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Gypsy and
Traveller Liaison
Service

Annual Report

2013/14

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Executive Summary

The County Council's Gypsy Traveller Liaison Service (GTLS) provides a responsive and cost effective service which seeks to address the unmet needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities in Devon. The GTLS continues to meet the demands placed upon it and set goals for the future within local, regional and national policies.

From April 2013 to April 2014 the service built on established good practice and saw greater communication between all stakeholders through multi-agency working. Over the past twelve months, the service has seen more agencies feeling able to work directly with the Gypsy Traveller Community and engage in a two way process of identification of needs and solutions.

The service has managed 31 unauthorised encampments (UEs) in the twelve month period and provided a range of advice and guidance to others on dealing with encampments on their land. This is a slight decrease of 1 from the year 12/13.

The total number of people using these 31 unauthorised encampments was 315 including children.

The passing of planning permission for a new site at Haldon Ridge, Teignbridge aims to reduce the number of unauthorised encampments in the area. 15 new pitches will be built next financial year. However, the need to identify further land or other solutions to address the lack of pitches and sites remains, particularly in the south of the county where we see our highest figures for UEs. The first milestone needs to focus on permanent pitches to address the shortage now. Looking into the future transit/temporary stopping places would alleviate the number of short term unauthorised encampments.

We hope this report provides an insight into the complex issues involved and how these are addressed. As a service, we are always open to suggestions, comments and requests for training or guidance.

The introduction of a new handbook, code of conduct, monitoring forms and national policies this year has added an extra dimension to clarify roles and responsibilities. The easy read code of conduct has been successful and as a result we have seen sites more tidy and complaints fall. A fair and consistent approach to UEs has proven very effective once handbook and associated documents were in effect.

Introduction

Gypsy and Traveller Groups

Romany Gypsies include English, Welsh and Scottish Gypsies and European Roma. Gypsies have the longest known history of the Traveller groups and are a recognised ethnicity/race. Gypsies' ethnic roots lie in Northern India, where nomadic groups first started moving towards Europe around 1,000 years ago.

Irish Heritage Travellers have a long and detailed history, starting in Ireland as long ago as the 15th century. At a similar time, Gypsies were unlikely to settle in Ireland, due to the already established communities of Tinkers (metal workers) who would be in competition for the work and stopping places. They are predominantly of strong Catholic faith, and prefer to send their children to Catholic schools.

Showmen are a cultural minority with a long, rich history of providing travelling entertainment and fairground rides at local Markets and festivals.

Circus Families have a long heritage as travelling entertainers. The service they provide is generally wanted, accepted and enjoyed by the majority of the population.

New Travellers arose mainly in the 20th century, adopting a 'low impact lifestyle' for environmental, social and/or economic reasons. Many of the adults have grown up in mainstream society, and are well versed in education and other service entitlements. All families and communes tend to be different with little commonality on accommodation, mobility, work or faith trends

According to the most recent Census data by the Office for National Statistics, Ethnic Gypsies and Travellers nationally make up 0.1 per cent of the population. Devon has less than the national average, however we know that many do not disclose their ethnicity and therefore figures are an under-representation. Figures do not capture data on New Age Travellers who have a significant presence in Devon and the South West:

Census Data 1

	Total Population	Gypsy/ Irish Traveller	% Gypsy Irish Traveller
East Devon	132457	90	0.07%
Exeter	117773	93	0.08%
Mid Devon	77750	88	0.11%
North Devon	93667	45	0.05%
South Hams	83140	45	0.05%
Teignbridge	124220	118	0.09%
Torridge	63839	54	0.08%
West Devon	53553	21	0.04%
Devon	746399	554	0.07%

[Data by the Office for National Statistics](#)

The Gypsy Traveller Liaison Service

Staffing within the service consists of:

- One part time Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Officer (GTLO),
- One full time Assistant Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Officer (AGTLO).

Management has been provided from within the Strategy, Organisational Change Team (Services for Communities). The GTLO's work alongside the corporate equality officer and the hate crime prevention officer forming the Equality and Outreach Team.

The Portfolio Holder for Gypsies and Travellers is Councillor Roger Croad.

We regularly consult with Devon County Council legal department to ensure safe and lawful decisions are made.

