

## MINUTES

### Community Services Scrutiny Panel

8<sup>th</sup> November 2006 at 5.30pm

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

**Also Present:** Councillors Kellett, Marsden, Stoddart, Thomson and Turnbull.

Lynne Boyd	-	Housing Manager (City of Durham)
Gavin Scott	-	Policy & Regeneration Manager (City of Durham)
Sue Green	-	Durham County Council
Martin Woods	-	Consultant on Needs Assessment

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

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Griffin.

#### **2. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006 were confirmed as a correct record, subject to it being noted that the Review of Council House Repairs report would be circulated to the Panel for the Meeting on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2006, and all being well, to Scrutiny Committee on 18<sup>th</sup> December 2006, and Cabinet in January 2007.

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

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

Sue Green from the Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service at Durham County Council, and Martin Woods who is involved in the production of the Gypsy and Traveller Needs Assessment were in attendance.

The Ethnic Minority and Traveller Achievement Service promoted inclusion and equality of opportunity for ethnic minority and Traveller children, young people and their families. The service supported people for whom English was a second language, aimed to increase the achievement of Traveller children, and promote race equality and cultural diversity. Resources relating to Gypsies and Travellers, culture and communities were produced to support the work of the service in schools.

Gypsy and Traveller pupils were the most underachieving group nationally; some settled Gypsies and Travellers still underachieved. One of the key tasks of the service was to close this gap in education. Attendance at school was monitored in the same way as children from the settled community, working with the Education Welfare Service to ensure attendance. Penalties for non attendance were the same as for the settled community, however children from Gypsy and Traveller families were allowed time off to travel for the family business. They would however often attend local schools when travelling, although transport to school could sometimes cause difficulties. Children and young people living on official sites generally attended school on a daily basis.

Some schools would stand in the way of admitting children from the Gypsy and Traveller community as, for example, travelling time would impact on the school's attendance figures, underachievement could affect SATs results, or they may exceed class sizes. There was therefore a conflict between inclusion and attainment.

Gypsy and Traveller culture was taught in all County Durham schools and all were required to have a race equality action plan.

In school children, attitudes appeared to be generally changing, although possibly not in the community as a whole.

**Note:** Councillor Young left the Meeting at 6.25pm

**Note:** Councillor Robinson left the Meeting at 6.30pm

It was a Government requirement to carry out an accommodation needs assessment, and the seven district councils in County Durham, together with the County Council had commissioned this. The objectives included assessing types of accommodation, demand for alternative accommodation, expansion/improvement of existing sites, the need for transit sites and seasonal demand, geographic gaps in current provision, and the affordability of the current and proposed provision. Supporting People and the Health Authority had also had an input.

Surveys of the Gypsy and Traveller community, including those living in houses were being carried out, along with secondary data analysis. The project was currently about half way through, and was scheduled for completion in March 2007. The assessment was being carried out over a long period of time to take account of varying seasonal demands.

**Note:** Councillor Walton left the Meeting at 6.40pm

The Chair advised that following the Panel's further consideration of the topic, it would be useful to review any conclusions with Sue Green and Martin Woods, and invited them back to a future meeting.

**Note:** Councillors Hopgood and Kinghorn left the Meeting at 6.45pm

#### **4. Council Garages**

The Housing Manager was in attendance to provide Members with a summary of the work undertaken since the July meeting, and with work planned for the future.

The Policy and new Tenancy Agreement had been approved by Cabinet on 20<sup>th</sup> September 2006, and all new garage tenants had had to sign this. The Panel had requested that all current tenants sign the new Agreement before the next financial year. The Rent Section was currently reviewing garage rent accounts so that any necessary action which may lead to termination of tenancies could be taken prior to Housing sending out the new Agreements for signature. The new Agreements would be issued to tenants during December 2006, although this process may take a fairly substantial amount of time.

Garage tenants would also be asked to report any inappropriate use of garages of which they were aware, while Housing Officers continues to try to let empty garages and considered the future of garages where there was no demand, or safety or neighbourhood issues.

Members remained concerned about the inspection routine, and although this issue has been partly addressed, twice yearly inspections were not possible due to resource implications.

The Chair thanked the Housing Manager for attending the meeting and advised that a review report would be prepared for consideration at the next Panel meeting.

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

There was no other business.

The Meeting terminated at 7.05 pm