

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS)

THURSDAY, 2ND DECEMBER, 2010

PRESENT: Councillor B Anderson in the Chair

Councillors G Driver, P Ewens,
P Grahame, R Grahame, G Hyde and
P Wadsworth

61 Chair's Opening Remarks

The Chair welcomed everyone to the December meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods).

62 Late Items

The Chair agreed to accept the following documents as supplementary information:-

- Copies of documents submitted to the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Gypsy and Traveller Working Group held on 29th November 2010
- Draft note of a meeting of Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Gypsy and Traveller Working Group held on 29th November 2010
- Submission of written evidence prepared by the Leeds Gypsy and Traveller Exchange (GATE)

The documents in question were not available at the time of the agenda despatch, but circulated by e mail and made available to the public on the Council's web site prior today's meeting.

63 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting.

64 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors J Marjoram and L Mulherin.

Notification had been received for Councillor P Grahame to substitute for Councillor L Mulherin.

65 Minutes - 8th November 2010

RESOLVED- That the minutes of the meeting held on 8th November 2010 be approved as a correct record.

66 Scrutiny Inquiry into Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision in Leeds

Further to Minute 52, 8th November 2010, the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report updating the Board on progress in respect of the Inquiry on Gypsy and Traveller Site provision in Leeds.

Appended to the report were notes of the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Gypsy and Travellers Working Group held on 1st and 15th November 2010 together with the papers considered at those meetings..

The Board also received a note of the Working Group held on 29th November, together with the papers considered at that meeting (Minute 62 refers).

The purpose of today's Board meeting was to:-

- hear from and ask questions of the witnesses
- receive the meeting notes of the Gypsy and Traveller Working Group meetings held on 1st, 15th and 29th November 2010 and the reports and other papers which were considered at those sessions
- identify any further witnesses the Board would like to hear from before concluding its Inquiry
- consider what, if any, further information the Board would like to receive before concluding this Inquiry

In attendance at the meeting, and responding to Members' queries and comments were:-

- Ms Helen Jones, Chief Executive of Leeds GATE
- Ms Eileen Lowther, Chair of Leeds GATE
- Ms Kim Maloney, Vice Chair of Leeds GATE
- Ms Maddy Connors, Representing roadside gypsies and travellers
- Mr James Connors, Representing roadside gypsies and travellers
- Mr Michael Maloney, Representing roadside gypsies and travellers
- Ms Michelle McGill, Chair of New Wortley Residents Association
- Ms Bridget Emery, Head of Housing Strategy and Solutions
- Mr Ian Spafford, Head of Community Services & Litigation

The Board noted that apologies for absence had been received from Mr Xavier Chevillard, Vice Chair of New Wortley Residents Associations.

At the request of the Chair, the Board heard evidence from Leeds GATE; roadside gypsies and travellers and the New Wortley Residents Association.

In brief summary, a number of issues were discussed including:-

- the present policy of the Council moving gypsies and travellers from one unlawful encampment to the next
- the view that some local authorities including Cheshire had managed to break the cycle of moving gypsies and travellers from one unlawful

encampment to the next through the initial use of negotiated stopping sites as a short term measure

(The Head of Housing Strategy and Solutions informed the meeting that planning permission was necessary with regards to negotiated stopping sites)

