

Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

SJR(2) –12-06(p1) Annex A

Date: Thursday 21 September 2006

Time: 9.30am – 12.30pm

Venue: Senedd, National Assembly for Wales

Title: Actions to be taken forward by Housing Directorate (with partners in some cases) arising out of the recommendations of the Pat Niner Report

Strategy and Policy Framework

1: Develop a national strategy for Gypsy-Traveller accommodation provision. through consultation with local authorities, other relevant agencies and Gypsy-Travellers

If established then the Gypsy and Traveller unit can take the lead. Can be included in the 2007/08 Operational Plan.

3: Develop, issue and promote guidance on assessing Gypsy-Traveller accommodation needs. Draft guidance has been issued for consultation. Assessment of 'hidden' needs from Gypsy-Travellers in housing to be stressed. Together with WLGA, to consider training needs of local authority personnel to carry out high quality assessments.

Completed in the Local Housing Market Assessment guidance issued in March 2006.

5: In consultation with existing agencies already working with Gypsy-Travellers, consider how best to develop a support body (or bodies) to work with and for Gypsy-Travellers across Wales.

Housing has a small role at present.

6: Develop further, along with local authorities, the process of considering the needs of Gypsy-Travellers in all relevant mainstream strategies and policies. Consider carefully and implement the recommendations from the Commission for Racial Equality's scrutiny exercise on services for Gypsies and Irish Travellers when published. Evidence suggests that prejudice and discrimination against Gypsy-Travellers must be tackled if site provision is to be successfully achieved.

If unit is established, would take the lead on this recommendation. A joined up approach is required, linking this report with the earlier EOC Review of Service Provision report would ensure a consistent, joined up implementation, accepting recommendations in both reports

7: Work with WLGA and others to raise the profile of Gypsy-Traveller issues, recognising and promoting good practice in Gypsy Traveller service provision.

On going

The Existing Sites Network

8: Develop, with local authorities and Gypsy-Travellers – a ‘decent sites standard’, incorporating location and environment as well as site design, facilities and infrastructure, amenity unit size, design and facilities. Where possible, improvements of existing sites should aim to meet this standard; the standard will be applied to new site proposals. The standard should reflect the fact that Gypsy-Traveller sites are housing and conform to expectations for residential development.

Decent site standard should be developed following consultation as part of grant criteria. No statutory obligation for Local Authorities to have site standards. Consideration could be given to the possibility of new legislation. Work needs to be done on linking this with grant criteria, monitoring of it and whether to include RSL’s.

9: Commission research on differential demand for local authority sites across Wales, identifying factors underlying low demand, and the extent to which investment might create a sustainable site. Relationships between site management, pitch allocations and low demand should be explored.

Currently being addressed by local assessment of need in local housing market assessment guidance.

10: Introduce a scheme along the lines of the English Gypsy Sites Refurbishment Grant, providing funds for site improvement and refurbishment. This would provide some certainty to local authorities encouraging them to undertake preliminary consultation with site residents and getting planning permissions. Funds for site improvement should be ring-fenced, and should aim to achieve expenditure of about £3 million over the next five years.

Subject to the setting up of the Gypsy and Traveller unit and provided that resources are available

11: In targeting funds for site improvement, consider prioritising:

Sites with proven demand for pitches, the site is sustainable and where refurbishment could involve an increase in the number of pitches to be provided where it is thought manageable by both site managers and site residents.

Sites with low demand but existing site residents are suffering poor conditions due to vacant/closed pitches and where investment could improve living standards, ensuring the site remains sustainable albeit at a smaller size.

12: Cases to be made when bidding for funds should emphasise:

Involvement of site residents in developing the proposals.

The extent to which the 'decent site standard' can be achieved, and how any shortfalls can be mitigated.

Where there is low demand at present, an analysis of the causes of low demand (e.g. location, current standards and conditions, social or family reasons) and how the proposed works would impact on demand in future.

