

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE Housing and Environment

DATE 15 January 2013

DIRECTOR Pete Leonard

TITLE OF REPORT Establishment of Short-term Halting Sites for
Gypsies/Travellers

REPORT NUMBER:H&E/12/102

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks agreement on the establishment of a Short-term Halting Site for Gypsies/Travellers and provides members with an update on the work being undertaken by City/Shire Officers on a shared service agenda.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- (a) Instruct Officers to progress the establishment of an interim Short-term Halting Site at Granitehill Industrial Estate including preparation of a specification with full cost implications and community communications plan and report back to the March cycle.
- (b) Committee agree that long term provision to be located at Scotstown Road Recycling Centre and officers begin work, including planning etc, to prepare for the location once the recycling centre is relocated.
- (c) Note the joint work that is continuing with Aberdeenshire Council.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Definitive costs are difficult to estimate, given the ad-hoc nature of temporary encampments. None of these costs are currently built into budgets but are currently being met from budgets held by Housing & Environment on a reactive basis.

So far this financial year, The Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer/Site Manager has handled 57 encampments. These consist of 21 on Council owned land and 36 on privately owned. Approximate clean up and legal costs amount to £20,000. Staff time and associated resources are not so tangible however.

There will be some costs in establishing any site (e.g. ground condition, water supply and screening) but the revenue running costs for halting sites would be less than the reactive cost clearing up unauthorised sites.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Legal - Whilst there is no statutory duty placed upon Aberdeen City Council to specifically have Halting Sites within the City, we have a duty to respond to the needs of Gypsies/Travellers who come into the local authority area. Officers are currently investigating the potential to utilise Bye-Laws legislation to prevent unauthorised encampments on sensitive areas of the City which have been subject to ongoing and persistent pressure and form part of our existing Good Neighbour Code.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

Short-term Halting Sites

Aberdeen City Council's Policy and Strategy Committee, at its meeting on 29 November 2005, agreed in principle to the development of short-term halting sites for Gypsies/Travellers.

Although Council agreed on 15 August 2007 to approve a list of 9 potential sites and embarked on an extensive consultation process it was clear that each local community held strong views on these proposals hence why it proved extremely difficult to identify sites that had any level of acceptance within communities.

Consequently, the Council's Policy & Strategy Committee on 2 December 2008 instructed officers to stand down all current searches and consultations, to continue examining how best to manage informal encampments and for officers to prepare details for upgrading the Clinterty site to include potential short term provision.

Despite a review of our Policy which included a review of the Good Neighbour Code, upgrading the Clinterty site – including the creation of 4 Short-term plots, Aberdeen continues to experience Unauthorised Encampments on an unprecedented scale. These encampments invariably generate high profile attention and considerable controversy as to the rights of the settled community and the rights of Gypsies/Travellers. The camp sizes have grown over the last 4 years and we now require sites which are suitable for a large family group.

Like other local authorities, Aberdeen City Council has a duty to respond to the needs of Gypsies/Travellers who come into the local authority area. However, there is currently inadequate provision within Aberdeen and indeed, nationally.

By moving to a position of developing Short-term Halting Sites, not only will this increase site provision with the City but should assist in the challenges being faced with Unauthorised Encampments. It will also enable immediate action to commence to move people on from these sites should such issues arise and hopefully encourage support from both Police and the Courts.

Given the robust consultation exercise previously undertaken it is unlikely that public opinion with the regard to the development of Halting Sites will have softened. Indeed, it is possible that negative attitudes will have intensified. In order to take this matter forward, it will be necessary for the City Council to take decisive action to increase provision of temporary Halting Sites with the intention of reducing the impact of unauthorised sites on the settled community.

Officers have used the undernoted established assessment criteria to assess the suitability of potential sites.

Objective	Scotstown Recycling	Shielhill	Bankhead Academy	Hazlehead Area	Howes Road	Granitehill Industrial Estate	Danestone Country Park
Access to Public Transport	3	2	3	3	3	3	2
Access to Shops	3	2	3	3	3	3	2
Access to Medical Facilities	2	2	3	1	3	3	2
Ease of Access to Bins / Toilet Collections	3	3	3	3	3	3	1
Hard Standing	3	2	3	3	3	3	1
Privacy / Screening / Landscaping	3	2	1	3	1	1	3
Running Potable Water	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
Proximity to Settled Community	1	1	1	2	2	1	1
Safe Access	3	3	2	3	3	3	1
Proximity to Railways / Overhead Pylons / High Speed Roads	2	3	3	3	3	3	3
Proximity to High Profile Employers	3	1	2	1	1	1	3
Acceptable to Travellers	3	3	2	3	1	2	1
Site of Cultural Importance	2	1	1	1	2	1	2
Site of Environmental Designation	2	3	1	1	2	3	1
Site of Economic Importance	2	1	1	1	2	2	2
Cost Effective	3	1	2	3	3	3	1
Sufficient Space to Meet the Good Neighbour Code	2	3	3	3	3	3	1
TOTAL POINTS	43	36	37	40	41	41	30

- 1 Point = Unsuitable
- 2 Points = Possibility
- 3 Points = Highly Suitable

A number of potential sites have been previously identified and assessed against these criteria. The sites selected exclude any which are included within any strategic land assembly. Although the Scotstown Recycling Centre is the top scored option, this particular location will not be available within the next two years as the Waste Team are currently examining relocation options which will include land purchase, contracting, design, planning and build stages. The next options in terms of the scoring exercise are Howes Road and Granitehill Industrial Estate. Although these options score similar, we have previous experience of the Gypsies/Travellers using Howes Road

and they were forced from this site by persons unknown. In addition, concerns were also expressed about the one access road option to this site. Consequently, it is recommended that Officers progress the Granitehill Industrial Site option and we would intend to consult with the local community as to how best to mitigate the impact of this provision on the settled community which will include involvement in the design of the site as well as agreeing a set of operational arrangements and regular meetings.

Joint work with Aberdeenshire

The two Councils continue to commit to collaborative working and regular Officer meetings are held. Current projects include the establishment of a Service Level Agreement for managing the Short-term plots at Clinterty and a review of the staffing model at the site. By using Scottish Government Grant funding obtained, Aberdeenshire have agreed to part fund a seasonal Caretaker post at Clinterty and a business case will be developed for this to happen. Aberdeenshire continue to undertake their own searches for Short-term Halting Sites and any progress on this should complement what Aberdeen City Council are attempting and address the chronic shortage of site provision in the North East of Scotland as identified within the content of the Craigforth Report which was commissioned back in 2009. In addition, by committing to this approach, this is needed to manage the movement of Gypsies/Travellers between the two local authorities.

6. IMPACT

Public – this report will generate significant public interest given the previous attempts to address this contentious issue.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Policy & Strategy 29 November 2005
Council 15 August 2007
Council 21 November 2007
Area Committee South 29 November 2007
Area Committee South 21 February 2008
Area Committee North 23 September 2008
Policy & Strategy 7 October 2008
Policy & Strategy 2 December 2008

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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