

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Leader and Cabinet 11 February 2010
AUTHOR/S: Chief Executive / Corporate Manager, Community & Customer Services

GYPSY AND TRAVELLER COMMUNITY STRATEGY 2010- 2013

Purpose

1. To recommend that Cabinet adopt a Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy, following endorsement by the Senior Management Team and a recommendation in support by the Housing Portfolio Holder at his meeting on 20 January 2010. The Strategy can be viewed as part of the agenda pack on the Council's website at www.scambs.gov.uk
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. The Council is 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	<p>The Council has a public responsibility to ensure that it adheres to legislative requirements in relation to equalities, which ensure that our services are open to, and, accessible by all our residents and reflect the diversity of our rural district.</p> <p>The Council's Race Equality Scheme (RES), identifies Gypsy and Traveller issues as highly relevant to race equality, since Gypsies and Travellers are the largest ethnic minority group in the district and it identifies ten service areas most closely associated with their specific needs.</p>
Staffing	The Equality and Diversity Officer is 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 Equality and Human Rights Commission inspection, <i>resulting in</i> reduction in reserves available to support balanced MTFs, adverse publicity and effect on reputation.
Equal Opportunities	<p>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:</p> <p><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></p> <p>An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) has been completed on the Strategy. The assessment found that the strategy would have a positive impact on equalities as it seeks to promote equality of opportunity and access by the Gypsy and Traveller communities.</p>

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. 19 responses were received from Parish Councils in the District, 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 Strategy has since been developed with significant input by the Travellers Strategic Officers Group (SOG) and Senior Management Team, to ensure the right balance between deliverable actions and longer-term commitments, which will be incorporated within action plans covering future years.
- 13. Following endorsement by SMT, the strategy was submitted to the Housing Portfolio Holder at his meeting on 20 January. The Portfolio Holder supported the increased focus on deliverable actions for 2010-11 and welcomed assurances that the Gypsy and Traveller community would be actively involved in implementing the strategy. The Portfolio Holder recommended to Cabinet that strategy be adopted, subject to the inclusion of minor amendments, which have been incorporated into the final version submitted to Cabinet.

Effect on Strategic Aims

14.	<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 the Council 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 what unites. Mutual misunderstandings and stereotypes abound, with high profile cases of unauthorised encampments dominating interaction between Gypsies and Travellers and affected settled communities. 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

15. The Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy meets the commitment set out in the Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 -2012.
16. A list of commitments has been developed and a new appendix has been added, which highlights the key actions for delivery from 2010 – 2011 to demonstrate how the priorities set out in the Strategy will be delivered.
17. The Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy will go 'live' with effect from 1 April 2010, and the Housing Portfolio Holder will monitor its delivery on a quarterly basis.

Recommendation

18. That the final draft of the Gypsy and Traveller Community Strategy, as amended and endorsed by the Housing Portfolio Holder on 20 January 2010, be adopted.

Background Papers: the following background papers were used in the preparation of this report: Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009 -2012

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