

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER ADVISORY BOARD

MINUTES of a meeting of the Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board held at Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Wednesday, 25 July 2007.

PRESENT: Mr J B O Fullarton (Chairman), Mr J Curwood (substitute for Mr R Burgess), Mr M J Fittock, Mr I T N Jones, Mr S J G Koowaree and Mrs P A V Stockell (substitute for Mrs A D Allen).

OFFICERS: Mr B Forrester, Head of Gypsy and Traveller Unit; Mr A Casson, Operations Manager, Gypsy and Traveller Unit; Mr O Mills, Managing Director of KASS, and Miss C Ricci, Democratic Services.

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

1. Election of Chairman

Mr J Fullarton said he would be stepping down as Chairman of the Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board, in order to take up the role of Chairman on the Adult Social Services Policy Overview Committee. He thanked the officers of the Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Officers in the CFE Directorate and of Democratic Services for their hard work and commitment shown to the Advisory Board. Mr Fullarton then proposed and Mrs Stockell seconded that Mr Bowles be elected as Chairman of the Advisory Board.

Carried unanimously

2. Election of Vice-Chairman

Mrs Stockell proposed and Mr Curwood seconded that Mr Fullarton be elected Vice-Chairman of the Advisory Board.

Carried unanimously

3. Minutes

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2007 were correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

4. Government Consultation on Gypsy and Traveller Site Design Guidance (Item B1 – Report by Mr Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Adult Social Services)

(1) The report provided a summary on a Government consultation document on Gypsy and Traveller Site Design Guidance for Local Authorities, produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). Mr Fullarton said he welcomed this piece of work and thanked officers for the detail and quality of their report.

(2) Mr Forrester said that the report published by the DCLG had been drafted by Tribal Consulting and had considerable input from people living both on and off sites. He highlighted the main points of the report, which looked at customising sites and pitch sizes according to user need and said site location would likely become a big issue in the future. Currently KCC had sites in good locations, so it was unlikely any of these would need to be re-located. The report had highlighted the issue that sites should not be located in a place that a housing estate would not be located. This factor centred on equality of provision, and the Gypsy and Traveller Unit would continue to work hard to ensure that equality of provision remained high on the team's agenda. Mr Forrester said he was hoping to invite an officer from DCLG to come and give a seminar to KCC Members covering the main points of the site design guidance document before the consultation response deadline, so that KCC could make an informed response.

(3) In reply to a question from Mrs Stockell, Mr Forrester said the guidance was aimed at publicly run sites rather than privately owned family sites.. Mrs Stockell said this was a real concern, as in her constituency and elsewhere throughout the country, privately run sites were sited in unsustainable locations, and Health and Safety issues and the size of these sites were a big issue. Mr Jones said the management of privately run sites was an ongoing issue, and the fact this guidance did not cover private sites was of concern.

(4) Mr Fittock said the paper presented some challenges for KCC, but that overall it was a very positive step forward. He said that site distribution needed further investigation in order to ensure equality of provision for Gypsy and Traveller people. Mr Fittock felt that the section of the report entitled 'Promoting Good Relations within the Settled Community' would need some clarification. In reply to a question from Mr Fittock, Mr Forrester said it was likely rents would have to be looked at if any significant changes were made to sites as a result of the publication of this guidance.

(5) Mr Curwood said in the past, children's play and recreational areas had he felt been neglected or used for other purposes. Mr Forrester said the provision of play areas had previously been avoided as those living on the sites preferred larger plots or more free space as opposed to designated play areas.

(9) Mr Curwood asked about the provision of 'Transit Sites' where those awaiting spaces on sites could have access to plots. Mr Casson said that the Gypsy and Traveller Unit was in the process of analysing the need for 'Transit' sites although the responsibility for assessing that need and providing transit sites now fell to District Councils. However the County Council was assisting the Districts wherever necessary to better formulate a plan for transit sites.

(6) Mr Koowaree said he felt this guidance missed an opportunity to look at sites from a new angle, for example, looking at the design of sites to make them more attractive and Mr Fullarton asked if new site designs could be submitted to meetings of the Advisory Board. Mr Forrester said that new site designs could in future be brought to the Advisory Board to inform and advise on the plans for future sites. He also said the plans for all sites, both public and private were submitted to Planning Applications Committee. Mr Forrester said this guidance would have a progressive impact and Mr Fullarton said he welcomed the guidance, as it would bring Gypsy and Traveller sites into line with the National Caravanning Association guidelines.

(7) Mr Curwood asked if the section of the guidance relating to wheelchair accessibility and DDA compliance was achievable? Mr Forrester said that the Gypsy and Traveller

Unit worked closely with occupational therapy teams to assess the needs of individuals with a disability currently living on sites. Mr Jones said the DDA compliance outlined in the report was an important issue, and one which he understood was already being addressed by the Gypsy and Traveller Unit.

(13) Following further discussion the Advisory Board noted that a final response would be sent on behalf of the County Council by the Managing Director of Kent Adult Social Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services.

35. Government Consultation on Gypsy and Traveller Public Site Management Guidance

(Item B2 Report by Oliver Mills, Managing Director – Kent Adult Social Services)

(1) This report gave a summary on a consultation document on Gypsy and Traveller Site Management Guidance for Local Authorities, produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG). Mr Fullarton thanked the officers of the Gypsy and Traveller Unit for the quality of the covering report, a comment with which other Members of the Board agreed.

(2) Members considered and commented on the consultation document and noted that the views of the Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board would be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services for him to consider as part of the County Council's response to this consultation.