

## **REVIEW OF POLICY AND SERVICE RESPONSE IN RESPECT OF GYPSIES AND OTHER TRAVELLERS**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 To seek Members' agreement to undertake this review as set out in the attached appendix.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 In line with the agreed programme of work and the priorities set out in the Corporate Plan/Best Value Performance Plan, this Committee needs to consider how it wishes to carry out the task of reviewing the policy and service response in respect of gypsies and other travellers. Once the Committee has considered the issues and options it will need to make recommendations to Council on any changes it feels are appropriate.
- 2.2 Over the years the Council has developed a number of policies with regard to gypsies and travellers, both through the local plan and also the service delivery framework, for example, the Code of Tolerance agreed with Essex County Council regarding encampments on County owned land. Consideration of these will form part of the Committee's work. It will also be important for Members to receive adequate information to enable them to understand the main issues, before moving on to look at what the appropriate responses should be.
- 2.3 The Government is developing or revising a number of policy documents that will form part of the documentation under review.
- 2.4 Members are asked to consider the attached appendix, which sets out the scope of the review and sets out a suggested programme for comment/amendment.
- 2.5 When considering the final report of the Best Value Review of Public Regulation, Inspection and Protection, Members of Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested that this review examine:
- The issues associated with the provision of short-term stopping places and designated sites for travellers who visit the District.
  - How liaison with farmers and other landowners and the Police can be improved to prevent unlawful occupation of land.
  - What assistance and guidance can be given to landowners on taking possession proceedings to remove encampments.

- Whether further lobbying of Government should be undertaken to improve controls over unlawful encampments, creation of a criminal offence to station a residential caravan without the necessary consents and for more effective and workable powers to take direct action to remove unlawful caravans.
- Development of best practice procedures to aid decision making in enforcement against unauthorised encampments.
- How to provide better feedback to customers who complain about caravan related issues.

The suggested structure for the review will enable these matters to be considered.

### **3 RISK IMPLICATIONS**

#### **3.1 Strategic Risk**

This review should help the Council to identify how it can best arrange its policies and services for the longer term.

#### **3.2 Resource Risk**

In the short-term, there will be Member and officer resources required to carry out the review, but failure to have effective policy and operational response frameworks in place is likely to lead to more resources being used to respond to issues in the future.

#### **3.3 Reputation Risk**

The review should help to make clear the Council's role and policies to all sections of the Community and to partner organisations.

### **4 RECOMMENDATION**

#### **4.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES****

That, subject to any amendments agreed by the Committee, the form, content and timetable for the review be as set out in the Appendix.

Graham Woolhouse

Head of Housing, Health & Community Care

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**Background Papers:**

None

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**Appendix**

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY – SCOPING FORM FOR POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT/REVIEWS**

<b>Committee: Community Overview &amp; Scrutiny</b>	<b>Date: 15 July 2004</b>
<b>Review Title: Review of Policies and Services in respect of gypsies and other travellers</b>	
<b>Terms of Reference:</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To consider the patterns of gypsy/traveller movement and encampment in the district and the strategic and operational issues arising, including assessment of the demand for sites</li><li>• To consider the legal/guidance framework and how this is likely to change</li><li>• To consider the views of those most affected</li><li>• To put forward proposals in respect of the District Council's role, its policies and the services it provides</li></ul>	
<b>Witnesses: <i>Who? Why?</i></b>	
<p><i>Essex County Council</i> – responsibility for traveller services, education, social services, highways</p> <p><i>Representatives of local landowners</i> – issues relating to securing land, eviction</p> <p><i>Police</i> – responsibility for upholding the law in all respects and for some aspects of enforcement</p>	

*Office of the Deputy Prime Minister* – Government policy and proposed changes

*RDC* – planning, environmental health, community safety, public relations, housing, legal services

*Other local authorities* – experiences in managing issues and establishing an effective framework

*Traveller representatives* – to gain an appreciation of the issues from the gypsy/traveller perspective

*Press/media* – understanding of how to handle media interest in gypsy/traveller issues

*Parish Council representatives* – perspective on the issues affecting a local community

**Documents/information: *What? Why?***

Existing RDC policies and operational framework – to assess how well these meet current and anticipated future needs

Government guidance and proposals – to set the Council's decisions in a national context

Examples of policies and operational procedures from other local authorities

**Site visits: *Where? Why? When?***

Authorised sites – permanent and short-term/stopping places – to understand how they work and their impact on the locality

**Consultation/research: *Who? Why? What?***

Consultation Panel – views of local people

**Venues to be used for evidence gathering: *Where? When?***

Civic Suite

Traveller sites (to be determined)

**Officer support and other resources:**

Steve Neville

Paul Keenan

Shaun Scrutton

Contributions from Stephen Garland, Tamara Burton, Albert Bugeja

<b>Timescale:</b>
Start review August 2004  Allow six months maximum
<b>Reporting line for the Review:</b>
From Overview & Scrutiny Committee to Community Services Committee. Planning Policy issues to Environmental Services Committee