

ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	Van Life - Listening Enquiry
Meeting date	9 September 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	In response to a recommendation from Full Council the Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to add to its work programme an item on Van Life – Supporting all Communities to consider developing the detail of a Community Pact for all Vehicle Dwellers in BCP. The Committee proposed that this work be initiated through enquiry sessions which would seek input from various members of the community impacted by this issue.
Recommendations	It is RECOMMENDED that: The Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee consider the views and opinions raised by members of the community and agree the next steps to be taken by the Committee on this issue.
Reason for recommendations	The Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee should listen to and consider the views and opinions raised by members of the community regarding the development of the proposed Van Life Community Pact. This engagement reflects the Committee's commitment to democratic accountability and evidence-based decision-making. Community contributions can provide valuable insight into the lived experiences of van dwellers, and stakeholders. These perspectives can help the Committee identify and understand the issues requiring further exploration. Engagement with stakeholders helps to contribute to building transparency and build trust in the scrutiny process and helps provide a basis for any recommendations made by the Committee.

Portfolio Holder(s):	N/A – Overview and Scrutiny is a non-executive function
Corporate Director	Aiden Dunn – Chief Executive
Report Authors	Claire Johnston – Democratic Services
Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Information

Background

1. At its meeting on 26 February 2025 the Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a recommendation from Full Council on Van Life – Supporting All Communities. The recommendation was made in response to a motion brought to Council which was proposed by Cllr P Cooper and seconded by Cllr P Canavan. The motion was amended by Cllr A Hadley to request that the Environment and Place O&S Committee consider the detail for the development of the Pact: The amended motion was as follows:
2. *Van dwellers, including van lifers and members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, often face challenges that highlight a complex tension between individual lifestyle choices and community regulations. This can lead to friction and a sense of exclusion among residents who feel their natural surroundings are being monopolised.*
3. *Meanwhile, Gypsy and Traveller communities often find themselves moved on by local authorities. This incurs significant costs and frustrations for both the travellers and the councils involved. These issues underscore the broader debate on the right to live according to personal or cultural circumstances, whether out of choice or economic necessity. While everyone has the right to choose their way of life, there is a growing need for balanced solutions that respect both the rights of individuals and the interests of local communities.*
4. *This Council acknowledges the travelling community and van dwellers as valuable members of our society who contribute to the diversity and cultural richness of our area and commits to fostering a respectful and inclusive environment where all individuals, regardless of their housing situation, are treated with dignity and fairness.*
5. *To this end, the Council resolves to: develop a Community Pact, requesting that the Place and Environment OSC consider the detail, for all vehicle dwellers that will:*
 - (a) *Outline a clear plan to establish designated safe parking areas with access to basic amenities for van dwellers that will provide both permanent and temporary sites for vehicle dwellers and ensure that they have secure and legal places to stay.*

- (b) *Meet anticipated future requirements and facilitate access to essential services such as healthcare, sanitation, and education, ensuring that all residents can live safely and healthily.*
 - (c) *Set up an ongoing forum for dialogue between local communities and travellers as a safe space in which discussion can take place and issues can be resolved quickly.*
 - (d) *Promote anti-discrimination policies that protect these communities from harassment and unfair treatment, whether by private individuals or public authorities, alongside the responsibility of all concerned to abide by existing laws and expectations.*
6. The Committee accepted this recommendation from Council and agreed to place this issue on the Work Plan for the Committee. It was since agreed that it would be best to conduct this work in the form of an evidence gathering enquiry.
 7. In response to the recommendation the Committee agreed to add this to its work programme and agreed that it would begin exploring this issue through an enquiry session with input from community contributors. The Committee developed a Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) Document to guide its work and this is included as an Appendix to this report.
 8. The KLOE focuses on understanding the diverse needs of individuals who live in vans locally, including those who do so by choice, cultural tradition (such as Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities), or due to homelessness. The Committee also seeks to explore the experiences of van travellers visiting the BCP area and assess the impact on residents in densely populated parking areas.
 9. It was since agreed that it would be best to conduct this work in the form of an evidence gathering enquiry.

Public Survey/Information Gathering Exercise

10. The commencement of this process was, unfortunately, delayed to early 2026. The Committee initially agreed to gather information from an open survey which was hosted on the Environment and Place O&S Committee scrutiny web page. There is no budget for scrutiny to undertake this work and therefore the survey was only hosted digitally.
11. It was agreed that the best way forward for promotion of the survey would be to promote this through informal channels rather than utilise social media. Councillors were encouraged to share a link to the survey with anyone they knew of who may be interested in completing it. It was also shared with Kushti Bok - a charity supporting the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community in Dorset and St. Mugo's – a charity supporting people who experience homelessness.
12. There were 16 responses received to the survey and these evidenced a number of different themes concerning the challenges faced by van dwellers and the potential support which could help improve their lives. The following word clouds provides an indication of the responses to the key questions from the survey.

