

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 23rd April 2015

Lead Member / Officer: Lead Member for Public Realm/
Head of Planning and Public Protection

Report Author: Development Manager (Planning and Public
Protection)

Title: Better Regulation of Caravan Sites

1. What is the report about?

1.1 The report is a follow up to the one presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee in December 2014. It will outline the work undertaken on the project since that time.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 The report has been prepared as a result of a Scrutiny Committee request for an update on the progress with the caravan sites strategy, the development of a post to drive the project forward and any progress made on the effective enforcement of sites through specific action and negotiation with owners.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That Committee considers the information and comments on the progress of the project to date.

4. Report details.

4.1 There are a large number of caravan sites in Denbighshire. These sites vary in size and in how they operate. The majority were created for holiday and tourist purposes. Planning and licensing controls exist on most of these sites, however, records are often inconsistent and have not kept pace with changes to both holiday patterns and the sites themselves.

4.2 Elected members and others have expressed concerns about the proliferation of caravan sites in the county and how they may be being used. The concerns relate, in the main, to the perception that individuals are using holiday caravans as their main or sole residence avoiding Council Tax and using local services such as schools and doctors surgeries. Caravans can generally be considered to provide sub-standard accommodation for permanent usage. The Police have also raised concerns about the increasing numbers of crimes being reported from caravans and caravan parks. As such, Officers have

acknowledged that this is a major issue for the County which requires cross-service co-ordination.

- 4.3 A review of the caravan parks in the county and the development of a strategy for their future management have been identified as a Service priority within the Planning and Public Protection Service. The priority is being addressed using the Council's project management methodology and is led by a steering group of senior officers from across the service.

Update

- 4.4 Since the December 2014 meeting of the Communities Scrutiny Committee the following further work has been undertaken:
- Wider research work into persons providing caravans as their address when accessing services.
 - Meetings with caravan site owners and colleagues in Conwy CBC.
 - The engagement of the Business Improvement and Modernisation Service of the Council to co-ordinate the project.
- 4.5 Members may recall that an initial trawl of a pilot group of 5 holiday caravan sites took place. This was to enable the project to commence, to ascertain the potential scale of the problem and to guide a proposed strategy. The initial findings are contained within **Document 1 (Appendix 1)** attached to this report. This document is exempt from public disclosure by virtue of paragraphs 13 and 18 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.
- 4.6 In undertaking the initial work it became clear that the Council would hold a variety of records from people accessing Council and other services who have given a caravan in the County as their address. These persons may be perfectly entitled to access and receive these services, however, in doing so they may be providing us with tangible evidence that they are not using the caravan for the holiday use it was originally designed for.
- 4.7 Officers within the Council responsible for managing back office systems for a variety of services are currently undertaking research into how many people accessing services have provided a caravan as their address. At the time of writing this report further data has not been compiled, however, we have discovered at least 5 licensed taxi drivers have given caravans as their address in the north of the County.
- 4.8 Officers are seeking information on blue badge holders, those seeking adult/children's services, education services, housing services and other services. Officers have also spoken with colleagues in Legal Services about the legal requirements on the Council to offer certain services to persons residing in caravans.

- 4.9 On 9th January 2015 an Officer met a major caravan park owner on site. The purpose of this visit was for the Officer to explain the nature of the Council project. The visit also provided an opportunity for the owner to explain the nature of his business in the context of potential evidence of residential occupation of holiday caravans. A summary of the meeting is attached as **Document 2 (Appendix 2)**.
- 4.10 On 16th February 2015 an Officer met with colleagues in Conwy CBC. The purpose of the visit was to explain the nature of the Council project. In addition, the visit was an opportunity to discuss the scale of the problem in the neighbouring county and how officers there are trying to deal with it. Discussions took place about the potential for collaborative work on a "Site Monitoring" protocol.
- 4.11 On 5th March 2015 Officers from the Planning and Public Protection Service attended CET. The purpose of this was to discuss the project and how to allocate necessary resources to drive it forward. In the first instance it was agreed to engage the Business Improvement and Modernisation Service of the Council in the project. From there it is hoped that an Officer could be allocated to move the project forward by:
- Establishing clear outcomes i.e. what does the Council hope to achieve by tackling residential use of caravans.
 - Establishing a robust evidence base from the numerous back office systems.
 - Establishing a finished strategy document which captures the above.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

- 5.1 Controlling the way caravan parks are used contributes towards Council priorities:-
- Developing the local economy
 - Vulnerable people are protected and are able to live as independently as possible
 - Ensuring access to good quality housing

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

- 6.1 The project may have resource implications should it be decided that a post be created to manage the project. The project may impact upon other services in terms of the information they keep, the procedures they follow and ultimately the services they provide to persons found to be residing in caravans.

7. What are the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

7.1 An EqIA will be undertaken for the further development of the Strategy document and prior to its formal adoption.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 None.

9 Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1 N/A

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1 There are no perceived risks associated with the recommendations in this report.

11. Power to make the Decision

11.1 Article 6.3.3 of the Council's Constitution outlines scrutiny's policy development functions.

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