

This report may be of interest to: All Members

## TRAVELLERS' ISSUES

Accountable Officer: David Jones (Strategic Director, Neighbourhood Services)

Author: Derek Nickless (Head of Neighbourhood Services (Housing)) -  
MK 253498

### 1. Purpose

- 1.1 To update the Committee on progress in developing a comprehensive partnership strategy for Travellers' Issues.

### 2. Summary

- 2.1 This report provides statistical information relating to the numbers of unauthorised encampments.
- 2.2 The report outlines progress on a number of initiatives being considered by the Travellers' Steering Group.

### 3. Recommendations

- 3.1 The Committee is recommended to:
- (a) note the current levels of unauthorised encampments and recent activity levels;
  - (b) note the progress in developing a variety of initiatives through the Travellers' Steering Group and Joint Planning Forum; and
  - (c) note that a central office co-ordinating all activities related to Travellers in Milton Keynes will be in operation from January 2000.

#### 4. **Background**

- 4.1 The Committee called for update reports at each meeting of this Committee. Progress on initiatives stemming from the work of the Milton Keynes Citizens Advisory Group on Travellers has been pursued through the Travellers Steering Group. The creation of a joint strategy is seen as a high priority within the Neighbourhood Services Strategic Plan (Sections 1.10 and 3.5).
- 4.2 An analysis of the level of unauthorised encampments shows a very similar picture this year compared with 1998. Statistics are based on weekly counts.

##### Snapshot counts (i.e. the situation at any one time)

Average number unauthorised encampments during 1998 7

Average number of unauthorised encampments in 1999 (up to 11.10.99) 7

Average number of caravans in 1998 53

Average number of caravans in 1999 (up to 1.10.99) 58

##### Unauthorised encampments 1999

Total number of encampments up until 11.10.99 278

Proportion of sites vacated following MKC 'request to leave' 37%

Proportion of sites vacated following landowner eviction 16%

Proportion of sites vacated following Police warning 9%

Proportion of sites vacated following Police notice 7%

Moved of own volition 31%

Average length of encampment August 1999 7 days

Average length of encampment September 1999 5 days

#### 5. **Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 The Committee called for the identification of resources to be taken into account when updating the Travellers' action plan. Alongside specific proposals related to the creation of a central office, enforcement, site searches, welfare issues and miscellaneous proposals, have been considered by the Officer meeting of the Travellers' Steering Group at its last meeting on the 20th October.
- 5.2 **Central Office:** Significant progress has been made in agreeing a central office for co-ordinating activity amongst the partner organisations. It has been agreed that this team headed by a Traveller Team Manager will be based at the Council, in Saxon Court. A staffing structure has been agreed with an additional two Traveller Liaison Officers being

devoted to this work. Thames Valley Police are contributing by seconding an officer at inspector level to head this team. This Council is making budgetary arrangements to fund one of the additional posts. Discussions are under way with other agencies including Parish Councils with regard to funding of the second new post. English Partnerships and Milton Keynes Parks Trust have confirmed their support to this arrangement through their existing contractual arrangements for dealing with unauthorised encampments and linking this in a clearly defined way through the central office.

- 5.3 **Enforcement Policy:** The partners have agreed the basis of the enforcement policy, subject to some detailed fine tuning which is expected to be resolved very soon. A copy of the Enforcement Policy is attached as an **Annex**.
- 5.4 **Cleansing Issues:** The Travellers Steering Group has agreed a way forward to harmonise various landowners responses to the need to remove litter and rubbish in accordance with performance targets and statutory guidelines.
- 5.5 **Site Search:** Good progress has been made on proposals for a new Travellers Site, but there is some detailed work before an announcement on a consultation process can be made.
- 5.6 **Joint Planning Forum:** The first meeting of the Joint Planning Forum on Travellers will be held on the 8<sup>th</sup> November 1999. That group will finalise the draft terms of reference. Broadly the forum will act as the strategic group covering all Travellers issues, will determine policies and regularly review performance. Membership comprises of representatives from all key stakeholders although discussion will be needed on the subject of traveller involvement.
- 5.7 **Welfare Issues:** A multi-agency Education, Health and Social Inclusion Group has been set up, Borough Bus sessions have recommenced at the Calverton Site.

## 6. **Implications**

### 6.1 Environmental

The development of a strategy will have significant environmental impact.

### 6.2 Equalities

Equalities issues have featured prominently in the development of the MKCAGoT proposals and are being covered fully through the Travellers' action plan.

### 6.3 Financial

The development of a central co-ordinating office will require additional funding, with contributions anticipated from all partner agencies. The Council's contributions have been identified through the budgetary process for 2000/2001. The creation of new sites and any other developmental work will require funding that needs to be considered through the normal budgetary process.

6.4 Legal

Any further proposals will be fully reviewed by the legal service of the partner agencies.

6.5 Staff and Accommodation

The creation of a central co-ordinating office will have staff and accommodation implications. Accommodation within Saxon Court is being explored.

7. **Conclusions**

7.1 The Travellers' Steering Group continues to develop its work through the Travellers' action plan in moving forward towards a joint strategy for dealing with Travellers' issues.

Background Papers: Report and annexes to Neighbourhood Services Committee, 7 July 1999  
Report to Neighbourhood Services Committee 7 September 1999