

A coordinated approach to **Gypsy, Roma and Traveller** needs



2017
MJ Achievement Awards
Delivering better outcomes

Executive summary

- 1 The County Durham Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Executive Group takes a joined-up approach to the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities living in and visiting Durham.
- 2 Notable successes include:
 - site refurbishments and improved site management;
 - working with community leaders to better manage unauthorised encampments and events;
 - the provision of homework clubs and educational support and attainment;
 - the development of community health trainers and nursing support.
- 3 Durham has received regional and national recognition for this work and is seen a model of good practice in engaging with GRT and the wider community and in improving services for GRT communities.

Background

- 4 Durham County Council established the County Durham Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Executive Group in 2014 to take a joined-up approach to the needs of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller (GRT) communities living in and visiting County Durham. Its objectives were to:
 - agree a comprehensive, coherent and practical corporate strategy;
 - meet the accommodation needs of Gypsies, Roma and Travellers, including the refurbishment of the six permanent council-owned sites;
 - ensure the effective management of unauthorised encampments, including the identification of stopover areas for unauthorised encampments;
 - influence partner agencies' policies to take account of the impact on Gypsies, Roma and Travellers;
 - co-ordinate partners' overall approach to Gypsy, Roma and Traveller events;
 - promote the health, education and wellbeing of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities in County Durham;
 - promote awareness and understanding of Gypsy, Roma and Traveller cultures amongst partner agencies.

- 5 Many of these strategic objectives have been achieved and become 'business as usual'. Notable successes include:

Site Management

- Successful site refurbishment
- Management of sites/site utility bills

Managing unauthorised encampments and events

- Sharing good practice and intelligence
- Much improved management of local horse fairs in partnership with key community leaders and the police
- Establishment of temporary stopovers for migration to Appleby
- Approach to enforcement (firm but fair).

Education

- Educational support and attainment
- Homework clubs

Health

- Development of community health trainers
- Establishment of GRT nurse post (now mainstreamed)
- Cultural awareness training with health and social care staff

- 6 Durham has received regional and national recognition and awards for much of this work and is seen a model of good practice in management of GRT and wider community engagement and improved services working with and for GRT communities.



Site Management

- 7 In 2013 Durham County Council secured Homes and Community Agency funding to refurbish four of its permanent Gypsy and Roma Traveller sites. This enabled the council to carry out a full site refurbish on four of the six traveller sites that were in urgent need of upgrading, which also included the addition of eight new pitches, an office and a community building on each site.
- 8 Following a council review, it was also recommended that an extensive improvement plan for the management of the permanent sites be implemented. This has supported the delivery of a more joined-up working approach with Housing, Health and Education to improve and make a real difference to the GRT community living on site.
- 9 The Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Site Management Team has been recognised nationally as a best practice case study in *"Managing and delivering Gypsy and Traveller sites: negotiating conflict"*, a 2016 report by Professor Jo Richardson, Director, Centre for Comparative Housing Research, De Montfort University, Leicester.
- 10 The team has worked together with partner organisations and in consultation with the GRT community to make effective changes along with the implementation of a revised allocation policy to ensure fairness, transparency and consistency as well as a new income recovery system which has allowed the removal of manual rent collection. The installation of individual water and electric meters now allows residents to be in control of their finances, have personal choice on suppliers and also access grant funds such as Warm Homes Discount. Improved access to Health, Education and social needs of Gypsies and Travellers on site, has been achieved through the physical improvement of the sites, as well as changes to the management processes.
- 11 Open and transparent dialogue with the GRT community means that the relationship between the council and residents has improved substantially. The De Montfort report noted:
 - *"the site management benefits from being firmly rooted in a council strategic plan";*
 - *"site managers discuss any problems and take proactive measures";*
 - *"repairs are more easily monitored";*
 - *"The council is forward-thinking in terms of capital investment and refurbishment on sites ... with political support and leadership";*
 - *"The residents 'love' the new sheds and the county council has a good reputation with the community for the sites".*



Education

- 12 The council's Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Education team work with almost 600 children and their families each year providing advice, guidance and support to ensure our GRT children, young people and families access education, make academic progress and feel included in the school community.
- 13 After assessing the needs of pupils, the team initiated and continues to develop a homework club once a week on the council's permanent sites. Low literacy levels prevent some families helping their children with homework and these clubs have made a real difference to the lives of the young people and their families. The homework clubs provide pupils with much needed support to accelerate educational progress and attainment. The GRT advisors liaise with local primary schools to ensure homework is completed on time and also provide home/school liaison visits to ensure parents or carers feel included.
- 14 The team also looks at ways to work collaboratively with other services and has completed a project with Health encouraging children to attend a gardening club with in the homework club. This allowed the young people to explore how food is grown by planting seeds, how to care for plants and how to use plants for healthy eating recipes. The young people successfully grew herbs with many displaying a small herb garden outside their trailer. The families enjoyed encouraging the children to take care of their plants. The GRT health trainers arranged healthy eating events to complement the work of the homework club.
- 15 The GRT Education Team strives to break down the barriers which prevent young people accessing education. Often these issues come from housing problems, financial hardship and often a lack of understanding of the frequently evolving education system. Through partnership work and signposting and liaising with voluntary sector agencies such as DISC, families are supported in the broader sense to achieve successful outcomes in education for their children. Council services seek to deliver a one stop response and through successful collaboration between local authority services, families new to the area looking for housing and school places, receive a more holistic response.



