

# **Grampian Regional Equalities Council**

## **Research Paper: Accommodation Needs of Ethnic Minorities, Gypsy/Travellers and Travelling Showpeople (2022)**

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire is one of the most multicultural regions in the country. Aberdeen City has a diverse population with a relatively high percentage of ethnic minorities: roughly 16% of the city's residents come from minority ethnic backgrounds, compared to around 10-12% of the wider Scottish population.<sup>1</sup> Aberdeenshire is less widely populated by minorities, perhaps unsurprisingly due to its rurality. There are nonetheless areas within Aberdeenshire with sizeable minority ethnic communities including Peterhead and Fraserburgh.

Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire's minority ethnic population is not a homogenous group, but rather comprises numerous distinct communities of individuals each with their own specific needs. "Ethnic minority" is in fact an umbrella term comprising those born outside the UK, as well as those born within the UK whose ethnicity is anything other than white Scottish/British/English. This broad term includes Roma/Gypsy/Travellers as well as Travelling Showpeople, though these have each been treated as their own distinct category for the purposes of this report.

Asylum seekers have also been treated as an individual category, and a section at the end of the report has been dedicated to discussing their specific housing and accommodation needs. Although not included in the initial research outcomes as outlined below, we felt this would be a valuable addition as the local population of asylum seekers has seen considerable growth in recent years.

### **2. RESEARCH OUTCOMES**

#### **2.1 Ethnic Minorities**

- An assessment of any additional accommodation needs and any other specific cultural needs of ethnic minority communities.
- Detail on accommodation requirements for larger/extended family groups.
- Detail on what engagement has been undertaken with the ethnic minority communities to determine any additional accommodation needs.

#### **2.2 Gypsy/Travellers**

- Any identified need for additional permanent or transit site(s) and whether the additional need is for year-round provision or if it is of a more seasonal nature. This should include consideration of any requirement for permanent affordable housing (see ss.6-8 below).
- Detail on what engagement has been undertaken with the Gypsy/Traveller community to determine any need for sites/pitches both public and private provision, and related services.

#### **2.3 Travelling Showpeople**

- Any identified need for future site provision for Travelling Showpeople.

- Detail on what engagement has been undertaken with the Travelling Showpeople community to determine any need for sites/pitches both public and private provision, and related services.

### 3. HOUSING NEEDS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN ABERDEEN CITY

#### 3.1 Research and Engagement

Researching the housing needs of Aberdeen's ethnic minority population involved a review of existing national and local data as well as gathering feedback directly from members of the community. To facilitate community engagement, we held a series of three focus groups at different locations in the city, which had a combined total of 17 participants. We also published a research survey which received 16 responses from Aberdeen City residents.

Additionally, we held focus groups for frontline staff working in housing and accommodation. 12 frontline workers attended these sessions, representing 10 different organisations including local authorities, social housing providers, and third sector support services.

#### 3.2 Property Needs

**3.2.1** Our research participants consisted of owner/occupiers and social housing tenants as well as private renters. <sup>2(OBJ)</sup> The majority fell into the final category, fitting with national trends of ethnic minorities being overrepresented in the private rental sector. This is particularly true for migrants with NRPF who are, except in rare cases, ineligible for local authority housing and homelessness support. It is thus essential that Aberdeen has a well-managed private rental sector with affordable, quality housing stock in order to meet the housing needs of local ethnic minorities.

Affordable rent was identified as a pressing housing need by the majority of attendees (with the obvious exception of owner/occupiers). According to national data those from minority ethnic backgrounds are more likely to be living in poverty<sup>3</sup>, so access to affordable housing is vital to ensuring property needs are met. Ethnicity was furthermore found to be one of the key characteristics increasing the likelihood of homelessness, with 14% of homelessness applications in Scotland over 2019-20 coming from ethnic minority households<sup>4</sup>.

