

Scrutiny Board (Neighbourhoods and Housing)

Terms of Reference for an Inquiry into Gypsy and Travellers Site Provision within Leeds

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on 13th September 2010, the Board agreed to undertake an Inquiry into the Council's policy on gypsies and travellers, with a particular emphasis on reviewing the Council's approach to tackling unauthorised encampments.
- 1.2 The Board is aware of a number of instances recently of the Council applying to the County Court for orders for possession in respect of Council owned land which has been unlawfully occupied by travellers and dealing with the legal and practical consequences of such unlawful occupation. Members are concerned that the Authority is in the best possible position to prevent unauthorised encampments and to deal with instances of unauthorised encampments whilst at the same time making adequate provision for travellers in line with its duty of care and commitment to the gypsy and travelling community.

2.0 Scope of the Inquiry

- 2.1 The purpose of the Inquiry is to make an assessment of and, where appropriate, make recommendations on the following:
 - The Council's policy concerning unauthorised encampments and the provision of permanent sites for gypsies and travellers within Leeds.
 - To consider whether provision is required and its likely effect upon unauthorised encampments.
 - To consider what criteria might be applied in the event that a need is identified for selecting a site or sites.

3.0 Establishment of Working Group

- 3.1 The Scrutiny Board at its meeting in September 2010 agreed to establish a Working Group to hear evidence from a range of witnesses, collate evidence and to produce a final report for consideration by the Scrutiny Board.
- 3.2 The Working Group will submit their notes of the work they have undertaken to the Scrutiny Board.
- 3.3 The Working Group consists of the following members:

Councillor B Anderson Chair
Councillor G Hyde
Councillor L Mulherin
Councillor P Ewens
Councillor R Grahame
Councillor R Procter

3.4 All Members of the Board shall be invited to attend meetings of the Working Group.

4.0 Timetable for the Inquiry

4.1 The Working Group will report back to the Scrutiny Board on the 8th November and 13th December 2010.

4.2 The above sessions and the length of the inquiry are subject to change. However it is anticipated that a final report will be available by 13th December 2010

5.0 Submission of Evidence to the Working Group

5.1 The Working Group will consider:

- The national and local position.
- The legal framework.
- New Government initiatives that are being proposed that may support or encourage the Board to recommend a particular course of action.
- The Council's current policy on providing sites for gypsies and travellers.
- The extent and nature of unauthorised encampments in Leeds and the region.
- Relevant housing, planning and equality legislation.
- The social, economic and environmental impact of unauthorised and authorised encampments on local communities.
- The Council's policy on tackling unauthorised encampments on its land.
- How other authorities and the region deal with the issue of unauthorised encampments.
- The direct and indirect costs of removing unauthorised encampments of gypsies and travellers within the city compared with the full capital and revenue costs of providing a permanent site or sites.
- Whether a distinction can be made between transient gypsy and travellers and those who remain within Leeds throughout the year.
- Determine a view if authorised sites are proved to be more cost effective than undertaking continued enforcement action as to whether a number of smaller permanent sites would be more appropriate than a single large site.

6.0 Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods)

Session One – 11th October 2010

- To approve the terms of reference for this inquiry
- To receive a note of the Working Group's first meeting

SESSION TWO – 8th November 2010

- To receive the minutes of the working group meetings and pursue, as appropriate, issues raised by the Working Group

SESSION THREE – 13th December 2010

- To agree the Board's final report and recommendations

7.0 Witnesses

7.1 The following witnesses have been identified as possible contributors to the Inquiry:

- Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods
- Representative of the Gypsy and Travelling community
- Representative from Education Leeds and City Development Department (Planning)
- Leeds Gypsy and Travellers Exchange GATE
- Area Committee Officer and a Member who is the party spokesperson on this issue from each political party
- Representative from Legal Services
- Representative from West Yorkshire Police
- Representatives from the officer Interdepartmental Travellers Working Group
- Local Residents / Elected Members who have experience of unauthorised sites
- Local Residents / Elected Members who have experience of authorised sites in the City Region
- Current and Previous Executive Board Member with portfolio responsibility for this issue
- Regional representation