

## KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

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### GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Friday, 23 February 2007.

PRESENT: Mr J B O Fullarton (Chairman), Mrs A D Allen, Mr A H T Bowles (Vice-Chairman), Mr M J Fittock, Mr S J G Koowaree and Mrs P A V Stockell.

OFFICERS: Mr B Forrester, Head of Gypsy and Traveller Unit; Mr A Casson, Operations Manager, Gypsy and Traveller Unit; Mrs G Eley, Head of Specialist Teaching Service and Acting Head of MCAS, Mrs M Howard, Director of Specialist Services, Adult Services Directorate and Mr G Mills, Democratic Services Manager.

#### UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

##### 31. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2006 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

Mrs Eley referred to paragraph 30 of the Minutes – Data for Local Authority Minority Ethnic Pupil Performance and said that the information regarding this matter was not yet to hand and therefore she would report to the Board at its next meeting.

##### 33. Presentation on KCC Site Management

*(Item B1 –Presentation by Mr Jonathan Cheeseman and Mr David Woodward of the Gypsy and Traveller Unit)*

(1) This presentation covered a range of matters relating to site management and community liaison and covered issues such as the statutory obligations and guidelines relating to the establishment of gypsy sites; the management of assets; community relations and residents' access to services. The presentation also covered the wide spectrum of responsibilities and diverse role of a Gypsy Site and Community Liaison manager and the work they undertake with the gypsy community.

(2) During the course of discussion, and in answer to a question, it was agreed that arrangements would be made for Members of the Advisory Board to visit the sites at Barnfield Park, New Ash Green and Heartenoak, Cranbrook. It was also agreed that a representative from the NHS would be invited to a future meeting to give the Board a briefing on the provision of health care and services to the Gypsy and Traveller Community.

(3) Following the presentation and subsequent discussion, the Board placed on record its thanks to Mr Cheeseman and Mr Woodward for their informative presentation, a copy of which would be circulated to Members of the Board. The Board also noted a representative from the NHS would be invited to attend a future meeting.

**34. County-wide Officer Group on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs**  
*(Item B2 – Report by Mr Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Adult Services)*

(1) This report provided a summary of progress on the work of the Countywide Officer Group on Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Needs.

(2) The establishment of a joint Kent and Medway Group to address the accommodation needs for Gypsies and Travellers was one of the 18 recommendations put forward by the Select Committee on Gypsies and Travellers. Whilst the prime objective of establishing this Group was to take forward the implementation of the Select Committee's recommendations, a number of Councils in Kent are deferring consideration of the Select Committee's report until the outcomes are known from the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments covering their area. The next meeting of the Group will focus on the results of various work strands on the transit site issue, which is important for the future, and one of the specific areas that the Select Committee tasked the Group to look at. Mr Forrester said the Group had therefore made a very positive start and that had paved the way for the establishment of a countywide group made up of elected Members.

(3) Following discussion, it was agreed that there would be regular feedback on the work of the Officer Group every six months. The Board then agreed to :-

- (i) support the work of the County-wide Group and to endorse its Terms of Reference as detailed in Annex 1 to the report;
- (ii) support the relationships being developed with people from Gypsy and Irish Traveller communities; and
- (iii) that there should be a report to the Board every six months on the work of the Countywide Group.

**35. Proposed KCC Response to Private Gypsy Site Planning Consultations**  
*(Item B3 – Report by Mr Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Adult Services)*

(1) This report put forward a proposed response to consultations or enquiries about KCC's position on individual private planning applications.

(2) Following discussion the Board supported the following approach:-

- (i) that the KCC Gypsy and Traveller Unit should respond to all private site consultations, and other applications or appeals, and clarify KCC's involvements with the applicant(s) or appellant(s), within the confines of Data Protection Legislation;
- (ii) KCC should make clear that it is not making any comment on the planning merits of any such application; and
- (iii) the position should be reviewed once the South East Plan comes into force, when KCC ceases to be the Strategic Planning Authority.

**36. South East Regional Assembly Activity and Partial Review of South East Plan**  
*(Item B4 – Report by Mr Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Adult Services)*

(1) The South East Regional Assembly is currently carrying out what is called a “partial review” of the South East Plan. This “partial review” is specifically about accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and is due to be finished in time for the results to be included in the South East Plan, due to be published in the Autumn of 2008. The South East Regional Assembly will decide, on the basis of data and other discussions which are ongoing, what number of new pitches must be allocated in each local area, by the inclusion of this data in their Local Development Frameworks, over the following five years. It is the Local Development Frameworks which will specify the locations of the sites to meet the assessed future need.

(2) As it seemed most appropriate to produce planning advice to the Regional Assembly for the whole geographical area of Kent and Medway, Mr Forrester said KCC was offering to host and facilitate a joint group, including an elected Member from each planning authority, which would consider the findings and recommendations of all Kent and Medway Gypsy and Traveller accommodation assessments. The Joint Group would provide a forum to debate the important issue of distribution of future sites across the area, and to produce the required two options for the Regional Assembly. There is no prescribed strategic lead for this area of work, hence the ongoing debate on who should take responsibility for it. For some other aspects of the South East Plan, KCC has been specified as the strategic lead.

(3) During the course of discussions, Mr Bowles said he endorsed the approach outlined in the report as it very much supported the aims and ethos of two tier working between the local authorities of Kent.

(4) Following further discussion, the Board:-

- (i) endorsed the proposal to host and facilitate the Kent and Medway Member Steering Group, with KCC acting as a conduit to the Regional Assembly for the planning advice from the constituent planning authorities. The Board noted that the proposed Steering Group was unlikely to be able to begin its work until the East Kent Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment had been completed and the data made available, which was likely to be late May or early June;
- (ii) endorsed the ongoing work being undertaken to identify the issues which the Steering Group would need to address.

**37. Rents on KCC Managed Sites – 2007/08**  
*(Item B5 – Report by Mr Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Adult Services)*

(1) The rents of the eight sites that the Gypsy and Traveller Unit now manage have remained unchanged since 2001. That was because of tighter housing benefit rules which can, in some cases, result in individual claimants living on sites, but Housing Benefit only paying what is called the Local Reference Rent rather than the actual rental costs. The way the system operated could therefore mean that if KCC raised rents, it could finish up

with less income, because the "review" which resulted could lower the amount paid by housing benefit down to the Local Reference Rent.

(2) Mr Forrester said that before proposing an overall, longer term rent review, approval was being sought through the Board to recommend that the Cabinet Member for Adult Services should be requested to raise the two lowest rents as they no longer reflected the quality either of the sites concerned, (both of which have been improved since 2001) nor the service provided by Unit staff. The only comparable rents in the rest of Kent are for the Chilmington site in Ashford and Cinderhill Wood site in Tunbridge Wells, where the lower rents only apply to pitches which do not have full facilities. As there are some people who pay their own rent on these sites, and as the proposed rise in percentage terms is substantial, arrangements would be put in place to cushion the impact of the these rises.

(3) Following discussion during which Mr Forrester answered a number of questions raised by Members, it was agreed that the Cabinet Member for Adult Services should be requested to raise the two lowest rents as detailed in the report.