

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of A meeting of the Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Tuesday, 22 April 2008.

PRESENT: Mr A H T Bowles (Chairman), Mrs A D Allen, Mr R B Burgess, Mr M J Fittock, Mr I T N Jones, DL, Mr S J G Koowaree, Dr T R Robinson and Mr F Wood-Brignall

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M J Angell

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr A Casson (Operations Manager), Mr W Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit), Miss C Highwood (Director - Resources), Mr M Lemon (Head of Policy KPHD), Ms J Robson (Head of Language & Traveller Achievement Service) and Louise (Advisor Refugee & Traveller Achievement, Mid Kent)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Substitutes
(Item. 1)

Dr T R Robinson Substitute for Mr J Fullarton

2. Minutes - 30 November 2007
(Item. 3)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2007 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Legislation, Policy and Practice Changes from Central Government
(Item. 4)

(1) This report updated Members of the Advisory Board on a number of current and future legislative changes, policy development and practice guidance documents which would impact on KCC and/or district councils and/or Gypsy and Travellers.

(2) In a wide ranging report, Mr Forrester said that there were major changes taking place to improve and update both the legislation and policy underlying caravan site development and management, including those specifically for gypsies and travellers. A key issue would be the extent to which these regulations were applied to both private and public run gypsy and traveller sites, where the regulatory framework was still behind that for caravan sites generally. Mr Forrester said that representations about that had been made to both the LGA and CLG who were beginning to address some of these issues. Other groups who were left out of the reckoning were migrant and other farm workers.

(3) During the course of discussion, Members of the Advisory Board raised a number of questions. In relation to security of tenure, Mr Forrester said that under current housing legislation, gypsies and travellers could not acquire rights to buy. However it was fair to say that people living on sites were treated equally amongst themselves but for the reasons outlined in the report, not the same as those who were in housing. As regards to rents, Mr Forrester said that KCC rents could be challenged as KCC was treated as if it were a private landlord. Overall the County Council was currently operating a loss on rents as it had not been able for regulatory reasons to increase these and that was a matter which was being taken up through both the LGA and with government. Mr Forrester also said that where appropriate, district councils were taking into account the Park Home Model Standards and even where the law did not necessarily apply, the local authorities are operating as if they did. On the issue of illegal sites Mr Forrester said that until the new system comes into force and sites are allocated by District Planning Authorities, some people may continue to take the risk of buying land and putting caravans on them. In those circumstances, it was up to district councils to take enforcement action which could result in an appeal and the Inspector giving short-term planning permission, so the situation could prove difficult to deal with.

(4) Following further discussion, the Advisory Board:-

(a) endorsed the report, with the implications of the changes for KCC, other Kent and Medway authorities and other stakeholders in the process being noted;

(b) agreed that a further report be submitted, once the legislation and guidance on security of tenure was finalised by the government; and

(c) agreed that representations should continue to be made to the Local Government Association and government on the importance of model standards being extended to all those who live on permanent caravan or mobile home sites, including gypsies, travellers and agricultural workers.

4. Gypsy and Traveller Health Issues *(Item. 5)*

(1) This report described various health inequalities experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller Communities in Kent and joint working to address these. Mr Casson said that there was little reliable scientific and statistical data available about the health of the Gypsy and Traveller populations, both nationally and locally. The most significant reliable information nationally was a report undertaken in 2004 by the University of Sheffield on behalf of the Department of Health. Broadly, the findings were that the overall health status of gypsies and travellers was relatively poor in comparison with other disadvantage groups and very poor compared with the general population. Also, certain health conditions and illnesses were significant for gypsy and traveller adults; these included anxiety, asthma, bronchitis, depression and long term illness.

(2) There were also significant health issues for children, many relating to lack of immunisation. In addition there were considerable risks to mothers and their babies leading up, at, or just after birth. Also, life expectancy could be very low with

one study in Leeds revealing that there was a life expectancy amongst the Gypsy and Traveller community of just 50 years, which Mr Lemon said that was a startling statistic within a developed country. Health and inequalities was therefore a big priority and strong efforts needed to be taken in order to address and identify health issues. KCC was playing its part in this by developing strategies through its Public Health Strategy.