Social housing stock must therefore include quality temporary accommodation options for those facing homelessness. Community focus group participants gave largely positive feedback about homelessness support provision locally, suggesting the Council provides a robust and egalitarian service in this area. Participants were also complementary of the social housing system in general, and it was noted that many came from countries where there are no such systems in place.

**3.2.3** Overcrowding was a common issue among research participants, particularly those living in the private rented sector: one particularly concerning response to our research survey came from a household of 5 living in a privately rented one-bedroom flat. This problem is largely due to the lack of larger properties suitable for large family groups available through social housing, as well as the considerable price jump between 2 and 3 bedroom, and 3 to 5+ bedroom properties. National data suggests Polish households suffer the highest levels of overcrowding (30%)<sup>5(OBJ)</sup>, followed by Bengali and Arab.

Some participants from larger families explained that overcrowding can lead to tension within the household. While number of bedrooms v household members is the metric used to assess levels of overcrowding, participants also found the number of bathrooms to have an impact. One family living in a privately rented 4-bedroom flat shares a single bathroom between its 7 household members, and explained the insufficient bathroom facilities are as challenging as are the cramped bedrooms.

**3.2.4** Another property need highlighted by research participants was effective maintenance of properties. This issue specifically affects those in rented accommodation, with both private and social tenants struggling to obtain support from their landlords to deal with maintenance problems that arise in their homes.

One council tenant, for example, spent a month without an oven after moving in to her council home; while a family in private rented accommodation have persistent boiler issues that have on more than one occasion left them without heat for over a week. While this is surely not a problem exclusive to ethnic minorities, it is exacerbated by the communication issues some minorities face, which are detailed further in s3.3 below.

**3.2.5** The final issue raised as a property need by research participants was energy efficiency. Many suffer poor insulation or ineffective heating, which can and does have repercussions for residents' health and wellbeing: several participants said their health, or the health of their families have been affected by damp, cold, or draughty homes.

Due to the ongoing cost of living crisis, fuel poverty caused by skyrocketing energy bills was also a concern. Poor insulation seems to be a particular issue for those living in the older tenements which are common throughout the city centre. Research participants recommended retrofitting to ensure properties are properly insulated and easier to heat

### **3.3 Other Needs**

**3.3.1** Many of the housing/accommodation needs of Aberdeen's minority ethnic communities are support needs, rather than property needs, commonly related to the issue of accessibility. In order to effectively meet the housing and accommodation needs of minority ethnic groups, robust support to address access barriers is as important as appropriate housing stock. People from minority ethnic backgrounds often suffer barriers to accessing housing and accommodation support and services as a direct or indirect result of their minority status: this is a fact evidenced by national data<sup>6</sup> and supported by feedback from our own research participants.

Ethnic minorities who have migrated to Aberdeen from outside of the UK, particularly newer arrivals, are often unfamiliar with British housing systems, institutions, rights et cetera. This in itself presents obvious disadvantages for those looking to find or maintain secure accommodation. To go about addressing this, the Council must ensure thorough, up-to-date information is easily available to service users through a variety of accessible sources and formats.

**3.3.2** Unsurprisingly, language barriers are cited frequently as a major obstacle to accessing support regarding housing. For those with little or no English skills, communication with housing services and providers poses obvious challenges. While Aberdeen City Council does have language support available

to service users who need it via Language Line and other agencies, our research suggests that in practice this support is not always easily accessed.

Recorded messages and telephone selection menus such as those used by Aberdeen City Council's main phone line can be intimidating to those who face a language barrier. Participants at our third sector focus group therefore highlighted the centralising of phone lines as a change which has negatively impacted local residents who do not speak English as a first language.

Aberdeen City Council's website was also identified during as an issue for improvement: numerous focus group participants reported both the website and housing portal as being overly complicated to navigate, and information being hard to find. Poor digital skills are common among some minority ethnic communities, which are exacerbated by language barriers. It is therefore important that online services are simple and user-friendly, and alternative lines of communication such as phone lines are easily accessible.

