

Subject: Gypsy and Traveller Site Provision in London

Report to: Housing Committee

Report of: Executive Director of Secretariat

Date: 16 October 2014

This report will be considered in public

1 Summary

- 1.1 This report sets out the background for the Committee's discussion of site provision for Gypsies and Travellers in London with invited guests. The meeting will also include an opportunity for the public to contribute.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 **That the Committee notes the report and the summary of its site visit to Gypsy and Traveller sites at Appendix 1, as background to discussing with invited guests key issues which arise from identifying and allocating Gypsy and Traveller sites.**

3 Background

- 3.1 In February 2014, the Committee agreed to investigate the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites in London as part of its work programme for 2014/15. The Committee conducted a site visit to two Gypsy and Traveller sites on 9 September 2014; to an authorised site (Southwark) and unauthorised site (Greenwich). A summary of those visits is attached at **Appendix 1**.

4 Issues for Consideration

- 4.1 This meeting provides an opportunity for the Committee to hear from a range of invited guests about the challenges they face when allocating sites as well as innovative schemes that have been implemented to offset site demand. It will also offer a chance to hear first-hand from Gypsies and Travellers about their experiences; a half-hour segment of the meeting will be given over to a discussion open to the floor.
- 4.2 Key issues that Members might want to cover in the discussion include:
- The 2008 Gypsy and Travellers Accommodation Needs Assessment and review if this still provides an accurate projection of need;

- The impact of any shortfall in site provision on the Gypsy and Traveller community and wider public services;
 - Highlighting local authority good practice and innovation in identifying and providing sites; and
 - The extent to which existing frameworks and policies support boroughs and communities in developing solutions locally.
- 4.3 Since the repeal of the statutory duty in 1994 that compelled boroughs to provide pitches, few new sites have been built and many were closed, resulting in reduced site provision in London. To compound this issue, borough targets were removed from the London Plan in 2010 after a change in government guidance, leaving the boroughs to understand need and determine how best to make provision for Gypsy and Traveller communities locally.
- 4.4 Despite the abolition of housing targets, local planning authorities have a statutory duty to assess accommodation needs of travellers for the preparation of Local Plans. According to the London Gypsy and Traveller Unit (LGTU) over the last ten years there has been a 15 per cent reduction in London of Gypsy and Traveller pitches in spite of evident need and population growth.¹ The LGTU estimates a need for 800 additional pitches over the next ten years.²
- 4.5 A lack of suitable sites and stopping areas may threaten the Gypsy and Traveller community's traditional travelling way of life, forcing them to stop on unauthorised plots. This can result in confrontation with local communities and carries a constant threat of eviction as well as imposing potentially significant enforcement action and clean-up costs on the relevant local authority. A lack of a permanent address is said to perpetuate the overt discrimination and poor outcomes in health and education from which Gypsies and Travellers suffer.
- 4.6 In April 2012, the Mayor inherited the Traveller Pitch Fund in London from the Homes and Communities Agency. Of the total budget of £1.55 million, £523k remains available. Under the London settlement this is an unring-fenced amount and could be utilised for any purpose. Funding for sites has been distributed to the London Boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Hounslow and Lambeth. Funding was also allocated to Camden and Kensington and Chelsea but was later withdrawn as the boroughs found the projects were no longer deliverable.
- 4.7 A shortfall of sites also impacts wider public service provision. For example, many Gypsies and Travellers living in bricks and mortar are occupying social housing that is already in short supply. Policing, health and education services may also be affected.
- 4.8 For practical reasons caravan sites and permanent Gypsy and Traveller sites require a greater degree of land usage per household than for smaller houses. Guidance suggests that an average family pitch must be capable of accommodating an amenity building, a larger trailer and a touring caravan, parking space for two vehicles and a small garden area. For London boroughs, finding and allocating land for Gypsy and Travellers is challenging. The land take for a moderately sized site can be the equivalent of 150 houses due to recommended pitch size and their single-story makeup. Locating and designating land, discerning ownership rights and invoking public consultations from the

¹ LGTU report *Abolition of Regional Spatial strategies*. Found at: <http://www.lgtu.org.uk/Abolition%20of%20RSSs%20%20LGTU%20submission%20with%20cover.pdf>

² Ibid

surrounding community can be arduous, time consuming and costly. Moreover, boroughs have to balance the need for sites against other demands on local land such as social and affordable housing.

5 Invited Guests

5.1 A panel of guests has been invited to discuss these issues with the Committee:

- **Rob McCartney, Head of Housing Support, Leeds City Council.** Leeds piloted a ‘negotiated stopping scheme’ to end the cycle of unauthorised encampments, which is considered to be a successful scheme.
- **Bill Forrester, Head of Service, Kent County Council.** Kent works closely with its local gypsy and traveller community to manage site demand. Previously, Bill Forrester was a Gypsy Liaison Officer for Essex County Council.
- **Ilinca Diaconescu, Planning Policy, LGTU.** The London Gypsy and Traveller Unit is a representative group that supports Travellers and Gypsies living in London. Its priorities are to improve their quality of life and the opportunities available to them.
- **Gill Slater, Policy Planner, LB Bromley.** The London Borough of Bromley has the highest concentration of Gypsies and Travellers in London.
- **Jamie Ratcliff, Assistant Director – Programme, Policy and Services, Greater London Authority.** To discuss site provision in London.

6 Legal Implications

6.1 The Committee has the power to do what is recommended in this report.

7 Financial Implications

7.1 There are no direct GLA financial implications arising from this report.

List of appendices to this report:

Appendix 1 – Summary of the Committee’s Site Visit to Gypsy and Traveller sites on 9 September 2014.

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

List of Background Papers: Background paper for investigation into Gypsy and Traveller site provision in London, [Agenda report](#), Housing Committee meeting, 10 July 2014.

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