

Environment & Place Overview and Scrutiny Van Life Discussion Session Meeting Notes

Date - 10 June 2026

Purpose

Informal evidence-gathering session with members of the van life community to support scrutiny work exploring a potential community pact for people living in vehicles across BCP.

Reasons People Live in Vehicles

- Lifestyle choice and freedom
- Retirement and travelling
- Housing affordability issues
- Relationship breakdown
- Lack of suitable housing options
- Seasonal or mobile work
- Ability to remain with pets
- Mental health and wellbeing considerations

Housing Affordability and Availability

- High private rental costs
- Large deposit requirements
- Limited housing supply
- Long waiting times for social housing
- Difficulties accessing support for single adults without dependent children

Lack of Basic Infrastructure

- Fresh water access
- Waste disposal facilities
- Safe overnight parking
- Recycling facilities
- Public bins
- Toilet emptying facilities

Other Issues Raised

Best Practice - Examples from France and Europe highlighted designated stopping areas, low-cost overnight stays, water and waste services, and clear management arrangements. Participants felt BCP may be missing economic opportunities by not catering for motorhome visitors and larger vehicles.

Community Relations - Perceived prejudice, complaints, social media criticism, and assumptions about vehicle dwellers were commonly raised.

Informal Community Code – The participants outlined their practice which was to stay for short periods, move regularly, minimise noise and leave locations clean.

Safety and Vulnerability - Concerns raised included harassment, vehicle damage, single women, people living in cars and those experiencing mental health difficulties.

Housing and Support Needs - Distinction made between people choosing van life and those experiencing hidden homelessness or requiring support.

Potential Solutions and Suggestions

- Water points and waste facilities
- Designated overnight parking areas
- Use of underused council assets
- 24–72 hour stay limits
- Community code of conduct
- Enhanced outreach and support information

Key Messages

- Vehicle living is diverse and not all vehicle dwellers are homeless.
- Vehicle living is increasing and unlikely to disappear.
- Water and waste facilities were identified as top priorities.
- Better infrastructure may reduce complaints and anti-social behaviour.
- Vehicle dwellers believe they make a positive economic contribution.
- A balanced approach of facilities, clear rules and enforcement was strongly supported.