

Report to: Economy, Transport and Environment (ETE) Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 22 November 2017

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: The Gypsy and Traveller Team Update

Purpose: To update the Scrutiny Committee on progress made in the Gypsy and Traveller Team

RECOMMENDATION:

To consider the progress being made in Traveller site management, Traveller liaison and Traveller support across East Sussex by the Gypsy and Traveller Team

1 Background Information

1.1 The Gypsy and Traveller Team have the following key functions and duties: Traveller site management, Traveller liaison and Traveller support. The team are responsible for managing Traveller unauthorised encampments across East Sussex. There are four permanent sites and one transit site that are managed by East Sussex County Council (ESCC). The team also work to support Travellers to engage with the settled community and access services including health and education to improve outcomes for Traveller families.

1.2 The team manages four permanent sites and one transit site. On the four permanent sites the rent collected is £60.59 per week per pitch. Utility bills are paid by residents. Residents either own or rent a static caravan on the pitch, and this is organised by the licensee. The four permanent sites are:

- Batts Bridge Caravan Site, Batts Bridge Road, Maresfield, TN22 2HN - 10 pitches
- Polly Arch Caravan Site, Lynholm Road, Polly Arch, Polegate, BN26 6JP - 6 pitches
- Redlands Lane Caravan Site, Redlands Lane, Salehurst, Robertsbridge, TN32 5NE - 8 pitches
- Swan Barn Caravan Site, Downwash, Hailsham, BN27 2RU - 9 pitches

1.3 The Transit Site has 9 pitches at Bridies Tan, Southerham Lane, Lewes, BN6 8DY. This site is used to assist with the management of unauthorised encampments across East Sussex. Travellers will also make contact with the team prior to arriving in East Sussex to take up residence, therefore avoiding an unauthorised encampment. Rent is charged at £50 per week per pitch and occupants can stay a maximum of 12 weeks on the site. This can be extended for a further four weeks, but only in exceptional circumstances, for example a health issue.

1.4 The Gypsy and Traveller Team is made up of four full-time and one part-time members of staff. These are the Team Manager, Traveller Liaison Officer, Site Manager, Site Officer and Support Worker.

1.5 The Gypsy and Traveller Team has an annual gross budget of £300,700. The team generates £95,081 of income from partners and a further £94,800 from rental payments. The annual net budget is therefore around £110,800 per annum.

1.6 Each of the five District and Borough councils in East Sussex contribute to the Traveller Liaison role and the running of Bridies Tan Transit Site. Sussex Police contribute solely to the Traveller Liaison role. Further detail on the budget can be found at Appendix 1.

Partnership Working

1.7 As described above each of the five District and Borough councils contribute to the Traveller Liaison role and the management of Bridies Tan Transit site. This longstanding agreement assists the district and borough councils with their requirement to provide

accommodation for Gypsies and Travellers and to assist in the management of unauthorised encampments in their areas. The partners are keen to continue to use this resource as this provides a cost effective approach to the management of travellers across East Sussex. The police contribute to the Traveller Liaison role in order to effectively use their powers to redirect encampments to the transit site or leave the area. This gives all partners a fast and effective way of managing an unauthorised encampment. The partnership approach gives the best outcomes for Travellers, the settled community and our partners. Quarterly meetings with the Sussex Police Lead for Gypsy and Travellers ensures a consistent approach to unauthorised encampments and ESCC influence on force policy. Pan Sussex Gypsy and Traveller managers' meetings ensure sharing of best practice and intelligence. A quarterly meeting with first responders and Planners within each district and borough ensures the needs of the travelling community are met through local plans and the management of unauthorised encampments.

