

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	13th May 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Cllr Mark Young (Lead Member for Planning, Public Protection and Safer Communities)/ Emlyn Jones (Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services)
Report author	Angela Loftus (Strategic Planning & Housing Manager)
Title	Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment – proposal to establish a Task & Finish Group

1. What is the report about?

1.1. The Housing (Wales) Act 2014 requires that an assessment of accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers must be undertaken and submitted to Welsh Government every 5 years. The Council is now required to undertake a new assessment, as our existing assessment was originally submitted in February 2016. This report proposes the creation of a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to support work on the new assessment.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval from Scrutiny Committee to establish a Task and Finish Group to support work on the Council's new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) and agree the draft Terms of Reference for the group.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That Members agree to establish a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group to assist with and inform work on the new Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment.

3.2. That Members agree the draft Terms of Reference for the group attached as Appendix 1.

4. Report details

Background

- 4.1. The Housing Act (Wales) 2014 places a legal duty on Local Authorities to assess the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers (Section 101) and subsequently meet those needs (Section 103). There is a legal requirement (Housing (Wales) Act 2014) for GTAAs to be undertaken as a minimum every 5 years and the Council is now required to undertake a new Assessment. The deadline for the GTAA to be submitted to Welsh Government is 24th February 2022.
- 4.2. An up to date GTAA is also a requirement for the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP). Without an up to date robust GTAA the Independent Inspector will not be able to approve a new LDP. The LDP is considered an important planning tool because it sets out local priorities for land allocation across the county and includes land allocations for housing, employment and the protection of green space etc. The LDP also includes local policies e.g. affordable housing, carbon reduction, protection of important environments and species. Without a new GTAA there can be no replacement LDP which would leave the Council in a vulnerable position regarding control/restricting inappropriate developments across the County and risk losing appropriate inward investment due to a lack of certainty in the planning process.
- 4.3. The GTAA identifies need and does not seek to identify specific locations for sites. Therefore, further work around possible sites would be progressed on completion of a new approved GTAA (subject to the identification of need). No work is currently being undertaken to identify sites.
- 4.4. A robust project management approach is being adopted with the establishment of a Member-led Project Board, with the Leader and Lead Member working with Senior Officers to direct this work ensuring Member involvement, openness and transparency throughout the process.
- 4.5. Consultants have been commissioned jointly with Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) to undertake the new GTAA via a formal tendering process. This procurement approach is to ensure consistency and cost efficiencies but each local authority has a separate contract with the consultants and the consultants will produce individual GTAA reports specific to each county. Work has not yet started on the assessment and it is key that concerns raised around the existing GTAA are incorporated into the

work brief for the consultants and that the new GTAA responds to those perceived gaps in information and process.

- 4.6. Key issues raised by elected Members and Scrutiny Committee previously included a requirement for an increased level of consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities around Transit provision (raised by all parties including Scrutiny), the need for early engagement with Scrutiny Committee and concerns about the lack of explanation around the recommendations in the GTAA.
- 4.7. In order to help to address these concerns it is proposed by the GTAA Project Board that a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group should be established to provide input and support to inform the development of the new GTAA. The proposal to establish a Task and Finish Group was discussed with Scrutiny Chairs and Vice Chairs Group on 11th March 2021 and they were supportive of the proposal.
- 4.8. The purpose of the Group will be to ensure that the approach taken to deliver the new GTAA complies with the Welsh Government methodology and that previous feedback is taken into account within the new document in line with Scrutiny requirements. In addition, the Group will monitor progress and advise as necessary on the delivery of the Assessment. A key role will be to help to develop a suitable stakeholder engagement plan that will satisfy Scrutiny concerns and requirements. The draft Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish Group are attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.9. This work will be responsible for supporting the delivery of the new GTAA. This work **will not** include any site selection (as no work on site selection is currently being undertaken) or respond to/review other ongoing operational matters around Gypsy and Traveller sites or unauthorised encampments.
- 4.10. It is proposed that the Group should comprise one elected Member appointed by each of the Council's Member Area Groups (MAGs), to ensure geographic spread. In view of timescales, nominations from each Member Area Group are currently being sought. The Group will be supported by the Corporate Director Economy and Public Realm, Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services, Service representatives and the Corporate Project Manager. Invitations will also be extended to Travelling Ahead (Third Sector Advocacy organisation for Gypsies and Travellers funded by WG), North Wales Police Diversity Team. The company working on behalf

of the Council, Opinion Research Services (ORS) will also be invited to meet the Group members and to attend to present updates as necessary.

4.11. The work of the Group will need to focus on developing the delivery approach and stakeholder engagement plan for the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, with a report to Communities Scrutiny Committee at the end of July, due to timescales a Special meeting would potentially be required.

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

Completion of the GTAA will contribute to the Corporate priority: Housing by identifying the accommodation needs of the Gypsy and Traveller community.

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

Consultants have been procured jointly with CCBC to undertake the GTAA. The DCC commitment of £5.5k will be met from the LDP budget. The work of the Task and Finish Group may identify some additional requirements for the consultants which may have an impact on the budget. This will be reviewed as the project progresses.

The controversial nature of this work and the proposal for a more detailed communication and stakeholder engagement plan will place greater demands on the Strategic Planning and Housing Team than other needs assessments required by the LDP. Consultation with Gypsy and Traveller families is an essential aspect of the GTAA process. Education and Social Care services in particular will have a key role in the dissemination of information relating to the consultation and the identification of existing families who may have a need during the consultation stage of the project.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

A Well-being Impact Assessment is being carried out for the project. However, this report seeks approval for the establishment of a Task and Finish Group and an assessment is not required at this stage.

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

A comprehensive series of engagement activities has been undertaken with members as set out below:

Meeting	Date
Group Leaders	10/2/21
Strategic Planning Group	17/2/21
Strategic Housing & Homelessness Group	26/2/21
Written Member's Briefing from SPG/Lead Member to all members – general overview prior to Council Briefing	1/3/21
Scrutiny Chairs and Vice-Chairs Group	11/3/21
Council Briefing	15/3/21

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

As set out in Section 6 there are no direct costs related with the establishment of a Task and Finish Group and it is welcome that the initial costs of consultants have been taken account of within existing budgets. The position will need to be monitored carefully over the coming months.

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

There are a significant number of risks to the project that have been identified at this early stage and will feed into the full project business case risk assessment process. The adoption of a project management process to the delivery of a replacement GTAA is one step to reduce the risk. A lack of political support has been identified as a significant risk which has led to the clear need for the Leader and Lead Member to be fully engaged in the development of the project from the start. The establishment of a Task and Finish Group will ensure wider Member involvement in the project from the outset.

11. Power to make the decision

Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

Section 7.4 of the Council's Constitution.