We also work closely with the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Achievement Service at Babcock LDP (Education Support).

Staffing this year has permanently reduced on the return of the Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer from maternity leave. This has seen a reduction in the operating costs for running the service.

The GTLS works not only with Gypsies and Travellers but acts as a reference point and contact for all initial enquiries within Devon and neighbouring regions. Information requests come from a wide range of sources. Often the first point of contact is the My Devon contact centre. Enquirers include:- the settled community, parish councillors, district councillors, county councillors, researchers, planning departments, housing and health agencies, students, the media, or personnel in other districts and regions. Information about the service and communities is provided on the Devon County Council website.

The GTLS monitors enquiries to gauge the main issues and responds to each issue on a case by case basis: identifying, understanding and balancing needs. Where necessary, we will make changes to policy or practice to ensure we achieve a fair and effective outcome in all that we do.

The GTLS regularly keeps up to date and shares information via its membership of NAGTO (National Association of Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officers).

The County Council's Roles and Responsibilities

The County Council considers its responsibilities under three broad areas:

- The duty to promote equality and human rights, and specifically to promote an environment in which the rights and responsibilities of both Gypsies and Travellers and the housed community are respected.
- Providing the Gypsy and Traveller community with a liaison link to assist in access to welfare and other support services.
- Being a substantial landowner.

Equality Duties and Human Rights

Although there is no legal right to stop on someone else's land without their consent, there is nothing unlawful in following a nomadic lifestyle. In fact, we have a Human Right to 'private and family life' which means a right to a live how we choose (i.e. to live a nomadic or settled life), provided it does not interfere with other rights or laws.

The Equality Act 2010 makes it unlawful to treat someone less favourably because of a range of protected characteristics, including race, nationality or ethnic or national origins. Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers are defined as a racial group in law. A Public Sector Equality Duty places a duty on the Council to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between persons of different groups.

Further information is available from www.devon.gov.uk/equalitylegislation.

Welfare and Liaison

Through the Gypsy and Traveller Liaison Service (GTLS), the County Council seeks to provide both Gypsies/Travellers and the wider community with a point of contact for advice and help for all related issues.

In terms of access to services, Gypsies and Travellers have the same entitlements to access services as any other member of society. When travelling or living on an Unauthorised Encampment (UE'S), access to services especially health, education and social care can be more challenging.

The GTLS has a key role in facilitating access and, when needed, will be an escort on site for doctors and others or take individuals to medical appointments, but will not act on behalf of another service or individual. As with anyone, where safeguarding concerns are identified, the relevant services will be contacted.

Sometimes homeless rough sleepers, who do not regard themselves as Gypsy or Traveller by definition or choice, are present on UE's. In this case the GLTS will work in partnership with local homeless charities and housing providers.

As a substantial Landowner

Devon County Council is a significant landowner in the county and owns or leases buildings from which council services are delivered or administered – for example, libraries, recycling centres, offices, day centres, waste disposal sites, vehicle parking and highway depots and the Stover/great western canal country parks. In addition, the County Council has areas of land such as county farms, highways, highway verges and lay-bys.

In relation to all its land and property interests the County Council has responsibilities to service users, staff and visitors, as would any other landowner. However, in the case of trespass and the creation of an UE, the County Council cannot trigger possession proceedings in the same way that private or commercial landowners can. In addition to land use issues, the County Council is required to conduct assessments of any public health issues and the welfare, education, human rights and needs of the occupiers. A Court may refuse our request for possession (eviction) if there are over-riding welfare needs.

In most but not all cases, the presence of an UE can generate a range of concerns from the neighbouring members of the housed community. It is another role of the GTLS, to seek to create positive relationships where possible, and, in any event to seek to reduce friction and mitigate the impact of the UE. The GLTS will liaise with the Police and local Racial Equality Council where community tensions escalate.

Meeting housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers

The responsibility for planning and housing rests with District Councils as per the Planning Policy for Travellers Sites 2012. This updates the Housing Act 2004.

Local Authorities with Housing responsibilities (in Devon these are District and Unitary Councils) are required to, by March 2013 (updating annually):

- Use a robust evidence base to identify a five year supply of specific and deliverable sites for Gypsies and Travellers.
- Identify broad locations for six to ten years.
- Grant Temporary Planning Permission to site requests, in the absence of a five year supply.