Health

- 16 Following a Health Needs Assessment conducted with the local Traveller communities, which highlighted poor health, low life expectancy and little engagement with health services, the council decided to deploy its Public Health grant to meet the recommendations in the report.
- 17 In 2014, we commissioned:

- a community nurse and two health trainers from the voluntary sector to work with communities focussing on their needs;
- training for health/social care staff in cultural awareness and offered support to GP surgeries that service our communities.

18 We are currently working with community members to produce a series of short 'youtube' type clips on various health topics.

19 To date the nurse has worked across all sites and has made important in-roads into the housed Traveller community, raising health issues, supporting people to register with a GP and promoting links with broader health and social care service.

"She's explained things to me, help me sort things out. It's just been lovely having somebody who's in the system who'll help me and who I know is listening to me, because before that I felt no one was listening to me."

20 The nurse works closely with the health trainers, education and DCC site management and unauthorised encampments teams, often planning joint visits to new families and running joint community activities with colleagues from the voluntary sector and education.

21 One year into post, we have ensured the sustainability of this post by mainstreaming it as a part of the 0-19 contract with Harrogate Foundation Trust, who have seen the value of the work and recently allocated additional support from within their community team.

22 The Health Trainers have engaged with communities across all six sites. They have worked with 42 people from the GRT community, including engaging people in the full health trainer support package and Check4Life health checks. In 2015/16 they supported 14 people on a one-to-one basis. In addition, they offered group support, health checks and promotion of national public health campaigns working closely with partners in health, housing and education.

"My Dad has had a health check; he hasn't even been to the doctors in 30 years! So that is a big thing for him. My little sister comes to the drop in and gets weighed in so she is starting to get more conscious of the way she eats, the changes have benefited the whole family's health and wellbeing."

23 The Health Trainer team has recently been awarded the North East Equalities Award for embedding inclusivity through equality and diversity in day-to-day working practices leading the way to a fairer future for all.

24 The council has trained 300 health/social care staff and from this has emerged a "Practitioners Forum"



which meet regularly, here professionals can get support and better coordinate work.

- 25 We have worked with Primary Care, supporting them to ensure that practices are more aware of community needs. We have received support from the county's two CCGs which have nominated GRT leads and commissioned an audit of GRT health records.
- 26 The GRT health work is being independently evaluated and a final report is due in March. However, initial findings are extremely promising showing very positive outcomes for individuals' and the communities' health status:
- 100% of service users were satisfied with the service quality.
 - 67% of service users achieved or partly achieved their goals.
 - 100% of volunteers increased wellbeing and self esteem.
 - 100% of service users found the service accessible.

Management of unauthorised encampments and GRT events

- 27 In 2014, the staff who responded to unauthorised encampment and GRT events joined the Neighbourhood Protection Team who have a wider remit to support a range of neighbourhood concerns (ASB, environmental crime & community safety) through education, coordinated operations and enforcement. At that time, the objective was to improve the management of unauthorised encampments and GRT events in Durham, responding to community concerns.
- 28 To do this, improved partnership working (council, police, fire, housing, health and town and parishes) delivered a coordinated approach. Firstly, a forward-looking approach has improved the response, for example in Teesdale the town and parish councils lead the migration to Appleby (the largest GRT event in Europe) with a coordinated pragmatic approach that provides improved camping facilities on the routes in acceptable locations.



- 29 In the Bishop/West Auckland area there is a high number of our GRT community, which brings the greatest number of camping visitors. The provision of a suitable site is now heavily used by 350 caravans/families through the summer period and has reduced the number of unauthorised encampments, many of which were in unsuitable locations. This area has recently started a forum including town and parish councils, local businesses, GRT representation, the police and the council, to look at further locations.
- 30 On a day-to-day basis for encampments, early engagement through Neighbourhood Wardens allows us to agree codes of conduct whilst understanding welfare needs and facilitate the provision of toilets/waste collection where appropriate. Where campers use unsuitable locations or the activities are causing concern, a 'encampment review group' is established to bring together information from partners to make a balanced judgement on the suitability of location and any enforcement if required.
- 31 The partnership approach outlined above has delivered a 7.4 percent reduction in the number of unauthorised encampments across the county between 2014/15-2015/16.
- 32 This collective involvement of partners ensures information is shared in planning and for enforcement where required, for example Direction to Leave, summons and injunctions. Sharing data also enables us to plan service responses and to take action such as hardening targets and strengthening susceptible areas.
- 33 The same coordinated approach has been taken with the events, for example 'Eddie's Horsefair' used to appear on a piece of land and create tension in local communities due to the fear of the unknown. Through working together, this now happens on a private piece of land with liaison with the community and the organiser around their plans which has reduced the tension vastly. Fewer police and council resources now need to be deployed to deal with issues, real or perceived. The approach was highly commended in Durham Constabulary's 'problem orientated policing' awards in 2016.
- 34 Education and awareness have been developed/delivered through a shared understanding of terms, the development of an education package for frontline staff and engagement. This led to the development of the Porrajmos exhibition to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day which uses the terrible story of the holocaust through the eyes of children in the GRT community.

Conclusion

- 35 In summary the coordinated and partnership based approach has enabled us to use our collective resources differently and more effectively to deliver better outcomes for the GRT and wider community in the county.