

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	9th December 2021
Lead Member / Officer	Councillor Mark Young – Lead Member for Planning, Public Protection, Safer Communities and Domestic Abuse Cllr Barry Mellor - Chair – Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment Task and Finish Group
Report authors	Angela Loftus (Strategic Planning & Housing Manager) & Kim Waller (Lead Project Manager)
Title	Denbighshire’s Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment (2021) – report back to Scrutiny from the 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 and submit a new assessment, as the existing assessment was approved in 2017. Following a report to Scrutiny Committee on 13th May 2021, a Task and Finish Group was established to support work on the new assessment. The Task and Finish Group has now concluded its work and the final report from the Group is attached as Appendix 1. This report provides the conclusions from the work of the Task and Finish Group.
- 1.2. This report also presents the draft Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment (GTAA) for Denbighshire (attached as Appendix 2).

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. Work on the GTAA has now been completed and the conclusions of the Task and Finish Group will help to inform Scrutiny’s consideration of the draft GTAA.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. That Scrutiny endorses the conclusions of the Task and Finish Group that:
 - a) Work on the Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment has met the requirements of the Work Brief and Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan endorsed by Scrutiny on 26th July 2021
 - b) The Welsh Government methodology has been applied appropriately to the analysis of need.
- 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.
- 3.3. That Scrutiny confirms that it has read, understood and taken account of the Well-being Impact Assessment (Appendix 3) as part of its consideration.
- 3.4. That Scrutiny recommends to Cabinet that the draft Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment should be approved for submission to Welsh Government.

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. An up to date GTAA is also a requirement for the replacement Local Development Plan (LDP). The deadline for the GTAA to be submitted to Welsh Government is 24th February 2022.

- 4.2. Welsh Government have published detailed statutory guidance '*Undertaking Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessments*'¹. Welsh Government will assess the completed GTAA against this methodology.
- 4.3. A robust project management approach has been 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.

Task and Finish Group

- 4.4. Elected Members and Scrutiny Committee had previously raised concerns regarding the level of consultation with Gypsy and Traveller communities and the need for early engagement with Members. Communities Scrutiny Committee agreed at its meeting on 13th May 2021 to establish a Task and Finish Group to provide support to the development of the new GTAA. (Terms of Reference are attached to Appendix 1).
- 4.5. The purpose of the Group has been 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 document in line with Scrutiny requirements.
- 4.6. The Task and Finish Group has met six times. Discussions have included all aspects of the Welsh Government methodology. They have reviewed progress on the assessment and the findings of the draft GTAA report. Their final report is attached as Appendix 1. The Lead Member, Councillor Mark Young has attended meetings as an observer at the invitation of the Task and Finish Group. The company undertaking the GTAA on behalf of the Council, Opinion Research Services (ORS) has attended Group meetings to meet the members and discuss the methodology. The Group were satisfied with the company's expertise and experience in undertaking GTAAs.
- 4.7. At its meeting on 26th July 2021, Communities Scrutiny Committee endorsed the *Work Brief* and the *Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan* (both of which can be viewed as [Appendices 2 & 3 to business item 4 on that meeting's agenda](#)) developed by the Task and Finish Group to support the delivery of the GTAA in line with the Welsh Government methodology. Scrutiny Committee confirmed that it

¹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2019-03/undertaking-gypsy-and-traveller-accommodation-assessments.pdf>

supported the approach adopted as being robust and in line with Welsh Government guidance. With the support of Scrutiny, the GTAA was launched. Work on the Assessment was undertaken through August to October 2021.

- 4.8. The Work Brief and Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan included activities to meet the requirements of the WG methodology as well as additional activities important to the Council. These have provided the framework for undertaking the GTAA. The range of additional activities included an on-line survey for members and the involvement of members in promoting the survey – ensuring greater member involvement at this early stage. The employment of a Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Liaison Officer during August also ensured that travelling families staying in the County during the Assessment period were made aware of then Assessment.
- 4.9. The Task and Finish Group have reviewed the work undertaken and agreed that they were satisfied with the delivery of the Work Brief and Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan previously endorsed by Communities Scrutiny Committee.
- 4.10. The draft GTAA findings and recommendations were presented to the Task and Finish Group at its meeting on 15th November and the Group agreed that they were satisfied that the WG methodology had been applied appropriately to the analysis of need.

Draft Denbighshire GTAA

- 4.11. A wide range of methods have been used to raise awareness of the GTAA and to engage with the Gypsy, Roma, Traveller (GRT) community in line with the Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan.
- 4.12. Fieldwork and data collection for the survey was undertaken by Opinion Research Services on behalf of the Council. Gypsy and Traveller households who had been identified were interviewed by ORS fieldworkers to assess their needs using the survey questionnaire provided within the WG methodology. Work on the Assessment has now been completed and the draft GTAA is attached as Appendix 2 (Appendix D to Appendix 2 is excluded from publication by virtue of Paragraphs 12 and 13 of Part 4 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act, 1972.)
- 4.13. The draft Denbighshire GTAA concludes that:

- There is a need for 8 residential pitches to meet the identified needs of 3 households/ extended family groups in the County.
- There is no evidence of need for a permanent transit site, due to the low numbers of unauthorised encampments, short term nature of these encampments and the fact that interviews with Gypsies and Travellers did not identify there was a need for permanent transit provision locally. It is recommended that the management based approach currently applied to unauthorised encampments could be further developed based on best practice from across the UK, which may include 'negotiated stopping'.
- Future household growth is predicted to be 4 additional households from 2026 - 2033

4.14. Discussions at this meeting will be reported to Cabinet on 14th December and the intention is to seek approval at that meeting for submission of the draft GTAA to Welsh Government for its approval.

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 Conwy County Borough Council (CCBC) to undertake a GTAA for each County. The DCC commitment of £5.5k will be met from the LDP budget.

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

A Well-being Impact Assessment has been carried out for the project and is attached as Appendix 3. This concludes that the overall impact is positive.

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

The Task and Finish Group established by this Committee has met six times and discussions informed the development of the Stakeholder Communication and Engagement Plan presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee on 26/7/21.

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.

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

A number of risks to the project have been identified and have been included in the full project business case risk assessment. A lack of political support has been identified as a significant risk which has led to the engagement of the Leader and Lead Member in the project from the start. The establishment of the Task and Finish Group and reports to Scrutiny aimed to ensure wider Member involvement in the project.

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.