2 Supporting Information

Unauthorised Encampments

2.1 In partnership with ESCC, the District and Borough councils (D&Bs) and Sussex Police, the team will attend unauthorised encampments across East Sussex. The aim is to carry out welfare checks of the group and initially inform the group they are trespassing. The role of the Traveller Liaison Officer is to make sure any immediate health needs are addressed and ascertain any reason the group cannot be moved on. The Officer will support police with recommendations of action to move the encampment on from the area. There are a number of pieces of legislation the team will advocate for the police to use. This can largely depend on the behaviour of the group. The police will use legislation to redirect the encampment to Bridies Tan or leave the area.

2.2 From the period 1 November 2016 to 31 October 2017 there were 15 unauthorised encampments that the Traveller Team has dealt with. This is a decrease on the previous year, 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016, where the Team dealt with 27 encampments. During this period seven enforcement notices were served redirecting the travelling group to Bridies Tan, but only one family decided to reside at the site. It is important to understand the transit site allows the police to use this power, otherwise these seven encampments would not be moved and other more costly action would then have to be considered. The police are only able to serve notice once welfare checks have been carried out by a member of the team.

Legislative powers

2.3 There are various legislative powers that are used by the Gypsy and Traveller Team, in conjunction with partners, in order to move an unauthorised encampment on. These are listed below.

2.3.1 Section 62a Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. This legislation gives the police power to redirect an encampment to a suitable caravan/transit site or leave the local authority area. The Traveller Liaison Officer will write up a report following the Community Impact meeting which will then be passed to Sussex Police. This information is then included in a report sent to the duty superintendent who makes a decision on whether to authorise the use of this power. By having the Bridies Tan transit site in East Sussex, this makes this legislation useable if there is sufficient space on the transit site.

2.3.2 Section 61 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. This legislation is considered when there have either been threatening, abusive and/or insulting words or behaviour, criminal damage caused by the group or the encampment is having a significant impact on the local settled community. Consideration would also be given for community events and the location of the encampment.

2.3.3 The Team may also support private landowners with recommendations of Civil Legal Action. Part 55 of the Civil Procedure Rules is a possession order.

2.4 In East Sussex there is a strong track record of effective and swift management of unauthorised encampment, and this is due to the close partnership working between ESCC, D&Bs, Sussex Police and other key agencies. The transit provision assists in limiting the number of unauthorised encampments that occur in East Sussex and gives the team an opportunity to engage with the travelling community prior to forming an encampment to encourage use of the transit site. The majority of transit site stay is through this form of negotiation prior to the encampment's arrival in East Sussex.

East Sussex Gypsy and Traveller Partnership Plan

2.5 In addition to the partnership work detailed above, partners contribute to a Partnership Plan to improve the outcomes for Gypsies and Travellers in East Sussex. Agencies include ESCC, D&Bs, Sussex Police and the NHS. Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education are all represented. Detail of this can be found at Appendix 2.

2.6 The key areas of priority in the plan are:

- Traveller Accommodation needs are met
- Unauthorised Encampments are managed in a fair and effective way across East Sussex
- We continue to plan positively to identify and meet Gypsy Traveller Pitch Provision within East Sussex
- We ensure Gypsy, Roma and Traveller pupils access education and close the gap regarding academic attainment with their East Sussex peers
- Keeping children safe
- Keeping adults Safe
- Improving health and wellbeing for individual travellers and for the travelling community and reduce health inequalities

2.7 The Gypsy and Traveller team regularly meets close neighbouring authorities to share best practice. The Team Manager and Sites Manager are both on the Executive Board of the National Association of Gypsy and Traveller Officers, keeping a close eye on the national picture and up to date with current legislation. The team holds site residents' meetings to build cohesion within the community and ensure the needs of the settled Traveller community are met. Quarterly property services meetings are held to ensure a consistent approach to site maintenance issues and that a safe working policy is adhered to for contractors visiting sites.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1 The Scrutiny Committee is therefore requested to consider the progress being made in Traveller site management, Traveller liaison and Traveller support by the Gypsy and Traveller Team.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Contact Officer: Lucy Corrie

Tel. No. 01323 463421

Email: lucy.corrie@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

All Members

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None