

LOOKING BACK MOVING FORWARD – ASSESSING THE HOUSING NEEDS OF GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS IN ESSEX

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report brings to Members' attention the results of an extensive study carried out by the Salford Housing and Urban Studies Unit on behalf of the Essex Planning Officers' Association, into the housing needs of Gypsies and Travellers.
- 1.2 A copy of the full report has been placed in the Members' Library and the executive summary is appended to this report (Appendix 1).

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Housing Act 2004 placed a duty on Local Authorities to develop and implement strategies to address the needs of gypsy and traveller communities. However, without detailed evidence on need, it is not possible to reach any meaningful conclusions about site provision.
- 2.2 The aims and objectives of the study are set out on page 6 of the executive summary, but the focus was on gathering sound data on tenure, household composition, work patterns, etc, to enable informed decisions to be made about provision, particularly given the emerging Core Strategy development plan documents being prepared by each of the Essex Authorities.
- 2.3 ODPM Circular 1/2006 entitled 'Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites' explains the arrangements planning authorities must follow to ensure that gypsy and traveller needs are addressed in development plan documents. In summary, a Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) must be prepared, which assesses need and identifies pitch requirements for each Local Authority area.
- 2.4 The GTAA is followed by consideration through the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS); the RSS will specify pitch numbers for each Local Authority. Finally the development plan document must specify sites to match the pitch numbers specified in the RSS.
- 2.5 The needs assessment now reported to Members analyses the Essex situation in some detail, but stops short of a breakdown of pitch requirements by District. That having been said, it is understood that the East of England Regional Assembly (EERA) has given a commitment to carry out a 'mini-review' of the East of England Plan to consider gypsy and traveller issues.

3 STUDY FINDINGS

- 3.1 The key findings of the study are outlined in the executive summary appended to this report.
- 3.2 At present there are currently 442 gypsies and travellers on unauthorised sites across the County; the distribution can be seen in Table 1 on page 4 of the executive summary.
- 3.3 The study estimates that, based on current trends, there would be a requirement to make provision for 59 additional gypsy and traveller households across Essex by 2016 (118 caravans or 59 pitches).
- 3.4 Therefore, on the basis of the information in the study, there is a need to accommodate a total of about 500 encampments in the period to 2016, taking account of the need to deal with unauthorised sites and provide for population increase.
- 3.5 The study also provided for the first time substantial amounts of information about attitudes to Council and private site provision, migration patterns and transient settlement patterns and employment education and health. Details can be found in the executive summary.

4 DISCUSSION

- 4.1 This study is intended to begin to fill in some of the gaps in our understanding of the housing needs of the gypsy and traveller community. It also, perhaps for the first time, seeks to quantify the scale of the requirements for sites in Essex.
- 4.2 Given the very clearly stated requirements in Circular 1/2006 that Regional Planning Policies must include pitch requirements by District in the RSS, the study provides a useful starting point for consideration of that issue, as well as providing much useful qualitative information.
- 4.3 It is not appropriate to read too much into the figures at this stage with regard to the implications for Rochford on future pitch provision. Certainly, though, Members can see the number of unauthorised encampments within the District and compare this to the overall requirement for new pitches across Essex to 2016.
- 4.4 The debate on gypsy and traveller housing needs in Essex (and the region) is really only just beginning, prompted in part by this study, but in large measure by the publication of Circular 1/2006. Therefore, it is proposed that Members simply note the publication of the document and that the Council continues to follow and participate in the discussions on the delivery of the requirements of the Circular, with further reports to Committee when further information emerges.

5 FINANCIAL INFORMATION

- 5.1 The outcome of deliberations on the housing needs of gypsies and travellers could result in a requirement, via the East of England Plan, for provision of public pitches in the District.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The provision of any gypsy and traveller sites must be assessed in the same way as any other site allocation, taking into account environmental issues, sustainability and so on.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That, subject to comments from Members, the report “Looking Back, Moving Forward” be noted.

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Background Papers:-

Circular 1/2006 – Planning for Gypsy and Traveller Caravan Sites.

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