



The Traveller Movement

Resource for London

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The Macpherson Report: Twenty Years On inquiry

Written submission from the Traveller Movement and the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association (GRTPA)

15 May 2019

About the Traveller Movement and GRTPA

1. The Traveller Movement (TM) is a leading national charity committed to the fulfilment of Human Rights for ethnic minority Gypsy Roma and Traveller (GRT) people. The GRTPA is a support network for police personnel who are from a GRT background. Both organisations work closely with individual police forces, the NPCC, Home Office, EHRC and other bodies to improve policing and participation for GRT communities.
2. Across the UK, the relationship between GRT people and the police is too often marked by mutual mistrust, poor communication and conflict limiting the communities' ability to access justice and the police's ability to protect citizens and fight crime. Twenty years on, many of the issues and recommendations raised by Macpherson still resonate with GRT peoples experience of policing today. The information in this submission is largely based on the experiences of GRTPA members and a 2018 national research project led by TM (in partnership with five police forces in England) into *Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Irish Travellers and the police*.¹

Summary and Recommendation

- The creation of the GRTPA in 2014 marked a significant step in improving GRT representation in the police, however, available data indicates representation is still very low. Retention of existing GRT officers and staff may also be a challenge due to ongoing cases of racism and discrimination within some forces.

¹ The Traveller Movement, 2018, '[Policing by consent: Understanding and improving relations between Gypsies, Roma, Irish Travellers and the police](#)'. The research involved a national survey of all 45 UK territorial police forces (conducted by FOI requests), and thirty-one in-depth qualitative interviews with police officers and community members living and working in five police force areas in England. The FOIs specifically looked at how territorial police forces conduct GRT community engagement, while the qualitative study focused on relationships, policing issues and building trust.



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The Home Office and NPCC should ensure that all minority staff police associations are adequately funded and resourced – including the GRTPA. Funding should enable associations and their members to work with individual forces to proactively build trust and recruit community members.

- Most GRT specific strategies and roles in police forces prioritise enforcement over more inclusive community engagement models, compounding already low levels of trust and crime reporting amongst the communities.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission and HMICFRS should conduct a review of Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer roles and related strategies to ensure they don't breach the Equality Act and do not unfairly marginalise GRT communities from mainstream policing practice in areas such as ethnic minority engagement and community/neighbourhood policing.

- Institutional racism against GRT people still exists within the police. TMs 2018 study found that nearly three quarters of police officers and the vast majority of community members interviewed had experienced unconscious bias, racism and discriminatory behaviour towards GRT by police.

Police forces should ensure all internal disciplinary procedures are equally applied to all racist incidents. Formal guidance addressing internal racist and discriminatory behaviour towards GRT communities should be re-issued by the NPCC.

HMICFRS should carry out a planned thematic inspection (i.e. a root and branch review) of all police forces engagement with GRT communities, focused on addressing institutional racism and improving good practice in community engagement.

- The Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that Gypsies and Irish Travellers are nearly half as likely to be confident in their local police. Despite this there are indications that police-community relations are very slowly improving, however, they still trail far behind other ethnic minority groups.

Police training packages and guidance should focus less on 'cultural competency' and more on change impact assessment, produced and delivered in close partnership with community organisations and members. A key objective of future engagement initiatives should be to achieve 'normal, everyday treatment' rather than 'special treatment' for GRT communities.

- A key barrier to improving relations and providing an equitable high-quality police service is GRT ethnicity being treated as a risk factor by police. This has resulted in



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the over-policing of everyday call outs to Traveller sites and cultural events such as weddings and fairs. There is also evidence of data and intelligence being ethnically defined, such as 'Traveller related' incidents and requiring a higher level of police response.

Police forces should review their data monitoring and intelligence systems to ensure they do not consciously or subconsciously stereotype and/or discriminate against GRT. Forces should also ensure their officers use the NDMM in all cases involving GRT and that decisions are regularly reviewed.

Progress improving GRT representation in the police

1. While specific data is not available on GRT police workforce numbers, it is highly likely they reflect wider ethnic minority underrepresentation considering levels of trust between GRT and the police are very low. Despite this, the creation of the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association (GRTPA) in 2014 marked a significant step in improving GRT representation in the police. With 130 members in 28 forces across the country the association has done far more than ever before to ensure GRT officers and staff are properly represented and supported. TMs research found that for many police and community respondents recruiting more GRT people into the police is key to improving relations.

"The most important thing that is happening is this Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Police Association so the public, and the police, and Travellers can see not just that there are Travellers in different jobs, but Gypsy and Traveller police" (Male, Romany Gypsy/Irish Traveller)

2. However, police and community respondents also described lack of trust and awareness on both sides as particular challenges in the recruitment process, even more so than with other marginalised groups.

