

<b>Report to</b>	<b>Communities Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>Date of meeting</b>	<b>26<sup>th</sup> July 2021</b>
<b>Lead Member / Officer</b>	<b>Councillor Barry Mellor</b> <b>Chair – Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment</b> <b>Task and Finish Group</b>
<b>Report authors</b>	<b>Angela Loftus (Strategic Planning &amp; Housing Manager) &amp;</b> <b>Kim Waller (Lead Project Manager)</b>
<b>Title</b>	<b>Gypsy &amp; Traveller Accommodation Assessment – report back to Scrutiny from the Task &amp; Finish Group</b>

## **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. Following a report to Scrutiny Committee on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021, a Task and Finish Group was established to support work on the new assessment. The agreed Terms of Reference for the group are attached as Appendix 1. This report provides an update on the work of the Task and Finish Group.

## **2. What is the reason for making this report?**

- 2.1. The purpose of this report is to update Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Task and Finish Group and to enable Members to consider the findings and recommendations of the Group. At this stage, the two key outputs are the work brief (attached as Appendix 2) and the Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plan (attached as Appendix 3) which have been developed to support the delivery of the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) in line with the Welsh Government methodology. Work on the assessment has not yet started and this report seeks Scrutiny Committee confirmation that Members are satisfied that the approach

proposed is robust and in line with Welsh Government methodology, together with Committee endorsement to start the assessment.

### **3. What are the Recommendations?**

- 3.1. That Scrutiny considers and endorses:
  - a) The Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Work Brief (attached as Appendix 2)
  - b) The Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plan (attached as Appendix 3)
- 3.2 That Scrutiny confirms support for the approach adopted for the delivery of Denbighshire's Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment as being robust and in line with Welsh Government guidance and endorses the start of the assessment.

### **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 GTAA to be undertaken as a minimum every 5 years and the Council is now required to undertake a new Assessment. An up to date GTAA is also a requirement for the replacement Local Development Plan. The deadline for the GTAA to be submitted to Welsh Government is 24<sup>th</sup> February 2022.
- 4.2. Welsh Government have published detailed statutory guidance '*Undertaking Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments*'. This forms the basis for undertaking the GTAA and Welsh Government will assess the completed GTAA against this methodology.
- 4.3. 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.

- 4.4. Consultants have been commissioned jointly with Conwy County Borough Council to undertake the new GTAA on behalf of both Councils and it is proposed that recommendations from the Task and Finish Group should be incorporated into the work brief for the consultants to ensure that the new GTAA responds to any perceived gaps in information and process. The draft Work Brief takes on board discussions and recommendations from the Task and Finish Group and is attached as Appendix 2. Although the work has been jointly commissioned separate assessments and reports will be produced for each authority. The WG GTAA methodology encourages partnership working with the aim of getting a better understanding of need and travelling patterns across administrative boundaries; a consistent approach; economies of cost and scale; and reduced risks of double counting.
- 4.5. In order to help to address concerns previously raised by elected Members and Scrutiny Committee regarding the level of consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities and the need for early engagement with Scrutiny Committee, it was proposed by the GTAA Project Board that a 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, together with Terms of Reference, was agreed by Communities Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> May 2021.
- 4.6. The purpose of the Group is 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 has been to help to develop a suitable stakeholder communications plan that will satisfy Scrutiny concerns and requirements. The draft Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plan is attached as Appendix 3. The role of the Group is to support the delivery of the new GTAA and does not include any work on site selection or responding to other ongoing operational matters around Gypsy and Traveller sites or unauthorised encampments.
- 4.7. The Group comprises one elected Member appointed by each of the Council's Member Area Groups, to ensure geographic spread. The Group is chaired by Councillor Barry Mellor and is being supported by the Corporate Director Economy and Public Realm, Head of Planning, Public Protection and Countryside Services, Service representatives and the Corporate Project Manager. The Lead Member, Councillor Mark Young has attended meetings as an observer at the invitation of the Task and

Finish Group. The company working on behalf of the Council, Opinion Research Services (ORS) has also attended Group meetings to meet the members and outline the methodology and answer any questions raised. The Task and Finish Group has met four times and discussions have included the Welsh Government methodology, project structure, data sources, engagement and communications and data analysis.

- 4.8. To date the work of the Group has focussed on developing the delivery approach and stakeholder engagement and communications plan for the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment, however further meetings are planned in the autumn to enable the Group to monitor progress on the assessment and review the emerging draft GTAA report.

## **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 controversial nature of this work and the proposal for a more detailed stakeholder engagement and communication 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 provides an update on the work of the Task and Finish Group and an assessment is not required at this stage.

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

The Task and Finish Group established by this Committee has met four times to date and discussions have informed the development of the Stakeholder Engagement and Communications Plan and Work Brief.

## **9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

As set out in Section 6 there are no direct costs related to the work of the 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 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 the Task and Finish Group aims to ensure wider Member involvement in the project from the outset.

## **11. Power to make the decision**

Section 101 - Housing (Wales) Act 2014

Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000.

Section 7.4.1 and Section 7.4.2 (d) of the Council's Constitution.