

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE (ESC)

3rd March 2010

PROGRESS REPORT – GYPSY & TRAVELLER STRATEGY

Executive Summary

The Gypsy and Traveller strategy project group was formed in September 2009. Work is now underway to create a strategy and supporting processes to deliver a coordinated and effective approach to service provision for and interaction with Gypsy & Traveller communities.

This report informs the Environmental Select Committee of the progress of this project, and presents the aims and objectives of strategy. Approval of and commitment to the new approach will be sought from Cabinet in April 2010.

The project group proposes that;

*The overall aim of Gypsy and Traveller strategy is that by 2015, service provision and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities will **be strengthened, coordinated and in line with our aims to create strong and resilient communities**, with the needs of those communities balanced against the needs of the settled population.*

This report details some of the actions that the project group propose to take in order to achieve this overall aim.

Proposal

It is proposed that the ESC;

1. Note the progress of the Gypsy and Traveller strategy project
2. Note the aims and objectives of the strategy
3. Scrutinise the strategy proposal to ensure a good fit with organisational goals and wider partnership objectives
4. Recommend the acceptance and adoption of the strategy to Cabinet in April.

Reason for Proposal

1. To enable Member understanding of the strategy aims and the action plan
2. To secure support and commitment for a change in approach to service delivery and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities with the emphasis on a more a more coordinated response to the needs of these communities.
3. To secure ESC backing/validation of the change in approach, and of the submission of the strategy to Cabinet

Authors: Graham Hogg, Service Director for Housing - Chair of the Gypsy and Traveller Corporate Project Team

Mayur Bhatt, Head of Equality and Diversity – Project Advisor

Contact: Rachel Goff, Gypsy and Traveller Strategy Project Manager 01225 718455 Rachel.Goff@wiltshire.gov.uk

PROGRESS REPORT – GYPSY & TRAVELLER STRATEGY

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is:
 - To update the Environment Select Committee on the progress of the Gypsy and Traveller strategy project
 - To provide the aims and objectives of the strategy to enable the Environment Select Committee (ESC) to scrutinise and ensure a good fit with organisational goals and wider partnership objectives
 - To update the ESC on the key actions that will be needed to successfully achieve the aims of the strategy, towards the provision of co-ordinated and consistent service provision and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities, with the needs of those communities balanced against the needs of the settled population.
 - To set out the forward plan for the project in order that the ESC are able to recommend the acceptance and adoption of the strategy to Cabinet in April.

Background

2. The ESC considered a report in January 2010 on the Gypsy and Traveller strategy. The report detailed the current status of the project and the rationale for creating a more integrated approach to service delivery and engagement for Gypsy & Traveller communities. The report also acknowledged the opportunities and associated challenges both to the project team in the successful delivery of a strategy, and to the authority if this work is undertaken without significant support and backing.
3. The ESC recommended that the Corporate Project Team continues its work to compile a document outlining the pathway towards establishing a strategy and action plan for reporting to Cabinet in April 2010.
4. At the January meeting, the ESC resolved to;
 - Acknowledge the current status of the project, recognising that a more integrated approach to service delivery for Gypsy and Traveller communities is required.
 - Acknowledge that successful delivery of the strategy will require significant support and backing across the authority.

- Recommend that the Corporate Project Team continues its work to compile a document outlining the pathway towards establishing a strategy and action plan for reporting to Cabinet in April 2010.
- Appoint Cllr Jose Green as a Scrutiny representative on the Gypsies and Travellers Project Board to provide updates to the Committee on any project developments.

Main Considerations for the Committee

Project update

5. As nominated by the ESC in January, Cllr Green has attended Gypsy and Traveller strategy project group meetings to gain knowledge and understanding of the current position of our existing service delivery, as well as to gain an awareness of Gypsy and Traveller issues and needs.
6. The project group met on the 21st of January 2010 to agree the overall aims and objectives of the strategy, and consider what service delivery and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities will be like in 5 years time.
7. Membership of the project group is detailed in appendix 1 and includes officers from across the authority a community representative from Friends, Family and Travellers, as well as the Chaplain to the Travelling community and Travelling Showpeople.

Wiltshire Council Gypsy and Traveller Strategy Definition

8. As a Local Authority Wiltshire Council provides services to all people regardless of their lifestyle and so for the purposes of this document, the definition of 'Gypsy and Traveller' will use be based on the legislative definition which recognises Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers as ethnic groups. But in this context the definition will be extended to include New Age travellers, Showpeople, and any other groups with a similarly nomadic lifestyle.

For reference, 'Nomadic' means 'people who move from place to place rather than living in one place'.

