

Cooperative Review of Unauthorised Encampments

Update for Your Plymouth Scrutiny Panel



1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1. In October 2013 a cross party task and finish group was established to conduct a cooperative review of our current procedures for managing unauthorised encampments (UE), with the aims of:
- clarifying current processes and procedures against a backdrop of legal, social and financial considerations.
 - attempting to ensure community cohesion and public reassurance.
- 1.2. The findings of the Cooperative Review were published in a report which was endorsed by the Cooperative Scrutiny Board on 26th March 2014. The report [Unauthorised Encampments](#) concluded that:
- Current policy and procedures are cost effective and efficient.
 - A policy that made speed of eviction the overriding consideration would lead to more frequent encampments, increase demand on resources and have a negative impact on race relations.
 - High levels of public concern could be addressed by improvements to operational practice.
 - Negative portrayals of Gypsies and Travellers needed to be addressed to improve race relations and community cohesion.
- 1.3. This report covers current performance and provides an update against the recommendations made by the cooperative review. These recommendations were considered by Cabinet on 17th June.
- 1.4 Cabinet thanked the members of the Cooperative review of Unauthorised Encampments and the Cooperative Scrutiny Board.
- 1.5 Cabinet noted the recommendations and agreed to act upon them as proposed below.
- Accept recommendations 1, 3,5 & 6.
 - Accept recommendation 4 subject to the requirement for incontrovertible proof of condition being met through the publication of a notice, e.g. via social media, advising that the site has been cleaned and inspected.
 - Accept recommendation 7 noting that the funds required to celebrate Gypsy and Traveller History month will be subject to future arrangements for allocating the equality budget in the context of our Welcoming City plan.
 - Not accept recommendation 2.

2. Performance in 2014

- 2.1 Analysis of our UE database covering the period December 2013 to November 2014 indicates that:
- We had 35 Unauthorised Encampments over the period, an increase of 30% on the preceding 12 months;
 - The average duration of a UE was down to 10 days, from 19 over the preceding 12 months;
 - SIU were on site within 24 hrs of the first report being received on all but 2 occasions;
 - The most frequently occupied sites were; Row Down Close, Language Business Park (5), Broadley Park Road (3), Prince Rock Playing Fields (3);
 - One family group were responsible for 7 UE's, two others were involved on multiple occasions;

3. Progress against recommendations

Recommendation	Progress
<p>The current policy should be reviewed when a transit site (currently being progressed) is up and running. Until then the current policy is appropriate in terms of ensuring that UE's are moved on without undue delay.</p>	<p>Cabinet accepted this recommendation. The current policy will be reviewed when we have a transit site up and running.</p>
<p>That consideration is given to provide weekend support with particular regard to provision of bins and toilets, located for convenient use by the travelling community.</p>	<p>This recommendation was not accepted by Cabinet. The estimated cost of this service is £64,795 based on our current operating model.</p>
<p>Consideration is given to improving communications with residents and Councillors in areas that are affected by UE's so that they are kept informed of the eviction process throughout, this could be by letter drop or publication of a timeline for each event on the council's website (including consideration of a self-service portal for reporting UE related incidents).</p>	<p>Cabinet accepted this recommendation. We have reviewed our standard letter to further improve the content and to channel people towards our webpages to keep themselves updated.</p> <p>We aim to ensure public access via the Self Service portal when this becomes generally available as part of the transformation programme.</p>
<p>The quality assurance process in place around clean-up operations should be evidenced in order to provide incontrovertible proof of condition of site following move on of UE's.</p>	<p>Cabinet accepted this recommendation, "subject to the requirement for incontrovertible proof of condition being met through the publication of a notice, e.g. via social media, advising that the site has been cleaned and inspected".</p> <p>We are currently exploring options to respond to this recommendation.</p>
<p>Consideration of interim clean-ups for UE's on a case-by-case basis, with degree of cleanliness and accumulated rubbish on the site, impact on the local community, and vulnerability of travellers on the site being key factors in this decision.</p>	<p>Cabinet accepted this recommendation. We carried out an interim cleansing operation at the site of the recent UE in Glen Park deploying the Poover for the first time in this context.</p>
<p>Development of a map of land that is owned by PCC so that responsibility for action can be established with greater speed.</p>	<p>Cabinet accepted this recommendation. A map is available in the form of the PCC GGP system. We have not experienced any delay in establishing land ownership over the last 12 months.</p>
<p>That Plymouth City Council should be role models for equality and inclusivity, for example by celebrating Gypsy and Traveller month; encouraging positive reflection of Gypsy and Traveller culture within the media; and providing training and awareness raising for PCC staff involved with Gypsy and Traveller sites.</p>	<p>Cabinet accepted this recommendation subject to funds being available. We plan to celebrate Gypsy and Traveller History month in 2015 within that proviso.</p>