

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Traveller Strategy Update</b>		
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>22 September 2011</b>		
<b>Report of:</b>	<b>Strategic Director, Place</b>		
<b>Lead Member:</b>	<b>Cabinet Member for Environment &amp; Sustainability</b>		
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Name: Geoff Raw</b>	<b>Tel: 29-7329</b>	
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<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>No</b>		
<b>Wards Affected:</b>	<b>All</b>		

**FOR GENERAL RELEASE****1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:**

- 1.1 This report considers the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller matters and outlines the timetable and approach to the review of the current Traveller Strategy.
- 1.2 The report also considers the petition '*Gypsies and Travellers in Brighton & Hove*' which has been referred to the Cabinet meeting following the debate at 21 July Council, and the motion '*Responsibilities Towards Travelling Communities*' which was carried at 21 July Full Council.
- 1.3 The report recognises the Council's duty and responsibility to local residents to ensure they are able to enjoy the city's parks and open spaces whilst at the same time we are mindful that Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are an often marginalised group with a way of life that the authority seeks to protect. The council takes a firm but fair approach to discourage Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups from setting up unauthorised encampments in sensitive locations and reduces the costly and disruptive cycle where travellers move from site to site.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Cabinet approves the timetable for the review of the Traveller Strategy as set out in Appendix 1.
- 2.2 That Cabinet notes the petition and motion in relation to Traveller matters that have been referred to Cabinet following 21 July Full Council and agrees to consider them as part of the work on the development of the Strategy.

**3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 At the 14 July Cabinet meeting of Brighton & Hove City Council, a Gypsy, Roma and Traveller 11/12 action plan was discussed which recommended a review of the current Traveller Strategy, which was approved in 2008.

Cabinet approved the following measures that form part of an action plan for this year under the current Traveller Strategy:

- (a) To commence a review of the 2008 Traveller Strategy to deal with the annual summer increase in unauthorised encampments
  - (b) To prioritise the provision of a permanent Travellers site
  - (c) To continue to offer appropriate support to assist Gypsy, Roma and Travellers with their welfare needs
  - (d) To promote cohesion between settled and travelling communities
  - (e) To focus site protection measures on those areas that are the most unsuitable for toleration
  - (f) To take firm enforcement and eviction action in partnership with the Police
  - (g) A commitment to examine new ways of managing the seasonal summer increase in Travellers, including consideration of the appropriate use of limited toleration on lower impact sites
  - (h) To ensure that Gypsy, Roma and Traveller groups, local residents and their representatives are consulted as part of the development of the refreshed strategy
  - (i) To encourage and work with neighbouring authorities to play their part in supporting the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller way of life
- 3.2 On 21 July 2011, a petition in relation to Gypsies & Travellers in Brighton & Hove was debated by Full Council. The full text of the petition can be found under Item 62A(ii) on the agenda. Full Council resolved to refer the petition to the Cabinet Meeting for consideration.
- 3.3 At 21 July Full Council, a notice of motion was carried in relation to *'Responsibilities Towards Travelling Communities'*. The full text of the motion can be found under Item 62A(iii) on the agenda.
- 3.4 Subsequently, a formal request for scrutiny was requested at the 5 September meeting of the City Council's Environment & Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee (ECSOSC). Following discussion ECSOSC agreed to establish a cross party 3-Member Scrutiny Panel to be involved in the Cabinet review of the Travellers Strategy, undertaking additional independent work only if necessary.

#### **4. WHO WE DEFINE AS TRAVELLERS**

- 4.1 'Travellers' is a collective term used to describe different groups who have a nomadic lifestyle or tradition/heritage of nomadism. Romany Travellers, English and Irish Travellers are recognised in law as ethnic groups and are identified as having a shared culture, language and beliefs. Romany Gypsies have been in England for over 600 years and Irish Travellers have a long history of travelling and living in this country.