Strategy aims and objectives

9. The overall aim of the Gypsy and Traveller strategy is that by 2015, service provision and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities *will be strengthened, coordinated and in line with our aims to create strong and resilient communities*, with the needs of those communities balanced against the needs of the settled population.

The strategy aims are;

10. That service provision and engagement is co-ordinated throughout the council and involves consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities.
11. The improvement of services and facilities are aimed to empower Gypsy and Traveller communities, through joint working, participation and involvement.
12. The needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities and settled communities are recognised and addressed in partnership, in line with our aims to create strong and resilient communities.
13. The project group held further meetings in February to examine service delivery and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities in relation to 4 key areas;

Accommodation

- 13.1 The provision of appropriate accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers, with equal standards to that of the settled population.

Knowledge and information

- 13.2 Gathering and using better knowledge and information to improve services that meet the needs of Gypsy and Travellers communities. Resources would need to be identified to meet these needs, and where possible funding will be sought for at either regional / national level.

Community engagement and involvement

- 13.3 Consultation with, and involvement of Gypsy and Traveller communities is essential to enable the council to identify and meet needs effectively. Through engagement and involvement with communities, services across the authority will be able to achieve positive engagement for effective planning and provision of services. Partnership working with Gypsies and Travellers will look to increase resilience and empowerment in those communities.

Health, education and safer communities

- 13.4 To understand the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities for health, education and safer communities, particularly the identification of existing inequalities and disadvantage, which has disproportional and adverse impacts on the quality of life for this community. Better planning and appropriate targeting of services will enable all partners to effectively meet the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities in relation to health, education and safer communities. By tackling inequalities and disadvantage in these areas, we will encourage service take up to improve health, educational and community safety needs within Gypsy and Traveller communities.

14. The meeting to focus on each area considered all aspects of service delivery and engagement, and looked at the actions that would be needed in each area.
15. The project group are in the process of finalising the complete action plan of the strategy, but from the start of the process some actions were immediately identified as being central to the success of the strategy.

Actions needed to achieve aims of strategy

Communication, education and training

16. The issue the project group felt was central to achieving the successful implementation of fair and equitable services for Gypsy and Traveller communities in 5 years time, is a joined up approach to service delivery internally and communication with stakeholders, the settled community, Gypsy and Traveller communities, officers, Members and frontline service workers.
17. It is clear that a joined up approach to service planning and provision needs to be established by various service areas in the council, which needs to ensure a coordinated and cost effective delivery of services overall
18. A joined up approach to service planning and delivery will mean that council officers and staff will
 - have greater awareness of how their specific service delivery links in with other services areas / provision
 - be able to share resources affectively
 - share expertise and experience of working with Gypsy and Traveller communities – including exchanging information and knowledge
 - increase capacity without additional staffing costs to deliver services
 - be able to be cost affective in service planning and delivery
19. There is also a need to look at how service provided by our external partners fit with our service provision – this includes NHS Wiltshire, Wiltshire Police, Fire & Rescue Service and services provided by the wider Voluntary and Community Sector.
20. Looking at multi-agency scope for joined-up service provision is something that will need to be considered within the strategy's delivery plan overall.

21. There is a need to review communication materials that are provided by the public sector, for example ensuring that planning guidance information is accessible and appropriate for communities who may have low literacy levels.
22. Successful communication of the strategy and its purpose is also a key part of this process. Without understanding the context of and need for the strategy, it can never be completely effectively implemented.
23. A central action in beginning the process of communication, education and training is a Member training session run by the IDeA (the Improvement and Development Agency) on the 19th of March.
24. This training session will provide support and advice to Members and senior officers on the issues faced by both the Gypsy and Traveller communities and the settled communities with the aim of enabling delegates to appreciate the Local Authority role in the provision of decent homes for all and the importance of this for the health and well-being of communities.
25. Further briefing and training events are likely to be able to be undertaken by existing officers. The production of training and education packs, and of officer time required to deliver sessions is not currently budgeted for.

Refurbishment of LA owned/managed sites

26. Wiltshire Council owns or manages 6 residential and one transit site for Gypsies and Travellers. A site conditions survey conducted in 2008 identified that in most cases these sites are in a poor state of repair. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2009 also identified that the standard of the accommodation of Gypsies and Travellers has a potential adverse impact on the health and wellbeing of those communities. (Please see the January ESC report for further information on this).
27. In considering the above, the project group has identified that it is essential for the council to consider the feasibility of refurbishing / rebuilding of Wiltshire Council's Gypsy and Traveller sites.
28. This would involve applying for funding from the Homes and Communities Agency that would potentially cover 50% of the cost of any site refurbishment.
29. Work is underway to identify the financial cost of beginning to carry out any such programme of work, along side an analysis of the cost impact that not refurbishing would have on the health and wellbeing of the residents.
30. This exercise will compare the cost of not providing adequate provision against the cost of the 50% match funding that would be required from the Council to undertake some or part of the refurbishing/rebuilding programme.

