

GYPSYTRAVELLER SUB-COMMITTEE

WEDNESDAY, 10TH JANUARY, 2024

- Present:** Councillors A Stirling (Chair), N Baillie, G Crowson, A Evison, G Owen, C Simpson, H Smith, and A Turner (as substitute for Councillor H Powell).
- Apologies:** Councillor H Powell and Constable Sarah Grant, Police Scotland.
- Officers:** Housing Manager (Strategy and Building Standards) (Hannah McSherry), Gypsy/Traveller Liaison Officer (Di Faithfull), Strategic Housing Officer (Liz Hamilton), Teacher (ASL) (representing Education & Children's Services) (Lyndsay Aspey), Quality Improvement Officer – Education (Marian Youngson), Principal Solicitor (Martin Ingram) and Committee Officer (Nicole Chidester).

Others in attendance: Jill Smith, NHS.

1 SEDERUNT AND DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

The Chair asked Members if they had any interests to declare, in terms of the Councillors' Code of Conduct. There were no interests declared.

2 PUBLIC SECTOR EQUALITY DUTY

In taking decisions on the undernoted items of business, the Committee **agreed**, in terms of Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010:-

- (1) To have due regard to the need to:-
 - (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) advance equality and opportunity between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and
 - (c) foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, and

to consider, where an Integrated Impact Assessment has been provided, its contents and to take those into consideration when reaching a decision.

3 MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF 15 NOVEMBER 2023

There had been circulated and was **approved** as a correct record the Minute of the Meeting of the Gypsy/Traveller Sub-Committee of 15 November 2023.

4 PRESENTATION ON EDUCATION

Members **noted** a presentation from Lyndsay Aspey, Teacher (ASL), which provided an education update as it related to the Gypsy/Traveller community.

Within Aberdeenshire, there were about 90 children who were attending school that identified as Gypsy/Traveller. Many Gypsy/Traveller children were not making the transition to secondary school. Monitoring of student data was valuable as it helped to safeguard the children.

A questionnaire had been issued about Gypsy/Traveller concerns and priorities. Results showed that schools increasingly had no concerns and that school priorities were aligned with national Gypsy/Traveller priorities. These priorities were briefly highlighted, and Members **noted** that all priorities were seeing improvements.

There had been significant efforts to increase cultural awareness – including the development of two ALDO courses, Continuing Professional Training (CPT) and events during Gypsy, Roma and Traveller History Month (GRTHM). Promotion of the ALDO courses was occurring weekly, but it was recognised that the intended audience may not be reached through current promotion efforts. Direct contact with schools would begin instead. Feedback on the courses was positive.

The presentation highlighted events and feedback from GRTHM. Additional work was ongoing to provide IT support and prevent racial discrimination. Focus areas for 2024 included 1) primary/secondary transitions/online learning, 2) guidance for schools, and 3) racial discrimination and commitment to 'The Pledge'.

Following the presentation, Members thanked the presenter for the information shared and the progress toward greater inclusion. Members discussed the importance of cultural awareness for all schools and teachers. They suggested that the Director of Education or Head of Schools should be more involved in the consideration of how to best deliver/promote the ALDO cultural awareness training courses. Members requested that the training courses be shared with them for promotion and completion.

Members queried how content was curated for GRTHM, including collaboration between neighbouring local authorities and the review/feedback process. Members suggested that more promotional work could be done for the GRTHM to engage with the public better, tackle stigma, and develop a programme with greater visibility. Members highlighted that the Area committees were well suited to assist with promotion.

5 GYPSY/TRAVELLER ACTION PLAN UPDATE

There had been circulated a report dated 15 December 2023, by the Director of Infrastructure Services, which highlighted the progress of delivery for projects contained within the Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan. This report was produced under the current Local Housing Strategy as a standing item on every agenda.

Members were informed that efforts had concentrated on developing the Gypsy/Traveller and Site Provision Strategy, and identifying upgrades for Akey Brae. An update was pending from the Scottish Government on the Gypsy Traveller Fund, with the potential for funding to be identified through the capital plan.