Proposed site management arrangements, and how these would contribute to site sustainability and security for investment as well as high quality services to residents, to be developed as part of grant criteria.

Need for Additional Residential Site Provision

13: Make available funding for the capital cost of providing local authority sites, at 100% of approved costs, ring-fenced both from other forms of social housing and Gypsy-Traveller site improvement.

This requires further development. Review method of funding sites including consideration of allowing RSL permissible purposes, which would then be met through Social Housing Grant BEL. Issues around private finance and housing associations being permitted to develop sites need to be explored. Existing arrangements could be used. The WLGA will be consulted.

17: The accommodation needs and preferences of Gypsy-Travellers vary. In recognition of this, a variety of accommodation should be aimed for, not just the provision of 'standard', formal local authority sites for about 20 families. The range should include:

(1) Private site provision – demand is low at present, partly because Gypsy-Travellers see the private provision option as impossible to achieve. The prime requirement is for local planning authorities to identify land where private site provision will be permitted and set realistic, achievable criteria against which applications for sites will be assessed. When it becomes apparent that local planning authorities are willing to grant planning permission, the WAG may consider giving grants/loans to Gypsy-Travellers to buy land and develop sites.

(2) Small local authority sites for five to ten caravans, for a single extended family. Attraction of private site development is being able to live with close family only. Within the public sector, a pilot scheme might be considered for authorities to provide land with a planning consent and encourage the families to develop the site themselves to meet the decent sites standard.

(3) Group housing on the Irish model. A possible collaborative pilot, involving the local authority and Gypsy-Travellers, might be based on the Waterloo site in Pembroke Dock where residents have expressed an interest in such an option.

Good practice to be reflected in a National Accommodation Strategy.

Gypsy-Traveller Site Management

22: Develop a model site licence agreement setting out rights and responsibilities of both the landlord and the licensee in plain and easy-to-understand language. Explore the possibility of giving licensees rights equivalent to those enjoyed by social tenants, including greater security of tenure.

If the unit is established responsibility for this recommendation will be there.

23: Introduce site management guidelines, including expectations on staffing levels, allocation policies, repair services, resident consultation and general enforcement approaches. Wherever possible, parity with mainstream housing management expectations should be achieved

If a Gypsy and Traveller unit is established, this can be developed in next year's Operational Plan

24: Develop both the model licence agreement and site management guidelines through an inclusive process of consultation involving site managers, WLGA, Gypsy-Travellers and site residents aimed to identify good practice.

26: Gypsy-Travellers to be included in homelessness strategies and policies where unauthorised encampments are experienced since such families are homeless. Where possible, local authorities should offer homeless Gypsy -Travellers site places where these are preferred

If unit is established it will take responsibility for this. Continued work through the National Homelessness Strategy action plan, which proposes to review the housing needs and service provision for Gypsies and Travellers in Wales by December 2006.

27: Allocation policies of social landlords should be sensitive to cultural needs of Gypsy-Travellers when making offers of accommodation. Tenancy support should be available to help Gypsy-Travellers make the transition to living in houses and on estates where this is new.

Responsibility will be with the unit if established. The allocation of Gypsies & Travellers has been accommodated in the Code Of Guidance which is currently being reviewed. 'Gypsies & Travellers' move into and out of social housing and are likely to continue to do so. Local authority allocations schemes should be sensitive to the cultural needs of Gypsies & Travellers wherever possible. Tenancy support should be made available based on assessment of need and prioritisation to help them make the transition to living in houses where this is new'. This is allowed for under supporting people criteria.

28: Gypsy-Traveller issues to be included in all equality and diversity training for housing officers in local authorities and registered social landlords. Officers should be made aware of the possibility of racial harassment against housed Gypsy-Travellers.

This is for Local Authorities and RSLs to address. However there is scope to promote this through specific guidance or best practice notes.

BME Housing Action Plan recommendation. Also the draft local authority housing strategy guidance provides advice on mainstreaming BME Strategies. This includes the need to prepare a racial harassment policy which includes Gypsies and Travellers