

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 1 November 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director(s) - Environment and Health and Community.

SUBJECT: Travellers- Provision of Transit Site.

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To bring Members up to date on the provision of a transit site and also to provide feedback following consultation.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:- The Executive Board agree to the strategy and process outlined in paragraph 4.1 to 4.4 of this report

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Executive Board first considered this matter at their 19 July, 2007 meeting.

The Board in considering the report noted that, since December 2006, the approach to Travellers had been to utilise a length of unused busway as a tolerated/accepted unauthorised encampment for travellers, working with them and managing the situation as opposed to chasing them from site to site. It was considered that this approach had been largely successful, with savings for the Authority in the region of £200,000, and had led to increased co-operation between the Council and the Police in respect of the small number of other unlawful encampments that had occurred.

Members were advised that the site currently being used did not offer a permanent solution and there was a need to identify an alternative "transit" site location if the current success was to be built upon.

Following research, a preferred site had been identified in accordance with the Needs Study set out in the report, next to an established permanent private caravan site between Warrington Road and the Manchester Ship Canal. This was land that was in Council ownership presently forming an area of informal greenspace not generally accessed or used by the public.

The financial implications were outlined for the Board's consideration and an estimate of the ongoing revenue implications were attached to the report.

The Board identified that the following issues needed to be progressed:

- There was a need for a written protocol between Halton Borough Council and the police formally setting out the agreement and responsibilities of each organisation.
- The rents needed to be reassessed in order that the site could be cost neutral in revenue terms.
- Further detail was to be sought regarding the costs involved.

The Board RESOLVED:

That

- (1) a detailed scheme be worked up to tender to confirm delivery within the set budget;
- (2) a further report on funding be presented to the Executive Board once tenders have been received;
- (3) subject to this being confirmed, formal permissions/consents be applied for; and
- (4) the Urban Renewal PPB be invited to review the approach proposed by the Executive Board and report back to the Executive Board on its findings.

- 3.2 Subsequent to the Boards consideration of the matter, a report was taken to the UR PPB to seek their views on the process and approach taken in locating a potential site.

The Policy Board after much debate resolved that:-

- before the provision of a site in Halton is progressed consideration should be given to the prospect of provision in neighbouring and nearby Boroughs where better alternatives may be available and;
- that assurance from Police should be sought , in respect of the use of their powers to ensure that unauthorised encampments are rigorously enforced against, should they occur.

- 3.3 Although it would be unreasonable for this Authority to express a view on the suitability of sites in other Districts, Members may wish to be apprised of the current position with adjacent and nearby Councils. Each Authority's existing provision is set out in the Needs

Study previously reported, however, following on from discussion with officers from the individual Authorities, it would appear that;-

St Helens are progressing with the provision of a 17 pitch transit site. The funding and permissions are already in place and work is expected to commence early in 2008.

Chester City Council are looking at a partnership to provide a transit site.

Congleton Borough Council, have no current plans to expand provision beyond their current site.

Ellesmere Port & Neston, Vale Royal and Crewe and Nantwich Councils as part of delivering their future Development Plan say they will have to assess need. It is understood that Vale Royal will be appointing consultants shortly to commence this work.

Both Warrington & Macclesfield are in the process of identifying land/sites.

The Merseyside Authorities are in the process of commissioning a "needs study".

- 3.4 Work on establishing the capital and revenue costs for the transit site have been progressed and detailed plans produced. The plans, which include for 14 pitches, each with its own water and electricity supply, and toilet and shower facilities have been shown to the Travellers presently located on the tolerated site. (Plans will be displayed at the meeting) The capital costs breaks down into two parts, Ground Works (Civil Engineering) and Buildings. The first element of costs, which involves site levelling, formation of internal roads, drains and pitches as well as, boundary treatment has been provisionally priced at £330,000.

The provision of buildings will follow on from the ground works and prices for this element of work are still awaited. The final costing of the "building" work will depend on the final specification agreed. Early indications are that the buildings should be deliverable within the original budget ceiling of £500,000

Notwithstanding the capital costs, the site will have to be maintained and managed.

On going work as suggested that the management and operational costs of the transit site may result in a pitch charge of above the £44.87 currently being levied of at the Riverside permanent site, if revenue costs are to break even.

There may be other management options available, including exploring the possibility of the site being managed through a

Housing Association, which could introduce efficiencies and reduce running costs. Again these are being explored.

- 3.5 A draft protocol has now been developed and shared with the Police which articulates and re-affirms the working arrangements between the two organisations and the commitment of the Police to utilise their powers to move on unauthorised incursions.

4.0 NEXT STEPS

- 4.1 In order to achieve the timetable for relocating the existing tolerated site it will be necessary to seek formal planning permission within the next 6 weeks. It is suggested that to avoid consultation periods clashing with the Christmas holiday period this application should be submitted in early November.

- 4.2 Running in parallel with this process discussions need to be commenced with organisations who could potentially manage the site. Once these avenues have been explored a further report can be brought to the Board giving surety on the revenue implications. Finalised capital costs will also be known at this stage.

- 4.3 The draft protocol with the Police should be implemented across the Borough.

- 4.4 Formal tenders will be sought for the development of the site shown on the plans to
Displayed.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton Borough Council

The provision of a well managed and monitored site will assist with ensuring appropriate welfare for the children within the Traveller community.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton Borough Council

There are no specific implications for this priority

5.3 A Healthy Halton

The provision of a regulated facility will reduce the number of unauthorised incursions and help reduce the potential for tipping/untidy sites and the implications which go with such nuisance.

5.4 **A Safer Halton**

The provision of a transit site will enable the Council in conjunction with the Police to react positive and quickly in removing unauthorised incursions elsewhere in the Borough.

5.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The provision of an authorised site will enable the current tolerated site to be relocated and development sites within Castlefields to be brought forward.

6.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 Evidence suggested that the provision of a site has reduced the number of incursions elsewhere and enables the situation to be better managed. It cannot, however, be totally discounted that once the facility is at capacity that other incursions and costs for dealing with them, will occur.

7.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 Local consultation will be carried out as part of the planning process before the proposal is formally considered. Provision of a transit site in addition to the existing permanent site would make a significant contribution to the Council's efforts to support equality and diversity.

8.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Document	Place of Inspection	Officer
Traveller Site Needs Study	Rutland House Halton Lea	Phil Watts
Site Assessment	Rutland House Halton Lea	Phil Watts