Devon County Council has a 'duty to co-operate' under Section 102 of the Localism Act 2011 and therefore a duty to assist other authorities in sourcing suitable sites/pitches.

At present there is no site provision other than the two sites of Sowton and Broadclyst, offering a total of 16 pitches which equates to 16 housing units. As with the settled community, this makes no provision for the next generation. As a result of this the GLTS manages a number of UE's throughout Devon whilst waiting for provision to become available. This can at times include large groups that are in transit, but, is in the majority limited to long term smaller sites. We continue to work hard with all involved to limit site sizes where we can. We tend to see New Age Traveller communities on longer term small encampments and Irish Traveller Communities on temporary (transit) encampments – sometimes up to 30 or so caravans as family groups converge on the limited land available.

To bring change to this situation, The County Council is happy to facilitate or, be involved in Devon-wide or regional forums for site planning. We will work in partnership with District areas to develop a strategy for identifying Temporary Stops, Transit and Permanent sites from our own land, to fulfil our duty to co-operate and foster good relations by reducing the number of UEs.

Consultation with Gypsies and Travellers is vital for seeking effective solutions. This may include working with areas of temporary acceptance within districts that are owned by other providers. The GLTS can facilitate consultation with individuals on UEs, but, there should be a Gypsy/Traveller Forum for each District. Currently only Teignbridge District have a working Forum.

The County Council is willing to work in partnership with other landowners to help identify suitable sites and individual pitches, particularly when involved in planned housing developments where pitch allocation can be part of those plans. Partners include:

- Local authorities, including neighbouring authorities.
- Highways Agency.
- Private landowners and businesses, particularly those near main transport routes with hard-standing areas.
- Ministry of Defence.
- Farmers.
- Church/religious organisations.
- British Residual Land Board.

The GLTS would particularly welcome to hear from people willing to act as landlords of Gypsy and Traveller tenants, or seek new tenants so that those on UEs can be properly accommodated.

The GLTS will also comment on planning strategies and has participated in local development framework meetings throughout Devon. We are able to impart ideas and solutions used in other areas throughout the United Kingdom because of our networks.

Achievements made during the past 12 months

Key Duties of the Gypsy Traveller Liaison Service

Below is a list of the key duties the Gypsy Traveller Liaison Service has undertaken during the last twelve months:

- Managing two authorised sites owned/leased by Devon County Council, comprising 11 fixed pitches within Exeter City Council district and 5 fixed pitches within East Devon District Council area.
- Responding to and managing Unauthorised Encampments (UEs) across land owned by Devon County Council (DCC) including highways land.
- Providing an assessment and liaison service for land owned by The Highways Agency.
- Maintaining the Devon Tree Framework to ensure tree safety at our sites and considering other health and safety issues for both fixed sites and unauthorised encampments.
- Working in partnership with homelessness agencies to advise those who are homeless and camped on our land of any works being undertaken and when possession of the land will take place.
- Working with other agencies across the County including District Councils, Health, Education and the Police to support the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and respond to any issues.
- Maintaining our own protocol to reflect any changes in government legislation as well as providing an easy read guide of our processes and expectations.
- Reducing friction within communities through consistent and fair application of a code of conduct, upon which toleration of UEs depends.
- Responding to consultations on planning applications for Gypsy and Traveller sites.
- Attending and working proactively in any district forums, research projects and consultations.
- Providing data to health services on issues and current practice and, if necessary, advocate for change via partnership working.
- Improving the relationship between settled and Gypsy and Traveller communities across Devon, by working to develop a better understanding between the differing cultures in order to help break down the barriers that exist.
- Supporting both the settled and Traveller community in accessing services.
- Being the first point of contact for anyone with questions, concerns or needing contact with the community.

Make up of Gypsy Traveller communities in Devon 2013-2014

Permanent Sites – Sowton and Broadclyst

Management of these sites is provided through the GTLS. Duties include, maintaining tenancies, liaison with residents, reading letters, support with utility bill issues, guidance and support with accessing agencies, support in times of conflict, reporting and implementation of repairs.

