

**FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** HOUSING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**DATE:** WEDNESDAY, 5 DECEMBER 2012

**REPORT BY:** DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

**SUBJECT:** GYPSY-TRAVELLER NEEDS ASSESSMENT

**1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.01 To consider the Gypsy-Traveller Needs Assessment that will inform the development of a Gypsy-Traveller Strategy

**2.00 BACKGROUND**

2.01 Flintshire participated in the wider North West Wales Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA). The study was conducted on behalf of Anglesey, Conwy, Denbighshire, Flintshire and Gwynedd councils by Bangor University. Wrexham have carried out an assessment of their own separately.

2.02 The collaborative approach is in line with Welsh Government guidance which urges “local authorities to work in a regional capacity and share the legal, moral, financial and political responsibility to address the accommodation inequality experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller community in Wales” (Travelling to a Better Future, Welsh Government).

2.03 There are currently five authorised sites for Gypsies and Travellers in Flintshire. There is one local authority owned site, Riverside, at Queensferry which has 20 pitches and is managed currently by the Gypsy community in partnership with the Council. The Council is currently exploring the extension of the Riverside site onto under utilised land in its ownership adjacent to the current site. (This site has the potential to provide up to 20 residential pitches).

2.04 There are four privately owned sites that benefit from planning consent. These are two long standing sites at Corbetts Yard, Sandycroft which has a capacity of 22 pitches and Mifford caravan site at Gwespyr which has a capacity of 20 pitches. There are also two smaller private sites in Flintshire which have been the subject of recent planning applications and subsequent appeals. These sites are at Dollar Park, Greenfield where a temporary permission exists up to 2016. The second recent private site is at Gwern Lane, Hope where a permanent consent was granted on appeal in May 2011 for four

caravans.

### **3.00 CONSIDERATIONS**

#### **3.01 The Gypsy Traveller Accommodation Assessment**

North Wales is a popular location for “stop over” for Gypsies and Travellers in general, as a principle travelling route passes through all of the local authority areas in North Wales. That said the population of Gypsies and Travellers in North East Wales is constrained in its choice of where it can stay by the pattern of provision of sites, which is skewed predominately to Flintshire and Wrexham, and also conversely by the lack of any authorised provision in Conwy or Denbighshire.

3.02 In terms of current site and pitch provision in North Wales Flintshire is the most significant provider of any North Wales local authority. According to the January 2012 caravan count Flintshire accommodates 66 caravans representing 58% of all of the caravans available in North Wales. Once the 37 caravans provided by Wrexham is excluded (33%), the remaining authorities in North Wales have only 10 recorded caravans between them, only 9% of the North Wales total, and none of which are on authorized sites.

3.03 This inequality of choice and provision has been clearly recognised by the Welsh Government in its framework for action, which also identified the imbalance of responsibility taken and leadership shown at a regional level to address and redress these factors. This frustration at the inadequacy of responses of local authorities to the issue of making provision for the need of Gypsies and Travellers has been given further expression by views expressed on emerging Local Development Plans (LDP's) in North Wales at examination, and via Welsh Government comments on plans at pre-examination stage. The proposal contained within the recent Housing White Paper gives the clearest indication that more needs to be done with proposals that local authorities will in future have a statutory obligation to provide sites based on an assessment of need.

3.04 As outlined earlier, the matter of need is less one of debating its existence, but rather how and more importantly where this need will be met. This is a key question encapsulated in the sub-regional approach taken to the GTAA.

3.05 This regional collaborative approach follows the approach supported and requested by the Welsh Government emphasising with it the need to accept and share the “legal, moral, financial and political responsibility to address the accommodation inequality experienced by the Gypsy and Traveller Community in Wales”.

3.06 The main findings of the GTAA are attached at Appendix 1 and will be commented on shortly, however it is important firstly to

understand the principle basis of the study and the main implications of the outcome of the study and its findings.