**3.3.3** Several research participants reported experiencing racism from neighbours, usually taking the form of persistent harassment. As well as having a potentially devastating impact on victims' health and wellbeing generally, this has inevitable consequences on their ability to fully enjoy their housing rights by hindering their ability to live in security, peace and dignity.

Unfortunately, research participants who experienced racism from neighbours broadly found the Council's response to be unsatisfactory. This suggests more robust support is required in order for local residents to be protected from discrimination, including training for frontline staff on effectively handling discriminatory behaviour when it arises.

### **3.4 Recommendations**

Based upon the issues raised during research and discussed above, there are a number of factors impacting the housing needs of local ethnic minorities that should be addressed by the Council.

- There is a notable lack in larger properties among Aberdeen City Council housing stock, meaning larger family groups common among certain ethnic minority communities are often consigned to the private rental sector where rental costs for larger properties can be prohibitive. The Council, in partnership with other social housing providers, should therefore invest in building more 5+ bedroom properties in order to accommodate the needs of larger family groups. Properties of this size should include a second toilet in addition to a main bathroom.
- Previous census data shows ethnic minorities are overrepresented in Aberdeen's most deprived areas: around a quarter (23.3%) of people in Grampian's ten most deprived areas were ethnic minorities, up to nearly a third (32.3%) in Woodside. The figure was less than 15% in Grampian's ten most affluent areas, although there are high concentrations of minorities in some affluent areas particularly around the city's hospitals. These areas should therefore be prioritised when developing new accommodation for larger family groups.
- All new properties should be designed with energy efficiency as a priority. Existing properties should furthermore be retrofitted to ensure they are adequately insulated and energy efficient. This is likely to be crucial in the next few years as the cost of living rises and weather becomes increasingly extreme, and would benefit not just minority ethnic communities, but the population of Aberdeen in general.

- As language barriers are such frequently cited issue, Aberdeen City Council should first and foremost ensure language support is consistently provided by training frontline staff on the importance of language support and how to work with interpreters.
- Updating the website to be more user-friendly, ensuring other lines of communication are accessible, and providing information in a variety of languages and formats would furthermore work to dismantle some of the barriers to accessing and maintaining housing experienced by ethnic minorities.
- In order to fulfil their duties under Public Sector Equality Duty, local authorities must work to eliminate discrimination and foster good relations between different people. Aberdeen City Council can work towards this goal by providing dedicated support to local minorities who experience racism from neighbours, and by taking swift action to deal with this behaviour.

#### **4. HOUSING NEEDS OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN ABERDEENSHIRE**

##### **4.1 Research and Engagement**

Researching the housing needs of Aberdeenshire's ethnic minority population involved a review of existing national and local data as well as gathering feedback directly from members of the community. According to the 2011 census the most ethnically diverse wards in Aberdeenshire are Fraserburgh and District (10.5% ethnic minorities), and Peterhead North and Rattray (9.9%).

We therefore held focus groups in both Peterhead and Fraserburgh which had a combined total of 12 participants. Our research survey additionally received 8 responses from ethnic minorities in Aberdeenshire. The focus groups for frontline workers

##### **4.2 Property Needs**

**4.2.1** The results of the 2022 census are yet to be released, but minority demographics are likely to have seen some change over the previous decade. Focus group participants in Fraserburgh and Peterhead reported that some members of their communities have moved out of the UK in recent years due to Brexit, though this migration has reportedly slowed in the months since we left the European Union.

Several research participants also noted that their property needs were likely to change in the next five years, expecting to downsize due to children moving out- a trend which is likely reflected among the wider community due to Aberdeenshire's ageing population. We may therefore see an increasing reduction in Aberdeenshire's minority ethnic populations as children of local families become adults and move to more populous urban areas.

Fraserburgh and Peterhead are likely to remain the areas most densely populated by ethnic minorities. Only 4 of 20 research participants from Aberdeenshire were based outwith these localities, with 1 in each of the following areas: AB33, AB39, AB51, and AB54.

