regard them as trusted professionals. Therefore, whilst they are able to engage more freely with GRT communities, they have limited capacity to deliver essential healthcare.

GRT movement: Some in the GRT community are nomadic and have continued to move throughout lockdown. Others have doubled up on existing sites leading to risks of overcrowding and poor social distancing. As the rules on lockdown change, there are some people who are on the move to look for work. Therefore, any engagement with the communities needs to be quick and responsive, with a fast turn-around from primary care to provide registration and outreach support flexibly.

Welfare supplies: Food is an issue, with several single mothers being unable to go in local supermarkets with their children to buy food. Some councils are providing Food Bank deliveries, but families are often sharing their own deliveries with other vulnerable people on the site and so have very limited food supplies. The isolation of these groups from sources of help, together with a cash-based economy and low levels of literacy, is proving to be making it very difficult for these families to access the help available. Some families are in dire need, asking for clothes, nappies and food for their children.

Circulating information: An easy read information leaflet has been circulated by Surrey County Council, but there is no ongoing communication strategy to ensure vital information about access to support and health services is reaching all GRT communities.

Health needs: Health needs are not being addressed because of a fear of attending GPs and hospitals which GRT communities tend to have more need for at higher rates than the wider population.

A significant barrier being faced by GRT communities is accessing information that is related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is especially true because the guidance being released by Public Health England (PHE) has been predominantly online and a report by Friends Families and Travellers in 2018 uncovered high levels of digital exclusion amongst this community¹. As such, it is important that the format in which information is transmitted, the actual content as well as the modes of distribution of this information be considered.

The format chosen to communicate the information about COVID-19 should ideally be:

- Easy-read in a variety of languages
- Available in audio options

¹ <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/report/new-report-reveals-significant-digital-exclusion-in-gypsy-and-traveller-communities-in-the-uk/>

- Culturally sensitive/ relevant if possible

Some resources have been kindly made available by Friends, Families and Travellers – available here <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/covid-19/>

The COVID-19 information that needs to be circulated include:

- Information about what COVID is, symptoms of COVID, infection control measures such as social distancing, hand washing etc., what shielding is and who should be shielding, individual and household isolation and how/when to seek clinical support.
- Information about support available – financial support, access to food, medication, welfare checks, mental health including wellbeing hubs and GPs.

Upon consulting with partners who have regular contact with GRT communities, there appears to be conflicting views on the level of understanding and compliance with the social distancing guidance. Some GRT communities in Surrey have limited unnecessary outdoor activities.

However, there does not seem to be the same level of awareness regarding the support available for individuals and families during the pandemic. This poses a risk that members of GRT communities are shielding/isolating and following Public Health guidance but without being able to lean on available support, may be suffering/ barely managing.

As a result, the communication that will be pushed forward will be primarily concerned with circulating information about what support is available. There may also be a need to clarify specific guidance such as the need for other non-shielding family members to socially distance from those who are shielding whilst at home.

The GRT outreach team, REMA and the GRT support from SCA have been providing acute support for families to ensure that basic needs are met for those most in need. This has included facilitating access to food, supporting education of children and providing support with paperwork where levels of literacy are low.

Stakeholders and Key Informants

Five interviews were conducted with key stakeholders across the health and social care system in Surrey. The stakeholders either worked directly with gypsy, roma, traveller (GRT) communities or had oversight of teams that did. Alongside insight was gathered via informal conversations with relevant parties that did not want to be interviewed. The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Health Outreach project has also produced a report on the first year of the project that began in April 2019. This provides further insight into the challenges faced by gypsy, roma, traveller communities. There is a need for further engagement work with community members. Figure 2 shows a word cloud taken from the themes of the interviews.

It is clear from the feedback and findings from previous work that the issues faced by the GRT communities, without any mitigation or strategy to support GRT families, have the potential to be further exacerbated in a second wave of the pandemic.

Recovery

GRT strategy group

We know that GRT children, young people, adults and communities in Surrey experience poorer health, wellbeing and educational and employment outcomes, insufficient access to appropriate accommodation, increased poverty and discrimination resulting multiple barriers to accessing the things people need and should be able to expect. COVID-19 has shone a light on these issues: during lockdown, some families were unable to access clean running water and food. Basic human needs and rights were not met. The purpose of this group is to drive cultural and practice change across the strategic partnerships in Surrey to promote equality of access and outcome, including safeguarding, in such a way that honours and draws upon the strengths, assets and rich heritage of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities.

Aims and Objectives

- Members provide strategic support and updates.
- To provide leadership and remove strategic challenges and barriers and ensuring links with the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Community Safety Partnership and the Safeguarding Adults Board.
- To work as a partnership and make joint decisions in order to undertake a needs analysis, agree priorities, outcomes and a workplan with the relevant Strategic Partnerships.
- To provide (minimum) annual reports to the relevant Strategic Partnerships on progress of the Workplan and any need for revision.
- Ensure the voices and experiences of local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, young people and adults are recognised, listened to and influence change.
- Valuing the breadth of experience of members of the Strategy Group - together we can achieve more
- Learn from best policy and practice nationally.
- Seek advice from national GRT specialists as appropriate.

The strategy group will report into:

- Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership & Surrey Safeguarding Adults Board
- Health and Well-being Board
- Community Safety Partnership

The role of the strategy group members is to advocate for GRT communities within their own areas of work and within relevant county wide initiatives. This will include clear read across between the GRT strategy and wider system strategies.

The GRT strategy will have interdependencies with relevant Surrey system wide and county council led strategies. These include:

- Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- First 1000 Days Strategy
- Helping Families Early Strategy
- Family Resilience Strategy
- SEND transformation programme

There is work underway on a business case to sustain and maintain the work of the GRT Health Outreach Team. The First 1000 Days Strategy Group are writing a bid for the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Fund that looks at Starting Well. The focus is on GRT outcomes.

Priorities and solutions/Future Strategy

[The COVID-19 Surrey local outbreak control plan include a section on GRT communities and details how the Surrey system will oversee and respond to COVID-19 outbreaks within the GRT communities. This includes access to testing.](#)

The GRT strategy group will oversee the following recommendations:

- Anti-discrimination and cultural awareness training across Surrey to address the ongoing and established systemic issues that impact the way in which the Surrey system is able to identify and respond to the needs of the GRT communities effectively and a commitment to improving outcomes for GRT communities.
- All system wide staff working with GRT communities understand and implement their safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities.
- Clear read across between the GRT strategy and wider system strategies including the First 1000 days, Family Resilience, Helping Families Early strategies and the SEND transformation programme.
- Implementation of literacy training and support for community members.
- Further links with the Surrey GRT Forum are needed, especially to enable engagement with community members especially housed members of the GRT communities.
- Further joined up, co-ordinated and sustainable support for the local agencies and organisations working with GRT communities is required and should be overseen and co-ordinated by the GRT strategy group.
- Work closely with organisations like Friends, Families and Travellers and Traveller Movement who are supporting the work of the NHS England and NHS Improvement Health Inequalities National Advisory group, as part of their role on the VCSE Health and Wellbeing Alliance.