We have recently submitted a bid to the Homes and Communities for funding under the Gypsy Traveller site refurbishment scheme. Work has continued on the bid this year. The focus has shifted solely to the Sowton site due to funding constraints and time scales. We are confident that this bid will be successful and works hope to start next financial year 2014/15.

Successful partnership working with Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council's Gypsy and Traveller Worker, alongside the Council's Adult and Community Learning service has resulted in an uptake of literacy and computer courses. In addition, we have enabled more external agencies to offer services at the site. These include stop smoking advice, healthy initiatives, personal goal setting, basic literacy and computer training.

We will be reporting in the next annual report on the proposed works at Sowton. We are hoping to be starting work around Feb 2015.

Site	District	Number of Adults	Number of Children
Sowton	Exeter	18	4
Broadclyst	East Devon	11	4
Total		29	8

Unauthorised Encampments (UEs) Devon County Council owned land.

This year there have been 19 short term Unauthorised Encampments (UEs) across Devon. The UEs each vary in size, location and how long the Gypsies and Travellers plan to remain there. The vast majority of these have been within the South Hams area. Over the past twelve months we witnessed diverse groups arriving throughout the winter season which could be attributed to national economic issues.

There are 12 longer term unauthorised but tolerated encampments. These are home to Gypsies and Travellers that are not highly mobile but still travel for economic purposes around Devon and beyond. Some of these encampments may be on Highways Agency land and we work with the travellers and this agency when this occurs.

The responsibility of District Councils to either allocate land for Gypsies and Travellers or to provide social style accommodation is progressing although this has not progressed as quickly as hoped. Teignbridge District Council submitted a planning application for a 15 pitch Traveller's site with grant funding received via the Homes and Community Agency. We have assisted with the proposed site at Haldon, working closely with communities and stakeholders to bring about change. This has been approved and completion will be next financial year.

We have responded quickly to any requests and support needed. The level of UEs we saw this year across Devon although a reduced number from last financial year still demonstrates the shortage of permanent and transit sites. The longer-term UEs continue to be home to many G/Ts looking for suitable formal sites. We will continue to work with Districts to increase the number of authorised pitches/sites in Devon and this is again listed as a target for 2014/15.

The GTLS continues to be successful in reducing the costs associated with dealing with UEs. This is a result of better communication with the community and better multi-agency working in relation to co-ordinating services such as waste collection, and provision of temporary sanitation options. Please see appendix 1 for a financial summary.

We have again experienced occupations by homeless people in tents. It is our ongoing intention to explore options and consistent ways of working to ensure the health and wellbeing of those involved.

The tables below details the number of UE's by district. Short Term UE's are mainly for groups that are travelling through and do not wish to stay long term. These figures could suggest where there is most need for short term solutions such as a tolerated area, or, transit pitches.

These figures do not include encampments on District Council Land, such as car parks, or do they include information about those on other land for example, land owned by the Forestry Commission or Dartmoor National Parks. These encampments can be the same group looking for somewhere to park up short term, or subject to eviction from other district council land.

Short Term UE's 1 (Between 1 week and 2 months)

District	Adults	Children	No of UE's
Exeter	41	26	6
East Devon	20	12	3
Mid Devon	2	0	1
North Devon	3	0	3
West Devon	0	0	0
South Hams	41	55	5
Teignbridge	6	0	1
Torridge	0	0	0
Total	113	93	19

Aside from transit or short term solutions there is a need for permanent site provision.

The Homes and Communities Agency have made monies available to districts to provide new site provision.

The next table highlights where this shortfall of accommodation is most acute. However, these needs could change with economics and employment conditions to either, countywide, regionally or nationally.

Long Term UE's 1 (Tolerated on a longer term – more than 2 months)

District	Adults	Children	No of UE's
Exeter	0	0	0
East Devon	5	0	1
Mid Devon	0	0	0
North Devon	22	2	3
West Devon	0	0	0
South Hams	26	9	8
Teignbridge	30	15	1
Torridge	0	0	0
Total	83	26	13

Totals 2012/13 1

Type of encampment	Adults	Children
Long Term UE's (13)	83	26
Short Term UE's (19)	113	93
Fixed (2)	29	8
Total	225	127

As these tables highlight, services and agencies need to address both short and long term accommodation issues for these communities. These figures do not include those of each district and, other landowner's encampments. The GTLS is included in service updates from each district and, have, when requested assisted with information or advice.

