

Update on Gypsy/Traveller Strategy and Action Plan 2009

Introduction

- 1.1 West Dunbartonshire has recognised its responsibilities to its Gypsy/Traveller community for many years and in 2008 published a Gypsy/Traveller Strategy and action plan, under the supervision of its Gypsy/Traveller Corporate Forum, to draw together its policies and procedures in respect to this ethnic group. The strategy has been updated and a revised Action plan been developed in 2009. The Equality Scheme 2009-12 will contain a short section on Gypsies/Travellers and signpost to the Strategy and 2009 update.
- 1.2 The term 'Gypsy/Traveller' refers to distinct groups - such as Romany Gypsies, Scottish and Irish Travellers - who regard the travelling lifestyle as being part of their ethnic identity. There are also other distinct groups such as Occupational Travellers and New Age Travellers who do not regard themselves as Gypsies/Travellers.
- 1.3 In Scotland today many Gypsies/Travellers live on authorised council sites, while others live on private sites or roadside encampments. Access to health, education and social services and other supports can be difficult for them.
- 1.4 Gypsy/Traveller communities are a legally recognized minority ethnic group coming under the protection of the Race Relations Act (RRA) with specific needs and aspirations, and require protection from discrimination and abuse in common with all of Scotland's minority ethnic communities. This status is reflected in the scheme.

Community profile

- 1.5 The Twice Yearly Count of Gypsy/Traveller households on sites and in encampments in Scotland provides a reference point for the development of policy and provision of services, though it has never been intended as a measure of the whole Gypsy Traveller population because of practical difficulties in identifying families in permanent housing.
- 1.6 The 2007 study identified 1290 Gypsies/Travellers or 415 households living in West Central Scotland, representing around 0.06% of the total population. It is estimated that around 60% live in mainstream housing and around 40% on Council/RSL or private sites or encampments. The 270 Gypsies/Travellers identified in West Dunbartonshire represented 0.29% of the total Council population; the highest concentration of any local authority in the West of Scotland.

2.0 Gypsy/Traveller Corporate Forum

- 2.1 Services for the Gypsy/Traveller community are co-ordinated through the forum which has increasingly engaged with other community planning partners, particularly the Police and Health in planning services. Membership of the Corporate Forum will continue to be fluid to meet needs and issues as they arise.
- 2.2 An innovative range of approaches have been adopted to deliver services on site or at nearby facilities. The corporate forum has been developing a proposal to establish a unit to provide a base for services and a more detailed proposal is being finalised for consultation on this with the Dennystoun Forge site residents. Links with health services are being developed and a health needs assessment is to be carried out.
- 2.3 Recent forum discussions have focussed on networking with the wider Gypsy/Traveller Community and the forum has identified a range of priorities under the following broad headings:

- Accommodation
- Social Work and Health
- Economic Needs
- Learning and Capacity Building
- Consultation, Engagement & Involvement
- Positive Relations/Challenging Harassment
- Environment/unauthorised encampments

Action 1

The Council and community planning partners will continue to co-ordinate services through the Gypsy/Traveller Corporate Forum.

3.0 Accommodation

- 3.1 Dennystoun Forge Gypsy/Traveller site, with 20 pitches, was established in 1981 on the outskirts of Dumbarton and Renton, and is one of 32 official council-owned sites in Scotland. The site is open all year, and turnover is extremely low, with 65% of tenancies continuing for five years or more. There is currently a small waiting list.
- 3.2 The Craigforth study in 2007 of the housing needs of the Gypsy/Traveller community across the West of Scotland provides the foundation for assessment the housing needs of the community in West Dunbartonshire. These needs are addressed in the Local Plan; Local Housing Strategy and the Strategic Housing Improvement Plan.

- 3.3 The strategy identified the option of providing chalet accommodation on the Dennystoun site, but this has been rejected as an option that the council can lead on, though this does not preclude other bodies developing a different model of delivering this proposal.
- 3.4 The Council does, however, recognise that there are significant quality issues around the current accommodation including the availability of space, heating/condensation, leaks, and lack of plumbing/indoor toilet facilities. These can be exacerbated by doubling-up on pitches which has led to concerns about overcrowding. Although these issues are outwith the Council's direct control, it is aware that they impact on health and quality of life, and require assessment.

Action 2

The Council will support community to carry out a housing needs/quality assessment.

- 3.5 The Council has been investigating options for future provision of additional places, including a short stay site facility and additional places at Dennystoun Forge. These proposals are included in the Local Plan which is expected to be adopted in January 2010. Consultation with site residents on both these suggestions, and from Gypsies/Travellers in permanent housing who may wish to take up residence on sites, will be carried out when considering whether to progress with either or both proposals.

Action 3

The Council will conclude the option appraisal on a second site and communicate a decision.

4.0 Social Work and Health

- 4.1 Social Work and Health services are fully prepared to respond to demand from the Gypsy/Traveller community, but there is evidence that they can be reluctant to make demands on services. Service monitoring information is being gathered and this will be considered by the corporate forum in its role of ensuring that services are available when required.

Action 4

The Council and its partners will monitor services, assessment, and service delivery.

