

Monmouthshire Scrutiny

Feedback to Cabinet

Report Subject Matter: Gypsy and Traveller Provision

1.0 Context:

- 1.1 On 19th July 2023, the People Scrutiny Committee was asked to scrutinise the Gypsy and Travellers Needs Assessment. The scrutiny committee's role is to offer views to the cabinet and make any recommendations, which the Cabinet can accept or reject as part of their future decision-making.
- 1.2 The People Scrutiny Committee was presented with the following recommendations:
- a. Consider the process implemented to identify Council owned land suitable for the potential development of Gypsy & Traveller pitch provision.
 - b. Consider the evaluation of five pieces of Council owned land considered to be possibly suitable, subject to the findings of any further required assessment, for potential development of Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision.
 - c. Recommend to Cabinet that the following pieces of Council owned land are consulted on for potential development for Gypsy and Traveller pitch provision:
 - Manson Heights, Monmouth
 - Rocklea, Mitchel Troy
 - Garthi Close, Mitchel Troy
 - Langley Close, Magor
 - d) Recommend to Cabinet that further evaluation is undertaken on the following piece of Council owned land, to further inform possible suitability and if applicable, (subject to findings) future consultation.
 - Dancing Hill, Undy (west of Dancing Hill)
- 1.3 The following formal summary has been prepared to capture the views of the scrutiny committee, together with some additional comments for the Executive to consider. The Committee requests the Cabinet Member consider the findings, to assist future decision-making.

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Public Open Forum

- 1.4 There was a large public presence at the scrutiny meeting, the public highlighting key concerns in relation to the suitability of the sites under discussion. The following is just a selection of concerns raised in relation to different sites, as follows:
- Village greens/common land that is currently used for recreation by communities, particularly children who may be unable to access other facilities due to health and disability and the impact of the loss of green spaces on their health and well-being.
 - Accessibility for the travelling community and the following concerns;
 - Road safety concerns, lack of pavements, lack of safe walking routes, no street lighting and absence of active travel routes.
 - Poor links to public transport, other public services like schools, doctors.
 - Environmental concerns related to biodiversity and AONB (areas of outstanding natural beauty).
 - Proximity to motorways, noise and air pollution.
 - Land contamination concerns.

Key points raised by the Committee Members

- 1.5 The local Ward Members spoke at length to share their concerns about the suitability of the sites identified in their wards.
- 1.6 Committee Members questioned whether as a Council, we are truly considering the needs of Gypsies and Travellers and whether the Council is paying due respect to their feedback, given the travelling community has stated that none of the sites would meet their requirements.
- 1.7 The Scrutiny Committee expressed grave concerns around the accuracy of the RAG process and the process taken to remove sites from the list, leaving 4 sites that the Committee felt were wholly unsuitable for a wide range of reasons outlined by the public and the ward Members.
- 1.8 Members questioned whether the Council is evidentially applying the Guidance on Gypsy and Traveller Sites, which states that good quality accessible roads for heavy duty traffic are required ~ this was just one example of where the Scrutiny Committee felt the guidance hadn't been applied.
- 1.9 The Committee felt the process has been rushed, with Members not having sufficient notice to visit the sites and fully appraise themselves of their suitability. Members felt that the decisions are too important for Gypsy and Travellers and for existing

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communities to be rushed to meet the timescales of the Replacement Local Development Plan.

- 1.10 Members urged the Cabinet Member and Officers to negotiate with National Resources Wales to resolve issues on existing sites, where Gypsies and Travellers are settled and have strong ties to the local area.

Formal Outcome of the Scrutiny

- 1.11 The Committee rejected the four recommendations presented to the Scrutiny Committee.
- 1.12 Members recommended that a call is put to landowners to come forward with parcels of land (in line with the recommendation 2.3 in the Cabinet report for 26th July 2023) and that the selection process begin again.
- 1.13 Members recommended that existing Gypsy and Traveller Communities should be supported as far as possible, which could also assist the Council in meeting identified need.