As a service, we have been networking and liaising to offer solutions and identify gaps in provision and to improve outcomes for the Gypsy Traveller community. Agencies procedures do not always understand the difference between fixed, transit and unauthorised encampments. However we have been able to achieve the results listed in the table below by education and negotiating for change.

Multi Agency Work

The GTLS has been successful in engaging agencies in helping to deliver services to Gypsies and Travellers, through being involved in and supporting various pieces of work during the year that benefitted communities across Devon. Main projects this year were:

- Assisting Teign Housing and the Haldon Travellers with their consultations on the new site. Teignbridge Gypsy Traveller Forum and Haldon Users Group attendance.
- Teignbridge Recording Project. The idea was to create a piece of work that will help to dispel public fears associated with having Gypsies or Travellers as neighbours. It was a successful project.
- Accommodating a student Police Officer on site visits across the county as part of their learning.
- We have worked with Parish and District Councils to provide support, information, education, advice and possible solutions. One such example being the accommodation needs assessment
- We provide a reference point and contact for Devon Adult and Children's services to enable through care and service provision.
- Carers Refresh Strategy.
- Smoke Free Project.
- Worked closely with the Homes and Community Agency on the Sowton bid for grant money to refurbish the amenity blocks.
- We work with the Forestry Commission to address any issues when works are undertaken or encroachments are on their land.
- We have worked closely with the District Housing Departments to ensure new tenancies are supported and workable. We have provided a contact point for information and support to assist individuals applying for housing solutions. We also work with private sites to offer housing options.

- We work with the Ethnic Minority and Travellers Advisory Service (EMTAS) provided by Babcock LDP to ensure all children of school age on our land in Devon can be supported in education.
- We regularly work with GP practices, dentists, mental health teams, children and adult services across Devon to facilitate access and treatment options.
- We work with Regional and National Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officers to exchange good practice and be aware of any potential sites or vacancies available to our communities. Further to ensure standardised practice.
- We ensure that private planning applicants are aware of South West Planning Aid and the services this group can provide. District Planning departments regularly contact us to either start a dialogue, arrange site visits, or, report on developments. This year we were particularly active with Teignbridge District Council in their strategic planning.
- As well as direct work with other agencies, the GTLS has played a part in bridging the gap for delivery of services to Gypsies and Travellers by liaising with a whole host of agencies. This is part of managing UEs across Devon, and by facilitating this service for Gypsies and Travellers; it helps address the short fall in access to services that this community face.
- This last year we have welcomed the input of Children's Centres Workers at sites alongside either ourselves or the workers from EMTAS. These workers have provided play, activity and learning sessions on the sites. For large groups this has helped the districts settled community and the travellers considerably. Where possible the Children's centres have offered use of their centres facilities on damp days including access to information and advice on vaccinations and other child related issues. One unintended but valued spin off to this is the undocumented learning of the parents who have asked for improved education options, this highlights again the creative response and understanding of the workers which has improved what is available for this community.
- As well as the children's' centre we have welcomed the pragmatic response of one particular group of multi agency workers in the Plymstock area. Past experience has highlighted for them the multiple needs of these groups and how these can be addressed by visiting the site for one afternoon or morning and providing a link. Travellers have used these contacts to ascertain care through pregnancy, children with healthcare needs and their own ill health as they travel throughout Devon.
- On our fixed sites this same pragmatic approach was delivered by adult education; it has provided learning options. Some members of these communities have taken and passed exams to improve their prospects. Adult learning and the transitional young carers' workers

have also facilitated improved prospects for access to colleges for a cohort of younger members of these communities

Planning

The process of gaining private planning permission for a Gypsy/Traveller family site can prove costly and lengthy. The GTLS will liaise with the family, make a site visit (often more than once) and support the family by confirming Gypsy/Traveller status and any other supporting work that is necessary, such as support with literacy issues.

This year however there has been less need for support as planning departments within some districts have made services more accessible and consumer friendly. We will continue to support families who are required to prove their Gypsy/Traveller status.