- 3.07 The study shows that the current distribution of supply of sites is skewed to certain locations and from this the distribution of any need it has assessed is also skewed to where the population currently has to live. It is therefore not surprising that the needs calculation for permanent sites shows an unbalanced distribution, with a clear bias towards locations where there is current provision (authorised or otherwise) i.e. Flintshire, Gwynedd and Anglesey. Also, due to the method of calculating “growth” and various assumptions made in the study, the relationship that emerges is that the higher the current supply of pitches in an area, and specifically Flintshire, the greater the resulting calculated need.
- 3.08 On the one hand this is the function of a technical (and in the main hypothetical) calculation of population growth. In another sense the study shows how the population of Gypsies and Travellers in North Wales as presently accommodated, would grow if assumptions made come to fruition.
- 3.09 Given the geographic spread of the study area and the authorities covered, the correct way to interpret the basis and findings of the study is therefore not as an estimate of need where it arises, but rather as an estimate of need where it should be met.
- 3.10 This fundamental point is backed up by the fact that the Gypsy and Traveller community surveyed were asked to set out where new site accommodation should be located. This demand for site locations is set out below. Significantly and unsurprisingly, this evidence demonstrates a need for sites at strategic locations along the main travelling route through North Wales, with none of the top locations being locations within Flintshire. The most referenced locations were for permanent sites. None of these locations are in Flintshire and reflect the need to rebalance the current provision.

Table 1: Area preferences of adult Gypsy Travellers (permanent accommodation)

Number of responses	Town/ area.
1-5	Mold, Queensferry, Holywell, Flint A further 15 locations were noted outside Flintshire including the A55 corridor
6-10	4 locations were identified outside Flintshire

- 3.11 The Council’s view is that the findings and outcome of this GTAA are critical to the understanding of where need should be met in North Wales. What must be done from this study is for the study partners to examine the findings, to agree the actual level of need and to accept and agree a sub-regional distribution of new sites

throughout North Wales that is fair and equitable to all local authorities and also to the needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

- 3.12 From the GTAA, it is clear that this Council presently meets its obligations towards the needs of Gypsies and Travellers in North Wales far more responsibly than any other local authority. The GTAA has clearly demonstrated that the main factor in assessing the need for further sites for Gypsies and Travellers is where that need should be met, rather than just where it arises.

### **Gypsy and Traveller Strategy**

- 3.13 Although the Council is currently delivering and managing a range of services to the Gypsy - Traveller community there is a need for a coordinated approach. Consequently it is recommended that a Gypsy – Traveller strategy be developed using the results of the GTAA as a base and drawing together the range of activities currently being delivered in Flintshire, coordinating with other public authorities and agencies.
- 3.14 The Welsh Government has provided clear guidance within the national Gypsy-Traveller strategy and this will be taken into account in developing the strategy.
- 3.15 The timescale is to commence work on the Gypsy-Traveller strategy in early 2013 with project being completed in September 2013. This will coincide with the Spring travelling season and will ensure that opportunities to engage with the Gypsy-Traveller community are maximised. Opportunities will also be taken to incorporate consultation within the emerging LDP process.

## **4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 That the committee receives the findings of the GTAA and endorses the approach to develop a dedicated Gypsy – Traveller Strategy for Flintshire

## **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.01 The GTAA indicates growth for additional caravan pitches. Should the Council decide to expand its current provision the potential cost has not yet been fully quantified however Welsh Government grant assistance can be applied for to assist in meeting these costs.

## **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

- 6.01 There is no direct anti-poverty impact emerging from the GTAA other than accepting that in the main the Gypsy and Traveller community features amongst those communities most likely to suffer the effects of poverty.

## **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

- 7.01 There is no direct environmental impact emerging from the GTAA. The potential for small-scale environmental impact from isolated unauthorised encampments is outside the scope of this report but will be considered as part of the merging Gypsy-Traveller strategy.

## **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 8.01 The GTAA will make an important contribution towards identifying and meeting the needs of the Gypsy-Traveller community who typically suffer from inequality

## **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.01 Although there are no direct financial implications emerging from the GTAA the estimation of the need to make further provision in the form of permanent or temporary site provision suggests that additional personnel may be required. The implications of any additional provision have yet to be fully quantified but will form part of the emerging Gypsy-Traveller strategy.

## **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

- 10.01 Consultation with the Gypsy-Traveller community was carried out prior to the commencement of the GTAA. No further consultation has been carried out since the completion of the study. It is however intended that full consultation with the Gypsy-Traveller and settled communities will be undertaken as part of developing Flintshire's emerging Gypsy-Traveller strategy.

## **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

Representatives of the Gypsy-Traveller community were involved in the selection of the consultants used to carry out the interviews. Across the study area a total of 93 responses were received from adult Gypsies and Travellers and a further 43 from a survey of young Gypsies and Travellers.

## **12.00 APPENDICES**

- 12.01 Appendix 1: Main findings of the GTAA

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

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