

## Minutes

### Community Services Scrutiny Panel

Town Hall, Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> July 2006 at 5.30pm

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

**Also Present:** Councillors Carr, Gibbon, Kellett, Turnbull and Woods.

Mrs L Boyd	- Housing Manager
Mr G Scott	- Policy & Regeneration Manager
Mr N Laws	- Environmental Health Manager

#### 1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillors Hepplewhite and Walton.

#### 2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2006 were confirmed as a correct record.

**Note:** *Councillor Moderate entered the Meeting at 5.35pm*

#### 3. Council Garages

Lynne Boyd, Housing Manager, was in attendance to update Panel Members on progress made towards the Policy on Council garages which was recommended to be written in the Panel's report of October 2005.

Members were advised that the Policy covered procedures which were generally followed, however had never been previously written down.

Consideration was given by Members to the age limits under the Eligibility section of the Policy. Following extensive discussion, it was agreed that any person over the age of 17 years may apply for a Council garage with consideration also being given to someone of 16 years for the specific purpose of garaging a motorbike

Additionally, it was felt that information under the application section could be further clarified by the addition of '...to the City Council' to the end of the first sentence. Members also agreed that under Inspection and Maintenance Procedures, the final sentence should be amended to read 'The City Council will also periodically inspect garage sites. This maybe as part of routine estate walkabouts.'

Queries about the choice of locality/district were also raised, with Members enquiring as to where applicants would be permitted to apply for garages e.g. within 2 miles of their address, across the whole of the district etc. In line with the previous scrutiny discussion it was agreed that definition of the 'district' would be too complex to administer.

After discussion it was agreed that references in the tenancy agreement relating to inappropriate storage or use of the garages should be in bold print i.e. conditions 3, 4, and 5.

The Housing Manager advised that following the adoption of the Policy and amended Tenancy Agreement by Cabinet, it would be introduced to new garage tenants. Members requested that it be extended to cover all existing tenants and were informed that this would entail ending all current tenancies (over 1000 in total), and granting new tenancies with the revised tenancy agreement. Members requested that this be done, possibly at the beginning of the new financial year. It was

also suggested that this would be an opportunity for tenants to be asked to report any inappropriate use of garages of which they were aware to Housing Services for further action to be taken if need be.

Subject to the Policy and Tenancy Agreement being amended to reflect the Panel's views, it was agreed that they be forwarded to the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee, and then to Cabinet.

The Chair thanked the Housing Manager very much for the work she had done on the Policy and advised that it would be looked at further during the review of the original Scrutiny.

#### **4. Gypsy/Traveller Sites**

The Housing Manager, Policy and Regeneration Manager and Environmental Health Manager were in attendance to discuss the current situation regarding gypsy/traveller site provision in the District at the present time.

Records of occupation of the site at Adventure Lane were maintained by Council Tax/Revenues on a weekly basis. There was currently once vacancy on the site from 17 pitches. Government returns also had to be submitted quarterly. The County Council had completed these last year, but prior to this, the City Council maintained these records.

Planning legislation required the Council to make additional provision if the need was evident, and include this information in planning documents. Information regarding the North East Assembly Needs Assessment was circulated. Members enquired as to whether existing sites could be enlarged, and the Chair advised this could be discussed further at a future meeting with other options to increase provision if there was an indication of need.

If a transit site was available, it could then make the matter of moving travellers on from illegal encampments easier i.e. there could be provision on a site, rather than forcing them to create another illegal encampment. There would be a need, however, to ensure that any transit site was in an appropriate location or it would be poorly used. There could be cost implications in providing/not providing a transit site. It might be more cost effective to provide an additional site(s), than it is to clean up any illegal encampments. This cleaning usually was carried out by the City Council and recharged to the landowner. The costs could run into £1000s.

**Note:** *Councillors Kellett and Robinson left the Meeting at 6.30pm*

Members requested the Environmental Health Manager to provide information on other caravan sites in the District for the next meeting, and the Chair advised the Panel of some useful articles in various publications. Copies would be made available to Panel Members prior to the September meeting.

Derek Taylor from the County Council had been asked to attend this meeting but had been unable to do so due to illness. The Chair suggested that Scott McNally be invited to the September meeting and also a travellers representative if possible. Members of the Panel agreed to this.

#### **5. Any Other Business**

Due to the summer recess, the date of the next meeting would be Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

The Meeting terminated at 6.45 pm

## **LGA PRESS RELEASE**

**Press release no: 081/06**

**Thursday, 08 June 2006**

### **New measures to stop unauthorised gypsy & traveller sites**

**By LGA Media Office**

Council leaders are today launching a report calling for new measures to put an end to 4,000 unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites.

By providing the Gypsy and Traveller community with sufficient authorised sites, the spread of unauthorised encampments will be stopped and relationships between the settled and Gypsy and Traveller communities will be improved, a Local Government Association report states today.

Once located on authorised sites councils will be able to ensure that Travelling communities pay council tax for the services they use.

The LGA believes it is important that the Gypsy and Traveller community and the settled community have equal rights, and that they bear the same responsibilities. Only when this is seen to happen will there be reduced friction between the two groups.

Almost four thousand unauthorised sites in England account for a quarter of all sites.

The new measures outlined in the LGA report include:

- \* Provision of sufficient suitable sites for the 4,000 caravans currently on unauthorised sites or unauthorised developments.
- \* Ensuring all Gypsies and Travellers pay council tax. At present only some do.
- \* Limiting potential environmental damage by providing waste, sanitation and other services, which must be paid for by the Gypsies and Travellers using them.
- \* Dealing effectively with the minority of problem sites with measures including Anti Social Behaviour Orders and using police power where necessary.
- \* Establishing temporary stopping sites and then issuing annual licences to Gypsies and Travellers who want to use these sites.

Councillor Richard Bennett, Chairman of the Local Government Association's Gypsies and Travellers Task Group, said:

"Only by providing more authorised sites and implementing new measures can councils deal effectively with the problem of unauthorised encampments and unauthorised developments.

"Both the Gypsy and Traveller and settled communities must have equal rights and carry the same responsibilities. This means all Gypsies and Travellers must pay Council Tax and pay for the services they use. Only when this is seen to happen will there be reduced friction between the two groups.

"Councils must now complete accommodation needs assessments for both the travelling and settled communities, and then Gypsy and Traveller sites need to be provided urgently. Central government appears to be supportive of this, but there are cost implications which they need to address for this to happen.

"But this is not a case of central government versus local government. Many groups have come together to work on this, including the Commission for Racial Equality, the Gypsy and Traveller community, and the Department for Communities and Local Government."

ENDS