

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 Wednesday, 22 July 2009.

PRESENT: Mr J D Kirby (Chairman), Mrs A D Allen, Mr M J Angell, Mr R B Burgess, Mr A D Crowther, Mr D S Daley (Substitute for Mr S J G Koowaree) and Mrs J Whittle

ALSO PRESENT: Mr G Gibbens

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr W Forrester (Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit), Mr R Feasey (Development Planning Manager), Ms J Robson (Head of Language & Traveller Achievement Service), Mrs Angela Slaven (Director, Youth Services And Kdaat) and Mr Geoff Mills, Democratic Services Manager (Executive)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

Statement by Mr Graham Gibbens

Mr Gibbens said that in his capacity as the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services it was his view that the Board should discuss matters without him being present at its meetings. However, he said he would be delighted to attend any meeting for either its entirety or for a particular item if the Board would find that helpful.

1. Election of Vice Chairman

(Item. 3)

Mr J Kirby proposed and Mr M Angell seconded that Mrs A Allen be elected Vice Chairman of the Advisory Board.

Carried Unanimously

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2. Minutes of Meeting - 13 February 2009

(Item. 4)

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting held on 13 February 2009 are correctly recorded and that they be signed by the Chairman.

3. Community Cohesion

(Item. 5 - Report by Amanda Honey, Managing Director, Communities, Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Kent Adult Social Services and Rosalind Turner, Manager, Children, Families & Education)

1) This report outlined the Community Cohesion Agenda and its implications for the County Council as a whole. It also highlighted current good practice and suggested future opportunities to collaborative work in this area. Jenny Robson highlighted in particular the core strands of work which are being undertaken at a strategic level in relation to the Community Cohesion Agenda and emphasised the importance to proactively bring this work into the mainstream of the Council's work.

2) Members of the Advisory Board said that they welcomed this report and the wide range of initiatives which were already being undertaken within the Council in order to make Community Cohesion a core part of its activities. It was also said that consideration should be given to a representative from the gypsy community attending future meetings of the Advisory Board. Mr Forrester said that officers had encouraged representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller Community to set up a Gypsy and Traveller Forum and consideration would be given to someone attending future meetings of the Advisory Board to contribute to its proceedings as appropriate.

3) The Board resolved to support the ongoing work on Community Cohesion as detailed in the report and supported the development of further initiatives and opportunities for promoting Community Cohesion. The Advisory Board also noted that there would be a further report updating it on progress in 12 months' time.

4. Update: Progress on Improvement Access & Achievement for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children & Young People

(Item. 6 - Report by Rosalind Turner, Managing Director for Children, Families & Education (Ms Joanna Wainwright, Director of Commissioning) (Specialist Services) was present for this item)

1) This report updated Members on progress to improve access to education and achievement for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children and Young People. The report included comprehensive data for the Pupil Level Annual School Census, attendance returns and monitoring of key stage outcomes. The report also gave some illustrative examples of strategies to promote access and achievement.

2) Following discussion the Advisory Board thanked officers for this report and noted the progress being made in addressing the concerns related to access and achievement of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Children. The Advisory Board also noted that there would be a report on the Kent pilot of the National Strategies Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Achievement Programme at a future meeting.

5. South East Plan: Consultation on Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Show People Pitch Allocations 2006-2016 - Oral Report

(Item. 7 - Report by Mr Mike Austerberry, Executive Director, Environment Highways and Waste and Mr Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Kent Adult Social Services)

(1) The Chairman declared consideration of this report to be urgent on the grounds that it contained information which needed to be considered by the Advisory Board prior to the County Council sending a formal response by 1 September 2009, on the proposals submitted by the Regional Planning Body to Government on providing Gypsy and Traveller plus Travelling Show People accommodation.

(2) The Advisory Board had before it a report which had been prepared for a meeting of the Joint Member Steering Group of Kent authorities which met on 13 July 2009. That meeting had explored the scope for a common approach for all Kent and Medway authorities in responding to the consultation on the proposals submitted by the Regional Planning body to Government on providing for Gypsy, Traveller and Travelling Show People accommodation needs 2006 – 2016. The consultation period had been extended until 1 September 2009 and was based on option D of the previous four options that had been the subject of public consultation in Autumn 2008. It was now for the County Council to consider option D but also any alternative approaches it wished to consider. Following consideration of the representations received, a Government appointed Panel of inspectors would be holding an Examination in Public from 2 to 5 February 2010 and on that basis it could be assumed that the Inspectors' report would be published in the Spring/Early Summer of 2010. Allowing for consultation on any proposed changes, it was thought unlikely that the publication of the overall pitch numbers and the district by district distribution of pitches would be before late 2010.

(3) During the course of discussion, several Members expressed concern that they had not received this report in time to read and consider its contents and come to a considered view as to what recommendations the Advisory Board should make to the Cabinet Member for him to take into account when considering the views to put forward on behalf of the County Council. Mr Angell expressed the view that he would prefer to see the number of pitches to be dealt with through the Local Development Framework as he believed that would offer a simpler approach. Mr Feasey said that this was a 2 stage process and turning distribution numbers into detail would be something that would be done through the LDF but at a later stage. Mrs Whittle said that she understood the concerns which had been expressed by Members in relation to the time they had had in which to consider the report, but that nonetheless she believed that the right approach was to adopt Option C as she believed that to be the fairest and most equitable. It was also said that some district and borough councils had yet to consider their response and it was important for the County Council to be aware of all the views which had been expressed by district and borough partners.

(4) Taking these views into account and in noting that Mrs Whittle had expressed strong support for Option C, the Advisory Board decided that it was not in a position to comment on the report at this time. It was therefore agreed that individual Members of the Board would be invited to express any views they wished to make direct to Mr Feasey as soon as possible, so that these could be co-ordinated and made available to the Cabinet Member so that he could take them into account in sending a response to the consultation on behalf of the County Council.

Tour of Kent Gypsy and Traveller Sites

(5) At the request of the Advisory Board, Mr Forrester said that he would arrange in the early Autumn for Members of the Advisory Board to visit a number of Gypsy and Traveller encampments within the county.

6. Gypsy and Traveller sites in Kent 2009 - Oral Report

(Item. 8 -Presentation by Mr Bill Forrester)

1) Mr Forrester gave the Advisory Board a presentation with regard to the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites within Kent.

2) During the course of discussion, Mr Forrester responded to a number of questions particularly in relation to the planning laws relating to Gypsy & Traveller Encampments. He said that during the past 2 years or so, the Planning Inspectorate had shown an increasing tendency to grant planning permission for single family or small sites. What would be interesting to see now would be how the Planning Inspectorate interpreted the situation over the next 2 to 3 years in the light of the local planning policies in districts which would come into force once the South East Plan had been adopted. Mr Forrester said that he would prepare a flow chart showing who was responsible for what when it came to dealing with unauthorised caravans and encampments and would arrange for that to be circulated to Members of the Council.