

---

**From:** David Brazier, Cabinet Member – Transport & Environment  
Paul Crick – Director of Planning & Environment

**To:** Environment, Highways & Waste Cabinet Committee

**Date:** 3 October 2013

**Subject:** Possible Traveller Site Management Opportunities

**Classification:** Unrestricted

**Summary:** An outline of possible future opportunities for the Gypsy and Traveller Unit, and consideration of how they might reflect the transformation agenda, help improve quality and economy, and generate income.

**Recommendation:**

The views of the Committee are sought on the opportunities outlined in this paper, and whether they should be further explored.

## **1. Introduction & Background**

1.1 The KCC Gypsy and Traveller Unit was created in 1989, primarily to ensure that sufficient sites were established for “gipsies”, as was KCC’s duty then under the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

1.2 Under that Act, district councils had the duty to manage public sites, and county councils were obliged to pay the “reasonable losses” of district councils in managing them.

1.3 The Unit became involved in site management because of the scale of some of those losses.

1.4 Once the law changed in 1994, ending the duties mentioned above, site management generally followed freehold ownership of sites.

1.5 Today, the Gypsy and Traveller Unit manages seven KCC freehold sites, plus one Tonbridge & Malling BC site, and manages two further sites, under contract, with Maidstone BC. Ten sites in all are managed.

1.6 In addition, Unit staff have helped and advised other councils in Kent with site management issues.

1.7 The Unit also manages unauthorised encampments on KCC land (mainly highway land) across Kent, on behalf of KCC as Corporate Landlord.

## **2. “Facing the Challenge: Delivering Better Outcomes” – Whole-Council Transformation Plan”**

2.1 Although this service is not one of those listed under the first Market Engagement and Service Reviews, the principles of identifying the most appropriate provider, to deliver the best possible service for our customers, apply to all services.

2.2 It would seem to be appropriate to explore possibilities which could tackle duplication, repetition and remove low value or no value activity, and which encourage creativity and innovation.

2.3 Innovations since 2008 within the Gypsy and Traveller Unit have led to much greater competition for maintenance work on sites, maximising of income for pitch fees and utilities, and reduction of administration and other costs. The quality of service and experience for customers has also improved. Other innovations are in the pipeline.

## **3. Approaches from other Councils**

3.1 Within the past eighteen months, a number of councils outside Kent have approached the Unit with a variety of requests and proposals over site management.

3.2 One is a tender process for the long lease or freehold transfer and management of 11 sites in another county.

3.3 Another concerns restoring good management on two sites with a history of challenges. That could also involve a contract to manage unauthorised encampments.

3.4 Most recently, there has been an invitation to discuss joint opportunities, along with a number of county councils in the East and South East of England. That meeting is due to have taken place between the printing of this item and the Committee date, so any outcomes will be reported orally.

3.5 It is clear that other Councils have different ways of managing these services, and some are integrated with other services, so there are other models which we can consider.

## **4. The challenges**

4.1 It is understandable, in the current climate, that all authorities are looking for arrangements which are as economic and effective as they can obtain.

4.2 The risks of taking on any new arrangement depend on the nature of what is being offered. A contract to manage sites, like the one with Maidstone BC, has few financial risks to KCC, but is for a fixed fee and there are no extra financial benefits when site income exceeds costs.

4.3 However, transfer of a site long lease or freehold, with the long-term responsibility to manage the site or sites, involves careful consideration of a whole range of risks connected with land ownership, and consideration of whether the benefits that could reasonably be expected would be worth the potential risks.

## **5. Recommendation(s)**

The views of the Committee are sought on the opportunities outlined in this paper, and whether they should be further explored.

### **Contact details**

Report Author:

Bill Forrester  
Head of Gypsy & Traveller Unit  
[bill.forrester@kent.gov.uk](mailto:bill.forrester@kent.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01622 221846

Director:

Paul Crick  
Director of Planning & Environment  
[paul.crick@kent.gov.uk](mailto:paul.crick@kent.gov.uk)  
Tel: 01622 221527