

## **Minutes**

### **Community Services Scrutiny Panel**

Town Hall, Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> May 2006 at 5.30pm

**Present:** Councillors Howarth (in the Chair), Kinghorn, Moderate, Norman, Robinson, Taylor, and Young

**Also Present:** Councillors Carr, Colledge, Kellett and Pape

Mr G Scott - Policy & Regeneration Manager

#### **1. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Griffin, Hopgood, Norman, Walton and Wolstenholme

#### **2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2006, were confirmed as a correct record.

#### **3. Gypsy/Traveller Sites**

The Policy and Regeneration Manager advised Members that this Scrutiny arose from the publication of 'Planning for Housing', a Development Plan Document published for consultation following Cabinet in September 2005. It would form one of the documents that would make up the Local Development Framework for the District, replacing the current Local Plan, and guiding the use of land and planning decisions.

One of the options in the paper suggested the Council would 'seek one additional gypsy/traveller site within Durham City District.

Members were advised that Romany Gypsies and Irish Travellers had been recognised by the courts as being distinct ethnic groups covered by the Race Relations Act 1976. Councils must consider the consequences of refusing or granting planning permission on the rights of both gypsies/travellers and local residents.

The District currently has one formal site at Adventure Lane, West Rainton, however a number of private sites had been approved.

The existing Local Plan included a policy that allowed individual travellers sites at appropriate locations, in line with national guidance. The guidance treated travellers as a special case, and proposals for residential sites were allowed in areas where housing would not normally be approved.

The new Development Plan system was introduced in September 2004, and individual topic papers were prepared. The first stage of this preparation set out 'Issues and Alternative Options' and the Housing Paper was published in July 2005. That did not include the issue of whether additional provision of gypsy/traveller sites was needed in the District, but during the consultation, the matter had been mentioned by the Gypsy

Council. Additionally, with the new approach adopted by the County Council, which prompted the addition on the matter when the 'Preferred Options' paper was published. When comments received during the consultation exercise had been considered, a 'submission' version of the Development Plan Document would be presented to Cabinet.

Nationally, the ODPM had published a circular 'Planning for Gypsy and Travellers Caravan Sites' which post-dated the publication of the Planning for Housing Paper. The information in the circular would have to be taken into account when preparing the revised version of the document.

The Circular suggested that the Development Plan Document should set criteria based policies for the location of sites and allocation of sufficient sites in terms of the number of pitches required. Members requested copies of the Circular be circulated for their information.

The Chair advised that a presentation had been arranged for the next meeting by Scott McInally from the County Council's Travellers Liaison Services, and issues raised would be further discussed at that Meeting.

The terms of reference for this Scrutiny would be discussed and set at the Panel's Meeting in July 2006.

## **7. Any Other Business**

The Chair advised that Panel that following on from the Scrutiny of Council Garages last year, she had arranged for the Housing Manager to attend the July Meeting to update the Members with progress towards the recommendations the Panel made in their report.

The Meeting terminated at 6.10 pm