

**Project Documentation - Initial Project Proposal Document**  
**Project: Introduction of a Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer**  
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**1. Purpose of Document**

The purpose of this document is to justify the undertaking of the project based on the estimated cost of delivery and the anticipated benefits to be gained. The proposal outlined in this document will be used as part of the process for prioritising future projects.

**2. Project Description**

To reintroduce the role of a Gypsy Traveller Liaison Officer to provide a link between all Council services and the transient population which continues to grow within the District. This role would seek to engage with the Gypsy Traveller Community (G&T) around key issues such as planning, Licencing Health and Wellbeing and other support services. It would develop and maintain relationships within the G&T community and identify those leaders within it to facilitate improved communication between the G&T community, the wider settled community and CDC. The role would act as a single point of contact (SPOC) to liaise with countywide services primarily Sussex Police and West Sussex County Council services including adult and children's social care, this would also include West Sussex G&T liaison team particularly in relation to West Sussex managed sites and unauthorised encampments.

**In scope:**

- Support for Development Management/ Planning Enforcement to deal with planning applications and investigations to deal with matters efficiently and reducing the need for appeals.
- Facilitating relations between G&T community and wider settled community to seek to reduce community tensions.
- Support around unauthorised encampments including advising Parish Councils and supporting the delivery of the CDC and Parish Protocol.
- Support for Licensing Service for the licensing of caravan sites and to ensure that and any noncompliance is reported to the Licensing service
- Support for the Health and Wellbeing of the Gypsy Traveller Community

**Out of scope:**

- Any cross-over with functions provided by WSCC, Sussex Police or any role within the Council that currently engages with the travelling community. However this role would complement the work of these services/ roles and support where necessary.

**3. Background**

The Council previously had such a post within its Housing Service structure. The post was funded temporarily but delivered positive outcomes of discussion groups, networking, knowledge of the gypsy community and their family groups.

- *Is it meeting an identified need?*  
There is a need across the Council for a liaison officer. Tensions exist between the travelling and settled communities which could be ameliorated by the role of a liaison officer. We regularly receive complaints about the G&T community causing ASB and fear within the settled community and currently we have no dedicated resource to deal with these complaints. We also have a gap in knowledge around family groups and their connection to the local area and the needs of our G&T population. This role would help to inform the Development Management process and facilitate engagement with other services to identify and meet identified needs.
- *Does it support a Corporate Plan priority and/or objective?*  
Yes. Environmental and Housing objectives as well as Supporting our Communities, we have an ever growing G&T community and as a protected group we should be mindful of the supports available to them.
- *Will it generate annual revenue savings to support the Council's ongoing revenue budget?*  
Savings may be delivered through potential reduced spending on consultancy fees, less officer time dealing with ASB, unauthorised developments and community tension generated by the G&T community.
- *What are the consequences of not doing it?*  
Lack of corporate knowledge of the needs of the travelling community and meeting those needs, lack of knowledge of who is a traveller within the District, increased community tensions, continued adverse environmental impacts of unplanned development in the rural area, wider gaps in understanding between the Council, its Members, and gaps in information to inform policy development and relationships with our G&T community.

#### **4. Outcomes to be Achieved**

- To provide stability of contact with the travelling community and information to support the Council and its functions of Supporting Communities and Planning [Policy development, determination of applications and planning enforcement].
- To improve relations between the G&T and settled communities and reduced tensions.
- To improve the health and wellbeing of our G&T communities.
- To offer a SPOC for Police, WSCC and the G&T community to raise issues and share information.
- Support for Licensing Service for the licensing of caravan sites and to ensure that and any noncompliance is reported to the Licensing service

4.1 A Liaison Officer role would provide continuity and a conduit for sharing of information as part of a two way process.