**4.2.2** Much like in Aberdeen City, Aberdeenshire research participants highlighted poor insulation and energy efficiency as a key factor impacting their property needs, and one which is particularly concerning due to increasing energy prices.

Aberdeenshire Council tenants discussed a scheme through which solar power has been installed in some Council properties and queried why some tenants were offered this but not others. Participants felt this scheme should be rolled out to all Council tenants, and eventually all residents, as a matter of priority.

**4.2.3** Home security, and by extension personal safety, was also raised as a concern by participants in Fraserburgh and Peterhead. These areas have relatively high levels of substance misuse and other antisocial behaviour which, as well as causing a nuisance for neighbours, commonly lead to criminal activity. Residents therefore felt it especially important that their homes are safe and secure.

Unfortunately, those residing in rental properties must generally rely on their landlord to ensure the home is properly secure- and private landlords in particular do not always uphold their responsibilities in this respect. Related is the issue of property maintenance more generally, with research participants sharing concerns raised in Aberdeen about landlords being slow to carry out essential maintenance. Some participants complained of problems impacting their home security which were not repaired promptly: poorly maintained fencing and windows without secure locks were the examples provided.

### **4.3 Other Needs**

**4.3.1** The accessibility issues outlined by participants in Aberdeen above are also broadly applicable in Aberdeenshire: lack of familiarity with local housing systems, language barriers, and/or digital exclusion can preclude local ethnic minorities from adequately fulfilling their housing needs.

Several focus group participants did however report good experiences when accessing language support through Aberdeenshire Council's housing services. This suggests the Council provides an effective service in this area, which is vital in empowering local minorities who are affected by language barriers to access and maintain appropriate accommodation.

**4.3.2** Rural research participants complained of a general lack of support services available locally beyond those provided by the Council. This is a common problem in more remote rural communities across Scotland. This seems to be a particular issue for those who do not speak English as a first language and so are essentially excluded from services without language support, as well as individuals with NRPF who are largely ineligible for Council housing services and support.

Aberdeenshire Council alone cannot address the overall lack of support services in the region. It is therefore essential to work in close partnership with other public, third sector, and community organisations supporting ethnic minorities locally to ensure their housing needs are met. By supporting and collaborating with a wide range of services, the Council will be better able to connect minority ethnic residents with the housing or accommodation support they require.

### **4.4 Recommendations**

- Retrofitting properties to ensure they are adequately insulated and energy efficient, as well as ensuring all new properties are designed with energy efficiency as a priority, will help address residents concerns about the energy efficiency of their homes. The solar power scheme mentioned above should furthermore be rolled out to as many residents as possible.
- The Council should ensure all of its properties are efficiently and thoroughly maintained and respond promptly when repairs are required, and encourage other landlords in the area, both

private and social, to do the same. In particular, repairs that relate to home security should be considered emergencies and dealt with as such.

- Aberdeenshire Council should continue to be proactive in providing language support to residents who require it, and encourage other housing providers to provide this support to their non English speaking service users. The Council should furthermore work in partnership with other housing providers and support services to ensure the support needs of minorities living in rural areas are met.

## **HOUSING NEEDS OF GYPSY/TRAVELLERS IN ABERDEEN CITY**

### **5.1 Research and Engagement**

This research engages with the Northeast, Scottish and British contexts drawing on the national and local policy documents, third sector publications, and the Scottish Government's social research reports. We furthermore engaged directly with 5 Travellers from 2 families living at Clinterty.

### **5.2 Location or Land Needs**

**5.2.1** There are two primary obstacles facing Travellers in terms of their accommodation needs: the shortage of sites available, and the poor quality of these sites. This are certainly not problems specific to the local area: indeed, the Scottish Government has labelled the national shortage of Traveller sites as "chronic". As a result of the lack of available sites up to 80% of the Travelling community in Scotland live in brick-and-mortar homes, many of whom would rather be living the traditional Traveller lifestyle.