5.0 Economic

- 5.1 Assessing the economic and employment needs of the community are difficult. Self employment is a preferred option for many residents, while there are a number of residents who rely on benefits. National evidence suggests that discrimination is regularly experienced in the labour market and anecdotal evidence from support workers on site support this. The consequence of this are the poverty related issues being experienced by many Gypsies/Travellers.

Action 5

The Council will review support measures available to support the local Gypsy/Traveller community with employability and welfare issues.

6.0 Learning & Capacity Building

Interrupted Learning Programme (ILP)

- 6.1 Generally, a culture of enthusiasm for learning has been developed among children on the on the site and it is hoped that the existing education provision can be expanded with a number of exciting proposals being developed using new learning technology. This service is run by Education Services and has had some success in encouraging young people to continue on at school beyond the point at which many would normally have left education.

Action 6

The Council will deliver a bespoke education programme suitable to the needs of Gypsy/Traveller children and young people.

Literacy and Adult Education and Development

- 6.2 This enthusiasm for learning is beginning to filter through to parents and a range of informal learning opportunities have been developed as well as provision of support to the community to run their own groups, in particular the Gypsy/Traveller Action Group.

Action 7

The Council will deliver learning programme for adults which develops skills to support community engagement

Youth Work

- 6.3 A number of the young women and girls on the Dennystown Forge site are members of The Romany Youth Action Group (RYAG). This group is supported by the youth information and support network, Y-sort-it, which is open to young people, aged 12 – 25 from in and around West Dunbartonshire.
- 6.4 Some of the activities of the group have included outward bound courses, taking part in Catering classes at Clydebank College, and producing a DVD on their lives as Gypsies Travellers. The DVD was launched at Dumbarton Football Stadium and has been used by Dumbarton Academy for teaching pupils about different cultures. It was also shown at a national conference for the NEET (not in education, employment or training) strategy and led to a Times Educational Supplement article in 2006.

Action 8

The Council will continue to develop a learning programme through dialogue with young people.

7.0 Consultation, Engagement and Involvement

- 7.1 A range of services engage directly with the local Gypsy/Traveller community on site. Relationships are assisted by the consistency of staff involved and the low turnover of residents over a number of years. The needs of more transient visitors are less clear, and may be different from those of the existing site residents. Additional consultation methods need to be developed to address this, particularly around proposals to develop a second site.

Action 9

The Council will consolidate existing consultation arrangements and explore additional methods with neighbouring authorities and the National Gypsy/Traveller Coalition.

8.0 Positive Relations and Challenging Harassment

- 8.1 Anecdotal evidence from frontline staff indicates that while there has been clear improvement in how members of the public refer to other racial or ethnic minority groups, this level of restraint does not extend to references to the Gypsy/Traveller community. This issue will be picked up through the development of the training plan, developed as part of the Equality Scheme 2009-12. This could be addressed by specialist training for frontline staff around the needs of the Gypsy/Traveller community, or in training to address the issue of harassment as a whole.
- 8.2 The forthcoming national campaign, *One Scotland*, will offer opportunities to address a range of genuine concerns about attitudes towards the travelling community. This will be incorporated into the Communication plan developed as part of the Equality Scheme 2009-12.

9.0 Environmental Issues and Unauthorised Encampments

- 9.1 'Unauthorised' roadside camping can be a source of particular controversy. The Council will be practical and pragmatic in its response to roadside camps, with the related aims of providing appropriate and cost effective services to camps, and minimising nuisance and disruption to the settled community.
- 9.2 The council has developed a detailed policy and procedure for dealing with unauthorised encampments (within its Gypsy/Traveller Strategy), but the current twice yearly count of households does not capture their true incidence. The monitoring of this information is important to both understanding the scale of need in terms of sites and assessing the true scale of public concern resulting from unauthorised encampments.

Action 10

The Council will implement the procedures for unauthorised encampments and monitor and report on the outcomes.

Gypsy Traveller Strategy: Updated Action Plan 2009

1	The Council and community planning partners will continue to co-ordinate services through the Gypsy/Traveller Corporate Forum.	Quarterly meetings with Annual review	Gypsy/Traveller Corporate Forum /Policy Unit
2	The Council will support the community to carry out a housing needs/quality assessment.	To be determined	HEEDS (Housing)
3	The Council will conclude the option appraisal on a second site and communicate a decision.	2011 Quarterly progress review	HEEDS (Housing)
4	The Council and its partners will monitor services, assessment, and service delivery.	Initial baseline review	Social Work & Health
5	Review support measures available to support the local Gypsy/Traveller community with employability and welfare issues.	Quarterly and annual review	HEEDS (Economic Development)
6	The Council will deliver a bespoke education programme suitable to the needs of Gypsy/Traveller children.	Quarterly and annual review	Education Services
7	The Council will deliver learning programme for adults which develops skills to support community engagement.	Quarterly and annual review	Community Learning and Development
8	The Council will continue to develop a learning programme through dialogue with young people.	Quarterly and annual review	Community Learning and Development
9	The Council will consolidate existing consultation arrangements and explore additional methods with neighbouring authorities and the National Gypsy/Traveller Coalition.	October 2010	Gypsy/Traveller Corporate Forum /Policy Unit
10	The Council will implement the procedures for unauthorised encampments and monitor and report on the outcomes.	Quarterly and annual review	Gypsy/Traveller Corporate Forum (HEEDS, CL&D, Social Work & Health)