- the need to build on relationships if negotiated stopping sites were introduced as the first step in identifying land for small gypsy and traveller permanent sites in the city
- the Leeds economy, the benefits system and the high rents at Cottingley Springs
- residents perceptions of gypsies and travellers
- anti social behaviour by some gypsies and travellers including fly tipping and other environmental issues, particularly on playing fields and the damage caused to drainage which was very expensive to repair
- that small sites would be preferred by gypsies and travellers
(A representative from the roadside gypsies and travellers confirmed that four to six caravans would be an acceptable number)
- in discussing small sites clarification was sought as to the number of vans a family might have
(A representative from the roadside gypsies and travellers informed the meeting that within his particular group there were eight families and sixteen vans)
- the views of Leeds GATE should the Council decide to increase the capacity of Cottingley Springs
(The Chief Executive of Leeds GATE confirmed that any further expansion of Cottingley Springs would be unacceptable)
- the initial views of Leeds GATE should the Council decide to introduce a "Council house tenant suitability test" for gypsies and travellers should some additional provision be recommended as part of the Board's Inquiry
(The Chief Executive of Leeds GATE confirmed that she would give some thought to this proposal)
- the suggestion that a register be introduced for permanent Leeds gypsies and travellers wanting pitches in the city
(The Chief Executive of Leeds GATE informed the meeting that she had some reservations about a register)
- the offer from New Wortley Residents Association to support any pilot that might be established to identify a small site in Armley for gypsies and travellers and the Board agreed to seek further clarification and the views of Armley Ward Members on this issue
- the current process for removing gypsies and travellers from unauthorised sites which often resulted in children returning home in the evening to find that their families had been moved on
- the difficulties of getting adequate toilet provision on a negotiated small site for gypsies and travellers
(A representative from the roadside gypsies and travellers confirmed that they would be prepared to pay for any toilet provision on such a site)

- clarification of which travellers would be given priority when allocating caravans on authorised sites
(The Chief Executive of Leeds GATE confirmed that the same process that was applied to Council house tenants should be applied to gypsies and travellers. The Head of Housing Strategy and Solutions provided the Board with further details on the current arrangements for allocation of pitches and procedures within the Leeds Housing Register)
- the suggestion that gypsy and traveller girls aged 12 plus were often disengaged from education
(The Chief Executive of Leeds GATE confirmed that this was not the case. She made specific reference to historical cultural background issues and the Board noted and welcomed that every effort was being made to improve the education of girls)
- the fact that some other local authorities in the City Region were not offering sites for gypsies and travellers

RESOLVED-

- a) That the contents of the report and appendices, together with the supplementary information, be received and noted.
- b) That a vote of thanks be conveyed to representatives from Leeds GATE, roadside gypsies and travellers and New Wortley Residents Association for their attendance and contribution to the Inquiry.
- c) That at the next meeting of the Gypsy and Traveller Working Group, Members identify any recommendations they would wish to put forward for inclusion in the Board's final report following the conclusion of its inquiry on this issue.
- d) That the Board's Principal Scrutiny Adviser be requested to invite the Armley Ward Councillors, together with the Chair of the BITMO Board to give evidence at the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Gypsy and Traveller Working Group meeting on 13th December 2010.
- e) That this Board notes that that the Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods) Gypsy and Traveller Working Group's draft report and recommendations on gypsy and travellers site provision (Session 3) would be considered at the next Board meeting on 6th January 2011.

(Councillor P Ewens joined the meeting at 10.20am during discussions of the above item)

67 Work Programme

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report providing Members with a copy of the Board's current Work Programme. The Executive Board minutes of 3rd November 2010, together with the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st December 2010 to 31st March 2011 were also attached to the report.

RESOLVED-

- a) That the contents of the report and appendices be noted.

- b) That the Executive Board minutes of 3rd November 2010, together with the Forward Plan of Key Decisions for the period 1st December 2010 to 31st March 2011 be noted.
- c) That the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods submit an initial report on interruptions to the refuse collection service following the introduction of new rounds and the recent bad weather for consideration at the meeting of the Scrutiny Board on 17th January 2011.
- d) That the Board's Principal Scrutiny Adviser update the work programme in accordance with today's meeting.

68 Dates and Times of Future Meetings

To note the dates and times of future meetings:-

Thursday 6th January 2011
Monday 17th January 2011
Monday 14th February 2011
Monday 14th March 2011
Monday 11th April 2011

All at 10.00am (Pre-Meetings 9.30am)

(The meeting concluded at 11.55am)