



Belfast City Council

Report to: Development Committee

Subject: Inter Agency Forum on Travellers – Workshop Report

Date: 26 June 2012

Reporting Officer: John McGrillen, Director of Development

Contact Officer: Catherine Taggart, Community Services

1	Relevant Background Information
1.1	The Council supports the Travelling community through the work of its Traveller Liaison Officer, based in the Community Services Department, and through the Inter-departmental Traveller Liaison Group. Through this work, internal acceptance of Council responsibilities to Travellers has been effectively imbedded in the context of the Corporate Strategic aims of providing services and leadership.
1.2	Addressing the ongoing disadvantaged position of the Traveller community however will require an inter-agency partnership approach in order to sustainably plan and deliver support services across a diverse range of issues including health, accommodation, education, employment, policing, racism, community safety, culture and community development.
1.3	A number of emerging issues would also benefit from a joined up multi-stakeholder approach, for example, the changing accommodation responsibility, new planning regulations, unauthorised encampments legislation, land availability for site development, site licensing requirements, the Department of Education Task Force Report on Traveller Education 2011 and the All Ireland Traveller Health Study Report 2010.
1.4	There is however no forum to formally facilitate a holistic multi-stakeholder approach in Northern Ireland.
1.5	Despite legislative protections, the Traveller community continue to suffer disadvantage often displayed via inequalities in access to key statutory services and prevailing racist attitudes.
1.6	Current interagency work is generally targeted at specific single issues and there is a growing consensus that no single agency can resolve the overall disadvantaged position of the Traveller community.

1.7	<p>The existing multi-stakeholder Traveller groups include,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OFMDFM Traveller Thematic Group set up to monitor the 33 Recommendations of the PSI Report. This group has not meet for several years • Local Government Partnership on Traveller Issues represents the collective views of District Councils in Northern Ireland on Traveller Issues • BCC Inter-agency Community Safety Group deals with policing & community safety issues within Belfast. • NIHE Traveller Consultative Forum addresses accommodation issues only. • Traveller Health Action Zone Group dealt with health issues however it has been stood down. <p>Unlike all other jurisdictions within Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland does not have a high level, multi-agency grouping dealing with all aspects of quality of life issues that impact on the Traveller community.</p>
-----	--

2	Key Issues
2.1	<p>Many of the issues which impact on the health and well being of Travellers are therefore beyond the scope of any one agency. The recent publications in relation to Traveller health and education, the decision about responsibility for site provision, the new Caravan's Act and the emerging focus on litigation as a mechanism for ensuring that Traveller's rights are respected, all reinforce the need for specific and focused action in order to address the ongoing inequalities. Community Planning provides a new region wide impetus and framework within which to co-ordinate efforts in order to produce better results for Traveller people.</p>
2.2	<p>Within this context of need and opportunity, the service held a series of conversations with service providers and support agencies in order to scope the options for improved collaborative working in the city. This is in line with council's strategic theme to provide leadership and strategic direction for shaping, developing and managing the city. It will also allow Council to be proactive in working better together in order to improve services and the quality of life of the least advantaged people and inform how we make best use of our Traveller Liaison Officer resource in collaboration with others.</p>
2.3	<p>The gap identified by many of the people we spoke to was 'a framework to encourage and support multi agency work'. Agencies felt that a Belfast city approach could be developed as part of a regional approach, providing an accountability framework at local level for implementation. The expressed aims of the people we met are for a new model for working with Travellers. This would include an effective process for engaging Travellers and those with responsibility for Travellers, in order to impact on the determinants of health and quality of life.</p>
2.4	<p>Last month, BCC hosted an initial workshop to explore how invited agencies could jointly plan in order to increase levels of co-ordination of activity, synergy between initiatives and sharing of practice and developments.</p>
2.5	<p>The workshop was attended by senior representatives from key agencies including: BCC, Belfast HSCT, PHA, DoE Planning Service, Department of Education, Northern Ireland Housing Executive, NICCY, Department for Social</p>

	<p>Development, Equality Commission, NICEM, Bryson Charitable Group, An Munia Tober, Local Government Partnership for Travellers.</p> <p>2.6 As a result of our conversations, participants agreed that Belfast needs to re-ignite interest and action if it is to see a step change in the quality of life for Travellers. The establishment of a new Belfast Inter-Agency Forum on Travellers (BIAFT) would shine a light on and initiate action to address inequalities. Any newly established Forum should deal with strategic issues however the desire expressed by all was that it should become a model for getting things to happen in a joined up way.</p> <p>2.7 The purpose of the Forum will be to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Provide leadership and influence matters relating to Travellers in the Belfast area - Encourage collaborative working and integration of policy and response - Promote strategic cohesion with shared vision, values, priorities and resources across organisations - Create operational synergy, leading to improved outcomes - Maintain a positive and attentive attitude in dealing with Traveller disadvantage - Provide a strong voice to advocate for equality of opportunity for Travellers. <p>2.8 There was consensus on the following proposals:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. Ask Belfast City Council to convene a new Inter-Agency Forum ii. Seek participation and some resource from OFMDFM to ensure that there is administrative support for the Forum iii. Invite around 15-20 nominees from across the public and third sectors to join the Forum iv. Seek nominees with the experience and authority to speak for their organisation on matters relating to Travellers v. Ensure that there is inclusive Traveller representation on the Forum vi. Recruit an independent chair, charged with ensuring that an action plan is developed, agreed and implemented vii. Meet quarterly (initially), commencing June 2012 viii. The work of the Forum should cover the main areas identified in the range of official studies and reports produced, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Education - Employment and Training - Health and Wellbeing - Housing and Accommodation - Children and Young People <p>2.9 It was agreed that special attention would be given to addressing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public awareness, attitudes and prejudices • Traveller engagement, empowerment and representation. <p>2.10 Potential Forum Members: The following organisations were identified, in no particular order of preference, as being appropriate members and it was suggested that they be asked by the Council to nominate a representative to attend the Forum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belfast City Council
--	---

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lisburn Borough Council - Belfast and South Eastern Trusts - OFMDFM - Local Government Partnership on Travellers - Travellers' Representative - Local Commissioning Groups - Department of Employment and Learning - PSNI - Human Rights Commission - Equality Commission - NICCY - Department for Social Development (DSD) - Department of Education (DE) - BELB/ESA - Belfast Metropolitan College - Barnardos - Toybox.
2.11	Any further Council commitments would require Committee / Council approval.

3	Resource Implications
3.1	Staffing and related facilitation costs are within 2012/13 revenue estimates.

4	Equality and Good Relations Implications
4.1	The planned approach will support positive compliance.

5	Recommendations
5.1	Members are asked to support the establishment of a Belfast Inter-Agency Forum on Travellers and the pro-active participation of BCC.

6	Decision Tracking
Officer Responsible: Cate Taggart	

7	Key to Abbreviations
BELB:	Belfast Education & Library Board
BHSCT:	Belfast Health & Social Care Trust
BIAFT:	Belfast Inter-Agency Forum on Travellers
DSD:	Department for Social Development
DE:	Department of Education
ESA:	Education & Skills Authority
NIHE:	Northern Ireland Housing Executive
NICCY:	Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children & Young People
NICEM:	Northern Ireland Council for Ethnic Minorities
OFMDFM:	Office of First and Deputy First Ministers
PHA:	Public Health Agency
PSNI:	Police Service Northern Ireland