Current site provision in the city consists of one public site at Clinterty with 21 pitches (17 permanent and 4 temporary). There is additionally one private site near Dyce which is owned and occupied by one family group. The Clinterty site is shortly to undergo a refurbishment and will be closing until 2023-24. At the time of writing all but three families have been temporarily moved elsewhere.

**5.2.2** The long-awaited refurbishment will go a long way to addressing the issue of poor site quality locally- however it will also mean the only public Traveller site in the area is closed for a considerable period of time. Before it's closure Clinterty saw consistently high occupancy levels. Without alternate accommodation options, Aberdeen City could see an increase in unauthorised encampments.

The number of unauthorised encampments in Aberdeen rose over the 2021/22 period for the first time since 2018/19, following a brief reduction in numbers likely related to the coronavirus pandemic. There were 22 unauthorised encampments in 2021/22, up from 15 in 20/21. 10 camps have appeared around the city between January-July this year alone, five of which were located in Altens. Camps were also set up in Cove, Dyce, St Fitticks and Tillydrone.

**5.2.3** Aberdeen City Council has stated in previous Local Development Plans an intention to reduce Clinterty's size and develop one additional smaller site. It also advises creating one or two 'informal sites' and identified five zones in which new sites could be developed: Grandhome, Newhills Expansion (Craibstone, Rowett South and Greenferns Landward), Countesswells, Greenferns, and Loirston<sup>9</sup>. The Grandhome, Newhills, and Loirstone were explicitly considered the most appropriate for smaller transit sites<sup>10</sup>.

However, despite being identified in the past two consecutive LDPs as areas for development, no progress has yet been made in the development of new sites. Aberdeen has seen considerable

economic and social upheaval in recent years, which has no doubt contributed to the lack of progress in this area. However going forward, it should be a priority for the Council to move forward with plans to develop new sites.

**5.3.3** Among the Travellers we engaged with in Aberdeen, there was a strong preference for smaller sites with no more than 10 permanent pitches for use by individual family groups. Tension and challenging relationships within the community were cited as the reason for this preference.

They also acknowledged the need for a small transit sites but suggested that local Travellers prefer “unofficial” transit sites. This preference is apparently related to tradition: Travellers would previously camp on public land while “shifting”, but this has become increasingly challenging due to legislation limiting this traditional way of life.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

- Residents interviewed at Clinterty requested that the children’s playpark be prioritised as an area for improvement during the refurbishment, as the site’s rural location means there is little other enrichment available for children nearby.
- Rather than developing a new permanent site of a similar size to Clinterty, two smaller sites with 8-10 permanent pitches would better fit the needs of the community who would rather live on smaller sites with their family groups. Any of the areas previously identified in as being suitable for this purpose could be a candidate for development.
- Due to the stated preference among the community for unofficial transit sites, the Council should proceed with plans to develop at least one small, unofficial site locally. As the Altens area has seen high numbers of unauthorised camps, this would be a suitable location for the development of a new transit site.

## **5. HOUSING NEEDS OF GYPSY/TRAVELLERS IN ABERDEENSHIRE**

### **6.1 Research and Engagement**

As well as conducting a review of national and local literature and data, we furthermore engaged with 2 Travellers in St Cyrus, 1 in Peterhead and 3 living in settled accommodation to gather their views on housing and accommodation needs.

### **6.2 Location or Land Needs**

Aberdeenshire Council currently provides two public Traveller sites: Greenbanks, Banff (20 pitches) and Aikey Brae (10 pitches). Both sites have consistently high occupancy levels though Aikey Brae’s dropped considerably during 2020 and 2021, likely related to the coronavirus pandemic. Additionally, there are a number of private sites throughout the shire: Boyndie (14 pitches); New Pitsligo (2 pitches); Peterhead (2 pitches); Boddam (4 pitches); Kemnay (7 pitches); and North Esk, St Cyrus (20 permanent and 9 transit).

