

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

29TH JUNE, 2012

An EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of the REGENERATION AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the MANSION HOUSE, DONCASTER on FRIDAY 29<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2012 at 10.A.M.

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Tony Revill  
Vice Chair – Councillor Richard Cooper-Holmes

Councillors Monty Cuthbert, Nuala Fennelly, Stuart Hardy, Deborah Hutchinson, Ted Kitchen, John Sheppard, Yvonne Woodcock and Paul Wray.

Paul O'Brien – GMB, Mark Whitehouse - Unite

Also in Attendance:

Councillors Eddie Dobbs, Ros Jones, Moira Hood, Jane Knightingale, John Mounsey, Joe Blackham, Linda Curran

Violet Cannon - Gypsy & Traveller Inclusion Officer - Doncaster Community Voluntary Service (CVS) (Give Us A Voice Project),

Paula Nicholson - Assistant Inclusion Officer - Doncaster CVS (Give Us A Voice Project),

Superintendent Peter Norman – SY Police (Partnerships & Neighbourhoods)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence had been received from the Councillors Nuala Fennelly, Bob Ford and David Nevitt

**ACTION**

11. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made.

12. PUBLIC STATEMENTS

The Gypsy and Traveller Inclusion Officer - Doncaster CVS (Give Us A Voice Project) who attended as a representative from the Gypsy and Traveller Community was provided the opportunity to make a statement. It was noted that due to the timing of the report and that the fact that the representatives work part-time; the representatives had not had suitable time to consult with members of the Gypsy and Traveller Communities. They informed the Panel that in their opinion the research behind the evidence base was not robust and questioned the number of pitches identified for the next five years.

A request was also made by the Inclusion Officer for the names of the relevant contacts who they could liaise with regarding the work.

Head of Service  
(Housing Options)

13. GYPSY AND TRAVELLER REVIEW

The Panel received a report that provided information and sought Members' comments on the following recommendations that will be considered by Mayor and Cabinet on 4<sup>th</sup> July:-

- a) Mayor and Cabinet to agree the findings of the Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs assessment and the strategy to meet those needs.
- b) Mayor and Cabinet to note the progress of the refurbishment scheme at the Gibbons Lane site and the extension scheme at Land's End site to help address unmet Gypsy and Traveller accommodation needs following a successful bid to the HCA for £1.44m external funding (subject to specific scheme approval once Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) A contract is received)

Following the introduction of the report from the Head of Service (Housing Options) and Head of Development Management the Chair invited comments from the Panel.

During discussion, the following points were raised:

Concerns were raised about the robustness of the research, calculations and methodology used to provide the evidence base for the revised Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment. This was an opinion shared by both panel, non-panel Members, and representatives from the Gypsy And Traveller Community. Primarily, this related to the inclusion of unauthorised pitches within the calculations as it was confirmed by the Head of Development Management that in the needs assessments all authorised pitches had been counted, however, unauthorised or temporary sites had not been included in those figures. Officers reassured the Panel that calculations had been made in accordance with the methodology provided by Government and best practise and was a transparent and open calculation.

In respect of those caravans that moved onto a site without permission, one Member raised concern regarding how this was being addressed. It was noted that there were restrictions in place concerning the number of caravans on sites. It was further explained that if there were additional caravans on sites then the Council could enforce against it or a 'sympathetic' need should be demonstrated to allow the matter to come in through the planning application process. It was explained that a 'sympathetic' need is when there is a shortfall identified that needs to be delivered upon.

In relation to enforcement during the meeting, a number of Members raised their concerns regarding the use of Enforcement Officers. It was advised that Enforcement Officers address such issues as per the Scheme of Delegation and decisions are made on an individual basis dependent upon circumstances.

It was noted that although sites had been identified to meet the needs and proposals coming forward from the Gypsy and Traveller Review, if those sites were in a location where they shouldn't be then enforcement action could be taken. It was also stated that the Council was aware of issues at Stocksbridge Lane regarding unauthorised sites which have had no enforcement action and it maybe the case that the Council needs to look at suitable expansion if more appropriate; otherwise enforcement action needs to be considered. It was put forward by a non-panel Member that External Inspectors become involved with retrospective permission on site and that if the Council adopted a similar policy it would make those jobs a lot more straightforward.