- 4.2 Gypsy, Roma and Travellers as a group suffer a high level of inequality, particularly around life expectancy, health and education issues, and face discrimination and racial hatred.
- 4.3 The term 'Travellers' also covers some groups not currently recognised as ethnic groups including 'New Travellers' who are non-traditional travellers (most of whom originate from the settled community, although some children have been born into New Traveller communities) and Travelling showpeople.

## **5. REVIEW OF TRAVELLERS STRATEGY**

- 5.1 The Brighton & Hove Travellers Strategy was approved in 2008 and is currently under review. It is anticipated that the revised strategy will be presented to Cabinet for approval before the 2012 season starting at Easter. Appendix 1 outlines the timetable for the review and development of the Strategy.
- 5.2 The review will include consideration of recommendations made by the Council's Environment & Community Safety Overview & Scrutiny Committee (ECSOSC) Panel who will be involved in the review.
- 5.3 The review of the strategy will aim to find the right balance between the settled and travelling communities. The council has a duty and responsibility to local residents to ensure they are able to enjoy the city's parks and open spaces. However at the same time it is recognised that Gypsies and Travellers are an often marginalised group that suffer a high level of inequality, particularly around life expectancy, health and education issues. They also worryingly still face discrimination and racial hatred.
- 5.4 The review of the strategy will also focus upon the following issues:
- A review of the health, education and support that is provided to assist Gypsy, Roma and Travellers with their welfare needs
  - The promotion of cohesion between settled and travelling communities
  - The provision of site protection measures which are focused upon those areas that are the most unsuitable for toleration
  - A review of enforcement and eviction action in partnership with the Police
  - A commitment to examine new ways of managing the seasonal summer increase in Travellers, including consideration of the appropriate use of limited toleration on lower impact sites
  - Work with other local authorities to seek a regional solution to the provision of Traveller sites
  - Work with Friends and Families of Travellers and other organisations to address the problems faced by travelling communities and with residents' groups, local action teams etc. to address the problems faced by the local residents
- 5.5 The Council is working in partnership with the Police on a 'firm but fair' approach in response to reports of anti-social behaviour, disorder or crime associated with a small minority of travellers. Examples of recent actions taken in partnership with the Police are:
- Development of a Code of Conduct on Unauthorised Encampments that outlines behaviour which may result in eviction and sets the same standards of behaviour expected of the settled community

- Development of a leaflet to remind people that the anti-social use of motorcycles on public open spaces could result in the vehicle being seized
  - The introduction of daily visits by the Police to unauthorised encampments to reassure both residents and travellers through Operation Monza
- 5.6 In accordance with the existing strategy, Officers have taken and continue to take effective action regarding unauthorised encampments action consistent with the legal position and government guidance. This means each case being considered on its merit and appropriate action being taken ranging from immediate eviction to toleration to directing to an authorised site as is appropriate.
- 5.7 The strategy review will include a review of the provision of site protection measures, with a focus upon those areas that are the most unsuitable for toleration. Improvements to site protection at some sensitive sites have recently been introduced at Wild Park and Ladies Mile Road Nature Reserve. Further improvements are planned for Withdean Park.
- 5.8 A key aim of the revised Strategy will be to create a permanent travellers site. There is a need for this as many travellers live in the city year round. Nationally, there are not enough suitable sites to meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers and the lack of authorised sites has led to an increase in unauthorised encampments.
- 5.9 In 2008 a site selection process was undertaken to choose a suitable location for a permanent traveller site. At that time a site at Sheepcote Valley was identified as the best option, subject to further investigation of contamination issues. That further investigation of the site has discovered very serious levels of contamination, meaning it is not suitable for such a use.
- 5.10 The current exercise aims to identify a site (or sites):
- To accommodate 16 permanent traveller pitches
  - That would be acceptable in planning terms and deliverable
  - As far as possible has stakeholder buy-in
  - That could retain DCLG funding for the delivery of the site
- 5.11 For the purposes of planning it has been important to consider all potential sites within the wider Brighton and Hove area. Officers have agreed criteria for a site selection process. Selection of any final preferred site will need to take account of any measures to mitigate visual and environmental impacts. A large number of sites are under investigation and no preferred site has yet emerged.
- 5.12 It is acknowledged that, whilst developing a permanent Travellers site is a key priority, it will form only one part of a revised Travellers Strategy. It is recognised that some travelling communities come to the city looking for work, and live on a permanent site elsewhere in the Country. In these cases, the aim is to adopt a firm but fair approach to unauthorised encampments whilst also using the Horsdean Transit site more effectively.
- 5.13 The Council will continue to work with other local authorities to seek a regional solution to the provision of Traveller sites, and will seek to encourage and influence Government policy in relation to the provision of permanent sites. The council has recently responded to the Government's consultation on proposed

