

**TRAVELLING COMMUNITY STRATEGY SCRUTINY PANEL
28TH MAY 2012**

PRESENT: Councillor Jukes (Chair)
Councillor Sutherland (Vice-chair)
Councillors Day, Duffy, Gaskell, Newton, Pacey and
M. Smith

APOLOGIES: Councillors Ranson and Youell

The Head of Planning and Regeneration and the Governance and Scrutiny Research Officer attended the meeting to assist with the consideration of the items.

1. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting of the Panel held on 16th April 2012 were agreed.

2. SCOPE DOCUMENT

An updated Scope document was submitted for the information of the Panel.

AGREED that the scope document be noted.

3. RECENT INFORMATION PUBLISHED ON THE CHARNWOOD BOROUGH COUNCIL WEB SITE

Following the transfer of responsibilities for Gypsies and Travellers to the Neighbourhood Services Team, Ashley Russell had been identified as the Lead Officer at Charnwood for Gypsy and Traveller issues. As part of his ongoing work, he has developed a site of the Council's web site, in respect of unauthorised encampments. That site can be accessed using the link below:

http://www.charnwood.gov.uk/pages/gypsy_and_traveller_sites

AGREED that the information be welcomed.

4. PANEL REPORT

This item was included on the agenda to provide an opportunity for the Group to consider its final report. A draft report was circulated as a separate document to members of the Panel.

While considering the draft report the Chair made reference to the briefing paper submitted at item 6 on the agenda, highlighting information received during the Panel's consideration of Travelling Communities, to assist the Panel with its consideration of recommendations within the final report.

AGREED that the draft report be received.

5. GATHERING EVIDENCE FOR FURTHER CONSIDERATION

The Chair made reference to the draft report and the need for members to agree recommendations to be included in that report. To that end each member was requested to submit their views.

During consideration of recommendations, members of the Panel made reference to the following:

Sites

Separate locations were required for permanent gypsy/traveller sites, transit sites and Showmen.

Small kinship sites were recommended for permanent gypsy/traveller sites, situated in close proximity to services, including doctors. However, it was recognised that it might not be possible to satisfy the number of sites required.

Gypsy/traveller sites should not be established adjacent to existing developments, they would not be compatible, would reduce the value of the existing houses and the noise from vehicles and generators could cause disturbances.

The difficulties that showmen had in operating on their authorised sites was mentioned; in particular, in gaining planning permission to erect gantries.

Reference was made to the difficulties the Council had faced when they housed young and elderly people together. Some members of the Panel considered that similar problems would occur with gypsy/travellers living in close proximity to settled communities. Integration was a two way process and there were barriers still to be broken down.

Concern was expressed that including gypsy/travellers on Sustainable Urban Extensions (SUEs) would render areas of the development as sterile and restrict further development.

Gypsy/travellers owned plots of land around Leicestershire and those plots could be utilised for small kinships sites.

Management of Sites

The Derbyshire model, with the Council owning sites and managed by third parties appeared to work successfully. Appropriate management of, and service provision for both permanent and transit sites would be paramount in the successful running of those sites.

Access to Information

A 'One Stop Shop', for residents and gypsy/travellers to access information should be available and well publicised. Such information was available on the MATU website.

Multi-Agency Traveller Unit

As a member of MATU, Charnwood Borough Council should hold the Unit to account, to ensure it was addressing matters in the Borough in a timely manner.

Education

- The education of gypsy/traveller children;
- School children and residents being educated in respect of the culture and lives of gypsy/travellers (possible use of Gypsy and Traveller Equality (GATE)).

Highway Byelaws

Officers be requested to liaise with the Highways Department to ascertain whether a Borough wide byelaw could be introduced, to prevent more than a twenty four hour stop for caravans on the roadside.