- To establish:
  - What sites exist in the district
  - Who occupies the land
  - How many caravans do the occupiers have/need

- Family structures
  - Whether the occupier's travel/patterns of travel
  - What specific needs exist amongst the occupiers (health and educational); and to
  - To explain to the Gypsy and Traveller community;
    - why the Council needs to visit to assess development;
    - why compliance with an approved scheme is required and beneficial; and
    - to inform occupiers of the services they will need to engage with, such as waste collection and Council Tax
- 4.2 A great deal of time is spent by officers in discussions around why it is important for the owners of land to develop a gypsy site in accordance with the approved plans. The involvement of a liaison officer would assist, and they could explain how the planning authority works with other organisations and why.
- 4.3 A gypsy liaison officer could attend Members work/focus groups on this subject to bridge the knowledge gap and improve understanding; they could also provide the DLUHC with bi-annual returns regarding the number of gypsy and travelling show people caravans stationed within the District. A physical count is currently undertaken by planning officers and relies on knowledge of the site locations and achieving access to each. There is also a degree of conflict between those visiting for the purpose of data collection for Central Government and their roles within the Council to decide applications or enforce breaches of planning control. Hence Officers are not often received favourably on site.
- 4.4 In long running planning enforcement cases [i.e. land in Birdham where enforcement commenced in 2015] arguments of need and overriding personal circumstances are advanced by the defendants. Whereas the presence of a liaison officer could keep Officers apprised of changing circumstances and needs within the community as a constant thereby improving case management and potentially avoiding costly delays at appeal or court; and may also therefore assist in managing the expectations of the settled community.
- 4.5 A liaison officer could work alongside WSCC in its contact with the transient community and others who have reason to work with Gypsy's and Travellers such as Sussex Police, RSPCA, Environmental Protection, Housing and Planning Enforcement. They could also signpost customers around the issue of homelessness, the planning application process and planning enforcement. Working with and alongside these agencies, the role would therefore benefit the Communities team and support engagement of the G&T community with Council and voluntary services to ensure they don't miss out on support and that their basic needs are being met.
- 4.6 The post could feasibly sit within either the Communities or Development Management Division given the clear dual purpose of the role, and this would be finalised through the job profile and evaluation process should the new post be agreed. However, in terms of building trust and a relationship with the travelling community it is considered that this would be most successful if the post holder sits within the Communities Division. The post holder would need

to work closely with both divisions, attending regular team meetings and 1:1's with managers from both divisions to ensure time is managed effectively and all elements of the role are fulfilled.

- 4.5 Trust, consistency and familiarity is important to maintain confidence. Hence, the role needs to be permanent and to enable those in post to develop and maintain meaningful contact to obtain and share information/ knowledge.

**5. Timescales**

One year from agreement of the additional post being created to appointing a suitable candidate.

**6. Project Costs and Resources**

Costs (£)		Source
One-Off		
Revenue	around £50k a year so salary would be approx. £35k	
Savings	Not quantified but £850 per day quoted by consultant for attending one day G&T appeal hearing.	Savings in time spent enforcing developments, gathering data, use of consultants for assessing housing needs. Officer time spent dealing with the regular complaints regarding G&T issues which will allow them to concentrate on other prioritised work
Services to be involved in the project delivery	Communities and Customer Services, Development Management.	

**7. Benefits vs. Cost**

It could take time to see the benefits of this role as it builds up trust and engagement with the Gypsy Traveller community, this might be mitigated by the potential to employ someone from the Gypsy Traveller community itself. However once the role is established we should see less litigation around Planning applications, fewer reported incidents and tensions within the community reduced. It is also envisaged that Wellbeing benefits for the Gypsy Traveller Community will be improved as they will be encouraged by this role to access services available to them.

**8. Identify Risks**

- The Gypsy Traveller community may not engage and the situation does not improve.
- Tensions could increase and confidence in the Council reduces.

- The role may be too broad for 1 person and their time and tasking would need to be carefully managed.
- Health and safety would be a primary concern and specialist training around lone working and how to approach the G&T community would be a priority.