

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CABINET

15 MARCH 2016

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, COMMUNITIES

GYPSEY & TRAVELLER ACCOMMODATION ASSESSEMENT

1. Purpose of Report

To inform Cabinet of the findings of the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and to seek approval to submit the document (attached as Appendix 1) to Welsh Government for consideration.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

2.1 The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment will help to address the Council's Corporate Plan priorities of 'Supporting children and families by helping them to deal with their problems as early as possible' and 'Working together to make the best use of our resources'.

3. Background.

3.1 Part 3 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014 places a duty on all local authorities to undertake an assessment of the accommodation needs of Gypsy & Traveller households and to make provision for unmet mobile home pitch needs where the assessment identifies an unmet need for mobile home pitches.

3.2 The Local Authority, as the strategic housing body, is the lead agency that will take the assessment process forward. The Act requires that the Assessment must be completed and returned to Welsh Government and that it is undertaken at least every 5 years. The cost of undertaking the assessment is an additional budget pressure on the service.

3.3 A survey and analysis of Gypsy & Traveller households residing in or resorting to the county borough is required in order to inform the assessment. There is a pre-defined questionnaire provided by Welsh Government to do this. The survey must be undertaken in a census-style interview approach.

3.4 The definition of "Gypsies and Travellers" for the purposes of this assessment is contained in section 108 of the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The definition is as follows;

"(a) Persons of a nomadic habit of life, whatever their race or origin,

including:

- persons who, on grounds only of their own or their family's or dependent's educational or health needs or old age, have ceased to travel temporarily or permanently, and
- members of an organised group of travelling show people or circus people (whether or not travelling together as such); and
- all other persons with a cultural tradition of nomadism or of living in a mobile home."

3.5 Members of these communities do not necessarily need to demonstrate a continued nomadic habit of life to be considered Gypsies or Travellers for the purposes of this assessment. Therefore, Gypsy and Traveller households living in bricks and mortar must also be included in the assessment.

4. Current Situation

4.1 A Steering Group was established consisting of representatives from Housing & Community Regeneration, Development Planning, Public Protection, Education and Health, the Equalities & Engagement Officer and the Western Bay Regional Community Cohesion Coordinator. The purpose of the Steering Group was to ensure the process was informed by all available expertise, in particular those with established networks within the community and those with accountability for meeting the accommodation needs of these communities.

4.2 Opinion Research Services (ORS) were appointed to undertake the primary and secondary data research to establish their potential future accommodation requirements over the first 5 years of the study and also to utilise these findings to estimate future requirements over a longer period (6-15 years). Utilising the findings of this research, ORS were required to produce a report to meet the Welsh Government requirements as published in their Guidance document. A copy of the Final Report is attached at **Appendix 1**.

4.3 The methodology used for the Assessment was as prescribed by Welsh Government and involved seeking primary data through interviews with existing Gypsy and Traveller households both on existing permanent sites and those known to be living in bricks and mortar accommodation.

4.4 In order to maximize participation from members of the Travelling Community, it was important that effective publicity and pre-notification was put in place. The approach to publicity was agreed with members of the Steering Group prior to the fieldwork commencing. The publicity was managed by the Council and included posters and leaflets placed in key locations across the county borough such as Life Centres, GP Surgeries, Primary Care and Planning Team, Supermarkets, Catholic Churches and in the Bridgend Association of Voluntary Organisations (BAVO) offices.

- 4.5 The GTAA was advertised on the Council and the Communities First Programme websites, Facebook and Twitter pages and also on the Bridgend Housing Options website. A “message of the day” was sent to all staff within the Council advising them of the GTAA so they in turn could advise any Gypsy and Traveller households they were aware of.
- 4.6 In total 4 households on permanent authorised sites were identified and all participated in the Assessment. In addition, a further 16 households were identified as living in bricks and mortar accommodation, and of these, 5 agreed to participate in the Assessment, 5 refused for personal reasons and a further 6 did not reply despite numerous contacts.
- 4.7 The conclusions of the Assessment are summarised below.
- 4.7.1 Based upon the evidence presented in this study, the estimated additional pitch provision needed for Gypsies and Travellers in Bridgend for the first 5 years of the GTAA plan period is for no additional pitches. For the remainder of the GTAA plan period (years 6-15) there is currently a need for a further 1 additional pitch. This gives a total need for the whole GTAA plan period of 1 additional pitch. These figures should be seen as the projected amount of provision which is necessary to meet the identifiable needs of the population arising in the area. These figures are made up of new household formation as no other components of need have been identified.
- 4.7.2 The Assessment indicates that there is not a need for the Council to provide a permanent transit site in Bridgend. However the Council should continue to monitor the number of unauthorised encampments and continue the management approach set out in the Local Development Plan and in the Gypsy and Traveller Management Protocol through the use of short-term toleration or Negotiated Stopping Arrangements to deal with short-term transient stops.
- 4.7.3 Finally, whilst there are no Travelling Show people yards in Bridgend, contact was made with a number of travelling Show people who have expressed a wish to develop a yard in South Wales, which could be within the Bridgend area. It would however, like all such developments, be the subject of Planning process.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 The Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment will provide essential additional evidence to complement the current Local Development Plan and assist the evidence for the proposed Local Housing Strategy (2016-18), currently out for consultation, in providing services to vulnerable clients where identified and contributing to Corporate and Welsh Government objectives, within available resources.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 The GTAA will help to deliver the Council's Equality duties as it identifies the accommodation needs of a group of people with protected characteristics. An Equality Impact Assessment is not required to be undertaken as the GTAA specifically applies to one specific protected characteristic group. The Council will be undertaking a wider Local Housing Market Assessment for the whole of the County Borough area later this year which the GTAA will inform and as part of this, consultation work will be undertaken to produce an Equality Impact Assessment of the whole market needs.

7. Financial Implications.

- 7.1 The cost of undertaking this assessment has caused an additional budget pressure on the service, resulting from the additional statutory requirement imposed by the Housing (Wales) Act 2014. The cost of this assessment has been met from within existing service budgets.

8. Recommendation.

- 8.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
- 8.1.1 Note the findings of the Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment; and
- 8.1.2 Approve submission of the Assessment (attached as Appendix 1) to Welsh Government for their approval.

MARK SHEPHARD
CORPORATE DIRECTOR COMMUNITIES
18.02.16

Contact Officer: Martin Ridgeway
Housing Strategy Team leader

Telephone: (01656) 643527

E-mail: martin.ridgeway@bridgend.gov.uk

Postal Address Housing & Community Regeneration,
Communities Directorate,
Bridgend County Borough Council,
Civic Offices,
Angel Street,
Bridgend
CF31 4WB

Background documents

Undertaking Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments – Guidance (Welsh Government – May 2015)