Next steps

31. The delivery of coordinated and needs focused services and engagement/ involvement of Gypsy and Traveller communities will require internal commitment and dedication to a change of approach to the method, quality and style in which we plan and deliver services. This change of approach will also need a drive towards creating a refreshed and modern mindset and culture within the council overall, so that we promote inclusion of Gypsy and Traveller communities in line with our overall aims to create strong and resilient communities.
32. It is proposed that a report will be considered by Wiltshire Council Cabinet to approve the new strategy in April 2010. Member buy-in and commitment to a new approach to service delivery and engagement is an essential component of a change in approach to Gypsy and Traveller communities.
33. From June, a 6 month programme of rolling consultation and involvement will take place with Gypsy and Traveller communities across the county, and voluntary and community sector partners and other stakeholders will be involved.

Introduction of the strategy

34. June is Gypsy, Roma, Traveller history month, and a good time to begin rolling out the strategy.
35. During autumn 2010, the Gypsy and Traveller DPD site identification consultation will be taking place as part of the spatial planning work on the core strategy. The rolling programme for strategy consultation enables all comments and feedback gained during the autumn to be fed in to the next version of the strategy.
36. In April 2011 a new version of the Gypsy and Traveller strategy will be produced, building on the consultation feedback and new knowledge and information that have been gained.

Environmental impact of the proposal

37. It is envisaged that the strategy will have a positive effect upon environmental issues relating to Gypsy and Traveller communities occupying unauthorised sites (for example, waste and pollution, disturbing wildlife etc will look to be minimised through a coordinated response to Gypsy and Traveller community needs.
38. A wider environmental impact is on the perceptions of local communities – the potential risk of not adopting and actively promoting the Gypsy and Traveller strategy may mean adverse PR and reputation of the council with possible accusations of perpetuating inequalities and disadvantages exercised by Gypsy & Traveller communities.

39. Media and community relations will need to be managed affectively and with a view that our approach towards coordinated and consistent service delivery to Gypsy and Traveller communities in line with the Council's commitment to provide fair and equitable services to all, and not as preferential treatment to a particular group.

Equalities impact of the proposal

40. Our organisational goals are based on creating strong and resilient communities, and focus on lives and not services. Current service delivery and engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities is not coordinated nor consistent, leading to the possibility of unfairness and discriminatory service provision overall.
41. The development and delivery of a robust and coordinated Gypsy and Traveller strategy will enable us to strengthen our inclusion of this disadvantaged group, and our overall work in creating strong and resilient communities.
42. The adoption of and commitment to a Gypsy and Traveller strategy will provide evidence towards Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) and other assessments, including Wiltshire Assembly's priority to tackle Inequalities and disadvantage.
43. Overall the development of a robust and coordinated strategy will have a positive impact on the promotion of equality in Wiltshire

Risk assessment

44. Not tackling the issues around Gypsy and Traveller service provision and engagement is not perceived to be an option.
45. By not taking a more consistent, coordinated approach to meeting the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities and settled communities, the strength, resilience and sustainability of those local communities will be weakened, and possible perceptions of unfairness and discrimination will be increased.
46. The Comprehensive Area Assessment of Wiltshire in 2009 highlighted that the public sector is not doing enough to tackle the inequality and potential discrimination faced by Gypsy and Traveller communities.
47. Wiltshire Council has engaged consultants to produce a Gypsy and Traveller Site Allocations Development Planning Document (DPD) as a priority document that the Council will prepare as part of Wiltshire's Local Development. The purpose of the DPD is to ensure that the identified needs of Gypsies and Travellers that permanently reside in Wiltshire are met through the allocation of suitable and sustainable sites.

48. Without the wider strategy development to ensure coordinated and consistent service planning and delivery, we will not be meeting our aims to create strong and resilient communities effectively.
49. Without a comprehensive strategy which is focused on promoting engagement, we will not achieve our legal duties under the Race Relations legislation to promote good community relations. This risk has the biggest implication on the community relations between Gypsy and Traveller communities, and nearby settled communities.

Financial implications

50. Financial implications of the proposal involve an amount of revenue funding to support and deliver communication, education and training information to stakeholders.
51. Capital funding will also be required if a successful bid is submitted to the Homes and Communities Agency for 50% of the costs of any site refurbishment/rebuild.
52. Work is underway to identify the cost/benefits of these actions. The report to Cabinet will provide a clearer indication of these cost levels and some analysis on whether the actions should be taken forward. This will be balanced with the perceived risks of not effectively supporting the Gypsy and Traveller strategy to be implemented, adopted and applied effectively across the organisation.

