

By: Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Adult Social Services  
To: Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board – 30 November 2007  
Subject: **ENGAGEMENT WITH GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITIES**  
Classification: Unrestricted.

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Summary: A description of the increasing engagement between public bodies and those from Gypsy and Traveller communities in Kent, with proposals for further developments.

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## **Background**

1. Back in the 1990's, Gypsies and Travellers and their organisations had very little involvement in the policies and procedures that might have most impact on their lives.
2. With rare exceptions, including a very few councillors and KCC Members from the Gypsy or Traveller communities, there was little engagement by Councils or other public bodies with those communities, as such, and a strong belief in many quarters that it was really a matter of controlling the members of those communities who caused difficulties, and stopping them from doing things that caused distress to others. There was very little positive and enduring engagement to promote understanding.
3. During the latter part of the 1990's and early part of the 2000's, a number of organisations began to develop nationally and locally, including the Traveller Law Reform Coalition which was an umbrella organisation for most Gypsy and Traveller groups from the Gypsy Council and Irish Traveller Movement to New Travellers. Although it folded in 2005, it did excellent work.

## **Consultation Requirements over Site Improvements**

4. When the Government reintroduced grant aid for the improvement of public Gypsy sites in 2001, they required authorities to consult with site residents before they would agree a grant bid.
5. This was a practice that Kent authorities had already adopted, especially over major redevelopments like the turning of the Swan Farm land into the Barnfield Park site between 1993 and 1999.
6. When the Aylesham site in Dover District was redeveloped in 2002, regular meetings with residents took place at the Aylesham Project buildings, some of them involving the scheme architect. The residents were involved with every aspect of the designs and redevelopment, and their views influenced what was built.

## **Government Policy Review 2003/5**

7. The first time that Government realistically engaged with Gypsies and Travellers and their organisations was during the Policy Review by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.
8. That involved regular meetings, workshops, seminars and conferences as the legislative and policy and financial proposals emerged. The now Housing Minister, Yvette Cooper, was regularly involved in such meetings at that time.
9. The result of the Policy Review was incorporation of Gypsy site accommodation into the systems of planning and housing, through specific provisions in the Housing Act 2004 and the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004, a new planning circular in 2006, and Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments being introduced to gather the data needed for the planning and housing processes.

## **Partial Review of South East Plan**

10. The Partial Review requires engagement and consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities and Travelling Showpeople.
11. Two stakeholder engagement workshops were held in Kent in the lead-up to the submission of planning advice to the Regional Assembly.
12. Between May and August 2008, the Regional Assembly will be going through a formal consultation process, and KCC and other Kent and Medway authorities are already being asked to help make that consultation as wide as possible, through meetings and other means.

## **Police Engagement and Training**

13. Kent Police have taken a lead in engagement with Gypsy and Traveller communities and great progress is being made in helping Police Officers and those from these communities to understand each other much better.
14. Some people from Gypsy and Traveller communities have been closely involved with training of police officers, including providing the training themselves, and, recently, a trainee police officer had a four-day placement with KCC's Gypsy and Traveller Unit, and the opportunity for contact with a very wide range of Gypsies, Travellers and those who provide services to them, including other police officers.
15. Kent Police established a Gypsy and Traveller Action Group about two years ago, and strong links have been established with various individuals and groups within the Gypsy, Irish Traveller and other Traveller communities.
16. A new annual event from 2006 has been the Yellow Rose awards, presented to police officers and other public servants as a result of nominations by Gypsies and Travellers themselves.

## **Kent and Medway Countywide Officer Group**

17. Late in 2006, the Countywide Officer Group which was established specifically to drive forward the recommendations of the KCC Select Committee on this subject decided to invite a number of individuals from the Gypsy and Traveller Communities, including those from Gypsy and Traveller organisations, to attend every alternate meeting it held. This has been very successful in developing understanding on both sides.

## **Former Kent Unauthorised Encampments Liaison Group**

18. This Group was established in 2004, specifically to respond to and allow discussion of, the new protocol on managing unauthorised encampments, jointly with three representative organisations. It included Gypsies, Travellers and local government officers.

19. The meetings very soon became about much wider issues, and only occasionally about unauthorised encampments.

20. The name of the Group has now been changed to the Kent and Medway Traveller Liaison Forum and discussions are now taking place about holding a Kent and Medway meeting that could involve a much wider range of people from the Gypsy and Traveller community, and cover a wide range of subject areas.

21. The suggestion has also been made that a Forum might develop, as in other authorities like Fenland in Cambridgeshire, which is run by Gypsies and Travellers themselves, and they decide which other people are invited to contribute to their meetings

## **Interaction between Gypsies, Irish Travellers and parts of KCC**

22. There have been several recent examples of close interaction between parts of KCC and District Councils and Gypsies and Irish Travellers.

23. One has been the involvement of an individual from Pavee Advice and Assist Direct, an organisation representing Irish Travellers, with the Supporting People Audit Commission Review recently. Another has been plans for training of staff from the Youth Offending Service by Gypsies and Irish Travellers.

24. A further example is the involvement with KCC Children, Families and Education of representatives (including children and young people) from the Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller communities in a working group to steer the future commissioning of specialist services to promote access to education and raise achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children and young people. This work commenced in July 2007.

25. The Minority Communities Achievement Service promotes the inclusion, participation and involvement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families in community events within schools. This includes facilitating opportunities for all children to become aware of the diversity within the Kent community.

## **Diversity and Awareness Training**

26. The Gypsy and Traveller Unit was asked earlier this year to provide awareness training for staff from Canterbury City Council, and training was provided to around 200 staff. Canterbury City council is pursuing Equality Standard Level 4 by March 2008.
27. Plans are now being discussed for such training to be available to KCC staff in the various directorates.
28. This training is planned to involve an individual from a Romany Gypsy community and one from an Irish Traveller community as “professional experts” in the provision of it, and it may also include visits to public or private sites of Gypsies and Travellers in housing.
29. The Minority Communities Achievement Service provides training to professionals working within schools and other agencies in order to improve their skills, knowledge and understanding to enable them to successfully include Gypsy, Roma and Traveller families within the remit of their work. This training is gaining increased momentum within the emerging context of Children’s Trust Arrangements in Kent.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

30. From the above, one can conclude that engagement and awareness is developing considerably across Kent.
31. Members are asked to endorse the approaches being taken, may wish to suggest other examples of good practice which might be followed, and support the further widening of engagement and development of awareness training, in principle.

*Background Papers: None*

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