The Future

- The HCA have a funding programme within affordable housing to facilitate the building of new sites. Each District should be identifying a five year land supply for this purpose and making their interest known in order to bid for this money. We will support districts in this process.
- We hope to be included in the housing assessments when the districts start this process.
- We will continue to seek new ways of working with others and build on links already made with other agencies throughout next year. In the climate of reduced funding across the board, it's important we try to achieve the best possible outcomes for the service and its users.
- DCC and other agencies face more expenditure cuts whilst the needs of gypsy travellers remain. Large groups of travellers cause a lot of concern amongst the settled community and incur moving on costs via the court process, this can lead to tensions and a non profitable state for all. Often large groups turn up on high profile sites due to no choice once they turn up in an area; this causes the inflammatory headlines we see in the local media. Other areas are looking at negotiated stopping places, which would consist of a piece of land which would accommodate a medium/large group should they turn up in an area. This would allow the service to help link with different agencies and avoid costly court action. The service will be exploring this interim solution throughout the next year. If areas of land were identified as described above, whoever was using the land would still be subject the county council's code of conduct which covers all DCC land holdings. There is a planning limitation of 28 days maximum which would abate people's fears of unauthorised encampments.
- Securing arrangements for the long term future management at Sowton.
- Continuing discussions with South Hams District Council to support development of future local plans which would make provision to meet the needs of its accommodation needs assessment survey in 2014.

Ongoing issues for 2014/15

Issue	Outcome
Attend and work on South Hams/ West Devon land identification forum	To identify an area of temporary acceptance for Irish Travellers
Continued Health drive on both authorised and unauthorised sites	Better health outcomes for Gypsy/Travellers
To support cross border working on the provision of gypsy traveller sites	Reduction of long term UE's
Monitor and assess the impact of Welfare Reform on our communities	To maintain stability
Establish practice for homelessness issues	Equal treatment for anyone on DCC land
To ensure Health Promotion Links now a function of DCC	To improve health outcomes within our community
To continue to work with Parish District and County Councillors for community cohesion and inclusion	To aid better understanding between the settled community and those camped on our land
To pursue our HCA bid to fund improvement works	Improved outcomes for our communities
To work with communities in a flexible manner to enable appropriate responses to changing needs	More efficient service provision and communication to all stakeholders

As well as focusing on the above specific issues, we continue to focus overall on the County Council's better together agenda:

<https://new.devon.gov.uk/bettertogether/>

Appendix 1

Budget 2013/14

A. Summary

Expenditure:	
Staff salaries including travel, training and on costs	£ 54,035.00
Site maintenance and repairs	£25,984.00
Electricity and water on sites	£15,217.00
Miscellaneous including DCC in-house recharges	£ 11,179.00
Total	£106,415.00
Income: (portaloo's, skips)	£3,368.00
Rents	£48,270.00
Net Expenditure	£54,777.00

B. Breakdown of comparative costs

This section is highlighted to show what the potential costs would be if the County Council decided to take action to evict Gypsy and Traveller groups on a routine basis. Whilst such action would not be necessary in all cases, as groups often move on before court action is taken, it does show that the continued approach taken by the County Council is much more cost effective.

The other consideration is that, once evicted from one site, many groups simply move onto another Council owned site, resulting in multiple actions being taken against the same G/T. This is without taking into account the human costs of such an approach.

Fees for legal and court costs per eviction	770.00
Liaison with sites to collect relevant information for the legal team	100.00
Transportation of 1 x caravan to secure site	*450.00
*Some families have more than one caravan, so this estimate is conservative	
Total cost of eviction per family: (Average for 2 Adults and children with 1 caravan)	1,320.00
Total families for 2013/14 225 Adults / 3 at 1 caravan per unit)	75 units
Total cost for eviction only policy (75 x 1320)	99,000.00
Estimated cost if management of the two authorised sites were contracted out	45,500.00
Total	144,500.00
Actual current costs relating to management of authorised sites: 2 x Staff Annual Salary – including on costs, travel and	54,035.00

training	
Costs for portaloos provision for UEs at 1 per site for 4 weeks average for 19 short term sites	1,900.00
Costs for portaloos for provision for 6 long term UE's	7,800.00
Total	63,735.00
Total savings using the current system for in house management and a tolerated sites policy	80,765.00