

REPORT TO COMMUNITY DSP

REPORT OF: CORPORATE DIRECTOR (REGULATORY SERVICES)

REPORT NO. DRS25b

DATE: 5th January 2006

TITLE:	Supplementary Report to Agenda Item 8 Review of Housing Strategy - Gypsy and Travellers Needs Survey
FORWARD PLAN ITEM:	Yes
DATE WHEN FIRST APPEARED IN FORWARD PLAN:	16 th December 2005
KEY DECISION OR POLICY FRAMEWORK PROPOSAL:	KEY DECISION

COUNCIL AIMS/PORTFOLIO HOLDER NAME AND DESIGNATION:	Cllr. Mrs. Frances Cartwright
CORPORATE PRIORITY:	Affordable Housing – Category A
CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS:	None
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT IMPLICATIONS:	The report is available at the Council's website www.southkesteven.gov.uk under the Council's meetings
BACKGROUND PAPERS:	As detailed on the main report

1. INTRODUCTION

The main report on the Review of Housing Strategy refers to survey work undertaken by Fordham Research Ltd. This report deals with the Gypsy and Traveller Study. A copy of the Executive Summary of the report is attached at Appendix A.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to recommend the inclusion of the outline policy proposals within the Housing Strategy as identified in Section 4 and seek inclusion of proposals for gypsies and travellers within the Local Development Framework.

3. DETAILS OF REPORT

Research undertaken by Fordhams was to carry out a study of gypsies and travellers housing needs for South Kesteven. The Housing Act 2004 requires local authorities to include gypsies and travellers in their local housing needs assessment. The study considered five priority aims.

- i) To consider the accommodation needs of gypsies and travellers.
- ii) To obtain a wider understanding of issues facing gypsies and travellers.
- iii) To examine the use of official sites and problems encountered.
- iv) To understand the issues posed by unauthorised sites.
- v) Examine the strategic implications of the research findings.

Research Findings

The report has highlighted that in the light of the recent guidance from the ODPM more needs to be done to identify how the needs of gypsies and travellers might be met and the report recommends that a joined up strategic approach should be taken within the district. As part of this consideration it is suggested that working jointly with neighbouring authorities as a combined approach to meeting housing need is likely to be more successful given that gypsy and traveller issues are rarely confined to a particular area.

Within South Kesteven the gypsy and traveller population is relatively small when compared to neighbouring areas, although it has seen a 60% growth in the past two years. South Kesteven figures also point to a rise in unauthorised encampments.

Stakeholder Consultation

The stakeholders consulted have identified the following issues:

- More sites are needed although no overall consensus about the type of sites that need to be delivered.

- Assistance to be provided to gypsies and travellers wanting to buy their own land.
- A case for a fulltime liaison officer within the county to understand the needs of gypsies and travellers, including the relations with the settled community, and their ability to travel and maintain a traditional lifestyle whilst accessing services such as health and education.

Site Capacity

Fordham's research identified evidence that the capacity of authorised sites could be increased to provide alternative accommodation to the few groups currently on unauthorised sites, the report suggests up to twenty authorised pitches will be needed to provide permanent accommodation for these families. The report also suggested the need to increase authorised transit pitches by five to meet the lifestyle requirements of South Kesteven gypsies who currently use unauthorised sites en route to another area.

Fordhams indicate that based on the survey samples the number of gypsy and traveller households can be expected to increase by 6% over the next five years and therefore site capacity should be capable of meeting the predicted additional requirements.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The overall finding of the research is that whilst South Kesteven does not have a large gypsy and traveller population in relation to other districts in the East Midlands region, its numbers are increasing and its unauthorised sites appear to be increasing more than neighbouring areas. Whilst many of the unauthorised sites would prefer to be in permanent authorised accommodation and the capacity of these sites would need increasing there is also demand for temporary transit accommodation within South Kesteven which is not currently being met. The research recommended more effective monitoring of the size of the gypsy and traveller population and their requirements to help ensure needs are met in the future and that tensions within the settled community are minimised.

The recommendations put forward by Fordhams are as follows:

- i) Councils should consult with the inhabitants of the unauthorised encampment on the Meres Leisure Centre car park, given that it is the only significantly sized unauthorised site within the district, in respect of the inhabitants needs and how they may best be accommodated, either by increasing capacity at existing authorised permanent or transit sites or by establishing a new site on land with planning permission.
- ii) The capacity of authorised transit sites be increased by five pitches and that subject to the availability of land this should be separate from the existing site provision.

- iii) The site capacity on all Council sites be reviewed every three / five years to take account of the relatively young age at which new households form in gypsy and traveller communities and the preference of the young families to live on their own pitch on the same site as their wider family.
- iv) The Council should consider establishing a named contact in the Housing Solutions unit, who is able to assist a group of first time householders with daily tasks, for example paying rent and utility bills.
- v) Consider the provision of onsite adult literacy schemes to gypsies and travellers, together with providing information on Council services in different media, including audio, visual and diagrammatic.
- vi) South Kesteven Council to co-ordinate with other Lincolnshire districts to establish a countywide gypsy liaison officer responsible for liaising with gypsies and traveller groups, to provide a bridge between gypsy and travellers and settled community, local council, police and service providers. Whilst the post would improve service take-up and provide advice on buying land and obtaining planning permission, the post could also play a crucial role in diffusing tensions for the wider community.
- vii) The Council to consider identifying a post in either Housing or Planning units to take or co-ordinate responsibility for monitoring gypsy and traveller sites.

9. CONTACT OFFICER

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