"We're accepting of LGBT, we're accepting of BME candidates into the police and we strive to get a better cross-section of police officers into the service so we can better represent our community, and then there's that one community we are not aware of" (Female, Sergeant, Neighbourhoods)

3. Critically, police forces also need to focus on retention of existing GRT officers, paying attention to the sometimes hostile and/or discriminatory environment in which they may have to work. TMs research highlighted the experiences of several officers from GRT backgrounds who described the challenges of working in the police, including being



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marginalised within the ranks when faced with discriminatory behaviour, being classified as the go to person for all GRT issues, and facing hostility from their own communities.

"You're either ostracised within it...so you're not part of the group and your functioning on the outside of the group at a removed level, or you're pushed out altogether, or you actually give up and join the group, and that's the only way you get accepted" (Male, Constable)

The Home Office and NPCC should ensure that all minority staff police associations are adequately funded and resourced – including the Gypsy Roma Traveller Police Association. Funding should enable associations and their members to work with individual forces to proactively build trust and recruit GRT people.

Extent to which the police service is inclusive of GRT communities

4. Despite evidence of localised good practice, most police force strategies and roles relating to GRT communities prioritise enforcement over more inclusive community engagement models. TMs 2018 research into Understanding and improving relations between GRT and the police found that forces are poor at prioritising prevention and including GRT in community policing. Only two forces (under 5% of those who responded) described having a targeted strategy for improving relations with the GRT communities, both of which were in Wales. The remainder had either no strategy or a wider strategy that was applicable to, but not targeted at GRT communities. A significant minority - over 16% of forces - associated GRT community engagement strategies with enforcement led unauthorised encampment policies.
5. Worryingly TMs research found that where dedicated GRT community engagement roles existed - namely Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer posts - they were more likely to prioritise enforcement over community engagement. Twelve forces with GTLOs (60% of those who responded providing job descriptions and/or role profiles for dedicated GRT roles) made specific reference to dealing with enforcement against unauthorised encampments and other response issues.
6. The research found that the emphasis on reactive rather than preventative policing compounded other outcomes, including GRT people being less likely to report being victims of crime and low levels of trust and confidence between community members and police officers. Most GRT respondents state a clear desire for 'normal, everyday treatment' rather than 'special treatment' from the police.



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'Treat us like neighbours, that's all we ask, we're not asking for special treatment, we're asking for normal, everyday treatment, like your neighbour...if they could put that in a bottle and make them all go and swig a gulp-full each day before they start work things would be better' (Male, Romany Gypsy)

The Equality and Human Rights Commission and HMICFRS should conduct a review of Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer roles and related strategies to ensure they don't breach the Equality Act and do not unfairly marginalise GRT communities from mainstream policing practice in areas such as ethnic minority engagement and community/neighbourhood policing.

Institutional racism against GRT

7. TMs research found that nearly three quarters of police officers and the vast majority of community members interviewed had experienced unconscious bias, racism and discriminatory behaviour towards GRT by police. This included use of racist language, perceptions of the communities as criminogenic, and community members automatically being treated as suspects.

'Gypsies and Travellers have been the two ethnic groups where it's been okay to be openly racist against, almost to the point where it's expected really, nobody bats an eyelid if someone's being overtly racist...I used to hear it every week' (Male, Constable)

'That's kind of what we're trying to promote and change, the perception that these are criminals, what are they doing, what are they up to, why are they here, let's get their reg's, go and hound them every half-an-hour, that's the cultural thing the police very slowly, I hope, are trying to change' (Male, Inspector)

8. These findings are supported by wider examples of institutional racism against GRT within the police. In 2017 the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) upheld a TM complaint to the Met regarding racist posts by serving officers on a Facebook group. The IPCC decision followed two unsatisfactory appeals to the Met, who would only commit to taking 'management action' against the officers involved.¹ The IPCC recommended the Met police hold full misconduct proceedings with the officers. Among the posts were: 'I fucking hate p*keys' and 'You know when they are lying ... their lips move.'

¹ Guardian, 2017, [Met police chat forum was used to post insults aimed at Gypsies](#)
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Police forces should ensure all internal disciplinary procedures are equally applied to all racist incidents. Formal guidance addressing internal racist and discriminatory behaviour towards GRT communities should be re-issued by the NPCC.

9. The Met are not on their own in this regard. In 2014 Thames Valley Police launched a review of policies and procedures relating to GRT communities after being accused of institutional racism by one of its own officers and brought before an employment tribunal.² On publication of the review, the Assistant Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police acknowledged that 'cultural and operational changes' were needed in the force and recognised the 'national need for change' in how the police service engage GRT.
10. In recent evidence to the Women and Equalities Committee, the GRTPA highlighted cases of conscious and unconscious racial stereotyping of GRT in police data collection and information systems. In particular, they expressed concern regarding the workings of Operation Liberal, a police unit based in the East Midlands that deals with serious and organised acquisitive criminality. In its evidence to the Committee, a representative from Operation Liberal stated the unit does not collect the ethnicities of potential offenders but also stated that "Ninety per cent may be from Gypsy and Traveller Communities". The Committee expressed serious concern at this contradictory evidence, highlighting that such conduct in the police provides 'a stark example of how a culture of stereotyping can lead organisations to treat Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people in a discriminatory manner'. The Committee went on to state that it heard too many incidents of discrimination to conclude that these were isolated cases and reminded forces of their duties under the Public Sector Equality Duty and that discrimination can be structural as well as overt.³

HMICFRS should carry out a planned thematic inspection (i.e. a root and branch review) of all police forces engagement with GRT communities, focused on addressing institutional racism and improving good practice in community engagement.