replacement planning guidance for planning for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople.

## **6. CONSULTATION**

- 6.1 Engagement with Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, partner agencies and support groups (such as Friends, Families and Travellers), and the settled community is essential to ensure that the Travellers Strategy meets needs in an effective way.
- 6.2 As part of the development of a new Travellers Strategy, the Council will seek to enhance existing consultation and dialogue mechanisms with stakeholders, the local settled community and locally based Gypsy, Roma and Travellers. It is hoped that the Environment & Community Safety Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be involved in the strategy development.
- 6.3 In addition the Council will work proactively with partners and stakeholders to promote good race relations and community cohesion between Gypsies, Roma, Travellers and the settled community. This will involve the development of initiatives to raise awareness of issues relating to Travellers and address some of the 'myths' that still surround the travelling community.

## **7. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:**

### Financial Implications:

- 7.1 The Traveller Liaison budget for 2011/12 is £0.310 million. Whilst budget efficiencies have been planned for, the budget is likely to overspend this financial year (as it has done in previous financial years). Any financial implications associated with implementation and review of the Travellers Strategy will be included in the Council's budget review and future reports back to Cabinet as per the action plan timetable

*Finance Officer Consulted: Susie Allen*

*Date: 09/09/11*

### Legal Implications

- 7.2 Legal Services have worked and will continue to work closely with the Travellers' Liaison Team and other officers regarding unauthorised encampments and the development of the Traveller, Roma and Gypsy strategy. All the actions of the Council so far have been in accordance with Legal Requirements, including the Human Rights Act.

*Lawyers Consulted: Abraham Ghebre-Ghiorghis*

*Date: 09/09/11*

### Equalities Implications:

- 7.3 Gypsies, Roma and Travellers are an often marginalised group with a way of life that the authority seeks to protect whilst at the same time considering the needs of local residents. Gypsies, Roma and Travellers as a group suffer a high level of inequality, particularly around life expectancy, health and education issues, and suffer from discrimination and racial hatred.

- 7.4 An Equality Impact Assessment was carried out as part of the development of the existing Traveller Strategy and a fresh assessment will be carried out as part of the upcoming review of the Traveller Strategy.

Sustainability Implications:

- 7.5 The repeated evictions of travelling groups from the city's parks, historic and otherwise important sites only to see them again camp on a similar site is causing distress to travelling groups, local people and the environment. In focussing protection measures on locations most unsuitable for encampments the report seeks to minimise the impact on residents and travellers and also prevent further damage to the city's important open spaces.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 7.6 Joint work with the Police is strengthening our approach to dealing with anti-social behaviour, crime and disorder associated with a small number of the travelling community.

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

- 7.7 None in relation to this report.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 7.8 Effective management of unauthorised encampments is essential to support local residents, the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community and to protect the city's open spaces. In addition, an ineffective approach is likely to exacerbate the number of unauthorised encampments with additional associated community tensions and costs.

**8. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):**

- 8.1 The review of the Travellers Strategy will examine new ways of managing the seasonal summer increase in Travellers, including consideration of the appropriate use of limited toleration on lower impact sites.

**9. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 The report seeks approval for the timetable for the review of the Travellers Strategy.

## **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION**

### **Appendices**

1. Strategy review and development timeline.

### **Documents in Members' Rooms**

None

### **Background Documents**

1. Traveller Strategy, Brighton & Hove City Council, 2008  
[www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/travellers](http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/travellers)

### Strategy Development Timeline