(3) Mr Lemon said that a workshop on gypsy and traveller health involving a number of agencies and community members took place in January 2008. A number of work streams emerged from that meeting and these were detailed in the report. In particular Mr Lemon said that the newly established Public Health Observatory could collate currently available gypsy and traveller health data, so that partners could identify what was missing and consider how best to fill the gap. In addition a County Council Health Care Select Committee was in the process of being constituted and possibly within its terms of reference could be referenced evidence on Gypsy and Traveller health equalities.

(4) There was also a need to improve awareness amongst Health and Social Care professionals of these communities and their needs. The County Council's Health colleagues were considering how best to achieve that and internally the Gypsy and Traveller Unit was having discussions with colleagues with a view to establishing a familiarisation course for KCC staff, initially for those in Kent Adult Social Services who provide services to these communities. Alongside this, there was a need to identify those healthcare professionals that had expertise and an awareness of gypsies and travellers, their culture and their medical needs. A number of healthcare staff who have regularly dealt with these communities have already been identified by PCT colleagues. There is also a proposal to introduce a Gypsy and Traveller Health passport which can be kept and presented to healthcare professionals wherever the gypsy or traveller may be.

(5) Following further discussion, the Advisory Board endorsed the approach outlined in the report and agreed that it would be useful to include evidence on gypsy and traveller health outcomes and equalities to the planned Select Committee on Access to Healthcare.

5. Update: National Developments, outcomes of early consultation with the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community and review of the Minority Communities Achievement Service
(Item. 6)

(1) This report updated Members on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history month, the national Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement programme and the outcomes of early consultation with the community and a review of the Minority Achievement Service.

(2) Jenny Robson said that KCC had been selected by the Government as one of ten local authorities taking part in a pilot programme to address the national Under Achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children. This was in recognition of Kent's significant and diverse gypsy, Roma and traveller population, and the effective work which the Minority Communities Achievement Service was

currently undertaking to support Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils (including new EU arrivals).

(3) Jenny Robson also briefed Members on the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month which was a nationwide event taking place in June 2008. The aims of the History Month would be to explain the history and culture of these communities, to challenge misunderstanding to breakdown barriers and to celebrate the richness that these communities contribute to everyday life. History Month would be led by community members on a regional basis and the contact for the South East was Mr Jake Bowers. Kent was being represented at Regional Network Planning meetings by staff from the MCAS and members of the local Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community. In Kent, schools were being encouraged to take part in a national poster campaign led by Education Leeds launched in the House of Lords with government endorsement. Locally, History Month was seen as an opportunity to draw attention to projects and developments already placed and promote a greater understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller history and achievements.

(4) Jenny Robson also briefed the meeting on outcomes of consultation with Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller Community members. In July 2006, the Department for Schools, Children & Families set out an agenda for the future through its document "Positive Pathways to the Future Provision for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children". Specialist services were encouraged to reassess the orientation of their core work within the context of the agenda for Every Child Matters so that an assessment could be made of the educational needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Communities, by

- (a) assisting the local authority and other partners to fulfil their legal and professional responsibilities
- (b) focusing on the traditional work of supporting families, children and schools; and
- (c) clarifying the role function and leadership and service delivery model within the local authority for any specialist service with goal of achievement of equality in terms of access, attendance and achievement.

(5) In her report, Jenny Robson also provided the Advisory Board with details of the consultation arrangements and also feedback on the outcomes of the consultation.

(6) Jenny Robson provided the Board with an update on the mapping of specialist services for the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community. She said that a priority for the Minority Communities and Achievement Service was to work with other service providers to ensure that the services of all children, young people and their families/carers in Kent were accessible to the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Community and strategies to achieve this priority were already in place and these were detailed in her report.

(7) Jenny Robson also gave the Board a briefing on a review which had been undertaken of the Minority Community Achievement Service and how it was intended it would meet budget reductions (which had been agreed through the

Medium Term Plan) whilst at the same time maintaining its high quality services to schools, settings, children and young people and supporting the transition to Local Children's Services Partnerships.

(8) Following discussion of her report and the issues which it raised, the Advisory Board noted it for information and also noted that a further report on the pilot of the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement programme would be submitted to a future meeting.