There was a discussion around the requirements of Doncaster following the Gypsy and Traveller Review and therefore what it means for Doncaster. An explanation was provided that Doncaster did have a large Gypsy and Community population and therefore different demands to other boroughs such as York. It was also noted that the Gypsy and Traveller community had a large association with family members who often stay with other family members which needs to be taken account of. It was later established by Officers that although the Council was meeting the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller Community now, this would not be the case over the next five years. On a number of occasions comments were made by both Members and representatives of the Gypsy and Traveller Community regarding the robustness of the review and the methodology behind the calculations.

It was pointed out by a member of the Panel that there were a total of 110 Gypsy and Traveller sites and 11 Showmen's giving a total of 121 sites. On this basis, it was felt that there was a large differential in the ratios with 4 council run sites having an average of 12.25 pitches but the 61 private sites only having an average of 4.45 pitches. Further to those calculations being presented it was questioned whether or not there were other avenues that could be explored.

There were a number of comments raised around the funds and the costing for the pitches. A member of the Panel raised concerns about the figure of £90,000 seeming to be a large amount and disproportionate for a provision of a pitch. It was commented that Cabinet had a responsibility to ensure funds were spent appropriately and to Best Value Principles and Value for Money. It was clarified that there was a maximum of £90,000 that the HCA would fund per pitch and commented that the Council was working on reducing the actual costs which had been estimated per site, for example, through procurement.

A request was made for an outline of what would be incorporated within this.

Head of Service  
(Housing Options)

It was also pointed out that as a further 34 pitches were required the total would be £3.6 million (at £90,000 per site) and as £1.44 million was awarded there was a shortfall to the authority of £2.16 million. It was expressed that this shortfall presented a greater case for the specifications and cost analysis to be made transparent.

There was a brief discussion on the Gypsy and Traveller Strategic Partnership meetings and Members were advised that the meetings were operational meetings rather than strategic ones. It was acknowledged that the Police endeavoured to

work closely with the Council and their decision making process. The Panel was reminded that work was currently being undertaken to look at allocations and that the police would be consulted with as part of that work.

In regards to consultation, one Member asked what consultation had been undertaken with the communities at the Gibbons Lane Site. Members were informed that confirmation was required first that the grant would be awarded but consultation would commence over the next couple of weeks as part of the funding agreement with HCA. It was raised as part of the discussion that there was dissatisfaction from members of the Gypsy and Traveller Community to live at Gibbons Lane which Officers were not aware of. One Member asked why consideration was not given to 16 new pitches on Lands End site and was advised that this was because the land was contaminated. Members were of the opinion that this was an issue that could be easily addressed by a private developer. It was stated that there was only a short period of time to submit a bid to the HCA and that allocations from the HCA would be site specific and if not used for that site would need to be given back.

There was a further discussion about the methodology behind the calculations including references to waiting list, privately rented accommodation, Stocksbrige Lane and those members of the Gypsy and Traveller community who have family members staying with them for more than 3 months of the year.

The Panel began to discuss the various options presented within the report and looked to the representatives from the Gypsy and Traveller group to seek their opinion in addition to their own. Representatives from the Gypsy and Traveller Community expressed that if the Gibbons Lane Site was selected for extension then those on site would like to be involved. The Panel were informed that there had not been enough time to consult with the communities involved, but were of the opinion that Gibbons Lane would not be a preferred option for a council site.

RESOLVED: -

- (1) that the Panel vote to dismiss Options 1-3 and agree that a proposal for a new Option (4) be put forward which is as follows: -

**Option 4:** That officers undertake further negotiation with HCA to transfer all financial funding secured to the land's end site and to sell the Gibbon's Lane site as a private gypsy and traveller site. Also, that the money received

All to note

from the disposal of Gibbon's Lane site should be ringfenced for works needed on the lands end site such as the contamination of the land that has been identified.

- (2) that the information included in the evidence needs to be revisited and further research carried out; and
- (3) that the methodology should be included as an Appendix A to the policy produced which would support the need for this process to be as open and transparent as possible. It was felt that the addition to the policy as an Appendix would show the previously calculated figure, the new revised figure and the methodology in order to demonstrate that this is a robust calculation.