Legal implications

53. The adoption of a new Gypsy and Traveller strategy should enhance Wiltshire Council's position in terms of governance, reputation management and public trust and confidence in the Council.
54. Wiltshire Council has a legal duty to stop trespass on Local Authority land, which is often in conflict with our commitment to promote good community relations. Agreeing the rights and responsibilities of both transient Gypsies and Travellers and the Local Authority will be a key tool to ensuring that enforcement of unauthorised encampments is a necessary and robust, but negotiated process.
55. Wiltshire Council have obligations under the Race Relations legislation to promote good community relations between persons of different racial groups, to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote equality of opportunity. A comprehensive strategy will strengthen our commitment to our obligations and also our obligations under the Human Rights legislation.

Options considered

56. Not tackling the issues around Gypsy and Traveller service provision and engagement is not perceived to be an option.

57. By not taking a more consistent, coordinated and consistent approach to meeting the needs of Gypsy and Traveller communities and settled communities, the strength, resilience and sustainability of those local communities will be weakened.
58. Gypsy and Traveller service provision and engagement has not been approached cohesively and this opportunity needs to be taken to bring together the services being provided, leading to a much more coordinated and consistent approach to service delivery, which has a beneficial impact on the lives of both Gypsy & Traveller and settled communities.

Conclusions

59. Taking all of the above information in to account, it is proposed that the ESC;
- Note the progress of the Gypsy and Traveller strategy project
 - Note the aims and objectives of the strategy
 - Scrutinise the strategy proposal to ensure a good fit with organisational goals and wider partnership objectives
 - Recommend the acceptance and adoption of the strategy to Cabinet in April.

Graham Hogg, Service Director for Housing - Chair of the Gypsy and Traveller Corporate Project Team

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Mayur Bhatt, Equality and Diversity Manager – Project Advisor

Contact: Rachel Goff, Gypsy and Traveller Strategy Project Manager
01225 718455 Rachel.Goff@wiltshire.gov.uk

22nd February 2010

Background Papers

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this report:

Gypsy and Traveller strategy project update – 12th January 2010, Environment Select Committee Report
[http://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/Data/Environment%20Select%20Committee/20100112/Agenda/\\$Item%20No.%2008%20-%20Gypsy%20and%20Traveller%20Project%20Update.doc.pdf](http://cms.wiltshire.gov.uk/Data/Environment%20Select%20Committee/20100112/Agenda/$Item%20No.%2008%20-%20Gypsy%20and%20Traveller%20Project%20Update.doc.pdf)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Gypsy and Traveller strategy project group membership

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Department/ organisation	Person	Role
Housing	Graham Hogg	Project lead - Service Director for Housing
	Amanda Smith	Service Development Manager, Housing Strategy and Support
	Sarah Hartley	Performance and Research Officer, Housing Strategy & Support
	Rachel Goff	Project manager, Gypsy and Traveller strategy project
Equality and Diversity	Mayur Bhatt	Project advisor – Head of Equality
Friends, Families and Travellers	Sally Woodbury	
Chaplain to Gypsies and Travellers	Roger Redding	
Wiltshire Police	Ron Peach	Community Affairs Officer
Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service	Rex Webb	
Councillors	Cllr Toby Sturgis	Cabinet Member for Waste, Property and Environment
	Cllr Jose Green	Scrutiny committee representative
Communications	Paul Langcaster	Communications Manager
Development Control	Stephen Hawkins	Lead Principal Enforcement Officer
	Richard Hughes	Principal Planning Officer
	Tony Phillips	Senior Planning Officer
	Daniel Tyrrell	Planning Compliance Officer
Health	Jo Howes	Wiltshire PCT Community Engagement Manager
	Liz Norris	
Legal	Frank Cain	Principal Lawyer
	Rebecca Thompson	Solicitor
Safer Communities	Kimberley Duckworth	Community Safety Manager
	Aileen Fenlon	Anti-Social Behaviour reduction officer

Social Care	Annie Paddock	Programme Lead – Policy Development
	Heather Ludlow	
Spatial Planning	James Millard	Assistant Spatial Plans Officer
	Carolyn Gibson	Principal Planning Officer
Traveller Education	Jenny Cavan	Team managers, Traveller Education Service
	Nicole Powell	
	Lindsey Cox	Education Welfare Officer
Traveller Services	Stephen Helsby	Highways Enforcement and Traveller Services Manager
	Vicky Cobbold	Senior Traveller Liaison Officer
	Mike Davies	Senior Traveller Liaison Officer

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