The community members we engaged with unanimously agreed that there should be more site provision for Travellers in Aberdeenshire, which supports data gathered from the community



previously.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore research conducted among the general Aberdeenshire population in 2014 showed 53% of those surveyed believed Aberdeenshire Council should increase its provision of authorised Gypsy / Traveller sites.<sup>12</sup>

There were 17 unauthorised encampments in Aberdeenshire in 2021, up from just 5 the previous year as the pandemic restricted movement among the community. While there is a spread of encampments across five of the six administrative areas within Aberdeenshire, the majority of unauthorised camps have been in the Buchan area. The proportion of unauthorised encampments by area reflects the movement patterns of Gypsy/Traveller communities along the A90, A93, A96 and A947.

### **6.3 Recommendations**

Aberdeenshire's previous Local Development Plans identify Inverurie, Blackdog, Ellon, and Chapleton as locations for development of four new public sites- two halting, one transit and one unspecified. However much like in the city, there has been little progress to speak of in developing these sites.

- Research suggests the most desirable kind of sites are permanent sites provided by the local authority, however there is demand for mixed provision. Aberdeenshire Council should therefore prioritise development of these four new sites in its future accommodation provision.
- Travellers we engaged with locally expressed a desire for a new site to be built in a location from which the city is more easily accessible. Inverurie was suggested as a suitable location. This site should consist of 20 pitches, including 2-3 temporary pitches for visiting relatives.
- The pitches intended for transit at both Aikey Brae and Greenbanks have mostly seen permanent use. It may therefore be sensible to convert these to permanent pitches, however in this case additional transit pitches should be created elsewhere to ensure there is sufficient provision to meet local needs.
- Considering the relatively high number of unauthorised encampments in the Buchan area, the council should identify a suitable location in this area to develop a new temporary site of 10 pitches.

## **6. HOUSING NEEDS OF TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE IN ABERDEEN CITY**

### **7.1 Research and Engagement**

Through the literature review it became apparent that there is a considerable gap in research relating to the accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople. Research for this section therefore primarily consisted of community engagement and consulting with the Scottish Showmen's Guild, as well as reviewing the scant literature that is available.

### **7.2 Land and Location Needs**

The Travelling Showpeople we consulted with primarily visited sites in Aberdeenshire and were less likely to pitch up in the City. This is apparently due to the relative inaccessibility of sites in Aberdeen City for smaller groups of Scottish/British Showpeople: there is a feeling among the community that the sites at the beach are reserved for larger, more international shows e.g. Circus Extreme, Ladyboys of Bangkok- both of which have recently been pitched up at Aberdeen Beach sites.

This is reportedly due to the existence of Codona's so close to these sites. It was implied that the park is seen as having an unofficial "monopoly" on the surrounding area. However, it was also highlighted that Codona's has less traditional "fairground" equipment than it used to, meaning there could be a market for Travelling Shows if they had access to a site farther from the existing park.

### **7.3 Recommendations**

The existing Travelling Showperson sites at the beach seem to be relatively well-served with regard to facilities, but as noted above these sites do not tend to be visited by smaller groups.

- In order to become accessible to a broader range of Travelling Showpeople, Aberdeen City would benefit from an additional site ideally further from Codona's than existing sites. This site would require at least 10 pitches for caravans alongside ample space for show equipment (e.g. tents/marquees, fairground rides).
- Access to water and power sources would also be required to ensure any new site meets the needs of Travelling Showpeople.

## **7. HOUSING NEEDS OF TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE IN ABERDEENSHIRE**

### **8.1 Research and Engagement**

As noted in section 7.1 above, very little research exists relating to Travelling Showpeople in Scotland or their accommodation needs. We were therefore lucky to be able to consult directly with Travelling Showpeople pitched at Inverurie, Banff, Stonehaven, and Peterhead.

