

**Meeting of Scrutiny Board (Environment and Neighbourhoods)
Gypsy and Travellers Working Group held at 2pm
on 15th November 2010**

Present:

Councillor B Anderson (BA), Chair
Councillor R Grahame (RG)
Councillor G Hyde (GH)
Councillor L Mulherin (LM)
Councillor P Ewens (PE)

Others Present

Mr R Powell (RP), Senior Research Fellow of the Centre for Economic and Social
Research at Sheffield Hallam University
Ms B Emery (BE), Head of Housing Strategy and Solutions
Ms K Murray (KM), Travellers Service Manager
Mr Gareth Self (GS) Liaison Officer
Mr I Spafford (IS) Head of Community Services & Litigation
Ms K Blackmore (KB) Team Leader, General Litigation Team
Mr R Mills (RM) Principal Scrutiny Adviser

No	Note	Action
1.0	Introduction and Welcome	
1.1	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and briefly referred to the agenda and the issues before the Working Group today.	
2.0	Note of Last Meeting	
2.1	Members received the note of the meeting of the Working Group held on 1 st November 2010.	
3.0	Matters Arising	
3.1	There were no matters arising that were not included on the meeting's agenda.	
4.0	Presentation	
4.1	(RP) gave a powerpoint presentation on the West Yorkshire Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) final report which was published in May 2008. He gave an overview of the research which he and his fellow authors undertook in writing this report for the West Yorkshire Housing Partnership. He then drew out some findings particular to Leeds and explained the methodology for concluding that Leeds needed a further 48 pitches for gypsies and travellers. It was agreed that the slides of the presentation be circulated to all Members of the Scrutiny Board.	RM
4.2	(GH) stated that the figure of 48 additional pitches was purely aspirational and a snap shot in time. What we currently know from the information provided to us by officers and the West Yorkshire Police he stated was that there are 20 Leeds based families with 27 caravans who want to stay in Leeds and are currently moved from one unauthorised encampment to the next.	

- 4.3 (BA) spoke of the costs associated with unauthorised encampments. He stated that whilst this was a consideration we had to be realistic about what was achievable.
- 4.4 (BA) referred to the fact that there were up to 4 caravans per pitch at Cottingley Springs. Although in May 2008 the Department for Communities and Local Government published a document entitled Designing Gypsy and Traveller Sites, the fact remains that there is no definitive definition of a pitch in terms of size, layout or volume.
- 4.4 (BA) commented that as the gypsy and traveller community is close knit and family orientated smaller sites may not be appropriate for the number of caravans required.
- 4.5 (PE) raised the issue of inheritance in the gypsy and traveller community and transfer of the ownership of a caravan and licence on the Cottingley Springs site. (BE) and (IS) responded.
- 4.6 Reference was made to the shortage of affordable housing and an increasing number of people on the Council house waiting list. (RP) referred to the increase in gypsies and travellers requiring pitches and the opportunities that partnership working could have with for example Housing Associations who often have a number of ethical requirements in their business plan.
- 4.7 (BA) thought that there may be more opportunities to promote private initiatives for gypsy and traveller sites. He referred to the purchase of private land in Gildersome which had received planning approval to provide three pitches for gypsies and travellers. The application received no objections from residents. (PE) stated that the location and sensitivity of an area had much to do with whether people would object to an application of this kind. (LM) stated that only 4% of applications for private pitches were successful.
- 4.8 Members referred to the requirements of the Mobile Homes Act and it was agreed that a briefing paper be submitted to the next meeting. **BE**
- 4.9 Members discussed the fact that the GTAA report had not been adopted by the Council and that it was still marked confidential. (RP) stated that Leeds had not adopted this report and that the document was no longer confidential as Wakefield Council had published it on their internet site.
- 4.10 A Member asked where Councils had been more successful in providing gypsy and travellers sites. (RP) responded that the South West and South East had been more successful in this regard. (BE) was asked to provide a briefing paper on these areas. **BE**
- 4.11 (RG) asked for information on the Ofsted report regarding the education and attendance of gypsies and travellers children. (LM) was also interested in seeing a breakdown of gypsy and traveller children in higher education. (BE) agreed to provide this. **BE**

5.0 Information Previously Requested by the Working Group

- 5.1 Members received a report of the Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods providing information requested by the Working

Group on the following issues:

- The definition of a “pitch”.
- The possibility of extending the provision at Cottingley Springs.
- The cost of providing permanent provision at Cottingley Springs.
- The estimated cost of providing additional pitches within Leeds
- The number of travellers who have no permanent pitch within the city and who consider themselves to be residents of Leeds.
- Information from other local authorities regarding pitch capacity and other details.
- Further information on patterns of unauthorised encampments within the city since 2007.

5.2 Members agreed that Appendix E of the report was confidential.

5.3 Members discussed the possibility of remodeling the Cottingley Springs site to provide a further 7 pitches and 14 caravans including soft boundaries to provide privacy to the pitches. (BE) was asked to submit a paper to the next Working Group on the capital costs of providing an additional 7 pitches and 14 caravans on the Cottingley Springs site and report to the next meeting.

BE

5.4 (LM) asked that the Council should make more use of photographic evidence concerning unauthorised encampments. Photographs should be taken when the gypsies and travellers first move on to a site and then during and after they have left. This evidence could then be used to assess how tolerant the Council and police should be when they move on to another illegal site. (BE) agreed to discuss this with officers and our partners when the policy is next reviewed.

5.5 Members referred to previous discussions held concerning the legal costs of removing unauthorised gypsy and traveller encampments and whether any of these costs are recovered from individuals. (IS) agreed to circulate a note on this issue.

KB

6.0 Agenda Content Next Meeting and Witnesses

6.1 It was agreed that Councillors J L Carter and M Dobson be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group to give evidence to this inquiry. The Working Group would also consider the further information requested at today's meeting.

RM

7.0 Date and Time of Next Meeting

7.1 It was noted that the next meeting of the Working Group will be held on Monday 29th November 2010 at noon in Committee Room 3, Civic Hall.