Members asked for a progress update on site selection and sites previously selected, including those which were privately owned. They discussed the format of the action plan update, explaining it was difficult to monitor the work as the plan didn't give a sense of progress/extent of impact. They asked for more evidence/information from engagement activities with the Gypsy/Traveller community and critiqued the Integrated

Impact Assessment (IIA). Members requested that the IIA was better linked to the Action Plan, to ensure it gave Members a greater sense of assurance/guidance in terms of impact.

They asked how Aberdeenshire's primary to secondary school transition figures compared to national figures, why the transition was difficult, and if there were difficulties when these young people reengaged. They asked how success/impact were measured, how the status within the action plan was determined, and how 'better income' was defined.

Having considered the report, Members **agreed** to:-

- (1) Monitor the progress on actions in the Gypsy/Traveller Action Plan;
- (2) Instruct the Director of Infrastructure Services to prepare a revised action plan for consideration at the next meeting of the Sub Committee;
- (3) Instruct the Director of Infrastructure Services to prepare a Site Provision Report, detailing which sites the Council had selected, how they are moving forward, and details around private sites; and
- (4) Instruct the Housing Manager to share the recording of this meeting with colleagues to consider how to better link the IIA and Action Plan.

6 LOCAL HOUSING STRATEGY - GYPSY/TRAVELLER PROVISION

Members had a discussion on the Local Housing Strategy – Gypsy/Traveller Provision, which was led by the Housing Manager.

An update on the last Local Housing Strategy period was provided. During this period the Gypsy/Traveller and Site Provision Strategy for 2021 to 2026 had been agreed. This strategy prioritised new provision, particularly in central Aberdeenshire, and provided enhancements to facilities for current Traveller sites. Work was ongoing to identify additional sites. Adherence to the Code of Conduct had been consistently high and travellers were reporting they felt safe within Aberdeenshire. Applications for private sites had also been submitted.

Details from the latest Housing Need and Demand Assessment were also highlighted, including concerns about the aging population and predictions that this would continue to rise, and that the number of young adults had been decreasing. Research was ongoing regarding concealed households and updated census data would need to be examined once released. Housing affordability remained a challenge. Demand had increased for particular needs housing as well. There had been a lack of progress in identifying and delivering further Gypsy/Traveller sites.

On the 30 November 2023, a session for the Communities Committee Member was held to set high level priorities for the next period of the Local Housing Strategy (2024-2029). Officers were developing the priorities agreed by Members and identifying actions to align with these priorities.

Three actions had been identified within the Local Housing Strategy for the Gypsy Traveller Sub-Committee:

- 1- Minority ethnic groups to have access to good quality affordable housing which meets their needs, culture and lifestyle;
- 2- Gypsy/Travellers, normally resident in Aberdeenshire, and those Gypsy/Travellers visiting the area to have accommodation that meets their needs, culture and lifestyle; and
- 3- General relations between Gypsy/Traveller and settled communities to be improved.

At the conclusion of the Housing Managers introduction, she briefly reviewed additional items, including Net Zero and accessibility standards, that would need to be considered when delivering the Local Housing Strategy.

Members requested a copy of the slides for further review, along with a copy of the current Local Housing Strategy. Members commented that they would need more time to properly consider and respond to the plan. They confirmed that the three actions were still key areas of focus. Members queried if the increase in applications for private site was a result of the pandemic and clarified if members of the Gypsy/Traveller community still preferred to manage their own sites.

The need for more sites was highlighted, particularly for Central and South Aberdeenshire. If there were any ideas or potential sites, Members were invited to contact officers who could begin the necessary investigations.

The draft Local Housing Strategy would be consulted on during April/May 2024, with the plan going to each Area Committees. The final draft report would be considered by the Communities Committee in September 2024.

Following consideration, Members **agreed** to:-

- (1) instruct the Committee Officer to arrange a meeting for the end of April/beginning of May 2024 to discuss the Local Housing Strategy; and
- (2) instruct the Committee Officer to arrange an additional two meetings in 2024.