

Equalities Panel

Update on Gypsy and Travellers Issues

27th November 2006

1. Cambridge Transit Site

The Sub-Regional Gypsy and Travellers Needs Assessment 2006 identified a need for Cambridge City Council to provide 15 transit site pitches.

The Travellers Working Group, which is comprised of officers from Community Services, Environment and Planning and Corporate Strategy, asked that a Travellers Site Project Group be formed to take the lead on identifying suitable land for a transit site.

This work continues and it is hoped that if a suitable site can be identified officers will be able to submit a bid to the DCLG Travellers Site Grant in 2007.

2. Travellers Webpage

Kate Taylor, Housing Strategy Officer (Supporting People), has been working on the development of a City Council webpage specifically for Gypsy and Traveller issues.

The webpage will contain information on:

- ~ national legislation and policy (including recent planning guidance)
- ~ Race Relations legislation
- ~ the Sub-Regional Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment and the work being carried out in the City to meet the identified needs
- ~ information for Gypsies and Travellers wishing to stay in the City
- ~ information for private landowners and residents with regards to unauthorised encampments
- ~ a contacts page of organisations providing information to Gypsies and Travellers on legal matters, hate crime, health, aids and adaptations, education and benefits
- ~ positive information and imagery about Gypsy/Traveller communities and culture

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Details of organisations providing advocacy on Gypsy and Travellers issues will also be included, and there will be links to Liberty, the Commission for Racial Equality, BBC Three Counties' 'Rokker Radio' and The Travellers Times newspaper.

It is intended that the webpage will go 'live' end November/ beginning December 2006.

It had been hoped that MENTER's work to establish a Travellers Forum in the City would have progressed sufficiently to allow the webpage to be developed in conjunction with Gypsy and Traveller residents in Cambridge, but unfortunately this has not been the case. Therefore it has been decided that the webpage be uploaded immediately (consultation with Council officers has already taken place) with a view to working with Gypsy and Traveller representatives at a later date.

3. South Cambridgeshire District Council

South Cambridgeshire District Council has published a Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document Issues and Options Report I: General Approach that is currently out to consultation.

City Council officers from Community Services, Environment and Planning and Corporate Strategy met on Monday 13th November to discuss the City Council response to this document. At the time of writing this update it is not possible to inform the panel of what that response was.

4. Duty to promote good race relations

It is acknowledged that the council as a public sector organisation has duties to consider the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers, to act in relation to illegal encampments within the city, and to work positively around race issues with regard to these and settled communities. These duties do not always sit comfortably side by side, presenting challenges to the council – officers and Members – as to how to respond to these tensions as employer, service provider and community leader.

Race relations legislation requires public sector organisations **to promote good relations between different racial groups**. Racism towards Gypsies and Travellers is prevalent in UK society, and there is significant social exclusion, disadvantage and community hostility to deal with. With the aim of improving relations on a local level and to educate council staff, Members and the public, Cambridge City Council has undertaken proactive work with Ormiston Gypsy and Traveller Unit, Romany Theatre Company and Gypsy training providers to promote an alternative, positive view of Gypsy culture and communities.

This work's objective is to move away from racial stereotypes and myths, and to identify and draw on similarities between people in order to find some common ground, raise awareness and understanding, support community cohesion, encourage acceptance of differences, and ultimately tackle racism and prejudice.

Update written by Kate Taylor, Housing Strategy Officer (Supporting People), 9th November 2006.

Para 4 written by Sigrid Fisher, Strategy Officer (Equalities)