

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 16th March 2022
Report for: Decision
Report of: Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Report Title

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Visits Task and Finish Group interim report

Summary

The Task and Finish Group was agreed by the Scrutiny Committee in November 2021 following a presentation by the Executive Member for Environmental and Regulatory Services relating to Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community visits over the summer in September 2021. The Task and Finish Group was set up to investigate what Trafford Council could do to improve relations with the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities. The Task and Finish Group looked to connect with a representative from the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities and found the Charity Friends, Families, and Travellers, who provided a training session for Members on the 24th of February 2022. During the session several suggestions of how Trafford could improve relations with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities were made.

The group also gathered Ward Councillors experiences of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller visits to their Wards.

This interim report makes recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee and outlines how the Task and Finish Group intends to proceed.

Recommendation(s)

That the Scrutiny Committee;

- 1. Note the report,**
- 2. Agree the recommendations in section 4 of the report for submission to the Executive.**

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Alexander Murray
Extension: x4250

Background Papers: *None*

1. Background Information

Following a set of visits during summer Councillor Dagnall requested that Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller visits be considered by the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting in September 2022. The Executive Member for Environmental and Regulatory Services and the Director of Growth and Regulatory Services delivered a presentation at the September meeting outlining the Councils approach, the impact visits over the summer had, the upcoming changes in legislation, and the next steps under consideration. At the Committee's next meeting in November Councillor Axford requested a Task and Finish group be established to look at what else could be done to support Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller visits to. The Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish group and Councillors Acton, Axford, Dagnall, and Jerrome volunteered to be members of the group.

2. Gypsy and Traveller Cultural Awareness Training

At the first meeting of the group, it was agreed that they required input from a representative of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities to provide their perspective on relations between those communities and the Council. Councillor Axford contacted the Charity Friends, Families, and Travellers who work to end racism and discrimination against Gypsy, Roma and Traveller people and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life.

Friends, Families, and Travellers offered a training course on Gypsy and Traveller Cultural Awareness Training and a session was held on Thursday 24th of March 2022. The training was well attended and those who attended found the information provided very useful.

The training highlighted difficulties Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities faced in accessing services such as education and health services and the barriers and conflicts generated by a lack of cultural understanding. The task and finish group feel that the training session could go some way to addressing those issues both within the Council and their partners.

A section of the training focused specifically on the upcoming changes to the law once the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill (PCSC Bill) comes into force. It was made clear to the attendees that those changes would have a large impact on the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities. The trainers pointed out that the most concerning elements of the bill was the level of interpretation available to each area, which will make it difficult for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities to know the law in each area. They suggested that the best thing local authorities can do is to have an agreed approach to the new laws and to work with other local authorities so that the rules are as consistent across as wide an area as possible.

At the end of the training session the trainer answered a series of questions posed by attendees in advance. Many of which asked for suggestions of actions Trafford Council could take to improve relations with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities.

Below are a list of suggested actions;

- Have land available for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities to use

- Access national funding or work with housing trusts who support these communities.
- Utilise welfare visits to direct Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities to areas they can stay for a prolonged period and access any services they need.
- To open communication channels with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities by approaching those who do visit the area.
- To have communication with the wider community about Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller visits to frame the discussion positively.
- To have facilities in place with the authority's logo on to provide needed support and display the Council are aware and give validity to the site.
- To implement negotiated stopping with verbal and/or written agreements in place, if possible (gave Leeds City Council as a good example).

Following the training the Task and Finish group agreed several of the suggestions could form recommendations and the group would continue to work on the other areas, particularly around the PCSC Bill.

Friends, Families, and Travellers informed the Task and Finish group that they have been awarded funding to offer free training sessions to local authorities and other organisations from April 2022. The Task and Finish Group feel that the Council should take advantage of the opportunity.

3. Ward Councillors Views

Councillor Dagnall sent an email to Trafford Ward Councillors to ask for their experiences with Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities. A range of responses were received and a number of suggestions were made. Many expressed that they were happy for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities to visit the area but noted some hostility towards them from members of the community. All feedback noted there needed to be a way to reduce the impact and clean-up costs of the visits and several suggestions were made of how this could be achieved. The main suggestion that stood out to the Committee was that communications between officers working with the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller Communities and Ward Councillors needed to improve.

4. Recommendations

That the Scrutiny Committee recommend the Executive:

1. Purchase a set of mobile facilities (including bins and toilets) with Trafford Council branding for rapid deployment on any area of land that the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community are temporarily visiting.
2. In accordance with Section 10 of the Planning Policy for Traveller Sites 2015. The Council identify specific sites within Trafford for use by the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities for the next 5 years, to be included in the Local Plan.
3. Ensure that Ward Councillors are contacted as soon as a Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community visit is known about and ensure they are kept up to date on action being taken.
4. Take a proactive approach to communications around Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community visits via positive messaging through local and social media.
5. Arrange for Gypsy and Traveller Cultural Awareness Training to be rolled out to Councillors, staff, and partners.

6. Ensure that either local representatives of the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller community or the Charity Friends, Families, and Travellers are consulted on any plans affecting Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities in Trafford.
7. Assess the feasibility of implementing a negotiated stopping policy within Trafford for Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities and to produce a report detailing the findings for the Scrutiny Committee to consider by the end of 2022.
8. Explore and clarify Trafford's response to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill in relation to unauthorised encampments.