What are the biggest challenges you face while living in a vehicle day-to-day?



What kinds of support or services would make the biggest difference to your quality of life while living in a vehicle?



13. The survey also found that many respondents were living in vehicles due to lifestyle choice. However through informal conversations the Committee are aware that there are a number of people living in vehicles in the BCP area due to homelessness.
14. The survey asked respondents if they would be interested in attending an informal discussion on the topic and a number of positive responses were received in respect to this request. The next stage of the process was to conduct informal discussion sessions.

Listening Enquiry Process

15. The central aim is to determine how BCP Council can effectively respond to and support these varied groups, particularly in light of the growing number of people living in vehicles. These enquiries are designed to ensure that scrutiny leads to meaningful recommendations which are supported by effective data gathering.
16. Two engagement sessions were held in June and July 2026 with survey respondents and representatives from Kushti Bok. The first session was attended by five van dwellers, Councillors D d'Orton-Gibson and A-M Moriarty, and Democratic Services officers. The second session was attended by Councillors D d'Orton-Gibson, A-M Moriarty and J Edwards, together with representatives from Kushti Bok. Notes from both sessions are attached as Appendices B and C to this report.
17. The comments, feedback and a suggested proposal from the Committee Members who participated in the discussion groups are included at Appendix D to this report.

Supporting Information

18. Development of the BCP Local Plan is underway. As part of this process the Local Plan may need to identify areas for permanent and/or transit sites for Gypsies and Travellers. This Local Plan process is separate to the work being undertaken by the Environment and Place O&S Committee and it does not cover all van dwellers. The process for the local plan must be undertaken in accordance with the guidance in the 'Planning Policy for Traveller Sites (2024)' in order to establish the need for this provision. The Committee's intention is not to discuss or consider any suggestions or proposals for particular locations for sites. The purpose of the sessions was to gain an understanding from the community, as to what the Council should give consideration to, for the development of the Pact.
19. The Committee is asked to consider the evidence gathering work undertaken by members of the Committee and in light of the Council motion consider what recommendations and comments it may wish to make in relation to the development of a community pact.
20. A number of officers and relevant portfolio holders have been invited to the meeting to provide support to the Committee in developing recommendations and providing factual information which the Committee may require to support any recommendations.

Options Appraisal

21. The Committee is asked to consider the representations

Summary of financial implications

22. There are no direct financial implications associated with this report or enquiry session. Further consideration may need to be given to the financial implications to any recommendations made by the Committee when these are considered by the appropriate body.

Summary of legal implications

23. This enquiry evidence/session were be conducted in line with the Overview and Scrutiny Guidance for Councils 2024. There are no legal implications arising from this administrative report.

Summary of human resources implications

24. There are no human resources implications.

Summary of sustainability impact

25. There are no direct sustainability impact considerations arising from the report or enquiry session. Further consideration may need to be given to the sustainability impact implications to any recommendations made by the Committee when these are considered by the appropriate body.

Summary of public health implications

26. There are no direct public health implications arising from this report or enquiry sessions. Further consideration may need to be given to the implications to any

recommendations made by the Committee when these are considered by the appropriate body.

Summary of equality implications

27. A full EIA or EIA screening has not been completed for this paper as no decisions are proposed. The purpose of the report is to outline the evidence gathered by the Committee and any recommendations arising from the work of the Committee will need to be given further consideration at the appropriate point. The Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED), outlined in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010, requires the Council to consider how its policies and practices impact people with protected characteristics, including Gypsies and Travellers. This means that consideration should be given as to how the actions of the Council affects this community, with the aim to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations

Summary of risk assessment

28. When engaging with members of van-dwelling communities the Environment and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, has considered potential risks related to trust, representation, and safeguarding. These communities may have experienced historical marginalisation or negative interactions with public authorities, which may impact full and open participation. There is also a risk of unintentionally reinforcing stereotypes or excluding diverse voices within these groups. Ensuring sensitive facilitation and clear communication of the enquiry's purpose is essential to fostering constructive dialogue and mitigating risks.

Background papers

Published Works

Appendices

Appendix A - Key Lines of Enquiry Document – Van Life

Appendix B - Notes from first enquiry session

Appendix C - Notes from second enquiry session

Appendix D – Members comments