

REPORT TO: Health Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 29 May 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities

PORTFOLIO: Health and Adults
Neighbourhood, Leisure and Sport

SUBJECT: Gypsy & Traveller Sites Pitch Allocations
Policy, Procedure & Practice

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To present Members of the Health PPB with the revised policy, procedure and practice for the allocation of pitches on the Council's Gypsy & Traveller sites, which includes the permanent site, known as Riverview, located in Widnes and the transit site located in Astmoor, Runcorn.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

- i) **The report be noted; and**
- ii) **Members comment on the Policy, Procedure & Practice (PPP) attached as Appendix 1.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 A revised PPP has been developed with regard to the Gypsy & Traveller Site Management Good Practice Guide published by Communities & Local Government (CLG) in July 2009. A number of officers have contributed to the development of the revised PPP, including, the Gypsy & Traveller Liaison Officer, the Principal Manager Housing Solutions and the Divisional Manager Policy & Development Services.

3.2 The PPP brings the procedures in relation to allocation of accommodation for Gypsies & Travellers in line with the homelessness legislation to ensure that those who are in the greatest need are offered pitches when they become available.

3.3 The CLG guide states that:
'It is essential that local authorities have a published scheme which sets out the policies and procedures for allocating pitches. The policy for allocating pitches should be clear, fair and transparent'.

The revised PPP includes the following:

- Eligibility criteria which individuals must meet in order to be considered for allocation of a pitch;
- Information regarding the way in which need is assessed and prioritised (which falls in line with the homelessness assessment criteria, as contained in the Housing Act 1996 Part VII and amended by the Homelessness Act 2002);
- Procedural details in terms of how individuals can register their interest for a pitch and the application process upon a pitch becoming available;
- The assessment/decision-making process, including the consideration that is given to applicant compatibility with existing site residents. This is in line with the CLG guidance, which states that *'in some circumstances, management may take account of factors which would adversely affect the suitability of the site as a social unit'*;
- The procedure in relation to the transit site;
- A procedural flow chart and application/assessment forms are included as appendices.

- 3.4 The revised PPP complements the service provided to Halton's Gypsy & Traveller community by the Gypsy & Traveller Liaison Officers, the Site Wardens and the Gypsy & Traveller Education Consultant. These members of staff also work closely with the Gypsy & Traveller Police Liaison Officer and partners from the health sector.
- 3.5 The overall result of this co-ordinated service is that Halton's Gypsy & Traveller residents have the same opportunity as the settled community to access health, education and other services.
- 3.6 Gypsy & Traveller children are in attendance at two of the nursery schools within the borough, 14 of the primary schools and three of the high schools. There are also some pupils on the elective home education roll and their education is monitored by the local authority officer. Regular liaison and the provision of advice and support helps to ensure that children access education, demonstrate regular patterns of attendance and successfully move through the key stages.
- 3.7 All those residing on Halton's permanent Council-owned site access education as appropriate and are registered with local GP and dentist surgeries. Work also takes place to encourage inclusion for those who reside on the three privately owned sites in Halton.
- 3.8 The Council's permanent site was refurbished in recent years and now has a community building, which is available for use by the entire Gypsy & Traveller community within Halton and regular young peoples' groups and health events are held. Families are also

encouraged to access local Children's Centres and Sure Start facilities. The mobile library visits the sites regularly offering the opportunity to loan books and utilise computer/Internet access.

- 3.9 In 2009, Halton Borough Council opened a transit site, which offers Gypsies & Travellers coming into Halton a safe place to stay where they are able to access services. Families are able to stay for a three-month period, which must be followed by three months away from the site before they can return. The transit site has greatly reduced unauthorised encampments in Halton – only 14 have occurred in the last two years and these were successfully dealt with within hours and the only associated cost was staff time. This compares favourably against a neighbouring authority without a transit site where there were over 60 unauthorised encampments over the same time period, a number of which took weeks to resolve and involved court action and the associated costs.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The PPP will ensure that Halton complies with current good practice guidance and continues to offer an inclusive service to the Gypsy & Traveller community.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 None identified.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The revised PPP places families with children in a priority need category for the allocation of an available pitch on the permanent site. Once resident on site, the services provided ensure access to education and health services.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Residents on the Gypsy & Traveller sites within Halton are encouraged and supported to access education and employment.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The revised PPP places those who are vulnerable due to a physical or mental health issue in a priority need category for the allocation of an available pitch on the permanent site. Residents are supported to access health services.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

The revised PPP outlines a fair approach to the allocation of pitches on the permanent and the transit site and therefore reduces the incidence of unauthorised encampments, which disrupt community safety.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The revised PPP contributes to the sustainability of Halton's communities.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None identified.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 It is widely acknowledged that Gypsies and Travellers are amongst the most marginalised communities in the country and can suffer disproportionate levels of discrimination. The Equality Act 2010 places a general duty on public authorities to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity between different groups and foster good relations between different groups.

An associated Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed. No negative impacts were found on any of the protected characteristics.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Gypsy & Traveller Site Management Good Practice Guide (Communities & Local Government)	People & Communities Policy Team, 2 nd Floor, Runcorn Town Hall	Natalie Johnson