

By: Oliver Mills, Managing Director, Kent Adult Social Services
To: Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board – 11 February 2010
Subject: **PROPOSED GYPSY AND TRAVELLER FORUM**
Classification: Unrestricted.

Summary: A proposal to establish a Gypsy and Traveller Forum for Kent, run by members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities

Background

1. (1) One of the recommendations of the Select Committee on Gypsy and Traveller sites in 2006 was the establishment of a joint group of stakeholders, which included a number of members of the Gypsy and Traveller communities, and which met between 2006 and 2008.

(2) From about 2004 until 2008, there was a much smaller group of officers (from the Gypsy and Traveller Unit and the Minority Communities Achievement Service) who met with three Gypsy and Traveller organisations who operated in Kent, or took up cases for Kent Travellers. That was initially a group discussing unauthorised encampment issues, but as the number and scale of such encampments reduced considerably, the meetings moved on to discuss other issues.

(3) In 2007, the County Council hosted two large stakeholders meetings to discuss the South East Plan Partial Review (on Gypsy, Traveller and Showpeople accommodation), which were an excellent opportunity for a whole range of organisations and individuals (about 80 people at the first one, including about 40 people from Gypsy and Traveller communities) to get together and discuss site needs and how they should be met.

(4) In East Sussex, Councils have had a Forum running since about 2004, and, while until recently it was hosted by a Councillor from the hosting authority (meetings move round East Sussex), it is now being co-chaired by a Councillor and someone from the Gypsy community.

(5) In Fenland, in Cambridgeshire, the Council supported, a few years ago, the setting up of a Forum which is run by members of the Gypsy and Traveller Community, and which runs well.

What would suit Kent?

2. (1) Kent is far bigger in land area than East Sussex, and East Sussex is bigger than Fenland. So a Kent-wide, or Kent and Medway-wide Forum might be too big to be successful, and would also involve some people travelling long distances to attend meetings, which should be discouraged.

(2) However, one or two of the organisations previously involved are keen to see a Forum established, and hopefully developed like the Fenland one, or like the East Sussex one, depending on those discussions.

(3) The Forum could discuss a range of issues, including the introduction of the Mobile Homes Act and what it means to people on public sites, the Partial Review of the South East Plan, and planning allocations in individual districts, as well as wider strategic issues like employment access, health and social care access and relationships with the range of agencies involved in the subject. Most importantly, what is discussed by the Forum would be a matter for the Forum, and they would decide who is invited to their meetings, as has happened in Fenland and East Sussex for a number of years.

Financial Implications

3. (1) The costs of supporting the establishment of the Forum will be relatively small, and can be absorbed by the Gypsy and Traveller Unit budget.

(2) If the Board is content with the proposal, then KCC would set up the initial small meeting with interested people from the communities, and, if it is agreed to go ahead, also arrange a wider meeting to which Gypsies and Travellers from across Kent would be invited.

(3) If the Forum is established, then it would seek funding from external sources to run itself in the future.

Staffing

4. (1) There would be no staff specifically employed to run the Forum, but KCC and other authorities can assist with informing people about meetings, and getting invitations out to people on public sites, while working out the best way of contacting those on private sites, or in housing.

Conclusions

5. (1) It does appear timely to launch this initiative, with an open mind about how it could develop.

(2) It might well be that more than one Forum is necessary for Kent, to cover the areas involved.

(3) Once established, it could be a very useful consultative body for local authorities and other partners.

Recommendations

6. (1) Members of the Advisory Board are asked to:
 - (a) Endorse the recommendation to support this initiative and advise the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Services accordingly;
 - (b) Receive a further report at the Gypsy and Traveller Advisory Board on 13 July 2010.

Bill Forrester
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Background Papers: None