Current state of relations and quality of police service

11. The Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that Gypsies and Irish Travellers are nearly half as likely to be confident in their local police.⁴ TMs research supports this data with most GRT and police officer respondents describing current relations as mixed

² Bucks Free Press, 2014, [Thames Valley Police have launched an independent review](#)

³ Women and Equalities Committee, 2019, [Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#), p.48

⁴ Government website, 2017, [Racial Disparities Audit](#)



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or poor. Despite this half of community members and three quarters of police officers interviewed believe that police-community relations are slowly improving, however, any improvements are starting from a point where relations are very poor and trail far behind other ethnic minority groups.

'I think things have improved, however if you put that against the improvements made with the LGBT community or other Black and ethnic minority groups I think it's right at the bottom and very far at the bottom, off the list to be honest' (Male, Constable, GTLO)

'Over the years it hasn't been good, but it has got better...I don't think there's as much prejudice now' (Female, Irish Traveller)

12. The vast majority of police officers in the study who were working directly with GRT said they felt confident doing so, however, nearly two thirds of them also described their colleagues in the police as not being confident engaging the communities. This lack of confidence amongst officers often manifested itself in enforcement led over-policing of the communities. Most GRT community members also reported being confident engaging the police but described the wider communities as not being so.
13. Most police officers in the research expressed a desire for more first-hand interaction with GRT people as a means of building trust and improving relations and the quality of police service. GRT community members shared this desire citing examples of improved relations where police engagement was community rather than enforcement led.

Police training packages and guidance should focus less on 'cultural competency' and more on change impact assessment, produced and delivered in close partnership with community organisations and members. A key objective of future initiatives should be to achieve 'normal, everyday treatment' rather than 'special treatment' for GRT people.

14. A key barrier to improving relations and providing an equitable high-quality police service is GRT ethnicity being treated as a risk factor by police. TMs research provided clear evidence of this with two thirds of police officers and over three quarters of community members describing GRT ethnicity being treated as a risk factor, often resulting in a higher level of police response. Half of community members and a minority of police officers identified traffic stops and the recording of number plates on sites as specific areas where ethnicity influences the police response. Other examples included over-policing weddings and everyday call outs to Traveller sites and apparent 'Traveller related' incidents.



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'A wedding...September-October time, a hundred-people attending, no information to say there's going to be any crime or disorder. A landlord called up and said, "it's Gypsies" and the response was to bring out public order...a dog on standby...specialist public order trained officers, and then a member of the public called up the landlord and said, "actually it's not Gypsies" and everybody was stood down. So, if that doesn't display a lack of confidence in their own abilities to speak to people, I don't know what does'
(Male, Sergeant)

'The bigotry of individuals isn't really the problem, that's a symptom, the problem is that the structure, the systems, the organisational behaviours actually legitimises people doing that [bigotry against GRT], because all of those procedures, practices, behaviours run along the lines that these are criminal groups, it's our job to deal with criminals, therefore it's our job to deal with these people' (Male, Constable)

15. Some officers described applying the National Decision-Making Model (NDMM) to GRT cases to ensure they were making rational decisions based on the intelligence received, not the ethnicity of the individuals.

Police forces should review their data monitoring systems to ensure they do not consciously or subconsciously stereotype and/or discriminate against GRT. Forces should also ensure their officers use the NDMM in all cases involving GRT and that decisions are regularly reviewed.

Leadership of Home Office and other national bodies in achieving nationwide progress

16. In February 2019 Home Secretary Sajid Javid issued a public statement outlining new police powers to 'crackdown on illegal traveller sites' in an apparent effort to 'protect communities'.⁵ The use of such emotive language by Government endangers everyday efforts by many Gypsies, Roma, Travellers, police officers, charity workers, council officials and members of the wider public to foster good relations and promote community cohesion.
17. Despite many of the challenges outlined in this submission, the NPCC and EHRC have both played important roles in advancing policy and practice to improve police-GRT relations. Both bodies recently advocated for sustainable and preventative solutions to unauthorised Traveller encampments through the provision of appropriate sites rather than extra police powers to evict. The Home Office decision last year to mandate police

⁵ Home Office, February 2019, [The Home Secretary has today \(Wednesday 6 February\) announced plans to give police tough new powers to crackdown on illegal traveller sites.](#)



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forces to include GRT in their ethnic monitoring codes is also a positive step. However, as outlined in the recommendations in this submission, the Home Office and other national bodies need to do much more to improve outcomes and guarantee fair and non-discriminatory treatment for GRT communities.