### **8.2 Land and Location Needs**

**8.2.1** Existing sites for Travelling Showpeople in Aberdeenshire are well-used: the Travelling Showpeople we engaged with visit sites across the area regularly, namely Banff, Ellon, Peterhead, Turriff, Oldmeldrum and Stonehaven although the Ellon site is reportedly closing soon. Sites are generally located on public land such as parks and Travelling Showpeople pay rental fees to use them.

**8.2.3** Despite paying significant fees to use these spaces, basic facilities seem to be seriously limited almost across the board. Lack of accessible water is the most significant issue: of the sites mentioned, only Stonehaven was known to have a water source onsite. This forces Showpeople to rely on the goodwill of neighbours to access water.

Access to clean water is a fundamental human right and is reasonable to expect at any accommodation, rented or otherwise. It is unfortunate then that despite the fees paid by Showpeople, besides Stonehaven the majority of sites do not have an accessible water source.

These sites also tend to lack electrical power sources. Generally Travelling Showpeople will have gas access and electrical generators, but these generators can be loud so running them in the evenings can cause friction with neighbours. Providing access to these most basic facilities of water and power would make life easier for visiting Showpeople, and would also allow the Council to foster good relations between Travelling Showpeople and neighbouring communities.

**8.2.3** Larger groups of Travelling Showpeople who travel with 10+ caravans struggle for space at these existing sites. Furthermore, these sites are in such frequent use that there is concern among the community about overuse: one Showperson was pitched at Peterhead Lido for the third time this year already, and is scheduled to visit once more before summer is over.

### **8.3 Recommendations**

- As existing sites lack basic facilities such as water and power, it should be Aberdeenshire Council's priority to install water sources and electrical sources at existing sites to ensure they adequately meet the accommodation needs of Travelling Showpeople.
- With existing sites being so well-used, and particularly considering the loss of the Ellon site, it would be sensible for Aberdeenshire Council to create another site for Travelling Showpeople. Any new site would require a water source and ideally an electric source, as well as adequate pitches for at least 10 caravans and space for rides and other show equipment.
- It was suggested during our engagement that there are empty plots of land near Westhill and Portlethen that would be suitable for use as a Travelling Show site.

## **9. HOUSING NEEDS OF ASYLUM SEEKERS**

**9.1** Both Aberdeen City & Aberdeenshire have seen considerable growth in refugee and asylum-seeking populations over recent years, beginning with the resettlement of Syrian refugees in 2016/17. There are now well established Syrian communities in both Aberdeen City and Aberdeenshire living primarily in rented accommodation.

Aberdeen City hosts the largest population of asylum seekers in Scotland outside of Glasgow. As of 2022, all local authority areas across Scotland have become official "dispersal zones" for asylum seekers, meaning local asylum seeking and refugee populations are likely to continue growing.

**9.2** In Aberdeen there are three main groups of asylum seekers currently housed in hotels across the city. These groups consist of:

- Approximately 140 Afghans, including family groups and individuals
- Approximately 1,200 Ukrainians, including family groups and individuals
- 99 men of different nationalities, namely: Iran (40), Iraq (13), Sudan (14), Eritrea (10), Afghanistan (2), Chad (1), Vietnam (1), Yemen (2), Somalia (2), Egypt (1), Syria (11), Palestine (2), Tunisia (1), Saudi Arabia (2)

Afghan and Ukrainian asylum seekers are being accommodated by the Council, whereas accommodation for the final group listed is being provided by the for-profit Mears Group. While asylum hotel placements are intended to be temporary, some of these individuals have now spent close to a year living in hotels.

**9.3** It is important to note that not every asylum seeker currently residing in Aberdeen hotels will go on to stay in the area long-term. Rather it is likely that many will move on to other parts of the country, with several members of the community having expressed an intention to do so.

In order to accurately assess the housing needs of asylum seekers locally, it would therefore be sensible to survey the individuals living in hotels to ascertain how many plan to remain in the local area long-

term. Local councils should work together with the Mears Group to gather this data and inform future provision.