

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Housing Portfolio Holder 19 November 2009
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Equality and Diversity Officer

DRAFT GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITY STRATEGY

Purpose

1. To update the Housing Portfolio Holder on the draft Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy following a 12-week consultation period with internal and external stakeholders.
2. This is a key decision because
 - it is likely to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in all wards of the District.
 - it raises new issues of policy, or is made in the course of developing proposals to amend the policy framework, or is a decision taken under powers delegated by the Council to amend an aspect of the policy framework.
 - it is of such significance to a locality, the Council or the services which it provides that the decision-taker is of the opinion that it should be treated as a key decision.

and it was first published in the April 2009 Forward Plan.

Background

3. As a listed public body, South Cambridgeshire District Council must comply with the statutory duties enshrined in the:
 - Race Relations Amendment Act (2000)
 - The Equality Act (2006)
4. As an authority we are committed to eliminating discrimination and prejudice, and developing a culture which values difference, both in employment and service delivery, which is reflected in the Council's Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 – 2012. Following a positive peer review, Cabinet self-declared on 2 July 2009 that the Council was at Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government (which equates to "Developing" in the new Equality Framework for Local Government).
5. Equality is an important element of our Aim to make our services accessible to all and our Value of Mutual Respect. In 2009/10 we have a challenging work programme to embed equality and diversity within the Council and to build networks with external communities around equalities issues. One of the main tasks to be addressed in 2009/10 includes the development of a new Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy.

Considerations

6. The strategy, when referring to Gypsies and Travellers, includes new travellers and Travelling Showpeople as well as Gypsies and Irish Travellers, who are distinct ethnic groups covered by Race Relations legislation.

Implications

7.	Financial	Within existing budgets. The Council is being supported and sponsored by the joint East of England Regional Assembly and Improvement East project "Meeting the Equality Challenge." The Project consists of a variety of measures including training activities, master class workshops, and in-house support.
	Legal	Discrimination law protects people and the Council has a public responsibility to ensure that it adheres to its legislative requirements. Statutory duties in relation to equalities ensure that our services are open to, and, accessible by all our residents and reflect the diversity of our rural district. Our Race Equality Scheme (RES), identifies Gypsy and Traveller issues as the most relevant to race equality, since they are the largest ethnic minority group in our district and identifies ten service areas most closely associated with their issues.
	Staffing	The Equality and Diversity Officer and the Equalities Project Officer are responsible for mainstreaming equalities into the Council with the support of the Equality and Diversity Steering Group and Equalities Consultative Forum.
	Risk Management	The Council could be successfully challenged over not complying with general equalities legislation or legislation specific to public and local authority bodies, <i>leading to</i> financial compensation payments and penalties, possible Commission for Human Rights and Equalities inspection, <i>resulting in</i> reduction in reserves available to support balanced MTFs, adverse publicity and effect on reputation.
	Equal Opportunities	Gypsies and Travellers constitute South Cambridgeshire's largest minority ethnic community, comprising 1% of its population. The vision for this strategy, the Council's first focusing on Gypsy and Traveller communities, is: <i>To ensure that Gypsy and Traveller communities enjoy equality of service and are part of cohesive communities within which people from different backgrounds participate together and share equal rights and responsibilities.</i> An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been completed on the Strategy.

Consultations

8. Public consultation on the draft Gypsy and Traveller Community strategy concluded on 21 October 2009. The majority of consultation coincided with public consultation on the 'Issues and Options 2 - Site Options And Policies' stage of the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document.
9. A total of 104 responses were received during the consultation period. The Housing Portfolio Holder will be pleased to note that following a request to forward the draft Strategy to all Parish Councils in the District, 19 responses were received. In addition, 35 responses were received from Officers, 16 from District Councillors and 34 from external stakeholders or members of the public.
10. The majority of responses welcomed the Strategy and the key priority areas for action. However, some respondents commented that consultation on the Strategy should have taken place before the consultation on the 'Issues and Options 2 - Site Options And Policies' stage of the Gypsy and Traveller Development Plan Document.

This would have prevented some confusion between the two consultations, which was unavoidable.

11. A series of workshops held during September were well attended by Officers, District Councillors and community partners. Those who attended the workshops were invited to inform the implementation action plan of the Strategy. Over 75 per cent of actions shared with workshop delegates were highlighted as 'Very Important' or 'Somewhat Important.' This does, however, raise the issue of resources if the Council is to meet the aims and objectives highlighted in the Strategy.
12. The final version of the Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy will be considered by the Equality and Diversity Steering Group and the Travellers Strategic Officers Group (SOG). The Housing Portfolio Holder will then be requested to endorse and recommend that Cabinet adopt the new Strategy in early 2010.

Effect on Strategic Aims

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| 13. | <p>Commitment to being a listening council, providing first class services accessible to all.</p> <p>This Strategy will directly contribute to the achievement of this strategic aim, demonstrating that it is seeking and listening to the views of all residents and providing first class services to all.</p> |
| | <p>Commitment to ensuring that South Cambridgeshire continues to be a safe and healthy place for all.</p> <p>This Strategy will directly contribute to the achievement of this strategic aim, as one of the key areas for action is to develop and promote community cohesion. Whilst community cohesion is based on equality, participation and interaction, with respect to Gypsies and Travellers the focus remains largely on what divides people, rather than unites. Mutual misunderstandings and stereotypes abound, with high profile cases of unauthorised encampments dominating interaction between Gypsies and Travellers and other members of the public. Many Gypsies and Travellers are reluctant to engage with the local authority or the rest of the community because of perceived hostility and barriers to communication.</p> |

Conclusions/Summary

14. The Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy aligns with the commitment set out in the Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 -2012.
15. An Equalities Implementation Work Programme has been developed to meet the commitments outlined in the Comprehensive Equalities Policy. It addresses the most important things, which must be delivered, focusing particularly on compliance with statutory requirements.

Recommendations

15. The Housing Portfolio Holder is invited to note this report on the draft Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy following a 12-week consultation period with internal and external stakeholders.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:

Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 -2012

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