To clarify issues raised by the Panel, the Head of Planning and Regeneration provided information as follows:

- (i) Government Policy – New National Government policy was clear, in that Travellers should not be treated differently to settled communities. It promoted a peaceful and integrated co-existence between sites and the local community. Provision through the Local Development Framework (LDF) had to be deliverable and economic viability testing would be undertaken to ensure sites were deliverable. The fall back position is to identify sites through a later planning document, to meet need in close proximity to shops and services. Reference was made to the experiences of other local authorities when seeking to identify sites in later planning documents.
- (ii) Meeting the Need – Site Allocation – At its meeting in November 2011, the Panel had submitted recommendations to the Scrutiny Management Board that the sites be delivered as part of SUEs. This approach would enable a properly planned and integrated approach to new housing and traveller provision. New residents would therefore be clear about the format of the SUE before they purchased property. This was seen as a more equitable approach and a more realistic means of achieving traveller provision.

Developers would be required to make provision for gypsy/traveller sites as part of legal agreements; possibly as part of affordable housing requirements.

The Council would need to consider if it was able to provide alternative land to compensate developers for land lost on a SUE due to the location of a traveller site.

Delivery of Showmen's sites would also be considered through SUEs, in tandem with employment land. Should that not be possible the matter would be considered through later planning documents, looking at former employment sites and opportunities on brown field land.

- (iii) Permanent Sites – Gypsy/travellers may be able to purchase land, establish small kinship sites and manage those sites themselves. Alternatively sites provided as part of affordable housing requirements could be managed by Registered Providers.
- (iv) Transit Sites – These were short stay sites (for example stays of three weeks). Such sites required careful management, as there were cultural and familial differences in the travelling community and not all travellers wished to be together. Those sites were often the most difficult to interface within local communities.

The current Local Plan identified the Allsops Tip area for a traveller site but that had not been delivered. Officers were investigating whether this could be suitable as a transit site.

All traveller sites would require hard standing for caravans, infrastructure for electricity and water supply, as well as facilities for laundry rooms and bathrooms. Council tax and new homes bonus applied. The Council would need to provide services as it would for any other type of housing including waste collections etc.

- (v) Unauthorised Encampments - The Multi Agency Traveller Unit (MATU) responded to all unauthorised encampments.
- (vi) Traveller Owned Land – Some travellers may not wish to share information in respect of land they own. While they may have some of that information, officers did not expect that the Gypsy Council or MATU to have a comprehensive list.
- (vii) Existing Showmen's sites – Officers were not aware of any specific problem in Charnwood but could see that sites adjacent to residential development or in sensitive locations may have difficulties in achieving planning permission for certain types of development.

The Panel proposed the following be included in the Panel's final report recommendations:

1. The provision of permanent sites be based on identifying smaller kinship sites, including a maximum number of pitches on a site.
2. Options for the Council's involvement in the provision and management of transit sites be explored.
3. Where possible, planning applications for showmen's sites be considered sympathetically.

The Chair proposed that he meet with officers to consider the proposed recommendations, expand on those and circulate to members of the panel to consider

AGREED

1. that officers liaise with the Highways Department at Leicestershire County Council, to ascertain whether a Borough wide byelaw could be introduced, to prevent more than a twenty four hour stop for caravans on the roadside.
2. that the Chair meet with officers to consider further Panel recommendations and circulate proposals to members of the Panel for their consideration.

6. EQUALITY IMPACT NEEDS ASSESSMENT

As referred to in the Panel's Scope Document, members were requested to consider whether an Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EIA) was required for the Report.

While acknowledging that Gypsies and Travellers were a protected group within the Equalities Act, consideration had been given to EIA as part of the Council becoming a member of MATU and would be as part of the Local Development Framework.

Following consideration of the matter, it was proposed that an EIA would not be appropriate at this stage, as the report was not at a sufficiently detailed level to enable evaluation of the impact on individuals or groups of people.

AGREED that an Equality Impact Needs Assessment not be undertaken as part of the work of the Panel.

7. PUBLICITY

At the request of the Scrutiny Management Board, the Panel was asked to consider publicity for the final report.

AGREED that publicity for the report be considered once the report has been finalised.

8. ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUBSEQUENT MEETINGS

The Panel was requested to note that a further meeting date had been agreed as follows:

Thursday, 28th June 2012 – to finalise the report for submission to the Scrutiny Management Board

AGREED that the date for a future meeting of the Panel be noted.